

Submission  
No 44

## INQUIRY INTO ARTS AND MUSIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

**Organisation:** Visual Arts and Design Educators Association NSW

**Date Received:** 25 July 2024

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## **VADEA SUBMISSION TO:**

The Joint Select Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in NSW - **Inquiry into arts and music education and training in New South Wales**

### **Who is VADEA?**

Established in 2009, the Visual Arts and Design Educators Association NSW (VADEA) has grown to become the largest Visual Arts educator association in Australia. VADEA coordinates professional learning programs and advocates for NSW Visual Arts and Design educators on state and national curriculum issues. Comprising members from primary, secondary and tertiary education sectors, VADEA is recognised for its significant contributions to Visual Arts and Design education. In 2021, VADEA was honoured with the NSW Professional Teachers Council (PTC) Association of the Year Award for its exemplary service to education.

The VADEA Executive, a volunteer-driven body, emphasises its longstanding relationships with members and the broader visual arts community. This collaborative spirit underpins VADEA's vision for achieving high-quality educational outcomes for all NSW Visual Arts students and educators. The association actively engages with various external organisations and stakeholders, fostering innovation and professional development in NSW Visual Arts education.

### **Context - Visual Arts education in NSW schools**

In NSW, Visual Arts education is governed primarily through the framework established by the NSW Education Act (1990) and subsequent regulations and policies. The NSW Education Act mandates that all students in NSW have access to a comprehensive and balanced curriculum that includes Visual Arts education and empowers the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) to set standards for what students should know and be able to do in Visual Arts at different stages of their schooling. The NSW Education Act (1990) recognised the importance of providing opportunities for all students to engage with visual arts education as part of their broader educational experience. The provision for Visual Arts and Music education is covered under the RoSA certificate, which requires students in Stage 4-5 to have undertaken these subjects alongside a suite of others. Currently, Visual Arts is taught within the Creative Arts syllabus in Early Stage 1 - Stage 3; it is a mandatory 100 hour course in Stage 4 and becomes an elective from Stage 5 and into Stage 6. Current NESA Syllabus Reform is covered in a later section.

The Teacher Accreditation Act (2004) requires the Authority to accredit teachers and determine whether their qualification is relevant to the area in which the person is or is to be employed to teach. This ensures that teachers have the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies to effectively teach subjects such as Visual Arts, in accordance with the curriculum requirements. It ensures equity and access to high quality visual arts education, from appropriately qualified and accredited teachers, for all students, regardless of their background, abilities, or geographical location.

Additionally, The Teacher Accreditation Act 2004 supports ongoing professional development for teachers, including Visual Arts, to enhance their teaching practices and keep abreast of curriculum updates and best practices in arts education. In summary, the NSW Education Act provides the legislative framework that governs Visual Arts education in NSW, ensuring that students receive a high-quality, balanced education that includes opportunities for creative expression, cultural understanding, and skill development in the Visual Arts.

Visual Arts education is essential in shaping the holistic development of children and should be prioritised in the school curriculum. It serves as a universal language, bridging cultural divides and fostering empathy and understanding among students and is a powerful medium for cultural expression, allowing children to communicate their unique identities, traditions, and values while celebrating the diversity of human experiences. Engaging with art enhances emotional and psychological well-being, offering a safe space for

personal expression, stress management, and emotional resilience. Moreover, Visual Arts education fosters intellectual growth by promoting critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, which are crucial for success in the 21st century. Visual Arts also play a significant role in social cohesion, bringing students together and promoting a sense of community and shared purpose, contributing to the development of well-rounded, emotionally intelligent, and socially responsible individuals.

