



## **DEPA (NSW) Submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation May 2026**

### **DEPA (NSW)**

The Dance Educators Professional Teachers Association (DEPA NSW) was formed in 1999 to support the teaching of the K-12 Dance Syllabuses developed by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA).

### **ADVOCACY**

DEPA advocates for quality dance education, the continuing development of dance as an art form (and in other contexts) in education, and the recognition of the value and status of dance within the K-12 curriculum.

DEPA strongly supports the contention that the study of dance:

- facilitates well-rounded, disciplined, goal-oriented young people with great interpersonal skills that are valued by employers;
- challenges students to think critically, creatively, and reflectively through the engagement in higher-order thinking skills;
- provides a powerful context within which to develop general competencies essential for the acquisition of the effective, higher-order thinking skills that underpin further education, work and everyday life;
- fosters a lifelong interest in and ongoing support for the arts generally;
- contributes an Australian cultural identity.

### **Issues facing Dance Education and the Arts in general.**

A reduction in student numbers in dance elective subjects since covid has seen the closure of dance programs in schools, the loss of teaching positions, with the consequent reduction in availability and access for students. DEPA attributes this in part to:

- a failure by all Governments to fully promote the value of an education in the arts;
- an increased focus on subjects perceived to support tertiary entrance;
- changing perspectives about future employment opportunities for students;
- the deleterious impact of the focus on STEM subjects as opposed to STEAM;

- the discontinuation of tertiary arts programs, especially those with a focus on teacher training or professional careers (in NSW there are only two tertiary dance programs, both of which are private);
- the *Revive National Cultural Policy*'s failure to acknowledge the role and importance of Arts Education in supporting and developing the viability of the five existing pillars.

### **DEPA Response to the current National Cultural Policy (Revive)**

DEPA contends that the *Five Pillars* as presented in the *Revive Cultural Policy document* fail to adequately address the totality of factors that contribute to a national cultural identity. Without fully supported arts education at fundamental, experiential, career focused, and professional levels there may not be '*stories,*' or '*places for stories,*' '*artists,*' '*the identification of and support for our cultural identity*' or '*engaged audiences.*'

### **DEPA Recommends**

Establishing a sixth pillar in the National Cultural Policy that focuses on and promotes Arts Education and Training. Such an action would formalise arts education as being fundamental to an Australian Cultural Identity and the means to provide a practical underpinning to the current five pillars.

While there may be some discussion as to whether 'Arts Education' should be sited in 'Education' or 'The Arts' or indeed both, a National Cultural Policy without acknowledgement of Arts Education and Training as a pillar fails to realise its potential as a fundamental base of the national cultural identity.

While acknowledging the dire circumstances impacting on access to, and the study of, the Arts K-12, Tertiary Arts education and training programs have disappeared at an alarming rate. DEPA recommends that a new National Cultural Policy puts in place strategies to address this decline.

### **Conclusion**

The Minister, The Hon Tony Burke MP, stated in his preamble to the current National Cultural Policy that:

*... arts and culture are not a luxury, they are essential to our economy, our wellbeing, and our sense of belonging. (Public Consultation Paper, National Cultural Policy 2026: 2).*

However, in the current environment it may be argued that the preceding statement is more aspirational than generally accepted. A new National Cultural Policy must have the means and mechanisms to move from aspirational statements to change, acceptance and implementation.

A new National Cultural Policy must:

- embed in the entire population that culture is fundamental to our national life and identity;
- reinforce that access to arts education and training for all is a fundamental building block for our cultural identity;
- Actively promote STEAM rather than STEM to encourage the study of the arts in education;
- provide practical support to address the closure of secondary and tertiary arts programs;
- make explicit that access to arts is a right for all Australians and fundamental to our cultural identity.

