

National Cultural Policy Submission

19 August 2022

National Cultural Policy (NCP) Submission from the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS)

About CHASS: we are a peak body with a membership of over 60 humanities, arts and social sciences (HASS) organisations, including academic discipline associations, universities and members from HASS associated industries.

Challenges and opportunities related to the ‘five pillars’ from *Creative Australia*

First Nations: recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.

Investment in First Nations artists and culture should be a crucial pillar of an NCP. The value of these ways of knowing are gaining increased recognition across policy domains, and arts and culture have been a catalyst for this. There is now the opportunity to support First Nations people across the full range of artistic forms and industries. Australia can not only recognise the importance of over 70,000 years of culture and creativity but provide an avenue for extending its influence across politics, sciences, and society in the coming decade as we face significant challenges. A commitment to, and investment in, preserving and promoting the use of Indigenous languages is crucial to this. This support must be on First Nations terms. However, it is also important to move beyond a still-common view that First Nations people working in the cultural and creative industries can only be employed in positions relating to their own cultural background and experience.

A place for every story: reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.

The evolution of cultural policy away from the national policies of the 1990s that focused on the ‘talented few at the expense of the many’ should continue.ⁱ Participation in culture should be accessible to all, across all forms of arts and culture, in all parts of Australia. There is a real opportunity to extend an NCP to people who are not working artists and invite them to be part of the policy conversation – for example, in supporting the crucial work of volunteers in supporting our culture. **A recognition of the broader right not only to consume but to participate in and have a voice in shaping Australia’s culture should be a cornerstone of a new NCP.**ⁱⁱ Yet there are challenges within this pillar. Stories are contested and not all stories need to be supported. A reality that the NCP must

grapple with is the emergence of a new kind of reactionary politics: a revival of the ‘culture wars’, as well as new social movements around identities and inequalities. It is important at all stages and across institutions to respect the ownership of stories and the sensitivities, tensions and constraints regarding their sharing.

Strong institutions: providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture.

Strong institutions are the foundation of a thriving culture. Supporting a diverse ecology of arts and cultural institutions across all parts of the country is a foundation for an NCP for all Australians. **Currently, our institutions face significant challenges. A broad lack of trust and sense of belonging around social institutions in Australia, as in many countries, has eroded support for arts and culture. Often in the past these institutions have not been directly attacked but suffered steady attrition through mechanisms like efficiency dividends.** Finding ways to build diverse and democratic institutions that meet the needs of different communities and places to support culture activity in Australia while also helping them recover from the corrosive effects of past policy neglect is a key challenge facing an NCP. Our institutions also have a responsibility to partner with communities and with artists and researchers to fulfill their missions. But they require the resources to do this.

The centrality of the artist: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.

In recognising the cultural rights of Australian citizens to participate in culture, an NCP must not neglect the fact that art is also work. It must be recognised, regulated, and remunerated as such. There is international evidence that employment in arts and culture remains stratified by socio-economic background and may be becoming more so.ⁱⁱⁱ Social and cultural capital shape access to cultural opportunities.^{iv} The ‘bank of mum and dad’ is too-often used to navigate the precarity of employment in the arts. The demand that people in the arts often work for free remains an ugly and pressing issue.

As well as recognising diverse cultural needs, and ensuring that people of all backgrounds can engage with the arts, supporting artists should take a ‘whole of life’ approach. Policies specific to children, young people and the arts are largely lapsed. Federal youth arts policy culminated fifteen years ago in *Young People and the Arts*, delivered by the Australia Council for the Arts.^v The absence of young Australians in recent policy statements is stark. Young people should be taken seriously as artists in their own right, not in waiting and training. An NCP should support structured pathways through education for careers in arts and culture. Established artists often have access to more avenues to seek funding and relatively high-levels of support, even if more support is needed and the programs available do not articulate with each other. A focus on ‘whole of life’ careers in the arts highlights the need to remember mid-career artists in developing a national cultural policy. Taking such a tiered approach is a significant opportunity to create a model of artist support that works in the context of the contemporary world of work.

Reaching the audience: ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad.

While proper investment in infrastructure and technology is part of making the culture and arts produced by Australia’s artists available to audiences, there is a risk that this becomes the only approach to reaching audiences. Today, the line between audiences and producers is well and truly blurred. Reaching audiences requires recognising diversity, including generational diversity, and ‘whole of life’ policy strategies. The Australia Council’s *A Culturally Ambitious Nation: Strategic Plan 2014 To 2019* states that, “[c]reativity starts with childhood curiosity. It continues through our lives. A culturally ambitious nation embraces the arts in everyday life. ... We want to be a nation where artistic enterprise and respect for culture are entrenched”.^{vi}

There is an opportunity with a new NCP to properly articulate culture policy with other areas, most especially education and industry policy. This will support Australians to be passionate, informed producers and consumers of culture across established and emerging media throughout the life course wherever they live within the country. While subsidisation of access is not always the answer, the evidence is clear that cost is often a substantial barrier to participation, for young people and others.^{vii} **An integrated and properly resourced cultural policy will help build the type of environment that creates audiences, that international artists will want to visit and create within, and in which Australia can create art that speaks to the places within and beyond Australia.**

The importance of the five pillars

The core foundations of a strong NCP are obvious: adequate support for arts and culture, respect for our cultural institutions and proper alignment of policy and initiatives across state and local governments. The goals of the *Creative Australia* policy from 2015 still have relevance and there is value in translating them into the five pillars put forward for this consultation. First Nations culture, artists, institutions, audiences, and diversity of stories should be central to the new NCP. **However *Creative Australia* is a starting point and not revivable as a working document as the context in which it was developed has changed markedly. A current NCP needs to be attuned to the current context.**

ⁱ Gardiner-Garden, John. (2009). *Commonwealth arts policy and administration – Parliament of Australia Library Background Note*, p. 44.

ⁱⁱ Rankin, Scott. (2018). *Cultural Justice and the Right to Thrive. Platform Papers No. 57*. Sydney: Currency House, pp. 8-9.

ⁱⁱⁱ Friedman, S., & Laurison, D. (2020). *The Class Ceiling: Why it Pays to be Privileged*. Policy Press.

^{iv} Morgan, George., & Nelligan, Pariece. (2018). *The Creativity Hoax: Precarious Work and the Gig Economy*. U.K.: Anthem Press.

^v Australia Council for the Arts. (2003). *Young People and the Arts*. Strawberry Hills, Sydney: Australia Council for the Arts.

^{vi} Australia Council for the Arts. (2014). *A Culturally Ambitious Nation: Strategic Plan 2014 to 2019*, p. 1.

^{vii} Dockery, M. et al (2021). *Creativity at the Crossroads? The Creative Industries in Western Australia*. Perth: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre.