

The Honorary Tony Burke MP  
Minister for the Arts  
Parliament House  
Canberra

Dear Minister Burke

The Foundation for Learning and Literacy thanks the Australian Government for the opportunity to contribute to the revised National Cultural Policy.

Our submission focuses on one central theme: **Australia needs a national focus on reading, quality literature and the critical role of reading for pleasure in our lives and learning.** We currently have an adult literacy crisis in this country with 44% of adult Australians having difficulty with literacy and this surely threatens a healthy democracy. Research over more than two decades has demonstrated unequivocally that Reading for Pleasure/Enjoyment positively affects all aspects of our lives and nurtures learning and literacy development. **This focus requires the Ministry for the Arts and the Ministry of Education undertaking a consciously integrated approach rather than working in silos.**

As recognised centrally in *Revive, A place for every story, a story for every place*, we must ensure that stories in all their forms are created, shared, celebrated, published, read widely, and debated. Stories, books and reading underpin education, mental health and wellbeing, social cohesion, participation in the community: they seriously affect an individual's life chances.

A national focus on reading, quality literature and the role of reading for pleasure needs to encompass not only writing and publishing, but the support of bookshops and the equitable resourcing of libraries across the country to ensure we create equitable provision and encourage and support a reading and literary arts culture for children and adults alike.

Currently, reading for pleasure in this country is diminishing, libraries are unevenly resourced, AI looms as a risk to copyright, authors and artists face seriously insecure livelihoods and the book publishing industry is in difficulty.

**The Foundation for Learning and Literacy and why its work matters**

[The Foundation for Learning and Literacy](#) is a voluntary group of more than 1000 teachers and educators, parents and caregivers, academics, researchers and community members concerned with the central role deep literacy plays in ensuring our children and young people become compassionate, competent, confident, creative and resilient citizens in an increasingly complex and challenging world. We have developed [12 evidence based Touchstones](#) that underpin our work and advocacy and provide easy access to a range of research, resources and examples of successful classroom practices to support school leaders, teachers, early childhood educators, parents and caregivers. Our work is also relevant for politicians, policymakers, educational decisionmakers and the community more broadly. Over the last 4 years we have also partnered with 16 other like-minded organisations (including Reading Australia, The Children's Book Council Australia, the Indigenous Literacy Foundation, the Primary English Teaching Association Australia, Australia Reads, Australian Literacy Educators' Australia, Australian School Libraries Australia, The Australian Children's Laureate Foundation) to offer an annual series of [rich symposium events](#) that advocate for the role of rich literature in our lives and learning under the umbrella *We all like a good story*.

### **Current challenges**

One of the most serious cultural issues currently in this country is underpinned by the increasing gap between the advantaged and those who live in poverty with recent estimates that nearly 1 million children and young people aged from 0-17 years, or 1 in 6, are living this way (ACOSS, 2025). Those who live in poverty are more unlikely to be able to choose or own their own books, both significant factors in becoming deeply literate so richly resources libraries become even more important.

Alongside this appalling statistic is the persistent low regard for the teaching profession despite the rhetoric. The increasingly technical and recipe-like approach to improving literacy outcomes for vulnerable and at risk learners using reductive direct instruction models ultimately erode cultural and linguistic inclusivity, meaning-making and creative and critical thinking. Similarly the over-privileging of explicit instruction models often comes at the expense of learner agency.

Government resources have become increasingly tied to various forms of compliance and standardised performance with priority given to high stakes testing culminating in pressure to 'teach to the test'. (Comber, 2012). Little attention is now placed on quality literature and

reading for pleasure and appreciation in syllabus and other policy documents (Cremin & Scholes, 2024).

For too long the Ministry for the Arts and the Ministry of Education have worked in silos rather than working together in an integrated way to realise pivotal role the Arts can and should play in learning (see for example Fancourt, 2026; Martin et al, 2013; Catterall, 2012, 2009; Ewing, 2011, Bamford, 2006). This means that the arts education aims in the *Revive* policy has not been able to be fully realised.

The push for technology is now adversely affecting other important library roles. Qualified librarians and qualified library staff in public and school libraries play an extremely important role in the community but are undervalued.

### **The research around reading for pleasure**

There are many established long term benefits in reading for pleasure or volitional reading including, for example:

- Increased confidence, self-esteem and reading and writing proficiency (e.g. Australia Reads & Monash University, 2025; OECD, 2011, 2019)
- Higher levels of wellbeing (e.g. Kennewell et al., 2022), socio-emotional development, 'academic grit' (e.g. Bozgun & Akin-Kosterelioglu, 2020)
- Greater understanding of and empathy with others (e.g. Koopman, 2016; Kidd & Castano, 2013)
- A stronger and more engaged awareness of social issues and of cultural diversity (e.g. Cremin & Scholes, 2024)
- A reduction in stress, depression and loneliness (e.g. Fancourt, 2026)
- A lever for social change given volitional reading can be a mediator of gender and socio-economic status (OECD, 2021).

Reading imaginative fiction particularly nurtures our imaginations and evokes emotions and helps us make connections with others (Nikolajeva, 2009, 2019; Kidd & Castano, 2013; Koopman, 2016) leading to expanded models and repertoires of experience.

## **Our asks**

**Commission a national focus on reading, quality literature and the critical role of reading for pleasure in our lives and learning.**

**Ensure every Australian community has richly resourced public and school libraries with professional library staff** and is **funded equitably** whether regional, remote or metropolitan.

**Support the literary arts and the publication of exemplary literature** including a rich repertoire of First Nations literature. For example, build on the Writing Centre initiative.

Ensure there is **provision of high quality and inclusive literature and resources for every Australian early childhood centre, preschool and classroom** without exception.

These measures align with the submissions by Books Create Australia, Australia Reads, Reading Australia. All advocate the need to better support Australian stories and literature enabling knowledge, feelings and ideas to be shared, published, read, celebrated, valued.

## **To conclude**

It is both a right and a matter of social justice that every Australian is enabled and supported to become a keen and motivated reader. National attention to reading for pleasure is clearly critical.

The Foundation for Learning and Literacy would welcome the opportunity to work with sector partners and government on these measures.

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