



31 January 2025

Ms Georgie Purcell MP
Chair, Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament House, Spring St
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Chair,

Subject: Inquiry into the cultural and creative industries in Victoria

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission to the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee on the Inquiry into the Cultural and Creative industries in Victoria. The University of Melbourne welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry and highlight the importance to Victoria of sustaining a strong creative arts sector.

Melbourne is widely considered the cultural capital of Australia, offering a diverse array of artistic and creative experiences that contribute substantially to the nation's cultural landscape. The city showcases iconic institutions such as the Australian Ballet, Arts Centre Melbourne, and the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), the country's oldest art museum. Further afield, regional Victorian centres like Bendigo and Ballarat contribute to the State's cultural offerings, hosting major exhibitions within their cultural precincts.

The University of Melbourne is proud to be based in the leading creative State and cultural capital of Australia. We actively contribute to and help shape this vibrant landscape, playing a key role in maintaining Victoria's premier status. The cultural and creative industries are by their nature products of collaboration and partnerships with many disciplines. The University of Melbourne's education and training and its extensive cultural collections bring together disciplines and practices in a spirit of partnership with the creative and cultural industries of Victoria.

The University of Melbourne is home to respected arts institutions the Victorian College of the Arts and the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music in the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, based at the University's Southbank campus in the centre of Melbourne's Arts Precinct. With 2500 undergraduate and postgraduate students, the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music develops many of the country's most renowned artists through training, development, research and critique. The University of Melbourne is ranked equal first in Australia for Performing Arts based on the 2024 QS World University Rankings. In addition, the Faculty of Arts offers undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the creative industries such as media and cultural management. The Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning offers specialisations in design and the Faculty of Engineering and IT in software and games design.

The terms of reference for this inquiry primarily focus on Victoria's arts and cultural industry organisations, funding bodies and ARTS8 national performing arts training schools. As a university, we occupy a unique position in this landscape. The University is an educator, an employer of artists and academics, a custodian of creative infrastructure and assets and we hold significant responsibilities in the arts sector. These include maintaining a 50 per cent interest in the Australian National Academy of Music Limited Group and jointly owning the Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB). The University also oversees the Melbourne Theatre Company, the oldest

professional theatre company in Australia and the model for all the State theatre companies that followed. Moreover, for over three decades, the University has proudly hosted Asialink Arts, an institution that has become Australia's foremost centre for fostering creative engagement with Asia.

The University's cultural estate comprises a vast array of cultural and scientific collections, museums, galleries, libraries, archives, theatres and performance spaces. Both the University and the Victorian community have invested in this cultural estate since the University's foundation. The cultural estate is now deeply interwoven in the fabric of the University and represents a significant financial asset with collections valued at over \$450 million and related buildings, infrastructure and fit-out at over \$400 million. Over the last decade, the University has increasingly acknowledged the untapped resources of its collections and the opportunity they present to enhance the practices of teaching and research, the University's reputation, and its place in the community. In recent years, the University has undertaken significant work to ensure respectful and culturally appropriate access to Indigenous Collections under its stewardship. This includes the Donald Thomson Collection, which holds great cultural significance. Moreover, the University has been actively engaged in the careful and considerate process of repatriation of Indigenous materials.

Part of our role as a university is to bring together expertise from across the sector to engage in meaningful dialogue and act as a catalyst for change on issues of national and local importance. The University recently established the *Creative Industries Network* bringing together government, arts organisations, venues and festivals and convened an India-Australia Creative Connections Forum in Delhi celebrating cross-cultural collaboration and innovation within the creative sectors. In recent months, the University hosted a Creative Industries Forum exploring the creative precinct ecosystem, First Nations leadership in the arts, and creative health and wellbeing, involving 150 industry professionals that developed important linkages and highlighted improved ways of working.

Given our multifaceted role, our feedback encompasses industry perspectives and the impacts on artists and higher education. In this way, we particularly draw focus on the health of the sector for the graduates that we are training, as their future success is intrinsically linked to the vitality of the industry.

