Australian Academy of the Humanities

National Cultural Policy (NCP) consultation, May 2026

The Australian Academy of the Humanities takes an expansive view of the cultural life of the nation, which is necessary for Australia to meet its challenges economically, environmentally, socially, and as humans in the 21st century.

An expansive view of the cultural life of the nation in the context of Australia's National Cultural Policy (NCP) moves beyond a traditional 'arts sector' framework. We see culture as core democratic infrastructure: a system through which Australians make meaning, negotiate difference, sustain belonging, imagine futures, transmit knowledge, and exercise civic agency.

The logic underpinning Revive: Australia's National Cultural Policy already points in this direction through its progressive emphasis on "a place for every story, a story for every place", First Nations leadership, cultural infrastructure, creative work, and audience participation and co-production. At its heart it addresses and enables individual and community connection to the cultural life of our nation.

The pressures now shaping the 2020s and 2030s – democratic fragmentation, algorithmically-driven global media platforms, AI and automation, climate change and instability, geopolitical disruption, loneliness, inequality and declining social trust – suggest cultural policy may need to evolve from a focus on a specific sector through contributing to a broader policy architecture.

The next iteration of the NCP is an opportunity to achieve a stronger, networked national cultural ecosystem built around coordinated governance and cross-sector capability development. We are advocating for a more joined up approach, and stronger mechanisms, including across government portfolios, to amplify the impact of NCP.

Our submission is a direct response to the opportunities opened by Revive. Its vision for First Nations First recognised deep truths of First Nations life and culture and laid the foundation for a holistic view of cultural practice. This re-established the human value of a more expansive and connected view of culture, rather than the segmentation that has tended to silo arts, sciences and cultural fields – incorporating galleries, libraries, archives and museums (GLAM) and heritage in ways that reinforce the long human practice of culture on this continent.

With Revive at the forefront of our thinking, we set out three priorities to advance the NCP's five pillars into the future. In summary these priorities are:

1. A **policy and administrative architecture** to bring together *arts* and *culture* policy, inclusive of place-based culture and heritage, and GLAM. This approach provides a coherent framework to bridge and ultimately move beyond the unhelpful divide between culture and environment.

   Revive set the foundation; it is time now to move structurally to cement the NCP to deliver on the five pillars and contribute to whole-of-government outcomes for First Nations peoples, health, education, social cohesion, workforce and industry. Much can be achieved, even within a tight budget climate, by bringing GLAM and place-based heritage into NCP/Arts, potentially by expanding Creative Australia's remit, noting the expanded sector-specific knowledges, training and governance expertise this would require.

2. A **national humanities and arts capability** and workforce agenda. Strengthening and sustaining Australia's creative capability starts with the education and training system, including the 'pipeline' of creative talent in Australia's schools and universities, which is in decline, and lacks national coordination/planning.

   Creative workers across the full spectrum of the creative and cultural subsectors fundamentally share advanced creative arts and humanities qualifications.[1] Yet there has been a dramatic decline of arts and creative education across Australia over the last decade. Now a 'polycrisis', significantly exacerbated by the impacts of the Jobs Ready Graduates (JRG) policy,[2] these challenges are colliding with the rapid emergence of AI. Recent data suggests that 'GenAI shock' facing the creative and media sectors is more pronounced than in other parts of the economy.[3] 'Arts and media professionals' are now reported to have the highest proportion of job advertisements requiring AI skills (more even than 'ICT professionals').[4] Authors, and book and script editors, are reported to have (by a very long

[1] Marion McCutcheon, Scott Brook & Stuart Cunningham (2025): 'The Creative Trident Mark III: Correlating Creative Qualifications and Occupations', *Cultural Trends*, DOI: 10.1080/09548963.2025.2567567
[2] Sandra Gattenhof and John Saunders (2026), 'The Polycrisis for Arts and Creative Education in Australia', *Australian Journal of Education*, Volume 70, Issue 1: https://doi.org/10.1177/00049441261421275
[3] Department of Industry, Science and Resources (2025), *Australia's Artificial Intelligence Ecosystem: Growth and Opportunities*, https://www.ai.gov.au/news-and-insights/reports/australias-artificial-intelligence-ecosystem-growth-and-opportunities
[4] DISR (2025), *Australia's Artificial Intelligence Ecosystem,* p.47

way) the highest percentage of job postings requiring AI-related skills in occupations.[5]