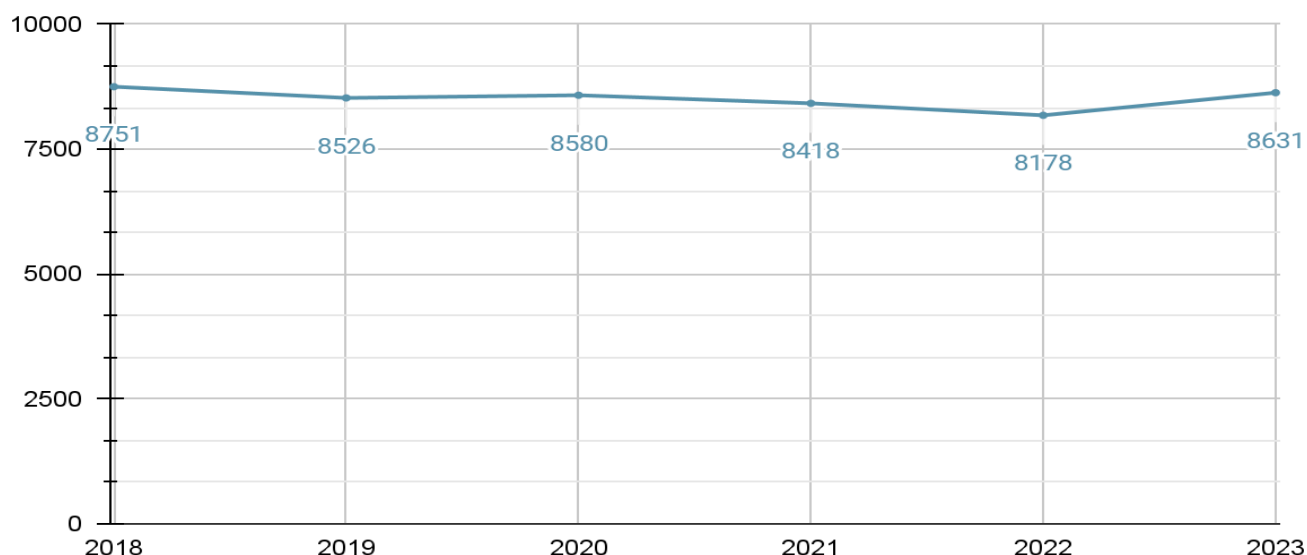
The following tables reveal the candidature of students who elect to study Visual Arts and other performing arts subjects in Stage 5-6 in 2023. This data is publicly available on the former BOSTES archives websites - see link below. VADEA have worked out the percentage of total candidature based on the figures provided by NESAs in these statistics. The results reveal that Visual Arts is consistently the most popular subject within the suite of Creative and Performing Arts subjects. According to NESAs in 2022, Visual Arts in the HSC was ranked the 11th most popular subject, with 8,178 candidates. In 2023, Visual Arts remained the 11th most popular subject, and is consistently the highest ranked subject with a submitted work. In 2023, 11.3% of the total state HSC candidature elected to study Visual Arts. It is evident from the 2018-2023 trend data below, that candidate numbers have largely maintained this six year period. This is despite the subject suffering significant impact from the pandemic, where students' access to resources and classroom artmaking experience was restricted. When the additional board endorsed courses are included, we can see that 14.5% of the total HSC candidature did a Visual Arts related course. In the Preliminary course, where the 1 unit board endorsed courses are increasingly popular, 19.5% students did a Visual Arts related course. This data is more revealing when compared to candidature in other performing arts subjects such as Music, Drama and Dance. In 2023, only 14% of students did a performing arts related course, compared to 19.5% in a Visual Arts related course.

The strength of Visual Arts in Stage 6 is fostered in the Stage 5 elective courses. In 2023, 28.4% (28,091) of students did a Visual Arts/Visual Design/Photographic and Digital Media course, compared to 18.6% of students electing to study Drama/Music/Dance. The elective numbers in Visual Arts/Visual Design/Photographic and Digital Media courses have been largely sustained over a number of years. More on their ability to make strong industry connections is made in the latter section of our submission.

This data reveals that the study of visual arts and design courses across NSW has remained strong and attests to the popularity of Visual Arts in schools, despite the impact of the pandemic and increasingly broad course offerings within different school contexts.

