

To the director and responsible policy area in the Department,

Thank you for progressing this consultation, and for this opportunity to comment. I would like to make a short submission focusing on “Pillar 4 - A Strong Cultural Infrastructure” to highlight certain areas that may require additional policy attention and prioritisation from the Government in the long term. I understand this submission may not be of immediate relevance.

I understand that the focus of the government’s broader cultural policy is currently focused on supporting the creative industry in Australia and its promotion abroad, however, I would like to speak on the importance of building greater cultural literacy in the humanities as a principle to be considered. It is important to recognise “culture” as a constantly evolving phenomenon that is being actively produced, it is however equally important, to recognise that a culture has a Canon worthy of defending, that did not emerge from a vacuum. Education, particularly secondary schooling, in Australia tends to be “deep but narrow” where a few areas are explored in depth. This creates a situation where awareness of broader heritage is sacrificed for developing abilities to research and argue on particular issues. The latter is of course important, but not at the expense of the former, and we should not rely on people to complete the former by themselves outside of an academic setting. The key reason I emphasise this, is because that broad knowledge enables people to better appreciate the cultural environments they have inherited, that is worthy to participate in and improve, as opposed to developing skills aimed at building competence to be used by others based on arbitrary judgements of a person’s usefulness.

Take for example, NSW’s Modern History syllabus, all the Year 12 subjects focus on the 20th Century and after, with Year 11 courses giving students choices amongst varied topics of the 19th Century. It is entirely possible to finish the course with exemplary grades then, without knowledge of the rise of absolutist rule or the consequences of the Thirty Years’ War. The system as it is, does not build broad knowledge. Rather than letting teachers choose whether to teach Enlightenment or the French Revolution in Year 11, the course should instead be a survey that will cover both. Even though this topic is beyond the scope of the consultation, I believe the principle of covering more topics at the expense of depth should be seen as an appropriate approach. The NSW’s English Advanced syllabus has the same problem, in that it focuses on specific texts rather than English’s cultural legacy from Chaucer to Joyce. A student can write an excellent essay assessing *Mrs Dalloway*, and not be aware of Woolf’s other works like *The Waves* or *Night and Day*. There is a further issue in that the module seems to have no texts prescribed written before Machiavelli.

The other major issue I take with building cultural legacy, is the consistent lowering of expectations (the Easy Read option on the consultation being an example). Take the English syllabus again, years ago Auden’s political poems were considered only advanced, they have now moved to Extension 1 (though it is welcomed to see Faulker and Wallace on the list). Filmmakers in the syllabus include Christopher Nolan and Wes Anderson, which is a missed opportunity to include Australian works like *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.

In all of these cases, appreciation of arts and the story of how the world came to be, themselves may become a byproduct of education, rather than its aim.

While I understand these developments may be designed with the aspiration of fostering accessibility, they may inadvertently lead to lowered outcomes. We should improve our cultural settings with what we have and can, but it is discouraging to see that a case study in *Revive* highlighted video games as a way to find new audiences for classical music. I would note that I am not making an elitist attack on video games as form, but rather that I would prefer for both forms to be promotable on their own terms, for their own merits.

In the end, to answer the consultation question, what do I want to see reflected in the next national cultural policy? First and foremost, continued deliveries based on what has already taken shape, fostering a market for contemporary Australian music, investment into domestic filmmaking, continued funding into artistic collection and training organisations (ie NFSA) and beyond. However, from my personal angle, I would like to see a more holistic understanding of building “cultural infrastructure” reflected in policy analysis and development over the long term, that takes into consideration artistic traditions that we have inherited. I would encourage the department and relevant agencies to consider the merits of engaging with our educational institutions on how to best promote the matters I have discussed, to build broad cultural knowledge and awareness. In essence, much of the good work that has been progressed, will be able to reach a much bigger audience, if we create an environment that appreciates culture rather than treating it as any other industry in the economy.

Nonetheless, it is incredible to observe the range of actions taken to actualise the aims of *Revive*, such as the increased funding for Music Australia and various cultural exchange programs involving Australia’s major galleries.

I understand this submission in particular may not be of assistance, however should one day related matters be considered, I wish it may be the basis of further considerations for action.

All the opinions and views put forth are my own, they do not represent any organisations or employers I may be involved with in the past, now or in the future.

Kind regards,
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