

29 September 2025

National Cultural Policy | Senate Inquiry | Submission from Sydney Dance Company

Sydney Dance Company (SDC) is Australia's leading major contemporary dance company. We:

- Annually commission and tour major new works – locally, nationally and international, showcasing the talent of Australian artists and creatives.
- Invest in creative employment pipelines through traineeships, mentorships, residencies and emerging artist programs, particularly through our status as a Registered Training Organisation (#45863) and our accredited Pre-Professional Year (PPY) program.
- Amplify the voices of a diverse range of independent artists through dedicated sector development programs such as *INDance*.
- Deliver the largest public dance program in Australia, providing opportunities to participate in dance from toddlers to our dedicated seniors' classes, in person and online.
- Deliver impactful youth education and community engagement programs to foster the next generation of artists and audiences.

We thank the Senate for this opportunity to contribute to the review of National Cultural Policy, *Revive*, and particularly in response to the request for views on “*potential tax reform and ways to boost the productivity of Australia's arts and creative sectors*”. These reforms have the potential to significantly strengthen the sustainability, vibrancy and resilience of the dance sector across Australia.

We would propose three focused areas of tax reform relating to the creative industries.

1. Introduce a Live Performance Production Incentive

We strongly support the proposition of incentives to offset development and pre-production costs of live performance. Specifically, we support Live Performance Australia's (LPA) proposal for a 40% offset for eligible pre-production and production costs for commercial theatre and not-for-profit companies across all forms of live performance, including dance. Eligible costs would include licencing, materials, wages, commissioning fees, venue hire, equipment hire and other production costs. This is proposed to be applied as a tax offset for tax paying entities and as a rebate for non-taxpayers. As is the model in the UK, we would further encourage the scheme to consider an offset up to 50% if a work goes on to tour Australia and/or internationally, amplifying the impact of the upfront investment, and incentivising Australian works to reach broader audiences.

Contemporary dance deals with the now, the expanded present, what is current; Sydney Dance Company must remain up to date, of the moment and reflect our times. We do this by being bold. We explore the edges and boundaries, the latest ways our minds and souls are stimulated. We take artistic risks and explore unknown territories.

At the core of this mission is our commissioning and creation of new untried works that embrace excellence in all our practices to inspire audiences and challenge their expectations. These are multidisciplinary collaborations with celebrated and influential artists in different fields. They embrace a multitude of forms from technology, film and visual arts to design and fashion.

Producing new dance works is, however, complex, collaborative, and high-risk. Dance cannot be created in isolation – it requires dedicated time with artists physically working together for many weeks and months in the leadup to a new premiere, with production elements – sets, costume, lighting, music, technology – all being created alongside the movement. Upfront investment in research and development to facilitate new ideas being translated into tourable elements is essential but under-resourced, limiting creativity and innovation.

An incentive scheme for new creation within the screen and gaming sectors already exists within Australia. This proposal could adapt these schemes, providing equity for the live performance industry.



The case study of the UK Government's Theatre Tax Relief (TTR) has driven over £163 million in investment, supporting hundreds of new productions annually. The LPA modelling of a 40% tax offset anticipates this could create 4,000+ FTE jobs and add over \$1.5 billion in economic activity.

Reforms will significantly enhance our capacity to commission new Australian work, maintain touring, increased access for local audiences, continue to invest in ambitious programming, enable the ongoing creativity and innovation of Australian artists, and grow jobs and skills.

2. Strengthen incentives and systems for donating to the arts

Philanthropy and private sector giving is a vital enabler of creative ambition, risk-taking and long-term viability for contemporary dance in Australia. In 2024, philanthropy and corporate partnership support represented 27% of Sydney Dance Company income (\$3.8m).