3. **National leadership to drive cultural R&D and infrastructure** which builds on substantial state, city and university developments and capacities and captures value for the nation. We see potential, in Australia, for federal coordination and incentivisation of programs that currently exist, through an expanded remit for Creative Australia. This would connect the creative sector more broadly: across the arts, GLAM, science collection infrastructure, heritage, digital culture and 'creative clusters'.

   There are international models of value here, including programs in the UK which incentivised highly successful collaborations between universities, cultural institutions and creative industries to grow and enable audiences, particularly culturally diverse ones, to deepen insight and experiences through innovative advances in technology use, including AI. Through the next NCP, we propose a trial of a pilot program to bring together 'creative clusters' of GLAMs, universities and the private sector, building on lessons from successful approaches in the UK.

1. National Cultural Policy governance

Australia's cultural ecosystem is currently characterised by fragmented governance across arts, heritage, education, communications, and industry portfolios; underdeveloped digital cultural infrastructure and uneven digital capability amongst institutions and organisations; and weak integration between research, workforce development, digital economy, and industry policy. As a result: cultural production and discovery are structurally uneven; Australian stories risk reduced visibility in digital environments; and workforce and skills systems are not aligned with cultural and digital transformation.

Governance arrangements need to reflect the opportunities to network arts practice, cultural heritage, GLAM, education, and digital infrastructure more dynamically. The practical use of 'GLAM' as a shorthand across galleries, libraries, archives and museums, should not collapse the distinct, and interlocking, knowledges and practices of arts, heritage and memory institutions, as settler institutions with First Nations cultural holdings. These distinct sectors incorporate different governance, custodial and sovereignty considerations, particularly in relation to Indigenous collections and authority over cultural material which have the capacity to be better coordinated through authentic coordinated consultation and leadership.

[5] DISR (2025), *Australia's Artificial Intelligence Ecosystem,* p.50

Current arrangements are fragmented and siloed between arts funding systems and cultural heritage agencies. **Integrating arts and culture governance through the NCP would achieve better strategic outcomes**. This includes strengthened First Nations Cultural Governance emphasising: co-creation, shared authority, Indigenous-led storytelling and benefit sharing arrangements with cross-portfolio coordination with First Nations cultural programs (including languages). The First Nations First pillar is fundamentally germane to all of NCP because holistic thinking derives from a First Nations view of the world.

The next NCP needs to consider moving placed-based heritage at least administratively into the Arts portfolio. Without advocacy and representation within Creative Australia, the case to government is weakened, undermining digital infrastructure, failing First Nations interests, and limiting cultural equity and opportunity at scale. Australia needs this level of policy coherence to support a more integrated and long-term national cultural agenda. A framing of NCP to include 'place' ultimately needs to embrace a national 'infrastructure' inclusive of places of cultural significance. This means the built environment (how it is being made and peoples aspirations for it) and a recognition of the role of architecture and design.[6]

The current state of play is holding us back from at-scale initiatives such as cultural and research infrastructure partnerships to "break disciplinary silos [and] connect collections that are multi-modal in nature and across institutions" bringing together Indigenous knowledge, sciences and humanities, taking full advantage of AI.[7] Work achieved through the National Collaborative Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS) is at risk without longer term planning, co-development and NCP buy-in. This includes a stand-alone Indigenous Capability and plans for a National Research Collections Infrastructure Capability – for provision of support to extend national research digital infrastructure to support national collections beyond national scientific collections to nationally significant GLAM collections.[8]

[6] An exemplar of involving communities in making and adapting the built environment is the EU's New European Bauhaus, see https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/index_en

[7] See submission to the Department of Education's National Research Infrastructure consultation from the Collections as National Infrastructure Network, led by Profs Gaye Sculthorpe FAHA, Andrea Witcomb and Alistair Paterson: https://www.education.gov.au/system/files/2025-10/225_%20Roadmap%20Survey_%20Collections%20as%20National%20Infrastructure%20Network.pdf

