

Submission  
No 93

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

**Organisation:** Australian Film Television and Radio School

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## SUBMISSION

### **Inquiry into arts and music education and training in New South Wales**

Please find below the Australian Film Television and Radio School's (AFTRS) submission into the NSW Parliament's inquiry by the Joint Select Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in New South Wales.

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## Introduction

The Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Joint Select Committee's inquiry into arts and music education and training in New South Wales.

AFTRS has a national remit, but by virtue of its location in Sydney, over two-thirds of its students are based in NSW, which is the largest production hub for the screen industries in Australia. Many of our interstate students move to NSW for their studies and some join the NSW creative industries when they graduate.

During this time of change and opportunity in the screen and audio sectors, AFTRS welcomes **Creative Communities'** recognition of the importance of the state's universities, National Art School, NIDA and AFTRS to the state's cultural ecosystem and the need to strengthen partnerships with these institutions.

We, in turn, look forward to working with the NSW Government to grow the depth and breadth of creative industries throughout NSW through clear and well supported training pathways. A joined-up approach with NSW government and the other education providers in our screen and audio training ecosystem will ensure better outcomes and more inclusive career opportunities for the next generation of Australian artists and storytellers.

## Who We Are

AFTRS is the national screen and broadcast School and a critical part of the nation's screen and broadcast ecosystem. The School was established by a bipartisan Act of Parliament in 1973 to provide education, training and research to the screen arts and broadcast sector. This cultural initiative recognised the power of national storytelling and the need for Australians to access world-class content made by Australians for Australians. And while the industry AFTRS was created to serve has undergone significant change since 1973, AFTRS must continue to graduate the best creative talent in Australia who can meet the sector's needs, from grips to production accountants, composers to radio producers, to ensure Australians have access to world-class Australian content.

Recognising AFTRS' critical role in the training and education ecosystem, in the 2024-25 Federal Budget the Federal Government announced it will increase AFTRS' funding by \$23.2 million over the next 4 years. The School is grateful for this restoration of funding that secures the School's ongoing sustainability.

AFTRS is a Commonwealth Statutory Agency accountable to the federal Minister for the Arts, and must meet the Minister's Statement of Expectations. It is administered through the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and The Arts. It operates under the AFTRS Act and receives Commonwealth support through an annual appropriation in the Budget. As a self-accrediting higher-education provider, AFTRS is also subject to compliance standards (TEQSA, CRICOS/ESOS). AFTRS is one of seven institutions evaluated and accepted into the Provider category status of University College under the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021,



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recognising the “high national standing and performance of AFTRS” within our field and across the higher education sector more broadly.

Over the last 50 years AFTRS has honed a practice-based teaching model in partnership with the screen and audio industries. Our students learn in industry-simulated environments, taught by practitioners who bring their networks and community relationships. We have a 90% retention rate and over 80% employment rates within six months of graduation. The School has over 50 active partnerships with government, education providers, professional guilds and industry.

Each year, AFTRS trains over 3,000 individuals across:

- Four award courses: Bachelor of Arts: Screen Production; Graduate Diploma in Radio & Podcasting; Master of Arts: Screen; and Master of Arts: Screen Business.
- Short courses delivered in person and online, in Sydney and across the country.
- Industry-partnered training, including short courses designed to address current skills gaps in the screen and broadcast industries.
- First Nations and Outreach training co-designed with communities.

## The Screen and Audio Industries: growth, opportunity and skills gaps

The Australian screen and audio industries have experienced significant growth over the last five years. In FY 2021-22, the screen industry employed about 55,000 people and contributed more than \$6 billion to the Australian economy, the largest amount of any creative industry<sup>1</sup>. \$2.34 billion was spent on drama alone in Australia in FY 2022-23, 31% above the 5-year average<sup>2</sup>. Meanwhile, Australians are now the world’s most avid podcast listeners: in the last month, Australian podcast listenership was the highest ever recorded, climbing to 48% percent, a 20% increase in the last two years<sup>3</sup>.

In NSW, production, post-production and digital games businesses employed about 15,600 people in 2021-22, and contributed almost \$3.5 billion to the state economy, more than double since the last survey (2015-16). NSW is home to about half of Australia’s production businesses (2105 out of 4106 employers), and half of the country’s post-production facilities (284 out of 575 businesses)<sup>4</sup>.

There are multiple opportunities here for the NSW creative economy, for workforce development, and for the enrichment of Australian culture.

