

Strategic Plan

2026-2030



Empowering
Artists.
Shaping Art.
Connecting
the World.

NATIONAL
ART
SCHOOL J

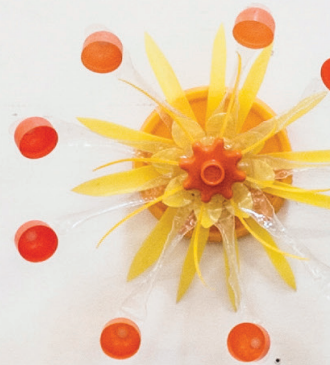


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The National Art School acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the Traditional Owners on whose Country we meet, share and create. We pay our respects to all Gadigal Elders past and present. We celebrate the diversity, history, knowledge and creativity of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia.



As the National Art School, we deliver exceptional art education, empowering artists to grow, experiment and thrive.



Independent, proud, and
passionate. Our community
shapes Australia's art ecology
and connects globally.



Our values shape the experiences we create, the culture we foster and the challenges we seek to solve.



Inclusivity and diversity

We value the different qualities each person brings, creating an environment where everyone feels respected and supported.

Creativity and innovation

We are curious, forward-thinking learners and generous, innovative makers.

Excellence and authenticity

We are fearlessly committed to authentic art education, academic rigour, artistic integrity and professional standards.

Community and collaboration

We are passionate and serious about what we do, connecting to the broader art ecology by cultivating a rich community of students, staff, alumni and supporters.

Strategic plan at a glance

Strategic intent

The National Art School is a vital part of Australia's art ecology. We shape the artists of tomorrow and strengthen the communities around them. We're here to be a catalyst, sparking ideas, leading art practices and showing the value of art in society.

We're proud of our history, but forever moving forward. We adapt to the needs of our students and staff and to the changing world beyond our gates. As a State Significant Organisation, with a secure site lease, our stability and independence give us the freedom to stay true to our core concerns: art, artists and the culture they shape.

Over the next five years, we will sharpen our education focus, open our doors wider and extend our reach to connect more deeply across NSW, Australia and globally.

Key priorities

Immersive education that lasts a lifetime

Our studio-based, hands-on teaching model led by artists is at the heart of the National Art School experience. We will refresh our courses to prepare students for contemporary practice, expand interdisciplinary learning and build stronger links to professional life. Our short courses and high school courses bring more people into our orbit. With increased philanthropic and corporate support we can remove financial barriers and create pathways into study for students from all backgrounds.

First Peoples at the centre

Through our Darani Ngalawada centre, we will foster the influence and self-determination of First Peoples artists — expanding scholarships, forging critical partnerships, developing course content, enabling visiting artist-lecturers, and creating more opportunities for emerging First Nations artists to participate and lead in the arts.

A connected creative network

Our alumni are living proof of the National Art School difference. We will grow this network, celebrate their achievements and create more opportunities for engagement, collaboration and working with our alumni.

Global reach, local strength

Sydney is a global city and the National Art School will be an active player in global art conversations. We will expand international enrolments and partnerships and create opportunities for cross-cultural exchange.

A campus alive with art

Our historic site is a vibrant home for learning and making. We will upgrade facilities to meet contemporary needs, open the campus to our neighbourhood and welcome more visitors to experience our exhibitions and collection. We will explore new accommodation and space options for artists in partnership with the government and the private sector.

A strong sustainable organisation

We will build on our strong relationships with Create NSW and the NSW Department of Education and grow partnerships with all levels of government and industry. Internally we will foster a culture of collaboration, care and excellence, supporting the people who make the National Art School what it is.



Strengthening our role as the National Art School.

Story so far

The National Art School (NAS) is Australia's leading independent art school. We are dedicated to offering the best in art education and playing a critical role in setting the Australian and global contemporary art agenda.



Our campus is located in central Sydney, wholly within the historic sandstone walls of what was once the Darlinghurst Gaol, on the unceded lands of Gadigal Country. The site has deep connections and significance to the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. This combination of deep history, local culture and colonial architecture offers a unique, immersive and collaborative environment in which artists and creative ideas flourish.

