

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Submitted: As an individual

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:

A Place for Every Story Children and young people have been largely invisible in previous attempts at formation of a national cultural policy. Children and young people historically have been positioned as art-makers or audiences in a future context. Children and young people should be recognised in a national cultural policy as having artistic agency, that is art-makers and audiences of the now. The inclusion of children and young people should not be limited to the inclusion of arts, culture and creative experiences in educational contexts. But rather there should be attention given to how the stories of the lives and lived experiences of children and young people can be shared, celebrated and interrogated through art and culture. Equally attention to how arts and cultural institutions include children, young people and their carers/families in spaces and programming should be signalled in a national cultural policy.

Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

When we look at the Australian cultural landscape not everyone's story has a place within the cultural conversation. Scott Rankin's Platform Paper *Cultural Justice and the Right to Thrive* is a powerful and timely tale for this time. He says, "The neglect of cultural rights can have a catastrophic effect. ... Every one of us should have the right to participate, be represented in and consume their country's culture, to have a voice in the cultural discussion, to be visible in the narration; because it is our cultural right"ⁱ. Rankin's text explores a story about art and cultural participation for all Australians but more accurately the barriers to participation that is not just rooted in economics.

Previous Labor governments have led the charge to establish a national cultural policy. Under the Julia Gillard Labor government there was the development of a national cultural policy titled *Creative Australia* (2013)ⁱⁱ that had its roots in *Creative Nation*ⁱⁱⁱ launched in 1994 under the Keating Labor government. In 1994, the same year that *Creative Nation* was launched, the federal coalition released a document entitled *The Cultural Frontier, Coalition Priorities for the Arts*. However found in both *The Cultural Frontier* and *Creative Nation* is the position that cultural "egalitarianism and fair play seem to come second to honouring the talented few at the expense of the many".^{iv} Or in the words of Scott Rankin, "[b]ecause of the power of culture, we need to pay attention to it, and be vigilant about everyone's rights, not for the few, or many, but for all. Because if we don't, it can be used against sections of society, demonising them or rendering their story invisible and citizenry vulnerable"^v. Labor's work in this space was significant under the prime ministership of Gough Whitlam including the establishment of the Australia Council for the Arts. In December 1972, the Australian Labor Party won office. Gough Whitlam brought to the leadership a passionate belief in the importance of the arts. Whitlam himself said of his government and the Arts, "[i]n any civilised community, the arts and associated amenities must occupy a central place. Their enjoyment should not be seen as remote from everyday life. Of all the objectives of my government, none had a higher priority than the encouragement of the arts".^{vi} Given the current political climate in Australia the contemporary relevance of these words is profound. In the contemporary sphere Rankin echoes Whitlam's position

by saying, "... culture is far from recreational, elitist or optional. It is an issue of justice, which plays out in pragmatic ways, as an essential service, like education, health."^{vii}

If we take a deep dive the inclusion of children and young people in arts engagement policy - cultural rights are seen in sharp relief. Contained in the previous Australia Council for the Arts document, *A Culturally Ambitious Nation: Strategic Plan 2014 To 2019*^{viii} is an opening statement that says, "[c]reativity starts with childhood curiosity. It continues through our lives. A culturally ambitious nation embraces the arts in everyday life. ... We want to be a nation where artistic enterprise and respect for culture are entrenched". This statement, although somewhat dated, is to be applauded. But the fact remains that at this moment there is no dedicated statement about the arts as it applies to young Australians. Children and young people both as art-makers and art consumers are largely absent from Australia Council for the Arts' 2020-2024 Corporate Plan titled *Creativity Connects Us*. The current state of play is that there are lapsed policies specific to children, young people and the arts. Federal policy, articulated through the Australia Council for the Arts, culminated fifteen years ago in the publication of *Young People and the Arts*^{ix}. This policy built on the Council's earlier *Framework for Youth and the Arts*^x and the work of Australia Council's Youth Panel in the two years previous. "The policy [was] about the Australia Council's role in supporting, promoting and raising the profile of artistic and creative work by, for and with young people and children"^{xi} Tracing through Council's *A Culturally Ambitious Nation: Strategic Plan 2014 To 2019* reference about arts and young people is captured under Goal Three as being "We will strengthen artistic experiences by, with and for children and young people by facilitating collaboration between young people and more established artists to create new work"^{xii}. This was about developing artist product not about inclusive arts engagement. The Australia Council for the Arts has always had as a primary objective the support of excellence but the invisibility of young Australians in this policy statement is stark and we are no closer to a dedicated strategy about the arts for children and young people. In the last attempt at a cohesive national cultural statement in 2013 the intersection of young Australians and the arts was in a statement that read, "a universal arts education for lifelong learning and to drive creativity and innovation"^{xiii}. This statement explicitly supported the inclusion of an arts entitlement for all young Australians through the activation of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts by mandating that "every student has the opportunity to receive an arts education" and that "creativity in schools is considered as a vital 21st century skill to drive innovation and productivity"^{xiv}. Yet, the Australian Curriculum: The Arts has not been consistently adopted across states and territories. The lack of a dedicated federal arts policy for young Australians may be interpreted to mean that access to and engagement in the arts for children and young people are not important. And even more, the provision of arts and cultural access for young Australians does not need further attention. Nothing could be further from the truth. We know that without the minimum entitlement through a cultural statement and/or policy for access and engagement in arts, culture and creativity all young Australians, no matter where they live or their economic background, children and young people will not be given equitable right to arts and cultural engagement.

ⁱ Rankin, Scott. (2018). *Cultural Justice and the Right to Thrive. Platform Papers No. 57*. Sydney: Currency House, pp. 8-9.

ⁱⁱ Australian Government. (2013). *Creative Australia*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

ⁱⁱⁱ Rankin, Scott. (2018). *Cultural Justice and the Right to Thrive. Platform Papers No. 57*. Sydney: Currency House, p. 3.

^{iv} Gardiner-Garden, John. (2009). *Commonwealth arts policy and administration – Parliament of Australia Library Background Note*, p. 44.

^v Rankin, Scott. (2018). *Cultural Justice and the Right to Thrive. Platform Papers No. 57*. Sydney: Currency House, p. 3.

^{vi} Gardiner-Garden, John. (2009). *Commonwealth arts policy and administration – Parliament of Australia Library Background Note*, p. 5.

^{vii} Rankin, Scott. (2018). *Cultural Justice and the Right to Thrive. Platform Papers No. 57*. Sydney: Currency House, p. 3.

^{viii} Australia Council for the Arts. (2014). *A Culturally Ambitious Nation: Strategic Plan 2014 to 2019*, p. 1.

^{ix} Australia Council for the Arts. (2003). *Young People and the Arts*. Strawberry Hills, Sydney: Australia Council for the Arts.

^x Australia Council for the Arts. (1999). *Framework for Youth and the Arts*. Strawberry Hills, Sydney: Australia Council for the Arts.

^{xi} Australia Council for the Arts. (2003). *Young People and the Arts*. Strawberry Hills, Sydney: Australia Council for the Arts, p. 4.

^{xii} Australia Council for the Arts. (2014). *A Culturally Ambitious Nation: Strategic Plan 2014 to 2019*, p. 6.

^{xiii} Australian Government. (2013). *Creative Australia*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, p. 77

^{xiv} *ibid.*