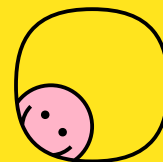


National Cultural Policy



Australian
Children's
Television
Foundation

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About Us

We are a non-profit company funded by the Commonwealth Government and the governments of all States and Territories of Australia. We invest in the development and production of children's content, nurture and scaffold new producers, distribute children's screen content all over the world and develop ancillary education resources to support the use of ACTF-supported programs in Australian schools.

Australia's National Cultural Policy: Revive

The Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF) reaffirms the position expressed in its initial submission to the Senate Inquiry into Australia's National Cultural Policy: *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place (Revive)* as part of the 47th Parliament. ACTF is an exemplar of everything *Revive* is striving to achieve. Our children's content tells stories that strengthen identity, build resilience and foster understanding of others. This role in shaping who we are as a nation makes children's screen content essential to our cultural, social and educational fabric.

Since making that submission in 2023, it has become even clearer that the children's screen sector is collapsing worldwide. In the digital age, children's viewing habits have shifted dramatically away from traditional broadcasters and formats, leading to notable declines in investment and the commissioning of new content. These industry-wide global changes have left the children's space especially vulnerable, despite its vital contribution to social cohesion and national storytelling. Now, more than ever, it is critical that Australian children's content receives robust policy support and sustained investment to ensure our children see themselves reflected on screen and continue to access content that enriches their lives and learning.

There is an opportunity for the Senate Committee on Environment and the Arts to address this issue in its final report and recommendations.

The ACTF is recommending that:

1. The National Cultural Policy should have a standalone pillar for children and young people – Next Generation Now.
2. The Australian Parliament should follow the example of the United Kingdom and inquire into the status of children's screen content in Australia in the digital age, to make recommendations for the support of Australian children's screen content, including the marketing and discoverability of that content, for Australian children.

The Digital Age and Social Media

Australian children are increasingly moving away from traditional broadcast television, gravitating instead toward digital platforms like YouTube, which now rival popular SVODs (Netflix, Stan, Amazon, Apple and Disney+), as their primary sources of screen entertainment.

To better understand how children find and choose content on streaming video platforms, we partnered with Swinburne and RMIT Universities to carry out a mixed-methods research study with children aged 7–9. The study involved a novel combination of lab-based observation of children's streaming platform use, media use diaries, and interviews with children and parents. Results were published in a double-blind peer-reviewed article in leading international academic journal *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*.¹

The research found that children had high levels of digital fluency with streaming platforms, with Netflix and YouTube being the most popular and often used. However, the children's strong technical ability to independently navigate streaming platforms was not counterbalanced by media literacy with the way these platforms worked, such as an understanding that they algorithmically surface, curate, and recommend content to them in strategic ways. The children also had low cultural literacy with content: they struggled to find and identify Australian content, with representative explanations including "All the YouTubers I watch are basically American" and "I don't even know what the Australian TV shows are".

The research demonstrates that content discoverability has become a serious challenge for Australian families, demanding a policy response. Children and their parents struggle to find and identify local, high-quality, and age-appropriate content in the streaming era, and they are calling for better support. In tandem with discoverability, there is a pressing need for stronger action to support children's streaming media literacies to achieve the National Cultural Policy's objective to "invest in digital and media literacy to empower Australian children and young people to become critical, responsive and active citizens online".

The Swinburne/RMIT research for the ACTF is confirmed by the PARK Report '*The complete picture of Media Consumption for Generation Alpha 2025*'² which cited YouTube, Paid VOD and mobile/tablet games as the top three primary platforms used by Australian children aged 2–12. YouTube's appeal lies not only in its endless bank of content, but also in its algorithmic recommendation system, which children actively engage with to discover new videos and personalities. Many children develop strong parasocial relationships with YouTubers and rely on the platform's visual cues and suggested content to guide their viewing choices.

Unlike scheduled programming, YouTube offers a dynamic and personalised experience that children perceive as empowering, even though it often sends them repetitive or sensationalist content. Content is pushed to children, rather than children proactively choosing the content they watch. Research from the Australian Research Council's Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child and the eSafety Commissioner highlights that algorithmic recommender systems, which are designed to maximise engagement, often amplify extreme, emotionally charged, or addictive content that can

¹ Balanzategui, J, Baker, D & Clift, G. 2024. 'What is "children's television" in the streaming era? Assessing content discoverability through Australian children's streaming platform fluencies.' *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, Vol. 30, Issue 4, pp. 1529–1554.

² PARK (Precise Advertiser Report – Kids) '*The complete picture of Media Consumption for Generation Alpha 2025 kids age 2–12 2025*'. available here: <https://content.precise.tv/park-precise-advertiser-report-kids-australia-2025>

negatively impact children's attention spans, cognitive development, and mental health.³ This reliance on algorithmic curation also poses challenges for the discoverability of Australian content, which is underrepresented and difficult for children to identify within a global platform.