For tens of thousands of generations this has been a significant location. For the Gadigal people it offered sweeping views and abundant resources from nearby creeks, bays and wooded valleys. A major walking track passed down the sandstone ridge from present day Oxford Street to Rushcutters Bay. Important waterways flowed by – the Tank Stream that ran from Circular Quay to the west of present-day Hyde Park, Yurong Creek that rose from Woolloomooloo Bay to Darlinghurst and to the east Rushcutters Creek, now buried beneath Boundary Street. Proximity to the bays meant a ready supply of seafood supplemented by the various plants and animals that occupied the woodland landscape. Gadigal people found natural shelters in the rocky sandstone overhangs of the nearby hills. During longer stays, they built conical bark huts and a welcoming fire burning close to the entrance, a practice continuing for generations.

The National Art School acknowledges Gadigal people's continuing connection to Country – the skies, land, water, plants, animals and people – and recognises that Aboriginal history, culture and presence in Sydney did not conclude with the arrival of Europeans in 1788. We respect Australia's diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and knowledge and embed them into our curriculum and programs. We invite all students, staff and visitors to develop a reflective relationship to the knowledge systems and sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Following colonisation, the site became Darlinghurst Gaol, built from locally sourced sandstone in 1822 and operating between 1841 to 1914. As a site of incarceration, it held thousands of people captive within its massive walls.

For more than 100 years this has been a site of reimagining through art and education. While our deeper roots go back to the Sydney Mechanics Institute of 1843, we moved into the former gaol buildings in 1922 as part of Sydney Technical College, later East Sydney Technical College. The National Art School gained autonomy from TAFE as an educational institution in 1996 and became the sole occupant of the Darlinghurst site in 2005. In 2009 the National Art School became a company limited by guarantee with two members, the NSW Minister for Education and the Minister for the Arts. In 2019, we signed a 45-year lease to remain on the site, receiving a State Significant Organisation designation with funding from the NSW Government. In 2021 the former Darlinghurst Gaol and National Art School received NSW Heritage Listing as Sydney's oldest surviving gaol complex.

Today, we're at the heart of the East Sydney cultural precinct around Taylor Square and Oxford Street. We're a proud beacon within the broader Rainbow Precinct that celebrates Sydney's LGBTQIA+ community. This hub of energy offers the space for artists, creatives, performers and visitors to celebrate Sydney and Australia's arts and cultural life.

We are the leading provider of choice in NSW. Our students, alumni and staff are highly visible award winners, exhibiting nationally and internationally, contributing to the strength and diversity of art practice in NSW and Australia. Many of our students go on to pursue careers in the arts sector, contributing in myriad ways to Australia's creative culture.

While our core focus will always be education, our advantageous location and site provide us with a unique opportunity to connect with our surrounding neighbourhood

Art is continually evolving and so are we. Our experience and deep institutional knowledge allow us to adapt while nurturing our rich legacy as the National Art School.

This strategic plan sets us up for the next 5 years and beyond, establishing key goals and performance indicators around our creative impact, our cultural connections and the inclusivity and capacity of our campus.

Our mission is to empower students with the skills and knowledge for successful and sustainable careers in the contemporary art sector and to attract the best creative makers regardless of their background, circumstance or experience. We will do this via a strategic plan that strengthens, enhances and protects our place at the leading edge of art education – cultivating independent makers, thinkers and culturally influential graduates.

We recognise that for many people the rising cost of living creates financial barriers to art education and participation in arts. We will work to grow scholarship opportunities to help a diversity of students overcome these barriers. By expanding and diversifying short courses and high school courses we will strengthen pathways into higher education and enable more people to participate in art.

By activating our alumni network, building new partnerships, increasing our presence through exhibitions and art projects, and participating in peak body activities, we see significant scope to grow our national profile.

To achieve the full potential of our site we need to expand and reimagine our learning spaces. With innovative approaches to optimising limited resources and respecting architectural heritage, we can preserve the best of what we have while setting ourselves up with world-class facilities for the future.

While our core focus will always be education, our advantageous location and site provide us with a unique opportunity to connect with our surrounding neighbourhood, visitor and night-time economies and contribute to the revitalisation of the creative spaces of Oxford Street and beyond. This will generate opportunities for the next generation of artists to be visible, showcase their practice and share their ideas and knowledge with wider audiences.

We believe in optimising everyone's different strengths and experiences by improving internal collaboration and communication. We are building a shared and clear organisational vision, defining core values, modelling good leadership and accountability, fostering collaboration, and building inter-team communications to minimise fragmentation. This will make us purpose-fit as a contemporary workplace and arts organisation.

