



AAH Policy

INFRASTRUCTURE AUSTRALIA AUDIT OCTOBER 2019

The [Australian Academy of the Humanities](#) (AAH) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Australian Infrastructure Audit 2019.

The Academy is the national body for the humanities in Australia, championing the contribution humanities, arts and culture make to national life. Our work aims to ensure ethical, historical and cultural perspectives inform discussions regarding Australia's future challenges and opportunities.

The Academy welcomes the inclusion, for the first time, of social infrastructure in the Australian Infrastructure Audit. This allows for a comprehensive appraisal of the complexity in the system and a consideration of how relationships between sectors may be more effectively leveraged for infrastructure provision and use into the future.

Our submission concentrates on the challenges and opportunities for social infrastructure, specifically educational [5b] and cultural infrastructure [5d], and the social inclusion agenda for telecommunications infrastructure [7d]. In each of these sectors and between them, there is a high degree of interdependence of physical and digital infrastructure. In our response we address this issue and point to research being undertaken of relevance to tackling challenges of data collection and evidence gathering.

The Academy's submission identifies three key areas where we think there are specific opportunities to improve integration between arts and cultural, telecommunications and education and research infrastructure:

1. Opportunities to align with strategic priorities for national research infrastructure investment [Social Infrastructure – 5b Education].
2. Tackling challenges and maximising opportunities for affordability and access in regional and remote Australia [Telecommunications – 7d Social Inclusion and Affordability].
3. Opportunities to better coordinate cultural infrastructure across government jurisdictions [Social Infrastructure – 5d Arts and Culture].

1. Education and research infrastructure challenges and opportunities

Opportunities to align with strategic priorities for national research infrastructure investment [Social Infrastructure – 5b Education – Challenge 106].

The Infrastructure Audit focuses on early childhood and school infrastructure; when it does address the tertiary education sector, its focus is largely on built infrastructure for educational purposes. We believe there is a gap which requires consideration – national research infrastructure. This is defined in the *2016 National Research Infrastructure Roadmap* as follows:

National research infrastructure comprises the nationally significant assets, facilities and services to support leading-edge research and innovation. It is accessible to publicly and privately funded users across Australia, and internationally (p.1).¹

Our universities are the engines of Australia’s research capability – delivering fundamental research through to the more applied and commercial end of the spectrum – and producing social, economic, environmental and cultural benefits. In order to continue to deliver in an increasingly digital and data-driven environment, the Australian Government has invested in strategic nationally collaborative infrastructure to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency in the system. National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS)-funded facilities and platforms “support approximately 40,000 domestic and international users (both within and outside the university sector) each year”.²

This model of infrastructure delivery has been highly effective, particularly in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields of research. National road-mapping exercises and investment plans ensure that there is regular review and strategic consultation with the sector to ensure that infrastructure facilities and services are fit-for-purpose and evolve as needed. Over the 15 years of NCRIS (and supporting programs), there has been a shift away from centralised facilities to complex networked infrastructure, such as the Population Health Research Network – a “national network of data linkage units, a secure data laboratory and e-research services which support researchers access to linked population data”.³

In the next phase of research infrastructure planning (in 2019), the Department of Education is commencing the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Scoping Study to explore the provision and better integration of information in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) and Indigenous research data platforms to maximise research outcomes, across a large and diverse group of stakeholders.⁴

HASS researchers rely on access to government records and data maintained by Australia’s collecting and cultural institutions, but there is not yet a coordinated strategy to realise the potential of a national social and cultural data infrastructure – which would seek to improve government decision-making and contribute to better living conditions and quality of life for communities. In a federated system research infrastructure of this kind is important to delivering for Australia’s regions – which we pick up on more detail below.

Australia can look to international lessons and innovations to inform our planning for a social infrastructure which would seek to leverage government data and cultural sector assets. In Denmark, for example, there has been a co-location of high-performance computing and cultural infrastructure delivering for research, a result of a partnership between the DeIC (Danish e-Infrastructure Cooperation) and the Royal Danish Library.⁵

In Australia, many of the pieces are in play – such as the National Library of Australia’s Trove facility, major initiatives such as the Indigenous Data Network, new sharing and release reforms for government data, and institutional infrastructures such as the PARADISEC (the Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures) and the Australian Data Archive (ADA).⁶ We also have frameworks for the responsible and safe use of data in place – notably, the Five Safes, Responsible Research and Innovation protocols, and AIATSIS’ *Guidelines for*

Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies.⁷ These will be vital to realising ongoing public trust and confidence in digital and data infrastructures.

It is difficult for universities to plan without strategic long-term government investment in education and research infrastructure. In the case of NCRIS, securing commitment for funding to 2028-29 has meant that the sector is able to strategise and innovate.⁸

2. Regional and remote access and affordability

Tackling challenges and maximising opportunities for affordability and access in regional and remote Australia. [Telecommunications – Social Inclusion and Affordability – Challenge 163].

