



Writing NSW submission on the proposed National Cultural Policy

About Writing NSW

Writing NSW is the premier organisation for writers and writing in NSW and is a key member of the National Writers Centre Network. We support and represent more than 10,000 writers from all parts of our state, from all backgrounds, across all genres, and at all stages of their careers. We employ around 300 writers each year as speakers, curators, tutors, mentors, judges, and contributors to publications, as well as providing capacity building support to other organisations in the sector.

We help writers to tell their stories, develop their skills, find professional pathways, take advantage of emerging opportunities offered by technological and other change, and build sustainable careers. Many prominent Australian writers have begun their careers at Writing NSW.

Submission

This submission addresses the challenges and opportunities facing Australia's arts and cultural industries, with particular reference to the literature sector, along with the role of government in addressing those, through a National Cultural Policy and more broadly.

The arts and cultural industries provide enormous economic and social benefit and play a key role in presenting an innovative and diverse Australia to the world. They are how we tell our stories, all of our stories. Though the arts, regional Australians, Indigenous people, migrant communities, and those with disability are able to make their voices heard. Nowhere is this more apparent than in literature, where new writers are emerging all the time to present a dazzling diversity of stories. Particularly notable are Indigenous writers like Kim Scott, Leah Purcell, Melissa Lucashenko, Tara June Winch and Alexis Wright, leading lights in Australian literature who are achieving international reputations.

The benefits of the arts to the Australian economy and society are made possible by audience engagement, private and public-sector support and a range of established infrastructure. Support from all levels of government has traditionally included direct funding for organisations and individual artists, policy and strategy support and provision of infrastructure.

However, governments generally show little understanding of the complex ecologies that contribute to a thriving culture. For literature this includes, not just individual writers, but the service organisations that support and nurture them, the festivals and events that allow them to connect with audiences, and the publishers and booksellers who bring their work to the public.

The lack of effective cooperation between different levels of government in relation to arts funding or policy leads to substantial inequities in funding, with some artists and organisations effectively receiving duplicate funding from federal and state governments, while other deserving applicants receive none. This particularly affects the small-to-medium arts organisations that power our cultural life, driving most of the innovation in the sector and nurturing the early careers of artists who will go on to figure on the world stage.

The situation is especially stark for the literature sector, which is so often overlooked in government funding and policy. Literature receives a derisory 4% of federal arts funding and is also underfunded by most state governments, including in NSW. Australia Council funding for literature has declined by more than 40% since 2013, and literature is the only artform not to receive targeted infrastructure support from the federal government.

This is disappointing and bewildering, given literature is one of our most popular artforms, engaged with by three-quarters of Australians, and that writing is crucial to so many other forms of cultural production. Without writers, we would have no theatre, no song, no film. Yet writers are some of the most poorly paid creatives in the country, with annual incomes from their creative practice averaging just \$12,900 per year, according to Macquarie University research.

Insufficient funding for the arts generally, and literature in particular, means organisations and individual artists devote enormous time and resources to competing for small amounts of money, often with little hope of success. Success rates in Australia Council funding rounds are generally around 15%, with substantial unfunded excellence recorded each time. A phenomenal 85% of applicants are spending weeks on applications to no purpose, time they could be spending on creating art or building the capacity of their organisations or the sector. Increased funding would help to address this, but funding bodies at all levels also need to streamline their application processes and make them less onerous (without, obviously, reducing the accountability that is essential to any public funding program).

Recommendations

In summary, Writing NSW believes the following initiatives are essential to ensure Australia's creative and cultural industries continue to thrive:

- A doubling of funding to the Australia Council, along with a requirement that at least 10% of total arts funding delivered by the organisation must go to the literature sector
- Expansion of fellowships and other initiatives designed to offer writers a living wage
- Expansion of multi-year federal funding opportunities for key organisations, including significant state-based service organisations such as writers' centres
- Streamlining of application and other process for arts funding across all levels of government
- Creation of a National Literature Framework, including an embedded funding guarantee for the literature sector, on similar lines to those already in existence for other artforms, to be completed in consultation with the sector and in collaboration with states and territories
- Expansion of the ELR/PLR scheme to cover digital lending, including ebooks and audiobooks
- Reversal of the decision to increase university fees for arts and humanities courses

I confirm that this submission can be made public and that I would be happy to provide further information if required.

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CEO, Writing NSW

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