

## **Joint Submission on *Revive*: National Cultural Strategy**

### **Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities & the Australian Council of Deans and Directors of Creative Arts**

#### **Submission to:**

Office of the Arts

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts

May 2026

#### **Overview**

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) and The Australian Council of Deans and Directors of Creative Arts (DDCA) welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of the next National Cultural Policy. The consultation paper appropriately recognises the role of arts and culture in Australia's economy, communities and national identity, including the importance of creative skills, cultural participation and resilient institutions.

As leaders across the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) and Creative Arts disciplines in universities across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, DASSH and DDCA encourage the next phase of national cultural policy to place greater emphasis on the education systems, institutions and partnerships that sustain long-term cultural capability. In particular, stronger coordination between cultural policy, higher education policy, skills policy and research policy will be important to supporting future creative workforce development, participation and innovation

We support the continued commitment to the five enduring pillars established through *Revive*, particularly the focus on cultural participation, creative skills, lifelong learning and resilient cultural infrastructure. We also recommend an addition of a sixth pillar, as detailed below, as a strategy to achieving the ambitions of the new National Cultural Policy.

#### **Key Recommendations**

- Recognise universities and higher education institutions as part of Australia's national cultural infrastructure.
- Establish stronger coordination between cultural policy, higher education policy, research policy and the work of ATEC to support cultural capability and workforce development.
- Support arts, cultural and creative capability development across schools, higher education and lifelong learning.

- Improve policy signalling across education, skills and cultural policy settings to support participation and sustainable creative pathways.
- Strengthen participation and pathways for underrepresented cohorts, including regional, First Nations, disability and low socioeconomic communities.
- We strongly support the National Advocates for Arts Education's (NAAE) recommendation for a sixth pillar within the National Cultural Policy: Arts Learning, Participation and Pathways as a key strategy in supporting and enabling the success of the other five pillars.

## **Higher Education as Cultural Infrastructure**

The consultation paper highlights the importance of strong and adaptable cultural infrastructure. The next National Cultural Policy should recognise universities, schools and cultural organisations as interconnected parts of Australia's cultural infrastructure.

Across Australia, universities contribute to cultural life through galleries, museums, archives, collections, theatres, festivals, public lectures and community programs, alongside partnerships with schools, communities, local governments, cultural organisations and creative industries.

Universities support cultural participation and workforce development through teaching, research, experimentation and industry engagement. In many regional communities, universities also provide critical cultural infrastructure and professional networks that support local creative practice and participation. Their contribution extends beyond workforce preparation to preserving and interpreting cultural knowledge through collections, archives and scholarship.

The next National Cultural Policy should recognise that the higher education sector is not separate from Australia's cultural landscape, but actively contributes to its sustainability, accessibility and development. Stronger collaboration between education providers, cultural organisations, government agencies and industry can support participation, audience development, creative capability and workforce sustainability across the sector.

For instance, greater coordination between cultural policy settings and the work of ATEC could support stronger alignment between national capability priorities, workforce planning and long-term cultural participation. It could also support more visible and consistent signalling about the value of Creative Arts and HASS pathways.

DASSH and DDCA support a whole-of-nation approach that recognises arts and culture as interconnected across education, research, institutions, industry and community. This includes ensuring arts and creative education is visible, available and valued throughout all stages of education.

## Aligning Cultural Policy, ATEC and Higher Education

The establishment of the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC)<sup>1</sup> and the development of mission-based compacts present an important opportunity to better connect higher education policy with Australia's long-term cultural and creative capability needs. DASSH and DDCA encourage stronger engagement between the development of the next National Cultural Policy and the work of ATEC, particularly in relation to cultural participation, creative workforce development and regional capability.

Mission-based compacts provide an opportunity to recognise the role universities play in supporting cultural participation, community engagement, creative practice and cultural infrastructure within their regions and areas of expertise. This is particularly important for regional and place-based universities, which may provide some of the only local access points to creative arts education, cultural studies, galleries, performance spaces and broader cultural participation.

The ATEC's Interim Statement of Strategic Priorities<sup>2</sup> appropriately identifies the importance of future skills, technological change and national capability. However, references to arts and humanities capability are currently limited, despite higher education institutions being major providers of the creative, cultural and human capabilities required across knowledge-based economies and civic life.

Creative Arts and HASS disciplines contribute to communication, interpretation, creativity, ethical reasoning, critical thinking, intercultural understanding and community engagement. Many of these capabilities have been identified by the World Economic Forum in the *Future of Jobs Report 2025* as being the most in demand skills by employers<sup>3</sup>.

In addition, Culture and Creative Activity contributed \$67.4 billion, or 2.5 per cent of GDP, to the Australian economy in 2023–24<sup>4</sup>, demonstrating the significance of Australia's cultural and creative sectors to national capability and knowledge-based industries.

Whilst these factors are important, the next National Cultural Policy presents an opportunity to better recognise the contribution of Arts, Creative Arts and HASS disciplines to Australia's broader national capability agenda beyond economic framing.

DASSH and DDCA are concerned that isolated discipline closures, faculty mergers and reductions in cultural and creative offerings across the higher education sector may cumulatively diminish Australia's long-term cultural capability. While these decisions are often made at an institutional level, their combined impact raises broader national questions regarding access, participation and capability development. Greater coordination across government portfolios, agencies and policy settings is needed to better understand and respond to these trends at a national level.

