

# WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY



## National Cultural Policy Submission

**Submitted by: Western Sydney Creative, Western Sydney University.  
Western Sydney University Locked Bag 1797. Penrith NSW 2751.**

**Contact: Dolla S. Merrillees, Director, Western Sydney Creative.  
Email: [WSC@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:WSC@westernsydney.edu.au)  
Public submission.**

*'The arts are not a luxury for a privileged elite. They belong to the whole community. They belong to the whole world'. Gough Whitlam, 1975*

### BACKGROUND

Western Sydney University (WSU) is a modern, forward-thinking, research-led university, located at the heart of Australia's fastest-growing, culturally and linguistically diverse, and economically significant region, Western Sydney. Boasting 11 campuses – many in Western Sydney CBD locations – and more than 200,000 alumni, 49,500 students and 3,500 staff, the University has 13 Schools with an array of well-designed programs and degrees carefully structured to meet the demands of future industry.

The University is ranked in the top two per cent of universities worldwide, and as a research leader, over 85 per cent of the University's assessed research is rated at 'World Standard' or above. Western Sydney University has been named number one in the world for its social, ecological and economic impact in the latest Times Higher Education (THE) University Impact Rankings.

### WESTERN SYDNEY CREATIVE

In 2019, Western Sydney University launched the *Western Sydney Creative* (WSC) decadal strategy, establishing a new and exciting opportunity for the arts and culture of our region. The strategy outlines the University's long-term commitment to the arts and cultural sector, including championing, celebrating and investing in the local in order to assist in the growth and maturation of the region's arts and cultural landscape nationally and internationally.

The Western Sydney arts and cultural network currently delivers events and cultural activations to over four million people annually, our strategy therefore recognises the significant and vital role that the sector plays in the economic, social and civic development of the region but understands that it faces significant challenges that need to be met with imagination, scaled commitment, investment and long-term vision. At this historic juncture following the COVID-19 pandemic and its profound impact on the employment and revenue within Western Sydney's cultural and creative sector, the University is stepping up to these challenges and has identified, but is not limited to, the following key areas:



- i. Women in the arts: Gender inequality and exclusionary practices;
- ii. Recognising, respecting and investing in Indigenous Australian arts and culture;
- iii. Ensuring students in Western Sydney have regular equitable access to a tertiary visual and performing art education;
- iv. Ensuring equitable investment in arts and culture in Sydney's West and to under-served communities; and
- v. Local, national and international institutional partnerships to expand and enhance cross-cultural participation, promote diversity and reflective of Western Sydney's multicultural community.

For the purposes of our submission however we have chosen to focus on one critical area in recognition that women have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and that their health and wellbeing, experiences at home, employment and economic security have been adversely affected now and into the future. Further it is crucial to consider that the pandemic has created a wider gulf of disadvantage, particularly for Indigenous women, women with disability, LGBTIQ+ and culturally and linguistically diverse women.

## DISCUSSION

*Australia's current national gender pay gap is 13.8% meaning that women earn on average \$255.30 per week less than men. ([Workplace Gender Equality Agency](#), February 2022)<sup>1</sup>*

*Director or CEO-level roles are held by 61.36 per cent women and 38.63 per cent men across the sector overall, while among state-owned galleries, the figures are 12.5 per cent women and 87.5 per cent men. ([The Countess Report 2019](#))<sup>2</sup>*

Women play an active role in the creation and promotion of artistic works and in the management of cultural and creative industries and institutions, historically however they have faced discrimination, lack of recognition and visibility, harmful stereotyping, the burden of unpaid care work, and gender gaps in terms of support of their production, access to resources, distribution of works, representation and access to key leaderships positions.<sup>3</sup>

The arts and entertainment sector in Australia employs a relatively even balance of women (53%) and men (47%). This contrasts sharply with the building construction, coal mining and oil and gas extraction industries which disproportionately employ men over women. Analysis from the Australian Institute released in 2019, shows that, per dollar invested, the arts industry employs twice as many men and ten times as many women as the building construction industry.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Workplace Gender Equity Agency, Australian Government (2022, 8 March). *Australia's Gender Pay Gap Statistics*. <https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/australias-gender-pay-gap-statistics>. Accessed August 2022.

<sup>2</sup> *The Countess Report* (2019). <https://countessreport/#>. Accessed August 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Santiago de Compostela City Council and Creative Europe Programme of the European Union (2020, March). *State of the Arts Report about the situation of women artists and professionals in the Cultural and Creative Industries sector in Europe*. <http://www.womarts.eu/upload/01-LI-WOMART-1-20-6.pdf>. Accessed August 2022.

<sup>4</sup> The Australian Institute (2021, May 13). *New Analysis: Arts & Entertainment Funding Creates 10x More Jobs for Women than Homebuilder*. <https://australianinstitute.org.au/post/new-analysis-arts-entertainment-funding-creates-10x-more-jobs-for-women-than-homebuilder/>. Accessed August 2022.



