



## CHASS Response to the Australia Council Review Consultations

### About the Council for the Humanities Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS)

The Council for the Humanities Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS) is the national peak body for 90 organisations including universities, schools and faculties, national institutions, professional peak bodies in design, performing arts, creative industries and arts and technology and others. We support our members in their advocacy for humanities, arts and social sciences (HASS), work with the government in strengthening the agenda around HASS issues and create links between policy and research in these learning areas. Currently CHASS is planning its landmark inaugural **The Human Dimension** National Forum in Canberra on 25 and 26 September. This aims to set a forward vision for the HASS sector and to link HASS learning to the burning issues facing Australia including sustainability, Australia in the Asian Century, science engagement and the human dimensions of new technology.

### CHASS and the National Cultural Policy

CHASS has been an active participant in the processes around the National Cultural Policy. The following activities have been undertaken in relation to this by CHASS:

- National Cultural Policy submission February 2010 in consultation which said

*In preparing this submission on a National Cultural Policy, we have sought input from more than 80 member organisations including the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA) and the Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) and other peak bodies in the creative and performing arts disciplines of Australian Universities like the National Association of Tertiary Music Schools, Museums Australia, Ausdance, Craft Australia, and the Australian Major Performing Arts Group. While this submission is a fair reflection of members' views and feedback, there will be significant diversity in detailed views given the range of the Council's membership and the depth of knowledge of specific cultural issues. This submission refers to work and recommendations of several member organisations which will be making detailed submissions. CHASS will also work to brief its network on the range of views and programs suggested during the policy consultation so they take an active part in the next stage of development.*

- National Cultural Policy workshop University of Western Sydney August 2011 which drew members from 90 participating organisations, key thinkers from arts, creative arts, industry, education and business sectors, government officials and the then Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for the Arts, Senator Kate Lundy.
- Submission to the National Cultural Policy consultations "Towards a National Cultural Policy for Australia" October 2011
- Communicating Big ideas: Connecting the Arts workshop November 2011 which including themes such as "Debating an Arts Policy for Australia", "Investigating Arts Participation" and "Cultural Research Networks".
- Media Release on 3 May 2012 in relation to delay in the release of the National Cultural Policy and subsequent media comments
- Joint statement in support of the National Cultural Policy endorsed overnight by 30 peak organisations and submitted to Minister Simon Crean on 4 May 2012.



## Overarching comments in Response to the Review of the Australia Council

CHASS considers the plans to enhance the role of the Australia Council for the Arts an exciting opportunity to enable arts to address the changes in the social policy landscape in recent times. It aims to strengthen the links between research, advocacy and practice, a model which organisations such as CHASS have developed in order to “join the dots” between the various dimensions of arts and culture. It recognises the need to have cross sectoral responses in increasingly complex societies where factors such technological advances, sustainability issues and globalisation have created the need for multi faceted rather than siloed approaches.

CHASS notes that there have been changes in research sector, VET sector funding and University sector funding that have direct impacts on the arts and creative industries in Australia. The skills agenda which emphasises “value for money” is also a challenge in terms of valuing arts, humanities and social sciences related studies and pathways to industry participation. The role of an independent statutory body that combines research, advocacy and practice based work has the potential to look at the whole of government role of arts support and the role that arts plays in the larger burning issues facing Australia. These include issues around identity and citizenship, the creation of sustainable communities and societies and in promoting an innovation culture. In this context CHASS notes that it may be helpful to benchmark cultural funding levels as a percentage of GDP to like countries to reflect upon and track Australia’s strategic vision and resource decisions in this arena. Any additional funding could be tracked for a given period to determine adequacy of this allocation against such benchmarks as well as against the identified needs of the sector.

### CHASS Response

Below are responses from CHASS with regard to the recommendations of the Review of the Australia Council. This is based on feedback from relevant board members of CHASS and some CHASS members and sector experts who are acknowledged at the end of the document.

#### Recommendation 1

*The Review recommends that a new purpose for the Council be expressed as follows:*

*To support and promote vibrant and distinctively Australian creative arts practice that is recognised nationally and internationally as excellent in its field.*

CHASS largely supports this vision but notes that definitions of “Australian” should include cultural diversity as a key aspect. CHASS has consistently emphasised this in our various submissions to the NCP process.

CHASS has commented later in this document on notions of excellence. What is required is a clear articulation of “excellence” as it has the potential to create exclusion rather than inclusion. Defining excellence is particularly important for emerging artists who need time to develop their practice. Different descriptors appropriate to different stages of practice would be useful for artists and assessors.

CHASS commends the inclusion of a research focus for the Australia Council. In particular we encourage the compilation of reports (such as those prepared by Screen Australia) which report and track trends on an annual basis and are easily accessible by the sector in support of their advocacy and other purposes.

