

A New National Cultural Policy: submission to consultation process
The ANU Research School of Humanities and the Arts

INTRODUCTION:

The Research School of Humanities and the Arts, at the Australian National University, seeks to understand the diversity and complexity of human experience, across cultures and languages, past and present; to examine the ways in which that experience shapes and is shaped by the environment - historical, political, sociocultural, linguistic and natural; and to discover how people have tried to make sense of the world and the place of humanity within it. Our researchers work across a range of arts and humanities disciplines, including archaeology and anthropology; heritage and museums; art practice and art history and theory; music performance and musicology; literature and creative writing; languages and linguistics; and classical studies, including ancient history. We partner with Indigenous communities; the GLAM sector; researchers and industry professions in medicine, science and technology.

Our graduates are characterised by their outstanding capacity to interpret, explain, explore and particularise, to respond to difference and diversity with curiosity, and to complexity and difficulty with the patience to illuminate it. These tools enable them to creatively and determinedly to make positive contributions within the lives and careers they build across an enormous range of sectors, including arts and culture.

Our submission is in strong support of a new National Cultural Policy, and considers the current challenges and opportunities particularly in relation to the vital role of universities in fostering a vibrant and diverse Australian culture. We begin by suggesting a number of steps that could be taken to meaningfully signal the centrality of arts and culture to the nation, before turning to several of the pillars.

OUR SUBMISSION:

The development of a National Cultural Policy is a sorely needed and very welcome initiative. There is an opportunity for the government to take steps to re-centre the crucial importance of a vibrant and diverse Australian culture and to ensure work in all areas of the arts and cultural sector is fostered, promoted and valued, not as an add-on, or optional extra, but as central to the future of the nation.

A robust national cultural policy must work across all government agencies so they work together to recognise and support the value of the arts and cultural sector. A range of policies over the past decade have contributed to the devaluing of work in the creative and cultural industries, including: efficiency dividends to cultural institutions; reduced funding to community arts organisations; the refusal to apply jobseeker and jobkeeper to ameliorate the effect of the covid-19 pandemic on creative industries; the attempt to funnel students into STEM disciplines by increasing the cost of humanities education in universities; the exclusion of arts and culture as 'industries' for the purpose of a range of government-sponsored grant programs; the development of a narrowly-defined national interest test for ARC funding that privileges particular kinds of (non-arts-focused) research; and so on.

Each of these policies corrodes the public perception of value of the arts and cultural sector, and contributes to a public discourse that constructs arts and cultural work as irrelevant in comparison to STEM. Labour in creative and cultural industries is treated as a hobby, and as somehow distinct from the 'real world'.

A robust National Cultural Policy requires a radical rethinking of how we understand the cultural sector and its contribution to society. The Parliamentary Report, *Sculpting a National Plan* (2021) is a first step in recognising and quantifying the value of the arts, both economic (\$112 billion p.a.) and non-economic

(to health and well-being, social cohesion, education and international engagement), while acknowledges that some of these benefits are not easily measurable.¹

More than this, a National Cultural Policy must recognise that the creative and cultural industries, and the humanities education that underpins them, foster a particular set of skills, distinct from those offered by training in STEM education and industries, and no less crucial to the future of Australia. In a world whose problems are often identified now as particularly complex and intertwined, or 'wicked', there is a strong need for the kinds of knowledge the humanities produce, in tandem with those of the sciences. To interpret, explain, explore and particularise [humanities methodologies] as well as to abstract and universalise [scientific methodologies]. To be patient with complexity, to sit with it, and illuminate it [humanities] as well as to reduce and unravel it [science]. In a world of wicked problems, the nation's future success will be determined by our capacity to foster, support and creatively deploy **both** approaches to knowing, understanding and intervening in the world.²

To have effect, and truly support and promote the value of the creative and cultural industries, a National Cultural Policy must enact, and not only assert, the value of creative and cultural work. It must redress the marginalisation and devaluing of this sector structurally, as well as in policy decisions.

Recommendations to *enact* the value and centrality of culture to the life of the nation:

1. Create a Ministry of Arts and Culture, mirrored by a government Department of Arts and Culture (which may include arts, cultural institutions, sport, broadcasting etc), rather than treating this sector as an add-on to miscellaneous departments (transport and infrastructure is only the most recent of omnibus combinations).³
2. Appoint a Chief Artist [or Chief Creative Artist or Chief Arts & Culture Practitioner, the nomenclature is less important than the role] to mirror the appointment of the Chief Scientist/ Medical Officer etc. to advocate for the sector; communicate its value to the public; and provide non-partisan advice to government on matters pertaining to the sector.⁴
3. Reverse the policy decision to raise the cost of humanities and arts education in an attempt to funnel students toward STEM; historically, attempts to direct students in this way does not affect student enrolment but communicates a devaluing of the arts and culture sector to new generations.
4. Reverse the efficiency dividends and other policies to redirect funding away from cultural institutions, community arts organisations and creative industries, including by seeking means to redress the neglect of these industries, and universities in the economic support measures adopted during the COVID-19 crisis.