We take our global environmental responsibilities seriously and recognise the opportunity to be leaders in the development of sustainable art practices. We will do all of this while managing expenditure responsibly and transparently and seeking out new funding sources to increase our resilience against unpredictable financial shocks.



Conjunctures opening night, 2023. Photo: Peter Morgan.





NAS Sculpture students working in the studio. Photo: Zan Wimberley

Goal 1 Art for all

As the leading NSW art school, we play an important role in shaping and enriching culture. To live up to this responsibility we must mirror the world's diversity and celebrate differences in perspectives, artistic approaches and cultures. We must foster generous, inclusive and collaborative environments to attract dedicated students and staff.

Objective 1a: Strengthen and continue to invest in Darani Ngalawada (First Peoples Centre) and implement our Reconciliation Action Plan

Darani Ngalawada is one of our most ambitious programs. Enhancing self-determination and recognition of First Peoples knowledge and art practice, it drives systemic change in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. With 17 students enrolled in 2025, we aim to maintain high participation through scholarships and ensure we are performing above the NSW and National percentages for First Nations students participating in higher education.

Our inaugural Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan guides this journey, increasing understanding, respect and inclusion of First Peoples perspectives in curricula, fostering new partnerships and setting a cultural benchmark for embedding First Peoples programs in artistic institutions.

Objective 1b: Represent the diversity of Australian society in all NAS activities

We will continue to employ outstanding artists as teachers, leveraging their different experiences to reflect Australia's communities. We will support staff in building welcoming and inclusive learning environments through professional development related to working with all students.

A range of student backgrounds will enrich our discussions and broaden our approaches to art. We aim to attract more participants from Greater Sydney, regional NSW and across Australia to our courses and exhibitions by listening to and understanding our audiences and participants.

We aim to draw more than 50,000 visitors annually through gallery programming that showcases Australian society, with promotion across multiple communities.

Objective 1c. Expand and improve access to short courses and high school courses

We have successfully opened our doors to many students outside of our degree programs through short courses, masterclass intensives and high school activities and workshops. We provide art making experiences to more than 3,000 students and reach nearly 160 schools across NSW.

By expanding and diversifying these courses we can reach a greater mix of new students and generate awareness of future study options and opportunities in the arts.

Objective 1d: Establish a NAS alumni network

As the longest continuing art school in Australia we have proudly educated an impressive cohort of influential alumni who continue to make an impact. We will build better connections by formalising and activating our alumni network through annual events, master classes and guest lectures.



BFA students Samuel Chan (left) and Adesh Parsons (right). Photo: Peter Morgan.

Goal 2 Art education for impact

We are a dedicated, specialist art school, focused entirely on art and artists. Our core strength is providing exceptional art education through our unique studio-based teaching model, centred on hands-on learning under the guidance of leading artists, scholars and educators.

We are proud of our specialised areas of studio practice and want to explore new opportunities to support interdisciplinary practices. Our inclusive and collaborative learning model values the contributions of both students and teachers to develop rigorous makers and thinkers, and to connect artmaking to global challenges. The quality of our art education is seen in our alumni and academic staff whose influence is felt across the sector.

Objective 2a: Provide an outstanding student learning experience

Exceptional learning experience and high-quality teaching is critical to our success. As student expectations rise we are committed to maintaining our position as the provider of choice in NSW and achieving continuous improvement in our academic performance indicators, including maintaining our overall student satisfaction rating at 5% above the sector average in the annual Quality Indicators in Learning and Teaching (QILT) Student Experience Survey.

Objective 2b: Strengthen our national profile and reputation

We are the National Art School. Being such an important part of Australia's art ecology requires clearly communicating who we are and what we do to all our audiences. We must extend our reach to artistic and public communities beyond Sydney and NSW and promote our artists, exhibitions and courses to all of Australia.

Through greater support our staff and alumni activities, and building a strong research culture, we can be a key and highly visible part of the national creative discourse. There are just under 50,000 professional artists in Australia and we aim to see NAS graduates standing out as leaders in this cohort. We will achieve this growth through professional grants, scholarship, exhibitions and events.

Objective 2c: Provide contemporary curricula to prepare students for professional careers.

