

International evidence in support of youth cultural passes

Submission to the Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts Inquiry into the challenges and opportunities within the Australian live music industry

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Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to the Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts Inquiry into the challenges and opportunities within the Australian live music industry. This submission looks at examples of “culture vouchers” or “culture passes” that have been introduced in parts of Europe as a way of making cultural events and products more accessible to young people. The idea of cultural passes has been discussed in various hearings held as part of this inquiry, including on 17 October 2024, when committee Chair Mr. Brian Mitchell MP asked the co-author of this report about the practicalities of how, and if, these passes work. This document is intended to respond to those questions.

CULTURAL PASSES IN EUROPE

Italy, Germany, and Spain

In the past decade, several European nations have introduced programs in which young people are given vouchers to spend on cultural events.

Italy pioneered the concept, when in 2016 it introduced the “18App”¹, which granted 18-year-olds up to EURO500 (AUD988)² to spend at cultural institutions, on cultural products, and on cultural education including foreign language and art courses. Young people had up to six months after their 18th birthday to register for the funding — which was provided via a phone-based app — and up to a year to spend it.³ However, in 2024 a newly-elected Italian Government replaced the app with two separate, means-tested vouchers (together worth EUR500): the “Carta Cultura” (Culture Card), which is granted based on income level, and the “Carta del Merito”⁴ (Merit Card), which is granted based on scholastic achievement.⁵

In 2023, Germany introduced the “Kulturpass” (Culturepass), which grants 18-year-old German residents EUR200 (AUD395) that can be spent through an app on cultural products and events. In 2024, this amount was reduced to EUR100.⁶

In Spain, the “Bono Cultural Jóven” (Youth Cultural Bonus) gives 18-year-old residents EUR400 (AUD970) to put towards cultural events and products.⁷ Young adults can apply for the funds through a website before or during the year they turn 18. They then have a year to use the funds, which can be spent in the following ways:

- €200 can be spent on live arts, cultural heritage and audiovisual arts. This includes tickets and subscriptions for performing arts, live music, cinema, museums, libraries, exhibitions, literary, musical or audiovisual festivals, and bullfighting shows.
- €100 can be spent on physical cultural products. This includes magazines, video games, CDs and DVDs which, except for subscriptions to magazines, have to be purchased or collected in-store.
- €100 can be spent on digital or online cultural products. This includes audiobooks, e-books, online video games, and subscriptions of up to four months to online publications, music or cinema platforms.

¹ 18app (n.d.) *Are you from 2002?*,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20220214045022/https://www.18app.italia.it/#/>

² This paper uses Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) conversion, which takes purchasing power differences into account.

³ Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (n.d.) *Bonus Cultura – 18app*,
<https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/bonus-cultura-18app/>

⁴ Ministero della Cultura (n.d.) *Carta del Merito*,

<https://cartegiovani.cultura.gov.it/giovanimeritoBeneficiario/#/accesso>

⁵ Giancarli (2024) *As Bologna Approaches: Italy's Culture Voucher Evolves*,

<https://publishingperspectives.com/2024/04/as-bologna-approaches-italys-culture-voucher-splits/>

⁶ Kulturpass (n.d.) *About the KulturPass*, <https://www.kulturpass.de/en/about-kulturpass>

⁷ Ministerio de Cultura (n.d.) *Bono Cultural Joven*, <https://bonoculturajoven.gob.es/>

The funds can only be spent at partnering institutions that operate in Spain. As of 2024, this includes about 4,100 physical partners and more than 400 online partners.⁸ As of 2022, EUR210 million has been allocated to the scheme, which is enough to allow the participation of approximately 500,000 young people.⁹

France - *Pass Culture*

In 2021, France launched the “Pass Culture” (Culture Pass),¹⁰ with the twofold aim of making arts and culture more accessible to young people and diversifying the kinds of culture they choose to patronise. The scheme has two components: the funding of art and cultural education activities through schools; and a EUR380 (AUD786) pass distributed to young people that can be spent on cultural activities and physical media. As it is most relevant to this Inquiry, this submission focuses on the latter, although it is important to note that the two schemes work in conjunction with one-another. The EUR380 pass is distributed to each French resident, in increments based on age, as follows:

- EUR20 when a person turns 15;
- EUR30 when a person turns 16;
- EUR30 when a person turns 17;
- EUR300 when a person turns 18.

