

30 October 2020

The Hon Paul Fletcher MP,
Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

Thank you for your letter 27 August 2020 outlining your expectations for the Australian Film, Television and Radio School for 2020-21. On behalf of the Council of the School, I would like to present the School's response.

AFTRS 2020-21 Statement of Intent

Role of AFTRS

COVID-19 and the continuing evolution of digital platforms have presented the screen and broadcast sectors with unprecedented opportunities and, of course, challenges. During this time of change and opportunity, AFTRS has a critical role to play in supporting, sustaining and growing a strong, vibrant local industry.

AFTRS led the Screen Sector Taskforce to draft COVIDSafe Production Guidelines that enabled our industry to get back to work quickly and we will continue to collaborate across sectors to deliver the outcomes and intent of the new policies and initiatives resulting from the *Supporting Australian stories on our screens* options paper.

AFTRS' priority is to support the Australian sector with the knowledge, training and highest quality screen and broadcast graduates it needs to thrive in this new world. The industry requires new skills from our graduates and new ideas, new ways of imagining how our sector can evolve and flourish in an increasingly dynamic international landscape.

Our vision remains to be the focal point for innovation in screen, sound, and storytelling, globally, and we work closely with industry partners to equip great Australian talent from all walks of life with the skills in storytelling, creativity and entrepreneurship to grow our industries into the future.

This year we have launched a new First Nations and Outreach division, building on the work we have done to embed First Nations culture in all we do at the school. A critical part of this future is recognising the power of our First Nations' heritage.

We also keep our sights trained on the job we have done so well for forty-five years — providing the best career-focussed training to screen and audio storytellers, craftspeople, entrepreneurs and dreamers across the country. We continue to train and upskill talent across Australia to be innovative, enterprising and adaptive in their pursuit of great content that engages local and international audiences. Our Graduate Outcomes Survey had outstanding results: 83% of graduates surveyed were either already in full-time work, full-time study or were at a stage in their working lives where they were not pursuing full-time work or study.



AFTRS' graduates continue to make their mark on our national and international screen and broadcast industries, with audacious, audience-focussed Australian work. The MA Screen's first feature film, *Sequin in a Blue Room*, went on to secure national and international distribution and Hattie Archibald's MA graduate project, the webseries *Gut Feeling*, secured distribution with ABC iview. Graduate Diploma Radio graduate Pariya Taherzadeh won two New York Festival Radio Awards for her radio documentary *Escape from Iran*. In this new world, more than ever, Australians need high quality content on the screen and airwaves to make sense of being an Australian in 2020 and the shared values, experiences and hopes that bind us.

AFTRS' strategy, now in its fifth year, is to find, develop and support new, emerging and existing talent by delivering future-facing, industry-relevant training and research.

This strategy, communicated in our current corporate plan, has the following areas of focus:

- **Outreach:** to find Australian storytelling talent, focusing on and fostering career development for emerging creative talent from across Australia and from a diversity of backgrounds.
- **Talent Development:** to offer world-class, industry-relevant education and skills, a curriculum focused on creativity and entrepreneurship, and generate an inclusive culture supporting creative risk-taking.
- **Industry Training:** to work with industry to offer relevant training and upskill practitioners through industry training.
- **Research and Innovation:** explore new frontiers of storytelling, technology, and business models.

The above outward facing areas of focus are underpinned by an efficient, impact-driven **effective organisation** that delivers value to the Federal Government, the screen arts and broadcast industries, and Australian audiences everywhere.

Outreach

The development of career pathways for talented storytellers and practitioners from underrepresented groups across Australia remains a priority for AFTRS.

Recently the School welcomed Dr Romaine Moreton to the newly created position of Director of First Nations and Outreach. Dr Moreton will be leading the design and implementation of a First Nations Strategy that will build on the range of training opportunities we offer First Nations practitioners, at the school, online, in regional communities and on country, and consider how we can most effectively support First Nations talent to embark on and continue careers in the screen and broadcast sectors.

Dr Moreton will also be driving a refreshed Outreach Strategy progressing a series of partnerships and collaborative workshops with diverse community organisations across Australia. We want to empower the most talented Australians, wherever they come from and whoever they are, so our screen and broadcast culture reflects the extraordinarily rich diversity of Australian experience.



