



National Cultural Policy

Submission

ABOUT GLAAS INC

GLAAS INC is a Registered Charity staffed entirely by volunteers, which works to support glass artists, makers, students and graduates. Glaas Inc has strong ties to the industry sector and other glass and arts organisations; and provides exhibition, employment and other opportunities for the glass community. The organisation was integral to the establishment of qualification courses delivered at Melbourne Polytechnic in Prahran from 2020, Melbourne Polytechnic being supported in this endeavour by a Victorian Labour State Government Grant (WITF in 2018).

In the six years since the Courses were established many graduates have progressed to establishing their own practices and businesses leading to a rebuilding of the leadlight and stained glass sector in Victoria, providing much needed trained leadlighters and artists to provide both new work and qualified restoration skills for repair and conservation of existing work - as there is a significant body of heritage work in the State.

The TAFE course – the only one of its kind in the world – provides skills training that was in danger of being lost, as well as opportunities to develop new glass methods for use in contemporary architectural applications.

GLAAS INC also delivers social impact programs including the First Nations Free Glass Workshop Program, which has provided free tuition and materials to First Nations People who had not had the opportunity to create glass art previously. The program, operational since September 2022, has opened up pathways to study - several participants have gone on to complete the Melbourne Polytechnic Courses. Many have created works which are exhibited in an annual NAIDOC Week exhibition; and there are instances of noted improvements in mental and physical health, employment opportunities, public recognition of works and creative and financial outcomes.

Recommendations

1. First Nations First

The reason that Glaas started the First Nations program was because our Director Donna Kennedy who had worked in the architectural glass sector for 35 years, had always noticed the absence of First Nations Glass Artists in the Australian Glass Art Sector (apart from a few notable artists).

Working with glass is much more expensive than painting and most other visual arts and the cost, as well as the lack of training opportunities for First Nations People, were barriers. Local Council funding provided the tuition costs and TAFE teachers were employed to deliver the workshops.

In 2026 all workshops are delivered by First Nations glass teachers and mentors who have progressed through the workshops and Melbourne Polytechnic training.

Recommendations:

To recognise and support the importance of TAFE education in Creative Industries for both First Nations People and non-Indigenous participants. The hands on industry-led practical skills and the experience of industry practitioners as teachers in Creative Arts subjects is vital to the growth of these industries. TAFE is best situated to deliver this type of training as well as the necessary theory.

2. A Place for Every Story

Spaces are very important to enable the delivery of Programs like the First Nations Glass Workshops – Glaas also runs workshops for the general public but it is important for First Nations participants to have a place to themselves to ensure it can always be a safe space.

Recommendation:

To recognise and support the provision of dedicated spaces for small organisations providing specialist training particularly in the Creative Arts and Industries. Having their own space provides a significant amount of safety and positive mental health outcomes in knowing that they have a ‘home’ for their learning – these places can also create opportunities for exhibitions and demonstrations to engage new First Nations learners and also to display their work and skills to non-Indigenous people, thus encouraging more understanding between them. The dedicated space also creates opportunities for the development of community with all of the subsequent supportive and positive outcomes.

Culture is a vital source for communication and connection; in this technological age we are embracing it is so important to support opportunities for creativity which so often lead to better mental health outcomes and the pathway to more positive and clearer ways of thinking, thus enhancing the experience of life itself.