These credits can be used up until a person’s 20th birthday, after which the pass expires. The pass can be used to pay for cultural products, live events, visits to cultural institutions, and consumption of online media. The pass functions through the phone-based “Pass Culture” app, which allows participants to purchase products and book tickets to events through participating providers. As the program seeks to encourage engagement with cultural institutions, the purchase of physical items must be done in store (delivery is not permitted).¹¹ Online media can only be purchased to a limit of EURO100, and only French platforms are allowed to participate. By presenting information about activities in a participant’s local area, the app also aims to foster

⁸ Ministerio de Cultura (n.d.) *Entidades adheridas*,
<https://beneficiarios.2024.bonoculturajoven.gob.es/entidades-adheridas>

⁹ Spain in English (2022) *Spain’s €400 ‘Youth Culture Voucher’ officially launched*,
<https://www.spainenglish.com/2022/07/26/spains-e400-youth-culture-voucher-officially-launched/>

¹⁰ Pass culture (n.d.) *Profite du pass Culture pour découvrir la culture autour de toi*,
<https://pass.culture.fr/>

¹¹ Pass Culture (2024) *[Jeunes] Que puis-je acheter avec mon pass Culture ?*,
<https://aide.passculture.app/hc/fr/articles/4412007236113--Jeunes-Que-puis-je-acheter-avec-mon-pass-Culture>

curiosity for a diverse range of cultural practices.¹² In addition, through so-called “Duo” offers, users are able to buy two tickets, even if the second ticket’s beneficiary is not a Culture Pass user.

Governance and budget

The scheme is administered by the French Ministry for Culture at a cost of EUR260 million (AUD538 million) per year, which is equivalent to 6% of the Ministry’s budget (excluding public broadcasting).¹³ Rather than the funds going to each individual user of the app, this money is distributed to participating cultural institutions as a reimbursement once a product or service is purchased through the app. In 2023, 89.4% of this budget was spent to refund the businesses and institutions that provide products and services via the app. Businesses are refunded between 90% and 100% of the cost of the goods and services they provide as part of the program, to a maximum of EUR20,000 a year.¹⁴ The potential 10% gap between what the French Government funds and what young people purchase through the app is made up by participating businesses, which in 2023 contributed EURO14 million (AUD29 million) in foregone revenue to the program.¹⁵

The Culture Pass scheme also includes a “culture ambassadors” program to promote the Pass around the country. There are 600 culture ambassadors as of 2024.¹⁶

The success of the French Cultural Pass

An increasing number of young people are taking advantage of the Cultural Pass.¹⁷ Among 16-19-year-olds:

- 67% have heard of it;
- 47% know exactly what it is.

As of 2023, 80% of schools make use of the educational part of the scheme.¹⁸ Both parts of the program are run through the school system, which means that young people are not only introduced to new forms of culture through school trips, but that

¹² Pass Culture (n.d.) *Rapport d’activités 2023*, <https://pass.culture.fr/nos-rapports-d'activite>

¹³ Poissenot (2024) *Qui veut la peau du Pass culture ?*, <https://theconversation.com/qui-veut-la-peau-du-pass-culture-239220>

¹⁴ Pass Culture (n.d.) *Rapport d’activités 2023*, p.48, <https://pass.culture.fr/nos-rapports-d'activite>

¹⁵ Pass Culture (n.d.) *Rapport d’activités 2023*, pp. 46-47, <https://pass.culture.fr/nos-rapports-d'activite>

¹⁶ Pass Culture (n.d.) *Le programme Ambassadeurs*, <https://pass.culture.fr/le-programme-ambassadeurs>

¹⁷ Centre national du livre (2024) *Les jeunes Français et la lecture en 2024*, p.78,

