

T R A N S C R I P T

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Cultural and Creative Industries in Victoria

Melbourne – Thursday 13 March 2025

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WITNESS

Anne Robertson, Executive Officer, Public Galleries Association of Victoria.

The CHAIR: I declare open the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into the Cultural and Creative Industries in Victoria. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the land we are gathered on today, and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings. I also welcome any other members of the public watching via the live broadcast.

To kick off, we will just get committee members to introduce themselves to you, starting with Mr Berger.

John BERGER: John Berger, Southern Metropolitan.

Katherine COPSEY: Katherine Copsey, Southern Metropolitan.

The CHAIR: Georgie Purcell, Northern Victoria.

Richard WELCH: Richard Welch, North-East Metropolitan.

Gaelle BROAD: Hi. I am Gaelle Broad, Member for Northern Victoria Region too.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Evan Mulholland, Northern Metro.

Anne ROBERTSON: Nice to meet you.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much for appearing today.

All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing, and then transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, can you please state your full name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of.

Anne ROBERTSON: My name is Anne Robertson. I am the Executive Officer with the Public Galleries Association of Victoria, or PGAV.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you. We now welcome your opening comments but ask that they are kept to around 10 to 15 minutes to ensure plenty of time for discussion and questions.

Anne ROBERTSON: Thank you for the opportunity to present at this inquiry. I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands we are meeting on today, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin nation, and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. Public Galleries Association of Victoria, which I will refer to by our acronym PGAV, is the peak body representing a network of 70 art galleries across Victoria, including 20 regional galleries. PGAV supports the sector through the delivery of capacity-building programs, conducts research to advocate for the sector and promotes public galleries to new and diverse audiences. Last year Victoria's public galleries attracted 7.3 million visitors. They invested \$4 million into the careers of over 5400 visual artists, contributed 723 full-time equivalent jobs to the state's economy and cared for nationally significant collections valued at \$5.2 billion. Our galleries are driving

visitation to Melbourne and across the regions, while their exhibitions and affiliated programs improve the mental health and wellbeing of millions of Victorians each year, and they have become the go-to places for teachers and students wanting to learn about First Nations history and culture as part of the national curriculum.

Despite the significant contributions Victoria's public galleries make to the communities they serve, the sector faces chronic sustainability challenges. Shortfalls in funding are placing its workforce, ageing buildings and nationally significant collections at risk and limiting the sector's ability to deliver free and affordable access to the arts for all Victorians. It is in this context that PGAV welcomed the Australian government's cultural policy *Revive* and its commitment to empowering our artists and arts organisations to thrive and grow. However, the \$200 million in additional funding for the delivery of the national cultural policy is a fraction of what is required to achieve its goals. I will now provide examples of the funding shortfall faced by Victoria's public gallery sector in my response to items (1), (2) and (5) of this inquiry's terms of reference.

Creative Australia, the federal government's principal arts investment and advisory body, currently funds 13 public galleries in Victoria to the value of \$3.2 million, only one of which is a regional gallery. Given there are over 70 public galleries in Victoria, the level of underfunding of the sector is stark and fails to address the sustainability challenges the sector faces. *Revive*'s \$35.5 million investment in First Nations art and culture includes the establishment of a workforce development strategy. We support this initiative and have identified the need for an \$11.25 million investment to fast-track First Nations workforce development at Victoria's public galleries. We invite Creative Australia to work with us to ensure this strategy is fit for purpose.

Revive's \$11.8 million Sharing the National Collection program is enabling Victoria's public galleries to take long-term loans from the National Gallery of Australia. However, the program does not address our gallery's urgent need for investment in a centralised approach to collection storage, upgrades to the ageing infrastructure and investment in collection staff and conservators, which are all limiting what our galleries can share with their audiences. *Revive* increased the Regional Arts Fund by \$8.5 million over four years. In the most recent round Victoria's public galleries shared in 3 per cent of the funding on offer. We recommend that Regional Arts Victoria, which manages the state distribution of the Regional Arts Fund, work with us to ensure that Victoria's galleries receive a fairer share.