HSC Visual Arts Candidature 2018-2023					
2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
8631	8178	8418	8580	8526	8751

## HSC Visual Arts Candidature Trend 2018-2023

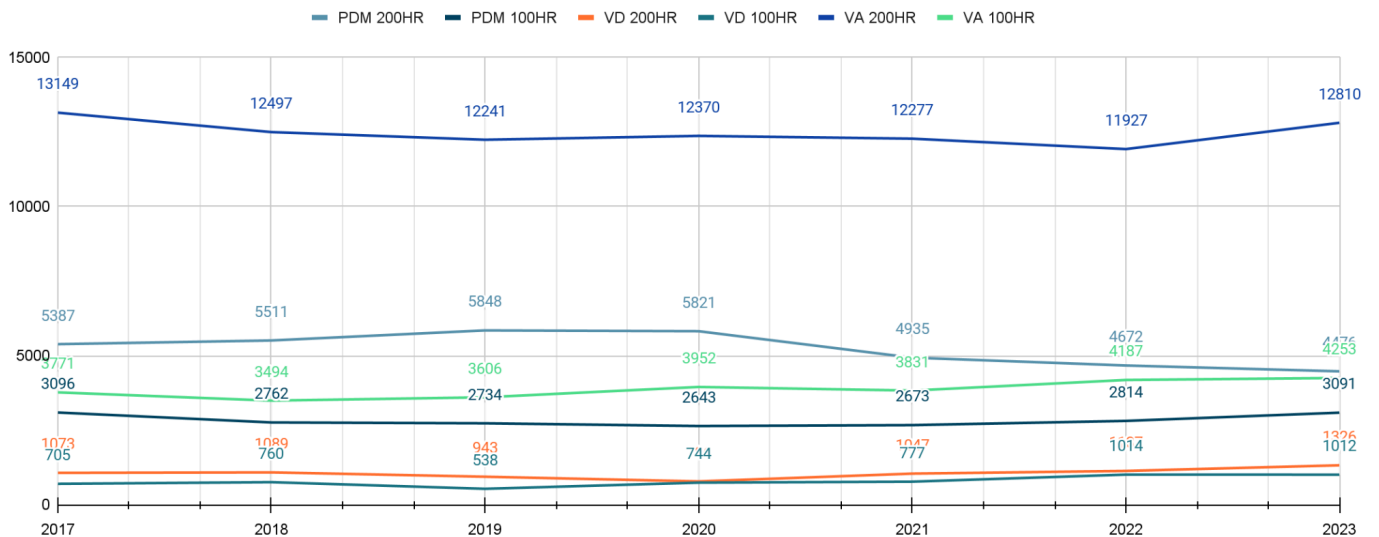


2023 HSC (Year 12)			Total candidature NSW = 76,268		
Visual Arts and Design Subjects	Candidates	Percentage of total candidature	Performing Arts Subjects	Candidates	Percentage of total candidature
Visual Arts	8631	11.3%	Music 1	4380	5.7%
Visual Arts Life Skills	504		Music 2	727	0.95%
Visual Design 1 unit (Board endorsed course)	11		Music Extension	386	0.5%
Visual Design 2 unit (Board endorsed course)	669		Music Life Skills	169	
Photography, Video and Digital Imaging 1 unit (Board endorsed course)	93		Drama	3324	4.4%
Photography, Video and Digital Imaging 2 unit (Board endorsed course)	994		Drama Life Skills	77	
Ceramics 1 unit (Board endorsed course)	11		Dance	771	1%
Ceramics 2 unit (Board endorsed course)	112		Dance Life Skills	10	
Visual Arts and Design subjects total percentage of total HSC candidature	11,025	14.5%	Performing Arts subjects total percentage of total HSC candidature	12.9%	

2023 Preliminary (Year 11)		Total candidature NSW = 88,070	
Visual Arts and Design Subjects	Candidates	Performing Arts Subjects	Candidates
Visual Arts	11384	Music 1	5856

Visual Arts Life Skills	636	Music 2	804
Visual Design 1 unit	385	Music Life Skills	244
Visual Design 2 unit	1106	Drama	4350
Photography, Video and Digital Imaging 1 unit	1356	Drama Life Skills	83
Photography, Video and Digital Imaging 2 unit	1696	Dance	1041
Ceramics 1 unit	419	Dance Life Skills	14
Ceramics 2 unit	213		
Visual Arts and Design subjects total percentage of total preliminary candidature	17,195 19.5%	Performing Arts subjects total percentage of total preliminary candidature	12,392 14%

