

Submission  
No 73

**INQUIRY INTO ARTS AND MUSIC EDUCATION AND  
TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Sydney Dance Company

**Date Received:** 25 July 2024

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## Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in New South Wales

### Sydney Dance Company Submission

#### **Contract Details:**

Sydney Dance Company  
Executive Director

#### **Background**

Sydney Dance Company is Australia's leading contemporary dance company, a National Performing Arts Partnerships Framework (NPAPF) organisation, a national and international touring company and a Registered Training Organisation (RTO #45863). We have more than fifty years of experience in dance practice and performance, ten years providing full-time accredited dance training, two years as a Registered Training Organisation, and fifteen plus years providing educational experiences to schools and young people across the country provided by experienced educators and industry specialists.

Our nationwide education program offers multiple opportunities for primary and secondary students through to career focused study for Pre-Professional Year dancers and university graduates. This includes a two-year tertiary level professional accredited vocational training program in contemporary dance.

We believe in the transformative power of dance education and its crucial role in shaping creative minds. Today more than ever, it is essential to foster an environment where creativity and artistic expression are at the forefront of our educational initiatives. As an organisation we are committed to providing a platform where young people can learn, explore, create and thrive, ensuring that the future of the performing arts remains vibrant and dynamic.

We therefore value the opportunity to provide input to the Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in New South Wales and its inquiry into this topic and commend the Parliament of NSW for dedicating time to search for new opportunities to fill existing gaps and enhance and leverage current best practice.

In our submission, we have commented on three areas from the Terms of Reference that support the sustainability and success of the arts education and training system in New South Wales:

- 1a viii) The most effective approach for the arts, culture, and creative industries to co-ordinate with the education system to support the development of creative skills
- 1a ix) Ways that students can learn entrepreneurial skills and gain industry experience to ensure they are job-ready
- 1a v) The contribution of the national performing arts training organisations in New South Wales and the adequacy of the support they receive

***We welcome the opportunity to discuss any aspect of this submission further should that be of assistance.***

## **The most effective approach for the arts, culture, and creative industries to co-ordinate with the education system to support the development of creative skills**

Sydney Dance Company have been delivering education and outreach programs in schools for over fifteen years. These programs are well-received by schools and communities. Educators consistently highlight that these programs offer valuable experiences in transdisciplinary learning, cross-curricular integration, creative and cognitive development, social and community well-being and first-person artistic engagement.

Genuine engagement between arts organisations and schools provides an authentic and meaningful learning experience for both student and teacher, delivering a curriculum aligned program in collaboration between industry-based teaching artists, alongside practicing classroom teachers.

However, barriers including cost, time, space, access to support staff and curriculum priorities, often hinder participation despite the recognised benefits of creative arts education. Therefore, to have a genuine and equitable impact on all students across NSW, there's a need for increased government investment – for professional arts organisations to deliver the programs and/or for schools and universities to access the programs.

This collaborative approach between organisations and schools also enables an efficient use of combined knowledge and skills - subject matter expertise is provided by current practicing artists, combined with the experience of highly skilled educators in the school sector. Without this type of collaboration, primary and secondary school teachers are frequently impractically required to have deep expertise across multiple forms of the creative arts, which particularly can be a challenge for those teachers whose personal, professional or pre-service arts experience may be limited.

We therefore see a significant opportunity to foster partnerships between the education system and arts organisations, facilitating the exchange of best practices and innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Increasing understanding of how the arts can be effectively used as a mechanism for the delivery of other key learning areas and be embedded into schools' curricula is also vital, not only to improve student outcomes but also to develop the well-researched soft skills associated with the arts.

Many arts organisations embrace research-based practices and contemporary training methodologies. With increased investment, this knowledge could be further shared with our primary, secondary and tertiary teachers and principals of schools and institutions to support the delivery of quality arts education informed by industry best practice.

Funded initiatives could also ensure current knowledge and research will be shared by professional artists trained in pedagogy and teaching, and delivered to communities who may not have access to such resources. This approach ensures that the benefits of arts education are widely distributed and equitably accessible while encouraging artists to continue to contribute meaningfully to the arts and education sector.

## **Ways that students can learn entrepreneurial skills and gain industry experience to ensure they are job-ready**

At Sydney Dance Company, we understand the opportunities and challenges of being a professional artist. In its first decade, our Pre-Professional Year full-time tertiary training program has had 290 graduates, who have gone on to roles within Sydney Dance Company, other Australian based organisations and international companies, as well as their own freelance careers.

A job-ready artist not only needs a strong artistic practice enriched with the skills, knowledge and techniques required to excel in their chosen field, but also entrepreneurial skills and practical business knowledge, particularly when working in freelance roles. This includes understanding

marketing, financial management and developing production budgets and financial plans. Building professional relationships and effectively sourcing job opportunities are crucial aspects of their training.

Most graduating students will need alternative income-generating activities to support their freelance careers, as there are limited positions in full-time performing arts companies. Jobs such as arts administration, front of house or backstage at a theatre, teaching and delivering creative workshops in their artistic practice and non-artistic sources of income are key to maintaining a sustainable career and artistic practice.

The need for self-producing skills, the ability to effectively articulate creative ideas in writing and the capability to navigate funding applications is necessary for all independent artists. Knowledge of funding opportunities at local, state and federal levels, as well as foundation fellowships, is crucial. Developing the confidence and clarity to pursue these opportunities is key to a thriving career in the arts.

At Sydney Dance Company, we are committed to equipping our students with these essential skills and knowledge, ensuring they are prepared to navigate and succeed in the dynamic world of professional dance and the broader arts sector.

### **The contribution of the national performing arts training organisations in New South Wales and the adequacy of the support they receive**

We recognise and celebrate the role that the existing [national training organisations in the performing arts](#) (“ARTS8”) play in our broad sector. We also acknowledge the recent vital uplift in funding received by these specific organisations through the Federal Government Revive policy.

However, we would note that currently there are no national performing arts training organisations which are focused on contemporary dance practice. In New South Wales there are also no tertiary degree focused on dance at any public university - this contrasts with courses at The University of Melbourne, Queensland University of Technology, and Edith Cowan University – Western Australia.

The vital teaching work that is also provided through these types of courses is additionally missing - reducing professional employment opportunities for practicing artists.

Additionally, contemporary dance encourages innovation, collaboration and creativity. Training organisations focusing on the development of these skills foster growth and development in those participating. This will not only prove beneficial for the future of artists and the arts in NSW, but for the creative problem-solving skills required to address the unique issues faced by future generations beyond the arts.

Broadening the range of artistic practices that are supported at a training pathway level allows for greater impact, not simply in the contemporary dance space, but more broadly in the way that dance connects and collaborates with other artistic practices. This has scope to increase the artistic output and excellence for NSW.

*We would welcome the opportunity to discuss options to improve support for formal training in contemporary dance in NSW, including the potential role of Sydney Dance Company.*