

## National Cultural Policy Submission

### About Us

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Organisation: The Australian Ballet  
Submission: On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation  
The submission can be made public  
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### Submission

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The Australian Ballet is the leading dance company in the Asia-Pacific region, a major employer of dancers, musicians and creative workers, and a company which creates and presents works of dance of the highest standard across Australia (metro and regional) and the world. The company is strongly committed to supporting the careers of talented Australian artists, creators and arts workers. We believe it is essential that all Australians have access to quality arts experiences which reflect the rich diversity and culture of Australia today and we are committed to supporting this objective through our activities on and off the stage.

We welcome the creation of a new National Cultural Policy which acknowledges the important role arts and cultural institutions play in giving voice to who we are, providing rich and fulfilling careers for Australian artists and creative workers and enriching the lives of all Australians.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute. Our comments here are provided to assist government to identify opportunities and to address some of the challenges impeding growth and sustainability.

#### **PILLAR ONE: First Nations: Recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.**

##### ***Challenges and Opportunities***

1.1 To increase visibility and presence of First Nations stories, we need to increase representation and opportunities for First Nations artists and arts workers. This requires more comprehensive training and development pathways at all levels, from entry to professional, to nurture talent, develop skills and drive creation of new works.

Additionally, we suggest that new support is required for creative institutions and artists, to encourage collaboration, and facilitate pathways to develop First Nations works for in-theatre performances and online distribution. This will facilitate increased presence and awareness of First Nations culture in our communities.

1.2 The representation of First Nations ballet dancers performing at professional level is quite limited, due to lack of access to dance schools and pathways to support talented artists into professional careers. We believe it requires a collective approach from First Nations communities, Australia's dance sector and governments to create supported traineeships and development programs for talented First Nations dancers.

1.3 Creating more First Nations stories will improve cultural awareness and understanding in our communities. This requires building knowledge and confidence to create culturally appropriate content. The creative sector would benefit from greater access to reputable cultural literacy and training programs. This could be realised with the development of best practice resources and access to accredited training organisations such as NAISDA or existing arts training organisations.

#### **PILLAR TWO: A place for every story: reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.**

##### ***Challenges and Opportunities***

2.1 We believe our performing arts should reflect both past, present and future, and bring audiences works which are relevant to contemporary interests. It is important that we have the capacity to

create new works which reflect this. Diversity onstage and onscreen helps audiences identify and connect, however creating new work can be expensive and a risky process. Through this Cultural Policy, governments have an opportunity to support the creation of new Australian stories and reduce risk by creating a “New Works” fund for research and development, to refine and produce new, high quality Australian works. We would suggest there is also an opportunity to engage other portfolios to support this initiative given the considerable benefits that high quality Australian works of art bring to health, education, trade and foreign affairs.

- 2.2 A diversity of voices and talent is essential to enable diverse art form development, commissioning of new work, outreach, educational programs and audience development. It would benefit the creative sector if there were greater access to educational programs and appropriate resources to provide attractive and inclusive workplaces where all people feel safe and supported.
- 2.3 Access to suitable, accessible rehearsal and performance locations and venues (which include technology to distribute digital content) is essential to create, perform and distribute new work. Currently there are limited theatres which are “fit for purpose” throughout urban and regional areas. We suggest a whole-of-Government approach to “audit” what is available today and that consideration could be given to including arts and cultural facilities in future urban and regional master planning of development projects.

**PILLAR THREE: The centrality of the artist: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.**

***Challenges and Opportunities***

- 3.1 To ensure artists and artworkers have fulfilling careers requires access to well-articulated and available development pathways. We believe it would be valuable to develop resources which provide advice and knowledge about training and development opportunities (including post-professional career options), as exists in other professions. We suggest developing a framework around access to education at all levels, from early talent identification programs and grassroots pathways into professional training and careers. This is a model successfully implemented across many sports codes, and worth exploring to identify and support talent early.

To ensure specialist arts skills are available in the future, is it essential there are programs available to develop skills in short supply. For example, The Australian Ballet struggles to find suitably qualified and experienced people in areas like costuming, millinery, scenic artists and props making.