Stage 5 Visual Arts Subjects Candidature Trend Data 2017-2023



2023 Stage 5 (Year 10)			Total candidature NSW = 98,942		
Visual Arts and Design Subjects	Candidates	Percentage of total candidature	Performing Arts Subjects	Candidates	Percentage of total candidature
Visual Arts 200hr	12810	12.9%	Music 200hr	8521	8.6%
Visual Arts 100hr	4253	4.3%	Music 100hr	2546	2.6%
Visual Arts Life Skills 200hr	614		Music Life Skills 200hr	233	
Visual Arts Life Skills 100hr	405		Music Life Skills 100hr	277	
Visual Design 200hr	1326	1.3%	Drama 200hr	4618	4.7%
Visual Design 100hr	1012	1%	Drama 100hr	1630	1.6%
Visual Design	20		Drama Life Skills	48	

Life Skills 200hr			200hr		
Visual Design Life Skills 100hr	10		Drama Life Skills 100hr	42	
Photographic and Digital Media 200hr	4476	4.2%	Dance 200hr	119	0.12%
Photographic and Digital Media 100hr	3091	3.1%	Dance 100hr	317	0.32%
Photographic and Digital Media Life Skills 200hr	44		Dance Life Skills 200hr	16	
Photographic and Digital Media Life Skills 100hr	30		Dance Life Skills 100hr	8	
Visual Arts and Design subjects total percentage of total Stage 5 - Year 10 candidature	28,091	28.4%	Performing Arts subjects total percentage of total Stage 5 - Year 10 candidature	18,375	18.6%

All statistics from: [https://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/ebos/static/ebos\\_stats.html](https://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/ebos/static/ebos_stats.html)

## State of Visual Arts Teacher Education & Professional Development in NSW

In New South Wales (NSW), individuals interested in becoming Visual Arts teachers can pursue training through various pathways, however, these have diminished in number and quality over time through closures of courses in some tertiary institutions or the erosion of the art education undergraduate streams in favour of a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) followed by a Graduate Diploma or Masters of Teaching. Very few universities in NSW offer undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Education with a specialisation in Visual Arts. These programs typically lead to qualifications that are recognised by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for teaching in primary and secondary schools. Examples of universities offering such programs include the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and the Australian Catholic University (ACU). VADEA understands there is currently no university offering a specialist postgraduate Masters of Education (Visual Arts). VADEA would recommend the Joint Committee look to the University sector for data on changes to Visual Arts teacher education. The ramifications of this dwindling number of tertiary institutions offering visual arts education undergraduate and postgraduate courses are significant, and the profession is starting to experience this now with the teacher shortage crisis.

Until recently, NESA has accredited professional development teacher education programs that meet specific standards for preparing teachers in NSW. Avenues for NESA accreditation were available through the NSW Department of Education (DoE), Association of Independent Schools (AIS) NSW or the Professional Teachers Council (PTC). As a member of the PTC, VADEA has always provided NESA accredited subject specific professional learning that was cross-sector. However, recently the NSW government has removed the requirement of a specific number of NESA accredited training hours in the climate of teacher shortages and push-back over onerous administrative requirements for teachers. This has resulted in there being little impetus from schools to encourage, recommend or accommodate teachers in gaining specialist professional development in subject specific areas. As it becomes increasingly hard to

get release from schools to attend professional development, the number of teachers partaking in annual events such as the VADEA Conference on Visual Arts and Design education is diminishing.

In addition to traditional university programs, alternative pathways to teaching exist, such as the Teach for Australia program, which recruits professionals from non-teaching backgrounds to teach in disadvantaged schools. These programs often provide training and support to help participants transition into teaching careers, however, they usually fall short, like other intensive programs implemented in the face of teacher shortages and are a stop-gap measure only. Teachers in schools via these intensive, short-term training programs face highly stressful introductions to teaching given the inadequate preparation provided to them. This was particularly evident in the NSW TAS teacher retraining programs from the early 2000's.

Historically, there has been an oversupply of Visual Arts teachers who struggled to find positions within schools. However, in the last 5-8 years with population increases, diminishment of young people entering the profession, reduced tertiary institutions offering courses and a devaluing of the teaching profession, there is now a significant shortage of Visual Arts trained teachers within primary and secondary schools. This has led to teachers having to teach out of their subject area or the collapse of Visual Arts classes, particularly in regional areas. Of concern, has been the diminishment of academic integrity and quality of teaching in these circumstances. Within this shifting educational landscape, NSW is currently going through curriculum reform, and this climate has impacted the development of syllabuses, particularly in specialist subjects like the creative and performing arts. This has been evident in the rhetoric from NESA during curriculum reform, particularly in primary education spaces, that has reduced the provision for high quality visual arts curriculum for the benefit of 'out of subject' teachers.