[8] See our submission to the Department of Education's National Research Infrastructure Issues Paper (December 2025), https://humanities.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/251208-AAH-2026-NRI-Issues-Paper_Final_updated.pdf

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A **national cultural coordination capacity** for strategic leadership, foresight, better alignment and integration with other relevant policy domains, including education, research and industry, and environment, and with states/territories. Creative Australia's remit could be expanded to take on this role or new architecture established.
- A **cultural heritage governance body** for GLAM coordination and collections strategy is needed. There are two options as we see it: a heritage commission connecting GLAM and place-based heritage with in the Office of the Arts sitting alongside Creative Australia; OR an expanded Creative Australia able to coordinate aspects of GLAM and place-based heritage policy (from DCCEEW), with the Office of the Arts becoming the Office of the Arts and Culture, or similar.

  This recognises and realises GLAM's role in delivering on Revive now and as part of next iteration. And to drive more dynamic, especially digitally and AI-driven, collaboration across National Cultural Institutions (NCIs), states, regions and local organisations. This means re-connecting place-based heritage with the arts portfolio. Either option will need to recognise and embed the distinct governance requirements of heritage collections, archival institutions and First Nations cultural holdings alongside arts and related sectors' requirements.
- This broader remit for arts and culture starts to 'join-up' cultural policy more concretely with wider social, economic and environmental policy. The **next stage of NCP should reckon with accelerating First Nations' knowledge across these domains** among many compelling opportunities for Australia to build on productive synergies between Indigenous knowledges and other contemporary knowledge systems. Just one example is the potential for closer collaboration among Indigenous knowledges, the environmental humanities, cultural geography, and ecological studies to bring the agendas of cultural and ecological citizenship into closer alliance.
- There is a **unique opportunity for Australia to build on First Nations knowledges and governance traditions across the full spectrum of national cultural policy** — including cultural infrastructure, AI and digital systems governance, workforce capability, heritage stewardship, research collaboration, and ecological citizenship. First Nations concepts of Country encompass not only relationships to land and environment, but systems of law, authority, economy, knowledge transmission and collective

responsibility. The next stage of the NCP presents an opportunity to recognise these perspectives as foundational to Australia's future cultural and institutional development.

2. Australia's Cultural and Creative Capability

The **skills, knowledge and experience of those holding humanities and creative arts tertiary qualifications are indispensable to the Government's ambitions to continue to grow the nation's cultural and creative capability** from its economic activity base in 2023-24 of $67.4 billion while employing over 591,000 people. Workforce futures, social connectedness, democratic resilience, responsible AI, and working productively with our neighbours in Asia-Pacific – none of these challenges can be met through technical solutions alone. Australia's cultural capability is profoundly shaped by humanities and arts graduates.

This capability is central to Revive's Pillars, starting with First Nations First. Future First Nations leaders pursue research across most disciplines, but the majority choose to ground themselves in humanities (e.g. pursuing research that integrates Indigenous knowledge practice as a necessary basis for innovation) as higher degree education and training.

Reporting by the Department of Education identified the humanities, arts and social sciences (HASS) as a major area of strength for First Nations Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students. In 2021, the Society and Culture field accounted for 212 Estimated Full-time Total Student Load (EFTSL), representing 42% of total Indigenous HDR enrolments. Across HASS more broadly, enrolments totaled 335 EFTSL — or 67% of the entire Indigenous HDR cohort. Creative Arts also represents a significant pathway, with 56 EFTSL (11% of total Indigenous HDR enrolments), making it the third-largest field after Society and Culture and Health, which recorded 79 EFTSL (16%).

