

Q&A's around PRODUCTION

Proposals to introduce major changes to RN production and programs likely to have a significant effect on employees (including potential redundancies)

Drama & the Creative Audio Unit:

- Drama programs except Poetica, ie Airplay, The Book Reading and Sunday Story, to be decommissioned for 2013
- A Creative Audio Unit to be established

Features:

- Creative Instinct and The Night Air to be decommissioned for 2013
- 360 documentaries, Hindsight and Into The Music to be recommissioned, with changes detailed below
- Away! to be recommissioned, with no changes
- Changes to the production model and staffing levels in Features:
 - Staff to be allocated to individual programs each year rather than working across most Features programs
 - Reduction in the average production cycle for programs
 - New quotas for program production
 - New commissioning process in Features
- A reduction in the staffing levels – 2 less Band 8 producers

Other programs:

- Lingua Franca to be decommissioned for 2013
- MovieTime to be decommissioned for 2013

DRAMA & THE CREATIVE AUDIO UNIT

Why are you deserting the Arts?

We're not deserting the Arts at all. RN will feature 18% more original first-run arts and culture programming than in 2011.

Our new Creative Audio Unit will enable us to **expand** the range of our offer of creative radio – and it will expand the range of artists and art forms with which we are able to engage, and different ways of engaging with an audience interested in audio performance. We expect that as the unit is established and developed that we will occasionally be able to commission new work from **both new and established** writers and give them the development and production they warrant.

The CPSU has recently claimed to the media and elsewhere that about 12 Arts positions have been lost from RN in the last 18 months and the proposed changes will further reduce support for the Arts. This is simply inaccurate. A detailed and thorough analysis of the Arts positions in RN as at 1 January 2011 and at 1 October 2012 shows that the number of Arts positions in RN has increased over that period – by 3.8 additional jobs, a 7% increase.

What is happening to Radio Drama?

In 2012 radio plays constituted 55 minutes of original programming each week on RN. Next year this will be replaced by 110 minutes of original audio performance programming including a range of storytelling, audio performance, both 'real' and fictional. This offer will include short run commissioned series which run for roughly 6 weeks such as **The Sound Library**. These series could accommodate new ventures along the lines of as the improvisational drama of New York based The Truth.

Why are you decommissioning Airplay?

The ABC began broadcasting radio plays 80 years ago – before the advent of television let alone television drama. With around 40,000 listeners per week (first-run and repeat) the Airplay audience has been in a steady decline for many years. Maintaining the regular development and production of 'traditional' radio plays comes at the cost of producing other innovative forms of audio performance, and storytelling, of which there has been an explosion around the world. We'd like to develop and produce work exploring new audio performance forms and fiction and non-fiction narratives with a distinctive Australian voice. This is not 'cheap storytelling', but inventive, innovative ways of exploring narratives in a way that new audiences want. The proposed CAU will work with a mix of freelance and inhouse producers – just as the Drama and Features areas have always done.

We also need to put the audience for Airplay into perspective. Around 40,000 people tune in to radio plays every week on Radio National. However:

- 400,000 Australians wake up with Fran Kelly every week
- 200,000 listeners go to bed with Phillip Adams every week
- 120,000 listeners join Michael Cathcart every morning for Books and Arts Daily

- 120,000 listeners join Robyn Williams in the science lecture theatre every week
- Over 600,000 Australians in the 5 large cities listen to the network on air every week.

The regular, ongoing production of radio drama is expensive and the level of resourcing required to continue with the regular production of radio plays - both in terms of time and budget - is not sustainable as part of the Radio National offer. Maintaining the production of radio plays means the continual sacrifice of other types of creative radio as well as other programs. If we want to maintain the production of Airplay, resourced appropriately, we would need to consider cutting 3 or 4 other positions from other programs to achieve a sustainable and responsible budget position. We do not believe this is justified. Further, we believe that if we maintain our current model of radio plays, we will no longer be able to engage with young writers and artists looking for different ways of working with sound and story.

This isn't a reflection on the team. We believe it's time to move on – we want the space to expand and take new directions with the Creative Audio Unit.