However, industry growth — and the sustainability of the production sector — are hampered by the rate at which professionals can be trained or upskilled at industry-ready standards, creating critical skills gaps. In

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<sup>1</sup> [Australian Bureau of Statistics \(2023\) Film, Television and Digital Games Australia FY 2021-22 survey](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Screen Australia \(2023\), Drama Report 2022-23](#)

<sup>3</sup> [The Infinite dial 2024 Report](#)

<sup>4</sup> [NSW continues to lead the Australian screen industry](#)



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NSW, nearly 60% of productions were under-crewed in 2023. There are critical skills gaps in roles such as production accountants, financial controllers, production coordinators, production managers, line producers, post-production supervisors, VFX supervisors, locations managers, costume supervisors, art directors and assistant directors.

New roles are also needed to reflect the shifts in industry practice, including access coordinators, intimacy coordinators, wellbeing facilitators, sustainability coordinators, virtual production coordinators and digital imaging technicians.

## A JOINED-UP SECTOR APPROACH

Over the last three years, as AFTRS navigated the best training models required to upskill new talent quickly in the post-COVID production boom, our experiences have demonstrated the importance of joined-up, partnered programs that combine training with placements or internships, mentoring and community engagement. Some examples of AFTRS partnered training programs include:

- The Screen Warriors program is a partnership between AFTRS and the Veterans Film Festival which provides training workshops for ex-Australian Defence Force personnel wanting to transition into the screen industries, acknowledging that their military-gained skills make service men and women ideally suited for certain below-the-line roles in the screen production sector. Participants can apply transferrable skills and benefit from training, follow-up placements on screen productions and engagement with the community facilitated by the Veterans Film Festival.
- AFTRS has an ongoing partnership with Screenworks and recently designed new curriculum for an On Set Onboarding course which will be delivered in regional NSW, starting with Byron Bay. The training will be followed by paid placements in early entry crew roles for selected participants over 6 months, facilitated by Netflix and Screenworks as part of their Regional Crew Pathways Program.
- AFTRS recently launched a partnership with TAFE NSW. Eligible graduates of TAFE's Diploma of Screen and Media can now be granted Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), providing direct entry into Year 2 of the AFTRS' Bachelor of Arts Screen: Production. The successful pilot saw the first cohort join AFTRS in 2024, and we are looking to expand this in the future. This new pathway into the School provides increased accessibility and further entry points for regional students.

These partnerships have allowed organisations to pool resources and expertise to ensure the best outcomes for training participants; they are also resource intensive. A dedicated skills fund that incentivises partnered and 'joined-up' training could encourage agencies and organisations to work together to identify and address both emergent and longer-term skills needs.

**Recommendation: A NSW arts skills fund promoting industry and educational training partnerships.**



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## Accessible and inclusive training and education

While joined-up sector wide thinking is critical to the future strength of the NSW arts sector, a priority also must be ensuring creative talent across Australia understands the rich and varied career possibilities in the arts and the pathways into these careers. This involves removing some of the barriers that we hear from our students, and prospective students, stop them being able to study at AFTRS and in Sydney.

### Student accommodation

Sydney's prohibitive cost of living is a critical barrier for people looking to study at AFTRS and studying in Sydney. Sydney is now ranked as the second least affordable city in the world<sup>5</sup>.

While AFTRS is working to build flexibility into its courses to allow students to learn online from remote and regional areas, the experience of learning on AFTRS campus – a purpose built, state of the art facility – must be available to all our students who want to come to learn here.

Students considering relocating to Sydney are faced with high cost of living, and in particular high rents, even in student accommodation (private student accommodation providers near Moore Park in Sydney are charging around \$750 per week for a room). In June 2024, the average unit price in Sydney was \$720 (up 7.5% year on year), or \$750 for a house (up 7.1%)<sup>6</sup>.

In 2019 a Student Housing Study was conducted at AFTRS which confirmed that more than half of students were experiencing housing stress and the majority were living more than 30 minutes away from campus. While we have not conducted another formal study since, the evidence from our Student Centre demonstrates that the number of students experiencing housing stress has significantly increased, as has the severity of the level of stress.

Key arts training providers such as AFTRS, NIDA and the National Arts School don't have the accommodation arrangements that universities benefit from, being able to leverage their critical mass, large influx of international students and significant real estate. Our students are left to fend in a highly competitive marketplace that often prices them out.

**Recommendation: Subsidised accommodation for Sydney-based arts training organisations.**

## Empowering arts education in high school

While most agree "the arts should be an important part of the education of every Australian" (Creative Australia, 2017), in NSW high schools, visual arts, music and drama are taught more consistently than filmmaking, digital storytelling, radio or podcasting.

