

National Cultural Policy Submission

1472898

Public and anonymous

Individual



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I am a PhD candidate researching the conditions that affect the production, distribution and consumption of contemporary dance in Western Australia. I have experience as both a consultant and board member in the arts sector. The following represents some of my research findings to date.

1. The current approach to cultural policy is not developing cultural sectors that are dependent on self-employed independent artists. The cultural policy, Revive, has rhetoric around supporting artists as workers based on principles of opportunity for access and participation, ... and supporting new works and emerging artists. However, federal funding continues to favour heritage artforms and entities over contemporary arts practices and individual artists. Federal funding allocations indicate there is virtually no support for 4-year professionally trained emerging contemporary dance creatives, particularly in Western Australia where WAAPA provides the pipeline of contemporary dancers.

One key issue is that funding structures and processes for small entities and independent contemporary dance artists do not align with the given objectives of Revive; they need to shift away from picking (established) winners to providing enabling conditions for successful innovation (eg. like the transition of industrial policy in the early 2000s where funds are available for innovation investment and incubators to nurture start-ups). A new approach to funding structures is required to: support the development process of new work by emerging artists; distribute the full risk-burden that emerging artists currently carry; and enable quality contemporary dance work (and other live performing arts) to be developed and presented.

Opportunities / pathways are required for experimentation and dance-making processes that develop gradually - for development of ideas into short-form and subsequent performance-ready works. Funding structures need to align with and support such development pathways. Models of creative development for performing arts, specifically where dependent on an independent workforce, could adopt product / service development models in other sectors to ensure contiguous development phases. ie. Approval in principle at concept stage for total funding to take a work from concept to market with particular milestone deliverables to trigger release of funds for each development phase. This would provide risk capital for innovative new work, remove the risk burden from emerging artists, and enable creatives to focus on the development and artistic outcomes rather than working multiple non-arts jobs that limit their creative capacity. It would also support development of works of excellence and increased scale, beyond solo presentations. Public funding is necessary to provide risk-capital, not linked to economic outcomes or social benefits, and increased opportunity for challenging work to be created and presented. This should also be aligned with universal income for artists (per the Irish model) as creative work is now largely unpaid, and artistic development (works and practice) is restricted by working multiple non-arts jobs.

2. Arts activities continue to be measured from an industry perspective, with expectations of instrumental social and economic outcomes rather than intrinsic benefits. These expectations shift the focus to reach and community engagement, often associated with a reduced focus on artistic quality / excellence.