This does not mean the end of creatively produced Australian stories and voices on RN. We simply need to look at different ways of presenting the work of creative writers and artists on radio, in line with audience expectations and desires.

In looking to established international benchmarks in radio drama, we are keenly aware of the ways in which broadcasters here and around the world have developed ways of dealing with narrative in new and bold ways that are bringing new audiences to acoustic narratives. We believe that the growing popularity of programs such as *The Truth*, *The Moth*, and performance radio around the world points to the need for RN to recast the way we produce drama and fiction in Australia. (And comparisons with the BBC are not useful – the levels of funding available to the BBC simply makes the comparison irrelevant.)

What about working with actors and writers?

The CPSU is claiming that more than 1,000 Australian writers, actors, musicians and composers have been given work by RN's Drama Unit since June 2011. A couple of comments. Firstly, this significantly overstates the numbers. According to RN's records, around 130 individual actors and approximately 100 writers and contributors have worked with the Drama Unit over the last 12 months. Overall Drama works with between 300 and 400 contributors overall covering actors, writers and musicians/composers over a 12-month period.

But, more importantly, with a commissioning budget of \$200 000, the CAU will continue to work with artists, writers and performers. Our commitment will not be diminished. The unit will broadcast a mix of real-life and fictional story telling. We are looking at opportunities to produce audio fictions, which will require actors. We will be doing more performance work as we establish the unit.

RN remains committed to supporting the work of actors and writers, and has committed the same funds in 2013 as 2012 toward engaging them for this content development.

Won't the CAU be full of low-budget buy-ins?

No. The CAU's remit will be to commission and work with the best audio performance makers in Australia and from time-to-time, overseas. We have talked about The Moth and The Truth simply as examples of what we want to do, but our work will have a unique flavour and sound.

RN proposes a strong commissioning model, as well as an extensive catalogue of overseas broadcasters from which we buy programs. For example, 360 already broadcasts content from third party producers overseas. And as a publicly funded organisation, we are obliged to be fiscally responsible. The CAU will do the same.

The CAU will commission freelancers on the same basis as Features & Drama programs currently do.

Will the CAU just be about 'cheap storytelling'?

Not at all. Firstly, it won't be 'cheap storytelling'. That is simply a throw-away line from those who have not looked at what we are proposing. In any event, the 'new' storytelling will be only one element in the CAU's rich and diverse offering. It is envisaged that the programs produced by the new CAU team will over the course of any one year include major performance works written by well known Australian writers, performed by Australian actors, with music by Australian composers. But the new CAU will also feature short fiction by new and emerging writers, documentaries that include elements of performance and fiction, and a whole lot more.

What options are there for current Drama staff in terms of other jobs?

They will have the opportunity to put themselves forward for the upcoming vacancy for a Band 7 producer on Poetica or the new positions in the Creative Audio Unit (Band 8 EP and Band 7 producer) that will be located in Sydney.

We're therefore proposing a selection process for the B7 producer role on Poetica in which one of the affected Drama B7 producers will be transferred into it on the basis of their interest, their previous performance appraisal, the knowledge of their manager, how well their skills and experience are suited to the position, and any further input they would like to provide.

There will also be a selection process for the Band 7 and Band 8 positions in the Creative Audio Unit based in Sydney – to be open to the Drama B7 producers not selected for the Poetica position, as well as other RN B8 producers who may otherwise be potentially redundant as a result of other proposed changes in RN. This will be based on:

- the selection criteria for each of the Creative Audio Unit positions (see attachments); with
- applicants for each position to be assessed on the basis of a written application; how well they meet the selection criteria for the role; their previous performance appraisal; knowledge of their Editor/Manager; and any other input the employee would like to provide. All those expressing an interest will also be interviewed.

FEATURES

Why are you introducing a new production model for Features?

The purpose of the PSP was to examine and review how RN does what it does to ensure there are equitable and reasonable benchmarks for production standards across the network. The aim is to ensure the network is resourced, supported and managed in the best way possible, so every dollar allocated to RN is spent wisely and effectively.