In relation to gallery infrastructure, the three tiers of government contributed equally to the redevelopment of six regional galleries from 2017 to 2023 at a combined cost of \$74.5 million. However, there is a \$438 million pipeline of public gallery infrastructure projects, 40 per cent of which are locked out of federal and state government infrastructure programs because they are located in metropolitan Melbourne. In relation to state government policies and spending, Creative Victoria's creative enterprises program is vital to PGAV's work. It enables us to deliver tailored professional development to the sector, which ensures gallery staff have up-to-date skills and knowledge to care for their collections and deliver programs that meet the changing needs of their increasingly diverse audiences. It also allows PGAV to undertake research of the sector and provide insightful advocacy. Our most recent benchmarking reveals that since 2020 Victoria's public galleries have tripled the investment going directly to artists and ramped up their public programming to support community wellbeing. This is despite rising costs and a 42 per cent drop in membership revenue due to the cost-of-living crisis. The data also shows workforce challenges continue to affect the sector, exacerbated by a 16 per cent drop in volunteers since the pandemic.

We would love to see more investment in the sector, and we have outlined our investment priorities in our submission. We have an incredible network of public galleries in Victoria. Regional audiences are telling us that they are the beating hearts of their communities that is not the pub, and we know that they are providing communities in our fast-growing outer metro suburbs with much-needed access to the arts close to home. But if we want our galleries to create jobs, improve the economic livelihoods of our artists and deliver programs that improve the wellbeing of the millions of visitors they attract each year, then we need to overcome the funding shortfall that is limiting their potential. We are seeking a new approach to government investment in Victoria's public galleries so that all levels of government are contributing equally to the sustainability of the sector.

But for this to be achieved local government needs to be at the negotiating table. We recommend that an arts and culture position be established within Local Government Victoria which can liaise with relevant staff at Victoria's 79 municipal councils and negotiate with state and federal governments to overcome the shortfall in funding that is limiting the potential of Victoria's public galleries. I note Ms Fielding from ANA's earlier comments when she recommended a national cabinet and a national strategy. The Australian Local

Government Association would sit at that table, and I see the position at Local Government Victoria contributing what the needs are for Victoria to ALGA to then lobby at a national level.

With a more equitable approach to funding, the three tiers of government can make our suburban and regional galleries more accessible by more people and increase the impact they have on the social, cultural and economic wellbeing of every Victorian. Thank you, and I welcome questions from the committee.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you so much for that. We will go to members for questions, and I will start with Ms Copsey.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. I am really interested in one of the points that are highlighted in the summary we have received of your submission around health and wellbeing programming. Some of the witnesses that we have heard from during the course of the hearing have been talking about social prescription and the value that the arts can play in providing places of social connection and inclusion for members of the community that they operate in. Could you take us through a little bit around what programs currently exist and what that pilot would cover?

Anne ROBERTSON: Currently in the public gallery sector different galleries are delivering different programs according to what access to funding or philanthropy they can secure. Bayside have been running their Connections program, which is supporting people with Alzheimer's and their carers, and Heide has a similar program, and I know that Wangaratta Art Gallery – this was pre pandemic – started a program addressing isolation and loneliness within their regional community. The trickiness there was that they had to schedule it to happen when the buses ran on a Saturday afternoon, and it became very difficult to run. They basically had a 1-hour window to run it. But the sector are very committed to delivering mental health and wellbeing programs to their constituents, and that is why we want to run a pilot to collect the evidence about what the impact is pre and post taking part in these programs to secure ongoing support for these kinds of programs. The research out of Western Australia – its catchphrase is 'You don't have to be good at the arts for the arts to be good for you.' They recommend 2 hours of any kind of art activity a week, and it can improve your mental health by 30 per cent. Galleries are already delivering these programs; it is just that they are often doing it with very few staff and very few resources.