As part of this submission, we would like to note the important work that Creative Victoria performs in supporting Victoria's creative industries.

In summary, we recommend that the Victorian Government:

- Advocate for increased Commonwealth funding for arts and cultural organisations and the specialist arts education programs that they support both within schools and through their own programming.
- Advocate to increase regional Victoria's share of national arts and cultural spending, recognising the important role that regional arts centres and institutions play and the broad benefits arts education provides for students.
- Continue to advocate for the importance of the public broadcasters and the creation of local programs produced from the Southbank (ABC) and Federation Square (SBS) Melbourne bases within the Melbourne Arts Precinct.
- Advocate to the Commonwealth Government on the importance of higher education for fostering artists. This should include advocating for an urgent overhaul of the existing Job-Ready Graduates program, in line with the recommendations of the Universities Accord.
- Boost Victorian investment in cultural and creative industries through a new creative arts policy, noting the community and economic benefits of a strong arts sector, consulting closely with universities, training organisations arts organisations. This new policy should commit to marketing Victoria globally as a significant cultural hub and embed universities in Victoria's cultural narrative.

Terms of Reference Item 1: The economic and social impact of the Commonwealth Government’s Australian cultural policy, *Revive*, on Victoria’s arts and cultural industries including, in particular, Victoria’s share of national arts and cultural spending.

The University of Melbourne welcomes the increased funding and focus that have accompanied the Commonwealth Government’s cultural policy, *Revive*, noting that the intention of the policy is “to change the trajectory of the creative sector...so that Australia’s artist and arts workers, organisations and audiences thrive and grow...”¹ We support the establishment of Creative Workplaces, Writing Australia, Music Australia and the First Nations Board within Creative Australia, in addition to the Creative Futures Fund.

The \$2.6 million investment to support specialist in-school arts education programs delivered by artists in areas of disadvantage is also vital to nurture arts participation and develop future artists from a young age. The value of arts education has been well-documented, and we highlight research on the far-reaching benefits of music education including enhanced student engagement and wellbeing, development, social inclusion and community cohesion. We believe the Commonwealth Government should increase funding for this important early learning program. We have not been able to identify the dispersal of this funding within Victoria but would welcome more engagement on this with Creative Victoria. The Faculty of Fine Arts and Music has undertaken school outreach to meet the Widening Participation aspirations outlined in the *Australian Universities Accord* and sees opportunities for collaboration in both metropolitan and regional Victoria (see below).

Recommendation: Advocate for increased Commonwealth funding for arts and cultural organisations and the specialist arts education programs that they support both within schools and through their own programming.

Terms of Reference Item 2: Regional Victoria’s share of national arts and cultural spending

The University encourages further funding to the regions, to grow audiences and maintain infrastructure, providing opportunities for artists and audiences and to promote local stories. With campus infrastructure, partnerships, teaching, learning and research in regional Victoria and a commitment to community, the University supports requests to increase regional Victoria’s share of national arts and cultural spending. The University has provided a number of [creative outreach programs in regional Victoria](#) in partnership with local communities and supports greater cultural spending to support social and economic development in the region.

Recommendation: Advocate to increase regional Victoria’s share of national arts and cultural spending, recognising the important role that regional arts centres and institutions play and the broad benefits arts education provides for students.

Terms of Reference Item 3: The importance of spending in the Victorian economy and the cultural dynamism and representation in Victoria of government funded national broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, and, in particular, whether these broadcasters are spending in Victoria a share of their budget that matches the size of Victoria’s population, economy and unique place within national cultural life.

