

National Cultural Policy submission

College of Creative Arts, Design and
Humanities



National Cultural Policy submission

Adelaide University respectfully acknowledges the Kaurna, Boandik and Barngarla First Nations Peoples and their Elders past and present, who are the First Nations' Traditional Owners of the lands that are home to our campuses across South Australia. We also acknowledge other First Nations lands across Australia with which we conduct business, their Elders, ancestors, cultures and heritage.

A note on terminology:

Adelaide University recognises that there are differing perspectives and preferences in terminology when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples / First Nations Peoples / First Peoples. We have sought to use culturally appropriate and respectful language, and use the terms First Nations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interchangeably.

Contents

Executive summary:	3
Part One: challenges and opportunities in the pillars most relevant to the College of Creative Arts Design and Humanities at Adelaide University	4
Pillar 1: First Nations First	4
Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story	5
Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist	6
Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure	8
Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience	9
Part two: Why do the five pillars matter to the College of Creative Arts, Design and Humanities and Adelaide University	10
Part three: what we would like to see reflected in the next national Cultural policy	11

National Cultural Policy submission

Executive summary:

The arts, culture and creative sector in Australia is vibrant, unique and an integral part of our nation's history and identity. The thriving areas of our arts, cultural and creative ecosystem are a product of key long-term, strategic investments in infrastructure, education and other key initiatives made by previous state and federal governments and thus stand as testaments to the value and benefit of targeted, long-term, and industry-specific policy in this sector. Our creative and cultural ecosystem is distinctive in its variety, accessibility, and connectedness. In particular, the rich and diverse Aboriginal arts and cultures are central to the strength, vibrancy, and resilience of our sector, and continuing to prioritise and champion Aboriginal-led organisations, initiatives and projects is vital.

Strategic policy aims should be informed by accurate and relevant data that is representative and reflective of the diversity of our sector, yet we have instead often grappled with policy settings that have made funding and investment for our sector out-of-sync with the needs and priorities of a 21st century society on the cusp of unprecedented change and disruption-especially as Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies are transforming so much of how we work, create and live. The National Cultural Policy: Revive: A place for every story, a story for every place, launched in 2023, was a vital first step in realigning policy settings to revitalise the sector through structured investment and a focus on improved community access to the arts. However, it cannot be ignored that there have been implementation delays for key initiatives of the National Cultural Policy which have impacted the realisation of tangible benefits across the sector.

Adelaide University – formed through the merger of The University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia – welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing development of the National Cultural Policy. As a new institution grounded in established strengths, the University is well positioned to support a refreshed policy framework. Through its College of Creative Arts, Design and Humanities, Adelaide University aims to act as a cultural anchor institution, contributing to policy outcomes through education, workforce development, research, and thought leadership. With a strong focus on access, inclusion, and societal impact, the University's strategic vision aligns closely with the five pillars of the National Cultural Policy.

Part One: challenges and opportunities in the pillars most relevant to the College of Creative Arts Design and Humanities at Adelaide University

Adelaide University's College of Creative Arts, Design and Humanities operates at the nexus of education and the creative and cultural sector. All five pillars of the National Cultural Policy are fundamental to our ways of working, thinking, teaching and creating. We also have a unique perspective and understanding of the challenges and opportunities of realising commitment and action across policy, practice, pedagogy and participation, ensuring that education, culture and creativity contribute meaningfully to a more inclusive, representative, and equitable Australia.

Pillar 1: First Nations First

The National Cultural Policy places First Nations voices and leadership at the centre of Australia's cultural life, prioritising Indigenous cultural authority, supporting diverse storytelling, and improving access to arts participation. The ambition of the policy to facilitate structural change in who creates, controls and experiences culture in Australia is foundational and should remain front and centre of future developments in national cultural policy going forward.

Opportunities:

A continued focus on First Nations cultural authority, self-determination and First Nations-led approaches will be critical to ensuring that cultural knowledge, heritage, stories and creative practice are governed and shared in ways that are determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Supporting First Nations leadership in decision-making strengthens cultural integrity and contributes to more sustainable and effective cultural outcomes.

