

Submission: The Critical Role of Qualified Collection Librarians in Supporting Reading in Australia

Introduction

My career has been in public libraries, working as a children's, youth, and collection librarian. I have served on the inaugural Premier's Reading Challenge committee in South Australia and established the *I Choose SA* Collection at my last library. My professional practice has always centred on promoting reading, developing strong collections, and ensuring communities have access to meaningful storytelling in all its forms.

What matters to me

My submission focuses on the critical role that **qualified Collection Librarians** play in supporting a reading culture in Australia. Reading and storytelling have shaped my life, both professionally and personally. Libraries have been central to that journey, and I remain committed to their potential to enrich society.

Challenges in the cultural sector

Libraries across Australia have expanded their services, but this shift has unintentionally pushed aside a core purpose: **fostering a genuine love of reading**. At the same time, the professional role best equipped to lead this work—the qualified and experienced Collection Librarian—is a disappearing resource.

This is occurring at the worst possible moment. National reading rates are declining, particularly among young people. *Aliteracy* (people who can read but choose not to) is becoming a widespread cultural issue. Libraries should be at the forefront of reversing this trend, but they cannot do so without the right professional expertise.

Why Collection Librarians matter

A qualified Collection Librarian is far more than a “book selector.” Their work shapes the intellectual and cultural identity of a library. They:

- curate collections that reflect community needs, trends, and aspirations,
- champion reading as a lifelong practice,
- mentor staff in reader engagement,
- design programs that build and sustain a reading culture,
- ensure diverse voices and Australian authors are visible and discoverable.

Their disappearance from libraries has weakened an important strand in literacy and the support of a reading culture.

Consequences of losing them

Without skilled, passionate staff who understand reading behaviour, a library cannot meaningfully foster a reading culture. As a regular library user, I see this firsthand:

many staff lack training in reader development and do not fully understand the importance of supporting a reading culture.

The consequences are clear:

- disengaged readers
- collections lacking depth and purpose
- fewer pathways for discovering Australian stories
- communities missing the transformative power of reading

What I would like to see in the new National Cultural Policy

To ensure libraries remain cultural anchors, literacy champions, and places of discovery, the National Cultural Policy should:

- *Mandate for qualified Collection Librarian positions* across public and school libraries,
- *Recognise reading culture as a core cultural outcome,*
- *Support professional standards and training* in collection strategy and reader development.

With reading participation declining, this focus is urgent.

Final note

While my submission focuses on reading, storytelling comes in many forms. A skilled Collection Librarian recognises and caters for the full spectrum of storytelling options available today. Ultimately, **collections are people**—their stories, their needs, their aspirations—and they deserve professional stewardship.