

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

17 July 2015

Dear Committee Members,

**The Impact on Contemporary Australian Arts Practice of the 2014 and 2015
Commonwealth Budget decisions on the Arts**

I am an independent dance artist, practicing for well over twenty years.

I wish to express my profound concern about the implications of the proposed establishment of a National Programme for Excellence in the Arts.

I was the founding artistic director of Restless Dance Theatre (Adelaide-based disability cultural dance theatre company) and the artistic director of the Australian Festival for Young People (the Southern hemisphere's largest and longest established arts festival for children and young people) for three biennial events. I am now a pioneer of performance for very young audiences, exploring the cultural lives of babies and very young children and showcasing the sheer sophistication of this specific and important audience. From my Adelaide base I've had the opportunity to tour my works to the world.

From 1999 to 2002 I chaired the Australia Council's Dance Board. A major aspect of this role was also to serve as a Council member. I had the pleasure of being involved in a period of critical cultural change within the Council. The very nature of contemporary arts practice, as well as fundamental questions about who was being funded for what area of practice, was being explored, challenged and re-defined through the development of dedicated panels advising on regional, young people and the arts and, eventually, disability cultural practice.

It was an exciting time. The Council wrestled with bold, dynamic areas of practice, which gained status and importance through the influence of the panels. Funding programs grew to embrace an ecology of art form practice, which recognised the inter-relationship of the independent practitioner, small company and major company. Access to the arts for people in regional Australia, for artists and audiences with a disability, for young people engaged with the arts and artists who were young and emerging opened up.

Excellence is not self-evident.

The criterion of excellence in deciding whether to fund this work was always present. For my Dance Board colleagues, personal taste was simply not an issue as we applied rigorous selection criteria based on the artistic context expressed through the applicant's rationale.

My dismay about the National Programme for Excellence in the Arts does not arise only from my conviction that the cultural lives of Australians already enjoy and benefit from a body – the Australia Council - which stipulates, recognises and funds excellent arts practice.

It also arises from a concern that it's all too easy to assume that we all know what is meant by excellence – that certain art forms somehow rise above others, that certain modes of performance have a higher status than others and that certain areas of arts practice somehow have a higher level of sophistication than others.

I would love all Australian young people to know and love *Hamlet*, as long as they also get to experience the works of Australian playwright Finnegan Kruckemeyer, many of whose works were developed in collaboration with one of our immensely strong young people's theatre companies.

I'd be delighted if all Australians were offered the visceral thrill of seeing Sydney Dance Theatre or Sydney Theatre Company if the similar gut grabbing thrill of seeing Restless Dance or Back to Back Theatre were also built in to their cultural lives.

The cultural lives of Australians are diverse, dynamic, varied and dependent on the context of their lives.

The Australia Council recognises this and has time-honoured, flexible, responsive and peer-driven systems for resourcing the nation's ecology of art practice; An ecology which also supported and underpins the excellence to which we all aspire.

I appreciate the opportunity to express my views.

Yours sincerely,

Sally Chance

Sally Chance Dance