



craft + design centre

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Professor Brian Schmidt AC FAA FRS
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2 December 2020

Dear Professor Schmidt

Craft ACT Request for reconsideration of proposed cuts to the ANU School of Art and Design

Craft ACT is deeply concerned about the proposed changes to the acclaimed School of Art and Design (the School) outlined in the “Managing Change Document” dated 18 November 2020 (proposal). Craft ACT urges the ANU to reconsider the proposed cuts to staffing and the disestablishment of several craft workshops because these changes will have a detrimental impact on the School’s reputation and the ACT and broader National arts sectors.

Craft ACT

Craft ACT is a 50 year old not-for-profit membership based organisation which supports ACT artists, craft practitioners, designers and makers at every stage of their careers through its membership program, the operation of a retail space and exhibition program which includes the annual DESIGN Canberra Festival. Craft ACT has worked closely with the School for decades. The Craft ACT artistic program supports and transitions artists into professional practice and places their work in view of the collecting institutions, business and industry, and audiences. Operationally, we provide an avenue for ANU students and alumni to undertake internships, gain employment in an arts organisation, sell their artwork and share their skills. Craft ACT also provides ANU alumni with national and international opportunities to exhibit their work. For example, in September 2020, Craft ACT co-presented a collective glass exhibition titled “Glass Utopia” at Venice Glass week. The exhibition will tour to Milan Design Week in 2021 and includes ANU alumni. Craft ACT’s annual outreach program DESIGN Canberra has selected ANU alumni for designers-in-residence including Kirstie Rea (glass), Chelsea Lemon (furniture) and Phoebe Porter (metals). Prospective students will no doubt be attracted to the School as a result of the availability of such high profile opportunities.

The School’s reputation

The proposal states that the School possesses an “enviable reputation”. Craft ACT strongly agrees. The School plays a vital role in the development of Canberra’s global identity as a city of making and design excellence and produces graduates of the highest calibre who go on to contribute to the local, national and international arts sectors. However, Craft ACT considers that the School’s reputation will be put at risk by the reduction in the School’s staff numbers, the increase in workloads of remaining staff and the disestablishment of the Furniture, Jewellery and Object, and

Animation and Video workshops. The internationally respected workshops are critical to the development of ANU students and practitioners who are refined only through tertiary experience in the complex suite of disciplines currently offered by the School. Future ANU students will be deprived of the opportunity to develop a diverse practice and prospective students will likely turn to other institutions at which they can expand their studio experience. Craft ACT is aware that the proposed cuts reflect similar proposals at other Australian tertiary institutions. Preserving the workshops in particular will serve to differentiate ANU from its competitors.

Impact upon the local and national arts sector

Craft ACT appreciates the difficult position the ANU currently faces due to challenges in the tertiary education sector and the global pandemic. The arts sector and artists who enrich Canberra's cultural life and contribute to its economy have suffered too but have demonstrated extraordinary resilience to maintain their livelihoods and services to the public.

Craft ACT considers that the proposal is inconsistent with the ANU's aim to "help provide the building blocks for national recovery". The capacity of the School to contribute meaningfully to both the Art and Design sector and local industry, is at stake as a result of the proposal. The impact upon the arts industry is not only confined to roles directly related to the disciplines taught at workshops. ANU furniture and jewellery graduates draw on their technical skills and appreciation of conservation practices in fulfilling invaluable roles at larger cultural institutions such as the National Gallery of Australia and the National Film and Sound Archive (for example in undertaking furniture fabrication and mount making for objects). As a result of the disestablishment of particular workshops, there will be a skills shortage that will detrimentally affect key cultural institutions and museums, galleries and cultural centres nationally.

Discussion

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and stakeholders in the contemporary craft community to explore alternative solutions to the proposal.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Coronel
President of the Craft ACT Board of Management