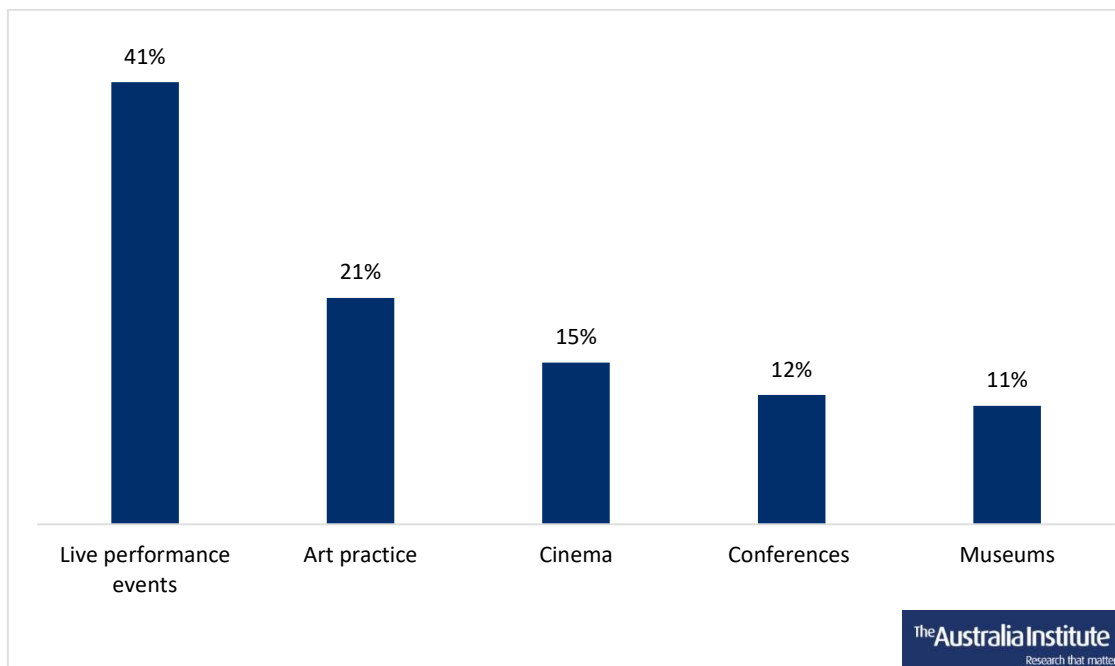
<https://centrenationaldulivre.fr/donnees-cles/les-jeunes-francais-et-la-lecture-en-2024>

¹⁸ Pass Culture (n.d.) *Rapport d’activités 2023*, p.32, <https://pass.culture.fr/nos-rapports-d'activite>

they are made aware of the app, which they can then use according to their own tastes.

Figure 1 below breaks down how funds were used:

Figure 1: Use of the Culture Pass educational fund, 2023



Source: Pass Culture (n.d.) *Rapport d'activités 2023*, p.10, <https://pass.culture.fr/nos-rapports-d'activite>

