

Submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation, Revive 2.0**Jeff Meiners**

I acknowledge and celebrate that the Arts are central to the knowing, doing, being and becoming of First Peoples of Australia. I respect all First Peoples past and present, as the original and enduring custodians of culture protecting the lands, seas, air and waterways and note this land now known as Australia was never ceded.

Background

This submission draws upon my experience of living and working in Australia since 1994 and prior as a professional based in England. My work includes dance and arts education across early childhood education, schools and universities, with artists, education organizations, dance companies and international projects. I am now retired and hold an Adjunct position at the newly formed Adelaide University (formerly with the University of South Australia).

My work led to positions as Australia Council Dance Board Community Representative (2002-2007) and Australian Arts curriculum dance Shape paper writer. I also won the 2009 Australian Dance Award (Outstanding Services to Dance Education) and in 2019 was awarded National Honorary Life Member of the Australian Dance Council.

My collaborative research and creative development projects with babies and toddlers for Windmill Theatre produced numerous publications. Presentations for UNESCO World Conferences on Arts Education include Lisbon (2025), Seoul (2010) and most recently, the 2024 Abu Dhabi Framework, emphasised lifelong learning in culture and arts within educational settings.

I have been a board member with the UK National Dance Teachers' Association, Dance Advisory Panel. Arts Council England; the Birmingham Royal Ballet; Tasdance; Carclew Youth Arts; Australian Dance Theatre; Ausdance representative, National Advocates for Arts Educators (NAAE); Co-Chair Education & Training Network, World Dance Alliance Asia-Pacific; Chair, Independent Makers and Presenters Program Panel, Arts South Australia.

I am past Chair of daCi (dance and the Child international) (2022-2025) and convened the Adelaide global congress 'Panpapanpalya 2018' which focused on intergenerational learning in dance. In 2020 I undertook a guest dance education teaching residency semester at the Graduate School of Dance, Taipei National University of the Arts.

Drawing upon this experience my submission is also informed by my doctorate research titled 'So we can dance?' (2017) which focused on factors impacting upon an inclusive primary school dance curriculum along with my PhD supervision and examination work with Australian and international students.

WHY THE FIVE PILLARS MATTER TO ME AND MY PRACTICE

I support the five pillars: First Nations First, A Place for Every Story, Centrality of the Artist, Strong Cultural Infrastructure, and Engaging the Audience. These are each important for building and sustaining an 'Australian culture' but consider there to be a significant gap that limits cultural policy, namely the absence of a pillar that supports arts learning across generations from early years through to later life.

THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE PILLARS MOST RELEVANT TO ME

The pillars reveal the **challenge** of a divide between arts and education systems, which results in incoherent responsibility and inconsistent access. Revive (Office of the Arts, 2023) asserts that cultural policy operates across government domains but operational structures required for cross-portfolio integration between the arts and education, in the broadest sense, to include formal, informal and non-formal learning settings, UNESCO, 2024). This divide was exemplified for me when I attended the 2024 UNESCO world conference on Arts and Culture in Abu Dhabi. Neither Tony Burke or Jason Clare were present and thus Australia was absent alongside most other countries,

A particular **challenge** is the disjunction between policy intentions and sector experience. The next National Cultural Policy provides an **opportunity** for cultural infrastructure to be strengthened by restoring funding to under-resourced areas such as arts education, youth arts and service organisations.

WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO SEE REFLECTED IN THE NEXT NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

I would like to see support for the National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE) call for a Sixth Pillar: Arts Learning, Training and Pathways:

This would ensure a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to arts education.

As one of the eight learning areas of the Australian Curriculum, the contribution of the Arts to student learning, engagement and development is well established. However, there is inequitable access to quality arts education for all Australian students due to reasons outlined by the NAAE. This pillar would ensure that this curriculum entitlement is realised in practice.

I would like to see a nationwide research study realised and highly publicised, such as the USA's *Champions of change – The impact of the arts on children's learning* (Fiske, 1999); this would illuminate schools implementing best practice in the arts curriculum from urban, suburban, remote, regional and low socioeconomic communities as exemplars that could enable improvement in other settings.

I would like to see support reinstated for service organisations:

The withdrawal of support for service organisations over the past twenty years has led to dismal lack of support across the ecosystems of the arts.

My particular interest in dance is exemplified by the former Australia Council's ultimately devastating withdrawal of funding for **Ausdance National** as a service organisation. The well-documented development of neoliberal economic rationalisation led to policy changes resulting in utter disregard for the altruistic vision and achievements of such organisations supporting the dance sector. This lack of support is a far cry from the foundational aspirations of early champions of Australian cultural policy, such as Donald Horne at the Australia Council and others who advocated for an independent Australian artistic identity and strengthening of the arts as foundational for cultural expression.

Ausdance National fed into the efforts of the Australia Council, advising, initiating and advocating for dance sector development. Ausdance led groundbreaking developments resulting in Safe Dance, Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Teaching Dance, Guide to Australian Dance Companies, Black Dance, Tertiary Dance Council, the Australian Dance Awards (ADAs), many forums and summits for Community Dance and Dance Education, with each initiative strengthening practices and the sector by connecting established and emerging individuals and reducing isolation.

Whilst aware that times have changed, Creative Australia has been reinvented as the 'Australian Government's principal arts investment and advisory body that champions and invests in arts and creativity to benefit all Australians'. With the loss of funding there has been an undermining of the vital work on Ausdance along with the inevitable questioning by some in the sector of the viability of Ausdance alongside the ongoing generous voluntary board of dance associated professionals.

With the loss of funding, there is pressure upon the charity of Ausdance volunteers across Australia, limited resources and sponsorship along with a much-reduced presence and activism of Ausdance National in Australian cultural life, an organisation highly regarded by overseas observers.

In sharp contrast, the sports sector is highly supported. How did it come to be that daily TV screens and radio celebrate the talents, competitions and successes of AFL, rugby, basketball, netball, tennis, car racing, cycling and golf stars as part of Australian culture? Sports people's injuries are even highlighted daily. These are regularly given significant time in TV news. How can interest in the televised possibilities of the arts within the news from presenters such as the ABC, SBS, 7, 9 and 10 networks be encouraged and supported?

A challenge for **Revive** is thus to support and empower championing and celebration of the Australian dance and wider sector.

In conclusion, for the next National Cultural Policy I suggest:

Recommendation 1: Add a sixth pillar for arts learning as per NAAE call

Recommendation 2: Address Structural Disconnection Between Arts and Education**Recommendation 3: Recognise Children and Young People as Cultural Citizens****Recommendation 4: Reinstate funding for professional arts service organisations such as Ausdance National****Recommendation 5: Address inequity between Sport and the Arts (Dance, Music, Theatre, Visual Arts).****Endorsements**

I endorse the following submissions to this consultation process:

- National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE) Submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation May 2026;
- Theatre Network Australia (TNA) Children, Young People and the Arts (CYPA) Advisory Group Submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation May 2026 (yet to see final version/s);
- CYPA coalition (all art forms) Next Generation Now: Embedding Children and Young People in Australia's Next National Cultural Policy Submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation May 2026.

References

Fiske, E. (Ed.). (1999). Champions of change – The impact of the arts on children's learning. The GE Fund, John D. and Catherine T. Macarthur Foundation.

United Nations Education Science and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). (2024). UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education.

https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2024/02/WCCAE_UNESCO%20Framework_EN_0.pdf