The commitment outlined in Revive to establish standalone Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) legislation is crucial to protect First Nations knowledge and traditional cultural rights, by empowering First Nations peoples to own, control, and protect their cultural heritage, knowledge, and artistic expressions. Establishing legislation presents a significant opportunity to provide the legal clarity needed to enact systemic change and prevent the cultural exploitation of First Nations knowledge. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are fundamental expressions of culture, identity and belonging. Continued support for language revitalisation, maintenance and transmission will contribute to cultural continuity, strengthen community wellbeing and ensure important cultural knowledge is preserved and shared across generations. The protection, stewardship and ethical use of First Nations cultural heritage, cultural expressions and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property remain critical considerations, particularly as digital technologies and artificial intelligence continue to evolve. Effective legislative, policy and institutional frameworks will be important to ensuring cultural materials are accessed, used and shared in ways that respect First Nations rights, responsibilities and cultural authority.

Adelaide University recognises that the university sector will play a key role in establishing institutional policy and governance to ensure our teaching and research activities uphold and protect First Nations rights to heritage, knowledge and culture. We launched our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Strategy in 2025. A key initiative in this strategy reflects our commitment to embedding new and best practice ICIP practices within Adelaide University, leveraging institutional resources to empower Aboriginal models of governance to meet contemporary needs, inclusive of data sovereignty. These initiatives are further supported by the University's institutional capabilities, including the Aboriginal Knowledges Centre, Cultural Capability Framework, and Community Research partnerships, all of which are closely aligned with the objectives of the National Cultural Policy. Standalone federal ICIP legislation will be a significant and important factor in how we can establish, maintain and enforce our ICIP principles and protocols.

Challenges:

As outlined in the Reconciliation Australia [*Guide – Respecting and Protecting Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property \(ICIP\)*](#), AI “creates risks for ICIP” because it “does not have cultural understanding” which may result in content or sources containing ICIP or Indigenous Data without appropriate permission or consent, or acknowledgement or attribution. It may also produce content that is inaccurate and/or culturally insensitive. Moreover, “Because AI is such a new technology, it is not certain how the law applies to it.” Challenges arising from legal ambiguity in the areas of AI and copyright are creating significant challenges in the creative and cultural sector as a whole, and it is worth highlighting how this is particularly concerning in terms of ICIP. The need for robust, comprehensive and enforceable ICIP legislation is therefore especially important and timely. While this commitment in the National Cultural Policy is clear, and action to develop and implement the policy has progressed, there may be challenges in maintaining momentum and focus as the political and socio-economic landscape continues to be subject to disruptive change.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

The National Cultural Policy recognises the importance of expanding access to the arts and cultural institutions, and that this requires both investment in inclusive creative production and systemic attention to equity barriers across education and participation.

Opportunities:

The opportunities in this pillar for both the arts, culture and education are interconnected and inter-influencing and require adjusted policy settings across both sectors. The education sector could play a key role in realising cross-sector collaboration between industry, universities, and community

organisations through dedicated creative funding programs that would enable research, experimentation and storytelling that reflects the full diversity of Australian experience.

Technological innovation, particularly AI and digital platforms, offer new opportunities to broaden participation in cultural creation and distribution. These tools can help overcome geographic isolation, support multilingual access, and enable new forms of storytelling across communities and abilities. Key examples of how Adelaide University can support and realise these opportunities include:

- **Adelaide Lab for Immersive Technologies (ALIT) painting application:** this technology uses smoothing algorithms to support fine motor control in individuals with neurodegenerative conditions, such as Parkinson's disease or multiple sclerosis. This tool enables users to create expressive artworks independently, restoring agency and creative fulfilment. Adelaide University is keen to collaborate further on this initiative to scale up such technologies, ensuring they are co-designed with and for the disability community, embedded in therapeutic and cultural spaces, and backed by inclusive design principles.
- **Innovative Approaches to Arts and Health, and Music Therapy:** aligning with the National Cultural Policy's emphasis on arts and health and music therapy, and the recognition of their community impact Adelaide University's research teams have developed a music theory-based application designed initially as a pain diversion tool for patients in non-traditional clinical settings. With refinement, this application has potential for wider therapeutic uses, including in rural, remote, or underserved communities, as well as for real-time data capture and outcome monitoring. This kind of distributed access platform could provide both personalised therapy experiences and valuable insights into community-wide mental health and wellbeing trends.