Australia's cultural and creative capability is strengthened immeasurably by First Nations intellectual and cultural leadership. There is potential for this leadership to contribute even more profoundly, and to benefit further from engagement with Australia's vibrant humanities training sector: across governance, digital systems, language, design, ethics, heritage management and emerging technologies. First Nations expertise is not supplementary to Australia's future capability agenda, but integral to the development of culturally

legitimate and socially trusted institutions, including AI systems and digital public infrastructure.[9]

Recent research establishing population-level correlations between highest qualification and employment shows that, in 2021, 6.5% of the Australian workforce held a creative qualification as their highest qualification. The top 12 qualifications held across *all* creative sectors were creative arts and humanities qualifications (with the sole exception of marketing). They include graphic arts and design studies, communication and media studies, creative arts, audio visual studies, journalism, literature and history. These creative arts and humanities qualifications rank highly in all seven creative sectors, including Software and Digital Content occupations, where Graphic Arts and Design and Media and Communication (nec) are the second and third highest ranked detailed fields of education after Programming.[10]

Humanities and creative arts education and training pipelines are fundamental to this wider cultural ecosystem. Yet, there are clear signs of decline. In creative arts education, what has been termed a 'polycrisis' spans senior secondary schooling, vocational education (TAFE), and higher education (universities). Looking at the university sector: Gattenhof and Saunders show that there's been an overall decline - 21% in ATAR arts enrolments in the period 2015-23; creative arts enrolments have declined overall from 2018 to 2023 by 4.5%; and there has also been supply-side contraction, with 48 creative arts degrees discontinued over the 2018–2025 period. Any growth in the system is concentrated in large metropolitan universities, with regional institutions particularly at risk.[11]

Jobs Ready Graduates Policy impacts

There are a range of factors at play here. One of which is the Morrison-era Job Ready Graduates (JRG) policy, which has now been in place for five years. Our response to the first NCP consultation for Revive in 2022 outlined the emerging impacts of the JRG.[12] Four years on the negative impacts of JRG are further entrenched and remain at cross-purposes with NCP, sending mixed signals

[9] Barrowcliffe, R., Hutchinson, B., Abdilla, A., Acres, L., Beetson, B., Bell, A., Benton, P., Bligh, B., Bowen, R., Burton, N., Carlson, B., Cawthorne, R., Cook, B., Farrell, A., Fay, D., Fejo, J., Fewster, J., Gray, N., Hackman, D., … Wright, S. (2025). Envisioning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander AI Futures Communique: March 2025. *Journal of Global Indigeneity*, *9*(1). https://doi.org/10.54760/001c.133656

[10] Marion McCutcheon, Scott Brook & Stuart Cunningham (2025): The Creative Trident Mark III: Correlating Creative Qualifications and Occupations, *Cultural Trends*, DOI: 10.1080/09548963.2025.2567567

[11] Sandra Gattenhof and John Saunders (2026), 'The Polycrisis for Arts and Creative Education in Australia'.

[12] Australian Academy of the Humanities (2022) National Cultural Policy submission: https://humanities.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/220821-AAH-National-Cultural-Policy-submission.pdf

about what the government values, and impacting workforce and pipeline for creative and cultural occupations (including teaching).

In a nutshell, JRG has increased cost barriers, reduced enrolments and contributed to contraction of programs at universities:

- Fees for history, philosophy, communications, journalism, media, curatorship, politics, and sociology have risen by 117% (from $6,684 to $14,500 in 2021, now $16,992), with 93% of the cost borne by the students (and only 7% through Commonwealth support). The cost of some humanities degrees has blown out to $50,000.[13]
- Creative arts degrees have experienced fee increases in the order of 19% (2020–2021) and 42% (2020–2026 projected).[14]
- The students carrying the heaviest burden of debt are disproportionately those the Government most wants to support: domestic students from low-income backgrounds, for whom the promise of higher education is being undermined by a policy widely agreed to be inequitable, unfair and counterproductive.
- The Innovative Research Universities (IRU) analysis shows that under the JRG, the number of Indigenous students paying the maximum student contribution band jumped from 18% to 40%. The average Indigenous student's contribution increased by 15%.[15]
- This threatens the broader economy and workforce relying on creative qualified graduates.
- Treasury's modelling confirms these are debts many will carry for much of their working lives.[16]
- Reforming JRG would assist in stabilising the pipeline of talent that will drive the next generation of creative practice in Australia.