Strengthening tax incentives would drive an increased pool of donors, grow larger and more consistent contributions from individuals and corporations, and encourage long-term relationships with arts and cultural organisations, noting:

- Although total donations have risen, Australia's giving remains behind that of New Zealand and the US as a percentage of GDP.
- The Productivity Commission has noted fewer Australians are claiming deductions for giving.
- The arts and cultural industries, whilst increasingly reliant on private sector giving, are also less visible as an option for philanthropists in Australia, where the largest recipients of philanthropic funds vary are generally organisations focused on health and medical research, social justice, and Indigenous causes.
- Corporate partnerships in the arts are often seen as less attractive than sport due to media and broader advertising benefits. Our world-leading arts organisations therefore need other levers to secure partnerships from the business sector.

We therefore support:

- Allowing tax deductions to exceed donation value for cultural organisations, as seen in Singapore's 250% deduction model. We would endorse the Live Performance Australia suggestion to implement a 150% for arts and cultural endeavours – providing increased visibility for this sector, growing the potential pool of donors and increasing private sector giving overall.
- Introducing ATO mechanisms to prompt giving through individual tax returns (e.g. opt-in use of refund such as the UK GiftAid scheme)
- Implementing greater corporate tax incentives, as in France's Le Mécénat model - with tax rebate incentives and a cap of 25% on associated benefits – as a scalable and sustainable funding model targeting corporate giving for cultural and artistic organisations.

3. Extension of Fringe Benefits Tax concessions and exemptions

Particularly within high-cost of living cities such as Sydney, wage levels of individual arts workers and artists are increasingly unsustainable, resulting in severe challenges to help attract and retain skilled workers, sector-wide shortages across the industry and increased wage-pressure for organisations who are already facing financial challenges.

However, many arts organisations, including Sydney Dance Company, also deliver substantial social, educational and cultural outcomes to the broader benefit of the community — especially those engaging with youth and educational communities, and/or with focused programs on accessibility.

To continue to attract highly-skilled workers into our cultural organisations, we recommend:

- Exempting employees from FBT when attending their own organisations' performances.
- Expanding PBI definitions to include live performance organisations that include accessibility, education, and youth programs within their offerings; or developing a parallel category that reflects the community development and social equity impact of creative organisations.
- Extending fringe benefit exemptions (e.g. housing, travel, training) for low-wage artists and arts workers.

Lastly, we note that tax reform must complement, not replace, existing investment models, and the requirement to deal with urgent short-term needs.

Our industry is continuing to rebuild from the impact of the pandemic, while confronting significantly higher input costs across the board, particularly for touring and production expenses, critical skills shortages, and changes to consumer behaviour caused by the current cost of living crisis. Financial sustainability is a very real and current challenge for many organisations, artists and arts workers.

We appreciate that potential tax reform, whilst presenting a once-in-a-generation opportunity for sustained systematic change, will require time to refine and implement.

In parallel with this tax reform initiative, we therefore look forward to working with all levels of Government on initiatives to address urgent shorter-term imperatives and survival of the sector during this longer-term reform process. These could include:

- Peppercorn leases in Government-owned arts venues, maximising the ability for artists and arts companies to leverage operational income for artistic purposes and engagement with our communities;
- Consistent indexing of all grant funding, including over-due adjustments for real cost growth;
- Increased investment to support regional, national and international touring, off-setting externally driven increases in travel costs and reducing risk for presenters in providing access to a breadth of performances in their communities, facilitating the sharing of Australian creative stories and talents across our country and the world;
- Dedicated sustained investment and cross-Government coordination of training and skills development programs to address skills shortages and retention of critical staff;
- Simplified grant reporting and acquittal processes;
- Matched funding incentives that amplify private donations through Government co-contributions, complementing the longer-term tax reform agenda potentially possible.

In conclusion, Sydney Dance Company strongly supports the proposed tax reform agenda, and the long-term impact these measures could make to enhance the cultural, economic and social value of the contemporary dance sector.

Furthermore, we remain committed to working with all levels of Government to champion and support a thriving cultural sector through all relevant initiatives, aligned with broader Federal policy goals.