We will continue with our highly successful Talent Camp: working with the State and Territory agencies and Screen Australia to bring together emerging talent from under-represented groups to a national professional development program.

We will also expand our Media Lab resource, an online storytelling, content creation, and creative problem-solving skills kit for teachers, that allows us to support teachers to build their students' literacy, skills and awareness of career pathways and creative opportunities in the screen and broadcast industries.

Talent Development

With the previous years' stabilising of our course offerings, AFTRS' focus can now close on the world-class excellence of our Award courses, our Industry Certificates and our short course and online programs. This year AFTRS will offer its Bachelor Screen Arts: Production, Graduate Diploma in Radio, a Masters of Screen, and a revised Masters of Screen Business.

As a consequence of COVID-19 and the move to online learning and collaboration, AFTRS has discovered exciting possibilities for delivering its hands-on, industry-aligned learning in the online space. Ernst & Young's 2018 University of the Future Report¹ found that 42% of prospective students have a strong preference for online learning. Taking advantage of increasing high-speed internet services, AFTRS will expand its online strategy to meet the growing demand for online learning². The Masters of Screen Business is the first course to move into the online space, allowing us to truly extend our national reach, whilst building a globally connected cohort of next generation leaders. We launched two new courses on the FutureLearn platform that engaged over 2,200 fully participating learners and garnered very positive feedback. The quality of our Virtual Postgraduate Information week is paying dividends in a 30% increase in the number of applications we received for our first round of postgraduate courses.

This year the School is developing a *Teaching and Learning Plan* that will articulate this unique pedagogical approach to teaching and learning and our commitment to ensure excellence in graduate outcomes is at the heart of everything we do. For AFTRS, this excellence is defined by our graduates' outstanding level of skills and their capacity to engage audiences here and internationally.

The School is reviewing its *Student Recruitment Strategy* to ensure we are able to achieve the targets set for student applications from culturally and linguistically diverse, regional and socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. We are also developing a *Wellbeing and Creativity Strategy*, that will work in tandem with our *Inclusion Plan*, so that our students are able to take the creative risks and courageous, daring decisions that excellence demands, in a safe, supportive and inclusive school community. Our new Student Centre, with three new Student Engagement Managers, including a qualified Counsellor, continues to do excellent and vital work supporting our students to learn and make the most of their time at AFTRS through this challenging time.

¹ EY, 2018, Can the Universities of Today Lead Learning for Tomorrow? The University of the Future

² IBISWorld, 2020, Online Education in Australia – Market Research Report

Industry Training

AFTRS supports and enriches the Australian screen and broadcast industries with a range of accessible, targeted courses informed by insights drawn from close partnerships and ongoing consultation with industry. AFTRS will continue to promote life-long learning and offer programs across the country that will equip practitioners, at all levels of their career, with the latest skills in emerging technology and practices, business models and the enduring principles of good story. We will continue to work closely with our industry advisory panels to design offerings such as our series of highly popular seminar series *Short, Sharp and Immediately Useful*, where top industry specialists cover topics such as emerging technologies, lean business planning, and exploiting IP.

A particular focus for us over the next year is to work closely with industry partners to develop skills training in growth areas like VFX and virtual production. With the success of the government's PDV offsets, major international players, such as the Disney-owned VFX company Industrial Light & Magic (ILM), have moved to Australia, bringing with them large-scale projects and a demand for local talent. The NSW Government has estimated that around 30% of the jobs created by this new PDV activity have to be recruited internationally due to the local PDV skills shortage. We are working across the sector to ensure this need can be met by upskilled Australian talent.

COVID-19 and the closure of borders has also illuminated specific skills gaps in the States and Territories. The School will continue to work across the Australian industry with its State and Territory partners to provide targeted skills training.

Research and Innovation

AFTRS actively cultivates and promotes innovation through partnered research projects that enrich School curriculum, distribute new knowledge to industry and support Australian talent and IP.

