

DASSH response to the Call for Comment on the Impact of the 2014 and 2015 Commonwealth Budget decisions on the Arts

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission in response to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee inquiry into the impact of the 2014 and 2015 Commonwealth Budget decisions on the Arts, in particular the establishment of the National Programme for Excellence in the Arts (NPEA).

DASSH represents ASSH disciplines across 37 Australian universities. The Australia Council for the Arts (Australia Council) is the primary funding body for creative arts research in Australia and funds a large proportion of the non-traditional research outputs in ASSH disciplines that contribute to Excellence for Research in Australia (ERA) evaluation. DASSH is particularly concerned about the impact on academic research in the arts, arts practitioners and industry partners that would arise from the proposed shift of Australia Council funding to NPEA.

The key role of the Australia Council is to increase the "visibility of Australia's vibrant arts and culture, and recognise the evolving way that Australians make and experience art." They achieve this through supporting not only new "unimagined" works, but also encouraging and funding our artistic community to reimagine, rediscover, play, and experiment at all stages of the creative process. Reduction in its funding will reduce its ability to achieve this.

DASSH welcomes the release of the draft Guidelines for the NPEA and for the opportunity to comment on these. However, we are concerned, not only by the effect that the late release of these guidelines has already had on the arts community (such as the scrapping of the Australia Council June grant round, the suspension of the six-year funding for organisations program, and the cessation of the ArtStart, Creative Communities Partnerships Initiative and Arts in Residence programs²), but by the potential long-term impact of these changes.

The Australia Council's processes for awarding grants through rigorous independent arms-length peer assessment and review has provided quality assurance and good governance in support of grants across art forms and media. One of Australia's most prominent theatre directors, David Berthold (Artistic Director of Brisbane Festival) has outlined ten reasons why the principles of independent peer review are vital in

¹ "What we do", Australia Council for the Arts, http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/ [Accessed 15/07/2015].

² "Australia Council Outlines 2015-16 Budget Impact", Australia Council for the Arts, press release 21 May 2015, http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/news/media-centre/media-releases/australia-council-outlines-2015-16-budget-impact/ [Accessed 15/07/2015].



the awarding of funding, particularly within the arts.³ DASSH specifically draws attention to his third and fourth points, that independent peer review protects not only artists' freedom of expression (from political taste, interference and censorship), but also the government (from public criticism of funding decisions) and society as a whole (ensuring they are exposed to a free, culturally diverse creative environment). The rotating peer assessment in place at the Australia Council not only allows the nurturing of new artists and artistic trends, but also provides the opportunity for long-term policy development and planning for the sector, not dictated by the whims of any current government. DASSH believes that this process is central to all government funding of research and the most appropriate way to deliver what is required for Australia's creative future.

One of the greatest strengths of the Australia Council is the provision of funding to a wide variety of artists and organisations. From our large arts organisations to small collectives and individual artists, from well-known established artists, to the young and emerging artists, the Australia Council has funding available for the promotion of excellence in the arts.

DASSH is concerned about the level of funding and support that will be provided by the NPEA for small to medium arts organisations and individual artists, particularly in light of the abolition of Australia Council programs directed at these groups. These organisations and artists are the life-blood of the Australian arts sector. These grants provide opportunities for testing new ideas and art forms. They demonstrate the substantial ingenuity and creativity in the Australian arts sector and should be nurtured. Focusing solely on large arts organisations to the detriment of the smaller operations is short-sighted, because it will prevent the natural growth of small companies to large companies over time: "from little things, big things grow". At the heart of these small companies are students and young people — our next generation of artists. These cuts will further erode their confidence in the system, hinder their ability to get projects off the ground, and limit their opportunities to pursue a career in the creative arts.

DASSH is concerned that the lack of support for emerging and smaller arts organisations will have an immediate effect on the arts higher education sector. Universities play an important role in the ecology of the arts, in that we train the next generation of Australia's creative talent, and for building creativity and design capacity in the economy. A likely repercussion to the cuts to arts funding in the 2014 and 2015 Budgets within our sector is that students will be discouraged from studying the arts as they see that the government's declared emphasis on established organisations and audience demand does not indicate support for emerging artists, innovation experimentation and diversity. DASSH strongly recommends that the government ensure significant funding opportunities for small to medium arts organisations and individual artists.

³ Berthold, D. (2015). "The Principles of Arts Funding and Why It's Unwise to Cut Off Your Arm". Carving in Snow, 18/05/2015. http://carveinsnow.blogspot.com.au/2015/05/on-why-its-unwise-to-cut-off-your-arm.html#sthash.QakhFeYr.dpuf [Accessed 15/07/2015]



Finally, the potential funding cuts to university art museums is cause for alarm to DASSH. These cultural collections play an important role in the research and learning experience of arts students, providing them with access to examples of art forms as well as being an important area of student and community engagement, including work-integrated learning opportunities, which this government has advocated as an "important part of a world-leading higher education system".⁴ As well as providing these educational opportunities for our students, university art museums represent the work of our best and brightest to the community at large, playing a vital role in providing access to the arts for all Australians.

DASSH strongly opposes the current iteration of the NPEA and urges the government to continually consult with stakeholders from a wide range of sections within the sector throughout the establishment and implementation of the NPEA.

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President

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

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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 supports those within these institutions who have responsibility for the governance and management of research and teaching and learning in their universities. DASSH also supports those who aspire to these positions through a Network of Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching) and a Network of Associate Deans (Research).

⁴ Pyne. C. (2014). "Destination Australia: Tapping into a New Generation of International Business Students". Speech at the Business Higher Education Round Table (BHERT), 11 June 2014. https://ministers.education.gov.au/pyne/business-higher-education-round-table-bhert [Accessed 16/07/2015].