Additionally, Principals are now able to employ early career teachers prior to graduation, once they have gained conditional accreditation through NESA, however, many result in being given classes out of subject area and/or difficult learning support classes with little or no support. This kind of exploitation of new teachers is exacerbating the exodus of young teachers from the profession in the first five years. Societal perceptions of teachers and the significant and challenging workloads also impact on the teacher shortage currently being experienced in NSW. This has been widely documented through the media and through teacher unions and federations.

Without the subject-specific professional development provided by VADEA as part of their core commitment to Visual Arts and Design educators, there would be very little provision for Visual Arts educators to improve their practice in schools and maintain the high standard already evident in NSW schools in HSC results and ARTEXPRESS exhibitions.

With the reduction in courses in Visual Arts education and the difficulty in sustaining post-graduate studies, there are now very few academics doing research in this space. As this kind of research is also costly for universities, it usually gets overlooked for more generic programs that are considered more financially viable. In particular, it has been noted during the current NSW curriculum reform, that the dearth of visual arts education academics undertaking contemporary research in this space, has meant the opportunity to build on contemporary understandings of best practice in the field of visual arts education has become increasingly challenging. The field is understudied and understaffed due to the systemic funding issues within the tertiary sector and competing priorities. VADEA would encourage the Joint Committee to look at ways to support the university sector, to encourage the employment of visual arts and design education academics and to support the ongoing and much needed research into art education.

### **Misaligned and Crowded Curriculum Spaces**

The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, established in 2008, which was followed by the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration in 2019, is a national policy framework that

outlines key goals and priorities for education across Australia. It was developed through collaboration between the Australian Government and state and territory governments, aiming to provide a unified vision for the education system.

One significant aspect of the Melbourne Declaration was its approach to arts education, specifically the Creative Arts Key Learning Area (KLA). The declaration emphasised the importance of fostering creativity, innovation, and cultural understanding through arts education. However, one notable decision was to integrate the various disciplines within the arts (Visual Arts, Music, Drama, Dance, and Media Arts) into a single Key Learning Area. This integration aimed to provide a more holistic approach to arts education, promoting cross-disciplinary learning and collaboration among students. Advocates of this approach argued that it would allow students to explore a broader range of artistic expressions and develop skills that could be applied across different art forms.

Critics, on the other hand, raised concerns about potential drawbacks of conflating diverse art forms into one KLA. They argued that each discipline within the arts has unique characteristics, skills, and knowledge bases that may require specialised teaching approaches. Combining them under a single umbrella could risk diluting the depth and specificity of learning experiences in each discipline. It is the experience of VADEA and our members that this dilution is taking place within schools, not just because new CAPA faculties are finding it hard to staff their courses, they are faced with cuts to period allocations in favour of literacy and numeracy initiatives, new course implementation and a de-valuing of the arts within many school contexts. Even the NSW DoE, now advertises regularly for CAPA teachers where they know an application will not be expert in multiple areas, causing the diminishment of the KLA they are employed but not trained to teach.

Despite these debates, the Declaration's integration of the arts into one KLA has influenced curriculum development and policy frameworks across Australian education systems. It prompted educators and curriculum developers to rethink how arts education could be structured and delivered to best meet the educational goals outlined in the declaration, such as fostering creativity, cultural understanding, and personal expression among students. It has also provided curriculum administrators with ways to reduce and conflate quality education in each KLA as part of more conflated CAPA and 'innovative' curriculum initiatives.

### **Impact of NAPLAN Testing**

The NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) testing, introduced in Australia in 2008, primarily focuses on assessing literacy and numeracy skills of students in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9. While NAPLAN itself does not directly assess arts education, its impact on schools has had several indirect effects on arts education including a curriculum emphasis on the high-stakes nature of NAPLAN testing and the focus on literacy and numeracy outcomes, some schools allocate more instructional time and resources to these areas. Schools feel pressure to perform well in NAPLAN tests, which are publicly reported and can influence perceptions of school quality. This pressure has led to a prioritisation of teaching time towards tested subjects (English and Mathematics) at the expense of non-tested subjects like arts education in many schools and narrowing of the curriculum and the marginalisation of arts education.

