

National Cultural Policy Submission

State Youth Orchestras

Hon Tony Burke MP
Minister for the Arts,
Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations
By email to cultural.policy@arts.gov.au

Monday 22 August 2022

Dear Minister Burke,

We write in response to the call for submissions to the National Cultural Policy and we warmly welcome the Government's commitment to opening this conversation to include Youth Arts Organisations.

This joint submission is made on behalf of Australia's State Youth Orchestras: Adelaide Youth Orchestras, Canberra Youth Orchestra, Melbourne Youth Orchestras, Queensland Youth Orchestras, Sydney Youth Orchestras, Tasmanian Youth Orchestras and Western Australia Youth Orchestras.

Over 3000 young people take part in our programs weekly. These programs not only improve the individual health and education outcomes of these young people but also sustain the professional orchestral and music sectors. 100% of professional orchestral musicians have participated in a youth orchestral program, because this training is critical to their ability to perform and teach at a professional level.

On average a professional violinist will have trained for at least 14 years, ideally starting this training between the ages of 5 and 7. A professional wind, brass and percussion player will have begun training by the age of 10.

We ask you to ensure that youth orchestras are a priority of the Cultural Plan in the context of [Youth Participation and Engagement](#), and we offer these responses within the feedback template:

1. What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars:

Strong institutions

Currently there are 4.9 million young Australians aged between 4 and 25 whose participation in the arts should be better supported. Sadly, we have witnessed arts investment systematically defunded in the areas of the professional industry focussed on children and young people – first the state youth orchestras (we were defunded in 2012) then the youth dance companies, and over the past decade youth theatre companies.

Concurrently, we have seen the impact of defunding of training for music teachers and the subsequent reduction of music education in schools. This was well documented in the [National Music Review 2005](#) conducted by The Hon Dr Brendan Nelson MP, the former Minister for Education, Science and Training, and more recently reviewed by Dr Anita Collins in a report commissioned by the Tony Foundation in 2020, [Music Education a Sound Investment](#).

These two reports, written 15 years apart, reached largely the same conclusions and include recommendations to improve music education in the areas of access, participation, teacher training, partnerships and networking, leadership and resources.

Alarming, given the length of time it takes to train a musician we are only now starting to see the impact of 15 years of defunding. As the nation's leaders in youth music we are fearful that without a overarching review

and clear strategic framework, the impact of these trends will not only have further negative outcomes for the future of music in Australia but will take generations to reverse.

Federal funding for music education at an elite, tertiary level through organisations such as ANAM and AYO has remained stable over this time, while little to no federal funding has been allocated to the feeder programs (the State Youth Orchestras) that underpin musicians' development providing the years of sustained engagement required to reach the level to access these institutions.

The National Music Review found it is unlikely that a child would start learning an instrument at all if they have not started playing by the age of 11. This age group is currently supported by all State Youth Orchestras but not by any federally funded institutions or ongoing arts funding.

Strong institutions need strong foundations.

There is an exciting opportunity to embed the arts in the lives of all young Australians by making Youth Engagement and Participation a priority of the National Cultural Policy. There is also an opportunity to review how education and arts funding can intersect creating equitable and focused support to create better pathways for young Australians to access the benefits of the arts and arts training.

The evidence for the beneficial impacts of participation in Youth Arts and Music Education is unequivocal. The very recent [Music and Resilience](#) research, conducted by Tasmanian Youth Orchestras and the University of Tasmania, shows us that music builds resilience in young people by fostering key skills including empathy, influence, teamwork, curiosity, focus, and grit – the capacity to pursue challenges and display determination and perseverance in the face of challenges.

These are the key 21st century skills which lead to successful individuals and thriving artistic communities.

3. Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:

1 & 2: First Nations and A Place for Every Story

The Youth Arts industry uses a rights-based approach to interacting with young people. Youth-focused companies specialise in giving young Australians safe and supportive spaces in which to find their voice, and stages on which to be heard.

Through the universal language of music our work brokers relationships within communities and starts conversations between young people who often don't have the opportunity to connect with one another within the formal education system. Our programs support all school systems and education sectors, and 35% of our musicians come from culturally and linguistically diverse families.

Our organisations continue to work to support this connection by providing:

- Over \$400,000 annually in financial assistance to overcome disadvantage and help young musicians who would otherwise be unable to take part
- Commissioning and performing works by first nations and Australian composers

3. Centrality of the Artist

Youth orchestras foster a unique relationship between young and professional musicians. Our organisations engage over 900 people (50 FTE) annually. Our artists comprise Australia's most accomplished orchestral musicians, conductors, and educators of today, and our participants are the professional musicians, conductors and educators of the future. This important feedback loop is critical for sector sustainability, however continues to be impacted by the unstable gig economy.

With the increase in government support during COVID 19, the State Youth Orchestras programs, which prioritise sustained weekly engagement, were able to continue to operate through 2021 and 2022, increase our capacity to employ independent artists unable to access job keeper, maintain youth engagement levels even through extended and flash lockdowns, and pivot our delivery and programs to embrace new ways of working.

Not a single state youth orchestra closed its doors during 2021 or 2022.

With an aggregate turnover of \$8.4 million, we contribute over \$18 million to the national economy, yet grants comprise just 12% of our income, with a *combined* grant income from state governments of \$1 million annually.

4. Reaching the Audience

Combined over the last 12 months and during COVID our concerts have reached an audience of over 360,000 – in person, online and broadcast on television and radio.

Our work is presented in the leading venues in our capital cities but also reaches across our states with a focus on connecting to schools and communities in regional areas. Unlike our professional counterparts our organisations are connected at a grass roots level and can be responsive to community need. Through our 3000 young people (core weekly program participants), additional 1500 who access our outreach programs, thousands of alumni over our combined 190 years of operations and their families, the Australian State Youth Orchestras have built large musical communities that create donors, sponsors and ticket buyers.

1. What is required within the Cultural Plan

We call on the federal Government to recognise the urgent need to prioritise youth engagement and participation in the National Cultural Plan in these ways:

1. **Include “Youth Engagement” as a priority of the cultural plan** with Youth Arts being included into whole-of-government approaches to learning, wellbeing, mental health, employment, resilience and artistic excellence.
2. **Re-establish an ongoing funding stream for Youth Arts** and investment in companies whose **core business** is youth engagement, sufficient to allow growth and enhanced impact, to be administered by the Australia Council for the Arts;
3. **Establish a separate stream of funding for youth engagement** and participation to be made available to Health, Employment and the Arts – co-managed by the Australia Council
4. **Establish Strategic Funding** for key youth arts networks to establish centralised systems, impact evaluation frameworks, collaborative working, and resource sharing. Recognising the important role these networks play in creating pathways to becoming a professional artist, musician, art professionals, donor, ticket buyer and strong connected communities.
5. **Establish Youth Advisory Committees** that reflect the diversity of the young, managed independently, as an ongoing standing committee for the Australia Council for the Arts and the Minister for the Arts, ensuring young Australians have a direct voice to the decision-makers impacting their lives.

We are happy for our submission to be made public, and our contact person for this submission will be Dorian Jones, CEO of Melbourne Youth Orchestras [REDACTED]

Thank you for undertaking this important consultation.

Sincerely

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