

20<sup>th</sup> November 2023

The Hon. Tony Burke MP  
Minister for the Arts  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

Thank you for your letter dated 15 September 2023, outlining your expectations for the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS) for 2023-24.

I note your request for particular areas of strategic focus and priority for the School this year, being:

- adhere to and promote the five key pillars of *Revive* - First Nations First, A Place for Every Story, Centrality of the Artist, Strong Cultural Infrastructure, and Engaging the Audience - as guiding principles of all work undertaken by the School;
- continue to embed First Nations values within the School to build capacity and knowledge of staff, graduates and industry;
- work collaboratively with Federal and state entities to address capacity gaps in the screen and broadcasting sectors;
- support the development of knowledge and resources to embrace emerging technology;
- engage with the Australian games development industry on training opportunities to support it to take advantage of the Government's new 30 per cent Digital Games Tax Offset, which will increase its market share in a rapidly expanding global sector and grow highly skilled transferable jobs;
- continue to explore opportunities to grow private sector support and increase own-source revenue; and
- continue to undertake data collection and research to strengthen understanding of the challenges and opportunities for the sector.

You will find in this letter AFTRS' Statement of Intent for 2023-24 to address your expectations noted above.

## STATEMENT OF INTENT 2023-2024

### The role of AFTRS

As the national screen and broadcast School, AFTRS provides world-leading education, training, and research to Australians, so that Australian culture and stories thrive both locally and around the world. The School's founding in 1973, by a bipartisan Act of Parliament, recognised the critical role of formal education and training in creating a thriving Australian industry of highly skilled practitioners.

### AFTRS Strategy: *Creating the Future*

As your Statement of Expectations outlines, this is an exciting time of change and growth for the screen and audio sectors and Australian culture.

AFTRS' strategy, *Creating the Future*, maps the objectives and activities the School must prioritise so our ongoing partnership with industry provides the same quality AFTRS education to our graduates, in a world where the parameters are continually shifting and extending: where the volume of talent required is growing; as is the creative breadth of the screen and audio industries; and resourcing remains a challenge. As the School reaches the midpoint of this strategy, our focus on the three pillars of national reach, excellence, and sustainability is allowing AFTRS to remain a forward-thinking institution that can respond to changing circumstances while maintaining its commitment to excellence.

### National Cultural Policy – *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place*

Over this period, AFTRS will continue its proud commitment to and support of *Revive*. *Creating the Future* is well-positioned to support the five pillars of the national cultural policy. We share *Revive's* commitment to First Nations first and the importance of accessibility for creative talent across Australia, so there is indeed a place for every story, and a story for every place. We welcome the policy's emphasis on developing a resilient, thriving cultural life for Australia — through robust cultural infrastructure and artists recognised as vital workers creating art, performances, music, films and stories that resonate through all parts of Australian creative life.

### NATIONAL REACH: First Nations First

Supporting *Revive's* commitment to **First Nations First** and recognising the critical significance of First Nations storytelling and culture to Australian society, AFTRS will continue to centre First Nations values and knowledges at the heart of School activity through the implementation of its First Nations Strategic Plan. This year, the School embarks on its systems and curriculum audit in partnership with ABSTARR, using First Nations values as a driver for change.

The School has convened a Council of Elders, known as Dhillā, with the participation of First Nations community members who hold esteemed positions within their respective communities. These individuals possess significant expertise and experience in First Nations cultural heritage, particularly in the domains of education, training, and creative media practice. As AFTRS progresses the implementation of its First Nations Strategic Plan, the Council of Elders will offer guidance on cultural and economic development, specifically in relation to supporting AFTRS' First Nations graduates, students, and community media makers. The Council of Elders aims to evaluate culturally safe pathways that enable individuals to enter and remain in the screen and audio industries.

AFTRS' commitment to access is critical to our National Reach focus and our support of *Revive* so storytellers across the country have the capacity and skills to tell their story, wherever they live in Australia. At AFTRS, there really is **a place for every story**. Our Flexible Delivery Framework ensures courses and training are flexible and available to learners across Australia.

A key part of this is micro-credentialing and developing policies and procedures for recognition of prior learning. AFTRS' newly launched partnership with TAFE NSW, rooted in a shared commitment to nurture talent and providing multiple pathways into the screen industries, allows eligible graduates of the TAFE NSW Diploma of Screen and Media to apply for entry directly into Year 2 of the AFTRS Bachelor of Arts: Screen Production program. The BA was developed in response to the needs of employers across the sector, training graduates who are multi-faceted, adaptable, job-ready, and skilled to work across a variety of entry-level roles and platforms. Taking up positions such as camera trainee, grip, or assistant editor, more than 85% of AFTRS' Bachelor of Arts Screen: Production graduates are working in the industry within six months of course completion.

### **EXCELLENCE: Centrality of the artist, engaging the audience & strong cultural infrastructure**

Over the last 50 years, the School has honed a unique hands-on approach to learning that balances the deep pursuit of creative excellence with the needs of industry partners in industry-simulated environments supported by world-leading practitioners and educators. The success of this model has created a deep bench of AFTRS alumni talent that protects the **centrality of the artist** and drives the quality of Australian IP across film, radio, and TV and the technical skill of Australian crews.

The 2021/22 ABS *Film Television and Digital Games Survey* found that in FY 2021/22, the screen industry employed 55,000 people and contributed more than \$6 billion to the Australian economy, the largest amount of any creative industry. AFTRS is a significant driver of this growth: our industries' ongoing global success requires world-leading talent that can work across film, television, radio and games, talent that AFTRS is uniquely placed to train.

