

Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham
Minister for Education
minister@education.gov.au

26th August 2016

Dear Minister

I am writing on behalf of the Australian visual arts sector in response to media reports that you are proposing a major overhaul of the Government's vocational loans scheme to come into effect next year.

As you are probably aware, the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) is the national peak industry body representing and advancing the professional interests of the Australian visual and media arts, craft and design sector. It provides advocacy, leadership, and services for this sector. Ensuring good educational opportunities for visual artists is one of NAVA's central concerns to enable artists to be well prepared to embark on and progress in their professional careers. Arts training in TAFEs and RTAs is key to reaching this objective.

While we fully support the Government in taking steps to prevent misuse of the VET Fee-Help scheme by unethical businesses which are targeting vulnerable people and ripping off taxpayers, we are concerned that you are considering other measures alongside this to impose limits on how much students can be loaned for particular vocational courses and to restrict funding only to courses with strong employment outcomes. In the media, there is a report that courses like performing arts and art therapy are likely to be ruled ineligible for government funds.

In considering which courses are sufficiently likely to lead to income generation and warrant government support, we would like to draw your attention to the statistics which offer a compelling picture of why the cutting of support for arts training within TAFEs and RTAs would be misguided and short-sighted. Informed predictions about the jobs of the future reveal that automation and artificial intelligence are changing the skills needs of the future. In June 2015 the report by the the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) predicted that technology could make almost 40 per cent of Australian jobs, including highly skilled roles, redundant in 10 to 15 years. It singled out jobs that involved "low levels of social interaction, low levels of creativity, or low levels of mobility and dexterity" as most likely to be replaced by automation. It indicated that the trend was towards highly skilled, agile, self-employed people who were capable in the areas of "architecting, designing and analysing", being those who would form a substantial proportion of the workforce of the future. These are the very skills in which arts creators are pre-eminent. Already we know that Australian cultural industries generated at least \$50 billion in economic activity¹.

¹ ABS 2014, Australian National Accounts: Cultural and Creative Activity Satellite Accounts, Experimental, 2008–09 (cat. no. 5271.0), 10 February

PO BOX 60, POTTS POINT, NSW 1335 | +61 2 9368 1900 | VISUALARTS.NET.AU | NAVA@VISUALARTS.NET.AU

NAVA gratefully acknowledges the assistance provided by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, and by the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory Governments.

Patrons: Pat Corrigan AM, Mrs Janet Homes à Court AC, Professor David Throsby AO. ACN 003 229 285 / ABN 16 003 229 285

The arts employs more people than agriculture, mining and construction and arts employment has been growing by around 2.6 percent annually since 1996, which is faster than the growth in employment overall of 1.9 percent². It would seem obvious that you would want to recognise and capitalise on this trend.

It is important to understand that the arts is not a 'jobs' industry but a small business sector, with entrepreneurs and multi-skilled practitioners generating their own jobs and essentially running micro enterprises. Indeed, they are understood by futurists to exemplify the pattern of work for the future.

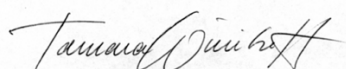
NAVA applauds the Turnbull Government's decision to provide \$10 million for CSIRO to extend the Scientist and Mathematicians in Schools programme. However, as Arts Minister Mitch Fifield said in his opening speech at the National Visual Art Education Conference in January 2016, "We had the national innovation statement released in December, which includes a national approach to what we know as STEM education, Science, Technology, Education and Maths. But if we want to have a real culture of innovation then we need to have creativity at the heart of that agenda and what we need to do is to put an A into STEM. We need to start talking about STEAM. Science, Technology, Education, the Arts and Mathematics. Because if we want to have a culture of innovation, a culture of creativity feeds directly into that.

As a member of the National Advocates for Arts Education, NAVA has advocated for many years for all 5 art forms be mandatory in the school curriculum. The success of this campaign should see more school leavers pursuing the arts at a tertiary level. To encourage this, the tertiary education options need to be strengthened and supported. TAFEs and RTAs need to provide a well-rounded set of government supported opportunities so that prospective students can make their own choice of study area.

It also is important to remember we are talking about a loans scheme, not subsidy, and the loan comes with a loan fee. Students are choosing to train in this area and take on the loan and it is only through training that the artists, actors, performers and multi-arts creators who develop Australia's cultural industries, learn their skills.

Minister, we sincerely hope you will think carefully and consult with the arts and cultural industries sector before making your decision. We would be pleased to bring a delegation of representatives to meet with you at your earliest convenience to provide you with our advice based on our long-standing industry experience. I will contact your office to seek a meeting.

Yours sincerely



Tamara Winikoff OAM
Executive Director

² Cunningham and Higgs, 'What the 2011 Census tells us about Arts Employment'