Katherine COPSEY: A lot of the time we have heard also about the need for pipelines of employment awareness, employment training and opportunity for arts workers. Could you speak to us a little bit about the pathways into working in the gallery space that a young person might face today, and also whether there is overlap between opportunities for emerging artists to develop skills that can support their creative career as well as working in a gallery space?

Anne ROBERTSON: Usually the pathway into working at a gallery is either through being a visual artist. People are often going through university, so they will have an undergraduate degree in visual arts and then go on to do further studies or on-the-job training – I came from that background. Then there are people going straight into doing art history courses and then specialising, often going on and doing arts management courses, so we have a very highly educated sector. But what we are finding, and this will be happening across the board, is that enrolments in those degrees are dropping. The federal government's Job-ready Graduates Package has increased the cost of an arts degree significantly. We are also seeing closures of arts courses, especially across regional Victoria – it is very challenging. The galleries are increasingly playing a role in arts education for potential artists, but increasingly they are going to need to play a role in terms of educating and training up our workforce. One of our requests for investment priorities is very much around creative workforce scholarships, enabling galleries to do on-the-job training. Similarly, our First Nations workforce development program is about doing three-year internships that turn into three-year positions in the gallery sector. It is the best way to fast-track the training into the sector for the future.

Katherine COPSEY: Fantastic. I have one more if there is time.

The CHAIR: Yes, of course.

Katherine COPSEY: We have heard quite a lot from various submitters throughout the hearing – and I welcome it – about the need for regional arts funding to be prioritised. I was interested though in the point that you made around the location of many established galleries that can attract a significant, large audience and often a visitation audience that is from international and interstate as well as the local audience. Could you

speak about the importance of those presentation opportunities and being housed in a metro gallery in terms of supporting regional creators, and how that ecosystem works?

Anne ROBERTSON: Thank you for that question. Often artists in regional areas, their first exhibition opportunity is through their local-government-run gallery, and the staff on the ground provide them with the skills and knowledge to prepare them to take up other exhibition opportunities – updating their CVs; helping them identify which artworks are most appropriate for presenting in a gallery setting; helping them with grant applications. So they play a really critical role in their career development. Then once they have had an exhibition there, they may get one at another regional gallery, a metropolitan gallery, right through to our state flagship institutions like NGV et cetera. So the galleries play a critical role in the career development of artists.

Katherine COPSEY: Fantastic. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Ms Copsey. I will go to Mrs Broad.

Gaelle BROAD: Thank you very much for coming today and for presenting. In this inquiry, part of our terms of reference is looking at the impact of COVID on the sector, and we have also heard about the cost of living. You mentioned declining memberships and declining volunteers, but can you expand on what that impact has been, particularly in your sector?

Anne ROBERTSON: We undertook a survey midway through COVID, through the lockdowns, and our members told us overall there was a \$21 million loss in earned income, and that was halfway through the pandemic. By the end of it – we have not surveyed what they lost overall, but that was a significant loss in earned income. I know that the performing arts sector was very badly hit, but the gallery sector generates about 30 per cent of its income in earned income, so that was a significant loss to what they could do. At the same time they were ramping up their programming; they were delivering online programming, trying to provide opportunities for artists to earn income.

The loss of volunteers was really pronounced, and they also lost a lot of casual staff, understandably. Some councils were able to keep employing or engaging their casual staff but not for the full length of time, and they were not eligible for the federal government's income support initiatives during the pandemic. So subsequently there has been a loss of casual staff, and we see that in the performing arts sector as well, especially with technicians. But the loss of volunteers is quite significant, and we have not seen them resume those levels. Prepandemic there were about 1200 volunteers in the sector, and then we have seen a 16 per cent drop. The volunteers are doing everything from front of house, providing that kind of critical support and engaging visitors, through to welcoming people, opening, serving drinks and all those kinds of things. But also they become ambassadors for the galleries in their communities. They give up their time because they love the galleries and they love the arts, and then they share that back to their communities.

