



Office for the Arts

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### **Towards a new National Cultural Policy: A response to the call for public consultation**

The Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP) exists to support teaching and research in creative and professional writing, and to improve the quality of programs across the country. As the peak body for Creative Writing programs in Australasian Higher Education Institutions, we support creative and professional writers, via undergraduate and postgraduate programs, seeking to hone their professional skills and contribute to the creative life of the nation. Our diverse membership body includes a vast cohort of Higher Degrees by Research candidates and Early Career Researchers, many of whom are precariously employed. As a consequence, the Association is also deeply focused on the capacity of skilled writers to develop their voices, reach their audiences, and build their own careers as well as contributing to the cultural capital found in published and performed writing – in the stories, imagery and innovation provided by Australian voices.

The AAWP appreciates the intention, expressed in REVIVE to support the literature sector; but we note areas in which this could be strengthened and, more so, where the intention can be realised. As such, we ask for the following:

- Actual regulation and oversight of generative AI and both its exploitation of existing literature, and the output of new writings by AI entities. These are not Australian voices: no matter how well an LLM is trained, it cannot generate literary works that are either innovative or authentic. In the current situation, the AI sector is avoiding copyright requirements, producing poorly written and unthought-through documents, and interfering with the capacity of Australian writers, readers and local publishers. If there is a genuine commitment to support ongoing innovation, ethical storytelling, and organic writing and



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reading practices, and the local publishers who work for the Australian literary sector, this needs proper attention and close regulation.

- A genuine focus on the training of new writers and publishers, including the cancellation of the Jobs Ready Graduates program, which is not only failing to produce jobs-ready graduates, but also leaving far too many graduates with unsustainable debt. The JRG fee structures are resulting in lower student enrolments in a number of disciplines, including the creative arts and writing, with the results that universities are closing or reducing these programs. This diminishes the national capability in writing and other arts, at the very time when decades of research are demonstrating the value of creative practice for health and wellbeing, national happiness, and with that, economic and social progress. Please reverse that very poor program. It is important to note that Creative Writing degrees and Creative Writing postgraduate programs are vital for developing and nurturing Australia's authors. As such they are an important part of Australia's literary eco-system.
- Meaningful pathways for more First Nations and culturally diverse workers in the Australia's literary industry – from editors, publishers, sales and marketing and executive positions, as well as in positions of leadership in Writers Festivals, Writers Centres and Arts Funding Bodies. Research shows that diverse writers have a better chance of having their work published and sensitively promoted when working with diverse publishing professionals<sup>i</sup>. While Magabala is exemplary, we would like to see pathways and incentives for First Nations professionals within the publishing sector in all publishing houses. Additionally there is stress from diverse Australian writers in response to their small number within the industry<sup>ii</sup>. We would like to see books are made more accessible in two ways. Firstly, that they are made more financially accessible, and secondly that there is more support for works that deal with cultural differences and class differences. Research has shown that books are still overwhelmingly written by a small, non-representative population and as such may not be attractive to the kinds of readers that Australia wants to develop. This would be mean better pathways for authors that come from diverse populations and better financial remuneration to incentivise diverse authors for creating creative works. A larger pool of diverse creative writers, means a better spread of stories that can reach audiences in meaningful ways.
- Tax reform that includes tax-free literary grants and prizes. Currently most literature awards are framed as taxable income – an approach that is not applied to prizes in other fields of endeavour. The long record of research by David Throsby and his team demonstrates the very low income earned by writers from their writing, and the taxation structure in Australia penalises them further by recording prizes and grants as personal taxable income. A recent survey undertaken by the Australian Society of Authors shows that the situation for Australian writers is worsening<sup>iii</sup>. If we want a literary sector where writers are able to continue building their work and reaching their audiences – for the benefit of the nation as



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well as their own integral wellbeing and income levels – then it is imperative that there is the sort of financial support and structure that builds, rather than diminishes, their capacity.

- Pilot a ‘universal basic income’ scheme for creatives. This has already been successfully undertaken in Ireland, and there are more local trials operating elsewhere in the world. It is an approach that recognises the public good of creative cultural practices, and by providing creatives with a basic income, it shores up the capacity of the nation as a whole to build this sector, and with it to deliver on the broader social and economic goals of the nation.

Sincerely,

Emeritus Distinguished Professor Jen Webb, Associate Professor Julia Prendergast, Dr Lee McGowan, Associate Professor Natalie Kon Yu, Dr Rachel Hennessy.

Members of the National Executive, Australasian Association of Writing Programs

Find out more about our organisation via our website: <https://aawp.org.au/>

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<sup>i</sup> <https://theconversation.com/friday-essay-we-are-the-voice-why-we-need-more-indigenous-editors-182222>, <https://www.booksandpublishing.com.au/articles/2022/09/21/220653/why-we-need-more-indigenous-editors/>, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-program-era-and-the-mainly-white-room/>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://content.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/first-nations-people-of-colour-writers-count.pdf>, <https://textjournal.scholasticahq.com/article/146400-we-don-t-want-to-hear-anything-else-from-you-culturally-diverse-authors-and-the-australian-literary-industry>, <https://theconversation.com/a-shadow-on-your-art-how-do-first-nations-and-culturally-diverse-authors-feel-about-representation-275446>,



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<https://www.booksandpublishing.com.au/articles/2026/03/04/325156/natalie-kon-yu-and-emily-booth-on-the-unintended-knock-on-effects-of-publishing-diversity-initiatives/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.asauthors.org.au/news/2025-asa-survey-creator-income-remains-unsustainably-low/>