It was clear from the PSP that the current allocation of producers (and resources more generally) across these programs is very uneven, and EPs need to manage a complex set of cross-program production arrangements in order to meet schedule requirements. Under the current arrangements getting a true picture of productivity and resource needs is difficult. At the very least the current arrangements add a further layer of complexity to the task of managing an intricate production slate.

We need to simplify production and resource management across the area and to make resource utilisation more transparent. It's critical for the Features area to address issues of sustainability and to respond to changing editorial needs and expectations.

Looking at the output of the area in recent years, the number of programs produced has varied widely across producers, with some producing two or three programs a year and others producing up to 17 programs a year. We need a balance and a more equitable and reasonable distribution across the area.

How can you say that 360 and Hindsight features can be produced in six and a half weeks? That's not realistic or achievable.

The network has always had production cycles which producers have had to adhere to. Working without some sort of benchmark for how long a radio production takes would be untenable. The network is simply reducing the production cycle to an *average* of 6.5 weeks to create a full length feature. Some stories take longer to come to fruition and some take less, which is why this is an average figure. No one has suggested that this is an exact science. However, it is both fair and sensible to set an informed best practice benchmark for production of a 50 or 55 minute program.

Serious thought was given to this benchmark. It included a detailed look at production of the unit, as well as other RN programs. We feel the current eight weeks for each production is not sustainable given budgetary, and operational pressures.

We also realise that some programs will take longer than six and a half weeks to produce. In order to maintain transparency and efficiency, under the proposed changes producers will be expected to plan their production schedule so that they can, if they wish, take longer on some programs, balancing these more expansive and intensive productions with productions that don't require as much time.

We do not believe this will mean a reduction in editorial quality. High quality programs can be made with an average production cycle of 6.5 weeks. Many great programs have been produced within that timeframe. Indeed, some programs have perhaps tended to be over-polished at times, with too much work being done in the studio, with the risk that the story telling sometimes is subsumed by the production. We need to get a better balance than we've had in the past.

Why are you making Features producers do more work?

The producers aren't being asked to do more work. Yes, they're being asked to produce more programs, but that is not the same thing. They are being asked to change how they work, not how much they work.

Are the proposed quotas achievable? Are they actually accurate?

Some staff have queried whether the quotas are accurate. They are, but perhaps they need to be explained further. For Hindsight and 360, we've proposed that each producer will need to produce '7 to 8' features per year, made up of 6-7 of that program plus 1 other – either for Poetica or for the Creative Audio Unit. We've also proposed that each producer does an additional 'unaccounted' feature through freelance supervision where those productions require relatively light supervision. Perhaps we hadn't made that clear enough. If the freelance supervision actually involves supervision that amounted to a full co-production, then that would be counted toward the main output quota.

As far as the numbers go, if a producer works 48 weeks of the year with a 6.5 week average production cycle, then they would be producing 7.3 features in the year. The confusion may have been caused by us providing a range of 7 to 8 rather than 7.3. But in our view, the figures do add up and they are doable.

Why do Features producers need to be allocated to the one program each year?

The aim is to bring greater focus and clarity to the Features area, to enable the consistent delivery of a more coherent and strategic approach to our programming. It will also give a greater focus on teamwork, mentoring and collaboration. This approach will also facilitate greater sharing of the freelance supervision and development burden that currently primarily falls on EPs. They will also be producing a program for Poetica or the new CAU so won't be entirely with the one program.

What about WHS implications of the new quotas?

We don't believe there will be an increased risk of injury under the new production model. We wouldn't go ahead with it if we thought that was the case.

When Comcare assessed the work practices in Features, particularly on 360, it found the risk of injury was largely due to the peaks and troughs in workload rather than the work itself. They found work patterns that went up and down rather than consistent or regular work patterns. The new production model, with clear targets and a more coherent and consistent approach to commissioning, will help ensure a more consistent and even workflow over the year.

With the proposed changes in place, there will be 21 producers, 40% of them senior, producing 5.5 hours of radio per week.

PROPOSED NEW COMMISSIONING PROCESS IN FEATURES

Why are you changing the way Features are Commissioned?