Our response to the challenges for regional and remote Australia concentrates on the digital inclusion agenda.

Australia's latest Digital Inclusion Index report provides the most comprehensive account to date of digital inclusion in Australia.⁹ While pointing to the complexity of digital inclusion in contemporary Australia, and the scale of the policy challenge, the report makes it clear that problems can be tackled if we recognise that inclusion cannot simply be resolved through the single prism of access to network infrastructure and hardware. Capabilities, skills, and affordability must also be addressed, and online rights and responsibilities need to be carefully considered. A national strategy framework, involving government, business, community, and our cultural institutions, will be necessary for Australia to improve outcomes in this area.

We commend the Infrastructure Audit for recognising the role of galleries, libraries, archives and museums (GLAM). The sector is a leader in Australia's digital access, literacy and inclusion agendas, and are important infrastructure actors in regional communities. Nationally coordinated, sector-led efforts to improve access to both digital and cultural infrastructure, including a collaborative initiative through GLAM Peak on Digital Access to Collections, could be expanded to achieve greater impact since many of these initiatives rely on ad hoc institutional funds.¹⁰ In forming GLAM Peak, the sector has demonstrated its commitment to a collaborative agenda and there is potential to leverage this body to help coordinate across jurisdictions.

As with arts and cultural infrastructure, Australia's regional, rural and remote universities and campuses play a fundamental role in the social and economic lives of the communities they serve. Recognising this, the Government's *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy* seeks to "strengthen the role of tertiary education providers in regional development and grow Australia's regions".¹¹ We would point to a project of relevance to this agenda, currently underway through the Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA) for the Department of Education, 'Enhancing Research Outcomes from Australia's Regional, Remote and Rural Universities', which is looking at ways in which education, research and cultural infrastructure in our regions might be better integrated and leveraged.¹²

3. Arts and cultural infrastructure challenges and opportunities

Opportunities to better coordinate cultural infrastructure across government jurisdictions. [Social Infrastructure – 5d Arts and Culture – Challenge 116, 117 – Opportunity 121, 122]

We agree that investment in arts and cultural infrastructure is often not prioritised because the true costs and benefits are not integrated into government decision making [Challenge 116]. We also concur with the Audit’s assessment that governance of arts and cultural infrastructure is fragmented, resulting in a lack of comprehensive data on the scale and distribution of the sector [Challenge 117].

On both these challenges, the Academy would draw Infrastructure Australia’s attention to a program of work which is seeking to address data gaps of this kind.

The Academy is the lead delivery partner in [A New Approach](#) (ANA) an independent think tank championing effective investment and return in Australian arts and culture under a three-year program funded by three philanthropic organisations.¹³

ANA’s ambition is to strengthen bipartisan, business and wider community support for arts and culture through a truly independent and non-partisan approach. To do this ANA is focused on fostering a more robust discussion about cultural policy, one which is based on good data and informed by shared understandings.

The first in a series of Insight Reports was released in August this year. Insight Report 1, *The Big Picture: Public Expenditure on Artistic, Cultural and Creative Activity in Australia* (2019), acknowledged the important role of governments in the cultural life of the nation, including setting an environment of investment confidence through policy and regulatory settings and by leading public acknowledgement of the important role of creativity and culture in the lives of Australians.¹⁴

The Big Picture report establishes a “baseline understanding of the quantum and trends in expenditure on culture by all levels of government over the last decade.” It examines more than a decade of expenditure on arts and culture by the three tiers of government in Australia (2007-08 to 2017-18) and contains several findings of direct relevance to the Audit. It found that:

- > Cultural expenditure is not matching population growth with per capita public expenditure on culture has dropped by 4.9 per cent over the decade 2007–08 to 2017–18, and expenditure as a percentage of GDP remains below the OECD average (p. 13)
- > The contribution of different tiers of government is shifting, with local governments steadily increasing their funding commitment to arts and culture, with expenditure up by 11.0 per cent per capita since 2007. Over the same period, state and territory governments have increased per capita expenditure by 3.9 per cent, while the federal government’s per capita expenditure has fallen by 18.9 per cent.
- > Capital expenditure has consistently been a minor part (between 11 and 18 per cent) of total cultural expenditure (capital and recurrent expenditure), however over the period surveyed it is increasing as a proportion of the total.

On the basis of its findings, the report calls for “more strategic and intentional cooperation between federal, state, territory and local governments including clearer delineation of areas of responsibility to ensure effective and purposeful use of public funds”.

A forthcoming Insight Report examines the international evidence on the connection between arts and cultural engagement and improved health and wellbeing outcomes, community cohesiveness and shared identities.

