

National Cultural Policy Submission

The Young People of Shopfront Arts Coop

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

As an artist

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:

First Nations

The welcomed and celebrated inclusion of First Nations people, culture and artists in the Australian community broadly is hugely important to the future of Australia's identity and cultural life. The opportunity to include First Nations culture more directly, and embed it into the daily life of all Australians is a great thing. All this change must be led by First Nations People, who must be paid for their time, advice and contributions.

"We need a voice to parliament. We need to accept the Uluru Statement of the Heart" - Liv, 14

"I think it's really important to listen to First Nations people about what they want to do." - Mabelle, 11

A Place for Every Story

As Young People much of our first experience of arts and culture is through the educational curriculum. We are lucky to be involved with the arts through programs outside school. Some Young People are exposed to more of Australia's cultural life than just their English syllabus, but the vast majority of Australian Young People think of theatre as being just Shakespeare.

We see an opportunity for a change in thinking, and the inclusion of diverse voices in the Australian identity, through much needed educational reform. For there to be a place for every story in the Australian cultural landscape, this needs to be reflected in the voices heard by our Young People throughout their education and in their cultural life.

"The things we learn about at school aren't the things I like to see or make. Whenever my friends come to see my shows they say 'Wow is that theatre?' because they don't know" - Liv, 14

"Any time we learn about art at school I'm like, that's boring! I've seen much better stuff in other places" - Mabelle, 11

The Centrality of the Artist

We think it is important to value art and artists, and for this value to be backed up with money. You cannot achieve the goals of the other four pillars without strong artists willing to tell new and bold stories in their work. Right now, Artist's struggle to take risks, because there is no space for them to fail, as the landscape is financially treacherous. To centre the artist is to remove the financial barrier from the ability to make art, especially in the early stages of a career.

Artists should be paid and valued in all arts spaces. This centrality of the artists extends once again to education. With arts courses at uni skyrocketing in price, the ability for Young People to start careers in the arts that they can continue are very slim. The centrality of the artist cannot only apply to artists who are already established. It needs to support new voices and risky art too.

"Artists deserve pay, and Young artists need some kind of respect and pay to be able to start out" - Olivia, 19

"If you don't value it, talk about it, care about it and you neglect it in 20 years you will ask "where are all the artists?" - Liv, 14

Strong Institutions

We think the constant uncertainty around funding makes it hard for institutions to plan for meaningful programs that promote diversity, uplift First Nations voices and enrich audiences. When institutions are changing sizes based on funding cuts or changes, the ability to make effective and impactful work is diminished.

Creating financially strong institutions that are less reliant on 'bums on seats' also opens the door to more artistic vibrancy, and less focus on retelling the same stories to the same privileged subscriber audiences. If key institutions are catering only to a more privileged audience base in order to financially remain viable then the arts becomes a place that caters to privilege.

We think institutions that show meaningful cultural and community impact deserve financial stability in order to remain strong, and that financial support for the arts should be increased dramatically. As one of Australia's biggest industries, it deserves more investment and value across all sectors.

"The arts should not be a place of privilege" - Olivia, 19

Reaching the Audience

The arts in Australia are seen as not being for everyone, and that doesn't seem fair. Cost and accessibility are very important in allowing the arts to be open, accessible and welcoming to all Australians. We believe strongly that reforms in educational curriculums and the inclusion of strong arts educations for Young People in schools would change the perception of art being only for "weird kids and old people."

If the Arts in Australia were as ingrained in the life of Young People as sports are, the national response to our cultural sector would shift within a generation.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:

First Nations

We as Young People believe in the importance of truthful education of Australia's history to all Young People in school. We also believe in dedicated spaces for truth telling and sharing of culture and language by First Nations communities on their terms. Australia's First Nations communities are the oldest living culture, and have the longest history of storytelling on the planet. To exclude them from arts and culture, and Australian discourse more generally would be an incredible harm. It is encouraging to see First Nations culture included as a pillar, and we can only hope it is always First Nations First as this policy plan unfolds.

"I went to school in Redfern, so I was lucky to learn about First Nations culture in primary school. The people I went to High School with knew nothing, and so they got it wrong a lot." - Tom, 18

A Place for Every Story

We believe in the power of art to widen perspectives, and that if the arts and cultural landscape tell diverse stories from different voices then Australian society will come to accept people more. We also believe it's important to recognise that 'diverse' stories from CALD people, First Nations People, Queer People, People living with Disability and others are still Australian stories, and that the work that needs to be done is not framing 'Australian' work versus 'Diverse' work to compete for space.

Instead we should recognise that Australian society is diverse, so Australian art is diverse.

We also think this pillar applies to places for Young Voices in the Australian Cultural Policy, and the arts sector. Young People have few opportunities to be heard, and opportunities are often behind financial barriers and so are not accessible to all Young People to tell their stories. Strong Youth Arts organisations that place Young People in positions to be heard by all of Australian society are essential and we think they need a strong place as well.

"It's so important to see people who aren't like me on stage, but it's also important that there is a place for everyone in the audience. I learnt so much from seeing shows like City of Gold at STC and when I looked around the audience, everyone was white and a lot older than me. I felt like there should have been First Nations people there getting to see the show too. Theatre should be for everyone" - Tom A, 18

The Centrality of the Artist

Arts and artists have been amazingly important to our development as Young People. The artists who have worked with us to help us develop our own sense of self and use our voices have given us skills we can use anywhere – not just if we eventually become artists. The importance of valuing those people, and the things they bring to everyone's lives is huge.

"The most important lessons I've learned were through art" - Mabelle, 11

Strong Institutions

Strong Institutions mean strong artists, strong pathways, more opportunities and better art. The less time artists and arts institutions spend trying to survive, the more they can create new art for people to enjoy and new opportunities for artists to develop.

Reaching the Audience

As Young People, it does not feel like anyone is programming things we want to see or that consider us as important. When we find art that is for us, it is life changing. The disconnect though of lots of art feeling as though it is for older people means that it is hard to feel a part of the arts sometimes. It feels like we need to wait until we're older before it's our turn to enjoy art. By then lots of people have given up on it altogether. Reaching young audiences, and giving them works of art that can show

them that art is for everyone, will go a long way to changing the Australian culture for the better.

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

Include “Young People's Engagement with the Arts ” as a priority of the National Cultural Plan.

For any National Cultural Policy to be effective in the long term it needs to seriously consider the experiences of Young People with arts and culture. The engagement of Young People with the arts in schools, in cultural/art institutions whose focus is on Young People, in arts and cultural programs that center Young People’s voices and in the programming of work, exhibitions and wider cultural experiences that appeal to Younger audiences are all meaningful ways to assist the success of the included five pillars of the national cultural policy.

We support the key recommendations of the Young Peoples Arts Sector organisations:

1. Include "Young People's Engagement with the Arts" as a priority of the National Cultural Plan;
2. 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;
3. Establish targeted, cross-department streams of funding for Young People's Engagement in the Arts to work with Health and Mental Health, Employment, Youth Justice, Regional Youth, and Education – co-managed by the Australia Council;
4. 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.