The PSP highlighted a lack of consistency in the commissioning of program proposals from internal Features.

What are the criteria for staff proposals?

Criteria are to be developed against which every internal feature proposal is measured. These criteria will include:

- Strong narrative/compelling idea
- Distinctiveness of the approach
- Audience engagement and benefit
- Creative use of sound and other program elements
- Potential for online component of the project

All Features producers will be required to submit written program proposals in the form of a treatment, with a synopsis of the idea, and an outline of the narrative arc of the piece. We believe this is reasonable and necessary.

Why should Features producers have to submit budgets and timelines?

Proposals will need to include a credible timetable for production, including a projected completion date, and details of studio and engineer time required. All proposals should fit within recommended production timelines.

All project proposals should estimate costs involved, such as the use of actors, rights costs, and travel. Costs are not seen as a competitive requirement in terms of pitching, but as a way of making costs of production inputs more transparent and therefore easier to track and maintain.

Is this dumbing down for ratings sake?

No. We want to maintain the individual creativity that producers in the Features Unit bring to their work. But we want to make sure that we are using resources to bring our audiences the best material we can, appealing to our target demographic of 35+ Australians wanting intelligent, thoughtful programming.

RN Management is particularly concerned to ensure the internal commissioning process put a priority on achieving network goals with regard to both editorial focus and audience benefit, as well as demonstrating strong ideas and creative approaches to the form.

How will proposals be considered?

As far as is practical, proposals will be considered by the EPs at a quarterly proposal meeting, with the final production slate agreed in consultation with the Editor, Arts & Culture.

Proposals will be considered 'out of round' as need and opportunity arise.

What's the role of EPs and the Editor in the new Features commissioning system?

One of the intentions of formalising the internal commissioning procedures is to enable EPs and the Editor to exercise a proper editorial overview of the Features output across the year.

This applies both to the range of voices and approaches to form, as much as in relation to meeting overarching network goals, including themes, issues and ideas that from time to time might be determined as RN priorities.

This might include asking Features producers to pitch program ideas around a particular theme or subject. Equally, it is to be expected that EPs and/or the Editor will reject proposals or ask producers to modify proposals in order to ensure the spread of ideas, subjects and approaches is balanced

Why do Features producers have to make 'specials' for the network?

Features producers are highly trained specialist producers, able to bring their depth of sound design expertise and creative thinking outside their traditional slots. It is essential that we tap into these skills to set new editorial and social agendas for our audience, and expand our offer throughout the schedule.

The network wants to be able to commission Feature producers to make short packages or interstitials along specified themes or ideas to add to our daily offering program mix.

Our travel budgets have been slashed. How are we supposed to make programs that speak to all Australians?

The travel budget has been reduced by 20% for this financial year.

This is not a problem that's exclusive to RN Features. Across the board, the ABC is experiencing a tightening of travel budgets. We will continue to find ways to broadcast voices and stories across Australia. This may mean more targeted freelance commissions, return to duty and phone interviews.

What about the future of 360 given the CAU's similarity to its brief and its cheaper staffing model?

While 360documentaries is a radio features and documentary program, the new unit will be charged with audio performance and storytelling. Its major focus is on commissioning and collaboration with other cultural bodies.

The CAU's external expenses budget will come from the decommissioned Airplay and Book Reading programs, and therefore does not increase commissioning levels over in-house production.

As with many of our programs there will be times when Feature programs do contest similar ideas or themes, or employ similar formal techniques and styles. While we don't anticipate this to be a significant issue in the case of the CAU and 360, clearly with a more formal commissioning process in place we will be able to better define the boundaries about the creative remit of each area.

Why not commission The Night Air? It's brought many young listeners to the network.

Not commissioning The Night Air is not a reflection on the team who has worked on The Night Air over ten years. However, while much of The Night Air's programming has developed our existing catalogue in new and interesting ways, we want to take the opportunity to use this space to develop other forms of audio performance for the network as part of the CAU.

