



Australian Universities Accord Panel
Department of Education

11 April 2023

Re: Australian Universities Accord Panel Discussion Paper Consultation

NAVA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation.

The National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) is an independent membership organisation which brings together the many voices of the visual arts, craft and design sector to improve the fundamental conditions of work and practice. We do this through advocacy, education and the Code of Practice for the Visual Arts, Craft and Design.

NAVA was established in 1983 as the peak body for the visual arts. Today, our community is made up of over 50,000 members, subscribers, friends and followers, consisting of artists, students, academics, arts workers and arts organisations.

The Job-ready Graduates Package made it even harder and more expensive for people to study the arts and creative practices. Concerningly, Universities Australia have recently reported that the Creative Arts have experienced the largest fall in undergraduate enrolments (-2.0 per cent) and as well as for postgraduate study – by coursework and research (-10.0 per cent).¹

Good educational opportunities for visual artists is one of NAVA's central concerns to ensure artists and arts workers are well prepared to embark on and progress in their professional careers. Arts training in higher education is key to reaching this objective. Affordable training is just as essential in the arts as in other industries and enables graduates either to establish their own cultural businesses or to be employed by others.

The Government's own statistical research demonstrates that arts and humanities graduates are more employable than science and mathematics graduates. The Australian Government's Bureau of Communications and Arts Research 2019 research report, *Creative Skills for the Future Economy*,² reinforced the importance of creative skills for future economic outcomes. The report, which analysed the skills and qualifications of people working in creative fields and how these may be used in the future, showed that businesses rely on \$87 billion worth of creative industry input for success, a figure that is growing rapidly. Creative skills, including original thought and innovation, are particularly sought-after and are likely to face even higher demand in the future workforce.

NAVA applauds the government's new National Cultural Policy '[Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place](#)' which asserts that Australian students have the opportunity to receive an education that includes culture, creativity, humanities and the arts.

NAVA's key recommendations

1. Reverse the Job Ready Graduates package and reduce tuition fees for arts and creative courses increased under the package.
2. Invest in university funding for creative courses and studio-based learning.
3. Invest in First Nations-led education, training, mentorship and skills development tertiary programs to support First Nations employment and representation in middle-tier jobs, leadership roles, boards, and Aboriginal advisory groups.

4. Strengthen professional practice teaching and learning to support business skills and good industry practice for student artists and arts workers:
 - a. Support universities and TAFEs to expand and update the delivery of professional practice units of study and key concepts for all arts students, in particular at Vocational Education and undergraduate level.
 - b. Support universities and TAFEs to embed industry good practice in course curriculums across all arts subjects and professional practice units, in particular NAVA's Code of Practice for Visual Arts, Craft and Design³.
5. Establish a Trade Course and paid traineeships to address critical production and technical skills shortages in the visual arts, craft and design sector and boost the number of available arts workers with a mix of skills including art handling, museum practices, lighting, white card, rigging, AV, carpentry, sewing, painting and plastering.
6. Remove Ministerial discretion from approving or rejecting research grants recommended and administered by the Australian Research Council (ARC).

Meeting Australia's knowledge and skills needs, now and in the future

A wealth of global research from the World Economic Forum⁴, PWC⁵, Deloitte⁶, McKinsey⁷, NESTA⁸, Harvard⁹, and even the Australian Government's Bureau of Communications and Arts Research¹⁰, all stipulate that creativity and creative skills are imperative for the workforce and economy of the future. The arts and humanities degrees are actually imbuing students with the creative skills they will need to be job-ready.

Soft skills are increasingly referred to as employability and enterprise skills which are transferable between industries and occupations¹¹. These are the types of skills and attributes that every student should develop at university.

Shortages in technical and production staff in the visual arts, craft and design are at critical levels. Long-term under-investment combined with the impacts of the pandemic have caused significant shortages of available arts workers with a mix of skills including art handling, museum practices, lighting, white card, rigging, AV, carpentry, sewing, painting and plastering. NAVA calls for the introduction of traineeships and trades to boost the number of qualified production and technical staff in the visual arts, craft and design.

NAVA's recommendations

- Reverse the Job Ready Graduates package and reduce tuition fees for arts and creative courses increased under the package.
- Invest in university funding for creative courses and studio-based learning.
- Strengthen professional practice teaching and learning to support business skills for student artists and arts workers:
 - Support universities and TAFEs to expand delivery of professional practice units for all arts students.
 - Support universities and TAFEs to embed industry good practice in course curriculums across all arts subjects and professional practice units, in particular NAVA's Code of Practice for Visual Arts, Craft and Design.¹²
- Establish a Trade Course and paid traineeships to address critical production and technical skills shortages in the visual arts, craft and design sector and boost the number of available arts workers with a mix of skills including art handling, museum practices, lighting, white card, rigging, AV, carpentry, sewing, painting and plastering.
- Support universities and TAFEs to embed arts literacy in learning content across all subjects.