The University enjoys a partnership with the ABC and Creative Australia on [TOP 5 Arts](#), a two-week media residency at the ABC’s Southbank headquarters for graduate early-career practitioners and PhD researchers

¹ Commonwealth of Australia, [Revive. Australia’s Cultural Policy for the next Five Years](#), 2023 p 16.

working in visual arts, performance, design, architecture and screen. This provides an opportunity for researchers to work alongside some of Australia's top journalists and broadcasters, training in media communication and developing content for different ABC platforms. The partnership highlights the importance of the ABC's footprint in the Melbourne Arts Precinct adjacent to the University's Southbank Fine Arts and Music campus. The connections between the broadcaster and University add significant value to our community and we would like to note the important role the ABC and SBS play, drawing upon the University's expertise and commentary.

The University would like to acknowledge the critical role public broadcasters play and note that we appreciate the context of budget pressures and the resultant centralising of operations.

Recommendation: Continue to advocate for the importance of the public broadcasters and the creation of local programs produced from the Southbank (ABC) and Federation Square (SBS) Melbourne bases within the Melbourne Arts Precinct.

Terms of Reference Item 4: The ongoing financial sustainability of the seven national performing arts training organisations including whether Victoria's share of this funding is adequate.

The eight performing arts training organisations that make up ARTS8 are essential to the sector and deserve appropriate government funding. With three of the eight organisations based in Victoria, Victoria secures a notable proportion of this particular funding. The budgeted, indexed and ongoing funding of all eight members to 2029 is a welcome longer-term assurance of their sustainability.

We highlight that the University has a close structural relationship with the Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM). ANAM has two "members" (sometimes called "owners"): the Commonwealth and the University of Melbourne with the Commonwealth as the funding member and the University serving as a custodial function with the University appointing two directors. We have an arrangement with ANAM allowing for eligible ANAM students who are school leavers to complete a UoM Bachelor of Music.

We note the limited reference to higher education or universities in *Revive* beyond acknowledgement that "training in both traditional creative skills and digital skills will be required to support growing industry needs."² *Revive* acknowledges the significant and disproportionate impacts of the Job-ready Graduates (JRG) student funding on students studying in the field of creative arts. Given artists tend to have higher levels of education (74% of artists hold university qualifications compared to one-quarter of the broader workforce)³ universities as creative arts education providers are essential for preparing future artists and producers of cultural content.

Under the JRG program, Visual and Performing Arts courses were reclassified from the lowest to a mid-range student contribution cluster. Consequently, this policy change has saddled arts students with higher debt, adversely and unfairly affecting the disposable income of practising artists. The Universities Accord has since called for "urgent remediation" of the JRG program. Despite this finding, the Commonwealth Government has yet to replace it. The University recommends that the Victorian Government advocate strongly to the Commonwealth for the abolition of the JRG program and the establishment of a more equitable system of student contributions. If the new system of student contributions is to be based on average graduate outcomes (as proposed in the Accord), it must

² *ibid*, p 61

³ Creative Australia, *Artists as Workers: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia*, 2024, p 29.

accurately account for and measure session-work income, ensuring a fair representation of the diverse earning patterns in creative industries.

Revive invites us to “think seriously about the pathways to becoming artists and cultural producers. It demands a rethinking of our education system and of the skills and training opportunities for young Australians.”⁴ Noting that the creative sector is experiencing critical workforce and skills shortages⁵ and supply and retention issues following COVID-19 as well as “ongoing and new challenges around precarious work and rapid technological and global change,” education and training is essential. With Creative Australia’s data showing that nine out of ten professional artists in Australia were continuing training in 2023, an increase of 17 percentage points compared with the 2016 survey,⁶ the importance of ongoing training and research organisations cannot be understated.

The University of Melbourne supports the ambition of Service and Creative Skills Australia, the Jobs and Skills Council for the sector, which is considering “new types of training and delivery models that bridge the gap between education and work.” The University is a leader in skills and professional practice and believes higher education also has a significant role to play in this space. The University’s production courses, highlighted in this [video](#), provide technical industry-based training. For example, the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music recently worked in partnership with Nant Studios in Docklands to build skills in the growing area of Virtual Production, delivering a number of [industry-based MicroCerts](#). This is a prime example of how we build ‘staircasing training’ that leads to professional degrees and deeper levels of skilled industry applied learning.