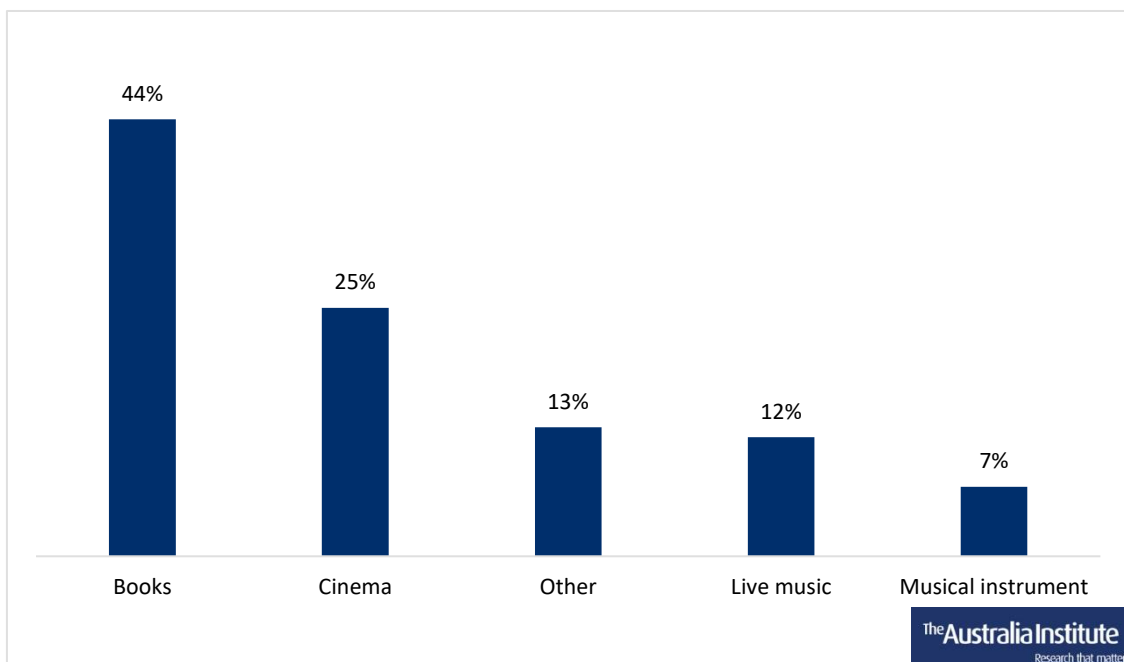
Most young people take advantage of the Culture Pass – 81% of people born in 2004 used at least part of the credit allocated to them, and more than half used almost all of it.¹⁹ In 2023, over 2.8 million people had a Culture Pass, of which 84% made at least one booking (2.4 million people). On average, each active user made 4.18 bookings. The overall total number of bookings was 12.1 million.²⁰

Figure 2 shows how young people chose to spend the money allocated to them through the Culture Pass app in 2023.

¹⁹ Poissenot (2024) *Qui veut la peau du Pass culture ?*, <https://theconversation.com/qui-veut-la-peau-du-pass-culture-239220>

²⁰ Pass Culture (n.d.) *Rapport d'activités 2023*, p.8, <https://pass.culture.fr/nos-rapports-d'activite>

Figure 2: Use of the Culture Pass app, 2023



Source: Pass Culture (n.d.) *Rapport d'activités 2023*, p.8, <https://pass.culture.fr/nos-rapports-d'activite>

Book purchases represent the biggest share of spending through the pass. Nine out of ten users choose to buy books, and an average of nine books is bought.²¹

Studies show that the pass has a positive effect on reading habits:

- 48% of users who have purchased a book through the pass say they have discovered a new bookstore or library in doing so;²²
- 42% of pass users buy at least one book a month, compared to less than a third of non-users of the same age;²³
- 59% of pass users say the pass made them want to read, or read more.²⁴

As this Inquiry is focused on live music, exactly what products and services are included as part of a cultural pass should be carefully considered. But, as far as the French program goes, evidence suggests that the pass is successful in its aim of

²¹ Pass Culture (2024) *Les jeunes et la lecture*, <https://pass.culture.fr/ressources/les-jeunes-et-la-lecture-juin-2024>

²² Poissenot (2024) *Qui veut la peau du Pass culture ?*, <https://theconversation.com/qui-veut-la-peau-du-pass-culture-239220>

²³ Pass Culture (2024) *Les jeunes et la lecture*, p.10, <https://pass.culture.fr/ressources/les-jeunes-et-la-lecture-juin-2024>

²⁴ Centre national du livre (2024) *Les jeunes Français et la lecture en 2024*, p.80, <https://centrenationaldulivre.fr/donnees-cles/les-jeunes-francais-et-la-lecture-en-2024>

diversifying the cultural interests of young people. Polling conducted by the government department that administers the program found that, among people born in 2003/2004, 66% used the Cultural Pass to discover a new cultural institution, which 55% visited again after their pass expired.²⁵

The Pass Culture and live music

Of the 12% of participants who used their Cultural Pass to make bookings for live music events, 54% purchased a ticket to a concert (on average EUR45/AUD93) and 45% purchased a ticket to a festival (on average EUR69/AUD143).²⁶ Through the “Duo” offer (which allows participants to use their Cultural Pass to purchase tickets for other people) 18-20-year-olds buy two tickets for 45% of concert bookings and 26.5% of festivals bookings.²⁷ Between 2022 and 2023, there was a strong increase in live music bookings through the pass (+80% between January/September 2022 and January/September 2023). This correlates to an increase in promotion for live music on the app²⁸, but also potentially to a general increase in attendance at live music events after COVID-19 related lockdowns.