Challenges:

Currently, funding models that specifically disadvantage Creative Arts and Humanities students create broader challenges by creating an exclusionary pipeline to creative and cultural careers- one that is narrowed by affordability and access. This is reinforced by the lack of ongoing sustainable career growth in the sector, which is described further in "centrality of the artist" section below. Addressing these structural barriers is essential to ensuring that where spaces and places are created in our socio-cultural landscape for a genuinely diverse and representative range of voices.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

Opportunities:

The centrality of the artist requires a recognition and support of artists as workers, and a full and coordinated effort to properly resource and reinforce creative workforce development at a sector

wide, systemic (rather than project specific) level. A basic income model for artists and cultural practitioners (such as Ireland's Basic Income for Artists pilot scheme introduced in 2022) demonstrate a compelling opportunity to stabilise and strengthen creative labour markets, enabling artists to dedicate more time to their practice while generating measurable social and economic returns. Strengthening pathways into creative and cultural careers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples remains an important opportunity. Education, mentoring, professional development and industry partnerships can support the growth of a strong First Nations creative workforce and increase First Nations leadership across the cultural and creative sectors.

The emergence of Generative AI technology also offers extraordinary creative possibilities by facilitating new forms of distributed creativity, global collaboration, and cultural diplomacy. It may help address chronic structural challenges within the arts- for example by streamlining administrative burdens and enabling rapid processing of large archives. AI that is guided by ethical and socially and culturally aware frameworks can enrich artistic practice through generative co-creation, offering composers, writers, and visual artists new materials and methodologies. When harnessed properly, AI can become a powerful ally in preserving, amplifying, and diversifying Australia's cultural narratives. However, this technology also poses unique and significant risks and challenges across the sector, as outlined below.

Challenges:

Current challenges in Australia include declining opportunities for early-career practitioners, gaps in training and mentoring pathways, and insufficient alignment between education and industry. These issues are compounded by policy settings, that discourage participation in creative disciplines and undermine workforce development. Artists and cultural practitioners who are unable to navigate the narrow and narrowing pipeline to careers in the sector cannot be centred within it.

The rise of AI further intensifies these concerns. While it offers powerful new creative tools, it also threatens to displace artistic labour, disrupt income streams, and challenge and devalue authorship and expertise. Culturally, AI's reliance on statistical averaging dilutes cultural specificity and originality – meaning the power of AI is not harnessed towards positive creative transformation, but to intensifying and perpetuating outputs mired in cliché, stereotypes and mimicry. Its capacity to generate hyper-realistic deepfakes threatens public trust, while the current lack of protection for artistic labour and copyright in training models poses significant risk to the sector. Understanding and protecting the role of the artists and creative and cultural is essential not just our sector but to the shared understanding of truth and trust that underpins social cohesion. This requires policy responses that safeguard intellectual property, ensure fair remuneration, and recognise the value of embodied artistic practice.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Opportunities:

Cultural infrastructure extends beyond physical venues such as theatres, museums and galleries to include operational and organisational structures including education systems, research capacity, and digital platforms that sustain creative and cultural practice. Cultural infrastructure can be designed to support inclusion, wellbeing, and community engagement alongside artistic excellence. Optimising cultural and creative infrastructure represents a key opportunity to strengthen and stabilise the sector and enhance its capacity for far-reaching and positive societal impact.