Access and opportunity: supporting the participation of students with low socio-economic backgrounds, First Nations Australians, people with disability and regional and rural Australians

Universities Australia recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and knowledge are assets to universities and the nation.¹³ Their genuine inclusion in teaching and research broadens, deepens and improves what Australian universities do in a unique way on the world stage.

The visual arts, craft and design sector face challenges in appointing and maintaining a First Nations workforce. Most art centres struggle to recruit suitably qualified First Nations managers and other art workers from their local community. Meanwhile, there is a total of just 25.1 FTE First Nations staff across 434 small-to-medium (S2M) public galleries in Australia.¹⁴

As identified by the Productivity Commission in their recent report on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts and crafts, full-time, salaried jobs, such as curators and gallerists, are highly competitive and usually require university qualifications. Professional development and training delivered through the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system are often not aligned with what the industry requires. For example, visual arts VET courses are predominantly focused on art production, with limited time spent on the business and technology skills required for arts workers and artists operating their own businesses. Moreover, many artists and arts workers learn valuable skills and practices from Elders, but this learning is often not formally recognised, limiting access to positions that may lead to senior management and leadership roles.¹⁵

The agency of the First Nations visual arts, craft and design sector requires strong investment in First Nations mid-career and leadership roles. We need a national strategic approach to build the pipeline of First Nations visual arts and crafts workers – and leaders – in remote, regional and urban areas.

Creating opportunities to access tertiary training and education without relocating is vital to ensuring the next generations of regional creatives. Increased education and training opportunities in regional Australia will ensure equity of access and address skills shortages in the visual arts, craft and design sector.¹⁶

NAVA's recommendations

- Invest in First Nations-led education, training, mentorship and skills development tertiary programs to support First Nations employment and representation in middle-tier jobs, leadership roles, boards, and Aboriginal advisory groups.
- Develop a framework around increasing access to education at all levels of school, university and TAFE, career and skills development, and professional practice so that everyone, everywhere can individually and collectively follow chosen pathways and careers. This must address barriers based on where people live, their financial situation or internet connection, and their ability to travel to another university or place of practice. / Introduce policies and programs that increase access and participation for people from historically marginalised backgrounds to professional pathways.
- Invest in arts education and career pathways in the regions
- Lift social security payments to above the poverty line (at least \$88 per day).
- Adjust youth allowance (and other social security payments) with the cost of living
- Update rent assistance to reflect and grow in line with market rents.
- Remove HECS/VET Loan indexation and raise the minimum payment income.
- Implement free undergraduate education and wipe student debt.

Investment and affordability: reviewing the Job-ready Graduates Package

Arts education in Australian education institutions has been devalued and under-resourced. Together with significant revenue declines and job losses from Australian universities since the start of the pandemic, the Higher Education Support Amendment Bill 2020 made it significantly more challenging and more expensive for people to study the arts at university. Many universities amalgamated arts courses or closed them altogether.

The Budget 2021-22 also saw large funding cuts to public universities, with the higher education sector slated for approximately \$1 billion in funding cuts to 2024. As arts, craft and design are resource intensive disciplines, the debilitating cuts being made at all universities continue to target the arts and studio-based learning in particular.

Course cuts and studio closures are having a deleterious impact on both the number and quality of artists in Australia and may result in severe cultural deficit for Australia. We have experienced a major destabilisation of the Australian visual arts, craft and design ecology with whole modes of practice now struggling to exist in several key states and regions. We have not simply lost courses and facilities – we have been witnessing the erosion of vital sites of experimentation, creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and joy.

Over time, a few university arts programs may still be accessible, but only to those who can afford the fee increases, who can afford the increased cost of living in city centres, who can afford to not juggle part time work on top of their long studio days. The point of irony that we arrive at is that although the arts are relentlessly derided for being inaccessible and elitist, it is precisely the defunding of the industry that makes entering it so cut-throat and unsustainable for the vast majority.

It is imperative that quality arts training programs, courses, and opportunities are accessible and affordable.

NAVA's recommendations

- Reverse the Job Ready Graduates package and reduce tuition fees for arts and creative courses increased under the package.

