

**Submission by the Australia
Council to the Review
*ABC and SBS: Towards a
Digital Future***

Introduction

The Australia Council is the Australian Government's principal arts funding and advisory body. Our vision is to enrich the nation by supporting the practice and enjoyment of the arts. Each year the Australia Council invests more than \$150 million in the creation of high quality works by Australian artists and arts organisations, and we are continually looking for ways to access new and bigger audiences for this work.

The public broadcasters have had a major role in building and uniting Australia; and in contributing to a lively national conversation. The arts play a crucial role in this national conversation, because they provide one of the most important ways in which we exchange ideas and explore our creativity and our humanity. They are the means by which the fabric of national culture is sewn together. For decades the public broadcasters have provided one of the most potent means by which art in Australia is experienced.

Therefore, a strong future for public broadcasting in the digital age is vital to the arts. Public broadcasters provide platforms for delivering more art to more Australians which directly impacts on the continued viability and vitality of the arts sector. There are many examples of the commitment of public broadcasting to the arts delivering excellent programs and partnering with the Australia Council to look for new and innovative ways to place the arts centre stage in the new digital environment. Together we can do more – content development, delivery, promotion and access are the keys to strengthening a place for the arts in the hearts and minds of our citizens and our reputation internationally for fostering world class creative talent.

The Australia Council and the ABC have developed a strategic partnership which will see free, nationally available arts content on ABC television and across other digital platforms. These types of partnership are critical for the Australian arts sector particularly for the development of new audiences and the creation of new markets. Working together with the public broadcasters we can realise a shared vision to create and promote Australian creative content consistent with many government policy directions for our digital future. Some of these include: supporting enhanced arts programming and audience growth; identifying opportunities to grow the independent creative sector; developing the arts in regional and remote areas; providing space for people to participate in their culture through alternative engagement with the arts; and developing and embedding new platforms in our cultural landscape.

These are some of the ways in which the Australia Council can collaborate with the ABC and SBS to create opportunities for the arts within the sphere of public broadcasting but the arts themselves provide many rich, diverse experiences transportable over the myriad of digital platforms that exist now and will proliferate up to 2012 and beyond.

Response to discussion questions

The role of national broadcasting

Public broadcasting, without the commercial imperatives of advertising, is in the best position to deliver programming that is appealing, relevant and interesting for all Australians. While fostering and promoting a national identity in a free to air environment is not the cheapest option, subsidy enables us to develop the best of our creative talent and ensure the availability of high quality product. The discussion paper recognises that both the ABC and SBS will require additional funding if they are to meet the challenges of the digital environment and keep pace with rapid change. The Australia Council urges support for additional funding for the creation of Australian artistic content and delivery through traditional and innovative platforms.

There is an incredible vibrancy, richness and diversity in the creative output of artists and arts organisations that demands platforms for delivery to more Australians beyond the traditional live performance and exhibition spaces. The Australia Council looks to the public broadcasters as instrumental in providing those outlets: leading the way and challenging artists to embrace new technologies and take advantage of the opportunities offered by the multichannel, multiplatform media environment.

The charters of both the ABC and SBS broadly address the expectations we have as a nation for our public broadcasters. Any amendments to the charters should reflect the arts as fundamental to Australian cultural development and expression. The arts exist in a myriad of forms as content developers, educators, presenters and promoters telling the diversity of Australian stories locally and internationally. The charters could also be amended to allow for non-broadcasting platforms, and platforms within platforms, in the online and mobile spheres that continue to emerge, to offer new possibilities.

Harnessing new technologies to deliver services

Digital technologies are changing the way Australians work and play. Creativity is critical, with artists and animators making up nearly one-third of the workforce producing digital games. The Australia Council recognises that Australians must be supported to push their creativity into new domains. Digital technologies help connect with new audiences and provide an important source of income. We have supported cutting edge artists working in media arts and interdisciplinary arts through grant programs and initiatives for many years. Recent initiatives have enabled writers to develop narratives for new media platforms, major performing arts companies to beam hit productions across the country, and artists to create and commercialise content for mobile platforms.

The Australia Council has worked in partnership with the ABC and SBS on many occasions. More recently we have developed a strategic partnership with the ABC to deliver more arts content across the ABC's digital delivery platforms. This partnership will help us grow and diversify our support for Australian artists and give more Australians the opportunity to experience and enjoy the arts in new and more accessible ways. The Australia Council and the ABC will develop a number of initiatives spanning the breadth of arts genres and practice in a range of formats, including live performance. ABC TV will present this arts programming across the schedules of ABC 1, ABC 2, ABC Online, Second Life, internet channels, and through mobiles, vodcasts and user-generated content (UCG).

Live broadcasts potentially enable millions of Australians to experience excellent performing arts events either in their own homes or in community spaces. Commencing earlier this year with Graeme Murphy's *Swan Lake* performed by the Australian Ballet at the Sydney Opera House screened live on ABC2 and beamed direct to digital cinemas around Australia and to Federation Square in Melbourne, this was followed by a broadcast of Opera Australia's *Carmen* and *Keating! The Musical*. Exploiting new digital platforms for the creation and distribution of artwork and the commissioning of innovative new digital work across all artistic genres has also begun: *My Favourite Australian*, an initiative with the National Portrait Gallery will see the production of film and video art portraits of much loved Australians. With this pioneering spirit and openness to the rich diversity of creative sources we can look forward to a digital frontier that taps the well of possibilities within the arts. This partnership will also lead to artists and arts organisations exploring issues around rights management and business models in the digital era, in addition to innovate and experiment in the creation of art.