Institutions such as Adelaide University's Elder Conservatorium of Music and School of Performing Arts demonstrate the importance of sustained, high-quality training environments in supporting both elite performance and broad participation. The Elder Conservatorium's dual commitment to equitable access and high-quality training directly addresses geographic and structural disparities in arts education, benefiting students from disadvantaged backgrounds and inclusion and accessibility. By advocating for a national music education strategy and championing the irreplaceable value of face-to-face, embodied learning, the Elder Conservatorium strengthens Australia's cultural infrastructure and ensures that music education remains a foundational and forward-looking element of the nation's civic and creative life, as envisioned in the Revive cultural policy.

Adelaide University's work in digitisation, virtual reality, and digital preservation highlights the opportunities available in digital cultural infrastructure. Key examples include MOD. (Museum of Discovery), the Andy Thomas Centre for Space Resources, and the digitisation experiment of the Arthur Boyd collection. These examples exemplify the leading role Adelaide University could play in developing and maintaining cultural infrastructure, particularly in expanding digital collections into comprehensive digital preservation platforms. Through its research and partnerships, the university can also support future-focused, technology-enabled creative practice, aligning with goals around global recognition and cultural diplomacy,

A more targeted cultural infrastructure opportunity specific to South Australia and Adelaide lies in the nexus of the First Nations First and Cultural Infrastructure pillars: with the continuation of Tarrkarri – Centre for First Nations Cultures in Adelaide. If this project is successfully continued, Adelaide could become an epicentre of funding and research in these two terrains. Education would be central to the mandate of the institution and its ongoing identity. As such, Adelaide University could be positioned as a key partner and collaborator in the most important Australian cultural infrastructure to be built in a generation.

Challenges:

Despite the multifaceted and positively reinforcing benefits of comprehensive and strategic investment in Cultural Infrastructure, the Creative and Cultural sector can struggle to articulate the value of these domains, and we likewise struggle to compete for funding and investment against areas that are more readily able to quantify their value - particularly in relation to short term financial or political cycles. The loss of momentum in the delivery of Tarrkarri may be one such example. Funding decision and policy setting are influenced by broader public discourse, and there has been a decline in public recognition of the value of the humanities and creative arts. Stronger institutional support, renewed investment in creative research and practice, and a clearer articulation of how the humanities and creative arts shape the lives and futures of all Australians, are necessary to rebuild trust and demonstrate the societal values of these field.

First Nations First and Strong Cultural Infrastructure are critical to the identity of the College of Creative Arts, Design and Humanities at Adelaide University, as they form part of the DNA of our Signature Research Themes and University-wide strategic aims. Adelaide University is proud of its museum and curatorial studies programs' strong focus on Work Integrated Learning, which actively trains people for careers in our cultural sector. This important work is significantly impacted by investments (or disinvestments) in cultural infrastructure and the careers that it supports. Better investment would enable us to leverage our cross-disciplinary experts in art history / anthropology / curation and archaeology, who could form the nucleus of a program that represents a nationally significant educational offering around First Nations art and culture.

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

Opportunities:

Audience engagement with cultural and creative outputs has always been shaped by technological, social, and cultural change. In our current context, the pace and scale of this change is unprecedented and potentially transformative. This requires new, creative and innovative approaches to ensuring AI and digital tools can be leveraged to expand engagement through personalised experiences, translation, and interactive formats.

At the same time, the arts play a critical role in fostering public trust, critical thinking, and shared cultural understanding- particularly in an era of deepfakes and misinformation. Supporting the arts as a space for reflection on how technology interacts with and impacts society is therefore essential to maintaining informed communities connected by shared understanding and trust.

Innovative models for utilising digital technology to broaden access cultural collections can significantly broaden audience reach, particularly in regional and underserved areas. Approaches that

integrate high-fidelity digitisation with contextual storytelling offer new ways for communities to engage with cultural materials while respecting their provenance and meaning.

Finally, the continued emphasis on embodied, live experience—particularly in the performing arts—remains critical. In an increasingly digital world, the value of shared, human-centred cultural experiences will only grow. Policy settings should recognise and support these forms of engagement as central to cultural life, not secondary to digital innovation.

