

National Cultural Policy Submission

1472777

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Individual

Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

As a mid-career, cross disciplinary artist with a practice steeped in community and education settings, it is excellent to see the role of arts education recognised as integral to the centrality of the artist in the next National Cultural Policy.

However, if artists are central to Australia's cultural future, policy must support the conditions that make creative careers possible, equitable and sustainable.

At a time when universities are closing arts programs at an alarming rate, pathways for developing creative skills are becoming increasingly limited. Where these programs remain available, they are often financially inaccessible.

The average income for artists in Australia is approximately \$54,500, with only around half derived from creative work (Creative Australia). For young artists, the increasing cost of higher education creates long-term financial disadvantage that is impossible to recover from through arts employment alone, perpetuating cycles of financial insecurity and limiting who is able to pursue creative careers. This has significant implications not only for artists themselves, but for the future sustainability and diversity of Australia's cultural sector.

The increasing cost of arts degrees makes entry into the sector more exclusive, without a corresponding increase in financial security or professional respect for artists. In turn, chronic financial instability and systemic underfunding at both federal and state levels make it extraordinarily difficult to sustain a long-term career as an artist in Australia.

Most artists graduate into an industry that relies heavily on independent practice. Independent artists are the lifeblood of the Australian arts sector. Even artists working with major companies across theatre, dance, music and other disciplines are frequently employed on short-term contracts and rely on piecing together income through freelance work, grants and secondary employment.

A particularly concerning issue is the loss of mid-career artists. Many highly skilled and experienced practitioners are forced to leave the sector between the ages of 35 and 50 — not due to a lack of talent or contribution, but because sustainable careers in the arts are financially untenable. While other industries benefit enormously from artists' creativity, adaptability and lateral thinking, the loss to Australia's cultural life is profound.

Without sustained investment across all career stages, Australia risks losing both cultural knowledge and artistic innovation.

Reflected in the next National Cultural Policy should be:

A commitment to affordable, high-quality arts, humanities and cultural education across Australian universities, including urgent reform to arts degree fee structures in line with recommendations from the Accord Review.

Recognition that the current cost of arts education disproportionately disadvantages emerging artists and creates barriers to participation, particularly for young people and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Increased funding for independent artists through Creative Australia grants programs, including greater support for early-career and mid-career practitioners.

The development of national wage guidelines and minimum standards for independent artists to support fairer and more sustainable working conditions.

Greater recognition of the economic, civic and social value artists contribute across Australian society.