Among young people who had not attended a concert or festival the year before they gained access to the pass, 20% went on to make at least one live music booking through the pass. Among them:

- 69% have discovered a new live music venue through their booking;
- 84% say the Culture Pass allows them to attend concerts and festivals more often.²⁹

Barriers identified to the scheme’s effectiveness are transport, especially for young people living in remote areas, and a lack of pre-existing cultural practices among young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.³⁰ How to overcome these obstacles should be carefully considered in any potential Australian scheme.

²⁵ Pass Culture (2024) on *LinkedIn*,

<https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7224425474284765184>

²⁶ Pass Culture (2023) *Musique Live : Usages et pratiques des jeunes*, p.5,

<https://passculture.docsend.com/view/p53hcar9b6zwcya>

²⁷ Pass Culture (2023) *Musique Live : Usages et pratiques des jeunes*, p.10,

<https://passculture.docsend.com/view/p53hcar9b6zwcya>

²⁸ Pass Culture (2023) *Musique Live : Usages et pratiques des jeunes*, p.13,

<https://passculture.docsend.com/view/p53hcar9b6zwcya>

²⁹ P.18, <https://passculture.docsend.com/view/p53hcar9b6zwcya>

³⁰ Lumeau (2024) *Le pass Culture dans l’impasse*, <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/le-point-culture/le-pass-culture-dans-l-impasse-4733962>

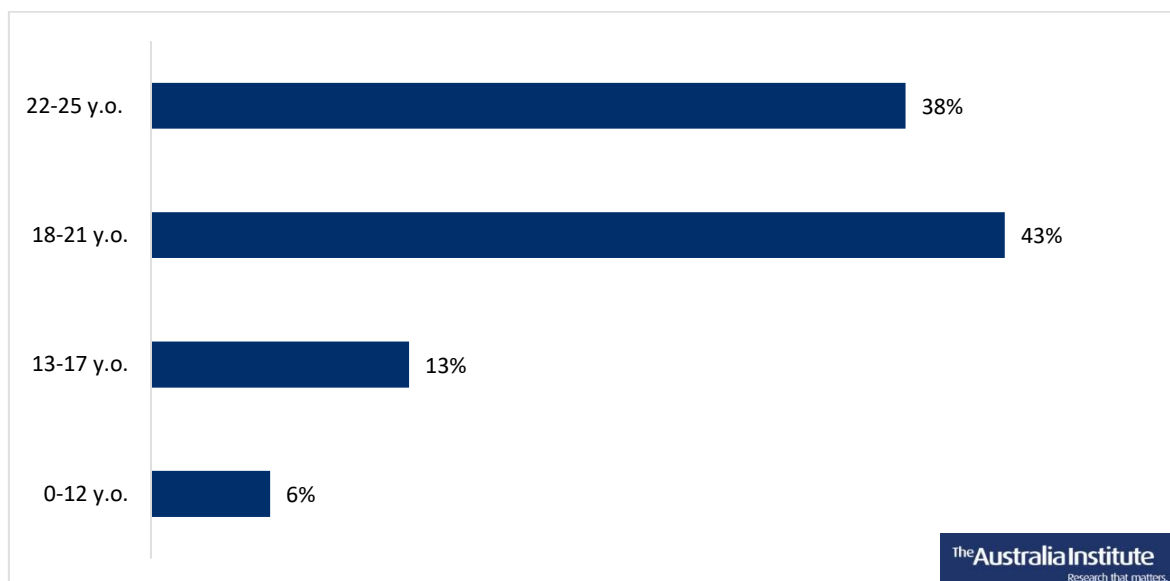
Switzerland - AG Culturel/Kultur-GA

In Switzerland, a slightly different approach to cultural passes has emerged. Instead of providing young people with a direct transfer of funds to be spent on cultural events, some Swiss cantons (states) have introduced a scheme in which young people buy a cultural pass at a set rate which then provides unlimited access to the arts. The “AG Culturel/Kultur-GA” (General Cultural Pass) is available to all Swiss residents under 26 years old for an annual price of CHF100 (AUD144). Given that a full price ticket to a live event in Switzerland costs between CHF20 and CHF70, once the pass has been used a couple of times it provides effectively free access to events.

