



21 May, 2026

National Cultural Policy Submission

AustLit Submission: National Cultural Policy Consultation

AustLit welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation. As the world's most comprehensive national bibliography of Australian literature, AustLit is Australia's central, authoritative research infrastructure for bibliographic data on Australian literature, writers, and storytelling. AustLit is globally unique in its capacity to map networks of national story-telling significance and in 2025, it was inaugurated into UNESCO's Australian Memory of the World register.

With over one million work records and 200,000 author records, expertly curated and manually entered, and hosts to dozens of online exhibitions, datasets and research project, AustLit underpins literary research, publishing, and narrative studies across universities, libraries, schools, cultural institutions, and the broader community.

We share *Revive's* position that without high-quality data, it is difficult to measure who and what the sector is, or to demonstrate success with evidence. AustLit makes the literary ecosystem - readers, writers, booksellers, publishers, librarians, institutions, and scholars - visible, discoverable, and analysable for current and future generations. As set out in the UNESCO *Charter on the Preservation of Digital Cultural Heritage* (2003), the loss of digital heritage is an urgent issue of worldwide concern. With this in mind, we recommend the following policy inclusions.

Pillar 1: First Nations First

AustLit's largest and most significant dataset is BlackWords. BlackWords encompasses 28,000+ records of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander storytelling, from Miles Franklin Award-winning novels to poems published in the Koori Mail, and including multiple digital information resources. Founded with a one-off federal grant in 2007, BlackWords promotes First Nations storytellers, supports community access to cultural data, and ensures visibility and participation in Indigenous culture. **We call for funded school library subscriptions to AustLit and BlackWords as a tangible means of building a national reading culture that centralises First Nations voices.**

We also call for a policy inclusion that mandates **fair remuneration for First Nations Elders, consultants,** whose cultural knowledge is increasingly sought but too often uncompensated.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

Places are not only where stories are created but where they are stored and accessed: in archives, libraries, universities, museums, and the digital infrastructure that enables discovery and sharing. AustLit embodies this pillar: it hosts dozens of curated datasets and research collaborations that have meaningfully contributed to building a national reading culture. However, these are targeted interventions and cannot address AustLit's broader infrastructure needs. **We call for ongoing**



operational support for this national asset to improve data integrity, inclusivity, accessibility, and searchability.

We support the proposed Books Create Australia program to increase international visibility of Australian writing. Greater cultural diplomacy and global reach, including First Nations writing in original language and translation, can only strengthen Australia's literary presence and promote our ideas and knowledge internationally.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

Readers want to see themselves reflected in the books they read. Raising the profile of Australian creators makes stories easier to discover and counters the effects of multinational, profit-driven algorithms. We need homegrown stories more than ever.

Beyond investment in school libraries and arts education pathways, **we call for reinvestment in literary education in the tertiary sector**, with a focus on Australian literature. University study of Australian literature produces informed, culturally engaged citizens and lifelong readers; its value for national cultural flourishing should not be underestimated.

We also call for the **rescinding of the 2020 Job-Ready Graduates reform**, which doubled the cost of humanities degrees and has had a devastating effect on students, early-career researchers, educators, librarians, and creators. We cannot afford further cuts to an already fragile sector.

Centrality of the artist encompasses not just writers and readers, but the wider networks, institutions and technologies, the "strong cultural infrastructure" that form an intrinsic yet under-recognised part of the literary ecosystem. Policy must account for this.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

AustLit is essential national digital research infrastructure. It is also a core part of Australia's cultural and civic life, and the gold standard for data in the literary sector. High-quality data and metadata determine whether books can be found by readers, recommended by booksellers, selected by libraries, sold internationally, licensed for translation, and measured by policymakers.

We call for investment in robust data systems and sustainable digital infrastructure to increase the discoverability, searchability, and visibility of the full range of Australian literature. Better data infrastructure improves analysability, enables international reach, assists libraries and schools, and gives governments a more accurate evidence base for cultural policy.

AustLit sits at the intersection of education, research, and the literary sector, areas that must be treated as connected, not siloed. When Australian institutions are displaced by generic, commercial, and frequently multinational digital platforms, Australian data sovereignty and digital literacy are undermined. Schools and universities are critical sites for discovering, debating and advocating for Australian literary culture, where discerning readers are formed, and future generations of teachers and increasingly writers are trained. AustLit is a central part of that story.



We call for a national policy that treats **research, education, and cultural production and participation as intrinsically connected**, with funding that allows assets like AustLit to thrive.

Pillar 5: Engaging Audiences

Connecting audiences, including writers, readers, researchers, teachers, and librarians, requires high-quality, reliable, human-curated data. **We call for investment in arts and literary organisations and peak industry bodies to partner with AustLit to improve digital literacy and sector-wide understanding of the importance of data.**

In support of Australia Reads, **we propose direct investment to enable schools to access AustLit through a funded subscription model.** Currently, only well-resourced schools can access AustLit, a significant equity concern. All students, particularly those in remote and regional Australia, should be able to access AustLit and BlackWords. **School access is a first step toward cultivating a future where reading and digital literacy can flourish together.**

Closing Statement

We commend the Federal Government on the accomplishments of *Revive* and support its commitment to a national policy that recognises the value of arts, literature, and creative culture. The establishment of Creative Australia and Writing Australia provides a strong foundation. What is needed now is a targeted investment strategy to turn policy reform into action.

We endorse the submission of Books Create Australia and stand in solidarity with the Australian book industry. Only through strategic investment and continued consultation will *Revive* meaningfully transform the sector. Australian stories, ideas, and knowledge deserve to be created, published, discovered, and valued, for the enrichment of our culture and the betterment of our society.

Yours sincerely,

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