Australia's decision to restrict social media accounts for children under 16, due to take effect in December 2025, underscores the seriousness of concerns about young people's safety online.

The legislation has been positioned as a safeguard against cyberbullying, addictive design, and harmful content, with platforms such as YouTube, TikTok and Snapchat required to detect and remove underage accounts or face significant penalties. It is acknowledged by all parties, however, that children will continue to be able to watch content on platforms like YouTube, they just won't be able to log in with their own account. As YouTube's CEO Neal Mohan stated in 2024 that "YouTube's next frontier is the living room", we can assume that children and young people will continue to engage with content on that platform on their family accounts or on their own without being logged in. It is therefore essential to balance and complement actions to restrict children's access to harmful content with proactive policies intended to increase the amount of quality, local content that is available to Australian children across all the platforms they engage with.

To effectively counter the flood of low-quality, sensationalist, and algorithmically engineered content dominating children's digital environments, it is essential to proactively invest in the creation and promotion of high-quality, culturally relevant Australian screen content. Rather than ceding this space to global platforms, Australia must ensure that children encounter enriching, age-appropriate content that supports their educational growth, health, and cultural identity. A proactive strategy that embeds quality Australian content within the digital platforms that children use can serve as a meaningful counterbalance to the algorithmic noise, helping children build healthier media habits and critical digital literacies.

³ eSafety Commissioner 'Full position statement – recommender systems and algorithms', available here: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/industry/tech-trends-and-challenges/recommender-systems-and-algorithms/full-position-statement>

ACTF's Recommendations

1. Embed Children and Young People in the National Cultural Policy via a standalone pillar – 'Next Generation Now'

Children and young people represent nearly 30% of Australia's population, yet their cultural participation is often overlooked or relegated to the education sector. The current National Cultural Policy, *Revive*, acknowledges their importance through general commitments, but lacks a dedicated framework to support their unique cultural needs and contributions. Embedding children and young people as a stand-alone pillar – 'Next Generation Now', would signal a strategic shift, recognising them not only as future audiences but as active cultural citizens and creators today. This pillar would ensure that cultural policy reflects their rights to access, participate in, and co-create meaningful artistic experiences, while also addressing systemic barriers to inclusion.

A dedicated pillar would deliver wide-reaching benefits across wellbeing, education, equity, and workforce development. Research shows that early cultural engagement, particularly before age nine, predicts lifelong participation in the arts. Arts involvement also builds essential human capabilities such as creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving, aligning with national employment strategies. Moreover, cultural participation has proven mental health benefits, offering low-stigma, community-based tools to combat rising youth loneliness and psychological distress.

Embedding children and young people as a core pillar would also enable whole-of-government alignment with national strategies such as the Early Years Strategy, Better and Fairer Schools, and Closing the Gap. It would ensure accountability and sustained support for a cohort whose cultural engagement is vital to Australia's future. This approach would secure the long-term sustainability of the cultural sector by cultivating new generations of audiences, creators, and leaders. It would also promote regional equity, ensuring that children in rural and remote communities have equal access to cultural life. In doing so, Australia would affirm its commitment to cultural rights for all, recognising that artistic expression and participation are essential to human development, regardless of age.

2. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts should be asked to inquire into the status of children's screen content in Australia in the digital age and make recommendations for supporting it, including marketing and discoverability

In July 2025, the UK Parliament's Culture, Media and Sport Committee launched a significant inquiry into children's television and video content in the United Kingdom, recognising the urgent need to safeguard the future of high-quality, locally produced programming for young audiences. The inquiry responds to a dramatic shift in children's viewing habits, with Ofcom reporting that 88% of UK children aged 3–17 now use YouTube as their primary platform, eclipsing traditional broadcasters. This transformation has made it increasingly difficult for public service content to be discovered, raising concerns about the visibility, diversity, and cultural relevance of what children are watching. The inquiry is examining how to support creators of original content, improve discoverability on digital platforms, and assess the

broader impacts of screen content on children's health, development, and cultural identity. As Chair Dame Caroline Dinenage MP noted, the inquiry seeks to ensure that children continue to access a rich mix of drama, factual, and educational programming, not just algorithmically driven entertainment.

This UK initiative provides a valuable model for Australia, highlighting the importance of proactive policy intervention to sustain national storytelling in the digital age. A similar inquiry by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts would allow Australia to address parallel challenges and opportunities in our own children's screen sector.

The Terms of Reference for the UK Inquiry can be found here:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/3694/>

ACTF recommends that a similar inquiry be conducted by the Australian Parliament to inform policy development that prioritises Australian screen content for Australian children.

Contemporary policies that support the production and discoverability of Australian children's screen content are an essential counterbalance to legislation that restricts access to social media and acknowledges children's rights to screen content that is culturally relevant and made especially for them.