Governance, accountability and community: improving university regulations for staff and students

The casualisation of staff is rampant across the whole university sector including arts faculties. Two thirds of university workers are on limited term contracts or casual appointments (NTEU 2022). Teachers have no security in terms of knowing whether they will be employed for the upcoming semester.

NAVA's recommendations

- Work with education departments to ensure artists are engaged by the education department respectfully and are offered fair contracts.
- Invest in university funding for creative courses and studio-based learning.
- Investment into secure, tenured teaching positions for lecturers and tutors.
- Adequate remuneration of teaching staff for the labour of administration, assessment consultation, and reading and marking assignments.
- Adequate remuneration for teaching staff to convert course material to digital formats and to receive support/training in teaching online.

NAVA's recommendations

- Strengthen professional practice teaching and learning to support business skills for student artists and arts workers:
 - Support universities and TAFEs to expand delivery of professional practice units of study and key concepts for all arts students, at Vocational Education and undergraduate level.
 - Support universities and TAFEs to embed industry good practice in course curriculums across all arts subjects and professional practice units, in particular NAVA's Code of Practice for Visual Arts, Craft and Design.¹⁷
- Establish a Trade Course and paid traineeships to address critical production and technical skills shortages in the visual arts, craft and design sector and boost the number of available arts workers with a mix of skills including art handling, museum practices, lighting, white card, rigging, AV, carpentry, sewing, painting and plastering.
- Invest \$10 million to develop a program of internships and cadetships which would see students and young people work in regional, small and/or community-focussed galleries, libraries, archives and museums.
- Work with student galleries to increase opportunities for students to learn critical business and professional development skills including exhibiting, curating, installing, administering and running small businesses and writing (exhibition essays, critical reviews etc.).

Quality and sustainability: solving the impacts of COVID-19, exploring the role of international students and deepening Australia's international partnerships

Many universities benefitted from excellence in their arts faculties, earning international reputations for cultural sophistication and investment in experimentation and innovation. They have enjoyed a strong recognition amongst peers, seen to be providing specialist and multi-disciplinary approaches to research-based visual arts, craft and design education that reflects the diversity of professional art practice.

However, successive funding cuts have bitten into the universities' ability to maintain their levels of research commitment, range of course options, numbers of staff and therefore staff student ratios, induction of fresh academic talent, career pathways for staff, tutorial provision, academic entry requirements and standards.

The pandemic left universities without access to any of the Federal Government's income support, including JobKeeper and in October 2020, the Job-Ready Graduates Bill passed through the Senate which meant a 113% increase in fees from 2021 for arts and humanities degrees.

In late 2020 and throughout 2021 and 2022, many Australian universities made numerous course and staffing cuts as well as proposals for more to come. The debilitating cuts being made at all universities are targeting the arts and studio-based learning. The months leading to these difficult decisions have been a stressful and exhausting time for many as universities considered sweeping changes as part of their COVID-19 recovery plans at the cost of the livelihoods of hundreds of staff members.

A vast majority of university staff in arts, craft and design faculties and schools across Australia endured months of job uncertainty and an unclear picture of their futures. For those 'fortunate' enough to keep their jobs, many of their roles have been restructured in ways that make their workloads unmanageable, and devalues what they do as teachers, researchers, and support staff.

COVID-19 and digital classrooms have resulted in a significant increase in class sizes. With more students, teachers are forced to manage a significant increase in emails, assessment consultations and marking - while wages remain the same. Job losses through voluntary and forced redundancies, as well as the non-renewal of limited term contracts, worsens the staff-to-student ratio in classrooms.¹⁸

Universities are particularly dependent on the fees of international students. International students pay much higher fees than domestic students and are not eligible for financial support either from universities or welfare mechanisms including JobKeeper. For parts of the pandemic international students were barred from entering the country to continue their studies.

NAVA's recommendations

- Invest in university funding for creative courses and studio-based learning.
- Investment into secure, tenured teaching positions for lecturers and tutors.
- Adequate remuneration of teaching staff for the labour of administration, assessment consultation, and reading and marking assignments.
- Adequate remuneration for teaching staff to convert course material to digital formats and to receive support/training in teaching online.
- Consultation into the needs of international students.
- Support and appropriate curriculum development to help international students understand an Australian industry context when studying a career in art.

Delivering new knowledge, innovation and capability: supporting research funding and encouraging the partnership between universities and industries for an increase in commercial returns

Funding through the Australian Research Council (ARC) is crucial for extensive partnership-based research between academic and arts industry bodies as the basis for exploring developments in practice, responding to local and global impacts on Australian artists and organisations, as well as informing arts infrastructure reforms.