The ABC has an extensive array of arts material within its archives including orchestral and opera recordings, theatre performances and arts documentaries. Digitising this material and making it available freely would be a significant step in increasing awareness, understanding and enjoyment of our arts history, a valuable educative experience in the arts and a source of inspiration and ideas. This, of course, does not come without a cost. Not only must the cost of digitisation be underwritten, but so to the proper remuneration of the artists involved for the renewed use of their work.

Informing and educating Australians

Both the ABC and SBS have a critical role to play in the promotion of Australia's cultural identity and presenting images of Australia. This has always been a major part of the role of public broadcasting and will become increasingly important with the fragmentation of media over multiple platforms and the availability of more and more content from across the globe. Increasing Australian content is not confined to raising the amount of drama produced. While this is important, it is also about looking for new and innovative ways to make programs and develop content. The Australia Council is working with the ABC is working to develop innovative arts content or deliver existing content in innovative ways.

ABC Radio delivers a wide range of artistic content including music, radio drama and information programs about the arts and literature. With the content available to download as podcasts, the opportunity for Australian material to be heard across the country and the world is enormous and immensely valuable for artists carving out a career in a crowded market place, particularly internationally.

There are many artists newly arrived in Australia who also make work or perform in their country of origin. In some cases their work outside Australia is recorded in broadcast quality for local consumption. This is a potential source of content that SBS may want to explore, perhaps in developing joint projects with these artists to showcase their experiences at home and abroad and widen Australians understanding of our cultural diversity.

Education skills and productivity

Australian arts organisations develop some of the most innovative arts educational products available worldwide. There is definitely a role for public broadcasting to use its infrastructure to deliver and assist arts organisations to develop these products further for delivery on digital platforms. This will enable greater access for young people in regional and remote areas and the potential for international commercial opportunities.

A dedicated national digital education channel would most certainly be an effective means of delivering education programs Australia-wide and support the development of the national curriculum.

The Australia Council partnered with the ABC through Triple J to deliver what proved to be a very successful program to mentor and develop young arts reporters. This model could be applied more broadly within the national broadcasters as a way of capturing innovative arts content for delivery on mobile and online platforms.

Social inclusion and cultural diversity

The Australia Council's vision is that Australia's dynamic cultural life and practices are embraced, celebrated and created by the diversity of our cultures.

With SBS looking to add 100 hours of Australian multicultural programming by 2012, an opportunity exists in the many artists across Australia developing work based on traditional forms from their country of origin and adding their unique Australian perspective. These artists often enjoy very high profiles overseas while awareness of their work here in Australia is low. Programs that profile these artists, their work and their inspirations would celebrate the cultural and artistic diversity that we enjoy in this country and raise awareness and understanding of different cultural perspectives.

Presenting Australia to the world

The Australia Council has assisted in projecting a strong identity for Australia and there has been considerable demand for Australian product on the international stage. The Council funds and manages specific international market development programs in the Asia Pacific and other international markets aiming to promote Australian arts and culture and also achieve cultural diplomacy outcomes. International activities include:

- artists' residencies in overseas studios;
- tours of exhibitions and performing arts projects;
- tours by individual artists to key international events;
- representation in major recurrent international events including performing arts markets, international book fairs, art and craft fairs, music markets, festivals, arts conferences and visual art biennales and triennales;
- international visitors' programs;
- collaborations between artists and their communities/countries of origin; and
- specific major showcase events, programs and strategies in target regions/markets.

In 2007 the Australia Council and the ABC joined forces in an international collaboration with Channel 4 and Arts Council England to commission new British and Australian dance films and purchase existing dance films to be broadcast on Channel 4 and ABC television. This initiative provides opportunities for Australian dance to find wider audiences both in Australia and the UK. It also gives both established directors and choreographers and new talent an opportunity to create new work for the screen. Exploring this model for further international arts/broadcasting collaborations and utilising innovative digital platforms would serve to open up audiences in new markets and enable skills development in areas of technical production. The performing arts is the obvious source of content but there are also opportunities to capture innovative hybrid artforms and collaborations between artists of different disciplines.

Documentary profiles of artists, particularly those that have lived and worked internationally and showcase the diversity of Australian creativity, hold real possibilities for international promotion of our artists and their work. Festivals also provide a wealth of talent and content for broadcast. The Australia Council recently sent 42 of Australia's best Indigenous artists to the 10th Festival of Pacific Arts in American Samoa. The ABC produced and screened a two part documentary which showcased the best of Indigenous arts and enabled an exchange of cultural dialogue between artists of the Pacific.

The Australia Council supports expansion by the national broadcasters into overseas markets as a platform for advancing cultural diplomacy and opening up new and bigger audiences for the arts. The creation of commercially viable digital content for Australian and international markets will contribute to redressing the current trade deficit in digital content.