What this illustrates is a significant opportunity to dramatically restructure the sector to take advantage of its extraordinary employment potential, especially for women to meet the G20 target towards reducing the gender gap in workforce participation by 25 per cent by 2025.<sup>5</sup>

The cultural and creative industries are one of the world's most rapidly growing economic sectors and are considered to be a key driver of economic and job growth over the long term. As governments worldwide look to rebuild their economies this has implications for Australia's public policy.<sup>6</sup> The success of the Australia's cultural industries is dependent on a sustainable, skilled and experienced workforce and to meet this demand requires greater opportunities, job, and career pathways for women. As COVID-19 continues to impact lives around the world, research has shown that women have been disproportionately affected by job losses and ongoing underemployment as well as shouldering the bulk of caring responsibilities, particularly women of colour and CaLD women.<sup>7</sup> ABS data reveals that of the 281,000 jobs lost across Australia over the period June-September 2021, 60% were jobs lost by women.<sup>8</sup>

The development of a new *National Cultural Policy* is an opportunity to ask questions about our gendered economic and social system; about whether the traditional infrastructure is fit for purpose in its support of women particularly in relation to the insecure work and economic precarity of our independent gig workers; and what are the longer-term opportunities for policies that will ensure economic security for women throughout their lifetime in the arts, cultural and entertainment sector. This submission also recognises that the increased demand for Indigenous employees in the arts and cultural sector represents a significant opportunity for investment in education programs, mentorships and training for Indigenous women artists and cultural workers.

This paper acknowledges that there are very significant issues facing women around Australia including domestic, family and sexual violence, sexism and gender bias, harassment and bullying in the workforce, affordable housing, affordable childcare and access to education, however for the purposes of *National Cultural Policy* this paper is focusing on barriers and opportunities to women's participation in arts and culture. A review of existing research reveals that there are significant gaps and very little data available on women in the arts workforce and that closing these knowledge gaps is an important dimension in order to address the status of women in the arts in the long-term.

---

<sup>5</sup> Australian Government (2017). *Towards 2025: An Australian Government strategy to boost women's workforce participation*. <https://womensworkforceparticipation.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/towards-2025-strategy.pdf>. Accessed August 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Deloitte (2021, June). *The Future of the Creative Economy: A Report*. <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/technology-media-telecommunications/deloitte-uk-future-creative-economy-report-final.pdf>. Accessed August 2022.

<sup>7</sup> McKinsey & Company (2020, July 15). *COVID-19 and gender equality: Countering the regressive effects*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects>. Accessed August 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Australians Investing in Women / Equity Economics (2021, November). *Changing the Trajectory: Investing in Women for a Fairer Future*. <https://www.aiiw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/AIIW-EE-Changing-the-Trajectory-Investing-in-Women-for-a-Fairer-Future-202111-spread.pdf>. Accessed August 2022.



## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The recommendations in this paper are deliberately broad made with the full awareness of the time needed to implement policy change and to allow for its implementation and impact. It addresses structural issues around pay and jobs in the arts sector as well as working towards building a more equitable and diverse sector.

This submission recommends the Government consider the following actions:

1. To address the lack of homogenous and reliable data commission and publish an annual evidence-led survey and a comprehensive cross-sectoral diagnosis to examine the participation and employment of women and gender diverse people working in Australia's arts, cultural and entertainment sector.
2. Together with Indigenous communities support professional development opportunities, career pathways, mentoring, leadership and training programs for Indigenous Australian women. Focussed initiatives in Indigenous curatorial practices and methodologies, and cultural heritage and collection management will advance the careers of Indigenous Australians in the arts and cultural sector, whilst encouraging self-determination and strengthening the Indigenous arts sector.
3. Implement initiatives, training and capacity building programs that tackle the gender digital divide, support digital accessibility and build a pipeline of strong female talent in the digital arts, creative industries and innovation ecosystem, including the development of an holistic Australia-wide strategy for exploring the use of digital and hybrid technology in the creative sector.
4. Explore options to make careers in the sector more attractive for women including developing women's leadership capabilities and pathways, continuity of funding, longer term contracts, secure jobs, and increased access to rights, benefits, and protections. Create new initiatives and allocate resources to ensure a safe and stable work environment to protect employees and address issues of sexual harassment and workplace bullying in the arts and creative industries.
5. Implement funding and training programs to support and boost participation of female entrepreneurs and founders and the development of micro-business initiatives in the cultural and creative industries.
6. Invest in opportunities for women with a specialised focus on CaLD women to participate in training, apprenticeships traineeships, mentorship and industry-based internship and placement schemes to deliver a diverse, highly skilled and inclusive workforce for the arts, cultural and entertainment sector.