Through the COVID-19 period, AFTRS has worked with Screen Australia, SPA, the MEAA and the Chief Medical Officer's Team, to lead in co-ordinating COVIDSafe Screen Production Guidelines for the Australian screen sector to assist the sector to return to production as safely and swiftly as possible. The school has adopted these guidelines and created COVIDSafe Production Protocols for all AFTRS productions, and these Student-facing Protocols have also been shared widely amongst our tertiary colleagues, including VCA and NIDA. Our Radio team also produced Safe Studio Principles for Radio & Podcasting with Commercial Radio Australia, the ABC, First Nations Media Australia, SBS, TAFE NSW, Community Media Training Organisation and Community Broadcasting Association of Australia.

A new research project that we are particularly proud of is our Artist-in-Residence (AIR) program, a knowledge exchange that invites a brilliant Australian creator to spend a semester at the school to test and hone an area of their craft; and allows the school community to be enriched by a world-class practitioner's creativity. Our inaugural AIR is Lynette Wallworth. During her time here, Lynette is working with industry partners and staff and students at AFTRS to pursue a project that tests the creative parameters and audience reach of audio narratives.

We are continuing to explore practical and accessible research collaborations with the Australia Council and Screen Australia on future-facing technologies in the screen arts.



Effective organisation

AFTRS' outward-facing priorities are underpinned by an efficient, impact-driven organisation that delivers value to the Australian Government, the screen arts and broadcast industries, and audiences everywhere.

This year, ahead of a new 5-year Corporate Plan to be launched in 2021, the Executive team has undertaken a review of how we use our resources most effectively to deliver the best quality learning outcomes for our graduates and the sector. While a Building and Resource audit is about to commence, we have embarked on a restructure of our divisions to allow for closer focus on the student experience and excellence in our graduate outcomes. A refocused Partnerships and Development division will seek out fresh private sector engagement and prioritise the business development opportunities to support our target of 25% own-source revenue of the total School budget. In line with a renewed focus on corporate partnerships, our P&D team will look at aligning with organisations that share AFTRS values to secure long-term scholarships enhancing our outreach and talent development goals.

We are working hard across the school to implement our Inclusion Strategy, driven by our staff-led diversity and inclusion network groups, and have launched a new initiative to welcome production interns from Bus Stop Films.

Relationship with Government

AFTRS works closely and cooperatively with the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications and the Arts and the Minister's office. We were delighted to welcome the Minister to the school in July. Staff and students were galvanised by the opportunity to show the Minister what we do, and how we are using our resources, economic and creative, to create a hub of excellence that finds, supports and develops talent across Australia. We are hopeful that we will be able to participate in the Minister's parliamentary screening in Canberra next year and showcase this talent and the ongoing strength of our graduates.

We will continue to work closely with the department and our cultural agency peers to support our sector through its COVID-19 recovery and into a new digital world.

Conclusion

During this time of change and opportunity, the strength of our Council and our Executive team has been instrumental in allowing the School to flourish and grow. Guided by our values of mastery, generosity, merit, daring and working together we are stronger and more resilient than we have ever been. This year we welcomed a new Council member, Chris Oliver-Taylor, the CEO of Fremantle Media, Asia Pacific, who brings an extraordinary wealth of experience across Australian television to our leadership team. And with our new CEO, Dr Nell Greenwood, at the helm, the School is moving towards a new 5-year strategy, that draws on the strategic gains achieved by former CEO, Neil Peplow, to position the school as a global hub of excellence that offers the highest level of screen & broadcast training across Australia.

The role AFTRS has to play in supporting Australian talent and the economic growth and jobs this creative talent drives, has never been in sharper focus. I am passionate about the power of creativity in this new world – for the school and for the screen and broadcast industries. The markets for content are global, and the power of creativity



AFTRS

Australian Film Television
and Radio School

The Entertainment Quarter
Moore Park NSW 2021
PO Box 2286
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012
CRICOS Provider Code: 03662D

T (02) 9805 6444
E info@aftrs.edu.au
W aftrs.edu.au

transformative. The skills that we embed in our students are creating a generation of resilient, adaptive individuals who strive for excellence in telling the Australian story to Australians and the world.

Yours sincerely,



RUSSEL HOWCROFT
Chair, AFTRS Council



Australian Government
AFTRS