Gaelle BROAD: I think a lot of the volunteers would be locally based and spread the word, whereas there is a lot of visitation that comes with art galleries. I am based in Bendigo, so we were seeing queues down the street with people lining up to come to exhibitions, certainly in the past. There were some ticketing changes to help to accommodate some of that load. But do you feel exhibitions are getting back to those levels now, or is there still a dip?

Anne ROBERTSON: There is. The state NGV of course will sway that \$7.3 million visitor number, but our members are telling us they are getting back to their pre-COVID levels of visitation in places like Ballarat and Bendigo. Bendigo are about to open their Frida Kahlo exhibition, so I am sure they will be having bumper numbers this year. It has been slow, but they are getting there now, yes.

Gaelle BROAD: We have heard a bit about the grant process, but you were talking about Commonwealth, state and local government funding. We know in Bendigo their refurbishment had issues because the application was not put in for the federal funding. But how does that work in practice? What is not working with the grants at the moment or that type of funding? What changes would you like to see?

Anne ROBERTSON: It is very, very slow. I guess the big issue is that regional galleries have a pathway to secure federal government infrastructure funding through DITRD and state government infrastructure funding through RDV. It is usually initiated through local government – the gallery working with their local government – and then they approach RDV and then they go for their federal government funding. For our

metropolitan galleries there are not mechanisms; they cannot access the federal government funding because it is limited to regional. And then with state government they are going to Creative Victoria and then working with their local MPs to pitch to Department of Treasury and Finance. There is no formal process.

The other issue is that the federal government uses the Monash model, and I know a number of people who have given evidence have made mention of this. They have got a different definition that they use for regional and metro. Geelong is in that situation. They have got an amazing and much-needed redevelopment. If you have been to Geelong Gallery, they have one set of toilets at the very back of the gallery downstairs. So if they have got people coming in for the Archibald Prize or any of their huge shows that they are drawing down there, they have got one set of toilets down at the back of the building. But under the Monash model they are seen as metropolitan. I mean, Geelong is our biggest, largest regional centre – and it is a regional centre. Living in regional Victoria, you fully understand it is different to living in metropolitan Melbourne. It has got different politics and different needs, and the community works very closely together. But it is a different environment.

Gaelle BROAD: So how do you see that disbursement of funds? Because this inquiry, again, looks at regional areas and their share of funding. You mentioned 13 galleries and I think one being regional. Does there need to be more focus on regional areas? What are your thoughts?

Anne ROBERTSON: Most definitely from the federal government. They are putting 4 per cent into our sector, so there is a lot of opportunity there for increased funding. That is why it was really great to hear Ms Fielding's evidence and her approach to this national strategy akin to the sports strategy. I think it is a really smart and much-needed approach to funding of the arts in Australia. But having all three tiers of government at the table looking at what is going to be funded and how is just going to be critical; it will be game changer. It is much needed. We are scrabbling for very small bits of money. It is hard to know what the federal government is actually contributing and how, and that is part of the frustration when we are in these positions of trying to advocate. I spent days poring through information, and I know that Ms Fielding expressed that frustration as well. We need to have that transparency so that we can look at this in a really smart, intelligent way and go 'Where does the funding need to come from to support what our audiences want?', which is well-funded galleries close to home.

Gaelle BROAD: I have just a brief question. You mentioned closure of arts courses in regional Victoria. What is behind that?

Anne ROBERTSON: Dwindling numbers, and the reason for that is that there are perceptions that you cannot get a job in the arts, that there are not jobs in the arts and that you cannot sustain yourself – you can. Often artists will come and work in a gallery, so they are working within the industry that they are skilled and trained in, and then they have their art practice as their side gig. Admittedly, it is the frustration of being an artist – generating enough money always means working in multiple jobs.

