

# National Cultural Policy Submission

**Name:** Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA)

**Submitted:** On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation

## What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you?

### First Nations

#### Challenges:

It is essential that First Nations voices are at the forefront of the National Cultural Policy. PICA recognises the importance of self-determination and greater recognition and understanding of First Nations epistemologies within the arts sector.

The Federal Government through the Australia Council should fund organisations to be equipped to support First Nations workers at all levels from entry level to senior management. To ensure the success of these roles, organisations need to be culturally equipped and safe spaces for all arts workers and artists. Funding is needed to support organisations to undertake cultural awareness and safety training, incorporate Indigenous knowledge and values, and create systems that support First Nations workers.

#### Opportunities:

PICA supports the introduction of a peak body for First Nations Artists.

This would provide a much-needed central body for the Indigenous arts and cultural sector, providing First Nations artists and cultural organisations with a national voice across all areas of practice.

The body would promote social, cultural and economic development, including leadership on matters such as cultural and intellectual property; arts practice priorities; and emerging issues and opportunities to increase economic returns for First Nations communities through increased participation in the creative industries.

### A Place for Every Story

**Challenges:** To ensure that a range of stories that represent and reflect the diversity of Australia can be presented, government support must be prioritised and increased.

The global pandemic highlighted the wage insecurity for so many freelance artists and arts workers who rely on high risk, low paid work. Arts organisations faced financial collapse due to the reliance on ticket income and private donations.

The sector is buckling under lack of skilled labour and staff shortages. Current wages fall well below other industries and desperately require an increase in order to be competitive and attract candidates. This lack of financial security for artists and arts workers limits who has the opportunity to participate in the arts creative worker, and therefore means that many stories will go untold – a missed opportunity for Australian culture.

#### Opportunities:

It is essential a living wage for artists and arts workers be established alongside a standardised wage schedule for all freelance and contract arts employees and mandatory superannuation for freelance artists and arts workers.

Increased funding and wage certainty will ensure the retainment of skilled workers and make the arts a more attractive and viable sector to study and work for people from all backgrounds, allowing for a diversity of voices to flourish and a broader range of stories to be told.

### **The Centrality of the Artist**

**Challenges:** Artists play a central role in telling the story of Australian culture, as well as improving quality of life and mental wellbeing for every Australian. However, to ensure the next generation of artists are able to contribute to the sector, the arts need to be supported from the ground up, including through early learning, secondary and tertiary education, and into the workplace.

Currently the cost of education is extremely prohibitive to the majority of Australians wanting to pursue a career in the arts, which has flow-on effects to the availability of skilled workers. Tertiary institutions are cutting arts courses and fees are increasing at astronomical rates, meaning that the next generation of artists will graduate saddled with debt and financial insecurity – or choose not to pursue an education in the arts at all.

#### **Opportunities:**

Artists should be central to any educational institution, including in residence in early learning, primary and secondary schools.

Quality arts education that is affordable and accessible to all is fundamental to ensuring the next generation of Australian artists can forge professional careers and contribute to the cultural life of our nation.

Fine arts courses at tertiary institutions must be reinstated and university reforms that make it harder for Australian students to study arts at a tertiary level by increasing fees and cutting courses, must be reversed to ensure they are not prohibitively expensive for students from lower income backgrounds.

Funding to TAFE courses where graduates learn the vocational skills of arts and craft must be increased and the HECS and HELP program extended to creative courses at TAFE as well as all universities

It is vital to focus on STEAM (not just STEM) in primary and secondary schools and provide opportunities for artist educators to share their skills and knowledge with the next generation through Artist Residency programs in schools, ensuring the value of the arts is fore-fronted from an early age.

### **Strong Institutions**

**Challenges:** In recent years funding to the Australia Council has been significantly reduced by the Federal Governments, meaning that less organisations and projects are supported. Organisations form the pillar of the arts sector, able to support the careers and practices of artists and arts workers across all levels of professional practice. Without funding certainty or with reduced funding, less artists and arts workers can be employed or supported through organisations, and organisations are unable to plan strategically for the future.

**Opportunities:** It is vital that the Australia Council funding is restored fully and a further \$100Million per year allocated to the arts sector to support organisations and through project grants.

PICA receives four-year funding as a multi arts venue as well as funding through the Visual Arts and Crafts Strategy. Recently, when there was an uplift in the four-year funding pool, there was a decrease in funding through VACS. Small-to-medium institutions such as PICA play a central role in the cultural fabric of their communities and this requires funding certainty and stability to ensure we are able to plan ahead and ensure the continuation of our 30+ year history of supporting artists and cultural workers in Australia.

More paid professional development opportunities need to be available at all levels so artists and arts workers can continue to develop their skills and advance their careers, as well as share their knowledge with other staff and artists at different career points.

It is vital that the next generation of future arts leaders can progress their skills. Governance training for arts board members is an opportunity to plan for the future and continue the tradition of stable yet visionary leadership of our organisations.

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

PICA recognises that the world is currently in a climate crisis and sustainability is an urgent issue. We would like to see mention of sustainability in the arts in the National Cultural Policy.

Additionally, more focus on the role and needs of independent arts workers and art spaces, such as artist-run spaces, as independent workers and venues in order to recognise the additional challenges of these roles and venues when often competing for grants and other income against larger institutional spaces.

Finally, mental wellbeing, social sustainability and mental health support for arts workers and artists is an urgent issue, particularly since the beginning of the pandemic, which should be addressed within the National Cultural Policy.