

19 February 2025

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

Dear Minister,

Thank you for your letter dated 11 October 2024, outlining your expectations for the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS) for 2024-25. I note your request for AFTRS to continue to deliver through our core work, industry-relevant training, talent development, outreach, and applied innovation research and the areas of strategic focus and priority for the School this year, being:

- Adhere to and promote Australia's cultural policy *Revive*;
- Continue to embed First Nations values to build capacity and knowledge of staff, graduates and industry;
- Work with federal and state entities to address capacity gaps in the sector;
- Support development of knowledge and resources to embrace emerging technology;
- Engage with the Australian games development industry on training opportunities to benefit from the Government's support, including the Digital Games Tax Offset, which is increasing Australia's market share in a rapidly expanding global sector and growing highly skilled transferable jobs;
- Continue to explore opportunities to grow private sector support and increase own-source revenue;
- Continue to undertake data collection and research to strengthen understanding of the challenges and opportunities for the sector;
- Continue to attract students outside of NSW and advance the School's national reach to grow and develop the sector at a national level; and
- Engage with industry on training opportunities to support the Government's workforce capacity requirements under the Location Offset and other initiatives.

You will find attached AFTRS' Statement of Intent 2024-25 to address your expectations noted above.

Yours faithfully,



RACHEL PERKINS
Chair



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AFTRS 2024–25 STATEMENT OF INTENT

The role of AFTRS

As the national screen and audio 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 corporate strategy: *Creating the Future*

The screen and audio industries, as well as Australian culture, are undergoing exciting transformation. In an ever-changing world, where the amount of talent needed is growing and the creative breadth of the screen and audio industries is expanding, AFTRS's strategy, *Creating the Future*, lays out the goals and activities the School must prioritise so we can continue to meet our remit. This strategy enables the School to remain forward focussed, adapt to new situations and maintain its commitment to world leading creative learning through its three pillars of national reach, excellence, and sustainability.

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

During this period, AFTRS looks forward to proudly maintaining its commitment to, and support of, *Revive*. AFTRS' corporate strategy *Creating the Future* is strategically positioned to champion each of *Revive's* five pillars. *Revive's* dedication to First Nations first and the significance of accessibility for creative talent throughout Australia are shared by us to ensure that there is, indeed, a story for every place and a place for every story. We fully support the policy's emphasis on the growth of a resilient, flourishing cultural life in Australia and the role national arts training organisations play in building strong cultural infrastructure. AFTRS recognises artists as essential workers who create art, performances, music, films, and stories that resonate throughout all aspects of Australian creative life and we are committed to working with industry to ensure it is supported with skilled creative creators who can engage with audiences within Australia and around the world.

NATIONAL REACH: First Nations first / a place for every story

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 ongoing implementation of its First Nations Strategic Plan and the launch of its Belonging & Inclusion Strategic Plan.



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With the support of the Government's grant received in 2024 of \$530,000 over two years, AFTRS will undertake two programs of work. The School will continue its working designing and delivering an On Country Pathways Program (previously referred to as the First Nations Bridging Program), supported through the National Cultural Policy, to bolster and develop training and career pathways for First Nations creative talent from remote and regional communities into the sector; it will also develop and undertake an audit of First Nations employment and training within the screen sector to provide data on where the gaps in First Nations' engagement lie.

This year, the School opened its First Nations Common Room, a suite of spaces designed to encourage strong networks between our Elder-in-Residence, First Nations students, staff, alumni and their collaborators and allies. Students are also able to work with the School's current Artist-in-Residence, Wotjobaluk and Ngarrindjeri practitioner Tracey Rigney, part of a dialogue around community-led, place-based practice, inspiring students and staff to deepen their understanding of First Nations knowledge systems, media technologies and ways of knowing.

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** and our Flexible Delivery Framework ensures courses and training are flexible, multi-modal and can be engaged with either in-person or remotely and therefore available to learners across Australia.

A key part of this is ensuring multiple entry points for students of all backgrounds. Across all four award courses, a quarter of offers made for academic year 2025 were made to students based on a VET qualification. We plan to expand beyond our successful partnership with TAFE NSW, which allows eligible graduates of the *Diploma of Screen and Media* to apply for entry directly into Year 2 of the AFTRS *Bachelor of Arts Screen: Production* (BA). 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, and more than 85% of AFTRS' BA graduates are working in the industry within six months of course completion.

