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Media release

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Arts Policies Fail Access Test

Prevailing cultural policies fail to give Australians equal access to ‘high art’, dumb down the arts and are curbing the development of future audiences, according to a new report by Canberra-based public policy think tank The Australia Institute.

In *Democratising excellence? Chamber music and arts policy in Australia*, Pauline Griffiths argues that recent arts policies have narrowed rather than extended access to the arts for Australians. She says policies imposing marketing and commercial management fads on ‘high art’ are having the reverse of their intended effects.

Using chamber music as a case study, Ms Griffiths says arts policy makers have failed to differentiate arts audiences from shoppers or sports fans, and do not understand the cultural precursors necessary to build an appreciation of the arts.

“The current pre-occupation with applying ‘business models’ to the arts and promoting them as vital links in local and international economies will fail to build growing audiences,” she says. “It is not enough to perform a piece of creative dance theatre during the quarter break of a televised football game or hold chamber music concerts in vineyards.

“Strategies such as these will not widen arts audiences. They do little to cultivate the enduring conditions of familiarity that are necessary for an appreciation of the arts. These conditions cannot be manufactured by any business model.”

Ms Griffiths says it is a dangerous shortcoming of current policy that the school and the family are completely ignored in ‘cultural planning’. Government ambitions to ‘democratise the arts’ and build audiences will continue to fail until cultural policies are based on an understanding of how audiences are developed. A review of, and investment in, arts programs at school, at home, and in the community are needed.

“For many people, the barriers of entry to the arts are not financial,” she says. “The cost of entry to a chamber music concert is often no more than that of a movie ticket. People are deprived because they have never been offered the knowledge and skill that would give them the choice. Until current arts and cultural policies are able to provide to everyone the education and experiences that result in a lifetime of aesthetic engagement, current government ambitions to democratise the arts will remain unfulfilled.”