There are perceptions that you cannot get a job in the arts, so people are not enrolling. But then the federal government's Job-ready Graduates Package has had a critical impact. With costs of a creative arts degree almost doubling, it is just prohibitive, especially when you are looking at that impacting on whether or not you can get a loan for a house. Then, in order to have a home, you pretty much need two incomes at \$100,000. Not many people in the arts are ever earning that kind of money, so it is a real deterrent.

Galleries are finding - Swan Hill is a great example - that arts courses in their region are closing. They are finding it more and more difficult to attract trained arts professionals into the jobs or to work as casuals because no-one is doing those courses anymore.

Gaelle BROAD: It is a great spot, Swan Hill. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thanks, Ms Broad. We will go to Mr Berger.

John BERGER: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Anne, for your appearance and presentation before. I am interested to unpack a bit more about the volunteer side of things. I know you mentioned that you rely on them quite heavily, and the amount that you have lost through COVID and all that. How are you going about recruiting and retaining the current ones that are in the system so far?

Anne ROBERTSON: That is a good question. This is one of the biggest perpetual challenges for our sector. In order to have a volunteer program, you need a staff member to do that, or a very dedicated volunteer to manage it for you. If you do not have someone who is overseeing and managing that recruitment and the training and just managing volunteers and ensuring that there is enough on in terms of – what do you call that; the words just fail me – getting people to turn up for a certain shift or to do a certain task. It takes a lot of time to manage, and most of our galleries are operating with between five and 10 staff, especially those in regional areas. It is a massive drain on their capacity. Many do not have it, and so they are struggling to do it. So that is exacerbating their ability to train up and recruit more volunteers, because they just do not have capacity themselves to do that.

John BERGER: It would be good if you could get a volunteer to manage the volunteers. I just wonder, is there a particular age group that currently are the volunteer group?

Anne ROBERTSON: They are usually people who have retired.

John BERGER: Recently, or just –

Anne ROBERTSON: I think, more often than not, from my experience – I have been in this role for 14 years, and we have run programs on how to manage and run a volunteer program et cetera – most of the volunteers are people of retirement age, which adds another complexity, in that often they have responsibilities of raising and caring for grandchildren and wanting to go on holidays and those things. We can see there are reasons why, but also with cost of living, people are just changing what they have been doing as well, and post COVID.

John BERGER: How do you maintain the level of interest for the volunteers?

Anne ROBERTSON: There is definitely the interest. When they come in, they are doing everything. You will see at the National Gallery of Victoria they are often running the tours. They get trained up, and they are drawing on their art history and drawing on all their passions and interests. Our galleries have very loyal audiences, but it is just the galleries having capacity to actually engage and recruit that I think is an issue.

John BERGER: Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Berger. We will go to Mr Mulholland.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for coming in today. I think it has been a fruitful discussion. I was at the opening of the Geelong Gallery last month, which was fantastic.

Anne ROBERTSON: Yes.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Your submission and our discussion have outlined the fact – and we have heard it from a lot of other witnesses – about funding not being indexed and that causing a very real cut to funding in the long term. Can you just talk us through what the not-indexing of funding means for you and means for your organisation?

Anne ROBERTSON: I can speak both for the Public Galleries Association, because we are one of the recipients of CEP, and for our members as well that receive CEP or the regional partnerships program. With the creative enterprises program not being indexed – and its predecessor, the organisations investment program – basically it is a 30 per cent loss of income over the past 10 years. For the regional partnerships program, which funds programming at galleries and artist fees at our regional galleries, that is equivalent to a 26 per cent cut. That money has been stagnant. I know Creative Victoria has been trying very hard to secure more funding. The biggest issue I think is trying to get through to the Department of Treasury and Finance the benefits of the gallery sector in terms of mental health, wellbeing and keeping kids at school. That is the story and the evidence that we need to capture and be able to articulate really well, to say that investing in the gallery sector is actually reducing costs in these kinds of areas. That would go a long way. The CPI has had a big impact, but generally the level of funding needs to grow anyway. The pie needs to grow. Hence we are looking at the three tiers of government. Our outer metropolitan local government local galleries are not eligible for Creative Victoria CEP funding.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Do you think that definition, particularly for our growth suburbs – some people call them interface council areas, some outer metro council areas; I particularly worry about the cultural desert that goes on in places like Donnybrook or Wyndham and other places – needs to be considered as regional now or at least considered as special cases?