Traineeships and internships remain a critical pathway for our students into industry and through a growing number of partnerships with production companies, broadcasters and streamers. AFTRS will offer over 40 internships and placements this year, boosting our graduates' employability. By offering remote learning and placements at local radio stations, our *Graduate Diploma in Radio and Podcasting* (GDRP) is allowing regional and remote students access to those key industry experiences and addressing the growing need for regional producers and local content makers outside the capital cities.



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The implementation of a flexible learning framework will accelerate this year as we embark on a review of the School's postgraduate screen award courses. The new courses will build on existing flexible delivery options in our GDRP and our *Master of Arts Screen: Business* and offer students the ability to participate wherever they live in Australia and to keep working and participating in their industry or community.

We are also continuing to focus on how we offer full access to remote students to AFTRS extensive production facilities at the Entertainment Quarter. This will require a small specialist team to research and scope this large, technically complex project which also needs strong cyber security protocols and systems.

Meeting our commitment to national reach, AFTRS will continue to grow its network of national training partnerships, delivering in-person short courses with Edith Cowan University in Perth, RMIT in Melbourne, Mercury CX in Adelaide and building similar training relationships in other states and territories. Increasing its regional training footprint, AFTRS will build on collaborations with The Smith Family's SmArts program and Screenworks to deliver On-Set Onboarding and other introductory training in regional centres nationally, from Launceston to Lismore.

For students who need to relocate to Sydney for their studies, AFTRS is investing in its capacity and capability to increase the number and value of scholarships it offers, prioritising support for living expenses – which in Sydney are among the highest in the world. To support First Nations pathways into the School, Council and Executive have made providing subsidised accommodation to First Nations students a priority focus this year.

Another priority focus is accessibility for members of the Disabled and d/Deaf Communities, who form an integral part of our country's stories and a critical part of our industry's future. This year AFTRS begins implementing its Disability Action Plan 2024-2027 which affirms the School's commitment to accessibility, belonging and inclusion, with the intention of modelling best practice and innovation to industry. All AFTRS productions address and provide options for accessibility in the feasibility and planning stages of each production.

Through the introduction of adjustment factors at application stage, scholarship support and targeted initiatives to attract and train individuals who are under-represented in the screen and audio industries, AFTRS is on track to graduate some of the most diverse cohorts in its history over the next three years.



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EXCELLENCE: Centrality of the artist / engaging the audience

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 demands of the sector, 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, podcasting and TV, as well as the technical skill of Australian crews. 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.

The screen and audio industries have experienced significant growth over the last five years. \$2.34 billion was spent on drama alone in Australia in FY 2022-23, 31% above the 5-year average. There are multiple opportunities here for the creative economy, for workforce development and for the enrichment of Australian culture. However, critical skills gaps still hamper industry growth. AFTRS will focus on the continued implementation of its Industry Skills Framework to identify and monitor these skills gaps and prioritise the development and national delivery of new training courses for roles which experience shortages, including production accountants, assistant directors and location managers.

The training requirements under the new Location Offset incentive present strong opportunities to upskill local crew. Leveraging its expertise in designing learning experiences that combine formal training, mentorship, placements and industry community engagement with industry-practising trainers, state-of-the-art campus and partnership management experience, AFTRS is liaising with studios to provide training programs for both early- and mid-career professionals. For example, AFTRS is partnering with The Walt Disney Studio to recruit for a program of traineeships placing graduates on a new 20th Century Fox production shooting in Sydney.

Growing the School's research capacity remains a priority for the year and AFTRS' research focus will be structured around its artist-in-residence program and online conference, the Digital Futures Summit (DFS), to support the critical reflexivity of the industry and to deepen understanding and innovation in emerging areas of creativity, business and craft. An understanding of the centrality of the artist is key to AFTRS' commitment to supporting this sector-wide discussion and the DFS is a valued forum connecting Australian and international screen and broadcast industry leaders with educators and Government in discussions on technological changes. The recent e-book summarising learnings from our AI-focused Digital Futures Summit was shared with all members of CILECT, the international association of film and television schools. AI's opportunities and risks for education and the creative industries are central in our discussions on student applications and assignments, curriculum design, creative practise and the future of the screen and audio workforces. Our Head of



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Curriculum was invited to present AFTRS approach to AI in a panel entitled 'Adapting to Generative AI' at last year's TEQSA conference.

