

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I am a historian and creative non-fiction writer, with professional relationships with a range of literary organisations. I am president of the History Council of NSW, former president of the Professional Historians' Association NSW/ACT, a board member of NSW State Archives Authority and an alumnus of Varuna, The National Writers' House. Within the last seven years I have received funding from the Australia Council, Copyright Agency Ltd, and The Australia Institute, as well as the 2022 Hazel Rowley Literary Fellowship. I have contributed to the joint statement from the History Councils of NSW, Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia, and reaffirm the need for more explicit recognition of history-making as a core dimension of cultural policy. I make the following general points as a mid-career creative practitioner.

I am a woman from a working-class background, who grew up in a regional town in southern Tasmania. I have worked hard to educate myself, taking on HECS debts to do so, and to carve out time for my creative work, while raising a child alone and living on the edge of Western Sydney. The grants I received were critical to my development as a writer. They represented encouragement, as well as an opportunity to step away from paid work and sink into my writing. They enabled me to think and work independently, without the constraints of the expectations of academia and the demands to publish work in specific formats. Funding for individual artists is absolutely crucial, because it frees them to think and create. I would like to see a renewed investment in funding for individual, self-directed work.

The next generation of artists is currently burdened by the unfair student contribution fees for arts and humanities that are incorporated in the Jobs Ready Graduates system of tertiary funding. This scheme is intended to discourage young people from exploring the arts, and the nation will be poorer for it if it continues. A national cultural policy should invest in the arts from the very ground up, so striving for excellence in education in the arts is critical.

Art thrives when artists have the opportunity to meet, talk, collaborate, and provide robust peer review and encouragement to other artists. For these reasons, artistic boards should be led by artists. Peer review should be the only determinant of artistic selection.

Finally, commitment to the arts and arts practice requires governments to defend the spaces within which art happens and the right of artists to express themselves freely, in all their diversity. Creative Australia needs to back artists that have been selected by peer review and to support its staff to make decisions outside the news cycle, and free from political interference. The leadership of Creative Australia should be refreshed and renewed to encourage this process.

Thank you for asking artists what we want to see.

Dr Naomi Parry Duncan, historian and writer