PILLAR ONE: FIRST NATIONS

We welcome the prioritising of First Nations as central to a National Cultural Policy. There is an urgent need for increased investment in First Nations art, music, literature, culture and arts-led research and practice.

It is vital that policy decisions be co-designed with First Nations communities, not only in relation to this pillar, but in reference to the whole National Cultural Policy. While it seems crucially important to establish an entity devoted to fostering First Nations art and culture, it is equally important that First

¹ Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts, Parliamentary Report: [Sculpting a National Cultural Plan: Igniting a post-COVID economy for the arts](#) (2021).

² For more on this distinction and value of the humanities, see Joe Moran, ['To the Anxious Humanities Scholar.'](#) *Critical Quarterly* 63:2 (July 2021). 4-23. Moran observes the construction of STEM as an urgent priority is based on a range of unexamined assumptions, including that 'the sciences and humanities are engaged in a zero-sum game of competitive usefulness: if STEM is essential, then other subjects must be less essential' (p.6).

³ See also Jo Caust. ['It is time to establish a national Ministry for Culture.'](#) *The Conversation* (28 March, 2022).

⁴ See Julian Meyrick, 'Why Australia Needs a Chief Artist.' *The Conversation*. 9 September, 2016. <https://theconversation.com/why-australia-needs-a-chief-artist-64974>

Nations voices, perspectives and knowledges permeate and shape the entire Cultural Policy, and not become hived off, or marginalised within the larger Policy.

There is an opportunity for government to immediately and cost-effectively scale up existing co-designed partnerships to foster First Nations art and artists. One example is the ANU School of Music's on-campus residencies (co-funded by the Australia Council) to bring emerging Indigenous musicians to campus, together with mentors; and use of the purpose-built Indigenous recording studio, *Yil Lull* which provides free facilities. Options for partnership might include taking a mobile recording studio to regional communities. There are many examples of arts and cultural initiatives and research co-created with Indigenous communities that could be developed as a base from which to achieve strong and swift benefits.

Recommendations:

1. All Cultural Policy decisions should be co-designed with Indigenous communities including, but not limited to, the creation of a First Nations Arts Policy (or similar).
2. Increased investment in First Nations artists, academics and identified community leaders to design a First Nations Arts Policy.
3. Increased investment in fellowships, training and multi-year project funding for First Nations artists, cultural practitioners and researchers.
4. More structured support to ensure First Nations artists and community leaders are not only 'closely involved' but resourced and supported to lead all stages of the repatriation process.⁵
5. Significant investment in and support of the network of First Nations cultural organisations which support cultural custodians and emerging cultural practitioners across the nation.
6. Explore options to partner with existing initiatives co-designed with First Nations communities, that can be quickly and cost-effectively scaled up and their reach expanded, to produce early and effective benefits from the National Cultural Policy.

First Nations Languages:

Our National Cultural Policy should recognise the significant role First Nations languages play in expressing, maintaining and reviving cultures. Additionally, the economic, well-being and effective-communication benefits of using First Nations languages are well-attested. Only 13 traditional languages are relatively strong, being learned by children as their main everyday language. More than 120 languages are currently being re-learned and renewed, processes that bring greater well-being to their communities, and are linked to higher rates of employment in arts and cultural domains.⁶ The First Nations languages with the largest numbers of speakers are new contact languages (Kriol and Yumplatok) that have arisen since colonisation, which has particular implications for ongoing reconciliation.