The Night Air has remained steady in terms of audience for many years. While comments have been made that the program has successfully brought younger audiences to the network, we don't have any evidence to show that is the case.

POTENTIAL REDUNDANCIES IN FEATURES

Why target Band 8s?

No one is being targeted because of their experience, the awards they've won, or their length of service. The network has developed recommendations around operational requirements. Overall a large proportion of RN staff are Band 8 or higher, at the top of the ABC pay scale for radio production. This is particularly evident in the Features area. This has huge budgetary implications, but also makes succession planning difficult. The network needs to get the balance right, and out of 21 staff in the Features pool, including staff in Poetica and the new Creative Audio Unit, there will still be eight Band 8 producers. This means 38% of Features staff will operate at the most senior level which continues to represent a substantial investment. From an operational perspective, that is a sufficient number for the area.

Based on what is needed in the Features area and programs, and the new production model, there is only a need for 2 Band 8 producers (not counting EP's and Series Producers).

Why target RN's best (award-winning) producers?

The number of awards won by various RN employees over the years was not a factor considered by the PSP – and nor should it be.

The PSP has focussed on setting up a sustainable framework for RN so that we can, as a network, meet RN's goals.

The word "target" has overtones of being unfair/unreasonable – the suggestion seems to be that RN management has asked "who are the best and most expensive? Let's target them". It is nothing like that. We have been focussing on the **operational and editorial requirements of RN**, asking what range of skills and experience is needed to produce feature programs to the required standard and quality.

We're not going to discuss individuals – but are people really saying the Band 7's don't produce great features or that they are not great mentors?

Of the current Band 8's in Features, not counting the EP's/Series Producers, we are planning to reduce the number of Band 8's from 4 to 2. We are not getting rid of all Band 8's. We've made an assessment of the number of Band 8's needed.

How will you choose between the Band 8's as to who will go and who will stay?

They will have the opportunity to put themselves forward for the new Band 8 EP position in the Creative Audio Unit. The process for that has been explained previously. However, if they're not interested in that role or if they are unsuccessful in getting the role, they will be assessed alongside the other B8 Features producers in a selection process for the 2 B8 producer positions remaining in Features.

The selection process will be based on:

- their previous performance appraisal;
- the knowledge of their Editor/Manager;
- their capacity to work in the new model (ie a more collaborative model in which teamwork and mentoring skills will be critical; demonstrated good working practices and generating ideas that support/advance the programming strategies of the team); and
- any input the employee would like considered.

OTHER PROGRAMS

Why are you axing MovieTime?

Yes, MovieTime is not on the draft schedule – but that doesn't mean we won't be covering movies on RN.

The retirement of Julie Rigg has presented the opportunity to refresh the way RN covers screen culture. The program has been on air for 8 years so it's a good time to think about how contemporary audiences may like to engage with this programming in the future.

Common Knowledge, RN's program about popular culture will expand its coverage of screen culture and move into a primetime slot of 5.30pm on Fridays. Jason Di Rosso will remain our roving movie expert, and it's anticipated that in addition to his hosting role on Common Knowledge, he will have 3-4 regular weekly appearances on a range of programs which could include Breakfast, Drive and Books and Arts Daily, to share the latest film reviews.

What will replace language program Lingua Franca and the Book Reading, and are you again abandoning the culture of words?

Books and Arts Daily will take up the challenge and have a new segment dedicated to words. The network anticipates using some interesting new talents to bring the latest engaging word-talk.

We know the RN audience loves words and language which is why so much of our coverage on programs like Late Night Live, Books and Arts Daily and Books + covers this territory. That's also why the draft schedule now includes an overnight repeat of Books and Arts Daily from Tuesday to Saturday, so there's an additional 5 hours of air time exploring word culture and the arts.

We're excited to be looking at ways to innovate in this area to bring fresh new approaches to a favourite RN offer.

Attachment

RN Creative Audio Unit Executive Producer Band 8

Located in Sydney

Objective: To establish, develop and lead RN's Creative Audio unit and its content offering (including online).