However, industry growth is outpacing the rate at which professionals can be trained or upskilled to meet this need, creating critical skills gaps. These skills shortages are across industry, in both legacy roles and in fast-developing areas such as digital and visual effects, virtual production and games design, and these skills gaps are predicted to grow with the increased need for talent across multiple platforms, including the new Digital Games Tax Offset. AFTRS' has prioritised training to upskill new talent quickly in these emerging areas of need —to a level that meets global standards of craft and artistry — and build the sector's capacity. This year, AFTRS is planning to undertake a micro-credit pilot in Production Accounting, which has been identified by state and territory screen agencies as a critical skills gap. The School has also commissioned a VFX gap analysis and strategy from leading VFX Scholar Associate Professor John McGhee to determine where, how and when AFTRS can add the most value in training the VFX Sector.

The School is committed to ensuring our graduates are equipped with the skills and understanding to support *Revive's* focus on **engaging the audience** and making sure our stories resonate at home and abroad.



AFTRS also remains committed to providing support across the spectrum of institutions that sustain storytelling in the arts, screen and broadcast sectors, by contributing to **strong cultural infrastructure**. The School looks forward to working with both federal and, state and territory screen partners to continue the work of the Ausfilm convened Workforce Capacity Working Group. AFTRS is also a founding member of the Screen Leaders group, with Screen Australia, Ausfilm, NIDA and the ACTF, working collaboratively to promote excellence in national screen storytelling and grow a highly-skilled, future-proofed workforce that can strengthen our sector's impact at home and on the global stage. The School also meets regularly with the seven other arts training organisations that make up Arts8, to ensure we address common challenges in a coordinated manner, and to organise annual skills sharing workshops. AFTRS also has specific partnerships with Arts8 members ANAM and NIDA to jointly run student workshops, networking events and resource sharing.

Critical to building sustained sector capacity is attracting talent and providing clear career pathways for talent into and through the industry. AFTRS will continue its work on initiatives that identify talent with transferable skills from other industries. Over this year, AFTRS will grow its *Screen Warriors* program, a highly successful partnership with the Veterans Film Festival, re-deploying Veterans' transferable skills to roles within the sector. A successfully completed NSW pilot program will now be expanded across other States and Territories.

Growing the School's research capacity remains an important focus for the year. With last year concentrated on building a robust Research Policy Framework, this year AFTRS is delivering industry partnered projects targeted on particular areas of industry need. Our first project is a partnership with Deakin University that will draw on data we collected in 2020 to create a report on Career Pathways in the Screen Sector.

This year, the School will scope a reimaged Digital Futures Lab. Building on our learning from our first 'tech-in-residence' — the virtual production studio — and how we best meet industry needs within the limited resources we have, this will be a tech-focused, industry-partnered space that will provide the sector and talent with learning opportunities in emerging areas of technology.

The School will also continue to deliver its online research conference, the Digital Futures Summit, to support the critical reflexivity of the industry and to deepen understanding and innovation in emerging areas of creativity, business and craft. This year's summit will bring together leaders from education, industry and government to grapple with the topical, exciting, challenging, and ever-changing area of AI.

## **SUSTAINABILITY**

AFTRS has a unique capacity to support industry and the government through its strategy. While we continue to leverage our available resources and industry connections to great effect, the increasingly challenging operational environment — with the increased training needs of industry, rising costs and funding restraints such as the efficiency dividend — is limiting our capacity to support the industry and deliver on our remit as we should. The School very much welcomes the commitment of *Revive* to a Government-led sustainability review of the Arts8 organisations as a vital opportunity to outline the material resourcing challenges experienced by the School and to put forward the School's needs if it is to grow proportionally to meet its expanding remit, and support a diverse and thriving industry.



The School will continue to actively grow its own revenue streams, both with industry partners and private sector support. AFTRS is focused on continuing this growth in 2024 with a new Revenue Plan.

An area of priority this year is ensuring the School's programs and systems continue to be flexible, adaptable, and as scalable as possible. This year, for example, the School is focusing on an ambitious upgrade of its Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to optimise student recruitment, marketing, fundraising, and stakeholder management. This is crucial to allow AFTRS to expand its operations and serve more communities throughout more regions, states, and territories, all within the limits of its human and material resources.

Environmental Sustainability is another dimension of AFTRS' commitment to sustainability. AFTRS will begin reporting on APS Net Zero 2030 in the second half of 2023. AFTRS is dedicated to achieving the goals of APS Net Zero 2030, facilitated by a revised Environmental Action Plan that is paving the way for a more comprehensive Environmental Sustainability Strategic Plan (ESSP) to ensure that AFTRS' goals, activities, and measures respond to the responsibilities, requirements, and best practices of this new landscape. AFTRS is in discussions with Western Sydney University (WSU), to support the design and implementation of our ESSP. WSU is ranked world No 1 impact rankings for its commitment to the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

## CONCLUSION

Australian society is in a time of tremendous change. As this new world asks us to reimagine and reforge our connections to each other and our country, culture and stories will be indispensable. AFTRS applauds the vision of *Revive* to support the arts, and organisations like AFTRS who have the important task of training the bold, talented dreamers who will tell these new stories.

Guided by *Revive* and our corporate strategy, *Creating the Future*, the School looks forward to delivering on its mission to train and support creative Australian talent over another 50 years so Australian stories and culture thrive.

We welcome further engagement with the Office for the Arts regarding the opportunities within the sector, and we look forward to working to meet the objectives for 2023-24.

Yours sincerely,



Debra Richards

Council Chair

Australian Film Television & Radio School

P.S. It has been a privilege!!