Anne ROBERTSON: I think that Wyndham has a great gallery.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Yes, it does.

Anne ROBERTSON: They are doing great work, and Bunjil. I think our metropolitan and our outer metro should all be funded. Just because you are in metropolitan Melbourne and outer metropolitan Melbourne does not mean you are going to the NGV, ACMI or Arts Centre Melbourne. People want to access art close to home, and they deserve to have world-class gallery experiences close to home. That is where we need to have a really serious look at this funding, it being the three tiers of government. Local government is doing the very heavy lifting at the moment, and we would love to grow the pie, as they say.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Just a quick one: I was interested in your flying squad proposal and how that would work across the public gallery sector.

Anne ROBERTSON: Currently none of our metropolitan and regional galleries, other than the state agencies, have conservators. People are coming through as conservators, graduating, but there are not many jobs. The galleries have these amazing collections but do not have the funding. It is less than 10 per cent that they are putting into the conservation of their work. What is happening is they are just putting their work back into the collection stores, and it is not being conserved. That is why we identified this need for the flying squad of conservators. It could be based in a metropolitan one and a regional one. They could go out to the galleries, see the work, work on it onsite or take it back to a hub either in metro and/or regional Victoria. It would really address and ensure that the galleries are caring for their collections to industry standards. They all want to, but just honestly, when it comes down to whether or not they can put a show on or how much money they will spend on conserving works in their collection, those are the difficult decisions they are having to make at the moment.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Cool. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Mulholland. I will go next. Like many other people we have had before us, you talked about your reliance on volunteers and some of the impact that that has had post COVID. Across the board volunteering seems to be a really big problem for a lot of groups and organisations. In your view what can the government do to bring people back to volunteering, or is volunteering even the way that it should be? Do we need to reassess how we can ensure its sustainability?

Anne ROBERTSON: We would like more jobs in the galleries so that they can do those jobs, and then the volunteers are the added extra thing. It is about that community building, the sharing, the buy-in and the sharing back of skills. I am not sure if it is still the same way, but when my father wanted to retire early you could do 15 hours of volunteering in order to be eligible for Newstart. So that was the lead-in. Basically government incentives that encourage volunteering, if they are there still – and if not, at least if they are made more known and for the gallery sector to be able to share that out to their communities – would be a great benefit.

The CHAIR: Absolutely. Again, both Gaelle and I are regional MPs and obviously have a bit of an interest in relation to our own patches, because while there are problems across the board, they seem to be particularly worse in regional Victoria and remote areas. Is that volunteering capacity being more heavily felt in the outer areas or is it everywhere?

Anne ROBERTSON: We have not noticed that it is particularly the case in regional. We have, in terms of the impact over time, declining membership and generation of operating funds. But in terms of volunteers, I think it is across the board.

The CHAIR: Right, okay. Just finally, in your submission, in relation to regional galleries again, with your calls for the urgency for renovations and fixing infrastructure and things like that, have you had any conversations with government or other politicians, and if so, have those conversations been in any way productive? Do you feel as if this matter is being taken seriously?