Given the emphasis on community arts later in the document the inclusion of the word ‘craft’ could further recognise this important aspect of creative practice. The purpose could therefore be: ‘To support and promote vibrant and distinctively Australian creative arts and crafts practice that is recognised nationally and internationally as excellent in its field.’

CHASS also encourages the Council to be bold in its vision of addressing gaps and unmet needs in the Australian arts sector. For example there is a dire need for innovative pathways for artists to find sustainable ways of using their skills and knowledge in the long term. Strategies and programs that support empowering facilitation in this arena could recognise the specific ways in which lifelong learning plays out in some arts professions where multiple careers are the norm.

## Recommendation 2

*This statement of purpose should be supported by a three year Strategic Plan, agreed with the Minister, which defines the KPIs against which the Council should be measured.*

CHASS supports the recommendation but would suggest that the timeframe is at least 5 years to provide a realistic timeframe for creating sustainable interventions and support mechanisms

There have been suggestions from experts that CHASS consulted that the Australia Council could consider making the report against the KPIs public thus creating enhanced opportunities for public understanding of its operations and decisions including factors that influence Australia Council's own funding environment.

## Recommendation 3

*The Review recommends that the Council work to remove duplication through the merger of AbaF and the Artsupport program as recommended by the Review of Private Sector Support for the Arts undertaken by Mr Harold Mitchell AO in 2011. However, this Review recommends the merged functions should sit within the Australia Council, subject to the resolution of the taxation issues surrounding transfer of the Australia Cultural Fund which is administered by AbaF.*

CHASS supports the integration of AbaF with the Australia Council. CHASS encourages the role of the Australia Council to include strong and mainstream advocacy to integrate information about arts philanthropy to the broad public through organisations such as the Australian Taxation Office. The inclusion of AbaF will strategically place the Australia Council to both promote and encourage advocacy and philanthropy of the arts. This merger will also heighten the awareness of artists of the 'business' side of their profession.

CHASS also notes that the current definition of culture within the context of the Australia Council which does not capture museums/history/ and other humanities based disciplines could potentially narrow its sponsorship scope.

## Recommendation 4

*The Review recommends that the Council and OFTA undertake a joint program audit. This audit would take account of the Council's new purpose and apply the excellence versus access filter to current programs. The agreed program split would then be the subject of sector consultation, before implementation.*

CHASS has reservations in the proposed dichotomy between access and excellence. The report does recognise that there is overlap in these considerations and that any definition will have to be mindful of this. However, the split will reinforce notions of exclusivity, particularly as it plays out in the cultural diversity and other similar sectors. The principles of access and equity should underpin all government service provision.

Notions of 'excellence' are themselves cultural constructions and access and equity requires an openness to reconceptualisation of excellence. Broadening access is the means through which we achieve this — it has excellence as a goal. Australia cannot afford to lose/miss out on talent where ever it occurs.

In addition, the community cultural development aspect of the arts provides key opportunities for overlap and interaction which supports the role of the arts in the broader social policy context. We need to ensure that community arts, much of which has a strong cultural diversity focus, is recognised as equal. If the aim of arts practice and policy is to position arts in the broadest possible social policy agenda, the silos created by separating "excellence" and "access" seem to be inconsistent with this aim.

Major Arts Organisations could also face potential complexity with this dichotomy where creative decisions are made in a matrix that includes considerations of touring, large box office projections and other infrastructure based issues which are integral aspects of such organisations.

CHASS acknowledges that in some situations the filter of access and excellence may work. However even here, there would need to be an assurance that work is equally weighted. In such cases the distinctions would

be based on intent and outcome. This does not preclude excellence within its context. Community cultural development work requires expertise in management and support. Access and excellence are dependent on social-cultural context and are not fixed and stable constructions. The various arts forms are also not equally measured against one another, such as indicated on p. 19 of the review in relation to community arts projects.

One of the roles of OFTA is to work with ACARA to develop the Australian Arts Curriculum, however Education and Training is not nominated as part of its mandate in the table on p. 15 of the review. The Australia Council has Education and Training indicated as a non-core activity undertaken by the agency. We believe the Australia Council has made a serious and concerted effort to raise the profile and importance of arts education particularly through the Artist in Residence initiatives in schools and universities. The joint program audit needs to identify which areas each agency is excelling in and support this.

Further, in Table 2.4 Research is seen as an overlapping middle ground, yet it does not appear as a function of the OFTA on p. 15, however it is illustrated as part of the Australia Council's core business activity.