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<sup>1</sup> [Australian Tertiary Education Commission](#), Australian Government

<sup>2</sup> [Interim Statement of Strategic Priorities](#), Australian Tertiary Education Commission

<sup>3</sup> [The Future of Jobs Report 2025](#), World Economic Forum

<sup>4</sup> [Culture and Creative Activity](#), Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts

The next National Cultural Policy should encourage collaboration between cultural policy agencies, ATEC and higher education providers to ensure cultural and creative capability development is embedded within long-term tertiary education planning. This includes consideration of policy settings, participation pathways and funding arrangements that support the sustainability of Arts, Creative Arts and HASS disciplines as part of Australia’s cultural infrastructure and national capability system.

## **Education, Skills and Cultural Capability**

The consultation paper identifies that younger people are engaging with culture in new ways and that future skills, creative pathways and participation patterns continue to evolve. Policy settings play an important role in shaping participation, enrolment patterns and long-term workforce development across arts and cultural sectors.

In this context, sustained investment in arts and cultural education across schools, higher education and lifelong learning is important to maintaining Australia’s cultural and creative capability pipeline.

In 2024, more than 73,000 undergraduate students and 15,000 postgraduate students were enrolled in Creative Arts programs nationally. In the same year, 204,309 undergraduate students and 96,862 postgraduate students were enrolled in Society and Culture fields of education, within which many cultural studies and related disciplines are embedded<sup>5</sup>.

These enrolments demonstrate the scale of Australia’s cultural and creative education system and the role higher education plays in developing future creative practitioners, educators, researchers and cultural leaders.

At the same time, in the last seven years, an article published in *The Guardian* around 50 Creative Arts degrees have been discontinued, in some regions entire disciplinary pathways have been terminated<sup>6</sup>. Yet the National Arts Participation Survey commissioned by Creative Australia (2023) shows that 97% of Australians engage with the arts, and that 74% of Australians surveyed agreed that the arts should be an important part of education<sup>7</sup>. If we are to fulfil the ambitions of *Revive*, we must consider that higher education is a key part of its success.

Arts, culture and HASS disciplines develop capabilities that are increasingly important in knowledge-based economies, including, as mentioned, communication, interpretation, creativity, ethical reasoning and intercultural understanding. As AI and digital technologies reshape labour markets, these capabilities will become increasingly important across creative industries, public institutions and civic life.

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<sup>5</sup> [Higher Education Statistics](#), Department of Education

<sup>6</sup> [Australia in danger of becoming an ‘artless country’ as enrolments in creative courses collapse](#), Caitlin Cassidy, *The Guardian*

<sup>7</sup> [Creating Value: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey](#), Creative Australia

The next National Cultural Policy should support stronger connections between education providers, cultural institutions and industry. This includes support for work-integrated learning, interdisciplinary collaboration and opportunities for emerging practitioners to develop sustainable careers.

We strongly support the NAAE's key recommendation for the establishment of a sixth pillar within the National Cultural Policy: Arts Learning, Participation and Pathways as a sound strategy to focus the critical role the education sector plays in achieving the other five pillars of the policy.

The consultation paper also highlights the importance of responding to changing technologies, audience behaviours and global demand for cultural content. In this context, policy settings should support experimentation, emerging practice and opportunities for early-career and independent creators to develop sustainable pathways.

Investment in work-integrated learning, industry partnerships, regional collaborations and interdisciplinary practice can help strengthen long-term cultural participation and innovation. Greater attention should also be given to equitable participation, including disability inclusion and pathways for underrepresented communities across education and cultural sectors.

### **Equity and Participation**

The next National Cultural Policy should continue to strengthen participation pathways for underrepresented cohorts, including regional, First Nations, disability and low socioeconomic communities. This supports the government's equity goals as outlined in the *Australian Universities Accord Final Report* released in February 2024<sup>8</sup>.

Particular attention should also be given to supporting First Nations leadership, language, knowledge systems and cultural practice across education and cultural institutions. Universities play an important role in supporting these priorities through teaching, research, community partnerships and the preservation and development of cultural knowledge.

DASSH and DDCA also encourage consideration of how broader higher education policy settings shape access to cultural and creative education pathways.

Current student contribution arrangements and funding settings under the Job-Ready Graduates Package (JRG) are influencing participation patterns across disciplines in which many arts, cultural and creative studies are embedded<sup>9</sup>. Cultural participation and creative opportunity should not depend on geography, income or background.

As the National Cultural Policy seeks to strengthen participation and long-term cultural capability, there is an opportunity to ensure policy settings across government support

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<sup>8</sup> [Australian Universities Accord Final Report](#), Department of Education

<sup>9</sup> [Impacts of the Job-Ready Graduates policy and options for reform](#), Innovative Research Universities

equitable access to these disciplines and the pathways they provide into cultural participation, creative industries and community leadership.

## About us

### DASSH

DASSH is a network of nearly 400 of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand's most senior leaders in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities across 43 universities. Our members play a critical role in shaping curriculum design, skill development and knowledge creation, which are essential to securing Australia's sovereign capabilities as a sustainable democracy. They also contribute towards creating well informed citizens who strengthen social cohesion and public trust, delivering benefits across the whole of society.

### DDCA

The DDCA is Australia's peak body for tertiary creative arts education and research. We aim to advance the culture of scholarship in the creative arts, offer strong leadership and advocacy for strategic development across Higher Education, and advocate for the role of the creative arts in society.

Our disciplines include visual arts, design, theatre, dance, music, screen production, digital arts and creative writing. Our membership includes approximately 40 institutions from around the country – universities and private providers – as well as a close association with four key disciplinary peak bodies: ACUADS (Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools), ASPERA (Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association), AAWP (Australasian Association of Writing Programs) and IDEA (Interior Design and Interior Architecture Educators Association). Our organisation is funded entirely by membership fees.

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