- 3.2 There is strong evidence to demonstrate the significant benefits when young people engage with the arts. These include development of creative problem solving, collaboration and teamwork skills, increased confidence, better health and wellbeing and enhanced STEM outcomes. We believe it is important to enable arts education for all students and teachers. This will positively contribute to developing and inspiring artists and audiences of the future, along with building a skilled and creative workforce. Through this National Cultural Policy there is an opportunity to review school curricula, create consistency across states and collaborate across portfolios and sectors (i.e. Education and Health) to achieve improved educational and well-being outcomes.
- 3.3 Long-term and economically viable careers remain challenging for many skilled artists and arts workers. Our sector’s workforce has been significantly impacted by COVID-19, including decreased ability to attract and retain the creative sector workforce and offer salaries that are competitive with other sectors. A Cultural Policy should consider employment conditions and employer incentives to ensure more equitable remuneration and protection of entitlements are available to arts workers.

**PILLAR FOUR: Strong institutions: providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture.**

***Challenges and Opportunities***

- 4.1 Cultural institutions are major employers in our sector and welcome the support provided by governments to sustain their operations. However, without adequate and fully indexed funding from government, institutions cannot remain strong. Insufficient financial resources affect artistic vibrancy - where risk taking is required, limit capacity to maintain employment levels and

workforces, capacity to maintain infrastructure and to keep ticket prices affordable so that performances are accessible to diverse audiences. The current partial indexation approach to some funding programs impacts organisations' ability to effectively manage increasing costs, maintain standards and make artforms accessible.

As organisations focus on recovery and rebuilding post-COVID-19 there is limited ability to invest in additional/non-core activities to meet initiatives identified by funders. We recommend governments align indexation to CPI to avoid erosion of initiatives, audience reach and development opportunities for artists.

- 4.2 Income from philanthropy and corporate partnerships is increasingly essential to organisations' sustainability, but many arts companies lack philanthropy and sponsorship skills and expertise. It is our experience that developing relationships to achieve these income streams requires investment in time, personnel and skills but that the results are rewarding. There is an opportunity to invest in programs to build skills and expertise to develop philanthropic, corporate and commercial support.

## **PILLAR FIVE: Reaching the audience: ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad.**

### ***Challenges and Opportunities***

- 5.1 We believe reach, engagement and access are important in equal measure to ensure our stories are relevant, inspiring and accessible through affordable pricing. A balance between live and digital performance is now critical to ensure that the creative process remains vibrant and immediate while having maximum impact both in and beyond theatres and performance spaces.

As a result of learnings during the pandemic, arts companies are increasing offering content online, however we still have a lot to learn and our experience to date has been expensive, with income not covering costs. Access to different skills from the record and broadcast sector, with funding to fully develop relationships, select and adapt content to maximise the attractiveness and value of digital content and to build skills in digital presentation is necessary to enable high quality Australian arts and cultural products to be taken to the world.

We recommend that programs supporting development of specialised skills in digital broadcast would be of great value: for example, increasing access to digital specialists, providing financial support for digital content creation and supporting teams of experts who can be engaged by arts organisations who are unable to afford 'in-house' resources.

- 5.2 Factors impacting audience attendance at live performances include venue location and access (i.e. proximity to home), ticket affordability, and quality/appeal of the work. A review of the location and attendances at venues across jurisdictions would highlight gaps and create an opportunity to develop initiatives to increase engagement and demand. For example, audience growth, particularly for marginalised and young people, could be achieved via a subsidised ticketing program for single parent families, pensioners, and young people. This could potentially align with government agencies like Centrelink and Education to provide greater access to arts experiences.
- 5.3 For large performing arts companies, touring high quality work beyond Australian capital cities and overseas, is costly and challenging. While a number of government funding programs are available, they are limited and often uncoordinated. This inhibits organisations' capacity to engage in necessary long-term planning with any certainty. There is an opportunity to align state and federal priorities to ensure a collective and consolidated approach to national and international touring, bringing more Australian arts and culture to audiences across Australia and overseas.