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Arts, cultural job cuts on the horizon to net million-dollar savings

By [Linda Morris](#) SMH
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Dozens of jobs are set to be lost among agencies supporting arts, heritage, Indigenous communities, and some of the state's biggest cultural projects as the NSW Premier's department searches for multi-million dollar savings.

Tim Reardon, head of the state's public service, is seeking voluntary redundancies across the Department of Premier and Cabinet as part of post-budget "necessary efficiency savings".

The redundancy drive has prompted the Public Service Association to complain to the department about a lack of consultation.

[Tim Reardon sent a letter to affected staff on February 1. *CREDIT:AAP*]

Heritage Council of NSW, Create NSW – the government's arts agency – and Aboriginal Affairs NSW fall within the department, along with positions responsible for the development and delivery of government strategy and legislation, major projects and state events.

The number of positions to be lost will depend on take-up but savings of up to \$8 million – when the redundancies are combined with other cost-saving measures – have been spoken about inside government, according to a source familiar with the process who spoke on the condition of anonymity. This figure was not challenged by the government. In November, the COVID-19-impacted NSW budget [reported a \\$16 billion deficit](#), the first in almost a decade.

Major cultural institutions including the Sydney Opera House, Australian Museum and the Art Gallery of NSW are understood to be exempt from the redundancy program.

But the arts sector is anxious the redundancies might herald a restructure of Create NSW, and even fewer resources to administer grants in the midst of pandemic disruptions.

Earlier this week [peak arts bodies rebuked the government](#) for the adequacy, integrity and lack of transparency of its arts grants process, often aggravated by

internal restructures and abrupt changes to personnel. Public engagement with the sector was poor, they said.

“Make no mistake, these job cuts will make it worse,” Shadow arts minister Walt Secord said on news of the redundancy round.

In a letter to affected staff dated February 1, Mr Reardon said such voluntary ...[...?]

A DPC spokesperson said this was an entirely voluntary program. “The NSW government recognises the arts and cultural sector plays an important role in the creation of jobs, attracting tourism, boosting the economy and strengthening the social fabric of our community,” they said. “The voluntary redundancy Expression of Interest will not affect the huge program of work the government undertakes in supporting the arts sector.”

Voluntary or not, the redundancies were still job losses, PSA general secretary Stewart Little said. “These roles won’t be replaced and it will leave NSW with fewer jobs overall. This government awards \$5 million in contracts to outsource its policy plans to big four consultants, and then cuts jobs – all in the name of efficiency. That’s not efficiency, it is economic vandalism.”

Applications for voluntary redundancy are due March 12, amid speculation of a Cabinet reshuffle the same month.

Penelope Benton, acting chief executive of the National Association for the Visual Arts, said Create NSW needed more people on the ground to ensure the efficient delivery of grant funding to artists.

“The arts sector is already change-weary with grant programs administered by Create NSW changing names and criteria virtually every year for the past four or five years and, of course, the current impact of the pandemic crisis on our sector.

“There must be a more effective way to be responsive to industry needs without the seeming introspectivity of moving people around or changing titles.”

<https://www.smh.com.au/culture/art-and-design/arts-cultural-job-cuts-on-the-horizon-to-net-million-dollar-savings-20210203-p56z02.html>