The official aim of the General Cultural Pass is to “facilitate access to culture for young people ... who often have a limited budget” and “have to think about which [cultural] event they can or cannot afford to attend”.³¹ The pass enables access to live arts and culture events at 290 partner cultural institutions in five Swiss states (a sixth state is set to join the scheme).

The General Cultural Pass operates through a phone-based app as well as a physical card that can be ordered online.

Figure 3: Use of the General Cultural Pass by age, 2023



Source: AG Culturel/Kultur-GA (n.d.) *Rapport d'activités 2022*, p.19, supplied.

³¹ Sabino, in Rohrbasser (2022) *Abonné à la culture*, <https://www.laliberte.ch/articles/societe/page-jeunes/abonne-a-la-culture-706819>

Governance and Budget

The General Cultural Pass is administered by a not-for-profit arts organisation (which is also known as the General Cultural Pass) established by several existing cultural institutions in 2012. The management committee of the General Cultural Pass includes a representative from a cultural institution in each participating state. The organisation is also backed by an interstate body promoting cultural cooperation.³² The administrative body asks state governments to provide subsidies for the program at a rate of 5% of the number of its inhabitants – for instance, a state with a population of 100,000 people will be asked to provide CHF5000.³³ The Swiss federal government is also providing funding to extend the scheme to other states.

This administrative body refunds cultural institutions CHF10 (AUD14) for each booking made through the pass.³⁴ The budget for this is provided partly from the revenue generated from the sale of passes, and partly from participating states, institutional and private partners.³⁵ Participating cultural institutions cover the gap between this CHF10 refund and the total cost of a ticket purchased through the General Cultural Pass app. Anecdotal evidence suggests that participating cultural institutes are willing to participate in the program even though it means forgoing revenue (by subsidising the cost of attendance at an event) because it means that more people patronise their businesses, which has other knock-on effects.

³² CDIP (n.d.) *Conférence spécialisée CDAC*, <https://www.edk.ch/fr/themes/culture/cdac>

³³ Personal correspondence with administrators of the General Cultural Pass.

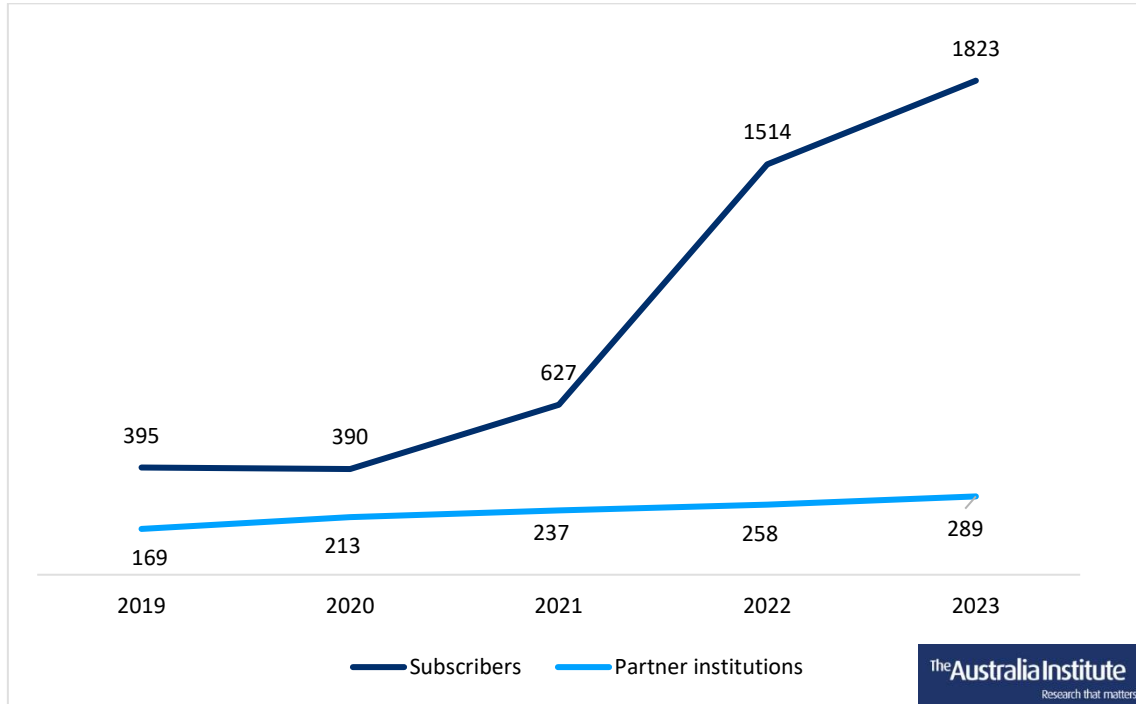
³⁴ Rohrbasser (2022) *Abonné à la culture*, <https://www.laliberte.ch/articles/societe/page-jeunes/abonne-a-la-culture-706819>