We welcome the Government's aim to fund 60 First Nations languages programs in schools across Australia. We ask that the Government also recognises the need to maintain the First Nations languages that are currently being spoken in communities, through increased investment in developing and implementing policy that responds better to the language ecology of each location. That is, which languages are spoken by whom, for what purposes and to what extent. This is especially important where new First Nations contact languages have arisen (e.g. Kriol, Yumplatok, Yarrie Lingo) but might not be officially recognised or well understood. This is critical for all areas of policy because different language ecologies require different supports and initiatives, like better and differentiated resourcing

⁵ See Australian Government Department of Communications and the Arts: [Australian Government Policy on Indigenous Repatriation](#)

⁶ See '[National Indigenous Languages Report 2019.](#)'

for interpreting and translation services, and differentiated funding guidelines for languages and arts initiatives, yet this is not current policy practice.⁷

Long term partnerships provided by universities (often respectfully less visible) enable the language and culture work of First Nations communities and individuals. From teaching indigenous languages – to First Nations and non-Indigenous students - to co-designed research projects, to community driven arts and culture material, universities have fostered and promoted this work. Our researchers, including Higher Degree Research students (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) develop accessible materials for maintenance, revival and revitalisation purposes across a range of languages. And our staff work with communities to produce short films, books and other multimedia products in First Nations languages, reaching audiences of children and adults.

Recommendations:

1. That universities and First Nations partnerships continue to be funded for languages and arts initiatives.
2. That First Nations languages and arts funding programs explicitly distinguish between, and support, different traditional language contexts (maintenance, revitalisation, revival/reawakening) and their different requirements.
3. That speakers of strong Indigenous languages, traditional and new, be supported to expand the use of their languages in media and arts (e.g. via explicit criteria in grants programs, funding for interpreting and translating services, promotion of language-based arts).
4. That important language issues (as a result of past colonial wrongs) be combined with arts initiatives, e.g. awareness raising and recognition of contact languages; funding for creative endeavours in traditional and new First Nations languages.

PILLAR TWO: A PLACE FOR EVERY STORY

Embracing a superdiverse Australian culture:

A National Cultural Policy should reflect, support and be shaped by the cultural and linguistic richness of Australian society. The multicultural model, while still playing an essential role in the development of an inclusive and cohesive society, is no longer sufficient in reflecting the superdiverse nature of Australian society, and in supporting the needs of multiethnic, multilingual, multiracial and superdiverse individuals and communities.

On the one hand, effective cultural policies for contemporary Australia must acknowledge the gatekeeping role played by conservative ethnic organisations. These organisations often receive and manage the bulk of multicultural resources, and prevent community members who do not align with their values from accessing them. On the other hand, prejudice towards ethnic communities often hinders their inclusion into key social and cultural policies and practices, for instance around LGBTIQ+ rights.

Crucial intercultural, transcultural and intersectional approaches must therefore be integrated and strongly supported in all relevant cultural policies, in order to provide increasing support and visibility to individuals, groups, organisations, institutions and communities that do not fit neatly within the boundaries imposed by the multicultural model.

These stakeholders can play a pivotal role in developing innovative, creative, and inclusive nodes of connections between different communities, different generations, and individuals and groups who are marginalised at the intersection of ethnicity, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, body ability and other forms of discrimination. This is vital not only for the development of more inclusive cultural programs, initiatives and artistic projects, but also for the development of cutting edge and original

⁷ See Denise Angelo et al, '[Well-being and Indigenous Language Ecologies \(WILE\): a strengths-based approach.](#)' In [National Indigenous Languages Report 2019.](#)'

artistic productions that move away from the dominant rhetorical discourse about multiculturalism, to embrace instead the great potentiality of a superdiverse society.

From this perspective, it is also important to recognise that the complex cultural and linguistic backgrounds of a growing number of Australian artists, intellectuals and cultural producers does not align with dominant cultural policies and practices. For instance, artists who are of both Indigenous and migrant ancestry find limited opportunities to explore openly and creatively the complexity of their lives and identities, as they do not fit within the rigid categorizations and expectations that often structure the multicultural model (Australian, Indigenous, European, Asian, migrant, multicultural, etc.).

A growing body of research suggests that the development of more open and productive spaces and opportunities for transculturation often takes place in informal settings, such as hip hop performances, parkour, street dancing, or informal sporting competitions. This essential characteristic of transculturation requires cultural policies and practices that sustain cultural and artistic development not only within established, disciplined and often conservative institutions and organisations, but also within genuinely independent and participatory groups that develop at community level, often in response to discrimination and marginalisation.

Recommendations:

1. Integrate and strongly support intercultural, transcultural and intersectional approaches to cultural policy development to ensure increasing support and visibility to individuals, groups, organisations, institutions and communities that do not fit neatly within the boundaries imposed by the multicultural model.
2. Ensure some financial and infrastructure support is directed to participatory, 'grass-roots' and independent community groups (and not only to established institutions and organisations) in order to support individuals, groups, organisations, and communities that do not fit neatly within the boundaries imposed by current models and embrace the vibrant artistic and creative potential of a superdiverse society.

