

# NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

DISCUSSION PAPER  
SUBMISSION



## **The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH)**

*(Submitted by Fiona Doyle, Executive Officer, on behalf of)*

Professor Krishna Sen, President

### **About DASSH**

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) is the authoritative agency on research, teaching and learning for the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (ASSH) in Australian and New Zealand universities. DASSH represents the Deans of 45 university faculties and a very large proportion of staff and practitioners involved in tertiary teaching and research in the creative arts, performance, Indigenous and cultural studies. We commend the Commonwealth review of the Culture Policy and we welcome the opportunity to provide feedback to the discussion paper.

### **Background**

DASSH welcomes the Minister's commitment to a National Culture Policy that:

- supports the education and training of future artists;
- supports the production of artistic work;
- engages Australian communities in the Arts; and
- supports institutions that provide for the study, exhibition, performance and preservation of arts and cultural works.

DASSH would like to reinforce the Discussion Paper's recognition of the important parts that a number of portfolios play in any Cultural Policy, and would like to draw attention to the role of Universities in realising all four of the goals of the culture policy.

**GOAL 1:** To ensure that what the Government supports — and how this support is provided — reflects the diversity of a 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia, and protects and supports Indigenous culture

Universities provide undergraduate, postgraduate and research higher degree learning and teaching opportunities in creative and performing arts, support the development of knowledge, understanding and awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, promote the value of visual and performing arts and creative practice within society, cultural studies, train and facilitate the development of artistic practice and entrepreneurial potential. In addition University academics in these areas are artistic practitioners, engage actively in research in the arts, produce creative works as research and oversee many collections, museums and archives housed within Universities.

While University activity related to the Culture Policy fall primarily under the aegis of the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science and Research (DIISR) and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), many Universities also house collections and archives that do not receive government support as their value for higher education or research do not readily fall within DIISR or DEEWR funding guidelines. While some of these are supported by generous bequests and public support, the potential for many collections to support excellence in cultural production, education and research is under-developed due to fiscal constraints.

Universities hold significant archives and cultural collections. These include:

- Archives: Colonial archives, archives relating to particular regions and communities, the papers of Australian organisations or academics.
- Collections: Antiquities, archaeological collections, rare books, specialist libraries, historical instruments and recordings (of music and language, especially endangered indigenous practices) and collections of historical research equipment and tools.
- Art collections: Historical and contemporary works, indigenous art and artefacts both of Australia and neighbouring Asia-Pacific nations.
- Ethnographic research: A small number of Australian universities have significant anthropological collections associated with the work of internationally noted anthropologists including Margaret Mead and the Berndts.

These collections serve at least three purposes:

- First, they are an important **educational resource**, allowing students direct access to the original materials, artworks or collections that are the object of their study; supporting their appreciation, understanding and critical engagement with the materials that is immediate and engaging for students.
- Second, they provide two kinds of **research materials**: data for research and analysis (for example, archives containing the letters and records of migrant communities or the records of Aboriginal missions) and the stored research outputs of earlier researchers (as in artistic collections and libraries) that can be drawn upon by contemporary researchers around the world.
- Third, they serve to preserve and make available to the wider Australian (and international) community important **cultural resources**.

A very large proportion of the collections held by Universities are not adequately financially supported through recurrent funds ensuring their on-going preservation or allowing them to be fully accessible. Researchers may be able to access them but access is limited by constraints such as the storage of the collections, lack of useable finding aids (catalogues), distance and the cost of retrieving the items (in those cases where access to the collection is on a fee for service basis). Universities have collaborated on number of initiatives through the ARC LIEF program and in seeking research infrastructure funding to support the digitisation of archives and some collections to make them more accessible for students, researchers and the wider community. Digitisation of many of these cultural and research resources will prove vital to their preservation and any future public access as they are continually under threat due to the age, condition and storage of the materials.

University Faculties of Arts, Social Science and Humanities support cross-disciplinary Aboriginal Studies or Indigenous Studies programs. These programs have three functions: to promote understanding and study of Indigenous communities, cultures, history, law, literature and politics; to support in involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, researchers and academics in Higher Education; and to provide resources and links between Universities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Many contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders have been involved in these programs and Universities continue to develop multi-disciplinary approaches to education and research in these areas (for example drawing on Aboriginal art and performance to inform the undergraduate education of Indigenous Health students and students studying primary education).