³⁵ AG Culturel/Kultur-GA (n.d.) *Rapport d'activités 2022*, supplied.

The success of the Swiss General Cultural Pass

While participation remains modest, between 2019 and 2023 subscriptions to the program have more than quadrupled (Figure 4) and are expected to continue to grow.

Figure 4: Increase in number of subscribers and partner institutions



Source: AG Culturel/Kultur-GA (n.d.) *Rapport d'activités 2022*, p.19, supplied.

Conclusion

Around the world, more and more countries are introducing schemes in which young people are granted money to spend on arts. In addition to the European nations discussed in this paper, the governments of Korea,³⁶ Morocco,³⁷ and the city of Buenos Aires³⁸ have all introduced versions of a youth cultural pass. This brief explains the practicalities of how some of these schemes work, and shows that they are affordable, popular, and injecting new life into the arts sector.

If such a scheme were to be introduced, there are practical steps that the Australian Government could take to ensure that funding granted through a youth cultural pass benefits as many Australian artists, cultural institutions and businesses as possible.

This includes:

- developing criteria for participation in the program that disqualifies large international corporations (Netflix, Apple Music etc.) from participation;
- limiting use of the pass to in-person transactions;
- putting spending limits on different kinds of purchases (i.e. physical media);
- Limiting use of the pass to small and medium-sized venues, and festivals. This would mitigate against the possibility that funds are spent on tickets to see large international touring acts.

However criteria for participation are determined, it is clear that youth cultural passes are an effective way of increasing engagement with the arts. Australia Institute polling shows that four in five young Australians (80%) would increase the number of music events they attend if a \$200 government-funded voucher were available.³⁹ With approximately 330,000 18-year-olds in Australia,⁴⁰ this would cost the Australian Government approximately \$66,000,000 in annual expenditure. Given that Australia's spending on 'cultural services' is well below the OECD average,⁴¹ this would be a cost-effective way to support the sector.

³⁶ Korea.net (2024) *Youth culture-arts pass worth up to KRW 150,000 released*, <https://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Society/view?articleId=249065>

³⁷ Pass Jeunes (2023) *Enjoy your youth pass*, <https://www.passjeunes.ma/en>

³⁸ World Cities Cultural Forum (2024) *Buenos Aires culture pass: transforming the city's youth into cultural enthusiasts*, <https://worldcitiescultureforum.com/city-project/cultural-pass/>

³⁹ Australia Institute (2024) *Polling – Young Australians' participation in live music*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/polling-young-australians-participation-in-live-music/>

⁴⁰ ABS (2022) *Population Projections, Australia* (Australia, medium series, financial year 2023-24), <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/population-projections-australia/latest-release#data-downloads>

⁴¹ OECD (2022) *The Culture Fix*, p218, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-culture-fix_991bb520-en/full-report/component-17.html#chapter-d1e25516