The Infrastructure Audit rightly identifies opportunities for arts and cultural infrastructure in the social and economic empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples [Opportunity 121]. Our cultural institutions have a strong role to play in improving engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and other First Nations people. Earlier this year, the Australian Museums and Galleries Association launched *First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries* written by Terri Janke and Company.¹⁵ National and State Libraries Australia (NSLA) launched its Culturally Safe Libraries Program in 2018, which includes cultural competency training for its workforce.¹⁶

There is also a major opportunity, as the Audit identifies, to harness digital technology for new ways to access arts and cultural infrastructure, beyond physical assets [Opportunity 122].

We are at crisis point in some part cultural sector in the preservation of Australia’s rich and unique cultural heritage. As the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) has outlined:

Unless we act swiftly to invest in digitisation infrastructure and capability, we will be facing a ‘second mass extinction’ when tens of thousands of hours of music, spoken word, news and current affairs, drama and comedy become inaccessible only a decade from now.¹⁷

If this material is lost, Australia loses a rich and fundamental part of our cultural memory and our cultural identity. The GLAM sector is demonstrating real commitment to this agenda, and we would suggest that there is a role for government in working with the sector to develop a national strategy for sustainable digital infrastructure.

The Academy of the Humanities would welcome the opportunity to be engaged in further consultation on any of the challenges and opportunities identified in this submission.

NOTES

- ¹ Australian Government (2018), *2016 National Research Infrastructure Roadmap* https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/ed16-0269_national_research_infrastructure_roadmap_report_internals_acc.pdf
- ² Department of Education (n.d), ‘National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy’ (NCRIS), <https://www.education.gov.au/national-collaborative-research-infrastructure-strategy-ncris>
- ³ Population Health Research Network (n.d), ‘What is PHRN?’, <https://www.phrn.org.au/>
- ⁴ Department of Education (2019), ‘National Research Infrastructure Scoping Studies’, <https://www.education.gov.au/national-research-infrastructure-scoping-studies>
- ⁵ Danish e Infrastructure Cooperation (2018), ‘DeIC National Cultural Heritage Cluster’, https://www.deic.dk/en/cultural_heritage_cluster
- ⁶ National Library of Australia (n.d), Trove, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/>; Australian Data Archive (n.d), <https://ada.edu.au/>; PARADISEC (n.d), <http://www.paradisec.org.au/>; Productivity Commission (2017), *Data Availability and Use*, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/data-access/report/data-access.pdf>; Office of the National Data Commissioner (2019), ‘Data Sharing Principles’, <https://www.datacommissioner.gov.au/safeguards/sharing-principles>
- ⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017) ‘Managing the Risks of Disclosure: the Five Safes Framework’, 1160.0 - ABS Confidentiality Series, August 2017, <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/1160.0Main%20Features4Aug%202017>; Responsible Research and Innovation Project (n.d), ‘The PRISMA Responsible, Research & Innovation Toolkit’, <https://www.rri-tools.eu/-/the-prisma-responsible-research-innovation-toolkit>; AIATSIS (2012), *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies*, <https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/docs/research-and-guides/ethics/gerais.pdf>.
- ⁸ Australian Government (2018), *Facilities for the Future: Underpinning Australia’s Research and Innovation*, https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/ed18-0069_-_he_-_research_infrastructure_investment_plan_-_public_version.pdf
- ⁹ Thomas, J., Barraket, J., Wilson, C.K., Rennie, E., Ewing, S., and MacDonald, T. (2019), *Measuring Australia’s Digital Divide: the Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2019* <https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/>
- ¹⁰ GLAM Peak (n.d) Digital Access to Collections, <http://www.digitalcollections.org.au/glam-peak>
- ¹¹ https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/national_regional_rural_and_remote_tertiary_education_strategy.pdf
- ¹² Australian Council of Learned Academies (2019). ‘Discussion Paper: Enhancing Research Outcomes from Australia’s Regional, Remote and Rural Universities’, https://acola.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/ACOLA_Discussion-Paper.pdf
- ¹³ Australian Academy of the Humanities (2018), A New Approach, <https://www.humanities.org.au/new-approach/>
- ¹⁴ A New Approach (2019), *The Big Picture: Public Expenditure on Artistic, Cultural and Creative Activity in Australia*, <https://www.humanities.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/ANA-InsightReportOne-FullReport.pdf>
- ¹⁵ Janke, T. (2019) *First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries*, Australian Museums and Galleries Association, https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/f76062_c67539d5b2e2433181f66b15ec499d89.pdf
- ¹⁶ National and State Libraries Australia (2018), ‘Culturally Safe Libraries’, <https://www.nsla.org.au/our-work/culturally-safe-libraries>
- ¹⁷ National Film and Sound Archive (2017) *Deadline 2025: Collections at Risk*, <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/corporate-information/publications/deadline-2025>