

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public and anonymous



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

As an English teacher and current teacher Librarian, my 10 years of working with teenagers, to encourage reading, literacy, and critical thinking, have left me deeply concerned about the state of libraries, including school libraries, and the need for libraries to be considered as an integral and fundamental part of Australia's arts and culture sector.

Public libraries, including school libraries, are among the last true third spaces, where people are free to visit, access resources and services, and engage in learning, hobbies, and socialisation, free from the demands or pressures of privatised spaces. Funding for libraries is essential in democratising the arts, literature, storytelling and digital literacy. In an Australia that sits on the precipice of an AI industrial revolution libraries are one of the few spaces with the resources and staff experience to ensure every person in Australia is able to access and understand new technologies, while also being able to access books, reading and storytelling across multiple mediums without the burden of cost, or the barriers of entry that privatised offerings give.

This is especially true in the funding of trained professional librarians to adequately staff and deliver library services for the 21st century.

Teacher Librarians are equally as Important, if not more so, in this current climate. At this point in time, the only state in NSW that ensures public schools are allocated funding for a qualified teacher librarian and a school library. In other states, this is often a luxury, reserved for private or metropolitan schools in high-socioeconomic areas. If we want truly equitable education, we must ensure that all students, regardless of background, have the opportunity, through adequate funding and staffing of teacher Librarians, to access information literacy programs.

Teacher librarians are dual-qualified, with the expertise to encourage a love of reading, develop students' reading for pleasure, strengthen digital citizenship and digital literacy skills, and develop information fluency programs to ensure students are equipped with the critical-thinking skills and explicitly taught expertise to thrive in a modern digital world.

To have a population that is able to engage with culture, the arts and literature requires investment in these areas for young people. They will become the future citizens who engage with, create, and develop this field, and who this cultural development policy will most impact.

Ensuring that all public schools across Australia have adequate funding for a school library, and more importantly, the funding and requirements for all public schools to be staffed with a qualified teacher Librarian, ensures not only equity. But all students will have the ability to access, discuss, and create physically and digitally in the future world.

To create a future that values information, creativity and literacy in Australia, investment must be directed to our children, and the best way to ensure every child has access to these services is through universal access in schools. Access to cultural resources and information should not be determined by location; every child should have a well-resourced school library and a qualified teacher librarian, regardless of their address, their parents' income or their cultural background.