Anne ROBERTSON: We did a lot of research and put together our *Public Galleries: Our Creative Heart* campaign, which we launched in March 2023. Before we launched it we met with different ministers and also shadow ministers to outline what the needs were, including infrastructure needs. PGAV was part of the state government's Regional Collection Access Program. We helped design and implement that, which was for small-scale infrastructure upgrades. Four million dollars I think was allocated to that, which was quite transformational. Hamilton Gallery was a great example. They could then take a show from the NGV – that was about a year ago that they did that – of baroque masterpieces, really quite an incredible exhibition. In our consultations and meetings with ministers and shadow ministers we have let them know of this need.

We also know what the pipeline is because we went out to our members and provided that information through Creative Victoria, and that was also shared with Regional Development Victoria, I understand. The government is aware that there is that pipeline, and our galleries themselves are advocating to Creative Victoria, Treasury and RDV. These are job-creating programs, and the return is that we have this amazing infrastructure that enables galleries to deliver more programming – larger and more ambitious programming that attracts people there, whether it is to metropolitan or regional areas – and there are the economic benefits that flow from that. Of course the big issue is always that you also need programming dollars to ensure that galleries have the staff to be able to deliver that complex programming. Often when you have a gallery redevelopment the staffing does not necessarily increase, and that is putting a massive strain upon the sector as well.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will hand you to Mr Welch.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Anne. Thanks for coming in and for your contributions. I am going to ask the really stupid question first: when you say 'public', do you mean publicly owned or a mixture of public and private, or what are you?

Anne ROBERTSON: Largely publicly owned. We have university art museums, but they are open to the public. Being open to the public is a requirement of being a member of the PGAV.

Richard WELCH: Right, so you are predominantly public, as in state public owned. That is good.

Anne ROBERTSON: Yes, or local government and state government owned.

Richard WELCH: And I think in answer to one of Gaelle's questions you said about 30 per cent of the income from galleries, on average, is earned income, and by earned income, do we mean tickets or sponsorships?

Anne ROBERTSON: Most of the galleries are free, but it would be tickets to their workshops and things like that, membership fees, venue hire, and if they have a cafe or retail as well, that is also generating income.

Richard WELCH: And entry is generally free unless there is a special exhibition or something like that?

Anne ROBERTSON: I think there are one or two galleries where you do have to pay to get in. I think TarraWarra Museum of Art charges non-residents an entry fee, but largely, at 99 per cent of them it is free.

Richard WELCH: You have got a real drop in funding, but you would also have had increasing costs. What are the headline cost increases that are the most impactful on what you do?

Anne ROBERTSON: They are things like freight. Taking a touring exhibition, a lot of galleries their collection stores are beyond capacity, so they are actually storing work offsite in commercial storage. You then have to have freight to get it to and fro, and that has gone through the roof. That is impacting our regional galleries, and of course it is double if you are in regional in terms of you are going further distances.

Richard WELCH: And it is not standard freight, either, is it?

Anne ROBERTSON: No.

Richard WELCH: It is specialised freight at the same time.

Anne ROBERTSON: Yes. They need to be climate-controlled trucks, often, and you need specialist art handlers to know what they are doing, rather than just your normal removalists.

Richard WELCH: Is insurance a bigger problem than it has been in the past?

Anne ROBERTSON: Yes, as insurance is everywhere, those costs are going up. They are always an issue, and a big, big one is around care and safety of children, the Child Protection Insurance – there are only two insurers. One is Australian and one is overseas, and that has been a real sticking point. It is very expensive.

Richard WELCH: Is that because of the nature of a gallery as sort of an unsupervised space?

Anne ROBERTSON: Well, when the galleries are running education programs they have to have an education person, like a gallery educator or a public programs person, and often they will ensure that the school that is visiting always has to have a staff member there to minimise their risk and ensure that the kids are being cared for, observed and looked after.

Richard WELCH: That is really interesting food for thought, all those points, because they are almost unique to your discipline in a way.

Anne ROBERTSON: Anywhere in the arts that is delivering children's programs is facing this issue.

