

22 May 2026

The Australian Council of University Art & Design Schools (ACUADS)

ABN 68 551 409 321

SUBMISSION BY
THE AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF UNIVERSITY ART & DESIGN SCHOOLS (ACUADS)
TO THE MINISTER FOR THE ARTS ON THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION PAPER:
TOWARDS A NEW NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

The **Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools (ACUADS)** is the nation's peak organisation representing the interests of art and design schools within Australian universities. ACUADS currently represents more than 20 Australian tertiary art and design faculties, schools and departments offering university degrees at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in art, craft and design.

ACUADS welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the next National Cultural Policy. We emphatically support the continuation of the five pillars first set out in *Revive* and offer the following perspectives on how the next policy can strengthen the tertiary education and research foundations on which the entire cultural ecosystem depends.

Reviving tertiary art and design education

The tertiary art and design sector is in a period of sustained contraction that threatens the workforce pipeline at the heart of Pillar 3, the *Centrality of the Artist*. Since 2018, more than 30 art and design degree programs have been discontinued across Australian universities, with national enrolments falling from approximately 76,000 in 2019 to around 72,000 in 2023 (Gattenhof & Saunders, 2026). These losses continue to be concentrated in regional and outer-metropolitan institutions, progressively narrowing provision to a small number of metropolitan universities.

Policy settings have driven much of this decline. The 2020 Job-Ready Graduates package notoriously increased the cost of arts and humanities subjects, changes that increased the costs of Creative Arts degrees, and sending a powerful signal about the perceived value of creative study at precisely the moment the sector requires renewal. The result is a self-reinforcing cycle in which declining enrolments prompt program closures, which further restrict access and weaken the pathway into the cultural and creative workforce. This is occurring while the sector reports growing skills shortages and a retiring cohort of practitioners, and despite a cultural and creative sector that contributes some \$67 billion to the national economy (Browne, 2020). We urge the government to reform the Job-Ready Graduates settings as they apply to creative disciplines as a matter of priority and to commit to stabilising creative arts provision across the university and vocational sectors.

Recognising creative and practice-led research

University art and design schools are not only sites of teaching but engines of creative research and development. Practice-led research, the generation of new knowledge through prototyping, performance and artistic experimentation, produces cultural, social and intellectual value that feeds directly into the wider creative economy. This contribution

remains poorly recognised in national cultural and research policy, where the creative arts are too often subsumed within the humanities rather than identified as a distinct field of knowledge creation.

A renewed National Cultural Policy is an opportunity to make this research visible and to align cultural and research policy settings. We encourage the government to recognise university creative research as essential cultural infrastructure under Pillar 4, and to safeguard the arms-length, evidence-based decision-making on which both research excellence and artistic freedom depend.

Support for a sixth pillar: *Arts Learning, Training and Pathways*

ACUADS supports the proposal, advanced by the National Advocates for Arts Education and others, to establish a sixth pillar: *Arts Learning, Training and Pathways*. The current five pillars rely on the outcomes of arts education (*participation, workforce development and audience engagement*) without adequately investing in the systems that produce them. A sixth pillar would recognise *arts learning*, from school through to tertiary study and lifelong practice, as essential national infrastructure and a shared responsibility across the Arts and Education portfolios. For our sector, it would provide the policy coherence and accountability needed to sustain the tertiary pathways and research capacity that underpin Australia's cultural future.

Art and design schools as cultural infrastructure

Beyond their teaching and research roles, we would like to underscore that art and design schools are significant forms of cultural infrastructure in their own right. Their galleries, studios, workshops, collections and public programs nourish local creative ecosystems and provide many communities, particularly outside the major cities, with their primary access to contemporary art and design. The closure of regional and outer-metropolitan programs therefore removes not only educational pathways but cultural infrastructure, deepening the divide between metropolitan and regional Australia that Pillar 2, *A Place for Every Story*, seeks to redress. Sustained investment in our nation's art and design institutions is also investment in equitable national access to culture.

First Nations leadership in tertiary art and design

ACUADS strongly supports the centrality of *First Nations First*. Universities have a particular responsibility to embed First Nations cultural authority within art and design curricula and pedagogy, to recognise Indigenous Knowledges as valuable and valid research methodologies, and to ensure Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property is protected as artistic practice and research increasingly intersect with artificial intelligence. This work must be properly resourced. The cultural load carried by First Nations academic staff should be formally recognised and remunerated, and clear, supported pathways developed for First Nations students into and through tertiary art and design study and the cultural workforce.

Coordinating across the Arts and Education portfolios

It can be seen that the issues raised here sit at the intersection of the Arts and Education portfolios. We recommend that the next National Cultural Policy establish formal mechanisms for cross-portfolio coordination so that cultural and education policy settings work together

rather than at cross-purposes. Tertiary art and design education and research are foundational to every ambition of the National Cultural Policy; without them there are no future artists, designers, researchers or audiences.

ACUADS thanks the federal government for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission further. Should there be any questions or follow-up regarding this submission, please do not hesitate to contact me via

[REDACTED]

Thank you for your consideration.



Associate Professor Charles Robb

Chair (Acting), Australian Council of University Art & Design Schools (ACUADS)

References

Browne, B. (2020). Economic contribution of the arts and cultural sector. The Australia Institute. <https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Background-Brief-Economic-importance-of-arts-and-entertainment-WEB.pdf>

Gattenhof, S., & Saunders, J. N. (2026). The Polycrisis for Arts and Creative Education in Australia. *Australian Journal of Education*, 70(1), 87–106.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00049441261421275>

ACUADS Member Institutions

Adelaide Central School of Art
Adelaide University
Australian National University
Curtin University
Deakin University
Edith Cowan University
Flinders University
Griffith University
Monash University
National Art School
Queensland University of Technology

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
Swinburne University
University of Melbourne
University of New South Wales
University of South Australia
University of Southern Queensland
University of Sydney
University of Technology Sydney
University of Western Australia
University of Western Sydney