

National Cultural Policy Submission

Youth Dance Australia

Submitted: on behalf of an arts peak body

Youth Dance Australia (YDA) is a network of youth dance companies and artists that advocate for, support, and develop youth dance practice in Australia. Our purpose is to foster articulate young contemporary artists, asserting them as creative leaders and innovators. Youth dance practice is an incredibly important and crucial contemporary dance form unto itself. Youth dance practice and YDA prioritise choreographic literacy, intellectual engagement, process-lead dance making, and the discipline of creative practice.

This National Cultural Policy Submission is a joint call to action from the members of Youth Dance Australia, facilitated by Ausdance Victoria. Key members currently include- but are not limited to: Stompin (Launceston), QL2 (Canberra), Austi Youth Dance Company (Austinmer), Wagana and DUST (Blue Mountains), Yellow Wheel (Melbourne), FLING Physical Theatre (Bega Valley), DRILL (Hobart), Australasian Dance Collective Youth Dance Company (Brisbane), Youth Dance Makers Initiative (Melbourne), Adam Wheeler (Tasdance - Launceston) and Flipside Youth Dance Company (Newcastle).

We are advocating for the Inclusion of “Young People's Engagement with the Arts” as a priority of the National Cultural Plan.

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

1. First Nations

We seek support to come together as a formalised community so that we can connect with First Nations artists and young people who are interested in our sector. With formalised networking and mentoring programs in place we could appeal, become more accessible, and relevant to more First Nations young people.

We see the broad benefits Youth Dance Practice has for young people, supporting better mental and physical health, building skills in teamwork and problem solving, developing confidence, resilience, a sense of identity and agency, and believe these benefits should be made more accessible for first nations youth within our communities.

2. A Place for Every Story

A key component of Youth Dance Practice as practiced by all of our companies is the inclusion of the voice of young people as collaborators in the process of developing work.

Young people often aren't able to see themselves reflected in our culture- valued and respected. It is paramount that our young people can, not only participate in the Arts

and the dance sector but that they also have the opportunity to drive it. They are artists in their own right - their story is valid now - not just because of the contributions they will make in their future.

3. The Centrality of the Artist

We need support in the centring of First Nations artists, Deaf and disabled artists, and artists of colour in every sub-strategy, with a dedicated, funded, and measurable action plan to address the under-representation of these artists in decision making and leadership roles, including at the Australia Council.

Better collaboration across government portfolios that recognises and provides support for the broader benefits of youth arts practice including improved mental and physical health.

We call for the arts to be recognised as a profession by government, including by Centrelink, and that Centrelink and the ATO harmonise income averaging arrangements. There is also an opportunity to encourage employers to put artists onto payroll instead of contracting them, as this ensures artists receive superannuation and are covered under WorkCover. This could be a requirement or a target for funded organisations to meet.

Long-term, stable funding for independent artists has shown to increase productivity and reduce the desire to set up burdensome incorporations or companies. Creative Victoria's Creative Ventures Program is a relevant model, as are artist fellowships (e.g. Australia Council, Myer Foundation).

Youth Dance Companies, while supporting young people are also offering important employment opportunities to professional artists- both in terms of income and professional and choreographic development. We regularly employ both established and emerging artists to create original work with our companies, contributing to artform development.

4. Strong Institutions

Investment in Youth Arts- We believe that the broader benefits of youth arts engagement should be available to all young people across Australia. The youth arts sector is currently held back by the limitations of funding, so that the current number of organisations that exist are generally underfunded. The vision youth arts within the national cultural policy needs to see a level of investment that both better supports existing companies and also creates opportunities for new youth companies to be initiated to provide greater access for all young people across the country.

Strong support for the goal of a Young People and Culture Plan, including the reinstatement of the Arts Start program to facilitate career development for graduates, and a dedicated peer-assessed funding stream at the Australia Council for young people and the arts.

5. Reaching the Audience

Youth Dance has immense potential to powerfully build arts and dance audiences through education and development opportunities that stem from our connections with families and community.

Visibility is something we often battle. With adequate support and specified funding, we could establish a deeper connection to diverse communities, stronger foundations for our far-reaching networks and better supported artists and organisations.

The National Cultural Policy needs to take an ambitious approach to the development of future audiences that will contribute to the growth of arts and culture at a national level. Youth Arts companies contribute to developing future audiences by providing opportunities for young people to gain insight into the arts, which is often a first step in engagement and establishing for young people that the arts are as much for them as for anyone else- and not exclusive or elitist.

The National Cultural Policy should be considering young people's engagement with the arts as a key element of welcoming future audiences into the arts, and youth arts companies are the best placed organisations to do this.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice.

1. First Nations

Workshops and collaboration between Indigenous youth and youth dance companies facilitate cultural exchange and opportunities to develop cultural awareness in non-indigenous youth and offer Indigenous youth access and exposure to contemporary artistic practices that can help them build their own artistic language and expressive tools to share their perspectives.

Youth dance companies provide choreographic opportunities and project-based employment for emerging Indigenous artists to develop and share their practice.

2. A Place for Every Story

'A place for every story' must include young people, who deserve opportunities to tell their stories and see themselves reflected in our culture. YDA support young people as artists and creators of culture, and to create work that engages and appeals to them as audiences.

3. The Centrality of the Artist

Our industry has an incredible track record of fostering the next generation of artists and supporting artists right through their careers from first commissions for emerging artists to choreographic opportunities for highly acclaimed professionals.

4. Strong Institutions

Long-lasting networks and pathways are naturally built into the way our youth dance companies operate and have the potential to bolster and support the sector even more so if we had more resources to develop these models further.

5. Reaching the Audience

Youth Arts also connects with broad audiences connected to youth participants, including families, relatives and friends including young people, that might not otherwise engage with the arts, and so have the potential to grow arts audiences.

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

- Establish an ongoing, dedicated funding stream for Young People's Engagement with the Arts for companies whose core business is young people's engagement, administered by the Australia Council for the Arts.
- Establish targeted, cross-department streams of funding for Young People's Engagement to work with Health and Mental Health, Employment, Youth Justice, Regional Youth and Education – co-managed by the Australia Council.
- Establish Advisory Boards that represent the diversity of young Australians, managed independently, as ongoing standing committees for the Australia Council for the Arts and the Minister for the Arts.
- Recognition of Young People as artists.
- Youth Dance Companies championed as the foundation and generator of a significant amount of artistic output in this nation.
- Support for Youth Dance Leaders to come together to build the sector.
- Support for more national programs to be developed to support the sector.

Issues affecting the Small to Medium Sector-

The Organisations within Youth Dance Australia generally operate as small to medium organisations and are affected by issues affecting this broader sector which need to be addressed, including:

- Ensuring base levels of investment in the small to medium sector are protected from federal budget cuts, in the same way that funding for major organisations is protected.
- Increased investment to begin to reverse the devastating impact of successive cuts over previous years.
- Establishing a new layer of funding within the Australia Council to support small to Medium Organisations who are not yet at the level to compete for Four Year funding but who have been successful with project funding- there is currently no steppingstone between these two levels of investment, which is a significant gap that most organisations are not able to overcome. A level of Annual Program Funding for organisations would help bridge this gap and create a pathway for organisations to receive greater support.