

QUEENSLAND THEATRE

RESPONSE TO THE NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY CONSULTATION

August 2022

Queensland Theatre is the state theatre company for Queensland, part of the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework and a member of CAST, the Consortium of Australian State Theatre Companies.

Queensland Theatre is a statutory body with principles and objectives defined in the Queensland Theatre Company Act 1970. The Company is located in Brisbane but has a responsibility to be responsive to the needs of the whole state.

National Cultural Policy

Queensland Theatre is fully supportive of the Australian Government's creation of a national cultural policy. Following the damage to the industry brought about by Covid 19, and a failure of investment in the preceding years, it is important to take broad stock of the current situation and take steps to strategically reinvigorate artistic activity and audience sentiment.

A national cultural policy will clearly signal the government's commitment to the creative sector, will raise the profile of the arts industry and assist in creating sustainable careers for artists and arts workers. Most importantly, a strong cultural sector will enhance the lives of all Australians, building confidence and social cohesion and providing a place for building a rich and diverse national identity.

Queensland Theatre supports arms-length arts funding, with a rigorous peer-assessed evaluation process. The Australia Council is the institution capable of implementing a national cultural policy and it should be strengthened through increased funding, as a matter of priority, so that innovation and reform can take place. It is vital to take a holistic approach to the health of the industry and to have this assessment and action carried out by a central organisation, engaging directly with industry.

Queensland Theatre agrees that the five pillars on which the policy will be built are still relevant and useful and offers the following comments in each of the different areas:

First Nations First

Queensland Theatre is committed to the consistent and ethical presentation of First Nations-led work and agrees that First Nations artistic expression needs to be at the centre of the national cultural policy. The policy could consider providing for:

- Increased number of First Nations theatre companies
- Skills development and capacity building program to increase the skilled First Nations workforce. This could take the form of funding available for traineeships in major companies across all different areas, supported by First Nations professionals, funding support for tertiary qualification or bridging courses
- Funding to support in-depth and timely cultural consultation, different methods of creation and multi-artform works, location specific development of work (on

country), language support and appropriate counselling and community involvement

- Programs specifically directed towards First Nations secondary students to demonstrate safe and culturally appropriate pathways into the arts
- Increased First Nations staffing in all companies, and staff shared between companies
- Creation of a service organisation for First Nations arts as envisaged by the Australia Council in its 2020 plan, able to support First Nations and non-First Nations artists and companies.

A Place for Every Story

The 2021 Census clearly demonstrates the diversity within the Australian population. The national cultural policy needs to recognise the many different voices that make up the Australian identity and make access and inclusion a key pillar of the response. The policy should include:

- Support for culturally diverse companies (linguistic, age, ability diversity)
- Pathways programs that give diverse artists the time, space and resources to develop their work, with a long-term view of creating a pipeline of diverse works, attracting a wide audience
- Development fund to allow companies to consistently develop and program diverse works
- Marketing resources to take the time and care to develop sustainable relationships with diverse audiences
- Funding to support all companies to reach agreed standards of access and inclusion: ticket pricing strategies, physical access, partnerships
- Access to training and advice to assist companies in increasing the diversity of their workforce and making workplaces more inclusive
- Recognition of the cultural diversity between metropolitan and regional/remote communities and providing resources to make sure that works can be produced that reflect each community and reach wide audiences.

Centrality of the Artist

Covid 19, in addition to previous cuts to funding for the small to medium sector and other areas of the arts, have highlighted the fact that the arts have not been viewed as a vital industry requiring long-term planning and investment for growth and sustainability. As a result, in some states there are few small to medium companies and youth companies for new entrants to the industry, there are chronic skills shortages in some areas and for many artists there is little incentive to stay in the industry. Employment in the arts needs to be seen as a viable career option. The cultural policy could include:

- Coordination with other areas of government to ensure that arts education is a strong part of the curriculum, especially at the secondary level. Arts education is being steadily eroded to the point where many regional and remote schools are no longer able to offer arts subjects at senior level. Scaling of arts subjects for senior years is also a disincentive for students.
- Strong support for the creation of new works of scale. Cast sizes have been decreasing steadily over the past few years, with the corresponding lack of employment opportunities for artists.

- A comprehensive program of skills training for artists at all levels, including mid-career levels and artist wishing to transition to different areas (actor to director, actor to playwright etc). Much of this training could take place inside arts organisations via residencies.
- Support for a strong small to medium and independent sector, an essential part of the overall arts ecology, an entry point for many artists to test ideas and build skills and a driving force in the creation of innovative approaches to art making
- Mechanisms to provide support for regional artists and to tour work regionally.
- Resources to support safety within the industry, protecting artists – cultural awareness training, emotional safety audits, intimacy training

Strong Institutions

Strong institutions are vital for a sustainable industry. Unfortunately funding for major institutions is not keeping pace with inflation, leading to a reduction in activity levels and employment opportunities for many major organisations. Strong institutions build the careers of artists, supporting a permanent workforce for the industry and most importantly, build audiences. The national cultural policy should reinforce the role of strong institutions as a support for the entire industry:

- Recognise the role that major institutions play in arts education and support companies to expand this work, supported by a whole of government approach
- Support major companies to offer consistent skills training programs across areas of chronic shortages
- Investment in works of scale that tour, including international presentations as a strong pillar of cultural diplomacy
- Emphasis on developing high level digital skills both for making and recording work
- Consistent funding to build strong small to medium and independent companies to make sure they are a permanent part of the overall ecology

Reaching the Audience

Like many arts companies, Queensland Theatre is in the process of rebuilding its audience, especially the subscriber base, in the face of continual Covid 19 disruptions. There is a commitment to both reconnecting with lapsed audience members as well as seeking out new and diverse audiences. Audience development requires sustained, long-term effort, which can be supported by the national cultural policy in the following ways:

- Advocacy for the arts and its role in building a strong, cohesive community
- Consistent celebration of artists and their contribution to society
- Emphasis on arts education/participation and exposure to the performing arts at all levels of schooling, building both the creative workforce and future audiences
- Support for major companies to make their work accessible, physically, economically and geographically. In large states, regional work can be prohibitively expensive and inconsistent, making it difficult to develop deeper relationships.
- Supported and coordinated audience development initiatives, especially for new work designed to reach new audiences
- Research to support effective audience development initiatives
- Development of clear industrial relations guidelines for digital recordings of live performances
- Support to tour productions both nationally and internationally