7. Put in place a framework, policies and dedicated funding as necessary to ensure gender equality in the arts, cultural and entertainment sector including promoting gender equality at leadership level and committing to targets and measures to eliminate the pay gap.
8. Provide funding to grow and expand projects that support women and girls, regardless of their background to develop their artistic and creative skills, eliminate barriers and revitalise humanities and arts curricula to ensure equitable access for women's participation in arts education and increase awareness of careers in the arts, cultural and entertainment industries.
9. Increase investment into arts and cultural organisations in Western Sydney to develop content, programs, events and activities targeted at women to ensure that our Australian Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities' stories are told and heard.
10. Increase financial resources available to arts and cultural organisations in Western Sydney to enable them to expand their radical accessibility and inclusion strategies and programs in order to improve and push the boundaries for access for disabled audiences and artists with a particular focus on girls and women who are among the more vulnerable and marginalised of society.

## **OUTCOMES**

The Government is uniquely placed to fund, elevate and implement gender equality initiatives that will lead to the following outcomes:

- i. Improved data collection related to economic inequity, employment and trends of women in the cultural workforce enabling a gender-equal economic approach and policies to support future growth areas.
- ii. Purposeful investment that encourages and fosters future innovation, job opportunities and industry growth.
- iii. Positioning women to take advantage of job opportunities by the creation of an agile, skilled, inclusive, culturally and linguistically diverse and resilient workforce.
- iv. Improved digital infrastructure and accessibility, increased digital-economy capability and skills for future jobs and content development.
- v. Increased women workforce participation rates, upskilling and training, sustained employment and improved productivity.
- vi. Increased cultural participation resulting in a more inclusive and sustainable economy and society, social inclusion, greater civic participation, skills development, education and life-long learning, well-being and health.

# WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY



- vii. Providing a strong foundation for women to fulfil their leadership potential and building a pipeline of women leaders in the arts and cultural sector.
- viii. Ensuring equitable access to, and attendance and participation in diverse cultural and creative experiences by removing barriers and biases and empowering women and girls from disadvantaged and disabled backgrounds.
- ix. Improved economic security for women.
- x. Increase our international standing by supporting girls and women who will be the next generation of culturally ambitious leaders to represent Australia on the world stage.

Western Sydney University

ABN 53 014 069 881 CRICOS Provider No: 00917K

Locked Bag 1797 Penrith NSW 2751 Australia

[westernsydney.edu.au](http://westernsydney.edu.au)



## REFERENCES

Australian Government (2017). *Towards 2025: An Australian Government strategy to boost women's workforce participation*.

<https://womensworkforceparticipation.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/towards-2025-strategy.pdf>.

Accessed August 2022.

Australians Investing in Women and Equity Economics (2021, November). *Changing the Trajectory: Investing in Women for a Fairer Future*. [https://www.aiiw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/AIIW-EE\\_Changing-the-Trajectory-Investing-in-Women-for-a-Fairer-Future-202111-spread.pdf](https://www.aiiw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/AIIW-EE_Changing-the-Trajectory-Investing-in-Women-for-a-Fairer-Future-202111-spread.pdf).

Accessed August 2022.

Deloitte (2021, June). *The Future of the Creative Economy: A Report*.

<https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/technology-media-telecommunications/deloitte-uk-future-creative-economy-report-final.pdf>.

Accessed August 2022.

Gender Equity Victoria, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (2021), *Left Behind: Migrant and Refugee Women's Experience of COVID-19*, <https://www.genvic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/LeftBehindWOMHEnReport61021FINAL.pdf>.

Accessed August 2022.

Lawton, A, WESTIR Limited (2019, July). *Women in Greater Western Sydney*.

<https://www.westir.org.au/new/images/WGWS2.pdf>. Accessed August 2022.

McKinsey & Company (2020, July 15). *COVID-19 and gender equality: Countering the regressive effects*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects>. Accessed August 2022.

Santiago de Compostela City Council and Creative Europe Programme of the European Union (2020, March). *State of the Arts Report about the situation of women artists and professionals in the Cultural and Creative Industries sector in Europe*. <http://www.womarts.eu/upload/01-LI-WOMART-1-20-6.pdf>. Accessed August 2022.

The Australian Institute (2021, May 13). *New Analysis: Arts & Entertainment Funding Creates 10x More Jobs for Women than Homebuilder*. <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/new-analysis-arts-entertainment-funding-creates-10x-more-jobs-for-women-than-homebuilder/>. Accessed August 2022.

*The Countess Report* (2019). <https://countess.report/#>. Accessed August 2022.

# WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY



Trembath, J.L., Fielding, K., 2020, *Australia's cultural and creative economy: A 21st century guide*. Produced by A New Approach think tank with lead delivery partner the Australian Academy of the Humanities, Canberra.

Workplace Gender Equity Agency, Australian Government (2022, 8 March). *Australia's Gender Pay Gap Statistics*. <https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/australias-gender-pay-gap-statistics>. Accessed August 2022.

\*Western Sydney Creative wishes to acknowledge and thank the *Western Sydney Women's Leadership Network: Arts & Culture* for the advice and guidance.