Challenges:

Creative and cultural activity that cross institutional and organisational boundaries can be uniquely impactful, but investment in creative research and development is a key gap in the current system, particularly where projects are multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary and therefore can fall outside established, siloed funding frameworks. One key challenge is that current policy settings, including the National Cultural Policy, offer little scope for integrating art into multidisciplinary collaborative projects. To foster innovative, impactful multidisciplinary research, the creative and cultural sector and the educational sector both need funding schemes that actively encourage collaboration across disciplinary boundaries. The funding structures for art and research remain largely separate, making collaboration between artists and researchers extremely difficult in practice.

Part two: why do the five pillars matter to the College of Creative Arts, Design and Humanities and Adelaide University

The five pillars of the National Cultural Policy demonstrate the deep interconnection between culture and education. Adelaide University's approach emphasises the importance of integrating industry and community engagement into teaching and research, ensuring graduates are equipped to contribute meaningfully to the sector.

Creative practice, cultural understanding, and critical thinking are essential capabilities for the future workforce. Supporting these capabilities enhances not only the creative sector but also broader social, economic, and community wellbeing. Arts, culture, education and cultural institutions play an important role in supporting truth-telling and fostering greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, experiences and contributions. Continued support for truth-telling initiatives can strengthen cultural understanding, social cohesion and respectful engagement with Australia's shared histories.

Adelaide University's strength – including its research themes, cultural institutions, and interdisciplinary centre – position it as a key contributor to the development of a sustainable and innovative creative economy. The University's strong global connections and regional engagement further support its capacity to deliver lasting societal impact.

Part three: what we would like to see reflected in the next national Cultural policy

The national cultural policy places First Nations voices and leadership at the centre of Australia's cultural life, prioritising Indigenous cultural authority, supporting diverse storytelling, and improving access to arts participation. The ambition of the policy to move beyond symbolism to facilitate meaningful structural change in who creates, controls and experiences culture in Australia is foundational and should remain front and centre of future developments in national cultural policy going forward. Moreover, these strategic aims should be strengthened and enhanced and the delivery of core commitments, such as the establishment of standalone ICIP legislation, should be prioritised. The role of Elders and knowledge holders in maintaining and sharing cultural knowledge is critical to sustaining culture and supporting cultural continuity. Continued investment in opportunities for intergenerational knowledge sharing will strengthen cultural capability, community connection and the transmission of knowledge to future generations.

The next National Cultural Policy needs to reflect an ambitious, evidence-based investment in cultural infrastructure. It should invest not only in the arts because they are important or worthy, but because they have demonstrable value to our economy and society. As such, the policy should also build in its own research program so this and all future policies can have baseline data to think with and act upon. Adelaide University, and the College of Creative Arts, Design and Humanities, are incredibly well placed, with the researchers and experts we have, to feed into this kind of long-term thinking, and indeed to be leaders in this field.

We would welcome a funding framework that more actively supports multidisciplinary research and collaboration between artists and researchers. In particular, funding mechanisms that bridge the divide between arts funding and research funding would create new opportunities for innovative projects that combine creative practice, research, and public engagement.

Embedding artists within broader systems of education, research, and policy is critical. The humanities and creative arts are not peripheral- they are central to how Australians understand identity, history, and collective futures. Strengthening this pillar requires renewed public investment and recognition of artists as essential contributors to social and cultural life.

Further enquiries

Professor Craig Batty

Pro Vice Chancellor,

**College of Creative Arts Design and
Humanities.**

Level 3, Kaurna Building
Adelaide University
SA, 5000

Web: adelaide.edu.au

The content in this publication is for general information only and Adelaide University makes no representation about its accuracy, completeness or suitability for any purpose. It is subject to change, and you can find updated information on our website at **adelaideuni.edu.au**

Australian University Provider Number PRV14404
CRICOS Provider Number 04249J