The emphasis placed on NAPLAN results in school performance rankings and league tables can influence perceptions of subjects within the school community. Subjects not included in NAPLAN testing may be perceived as less important or less valued, potentially affecting student enrollment and support for arts programs. Schools may prioritise professional development opportunities that focus on improving literacy and numeracy teaching strategies to enhance NAPLAN results, potentially at the expense of professional development in arts education.



Despite these challenges, it's important to note that the impact of NAPLAN on arts education can vary depending on how individual schools and education systems prioritise and support the arts within their overall curriculum framework but it is inconsistent across schools and particularly absent from disadvantaged areas that struggle to get specialised Visual Arts teachers. Many educators and advocates continue to stress the importance of a balanced and comprehensive education that includes arts education alongside core subjects like literacy and numeracy, recognising its essential role in fostering creativity, critical thinking, and holistic student development but there is a lot of lip service. While schools are 'judged' on their NAPLAN results, their priority will not be to improve their arts education programs.

### **Curriculum Reform Advocacy**

Visual Arts education, and curriculum, plays a crucial role in the development of individuals and society for several reasons. It fosters creativity by encouraging individuals to explore, experiment, and express themselves through various artistic mediums. This process nurtures innovative thinking, problem-solving skills, and the ability to generate new ideas. Studying Visual Arts involves analysing and interpreting visual information, artworks, and cultural contexts. This develops critical thinking skills, enabling individuals to evaluate, question, and understand different perspectives and meanings conveyed through visual imagery. A Visual Arts education introduces students to diverse cultures, histories, and artistic traditions from around the world. It promotes cultural awareness and sensitivity by encouraging students to engage with artworks that reflect different social, political, and cultural contexts.

Additionally, studying Visual Arts provides students with opportunities to communicate ideas, emotions, and narratives effectively without relying solely on verbal or written language. This enhances their ability to communicate complex concepts and feelings visually and through non-verbal means. With the exponential growth in creative visual career opportunities, Visual Arts education prepares students for careers in various creative industries such as fine arts, design, media, advertising, and digital arts. It equips them with practical skills, technical knowledge, and a portfolio of work that can be valuable in pursuing professional opportunities. In today's media-saturated world, Visual Arts education helps students become discerning consumers and producers of visual media. They learn to analyse and critique visual messages, understand media techniques, and create their own media content responsibly.

Creating and experiencing art has therapeutic benefits, promoting emotional well-being, stress reduction, and relaxation. It provides a constructive outlet for emotions and can serve as a form of therapy for individuals dealing with psychological challenges. Overall, Visual Arts education enriches lives by nurturing creativity, fostering critical thinking, promoting cultural understanding, and preparing individuals for personal and professional success in a visually oriented world.

Without quality Visual Arts education and curriculum, student abilities and opportunities are diminished. VADEA's role in curriculum advocacy at both national and state levels over many years has been critical. In recent years we have seen significant and overdue curriculum reform on both national and state levels with the latest update for ACARA completed in 2021 and reform in NSW initiated in 2020 and continuing. In summary:

#### **Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) Engagement:**

VADEA has actively participated in consultations with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) since its inception, providing detailed feedback on the Australian Curriculum: The Arts (AC:TA). Central to VADEA's concerns is the lack of clarity and depth in the curriculum's organisation, particularly its foundational structure and epistemological framework for visual arts education. The association continues to advocate for comprehensive discipline-specific knowledge and skills crucial for effective arts education. In response to the 2021 curriculum reform

of the Visual Arts syllabus, VADEA provided [this full report](#) and continues to stand by the expert analysis provided.