A role for the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC)

We have advocated for the new system steward, the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC), to have responsibility for monitoring sovereign

[13] See Innovative Research Universities' recent Discussion Paper Impacts of the Job-Ready Graduates policy and options for reform (March 2026), https://iru.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Impacts-of-the-Job-Ready-Graduates-policy-and-options-for-reform-IRU-analysis.pdf

[14] Sandra Gattenhof and John Saunders (2026), 'The Polycrisis for Arts and Creative Education in Australia'.

[15] Innovative Research Universities (2022), How Job Ready Graduates student charges impact different groups of students, https://iru.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/How-JRG-charges-impact-different-groups-of-students-28-Aug-2020.pdf

[16] See https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2026/may/04/hecs-student-loan-humanities-students-australia-25-years

capability across the disciplines for the nation. By Australia's sovereign capability, we mean the discipline range and depth of expertise in the university sector, to ensure it is meeting Australia's current and future capability needs, national security needs and productivity requirements, etc.[17]

The current lack of national planning and monitoring in the university sector means creative and cultural capability is at risk. If the 'polycrisis' in creative arts education is not addressed, Australia faces a challenge similar to its loss of the crucial geopolitical assets of languages and Asia capability for which we have consistently advocated.[18] If there is one thing that no one else in the world can produce, it is Australian culture and creative production! ATEC is a mechanism by which to translate national skills intelligence into culturally-specific capability pathways and align fragmented education delivery into coherent cultural workforce pipelines – bridging NCP, Education, and linking to Jobs and Skills Australia (in DISR).

The impact of AI on the cultural and creative sectors

Equally, the cultural and creative sectors are in the centre of the capability challenges and opportunities that AI is throwing down.

Australian leadership in AI governance must authentically engage with First Nations data sovereignty, cultural authority, intellectual property and the ethical stewardship of cultural collections and language materials. This engagement must be recognised as central to cultural policy concerns, and as an enabling foundation, rather than a specialist, peripheral or 'limiting' accommodation.

The *National AI Ecosystem* report (2025) underlines the significance of the arts, communications and media sectors in the current Gen AI landscape. The data suggest GenAI shock in the creative and media sectors above and beyond what is happening elsewhere. Some of the most striking findings of the report from a humanities/arts/NCP perspective are in jobs and skills:

- 'Arts and media professionals' is now the job category reported to have the highest percentages of jobs posted requiring AI skills, more even than 'ICT professionals'.[19]

[17] See https://humanities.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Universities-Accord-ATEC-Submission.pdf

[18] In the context of the Inquiry into Asia Capability, we have recommended that language and Asia capability need to be treated as national strategic assets and policy settings aligned across sectors. ATEC should monitor Asia capability across schools, universities and workforce, and advise governments on gaps, risks and priorities. This would overcome fragmentation between education, foreign affairs and skills portfolios. See our submission and supplementary evidence on the Committee's website https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Education/BuildingAsiacapability/Submissions

[19] DISR (2025) *Australia's Artificial Intelligence Ecosystem*, p. 47.

- Authors, book and script editors, journalists and other writers are all reported to be particularly important to the development of training AI models. Authors, and book and script editors are reported to have (by a very long way) the highest percentage of job postings requiring AI-related skills across all occupations.[20]

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- There needs to be much clearer articulation of these linkages, including the central role education plays in sustaining and growing the creative economy. NCP needs to be aligned to:
    - achieve consistency between education and cultural policy for identified areas of sovereign capability;
    - assess, mitigate and address the impacts of the JRG on creative capability and pathways; and
    - seize the opportunities presented by growing demand for AI-related skills in the creative and media sectors.
- Develop a strategic education capability agenda in partnership with Department of Education through ATEC. ATEC's Interim Strategic priorities include "Indigenous knowledges, culture and languages"; this agenda will be shaped by the First Nations Commissioner and the "establishment of a First Nations Working Group".[21]
- Government needs to ensure that the university sector can deliver on its pivotal role and responsibilities for Australian arts and culture.