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<sup>5</sup> [Demographia Housing Affordability Report](#), June 2024

<sup>6</sup> [Domain Rent Report, July 2024](#)



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NSW is the only state or territory in Australia not to recognise Media Arts as a discrete subject. Our culture today is interfaced primarily through audio and video, and understanding how to make, consume and share audio and video content creatively and responsibly is paramount to civic engagement and self-expression. With the advent of generative AI, there has never been a more pressing time to equip young people with the skills they need to navigate and create within the media landscape.

Teachers don't always feel confident to teach media literacy or media arts, often because they haven't had training themselves. This is further exacerbated in regional and remote schools where teachers are often required to teach outside of their trained subject areas and have less access to local subject matter experts. In addition to lacking in the subject matter expertise, many teachers have limited training in the creative pedagogies that support best practice arts education.

As part of its corporate strategy, AFTRS is developing a Graduate Certificate in Creative Education. This new 6-month program is planned to be offered from mid-2026. It has been conceived to allow us to ensure best practice teaching at the School, and support media teachers across NSW to benefit from AFTRS' 50 years of learning in creative pedagogy. Partnerships will be a key success factor in designing and delivering this curriculum.

## **Recommendation: supporting the development and design of a Graduate Certificate in Creative Education.**

Due to lack of resources, the School has had to pause active servicing of AFTRS Media Lab, which provides accessible media arts resources to Australian primary and secondary teachers and students. However, AFTRS is able to deliver training in regional secondary schools, but only through financial support from The Smith Family's SmArts Program. For example, in the past year, we have provided *Digital Filmmaking* and *Intro to Radio & Podcasting* workshops to schools in Liverpool, Goulburn, Taree, Tamworth and Wagga Wagga. There is a strong appetite from high schools for such training that complements the skills and knowledge of local arts/media arts teachers and introduces years 10, 11 and 12 students to career pathways into the screen and audio industries. Arts and media arts teachers, as well as career advisors, are often not aware of pathways into the screen and audio industries, or up to date on the professional opportunities that exist in these booming sectors.

## **Recommendation: Resource high-school workshops that introduce students to career pathways in screen and audio.**

## **Recommendation: Support education providers in promoting careers in the screen and audio industries for both emerging and mid-career talent.**



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## Removing barriers and creating pathways for people in regional and remote NSW

### Flexible training options

In the radio and audio sector, key shortages have arisen from a growing need for hyperlocal content makers and skilled regional producers across the country, especially outside the capital cities. AFTRS' Flexible Delivery Framework is allowing us to deliver a modular version of our Graduate Diploma in Radio and Podcasting (GDRP), where students can choose to participate in person or online and choose between one to four subjects per semester, allowing them to remain learning and working in their regional homes. This learning is supported by placements at local regional radio stations so students are still able to access that all important industry-based learning. Recent graduates have commenced roles in regional NSW, for example in Goulburn, Coffs Harbour, Central Coast, Bega and Armidale. Our regional graduate employment is forecast to grow from this year onwards to meet this need for regional radio talent.

However, this kind of flexibility, while critical to ensuring regional participation and inclusivity, is challenging for smaller arts training organisations and the traditional conservatorium model of full-time learning.

**Recommendation: A NSW working group on flexible arts learning including micro-credits, badging and online learning for practical courses.**

### Bridging programs and on-Country training for First Nations students

In partnership with First Nations communities, AFTRS is co-devising and delivering unique and relevant On-Country training to support pathways between First Nations communities and the Australian media industry. Supporting First Nations' community capacity for media making On-Country allows talent the option to remain and thrive in community, further enhancing the cultural and economic sustainability of the regional arts landscape and contributing to the diversification of the media industry. This also promotes the various pathways to screen and audio careers. While AFTRS has the model to deliver these programs in communities across the state, AFTRS does not currently have the necessary resources to expand the program.

**Recommendation: NSW funding for an expanded program of On-Country training for First Nations' communities in regional NSW.**

### Support for short courses in regional NSW and Western Sydney

Despite successful ad-hoc initiatives, AFTRS' resourcing is currently too limited to seize regional opportunities and deliver localised training at scale to support regional filmmaking hubs like Coffs Harbour, Northern Rivers and Illawarra. This training is essential for these regional hubs to attract and sustain a critical mass of screen productions that can sustain a local industry and its careers.





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**Recommendation: Provide State-based incentives to support training in regional hubs, particularly for curriculum-based courses addressing skills gaps in the screen and audio industries.**



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