Our courses will respond to the contemporary needs of learners and nurture their artistic identities as we prepare them for their future careers. By revitalising our course structures and curricula, and adding to our suite of degree courses, we will continue to provide rigorous yet flexible programs of study.

Flexible learning structures will recognise the varying contexts in which students will pursue their careers. Building our capability to generate quality, accessible digital learning interfaces will help us communicate effectively with all our students.

The updated Bachelor of Fine Art degree includes a deeper engagement with professional practice and expanded opportunities for both specialised and elective study in all studio disciplines. Our new Bachelor of Fine Art (Honours) degree will provide a vital capstone year of undergraduate study for our most vocationally committed students, while offering a pathway to postgraduate study in our revitalised Master of Fine Art and Doctor of Fine Art degrees.



Goal 3 Greater global engagement

We exist to collaborate. Our students and graduates seek opportunities to take their art to the world and to see the world in the National Art School. Greater cross-cultural interaction brings new insights, approaches and ideas. International residency programs are critical to shaping the careers of our graduates and staff.

We align with Revive and NSW Creative Communities in recognising the importance of taking Australian art, with its unique stories and cultural perspectives, to the world and consider it central to our role as the National Art School.

Objective 3a: Increase international student recruitment

We are looking to increase our international student recruitment in our degree program to 20 students – or around 3% of enrolments – by 2030. We will promote the school's academic prestige and central Sydney location to attract new students. Through an international engagement plan, we will identify key regions of focus and strategic partnerships. By adopting a semester system in our courses, we also create space for study abroad opportunities.

To support these international students we will develop structures for wellbeing, access to relevant health or job services, accommodation and English language and art writing support.

Objective 3b: Expand opportunities to support international engagement for staff

Our academic staff are practicing artists and scholars at the forefront of their fields and their international presence amplifies both their work and our reputation.

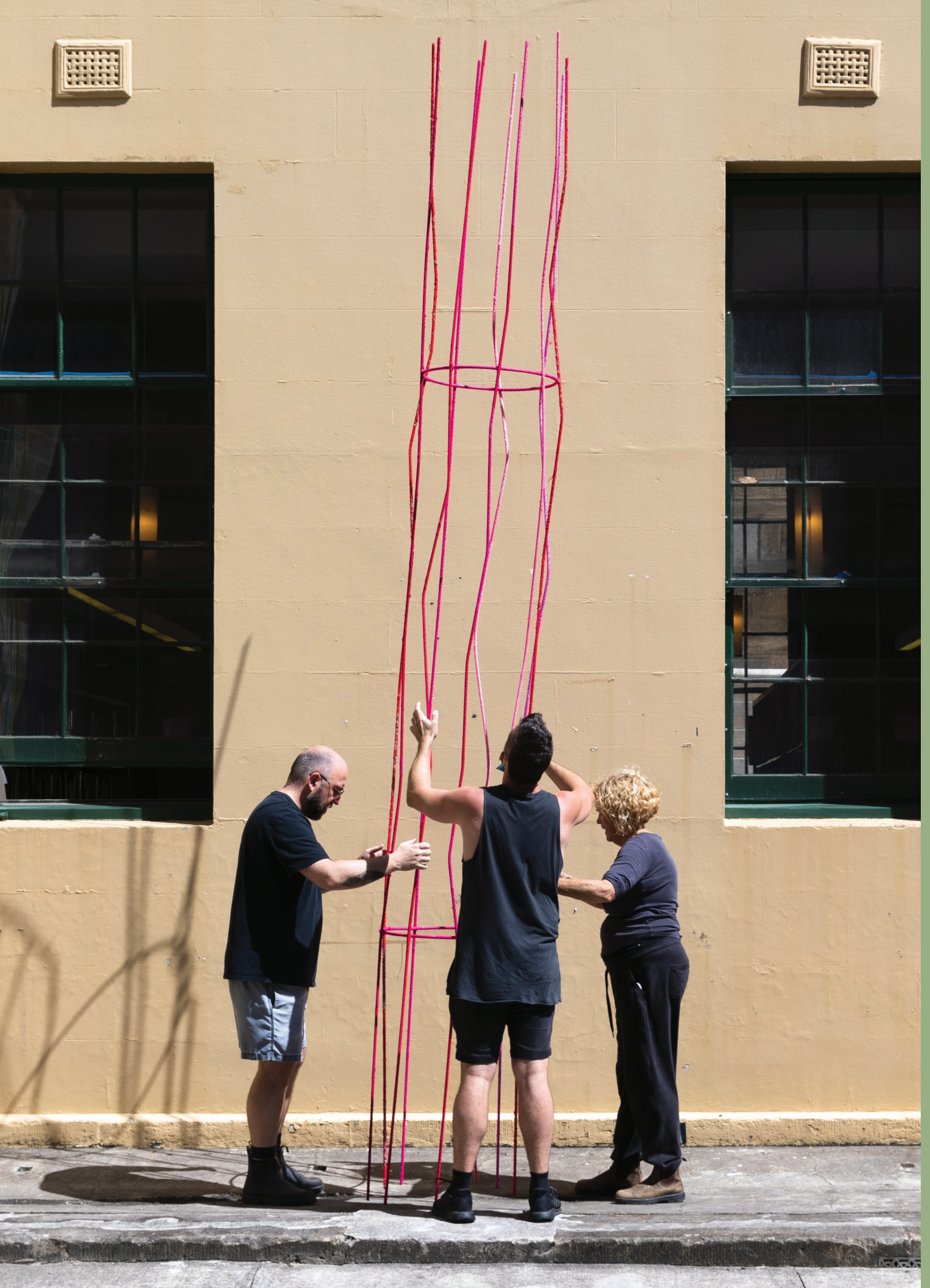
We will expand and prioritise opportunities for staff engagement abroad through Professional Practice Grants, a dedicated gallery space, regular scholarship forum and strategic partnerships with governments and international cultural organisations. These partnerships will open doors for staff-led projects, touring NAS Gallery exhibitions and contributions to major art events.

