

A New Approach (ANA)

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Strategic Engagement of Research and Development Secretariat
Department of Industry, Science and Resources
Australian Government
(via submission portal)

Strategic Examination of Research and Development: discussion paper

A New Approach (ANA) welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the *Strategic Examination of Research and Development: discussion paper*. ANA is Australia's national arts and culture think tank. We believe Australia can become a cultural powerhouse whose creativity is locally loved, nationally valued and globally influential. Through credible and independent public leadership, ANA helps build an ambitious and innovative policy and investment environment for arts, culture and creativity. We work to ensure Australia can be a great place for creators and audiences, whoever they are and wherever they live. ANA acknowledges the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia and their continuing cultural and creative practices in this land.

Arts, culture and creativity are directly relevant to Australia's productivity, prosperity and sustainability. Doing Research and Development (R&D) well means having a workforce equipped with creative and critical thinking skills. This is because the creative and systematic work of R&D relies on the creative and critical thinking skills that our education system develops and our cultural organisations and industries deploy.

In this submission we answer the following Discussion Paper questions:

- 1. What should an integrated, sustainable, dynamic and impactful Australian R&D system look like?**
- 7. What should we do to attract, develop and retain an R&D workforce suitable for Australia's future needs?**

In our role as a philanthropically funded, independent think tank, ANA is ready to provide further information about the response in this submission and would welcome the opportunity to discuss. We confirm that this submission can be made public.

Warm regards,



Kate Fielding, CEO, A New Approach (ANA)

Contact

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Question 1: What should an integrated, sustainable, dynamic and impactful Australian R&D system look like?

As the discussion paper itself highlights, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 'defines R&D as creative and systematic work undertaken to increase the stock of knowledge and to devise new applications of available knowledge.'¹

We already have a significant asset in Australia's teenagers, who rank fourth in the world for creative and critical thinking – essential skills for a productive workforce and economy. The OECD's first-ever assessment of creative and critical thinking in 64 countries reveals Australia's comparative advantage in these skills. Australia should act to harness this strength, leveraging creative and cultural engagement's capacity to benefit the key determinants of productivity. We also need to maintain and grow this strength, including by ensuring our students continue to have opportunities develop these skills.

We know that Australia has strong creative and critical thinking skills. Analysis of the latest Census data by Dr Marion McCutcheon and Professor Stuart Cunningham confirms more than half of the 409,000 workers in creative occupations were employed outside of creative industries.² Australia can better deploy these skills in and beyond cultural and creative industries. This includes increasing efforts to diffuse creative and critical thinking skills, including nurturing pathways for cultural and creative thinking beyond and outside of formal secondary and tertiary education. ANA recently highlighted these opportunities in its pitch to the Productivity Commission.³

Creative and critical thinking are essential skills that will equip Australia to face future problems and confront economic challenges. Our industries and workforce need creative and critical thinking to generate and refine diverse, original ideas for a productive and prosperous future. This is why Australians need lifelong opportunities to learn and strengthen these skills.

Question 7: What should we do to attract, develop and retain an R&D workforce suitable for Australia's future needs?

Successful R&D relies on creative and critical thinking. These are skills developed in childhood that can then be sustained and spread in the workforce. Opportunities to create a pipeline of creative and critical thinkers could include:

- Identifying ways to leverage Australia's high levels of childhood participation in cultural activities to bolster creative and critical thinking. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data shows that 94% of

¹ Strategic Examination of R&D independent expert panel, Strategic Examination of R&D Discussion paper (Canberra, Australia: Australian Government, February 2025) page 12.

² Marion McCutcheon and Stuart Cunningham, "The Creative Economy in Australia: What Census 2021 Tells Us – Briefing Paper 1," University of Canberra, 22 November 2022, <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2023-03/apo-nid322264.pdf>

³ A New Approach, Australia's Productivity Pitch – submission (Canberra, Australia: January 2025)

Australian children aged between 5 and 14 participated in a cultural activity outside of school hours in 2021–22. Such activities include screen-based activities, drama, singing or playing a musical instrument, dancing and creative writing.

- Building pathways to translate strong creative and critical thinking at a teenage level into a more creative and productive workforce. This could explicitly map problem solving and idea generation needs in the workforce to learning outcomes, which are part of a continuum already developed by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority.

However, and as also noted in our response to Question 1, it is critical that creative and critical thinking skills are supported beyond secondary and tertiary education. Analysis of the latest Census data by Dr Marion McCutcheon and Professor Stuart Cunningham confirms more than half of the 409,000 workers in creative occupations were employed outside of creative industries. This creates the ability to tap into creative and critical thinking skills to spread innovation beyond creative industries.

When other industries employ creative workers, this enables creative and critical thinking skills to spill over beyond creative industries, diffusing creative and critical thinking skills from cultural and creative workers to the wider economy and society. There is also an opportunity to build and support more formal pathways that develop creative and critical thinking skills that extend beyond secondary education into R&D workforce and the wider workforce.