

National Cultural Policy Submission

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THE RABBLE

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I am an independent artist who works both as a freelancer and as a the Co CEO of a very small theatre company: THE RABBLE. I have been working in the performing arts as a theatre director, designer, and dramaturg for over twenty years.

Below are some areas I would like to be considered as part of the National Cultural Policy.

Universal Basic Income

Universal Basic Income is the only real long-term solution for arts funding. It should be at the centre of every discussion. It effects all the pillars and goes some way to redressing many ongoing issues in the sector including funding structures, under resourcing, the gig economy, physical and mental health issues amongst artists, financial accessibility for audiences and supporting cultural, class and linguistic diversity.

Long-term, stable funding for independent artists has shown to increase productivity and reduce the desire to set up burdensome incorporations or companies. Creative Victoria's Creative Ventures Program and Creators Fund are relevant models that could be expanded, as are artist fellowships (e.g. Australia Council, Myer Foundation). These are all short-term versions of a UBI.

I have received a Sidney Myer Fellowship and it has made an enormous difference to my mental and physical health, the quality of work I have produced, my ability to nurture and mentor others in my sector, my financial stability, and my ability to expand my practice.

KPIs

The sector runs on unpaid labour, mainly by independent artists, but also by salaried artists, producers, and other arts workers who are often working extreme amounts of unpaid overtime. This is because companies feel intense pressure to deliver quantitative results rather than qualitative results in order to keep their funding. I call for the abolishment of quantitative KPIs in arts funding. We need to find different systems for measuring success. Productivity models and insecure funding mean that artists end up delivering outcomes for less money and many more unpaid hours. Artists unpaid labour is fuelling the arts sector.

Centrelink

I also call for the arts to be recognised as a profession by government, including by Centrelink, and that Centrelink and the ATO harmonise income averaging arrangements. There is also an opportunity to encourage employers to put artists onto payroll instead of contracting them, as this ensures artists receive superannuation and are covered under

Workcover. This could be a requirement or a target for funded organisations to meet. It is my experience that major organisations will attempt to avoid putting artists on payroll for short term contracts, forcing artists to become their own businesses. This model does little to provide financial and medical security for independent artists.

Funding Structures

I propose that we significantly redistribute arts funding in to ongoing, stable funding for independent artists and small to medium companies. The AMPAG companies eat a significant amount of the funding pie (particularly Opera, Symphonies and Classical Ballet), which, I believe, does not reflect their overall contribution to the cultural life of Australia.

The independent arts sector is not a step on the path towards a company role, it is a life-time career for tens of thousands of artists. Theatre Network Australia has analysed the programs of performing arts venues and festivals across Australia and found that over half of the programming is work produced by independent companies or individuals – those operating solely on project funding and working gig to gig. An example is the Sydney Festival 2020 (pre-COVID): of the Australian work in the program, half of it was independent. This work is a major part of our professional performing arts industry, yet independent arts workers remain the most vulnerable.