Key Accountabilities

- Develop strategic vision to establish new Creative Audio Unit under the broad direction of the Arts Editor and RN Manager.
- Contribute to strategies and priorities for the enhancement of creative content and programming across RN and online.
- To lead a development process with a strong focus on an expanded online creative offer.
- To build and maintain strong working relationships across the ABC, and to develop creative partnerships with external cultural organisations and institution such as Festivals, the Australia Council , arts companies and the tertiary sector.
- To develop a sustainable production processes to ensure RN's programming goals are met for the Creative Audio Unit.
- Manage the Creative Audio Unit budget and resource allocation.
- To ensure high creative and editorial standards are consistently met from internal and external contributions.
- Drive active commissioning of work from external and independent producers.
- Lead, supervise and mentor staff (including performance management) and supervise freelance productions.
- Originate content for Creative Radio programming strands.
- Maintain a good awareness of creative and cultural industry developments and trends in Australia and internationally, and audience trends that can be translated into compelling content for creative radio outlets (including online)
- Actively promote the ABC values and apply all relevant polices and guidelines including Editorial Policies, Equity and Diversity and Work, Health & Safety.

You must be able to demonstrate experience and highly advanced skills in the following:

Selection Criteria

- Experience in establishing and leading creative teams.
- Demonstrated capacity to develop and make innovative and engaging content across genres, and on multiple platforms including online.
- Demonstrated track record in producing outstanding, highly creative work in several forms and genres for example features, performance, music, documentaries.
- Proven ability to generate engaging, viable programming strategies as part of the RN creative programming mix.
- Experience in working with co-producers, writers, performers and musicians - sourcing, commissioning and collaborating on projects to generate the best possible content.
- An entrepreneurial approach with wide ranging industry and external contacts and experience in developing partnerships with internal and external organisations and individuals to develop viable creative projects with broadcast outcomes.

- Demonstrated project management skills to work with and manage other team members in order to deliver projects on time and within budget.
- Highly developed written, verbal and interpersonal skills.
- Ability to work well under pressure to tight deadlines, and cope with unexpected situations with flexibility and initiative.
- An understanding of and commitment to the ABC's aims, objectives and workplace values, together with relevant policies and guidelines including Editorial Policies, Equity & Diversity and Work, Health & Safety.

Attachment

Band 7 Content Maker Creative Audio Unit

Located in Sydney

Key Accountabilities

- Contribute to strategies and priorities for the enhancement of creative content and programming across RN and online.
- To build and maintain working relationships across the ABC, and to develop creative partnerships with external cultural organisations and institution such as Festivals, the Australia Council, arts companies and the tertiary sector.
- Contribute to the development of sustainable production processes to ensure RN's programming goals are met for the Creative Audio Unit.
- To ensure high creative and editorial standards are consistently met from internal and external contributions.
- Commissioning of work from external and independent producers.
- Mentor and support the development of staff and supervise freelance productions.
- Originate content for Creative Audio Unit programming strands.
- Maintain a good awareness of creative and cultural industry developments and trends in Australia and internationally, and audience trends that can be translated into compelling content for Creative Audio Unit outlets (including online).
- Actively promote the ABC values and apply all relevant polices and guidelines including Editorial Policies, Equity and Diversity and Work, Health & Safety.

Selection Criteria

- Demonstrated capacity to develop and make innovative content across genres and on multiple platforms including online under broad direction.
- Demonstrated track record in producing highly creative work in several forms and genres for example features, performance, music, documentaries.
- Proven ability to generate engaging, viable programming ideas and strategies as part of the RN creative programming mix.
- Experience in working with co-producers, writers, performers and musicians and sourcing and commissioning and collaborating on projects to generate the best possible content.
- An entrepreneurial approach with wide ranging industry and external contacts and experience in developing partnerships with internal and external organisations and individuals to develop viable creative projects with broadcast outcomes.
- Demonstrated experience in working successfully with contributors to realise creative project to deadlines within budget.
- Strong interpersonal and teamwork skills.
- An understanding of, and commitment to, the ABC's aims, objectives and workplace values, together with relevant policies and guidelines including Editorial Policies, Equity and Diversity and Work, Health & Safety.