



WestWords welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of Australia's next National Cultural Policy.

Revive mattered. It put culture back where it belongs: at the centre of national life. It recognised that artists are workers and it established Writing Australia, which was an important acknowledgement that literature needs dedicated national attention. The next policy has the chance to go further. Writing shouldn't be treated as marginal or as a soft extra around the edges of cultural life. It is core cultural infrastructure.

Writing is how we make sense of ourselves. It shapes literacy, imagination, empathy, confidence and civic participation. It also sits underneath so many other forms, from screen, music and theatre to digital storytelling and education. If Australia wants a serious cultural policy for the future, it must invest in the whole writing ecology:

Artistic training and development

- children and young people finding their voice,
- early, emerging and established writers, gaining craft and skills and building sustainable careers, and
- literature service organisations supporting bringing new Australian stories into the world.

Audience and market development

- Writers into schools to develop a culture of reading from an early age, and importantly in the first three years of high school
- Publishers and booksellers
- Bookshop based and arts organisations' events programs
- Festivals
- Foreign markets and industry exchanges

Each step in the pathway is equally important.

Therefore each step requires addressing separately within the new strategy.

Community and Cultural Development and Youth Arts should not be treated as a separate area in the policy rather an integral component of a sector's pathway and its ecology. This is especially important for foundational artforms eg writing, composing, visual arts (as opposed to interpretive eg performing arts)

Artworkers and artists need to be equally valued and supported. Artworkers create the conditions under which artists thrive, yet recognition is not given within grant guidelines and peer assessments. This is especially the case when providing critical support to service organisations.

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From where we stand, this is also a place-based issue. Western Sydney is not peripheral to Australian culture. It is central to it. This is one of the most diverse regions in the country and one of the places where contemporary Australia is being most actively imagined, debated and written. If national cultural policy genuinely wants to reflect the country we have become, then it has to invest in the communities where that country actually lives. The promise of a place for every story must be matched by support for the places where those stories emerge.

Writing Australia has stated that writers' centres are the responsibility of State governments. We would contest that assertion. The local is national. And never more so than the ecology of story-telling and literature development, production and dissemination. The States are largely abrogating their responsibility leaving the sustainability for development in crisis.

The development of the next generations of Australian writers and stories are a national responsibility. State based training institutions, including VCA, NIDA, AFTRS, WAAPA, NAVA training the next generations of actors, visual artists, directors, designers. There are no comprehensive industry based training institutions for writers outside of writers centre model and ourselves as the Western Sydney Centre for Writing receiving federal funding. True some universities offer writing courses within the academic environment, but it is within the academic environment, not in the affiliated model of training institutions like VCA, NAVA or NIDA.

We propose a National Centre for Writing and Translation set in Western Sydney with an affiliated network of centres across the country. The international models include the National Centre for Writing, UK and the network of Literatur Houses across Germany.

Our experience shows what that investment looks like in practice. In 2025, WestWords worked with 37 schools, 6,087 students and published 10 school anthologies. But that's only one part of the picture. Our work also includes workshops, mentorships, residencies, fellowships, publishing and professional opportunities that support writers across the whole of their practice and every stage of their development. In the same year we published 13 books into the trade, and across our broader programming we created hundreds of paid opportunities for writers and illustrators to share their skills, develop new work and build sustainable careers. This is what a healthy literature ecology looks like: young people becoming makers, writers being paid for their expertise, and new Australian stories being developed, published and shared.

We propose a national Writers into Schools program using our fully customised, scalable Writers in Schools Programs

This program currently reaches over 5,500 NSW students annually, provides employment to 30-50 writers annually as the tested, proven model. The precedent is the Albanese Labor Government's \$3.42 million investment into youth arts participation with four performing arts companies as part of Revive.

This matters because the precarity doesn't stop with individual writers. The 2022 National Survey of Australian Book Authors shows the average annual income of an author is \$18,200. At the same time, much of the work of developing, employing and publishing writers is being carried by small literature organisations operating with modest resources relative to the public value they create. If we are serious about Australian stories, then we have to be serious about the conditions that allow them to be written.

We propose:

- *Federal Government ask the Fair Work Commission to set nationally recognised minimum rates for all artists.*
Currently there is no equity in artist payments across the sectors. In tight budgets where literature compete with theatre, music, visual arts there needs to be a base line. This is about valuing *all* artists and their contribution to broader society.
- *tax concessions be available to all artists*
- *tax incentives be given to the private sector and philanthropy to support artists and arts companies*

The current market for books is driven by core, established readers. This readership is relatively small. The margins are so tight that risk in building new readerships and market segments that the small and mid-tier publishers are getting consumed by the multi-nationals. Consequently new work and new voices are being compromised. This is never more true than the stories speaking to, and reflective of, the populations of areas like Western Sydney.

We propose:

- *Support for place based independent publishers to develop and publish new work from debut writers, including not-for-profit publishers and publishers sitting within broader organisational structures. Criteria from the current initiative from Writing Australia excluded these innovative models.*
- *Grants for marketing, specifically to raise the visibility of debut writers within bookshops. This would include author tours, production of collateral, commissioning of reviews.*

The next National Cultural Policy should strengthen support for writers, ensure equitable access to high-quality literary opportunities and invest in organisations that build careers, audiences and cultural confidence over time. If we want Australian culture to reflect the full truth, complexity and possibility of this country, then we need to back the writers and communities already doing that work.

Ultimately it comes down to what value Federal Government places on the contribution telling Australia's story to build our social cohesion, economic development and identity as a nation.

Ultimately it comes down to money.

The current investment is not enough.