The Australian Curriculum: The Arts - Visual Arts syllabus was considered substandard for NSW students as determined by NESA and VADEA. It lacked any explicit acknowledgement that students develop theories of art and understandings of practice, grounded in the logical constraints of beliefs, practical action and conceptual development. The Australian Curriculum: Visual Arts does not allow for the development of students' understanding of the important contribution Visual Arts makes to society and its place within academia. Without a feasible and reflexive account of the discipline, the curriculum denies students aspirational avenues to become successful creative contributors to Australian culture as artists, critics, curators, art historians, conservators, researchers in art, art educators and consumers of art beyond schooling. These important aspects of the field of Visual Arts are ignored in this curriculum.

NESA have repeatedly stated that they will follow an 'adapt and adopt' approach to the Australian Curriculum, across all subjects. VADEA continues to support the robust standards developed in NSW in Visual Arts and the approach by NESA in regards to the Australian Curriculum.

### **New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA) Curriculum Reform:**

VADEA has been actively involved in the NSW Curriculum Reform, offering detailed and considered advice in response to the feedback of our members. VADEA is of the belief that the curriculum reform process should have focused on a backward design approach, starting with Stage 6 syllabus development and ending with K-6. This would have ensured there was an emphasis on fostering a strong continuum of learning, and to establish strong pathways to further study and industry links. However, K-6 Creative Arts and 7-10 Visual Arts were written simultaneously, and this has impacted both their quality and learning progression.

#### ***K-6 Draft Syllabus:***

VADEA has expressed significant reservations regarding the draft NSW Creative Arts K-6 syllabus, citing concerns about its coherence and substantive content for visual arts education. The association has urged the New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA) to enhance the syllabus's integrity and clarity, emphasising the need for a continuum of learning from Stage 3 to Stage 4 that does not yet exist. VADEA's 2024 full response to the final Have Your Say process [can be viewed here](#).

Nearly 90% of our members believe this draft syllabus to be inadequate and unwieldy and given these are trained Visual Arts specialists, it poses the question - How would generalist and out of subject teachers manage? Anecdotally, VADEA believes the inequities in Visual Arts education across sectors to be most pronounced in the K-6 area, with many independent schools having specialist Visual Arts K-6 teachers in specialist spaces providing quality Visual Arts education. In contrast, many NSW public schools rarely have designated Visual Arts content instead using the visual arts to support engagement in units developed for other KLA's. VADEA encourages the Joint Committee to review the implementation of Visual Arts education in the K-6 area across sectors in order to make visible these inequities.

VADEA notes that this week the final, official version of the Creative Arts K-6 syllabus was released and there were improvements across a range of areas including teaching advice and outcomes.

#### ***7-10 Draft Syllabus:***

In contrast, VADEA has endorsed the robustness of the draft NSW Visual Arts 7-10 syllabus, highlighting its alignment with established educational standards and the legacy of visual arts and design educators in NSW. The association welcomes the innovative approach and theoretical

framework underpinning the syllabus design, aimed at fostering student engagement and educational excellence. VADEA's 2024 full response to the final Have Your Say process [can be viewed here](#). VADEA anticipates a similar approach to be applied to the reform of the Visual Design and the Photographic & Digital Media syllabuses in coming months.

Similar inequities exist in the 7-10 space for Visual Arts (as outlined in the K-6 section) when comparing private and state schools but it is also the inequities across state schools where parent bodies particularly are assisting in the funding of Visual Arts programs within their schools because of the value and importance they place on them, particularly in more affluent areas. The Joint Committee might also like to consider how Visual Arts programs are funded in schools.

***Next steps:***

In addition to the remaining 7-10 draft syllabuses, VADEA awaits the release of the first draft 11-12 syllabus and is already drafting a status report for NESA based on the expectations of our membership. Looking ahead, VADEA remains committed to collaborating with NESA and other stakeholders to ensure the development of a cohesive and rigorous visual arts curriculum across all educational stages in NSW. The association advocates for the inclusion of expert educators in syllabus development processes to maintain high standards and relevance in arts education. VADEA's ongoing efforts in curriculum reform underscore its dedication to advancing visual arts and design education in NSW. The association continues to play a pivotal role in shaping the educational landscape, advocating for inclusive and comprehensive arts education that meets the needs of students and educators alike.

## **Pathways to Creative Industries**

The NSW Stage 5 Visual Arts courses have strong links to industry. This is particularly evident in Photographic and Digital Media (PDM) and Visual Design but not limited to them, as all Visual Arts courses provide students with practical skills and knowledge that have strong connections to a range of growing creative industries. The ability for each teacher to do so varies according to context.

