
QSLA Submission: Towards a New National Cultural Policy

To: Office for the Arts, Australian Government

From: Queensland School Library Association (QSLA)

Subject: Submission to the "Towards a New National Cultural Policy" Consultation Paper

Executive Summary

The Queensland School Library Association (QSLA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the next National Cultural Policy. As the professional body representing school library staff in Queensland, we advocate for the vital role that well-resourced school libraries and qualified teacher-librarians (TLs) play in Australia's cultural landscape. Our submission focuses on **Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story** and **Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience (Brighter Futures)**.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story A truly inclusive national culture requires that every child sees themselves reflected in the stories they consume. School libraries are the foundational "third space" in a child's life—a shared commons jointly owned by the community where diverse Australian stories are curated and celebrated.

Qualified teacher-librarians are cultural curators who:

- Develop responsive collections that include First Nations voices and stories from diverse backgrounds.
- Ensure that Australian literature is not an "afterthought" but a central part of a student's daily life.
- Provide a safe refuge for students to explore their identity through creativity and imagination.

Without a well-staffed school library, many children lose their primary access point to Australian stories, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience (Brighter Futures) The future of Australia's cultural economy depends on developing a "reading culture" today. Research consistently shows that "reading for pleasure" is the single strongest indicator of a child's future success and cultural engagement.

Teacher-librarians are the specialist workers who drive this engagement by:

- Implementing evidence-based reading promotion programs that turn reading into a sought-after experience.
- Using their expertise in youth popular culture to provide personalized book recommendations that "hook" reluctant readers.
- Developing critical digital literacy, ensuring the next generation can navigate and contribute to our digital cultural future safely and ethically.

Our data shows that Queensland schools with qualified TLs achieve NAPLAN reading scores significantly higher than those without, demonstrating that cultural engagement and academic achievement are inextricably linked.

Recommendations

To ensure the National Cultural Policy achieves its goals, the QSLA recommends:

1. **National Targets:** Setting a target for every Australian student to have access to a well-resourced library led by a qualified teacher-librarian.
2. **Recognition of TLs as Cultural Workers:** Formally acknowledging teacher-librarians as essential contributors to the national cultural life and the creative economy.
3. **Investment in Collections:** Increasing non-capital resourcing for school libraries to support the acquisition of diverse Australian content.

By investing in our school libraries, the government is not just supporting "the arts"; it is building a literate, engaged, and culturally rich future for all Australians.

