

All enquiries

Telephone: (08) 6213 2211
Email: kimberley.french@ccyp.wa.gov.au
Our reference: 15/4058
Your reference: 15/252

Mr Duncan Ord
Director General
Department of Culture and the Arts
Gordon Stephenson House
PO Box 8349
PERTH BUSINESS CENTRE WA 6849

Dear Mr Ord

Submission to the Arts Leadership Group on the *Towards a Strategic Directions Framework 2015-2030 Discussion Paper*

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment in regard to the above discussion paper.

Under the *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006 (WA) (the Act)* my statutory functions include advocating for children and young people, and monitoring and reviewing written laws, draft laws, policies, practices and services affecting the wellbeing of children and young people in Western Australia. I must give priority to, and have special regard to, the interests and needs of Aboriginal children and young people and those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged for any reason. I am also required to have regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Act also states that 'in performing a function under this Act the Commissioner or any other person must regard the best interests of children and young people as the paramount consideration'. It is with this in mind that I make the comments below.

In providing comments on the discussion paper I have taken into consideration the diversity of activities that fall under culture and the arts, from visual and performance art to writing, music, craft and multimedia.

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Australia is a signatory, recognises the right of children and young people to engage and participate fully in cultural life and the arts. It also recognises that this right should

be respected and promoted, and appropriate and equal opportunities afforded to all children and young people to engage in these activities¹.

I am broadly supportive of the discussion paper and am pleased that it acknowledges children and young people as consumers of arts and culture. I am also pleased that increasing community access and participation is a key theme. The challenges raised in this discussion point, and others, are equally relevant to children and young people.

Culture and the arts is a mechanism for children and young people to explore and enjoy life. It provides opportunities for building social skills, relationships, links with local communities and networks with a diverse range of people.

Research has also shown links to improved wellbeing and development such as positive self-perception, self-belief, self-confidence, self-awareness, communication and social skills.² Participating in a variety of activities provides opportunities to gain leadership experience, set goals and develop initiative and a sense of identity.³

The discussion paper acknowledges that engagement in culture and the arts must start from a young age, particularly if this engagement is to continue into adulthood. Indeed, the Australia Council for the Arts suggests that:

‘...being taken to arts events as a child influences later arts engagement as an adult. People who were taken to arts events as children are more likely to create or attend arts. Those never taken to the arts are less likely to create or attend arts...the picture is similar for attendance, with childhood attendance being related to higher attendance in 2013. Being taken to the arts as a child by your parents seems to embed the arts in people’s lives in a way that follows us through to adulthood.’⁴

The discussion paper highlights the importance of WA being a leader in culture and arts education; however the focus of this theme is the high school and tertiary education sector. To foster lifelong engagement, children must be supported to access culture and the arts from early childhood, both as current and future consumers and/or participants.

In 2011, the former Commissioner, Michelle Scott, hosted Paul Collard, UK expert on creativity and education, as the Commission’s first Thinker in Residence. The aim of this residency was to explore creativity, culture and education as a mechanism for engaging children and young people and improving wellbeing.

¹ United Nations 1989, *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*, Geneva: United Nations.

² The Smith Family 2013, *Sport, culture and the internet: Are Australian children participating?*, The Smith Family.

³ Ibid

⁴ Australia Council for the Arts 2014, *The Arts are Important in the Lives of Australian Children and Young People*, May 2014, Australian Government, Canberra.

The Thinker in Residence 2011 report concluded that there were limited opportunities to become involved in cultural activities in schools and that this was also infrequent outside of schools⁵. Whilst I am supportive of the partnership programs between the Department of Culture and the Arts and the Department of Education, access to cultural and arts activities for children and young people must take into consideration the diversity of children and young people across the state (location, children and young people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse children and young people, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and Aboriginal children and young people). It must also consider the availability of opportunities.

My report *The State of Western Australia's Children and Young People – Edition Two* indicated that some groups of children and young people had no or very limited access to cultural activities:

- one-half of children who lived in one-parent families where the parent was not employed did not participate in any cultural activity or sport;
- 60 per cent of children born in a non-English speaking country did not participate in any organised cultural activity or sport; and
- 30 per cent of children living in the most disadvantaged communities in WA did not participate in either sport or cultural activities, compared to 12.4 percent living in the most advantaged communities.⁶

The reasons for this can include significant costs often associated with participation; access to adequate and well-maintained facilities; access to transport to attend activities⁷; or simply a lack of local opportunities or opportunities that are appropriate and meet the needs of children and young people. These issues are amplified for children and young people living with disability; those for whom English is not their first language; and those living in rural and remote areas.

During a regional consultation in Kalgoorlie, children and young people told me that more activities that were relevant to them, such as low cost music festivals and community events such as Youth Fest⁸, would be beneficial, particularly for those who were not interested in participating in sports⁹.

⁵Collard P 2011, *Report of the 2011 Thinker in Residence: Unlocking Creativity*, February 2012 Commissioner for Children and Young People, Perth.

⁶ Commissioner for Children and Young People 2014, *The State of Western Australia's Children and Young People – Edition Two*, July 2014, Perth.

⁷ The Smith Family 2013, *Sport, culture and the internet: Are Australian children participating?*, The Smith Family.

⁸ Youth Fest is a National Youth Week event hosted by Kalgoorlie-Boulder Youth Council featuring live entertainment, workshops, rock-climbing and food.

⁹ Commissioner for Children and Young People 2014, *Regional Visit Report – Kalgoorlie*. May 2014, Perth.

I hope the theme of arts and culture education can be further expanded to include more focus on younger children's access to and engagement with arts and culture, taking into consideration the barriers to participation for children and young people.

I am also pleased that Aboriginal art and culture is a key theme in the discussion paper. Mr Collard's Thinker in Residence 2011 report noted that Aboriginal culture in WA is vibrant and has the potential to contribute to the identity of WA. He also highlighted the increased interest of many young people in learning an Aboriginal language and Aboriginal culture as a positive development to be capitalised on¹⁰. To ensure the momentum of this interest is built upon, Aboriginal children and young people must be appropriately supported to learn about their language and culture and encouraged to share it with others through arts and cultural pursuits.

I note the Department of Culture and the Arts previous action plan for young people and the arts. I hope that an action plan which complements the proposed Strategic Directions Framework, and is specific to children and young people, can be developed. Such an action plan should focus on supporting children and young people to access arts and culture from early childhood; address potential barriers to access for disadvantaged communities; and place an emphasis on encouraging Aboriginal children and young people to learn about, be involved in and share their language and culture with others.

An action plan for children and young people in Western Australia should be developed with input from children and young people from a range of backgrounds, including those currently involved in culture and the arts and those who are not engaged in such activities.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to comment on this discussion paper. Should you wish to discuss any of the matters raised, or you require further information, please contact Kimberley French, Senior Policy Officer, on (08) 6213 2211 or kimberley.french@ccyp.wa.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

JENNI PERKINS

A/Commissioner for Children and Young People WA

May 2015

¹⁰ Collard, P 2011 *Report of the 2011 Thinker in Residence: Unlocking Creativity*, February 2012 Commissioner for Children and Young People, Perth.