ASSH disciplines face on-going challenges in supporting cultural outreach that reflects the full diversity of Australia. There is an important link between support for languages other than English at University level and high quality research on the changing and diverse cultural practices, artistic production and creative entrepreneurial potential of Australia's changing population.

**GOAL 2:** To encourage the use of emerging technologies and new ideas that support the development of new artworks and the creative industries, and that enable more people to access and participate in arts and culture

Students and academics in Universities have demonstrated a high level of enthusiasm for integrating technological innovation with artistic production for example;

- in their uptake of digital technologies and Broadband to create interactive performance and exhibition spaces, virtual concerts, and interactive cultural interpretation maps;
- in their engagement with research in biotechnology and nanotechnology to explore the creative potential of these emerging areas of scientific research for cultural understanding and exploration; and
- in the use of imaging technologies in dance education, choreography and in performance; and in the critical cultural studies research that contributes to societal understanding and engagement with both emerging technologies and cultural practice.

Academic research in arts, performance and cultural studies regularly transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries in ways that make developments in technology and in culture more accessible to the wider community. All Australian universities that include the study of culture, creative arts and performance in their educational offerings seek to engage students and the community through a number of avenues, including public performance, public access to exhibitions, outreach to schools and regional communities, opportunities for community participation in research (e.g. archaeological digs, collecting data, involvement in community theatre projects) as well as multi-modal educational programs that extend well beyond classroom teaching. Many universities include performance venues that with better funding can be further integrated into research, experiments in the performing arts, community arts practices and performing arts teaching.

**GOAL 3:** To support excellence and world-class endeavour, and strengthen the role that the arts play in telling Australian stories both here and overseas

Both in research and in creative work, University academics in Arts and Humanities disciplines contribute significantly to Australia's international reputation and soft-power. ASSH academics are actively involved in international debates about arts and culture and present an Australian perspective internationally, while also bringing international debates and discussion into Australian research and artistic understanding.

DASSH welcomes the moves by the government to recognise non-traditional research outputs in ERA ranking of excellence in research, especially the recognition of the research embedded in original creative works and performances. The Australian Research Council's 2010 Excellence for Research in Australia collection formally collected and reported on the number and quality of research outputs including creative works and performance. It is concerning, however, that there is currently little funding to support the excellence of research in this area,

as most of these works are not yet counted in the research output of Universities through the annual Higher Education Research Data Collection (HERDC). The absence of these works from the HERDC reports means that universities do not receive government performance-based research funding (IGS and RTS; SRE and JRE) that recognises this research output, reducing the capacity of researchers in these fields to continue their work. It is unclear at this stage how ERA rankings in these areas will be reflected in future funding to Universities. This is significant to Cultural Policy as it limits the capacity of leading researchers to make a full contribution to Australian cultural development.

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**GOAL 4:** To increase and strengthen the capacity of the arts to contribute to our society and economy

Universities are (with the TAFE sector) the primary educational and training ground for young artists, performers and artistic entrepreneurs. As research organisations they also have a key role to play in theorising, interpreting and understanding arts and cultural practice. Innovation in teaching, research and cross-disciplinary collaboration in the Arts have contributed to the vitality and significance of the arts in Australian society. The Arts serve, in part, as a social corrective to an excessively utilitarian focus on education as training which is critical for unleashing the creative potential vital to an economy that will need to be transformed from an emphasis on extraction and manufacture to an economy that is more environmentally and socially sustainable, lithe, responsive to rapid social and technological change and can support the diversity of Australian talent.

In our neighbourhood, Singapore (since the 1990s) and South Korea (since 2001-2) have invested heavily in cultural and artistic work, bringing a coherent policy focus on technology, education and training in the arts. It is arguable that both Singapore and now more spectacularly South Korea have been outstandingly successful in developing a highly dynamic economy driven by the creative industries. What is unique about the Korean cultural policy is precisely the way it brings together industry, creativity and higher education, to drive one of the most amazing economic and social transformations of this century.

While the Australian context is necessarily different, the success stories of our near neighbours is worth considering seriously in designing the policy for a post-mining boom economy where creativity in conjunction with technology (both best generated and supported by a robust higher education sector) will be the prime driver of economic growth and determine Australia's place in the world.