Reciprocal relationships with international partners will foster cross-cultural collaboration and create new pathways for art education. Exchange programs, residencies and staff opportunities will help build a global community that sets NAS apart.

An artist-in-residence program will bring international artists into our exhibitions, masterclasses and teaching programs. We can provide studio space and access to specialist workshops on campus, while philanthropic support will be sought to cover other essential costs, including accommodation.

Objective 3c: Prepare our graduates to confidently operate in a global environment

We will leverage international engagement to develop more residencies and student exchange opportunities in degree courses. We will identify opportunities to provide financial support for global study intensives through government grant programs and private support. We will prepare our graduates for a global art world by implementing a new curriculum around international professional practice in our degree courses.



NAS students working onsite. Photo: Peter Morgan.

Goal 4 An enhanced contemporary campus

We are proud of being Australia's longest running art school and our iconic site is a unique part of our identity. While there has been ongoing investment in site improvements including the Cell Block Theatre, entrance and garden areas and stoneworks, our buildings and interior spaces would benefit from upgrades.

They do not represent the higher quality spaces that we believe all students and staff need to ensure outstanding studio-based learning. They also interrupt the experience of a special heritage site and in their current state constrain our capacity for innovation and program development.

Site enhancements will align the facilities with premium offerings and contemporary standards. They will also create opportunities for commercial development to help diversify our funding.

Objective 4a. Renew our studio and learning spaces

We will collaborate with Create NSW on asset management and facilities planning to enhance the site's rich heritage, maximise space for contemporary studio learning and create fit-for-purpose spaces and equipment upgrades.

We need to invest in new learning technologies and student amenities and make our facilities and equipment fit-for-purpose in line with student and staff needs.

Objective 4b: Improve mobility and access throughout the site

We want all students, staff and visitors to the site to feel comfortable and welcome on campus by ensuring it is user-friendly and easy to access.

We will work with Create NSW to complete a disability inclusion action plan and to continue to proactively address workplace health and safety issues.

Objective 4c: Reduce our impact on the environment

As a dedicated art school, we use our art to shape the culture. We see it as incumbent on ourselves to commit to minimising our environmental impact. We will commit to clear and meaningful actions to reduce, reuse and recycle our materials and resources on campus.

We will work with the NSW Government to support initiatives towards meeting net zero emissions by 2050.



Goal 5 Deeper and broader community connections

Our community reaches far beyond our gates. The National Art School — and our historic Darlinghurst Gaol site — is a fundamental part of the East Sydney Cultural Precinct, connected to Oxford Street and part of the broader Rainbow Precinct.

This vision extends our footprint, linking with neighbouring sites such as the Darlinghurst Court House and creating a cultural hub that honours the city's past while shaping its creative future.

