

Fellow of Senate  
University of Sydney

6th July 2016

Dear Senator

**Re: Sydney College of the Arts**

I am writing on behalf of the Australian visual arts sector to express our very great concern over the proposed 'merger' between Sydney College of the Arts (SCA) and University of New South Wales Art and Design (UNSW A&D). We wish to convey to you the adamant opposition of the arts community to the proposal for the University of Sydney to close Sydney College of the Arts.

As you are probably aware, the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) is the national peak industry body representing and advancing the professional interests of the Australian visual and media arts, craft and design sector. It provides advocacy, leadership, and services for this sector. Ensuring good educational opportunities for visual artists is one of NAVA's central concerns to enable artists to be well prepared to embark on and progress in their professional careers. University art schools are key to reaching this objective.

We believe the university is heralding the merger as, "an exciting step towards the creation of a national centre of artistic excellence that will put NSW at the forefront of art and design education and research in Australia, building on the best qualities of both centres." However, the arts sector believes that in reality, this is a cost saving exercise with the University of Sydney reneging on its responsibility to offer a diversity of educational options to students to enable them to fulfil their educational and career ambitions. We are concerned that the university is simply treating this as a business decision, has little commitment to the cultural environment created for the university itself and lacks an understanding of what this will do to its reputation in the larger world.

Under the Dawkins reforms, in agreeing to SCA becoming an academic college of the university in 1990 with status equivalent to a faculty, the University of Sydney was broadening its scope and gaining the economies of scale intended by the Dawkins reforms. I understand these reforms were aimed at enhancing the quality, diversity and equity of access to education and improving the international competitiveness of Australia's universities. The University of Sydney benefitted from this move and earned a reputation for cultural sophistication and investment in experimentation and innovation. SCA has enjoyed a strong reputation amongst its peers in providing a specialist and multi-disciplinary approach to research-based visual arts education that reflects the diversity of professional art practice.

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Patrons: Pat Corrigan AM, Mrs Janet Homes à Court AC, Professor David Throsby AO. ACN 003 229 285 / ABN 16 003 229 285

SCA has occupied the historic Kirkbride complex at Callan Park, for two decades and has extensive art-making facilities at the site, including specialist kilns and glassworks. Around 550 students use the buildings and resources. It has a very different model and set of objective to those of UNSW A&D and this diversity is seen as highly desirable in offering a breadth of choice to those wishing to undertake this area of study.

The closure of SCA would be likely to have a deleterious impact on both the number and quality of artists in Australia, and indeed could have ramifications for future federal investment to both the art sector and visual arts in higher education. As a member of the National Advocates for Arts Education, NAVA has lobbied for many years for all five art forms be mandatory in the national school curriculum. The success of this campaign should see more school leavers pursuing art at a tertiary level. To encourage this, the tertiary education options need to be strengthened and supported. Universities need to provide a well-rounded set of opportunities so that prospective students can make their own choice of study area.

Vice-chancellors in universities in other states acknowledge the public benefit of the deep engagement that the arts can bring to the university and through that, to the contextual community from which it draws students and financial and social support. In Melbourne with a smaller population, the three university art and design schools continue to expand their presence, offering excellent but diverse education and doing innovative and engaged research. Perth has at least three strong institutions and Queensland has at least two city and some regional campuses across the state. Conversely, plans for Sydney seem to be the downgrading of art education to eventually offer only one option by including the National Art School in the forward plan. We believe that the University of Sydney's reputation will suffer significant damage if this proposal proceeds.

The statistics offer a compelling picture of why the relinquishing of the art school within any university would be misguided and short-sighted. Informed predictions about the jobs of the future reveal that automation and artificial intelligence are changing the skills needs of the future. In June 2015 the report by the the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) predicted that technology could make almost 40 per cent of Australian jobs, including highly skilled roles, redundant in 10 to 15 years. It singled out jobs that involved "low levels of social interaction, low levels of creativity, or low levels of mobility and dexterity" as most likely to be replaced by automation. It indicated that the trend was towards highly skilled, agile, self-employed people who were capable in the areas of "architecting, designing and analysing", being those who would form a substantial proportion of the workforce of the future. These are the very skills in which art school graduates are pre-eminent. Already we know that cultural industries generated over \$50 billion in economic activity<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> ABS 2014, Australian National Accounts: Cultural and Creative Activity Satellite Accounts, Experimental, 2008–09 (cat. no. 5271.0), 10 February

The arts employs more people than agriculture, mining and construction and arts employment has been growing by around 2.6 percent annually since 1996, which is faster than the growth in employment overall of 1.9 percent<sup>2</sup>. Why is this trend not being recognised and capitalised on by the University of Sydney?

Because of our great concern that the proposed merger would have very deleterious consequences for art education in Australia, we urge you to reverse this decision.

We would be keen to meet with you to discuss the scope and implications of this proposal. I will contact you shortly to try to arrange a meeting.

Your sincerely



Tamara Winikoff OAM,  
Executive Director  
National Association for the Visual Arts

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<sup>2</sup> [Cunningham and Higgs, 'What the 2011 Census tells us about Arts Employment'](#)