3. Critical cultural Infrastructure: into the future

Our first priority, **policy and administrative architecture**, would re-connect place-based heritage with the arts, providing a much-needed coordinating framework for major cultural organisations and institutions to harness the opportunities presented by digital technologies and AI through an innovative **'creative clusters' approach.**

This priority addresses several NCP Pillars. The Consultation Paper recognises the need to capture "emerging modes of expression" (Pillar 2), "how cultural policy can respond to changing conditions for creative work, … protection of creative rights in the digital environment … and how creators are recognised across the broader economy" (Pillar 3), and "how cultural policy can respond to changing

[20] DISR (2025) *Australia's Artificial Intelligence Ecosystem*, p. 52.
[21] ATEC (2026), Interim Strategic Priorities, https://www.atec.gov.au/node/41

audience behaviours, discovery pathways and modes of engagement, including innovation in presentation and discovery to sustain participation" (Pillar 5). Pillar 4, of course, is fully focused on strengthening cultural infrastructure.

The NCP Consultation Paper righty recognises that 'culture drives prosperity and innovation': contributing $67.4 billion in economic activity in 2023-24, employing over 591,000 people, and fostering "creativity, design thinking and problem-solving capabilities" that are increasingly "recognised as important for innovation and productivity in the workforce".

As part of our response to the Strategic Examination of R&D (SERD)[22] and SERD Issues Papers[23] we highlighted opportunities in the creative economy and ways to potentially scale creative clusters/precincts which have been successful at state level. We also pointed to the UK's programming (funding through UKRI matched by industry partnerships) through its *Audience of the Future* industrial strategy and the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Creative Industries Cluster Program, which provided the seed investment to bring together universities, GLAM institutions and industry partners in a coordinated innovation ecosystem. Professor James Bennett, a leading figure in these initiatives, led the UK's £51.2m CoSTAR National Lab,[24] the country's largest ever investment in creative industries R&D, secured over £30m of R&D funding for creative industries as the Director of StoryFutures.[25] Professor Bennett relocated to Australia this year, as Dean of UTS' new Faculty of Design and Society.[26]

Bennett emphasises that these programs catalysed deeply networked innovation between universities, cultural institutions and creative industries. The result was a step change in the productivity of the creative sector, while simultaneously advancing the goals of inclusive and sustainable growth.

For every £1 invested by the Government, £5 was returned, with StoryFutures forming part of the broader £90m Creative Industries Clusters Program, which generated £277m return on investment. Key lessons and findings of relevance to Australia include:

- These initiatives create, support and grow jobs – particularly in emerging technologies, from GenAI to immersive platforms. More than 10,000 jobs were supported through the Clusters program.

[22] Australian Academy of the Humanities (April 2025), Response to Strategic Examination of R&D (SERD), https://humanities.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/AAH-Submussion-SERD-April-2025.pdf
[23] Australian Academy of the Humanities (October 2025), Response to SERD Issues Papers https://humanities.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/AAH-SERD-Response_October-2025.pdf
[24] UKRI, CoStar National Lab, https://www.ukri.org/councils/ahrc/remit-programmes-and-priorities/convergent-screen-technologies-and-performance-in-realtime-costar/costar-national-lab/
[25] See https://creativeindustriesclusters.com/clusters/storyfutures/
[26] See https://profiles.uts.edu.au/James.Bennett

- The work of the Clusters and CoSTAR programs underpinned the creative sector's outperformance of the broader UK economy, with creative industries GVA increasing by 4.6% (2023-24), compared to 1% growth across the UK economy overall.[27]
- Cultural Institutions were at the heart of Clusters' success, forging new partnerships with universities to enable creative industries to grow and enabling audiences, particularly culturally diverse ones, to experience new technologies.
- Each UK cluster was anchored by three essential partners: a large public sector institution, a large private sector organisation, and a university.
- A UK government report *Culture is Digital* (2017) identified the need for GLAM to leverage digital technologies.[28] This became central to StoryFutures' partnership with the National Gallery, which demonstrated the value of experimental immersive audience experiences and the potential for AI to support GLAM institutions through, for example, 'totally personalised' visitor experiences whether on-site or virtual.