The NSW Government's Cultural Infrastructure Plan 2025+ highlights the role of cultural infrastructure in driving jobs, tourism, urban renewal and economic development. Activating our site responds directly to this need — opening Sydney's layered history to wider audiences and fostering creative and economic opportunities.

Objective 5a: Advocate for site renewal

We will establish a roundtable for partners, City of Sydney, Create NSW and the Australian Government to collectively support the school as both the heart of art education in NSW and a key activator in the neighbourhood.

Objective 5b: Strengthen and expand key partnerships

We will continue to work with a range of organisations across Western Sydney, regional NSW, nationally and internationally to expand and build mutually reinforcing partnerships and expand our impact across artistic, education, community and local government organisations.

Onsite, we want to continue to host at least one major artist event a year through partnerships with city-wide events such as Mardi Gras.

Our local neighbourhood is key. By working with nearby institutions such as Qtopia, the Art Gallery of NSW, NIDA, AFTRS and Hyde Park Barracks, we can connect diverse audiences and contribute to Sydney's cultural life, helping to shape the 24-hour and visitor economies and supporting local businesses while creating new opportunities for our own commercial revenue.

Objective 5c. Increase public and visitor engagement with the NAS site

The Cultural Infrastructure Plan 2025+ notes that cultural and heritage visitors to NSW spent \$13 billion in 2017, up 53.2% from 2013. Creative Communities aims to increase national and international audiences and cultural tourism experiences. We can be part of the state's visitor economy ambitions and improve how locals interact with our site.

In 2024, almost 46,000 people engaged with NAS exhibitions — around 21,000 onsite and 25,000 through our touring programs. This momentum gives us a powerful platform to deepen access to the site's layered histories: its Gadigal origins, its time as the Darlinghurst Gaol and its century-long role as a centre for art education.

In the long term, this may include a dedicated museum space with street frontage. In the short term, we will consider better visitor access to our NAS Archive and Collection through digitisation and cross-institutional borrowing.

Objective 5d. Increase engagement with philanthropic opportunities

We will build on the strong community of donors and patrons to launch new initiatives to grow the financial support for the National Art School aligned to the Strategic Plan and vision, including activating corporate philanthropy and support.



Grad Show 2024 opening night.
Photo: Nicole Anderson.





Goal 6 A thriving organisation

To grow as an organisation we need to continue to improve and innovate the way we work and operate as a contemporary workplace and education institution. We need to improve internal collaboration and enhance communications across departments, staff and with external stakeholders. We commit to increased transparency of governance and decision making.

Objective 6a: Create a culture of collaboration and communication

We will improve how we communicate across teams within the National Art School. By modelling good leadership, a growth mindset and creating a genuinely shared vision – one that influences all our activities – we can improve our organisational collaboration and communication to enhance wellbeing and productivity.

Objective 6b: Foster a culture of continuous improvement and accountability

We will better recognise, reward and value individual and team successes to improve how we engage with and celebrate all staff. This includes developing a method for academic staff to communicate their creative scholarship, research and engagement activities.

We will continue to support staff to improve their work-life balance including continued opportunities to work flexibility. Updating academic staff work plans will ensure consistency in terms of working hours and expectations.

Objective 6c. Improve commercial event management efficiency

Our site offers incredible opportunities for facilitating external events that encourage visitation, boost our reputation and assist the bottom line. We will develop a high-value venue hire and commercial management model that leverages the site's premium character, improves efficiencies and increases profitability while minimising impacts on the school's core activities.

Objective 6d. Achieve ongoing good governance and risk management

We will enhance our governance and risk management to retain a strong culture of transparency, respect, accountability and professionalism. We aim to operate as a best-practice contemporary workplace by continuously improving workplace health and safety processes and outcomes, updating academic and corporate governance, and communicating policies through user-friendly digital platforms.

Objective 6e: Diversify revenue streams to strengthen financial capacity and enable future growth

We need to strengthen our financial resilience to cement the school's enduring future. This requires continued innovation and disciplined efficiency across all areas of the organisation. While we have already made considerable cost savings in recent years and operate with a lean structure, further financial strategies to support growth are essential to long-term sustainability.

We will continue to work with Create NSW to maintain our State Significant Organisation funding status for operational and capital works. We will build cross-government partnerships as well as continue to increase donor and corporate sponsorship.

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