PILLAR THREE: THE CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST

Our National Cultural Policy must include measures to reverse the tendency to treat creative artists as though the work they do is a hobby, rather than labour with national benefits. It must treat artists, musicians, writers and others working in creative industries as workers who make an extraordinary contribution to Australian culture, across a broad range of areas, including in ways not easily measured by quantitative methods.

A robust National Cultural Policy must include initiatives to produce greater stability in the working conditions of this segment of the labour force. It should also include a policy mandate to provide for the security and basic wage for those whose skills require freelance models of employment with emergency income support in the face of disasters, as was offered to almost every other industry affected by the recent pandemic. The *Making Art Work* Report (2018) noted that artists' incomes had not mirrored the rising trend in real incomes (relative to inflation) of other professionals over the period studied, meaning their relative position to other groups had deteriorated.⁸ A survey undertaken by the Australian Society of Authors found that "53.6% of full-time writers indicated they earn on average less than \$15,000 per year from their creative practice, with 23.2% of them earning on average between \$0 and \$1,999 per year."⁹ This situation was exacerbated by the pandemic, when appearance fees at schools, libraries, festivals and other venues abruptly ended. Writers surveyed reported the disjunction they felt between the importance of their work and their earnings as authors. The report cites author Nick Earls: "My diary emptied over the course of a few days, losing months of school and library bookings, festivals, interstate conference keynotes and more. At the same time, I was

⁸ [Making Art Work](#): An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia. Report by David Throsby for the Australia Council for the Arts, 2018, p.15. This report predates the pandemic and does not reflect its impact upon the arts sector.

⁹ See [ASA Survey Results - Author Earnings in Australia](#), 18/11/2020, n.p

hearing every day from readers shut in at home, who'd pull a book of mine from their shelves to read and take their mind away from the pandemic. They were telling me reading those books was getting them through. I was being read all over the country, yet the crash in my earnings was continuing unabated."¹⁰

Recommendations:

1. Investigate and implement strategies to support artists, musicians, writers and other practitioners to undertake their work in conditions of greater stability, such as

- cooperative models of income and practitioner insurance;
- income gap support for freelancers;
- regulatory reform to improve income sources for writers & other creative workers, for example in digital lending rights & tax reform for literary and artistic and other major awards
- a policy mandate to provide emergency income support for workers in these industries during disaster.

2. Create incentives for industry and universities to work closely to better formalise 'transition to work' and 'emerging graduate' programs in the arts and culture sector, which assist in the transition from student to freelance or other work.

PILLAR FOUR: STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Australia's National Cultural Policy should explicitly recognise the vital role higher education plays in fostering a vibrant and diverse Australian culture. Universities contribute in a range of crucial ways by:

- training Australian artists, musicians, theatre-makers, writers, editors, publishers, curators, cultural practitioners and speakers of languages;
- researching Australian creative arts and culture and preserving it for future generations;
- providing employment for many arts practitioners in teaching and technical roles;
- creating audiences and communities of interest and discussion around Australian art, music, literature, film and culture, by holding public events, exhibitions and outreach activities in addition to university courses.

And yet the higher education sector has been subjected to reduced funding, and policies that sideline the significance arts and humanities work, particularly visible in the previous government's attempt to redirect students away from these areas by raising fees; ministerial interference in ARC funding processes; and policies around major grant opportunities that explicitly exclude creative and cultural industries as industry.

Training future artistic and cultural leaders

Higher education providers play a leading role in shaping the nations' future artistic and cultural leaders. Australia's National Cultural Policy must speak to, and for, the role of education in equipping future arts practitioners, as well as arts workers with the skills they need to contribute to cultural communities across Australia. Universities are vital to the creation of expertise and experience for arts practitioners in Australia. As detailed in the *Making Art Work* Report¹¹, "artists are more highly educated than the workforce at large; just over three-quarters of them hold a university degree, compared to only 22 percent in the wider labour force." Degrees in the Humanities and the arts equip school leavers with the necessary skills - critical thinking, creativity¹², adaptability, innovation,

¹⁰ See [ASA Survey Results - Author Earnings in Australia](#), 18/11/2020, n.p

¹¹ See [Making Art Work](#): An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia. Report by David Throsby for the Australia Council for the Arts, 2018, p.7

¹² Defining and measuring creativity is difficult as there are many approaches. See Appendix A of [Creative skills for the future economy](#), 2019, for a list of creative occupations for Australia.

collaboration, communication – that are imperative for the workforce of the future¹³. Moreover, creativity is considered a “vital 21st century skill to drive innovation and productivity.”¹⁴ Studying at university also exposes students to networks and opportunities, to engage in the broader ecology of the sector, priming them for graduation as emerging practitioners. Similarly, the production of cultural knowledge through arts-led practice, is distinct from the methods used in traditional research.