While the School currently lacks the staff expertise and resourcing to make interactive games a dedicated award course, the School will continue to progress its VFX Strategy through its short course program and embedding principles of interactivity into its current award course offering. BA screenwriting students develop and test game prototypes as part of their coursework and often submit a game script for assessment, while our *Master of Arts Screen* (MA) students review case studies of games, interactive formats and VR/AR works in their Research & Development subject. AFTRS will also continue to develop and offer training in the LED Volume for industry and for BA and MA students as part of production subjects. The MA students use the LED Volume in their major productions and further LED Volume activities are currently in planning for the BA in 2025.

AFTRS is working with both industry and Government to identify requirements and build workforce capacity, including furthering the work of the Workforce Capacity Working Group and participating in Creative Australia's Arts Scoping Study for Services and Creative Skills Australia (SaCSA). AFTRS is also a 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 can strengthen our sector's impact at home and on the global stage. This year, the School will propose a Skills Action Plan updating and building on Ausfilm's Workforce Development Framework research carried out in 2022. This Skills Action Plan would map the screen training ecosystem and draw a roadmap to improving training outcomes and meeting skills gaps in the sector.

AFTRS meets regularly with state and territory screen agencies to identify and address skills gaps, offering customised short courses on-demand, mentorship and talent for industry placements. We will also work with NSW Government on its \$1 million pilot program to address skills shortages and fast-track entry level and mid-career below the line practitioners' careers, in line with the NSW Screen and Digital Games Strategy. We also work hand in hand with Screen Australia to support training in emerging industry roles such as accessibility coordinator and intimacy coordinator.

The School also works closely with its Arts8 counterparts to ensure we tackle common challenges in a coordinated manner, to organise annual skills sharing workshops and an annual student collaboration. AFTRS is working with NIDA to create online resources and associated campaigns educating new entrants about jobs in our vibrant sector and the relevant training pathways offered by trusted training providers, as well as subsidised training for groups which remain under-represented in our industries.



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SUSTAINABILITY: Strong cultural infrastructure

AFTRS is very grateful for the additional \$23.2 million in increased Government appropriation over the next 4 years, following the Financial Sustainability Review. The additional Government investment has permitted the School to address immediate workforce and operating pressures and maintain our leadership in the creative education sector and our capacity to continue innovating into the future.

Ensuring AFTRS production equipment and technology align with evolving industry standards to ensure students are job-ready, the funding will allow us to upgrade technical facilities including the radio studios, film studios, mix theatre, as well as our camera and lighting equipment – with many approaching end-of-life or losing industry currency. It will also be invested into training in-house LED Volume technicians, augmenting our production and specialist capabilities to add into our new award courses production exercises and simulations that reflect current and future needs of industry.

The increased appropriations will also support the implementation of new integrated systems and technologies to improve the student learning experience, particularly with our planned increase in flexible delivery, such as an updated Learning Management System (LMS) and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software purpose-designed for tertiary education. This investment will allow us collect and analyse stakeholder data in a way that increases the efficiency of our systems and through collected insights contribute to protecting and growing own-source revenue, as well as providing powerful tools to increase diversity and representation of our student cohorts.

The additional Government investment doesn't, of course, lessen our commitment to growing own-source revenue. AFTRS, with guidance from Council and key alumni, will assemble a Fundraising and Development team, appoint a Fundraising Committee and launch a Scholarship Action Plan and a Fundraising Strategy, building on the early success of its Alumni & Industry Scholarship Fund to both fund School initiatives and grow the number and value of scholarships for students who face barriers to accessing tertiary education and in screen and audio industries.

Environmental Sustainability is another dimension of AFTRS' commitment to sustainability. AFTRS reports on APS Net Zero 2030 and is dedicated to achieving the goals of APS NetZero2030. This will be facilitated by a new 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 will continue to be a member of Sustainable Screens Australia, a growing industry-funded project aimed at providing industry with access to resources, education and toolkits for accurately measuring production carbon footprint. Looking forward, AFTRS work in this area will continue to be guided by First Nations knowledges and values, including wise practice, deep listening and reciprocity, as expressed in AFTRS' First Nations Strategic Plan.



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Conclusion

Storytelling is a powerful way to connect to Country, to our culture and to each other, empowering Australians to make sense of a changing world and our place within it. AFTRS celebrates the vision of *Revive* to support the arts, and organisations such as AFTRS, to train the bold, talented and purposeful visionaries who will tell these 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 into the future, 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 2024-25.