Richard WELCH: But you have such small staff numbers it is probably disproportionately impacting you –

Anne ROBERTSON: Yes, it is hard.

Richard WELCH: and especially in regions, I would imagine, as well.

Anne ROBERTSON: Only about half the sector has qualified educators. It is a big issue for our sector. Those that do are servicing up to 100 schools in their area. Last year the sector had 350,000 primary and secondary students come through their doors, they cannot meet demand.

Richard WELCH: And maybe the gallery has one person who does that, so if they are off sick or if there is something else like that, the impact actually ripples out quite a bit. One of the things I think is actually the most concerning is when you said there is a 39 per cent reduction in spending on conservation of the collection and acquisitions, which reads to me like, 'Oh my God, our collections are in jeopardy.' That would reach a tipping point where we are going to start losing important pieces of history and artistic value. How close are we to that cliff?

Anne ROBERTSON: I cannot tell you how close we are to that cliff. I just know that collections, collection care and management are one of the biggest issues for the sector. These are nationally significant collections, and yet a lot of galleries will not have a dedicated collections manager or registrar, so gallery staff are doing multiple roles, and they have limited budgets for conservation as well. And then the crammed collection stores add more risk. That is why it is a multipronged approach that needs to happen. We need them to have the collection management staff. They need to have the budgets for their conservation, and they need to have the upgrades in their infrastructure. I know that Creative Victoria has been working towards, for 15 years, a shared approach to collection storage, and there are new ways of approaching that, like they have in the Netherlands, where they open collection stores and they are attracting people to them. We are hoping that that might be a way that Treasury goes, 'Yes, this is a great opportunity to care for our collections and also be a visitor drawcard to the state.' We always live in hope that it can get up, but honestly collection storage is a very serious issue.

Richard WELCH: Is there a centralised universal archival system so that everyone knows where everything is, or is it gallery by gallery?

Anne ROBERTSON: Gallery by gallery.

Richard WELCH: If you had a universal database, you could be saying, 'Here are our at-risk items,' and then there would be greater visibility and better, more efficient distribution of conservation resources.

Anne ROBERTSON: Most definitely. Anecdotally we know that galleries are at the point where they have their databases and they know where that is at but they have not got what their priorities are in terms of what needs to come first. They will have it – mentally they will know it – but they have not done that work because they are just too busy.

Richard WELCH: Yes. And I guess they are all probably bespoke systems in each of these places that would not talk to each other.

Anne ROBERTSON: Not 100 per cent. They all do use different systems according to what their budgets are and what they can afford.

Richard WELCH: So the danger is we have got less conservation going on generally – I presume we are losing conservation skills because there is not a –

Anne ROBERTSON: We have people who are coming through, but there are no jobs.

Richard WELCH: Okay, so there is supply.

Anne ROBERTSON: There is definitely supply. We have got conservators working in galleries, but they cannot do conservation because that is not what they are employed for.

Richard WELCH: But we have got the horrible situation that there could be really important pieces that we just do not know we are losing, and when it is gone, it is gone.

Anne ROBERTSON: Yes. The galleries do the best they possibly can, but it is an issue that we would love the state – and it is going to take federal as well.

Richard WELCH: And the quantum, what you think that would require, is a hundred million dollars.

Anne ROBERTSON: That would be for the infrastructure. Yes, that is over 10 years.

Richard WELCH: That is for your infrastructure, sorry – not that much; \$6 million is –

Anne ROBERTSON: Yes.

Richard WELCH: And would that incorporate system upgrades in order that – they have to know where to fly.

Anne ROBERTSON: Yes. We are envisaging having a hub – like a lab – in a metro and a regional, catering for those two different areas, yes.

Richard WELCH: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Anne.

Anne ROBERTSON: Thank you. Thanks for your interest.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Welch. That is all the questions from members, so thank you very much for appearing before us today and sharing your knowledge and information. It is super useful to the committee. That concludes the public hearing.

Witness withdrew.