The changes announced in 2021 to the Australian Research Council (ARC) – aimed at aligning ARC governance and research funding with the Government's manufacturing priorities and commercialisation agenda – raise significant concerns for NAVA. The changes see a shift away from the peer review process in favour of increased input from businesses and research end users into grant assessments. The reforms also include a recommendation to direct 70 per cent of applied research grants to align with six government-determined National Manufacturing Priorities in future Linkage Program rounds.

NAVA has serious concerns that the changes will result in a loss of critical research, investment and innovation in the arts and creative industries across Australia. The changes dilute the arm's length, peer review process and align the majority of research funding towards areas of mandated government priorities.

The changes come off the back of university funding cuts announced in 2020 through the Job-ready package, which saw disproportionate course and staffing cuts to faculties including humanities and the visual arts. The move to prioritise manufacturing outcomes threatens a further long-term diminution and decline in Australia's creative future.

Arts and humanities research is vital for Australia's culture and national identity. Through evidence-based research, universities and key bodies enhance our understanding of the complexities of the human process, explore our capacity to create, and reflect and innovate in response to critical social, environmental and economic challenges in contemporary society.

The ARC is an independent body operating under the Australian Research Council Act 2001 which states in section 33C that the Minister must not direct the CEO. NAVA calls for an immediate halt to the actions outlined in the Letter of Expectations and an immediate inquiry into the political interference in the independence of the ARC.

NAVA's recommendations

- Remove Ministerial discretion from approving or rejecting research grants recommended and administered by the Australian Research Council (ARC).

Please do not hesitate to contact us for any further information we can provide.

Sincerely

Leya Reid
Advocacy and Communication Manager

Penelope Benton
Executive Director

¹ 2022 HIGHER EDUCATION FACTS AND FIGURES, Universities Australia July 2022
https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/220207-HE-Facts-and-Figures-2022_2.0.pdf

² Australian Government Bureau of Communications and Arts Research., (2019). Creative Skills for the Future Economy working paper, pp. 1-33. Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications website at <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-centre/publications/creative-skills-future-economy-0>: Australian Government Bureau of Communications and Arts Research

³ Code of Practice for Visual Arts, Craft and Design <https://code.visualarts.net.au/>: National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA)

⁴ World Economic Forum, (2018). The Future of Jobs Report, pp. 1-147. World Economic Forum website at http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2018.pdf: World Economic Forum

⁵ PwC Australia., 10 skills you need for future employment, PwC Australia [website], 2016, <https://www.pwc.com.au/careers/blog/future-employment.html>

⁶ Deloitte., While the future of work is human, Australia faces a major skills crisis, Deloitte, 12 June 2020, <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/media-releases/articles/work-human-australia-faces-major-skills-crisis-120619.html>

⁷ Manyika et al., (2017). Jobs lost, jobs gained: What the future of work will mean for jobs, skills, and wages Report, McKinsey Global Institute website at <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/jobs-lost-jobs-gained-what-the-future-of-work-will-mean-for-jobs-skills-and-wages>: McKinsey Global Institute

⁸ Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC), (2018). Creativity and the future of skills, pp. 1-10. Nesta website at <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/creativity-and-future-skills/>: Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC)

⁹ Pistrui, J., The Future of Human Work Is Imagination, Creativity, and Strategy, Harvard Business Review, 18 January 2018, <https://hbr.org/2018/01/the-future-of-human-work-is-imagination-creativity-and-strategy>

¹⁰ Australian Government Bureau of Communications and Arts Research., (2019). Creative Skills for the Future Economy working paper, pp. 1-33. Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications website at <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/department/media/news/creative-skills-future-economy>: Australian Government Bureau of Communications and Arts Research

¹¹ Deloitte, Soft skills for business success: Building Australia's future workforce, <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/economics/articles/soft-skills-business-success.html>

¹² NAVA Code of Practice for Visual Arts, Craft and Design <https://code.visualarts.net.au/>

¹³ [Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2022-25](https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/220207-HE-Facts-and-Figures-2022_2.0.pdf)

¹⁴ Australian Public Galleries Snapshot 2019 <https://pgav.org.au/Australian-Public-Galleries-Snapshot-2019~7486>

¹⁵ Productivity Commission Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts and crafts Study report, 2022 <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/indigenous-arts/report/indigenous-arts.pdf>

¹⁶ Regional Arts Australia submission to National Cultural Policy consultation 2022 https://www.arts.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/ncp0185_regional_arts_australia.pdf

¹⁷ Code of Practice for Visual Arts, Craft and Design <https://code.visualarts.net.au/>: National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA)

¹⁸ UNSW Casuals Network <https://www.unswcasuals.net/>