Photographic and Digital Media (PDM) provisions students to learn to use digital cameras, editing software (like Adobe Photoshop, Blender, Premiere Pro), and various digital tools, which are essential skills in fields such as photography, film, graphic design, and digital marketing. Many teaching programs include training in industry-standard software and technologies with the mastery of tools like Adobe Creative Suite directly applicable to careers in photography, film production, web design, and advertising. Students are encouraged to create a body of work that can serve as a portfolio for tertiary education applications or job interviews, showcasing their practical skills and creativity to potential employers or educators.

Additionally, class work involves projects that simulate real-world tasks, such as photo shoots, editing projects, and multimedia presentations. This approach helps students understand the workflow and standards expected in professional environments. Excursions, guest speakers, and partnerships with local businesses or professionals provide insights into the industry. Students may visit studios, attend workshops, or participate in exhibitions, gaining firsthand experience of professional practices.

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Visual Design emphasises design thinking and creative problem-solving, which are crucial skills in various industries, including product design, fashion design, and interior design. Students undertake practical projects that mirror industry processes, such as creating prototypes, design plans, and marketing materials. This hands-on experience is invaluable for understanding the demands and expectations of design careers.

Training in software like Adobe Illustrator, InDesign, and CAD programs also ensures that students are proficient in the tools commonly used in design fields and course work often focuses on real-world applications, such as fashion & costume design, set design, designing logos, packaging, or advertising campaigns. This contextual learning helps students see the relevance of their skills and understand how to apply them in a professional setting.

In many of the Stage 5 teaching programs, group projects and collaborative tasks mimic industry environments where teamwork is essential. Networking opportunities through school-organised events or industry partnerships allow students to connect with professionals and gain insights into potential career paths.

Many schools look for opportunities to exhibit student work in school exhibitions, local galleries, external competitions or online platforms which help students gain exposure and build a professional presence. This can be a stepping stone to further opportunities, such as internships or freelance work.

Teachers often participate in professional development to stay current with industry trends and technologies, which they then incorporate into their teaching. Given the online nature of this type of training and the limited access to release for professional development, teachers remain current by accessing courses in their own time.

The value of this suite of courses cannot be underestimated and VADEA has always advocated for the continued inclusion and will continue to do so. This is particularly important given the limited industry connections that exist between schools and creative industries with the exception of art gallery and museum offerings.

Industry growth and change has been significant over the last 20-30 years for creative industries. Growth in jobs in animation, graphic design and TV/movie content has been exponential in recent years along with roles within galleries, museums and community organisations. While there are some outreach programs being directed at some schools, this is very ad-hoc and reliant on already extended teachers making more effort to support these connections for their students. Traditional work experience programs have also diminished in schools over recent years for a range of reasons. While Visual Arts education is not about producing more artists, this is the paradigm that has remained fixed in the minds of many administrators and parents.

Understandably, parents want careers that will provide their child with a job that allows security for the future. Students themselves want this too but do they really know what creative industry jobs are out there now? Without a more accurate picture of the creative industries landscape being communicated broadly by government and within schools via well-advised careers advisors, about the importance and viability of these roles, why would the broader community see it as a potential career area to sustain their children. Cultural paradigm shifts are needed if parents and students are to see the studying of the Visual Arts as a viable pathway to a future.

## **Conclusion**

The Visual Arts are not merely decorative; they are a vital cornerstone of human expression and cultural identity. As evidenced by numerous studies and scholarly works, art plays a pivotal role in shaping our cultural narrative, fostering social cohesion, and challenging societal norms. It serves as a powerful medium for communication across diverse communities, promoting empathy and understanding. By investing in a

Visual Arts education, we affirm our society's commitment to preserving our cultural heritage, nurturing creativity, and advancing our society towards a more cohesive and innovative future.

In a climate of diminishing investment in Visual Arts education, this inquiry is essential to highlight emerging issues within Visual Arts education in the curriculum administrative arena and the school-based, societal paradigms that devalue and value arts education while creating an inequitable access to the transformative potential of Visual Arts in building a vibrant and progressive society for generations to come.