

Election Policies required to Support Visual Arts and Craft - Social security and employment initiatives

1. Social Security

The non-financial recommendations in the Myer inquiry report¹ include the following: **the Commonwealth broaden the mutual obligation criteria for Newstart to include arts activities with community benefits.**

2. Art Business start-up initiative

A start-up art industry investment scheme to assist visual and craft artists to establish themselves in business, including provision of specialised training through the NEIS scheme.

Background

Reports done for the Australia Council show that few artists earn a consistent income from their art practice and must seek other forms of income support. For many this means working in either arts related or non arts related areas. For a smaller percentage it means periods of unemployment, and at these times these artists may seek unemployment benefits.

“Not all artists who are unemployed apply for the dole. In fact, as Table 32 shows, 44 per cent of artists who reported some unemployment experience did not seek unemployment benefits during this time. Of the 56 per cent who did apply, virtually all were successful, although one-third of them experienced some difficulty in accessing benefits on account of their occupation. The difficulties encountered revolved mainly around problems of recognition of artistic skills, and presumably because of this, an expectation that applicants would undertake work that was not related to their skills and experience as an artist.”

(Don't Give Up Your Day Job, page 43, Throsby and Hollister, Australia Council 2003.)

Although the Australia Council has stated that the Newstart and Mutual Obligation criteria do adequately cover artists' work, the above shows that artists are facing problems in the field. One recommended solution to this problem is better training of Centrelink staff to understand the specialised nature of work in the arts.

In addition, a more sophisticated consideration is called for of how the community could benefit from the skills of artists who are unemployed.

The work done by artists does fit under the current Mutual Obligation criteria.

¹ Report of the Contemporary Visual Arts And Craft Inquiry, 2002.

“This could mean doing a course, working part time, taking part in Work for the Dole or doing another activity to improve your chances of getting a job. It’s all based on putting something back into the community in return for your payments.”

(Centrelink website *Options For Your Future – Mutual Obligation.*)

The current activities under employment and community participation are:

- part time paid work
- Work for the Dole
- community development employment projects
- community work
- Green Corps.

Support Options

A number of new initiatives could be implemented specifically for artists including:

a) Living wage for artists

In its last two election policies. Labor has made a commitment to the provision of a “living wage” for two years after graduation for art practitioners engaged in professional activities. This is intended to bridge the start-up phase of an artist’s business. Such a scheme would be of great benefit in allowing practitioners to build the essential ground work for their careers without the added pressure of having to earn income. The terms of eligibility could be based on those proposed for the Tax Public Ruling.

What is required?

NAVA calls on politicians from all political parties to support the introduction of an artists’ living wage on the above model

b) Similar scheme to PACE—Pathways to Arts and Cultural Employment currently operating in New Zealand. In Australia such a scheme may become a recognised activity under “employment and community participation”.

The scheme in brief (based on information provided by the Artists Alliance NZ):

The PACE programme is fiscally neutral. It was set up and delivered by reallocating resources based on the number of people already on the dole with arts based skills who can be assisted off the dole by more effective and targeted service delivery.

The PACE scheme recognises and understands how people can use arts-based skills to get real jobs. Under PACE, artists can be registered as such, rather than having to select an alternative career and waste their arts skills and training. They can be better connected with art jobs and assisted into creative careers.

PACE has been set up to help unemployed artists overcome impediments that keep them from getting sustainable work in a dynamic and economically growing creative sector.

What is required?

NAVA calls on politicians from all political parties to support an investigation of the applicability of the New Zealand PACE scheme, in order to develop a similar model for adoption in Australian.

c) Start-up art industry investment scheme to assist visual and craft artists to establish themselves in business, provided through the NEIS scheme.

When the Arts Industry Development Scheme was instigated by government in the early 90s, several states provided specialised business development training for artists and craft practitioners, some through the NEIS Scheme. The success rate from this training was high and helped nascent businesses to become viable.

The reinstating of such a scheme would be a valuable way of helping artists to acquire the specialised business training designed particularly for arts enterprises that is not currently available. This could ensure a much higher degree of survival for creative enterprises than is currently the case.

What is required?

NAVA calls on politicians from all political parties to make a commitment to support the development of specialised art business training under the NEIS scheme and provide the necessary financial support for artists undertaking this training.

Further Information

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Reference Documents

Centrelink website – mutual obligation requirements

www.centrelink.gov.au/internet.nsf/payments/newstart_mutual_obigation.htm

Dole4arts.com. A website looking at the issue of artists and the dole, part of Arts Hub

www.dole4arts.com/dole4arts/

Don't Give Up Your Day Job, Throsby and Hollister, Australia Council 2003. Chapter 7
Employment and Time Allocation.

PACE – Pathways To Arts And Cultural Employment. See email attachment.

Arts Employment Success. Press release by NZ Government 18 June 2003.