In Australia, early reports through the Creative Industries Cluster Study (CICS 2001–03), commissioned by the Australian Government's Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA), did useful conceptual mapping that still has resonance. The study shifted the perspective of cultural institutions from being 'repositories of heritage' to being active innovation agents within a 'national innovation system'. They identified several key roles for GLAM and public broadcasting institutions:

- *Systems Integrators*: The report argued that institutions like the ABC, SBS, national GLAM institutions, and state galleries act as 'market organisers' or 'core systems integrators'
- *De-risking Innovation*: By commissioning works through procurement strategies and providing platforms, these institutions reduce the risk for small and medium enterprises in the digital content sector.
- *Aggregators*: They aggregate vast amounts of intellectual property and 'latent' content, making it accessible for new creative uses, effectively 'organising' a market that would otherwise be too fragmented for small players to navigate.

[27] Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (February 2026), *High-Growth Potential Firms in the UK's Creative Industries* report: https://pec.ac.uk/research_report_entr/high-growth-potential-firms-in-the-uks-creative-industries/.
[28] See https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/culture-is-digital/culture-is-digital

Any expanded digital and AI-enabled use of collections such as is outlined here must proceed with appropriate recognition of Indigenous cultural authority, consent frameworks and data sovereignty principles, and should model best practice in relation to the First Nations holdings of public institutions.

Another key aspect of the UK Clusters and CoSTAR programs is their strategies to work regionally. Of course, Australia and the UK have very different governmental structures. However, Professor James Bennett argues that "in Australia we have far more of the pieces in place to enable a huge increase in productivity than was in place when the projects started in the UK".[29]

Developed and developing clusters already exist in many of the states:

- TechCentral in Sydney[30]
- Melbourne's Digital Games 'Hot spot'[31]; the cultural precinct at Federation Square[32]
- Western Australian Creative Technology Innovation Hub based in Bunbury[33], ECU's new Perth City vertical campus (including WAAPA, Business and Law)[34] together with its new film studio.[35] These developments are supported within a broad Diversify WA policy which includes creative industry policy as part of the state's strategy to hedge against overdependence on the resources sector, together with a WA Government Creative Industries Taskforce.[36]
- Adelaide's digital games, screen and createch hubs, Games Plus[37], Adelaide Studios[38] and Lot 14.[39]

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Under tight budget conditions, the Government through the NCP should provide strategic national leadership which coordinates and builds on substantial state, city and university strategies and infrastructure and

[29] James Bennett, personal communication.
[30] https://www.nsw.gov.au/business-and-economy/innovation/tech-central
[31] https://www.invest.vic.gov.au/explore-your-sector/digital-technology/digital-games
[32] https://artsprecinct.melbourne/arts-precinct/
[33] https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-energy-and-economic-diversification/new-industries-fund-wa-creative-tech-innovation-hub
[34] https://www.ecu.edu.au/degrees/ecu-city
[35] https://www.cits.wa.gov.au/infrastructure/perth-film-studios
[36] https://www.wa.gov.au/government/media-statements/Cook%20Labor%20Government/New-Creative-Industries-Taskforce-to-drive-growth-and-collaboration--20260106
[37] https://gameplus.com.au/adelaide/
[38] https://www.safilm.com.au/adelaide-studios/
[39] https://lotfourteen.com.au/

looks to capture the economic, social and cultural value of creative clusters.

    - The UK experience is clear: all creative clusters had as anchors at least one large GLAM or public sector institution such as major public media, one large private sector leader which recognised the value of deep collaboration and synergy in a place-based context, and one lead university.
    - Australia's states/territories have developed creative industries strategies, policies, programs and infrastructure which benefit crucially from place-based cluster synergies, but without national strategic direction and incentivisation they remain inherently limited in the way they may contribute to national creative performance.

- We propose a pilot program coordinated by the Federal Government to drive a unique Australian agenda informed by NCP pillars, maximising federal and state co-investment, bringing together universities, GLAM and the private sector to test the potential for a national creative clusters network infrastructure and architecture.