Researching, communicating and curating Australian Culture for future generations:

Universities are an important site where Australian culture is researched, explored, communicated and introduced to thousands of Australian and international students and their broader communities each year. Through both research and teaching in the broad range of arts and humanities, universities play a vital role in curating, preserving and continuing to communicate Australian culture for future generations. In so doing, it also trains students in key methodologies which, together with those of STEM will ensure a vibrant and innovative future.

Providing arts infrastructure

Universities provide and sustain critical arts infrastructure and make it accessible to the community. For example, the ANU School of Music houses Canberra’s concert hall, which is used by a wide range of performing arts groups and is the home of the Canberra Symphony Orchestra. The School of Music also houses Canberra’s best recording studio and subsidises numerous professional and community music groups who rehearse in the premises, and hire our instruments. The ANU School of Art supports the professional development needs of local artists, arts organisations, teachers and schools with access to its facilities – including equipment for glass-blowing, ceramics, textiles and more - and via arts-led research activities that are often co-produced with community.

Employing creative artists

Universities are significant employers of creative artists and cultural practitioners and are vital to local artistic ecologies. Employment at universities provides more stability and higher incomes than many other areas of the sector. Artists and musicians employed by universities have the opportunity to work over the course of years and have access to superannuation and professional development. The ANU School of Music is the largest employer of musicians in Canberra, running a series of programs that keep professional musicians working in this city. The university provides a significant number of technical and developmental jobs that offer musicians and artists the opportunity to diversify and develop a portfolio career. Despite this, creative artists working at universities often fall between funding mechanisms: because of its skewing toward traditional research and interest measures, developed for science, it is very difficult to receive ARC funding for practice-led research, but as a university employee, Australia Council for the Arts grants are also very difficult to gain. If an Australia Council grant is awarded, it cannot be administered by the university, which creates tax implications for the recipient and excludes the university from funding benefits it receives for other kinds of major grants.

Collaborating with the art and culture industry

Universities collaborate powerfully with other institutions that sustain our arts and culture, but in a number of government-sponsored grant programs that promote industry engagement, the definition of ‘industry’ explicitly excludes arts and culture (again suggesting that labour in this area does not constitute work and devaluing this industry).

For Australian culture to be produced, and reach its audiences, it needs to be supported by a range of institutions: schools, universities, museums, libraries, galleries, archives and digital infrastructure, and other arts organisations. The dramatic reduction of funding to cultural institutions, such as the NLA, the NGA and NMA and others, significantly reduces capacity for researchers to partner with them to create benefits for Australian culture. Writers, theatremakers and artists are supported by national

¹³ See NAVA [‘Breaking: it’s now harder and more expensive for people to study the arts and creative practices at university’](#) media release, October 8, 2020.

¹⁴ See [Creative Australia: National Cultural Policy](#), 2013, p.77

institutions that have had significant funding cuts in recent years. Stable funding for institutions like these, as well as for key digital initiatives such as Trove and AustLit are essential to the ongoing cross-sectoral collaboration.

Recommendations:

1. Develop policies to rebuild arts, cultural and educational institution funding, which will in turn support pathways for employment and training opportunities for artists and cultural practitioners, and contribute to potential reach and engagement with diverse sectors of the Australian and international communities.
2. Enable greater participation by arts, arts-led, and humanities researchers in existing major national funding schemes by:
 - ending ministerial interference in the ARC process, which has adversely and disproportionately affected grants in humanities research;
 - reworking the national interests test (ARC) to recognise that research and practice-led research in the cultural sector is of intrinsic national benefit;
 - exploring possibilities to enhance participation of university-employed creative artists in Australia Council grant initiatives;
 - expanding the definition of 'industry' to include creative and cultural industries in a range of grant programs (including PhD internship programs), from which they are currently, specifically, excluded.
3. Develop new programs to support artist residencies and visiting writer programs within universities to provide meaningful employment and industry collaboration between writers, researchers and students.
4. Create mechanisms for investing in (and appropriately resourcing) institutions that house infrastructure critical to arts education and training (e.g., Glass, Ceramics, Textiles, Painting, Photography, Printmaking, Sculpture; venues like concert halls and recording studios).
5. Government sponsors stakeholders in the Australian arts sector – across visual art, music, creative writing – to collect, analyse and publish data relating to graduation and employment statistics.