We encourage greater engagement with the universities and industry on the development of a targeted skilled pipeline. This could replicate the work of [Creative UK](#), which is addressing the UK sector’s issues with a plan to grow the Creative Industries by £50 billion and create 1 million extra jobs by 2030, confirming the government’s commitment to the Creative Industries as a high-growth priority sector.

Recommendation: Advocate to the Commonwealth Government on the importance of higher education for fostering artists. This should include advocating for an urgent overhaul of the existing Job-Ready Graduates program, in line with the recommendations of the Universities Accord.

Terms of Reference Item 5: Whether the Revive policy and relevant state government policies and spending provide sufficient support and impetus to rebuild and sustain Victoria’s cultural and creative industries following the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector.

The University recognises the commitment to the creative and cultural sector demonstrated by both the Commonwealth and Victorian Government policies including *Creative State 2025*. Unfortunately, the devastating impact of COVID-19 and its long tail has been further exacerbated by cost-of-living pressures, therefore support for the sector is not sufficient. The way audiences engage in and with the arts has changed and the sector is not returning to the same pre-COVID-19 conditions. Subscriptions and other funding streams that have traditionally assisted creative companies across the sector to forecast income are decreasing, meaning fewer opportunities for ongoing work for artists.

⁴ Commonwealth of Australia, [Revive. Australia’s Cultural Policy for the next Five Years](#), 2023, p 13.

⁵ Service and Creative Skills Australia and Creative Australia *Arts Workforce Scoping Study Interim Findings*, p 5

⁶ Creative Australia, *Artists as Workers: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia*, 2024, p 34.

We expect that *Revive* and the associated funding will undoubtedly assist with the perception that Australia's arts education and training is "open for business" following COVID-19. The University has seen strong international demand for the University's Bachelor of Fine Arts and Bachelor of Music in 2025, which suggests that the global perception of Australia's creative sector is improving.


We look forward to the development of a new Victorian creative policy that nurtures the sector, noting that Creative State 2025 expires this year. This will be important, noting the vital contribution the arts make to the Victorian economy. According to Creative Victoria, in 2022-23 the creative economy contributed \$40.5 billion, representing a 7.6 per cent share of Victoria's total economy.⁷ This new creative policy should be underpinned by comprehensive consultation with stakeholders across the arts and cultural sector. It should also incorporate strategies to promote Victoria internationally as a premier destination for arts and culture and embed universities in Victoria's cultural narrative, recognising their role in shaping and enriching the state's creative landscape.

Recommendation: Boost Victorian investment in cultural and creative industries through a new creative arts policy, noting the community and economic benefits of a strong arts sector, consulting closely with universities, training organisations arts organisations. This new policy should commit to marketing Victoria globally as a significant cultural hub and embed universities in Victoria's cultural narrative.

I am pleased to include links below that highlight the University's contribution to building the future creative arts workforce.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide a submission. For further information, I can be contacted at michael.wesley@unimelb.edu.au.

Yours sincerely



Professor Michael Wesley

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Global, Culture and Engagement)

Attachments

1. University of Melbourne [Faculty of Fine Arts and Music overview](#) – Prof Marie Sierra, Dean of the Faculty
2. University of Melbourne [Faculty of Fine Arts and Music full 2024 showcase of work](#)
3. University of Melbourne [2024 Design and Production video overview](#) – highlighting skills development, building a workforce for the cultural and creative sectors
4. University of Melbourne [Opera showcase](#)
5. University of Melbourne [Film and TV](#) demonstrating practice-based development
6. University of Melbourne [LED Volume Studio](#)
7. University of Melbourne's [Faculty of Fine Arts and Music showcasing education and performances](#)

⁷ <https://creative.vic.gov.au/resources/data-insights/victorias-creative-economy/economic-impact> accessed 24 January 2025.