### **Recommendation 5**

*The Review recommends that the Council work to grow the Council's linkages.*

CHASS strongly supports all the points under this recommendation. The linking of the Australia Council to other sectors is key to developing an integrated model for arts support in Australia. CHASS's submissions have recommended such linkages including in its first submission (February 2010) where developing linkages was one of 2 key recommendations:

*The Government must support and encourage connections between the arts and broader areas of civic culture, industry and social policy. It should connect arts-based innovation and experience to audiences, investors and education institutions and through them to broader areas of community and industry.*

As part of this discussion we had included plans for a national forum to develop networks across these areas. CHASS's Inaugural National Forum is planned for September 2012.

CHASS would recommend the inclusion of specific sectors such as design and cultural industries and the creative disciplines as part of the plan for linkages.

CHASS commends the recognition of collecting institutions as important partners in the linkages plan. In addition, we would like to see art, craft and design included in linkages.

CHASS strongly supports the Asia-Pacific focus for international engagement. While there has been increased interaction with the arts of our regional context, more can be done to enhance this, particularly in the context of the Australia in the Asian Century White Paper. For example, links to the Asialink arts residencies and the Qld Art Gallery's Asia Pacific Triennial as important Australian initiatives that are already working well and could be further promoted through the Australia Council and artist in residences in schools and universities. CHASS's submission to Australia in the Asian Century consultation highlighted the role of culture and language in creating relationships between Australia and the countries in this region. Our response to the Budget also identified the gap in the focus on Asian languages as a barrier to creating sustainable relationships which are required to support business and other interests.

In supporting the Asia Pacific focus, CHASS would make two points:

1. That this focus is in addition to and not a substitute for existing areas of international engagement. Many organisations have invested resources over a period of time in building relationships and networks in European, North American and other markets and there is continued value in maintaining these relations
2. That the Asia Pacific focus is supported by structured and organisational pathways. This would mean Australia Council having in house expertise as well as capacity to build partnerships and networks integrated into its core operational structures and strategies. There needs to be strategic and operational policies in place to support this specialised focus area

### **Recommendation 6**

*In order to facilitate implementation of the new purpose for the Council, the Review recommends that the Australian Government provide additional funding of \$21.25 million per annum to the Council to cover current funding pressures and changes to its purpose*

CHASS strongly supports the research and advocacy support for the Australia Council. CHASS will be happy to provide networks with linkages across the research, advocacy and industry sectors to support this work.

The research and advocacy work of the Australia Council, particularly in relation to recent review and documents promoting the arts in education is excellent. We believe it is important this work of the Australia Council continue.

While CHASS supports the role of the Council as a “funding generator” we would also seek to include within this purview the role of the Council in ensuring government commitment to arts funding that is commensurate to its social and economic significance. Additional funding to bring Australia to a similar arts and cultural standard of other countries is important as creativity is seen as a current economic driver. Caldwell & Vaughan (2012) ‘Transforming Education through the Arts’ note that Australia is currently in breach of UNESCO’s recommendations and roadmap for the Arts.

CHASS recommends that if there is an opening up of a proportion Major Performing Arts (MPA) funding to peer review, it should be made with due consideration of whether/ how this could contribute to improved outcomes for the MPAs.

CHASS strongly supports the additional resourcing of small to medium organisations and individual producers recognising that the support to this sector has eroded over the past period. Unfunded excellence could be addressed through smaller targeted grants for individuals and smaller groups.

### **Recommendation 7**

*The Review recommends that, in order to provide the Council with increased funding flexibility, the Australian Government pursue with the states and territories the opening up of the MPA Framework to allow for competitive funding based on peer review.*

Please see comments above with regard to peer reviews for MPAs. In addition, there would need to be due consideration of appropriate “peers” in such cases.

Another issue to be considered in that often the states’ agenda for funding such companies is very different to the Australia Council considerations. The state-federal partnership in terms of discretionary funding would raise issues of consistency and stability across jurisdictions.

### **Recommendation 8**

*To arrest the erosion of the Council’s funding base, the Review also recommends exempting the Council from any further application of the efficiency dividend.*

CHASS strongly supports this recommendation. CHASS also recommends a commitment by the Australia Council to maximise support for the arts by maintaining an efficient and lean bureaucracy.

If Australia is to be competitive among similar countries, then erosion of the funding base needs to be eradicated with due consideration given to quality processes without compromising the integrity of what the Australia Council represents.

The arts is highly labour intensive as such a significant impact on cost is wages- the CPI is based on domestic purchasing and so often does not reflect the real cost increases in the sector. Traditionally the wages in art sector are low and yet the creative commitment means people absorb costs through discounting their own value. Wages are often determined with union agreements which include wage indexation. Therefore the real value of subsidies is eroded unless these considerations are taken into account.

### **Recommendation 9**

*The Review recommends that new enabling legislation for the Council clearly provide for a conventional, skills-based Governing Board. The new Act should limit membership of the Board to nine, with all appointments made by the Minister after receiving advice from the Chair. The Chair should be appointed by the Minister. The Board should be composed primarily of people with a deep experience in and passion for artistic practice who can bring a balanced blend of skills and expertise to the Council and through it, to Australia's cultural life.*

CHASS supports this but notes that it is important that the Board be representative of diversity issues including culture and gender.

CHASS calls for the inclusion of arts based skills on the Board through eminent representatives with a deep knowledge of and experience in the arts.

With regard to the number of board members, CHASS recommends that it is in line with the policies of other comparable government agencies.

CHASS also strongly recommends a focus on transparency and conflict of interest processes in a structural manner within the Australia Council. It is important that such processes are openly accessible and communicated to the public.

### **Recommendation 12**

*Sector Advisory Panels, which would be the principal agents for engagement with the artforms and custodians of artform practice within the sector, should support and inform the work of the new Board and management, as directed by that Board. Specifically, the Panels should provide sectoral expertise and advise on and inform the Strategic Priorities of the Board. The Board may constitute any number of Advisory Panels and determine their mandates based on the needs of the Board in developing and executing its Strategic Priorities. It may conclude the activities of any Panel as it sees fit.*

CHASS supports the principle of person/skills filter in terms of approaching modern arts practice in Australia. We think that this will support an integrated approach to arts policy and support, one that is being increasingly seen as a hallmark of public policy and service delivery across the board.

At the same time, we also recognise the high level of sector specific expertise that exists and we think that the review does address ways of harnessing this specialist expertise. We would recommend that there is clarity around the relationship between structures that provide such advice and the broader non siloed structures.

For example it is not clear how the Sector Advisory Panels will function within the corporate structure of the Council. If their role is to provide sector specific advice to the Board, it would seem to be inconsistent with the vision of the Council to move away from a siloed model of artform based approaches.

CHASS is cognizant of the fact that some of its members support the continuation of artform specific models. Their view is that specific arts forms cannot be assessed in a whole of evaluation approach. Therefore sector specific advice and expertise will enable artsform needs to be assessed within their own domains.

CHASS's view is that there are positive and negative factors in either model. However it would seem a consistency of approach is important to deliver the desired outcome, if indeed it is to have an integrated model of arts support.

### **Recommendation 14**

*The Review recommends that a new model for grant allocation be implemented that:*

*a) Replaces the standing Artform Board structure with a general stream for grant applications across all artforms; and*

*b) Maintains the centrality of peer assessment but promotes flexibility and breadth by adopting, but adapting, the model employed by the Canada Council for the Arts that allows for more peers to become involved in assessment and thereby diversifying the mix of peers*

CHASS supports the reviews efforts to address feedback regarding issues of transparency and representation in the peer assessment process. We support the recommendations around the constitution of panels responding to the applications. CHASS suggests that principles of access should apply in these appointments.

CHASS draws attention to the significant administrative support that this process may require and that this is considered in the planning process.

In addition, we seek clarity around the processes by which peers are selected- for example do they nominate themselves to a pool of names or are they invited based on specific criteria. We also note that although diversifying the mix of peers is an interesting concept it may challenge maintaining notions of consistency in regards to quality of assessment. If peers are changed on a regular basis there could be a lack of consistency in approach and corporate knowledge. CHASS also notes that smaller companies and individual artists would need to be actively included in peer selection processes.

CHASS notes that there is a tension in the purported aim of the Council to move towards an integrated model of arts support where arts is positioned in a broader context including NBN, research and other social policy agendas and the retention of artform based structures. As noted before, CHASS recognises merits in either situation. However, it would seem that the vision of an integrated delivery of support for the arts would need stronger resourcing in terms of expertise to enable this from sector.

#### **Recommendation 15**

*To support these reforms the Review recommends a new operational structure for the Council which would cover key areas set out in the figure on page 33, "Overall Structure for the Council". These aspects of the Council's recommended governance structure are included to show how the Board and Executive would interact, especially noting the role of the Sector Advisory Panels.*

As noted above, the structural relationships between the various boards and panels are not clear as they stand currently. It would seem that there is a lack of resolution between the aim of moving away from artform specific structures towards cross sectoral expertise.

#### **Recommendation 16**

*The Review recommends community consultation to inform the Council's finalisation of its new operational structure.*

CHASS supports the plan to have community input into the processes around new operational structures. However we encourage that there is sufficient advance information broadly available about the consultations to support maximum access and participation. We also recommend that there is an expert panel to finalise the process after the consultations.

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In addition CHASS acknowledges that many of our members such as the Music Council of Australia (MCA) and others have made their own submissions to the consultations.