

Office for the Arts
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GPO Box 594 | CANBERRA ACT 2601

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National Cultural Policy Submission

I am an award-winning Deaf author who has published two novels, a hybrid memoir about deafness, and collection of essays about deafness and the environment. I am a 2022 – 2023 Creative Australia Arts Leader and I remain involved with Creative Australia as a peer assessor. I am a member of the Australian Society of Authors and Writers SA, and I have worked closely with AustLit, the Australian Literature database, and its team (and I support each of these organisations' submissions to the National Cultural Policy). I am, with Dr Amanda Niehaus, co-founder of the literary journal [Science Write Now](#), and was until recently a co-editor of the journal. I am also an Associate Professor in creative writing and literary studies and am Chief Investigator on the Australia Research Council-funded project, [Finding Australia's Disabled Authors](#). This submission to the National Cultural Policy is shaped by my experience as an Australian writer, editor, and academic.

With rising costs of living, the incursions of AI, and the ever-diminishing profit margins of publishing houses, surviving as an Australian writer is becoming impossible. For disabled writers, it's even harder. I need to work as an academic because I cannot survive on my income from writing alone. My job, particularly when I am teaching, requires huge reserves of energy for lipreading and auditory processing so that I can follow what my students are saying. This means that I am often too exhausted to write, and my books take, at a minimum, seven years to come into being.

Many anthologies of writing by disabled people in Australia, such as Carly Findlay's *Growing Up Disabled in Australia* (2021), Andy Jackson, Esther Ottaway and Kerri Shying's *Raging Grace: Australian Writers Speak out on Disability* (2024), Clem Bastow and Jo Case's *Someone Like Me: An Anthology of Non-fiction by Autistic Writers* (2025), as well as being testimonials for the creativity and lateral thinking that disabled people bring to creative writing, are literary witnesses to the statistic, reported by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [that 46% of complaints to the Australian Human Rights Commission in 2022 – 2023 were about disability discrimination](#). The prejudice against disabled people in Australia extends to our literary sector. As disabled writer Dr Amanda Tink and I have noted, [no Miles Franklin award winner has ever identified as disabled](#). Many people do not know [that famous Australian authors such as Henry Lawson, Les Murray, and Judith Wright, were disabled](#). Disabled people now make up 21% of Australia's population, yet this is not reflected in Australia's creative and critical writing. If disability is ignored in Australia's literary culture, how will young disabled writers find pathways to publication and, given the demands on our bodies and minds in an ableist culture, how will mid-career disabled writers maintain our outputs? And how, in turn, will disabled readers find themselves and their community in these pages?

To facilitate more support and opportunities for Australian writers — particularly disabled writers — we need a universal basic income for writers; seed money for emerging writers; multi-year fellowships that provide mid-career authors with stability and time to write; a top up of the Lending Rights budget, which is a key income source for many writers; literary prizes and grants that are tax-free; and a tax-free threshold for writers and illustrators.

I also call for more substantial, multi-year funding for literary journals. As Dr Catriona Menzies-Pike has [reported in research conducted with Creative Australia](#), literary journals have, and continue to be, important laboratories for new voices and ideas. *Science Write Now* is the only journal in Australia dedicated to creative writing and art inspired by science. Like many of those identified by Dr Menzies-Pike, its editors have forgone payment so as to support their writers. The process of applying for funding takes hours, and is fitted in around the editors' day jobs, and yet applications are often unsuccessful. A stand-alone Australian Book Fund to support literary journals, particularly new journals, will ensure that editors are paid for their work in facilitating publication opportunities and new ideas, and will offer them the time and stability to grow their audience and become sustainable.

As an academic, I have watched with dismay as the 2020 Job-Ready Graduate programme has decimated the numbers of students enrolling in the arts and humanities. The government's slowness to address this situation — created by a former government that was hostile to the arts — sends a strong and disheartening signal that it does not support the education of Australia's writers, nor the study of Australian literature. The attrition of courses in Australian literature is particularly disappointing as these courses offer opportunities for students to learn about Australian literary history, including the rich and varied voices of First Nations writers. Arts and humanities subjects also teach students critical thinking and creativity — skills that are becoming increasingly important in a world shaped by artificial intelligence. The government's tardiness in failing to abolish the Job-Ready Graduate Scheme is therefore perplexing, and I call for an immediate reversal of this grossly unfair scheme.

As a writer whose work was stolen by Meta and subsequently fed to its artificial intelligence algorithm, I also call for solutions to the unprecedented theft of Australian writers' work by multinational tech companies. I would like to see transparency on copyright inputs for, and outputs from, generative AI models and research into the impact of generative AI on creative careers and Australian cultural output. I would also like to see fair remuneration to writers for their words used by multinational AI companies to programme algorithms. These companies are wealthy and can afford it.

The establishment of Writing Australia was a welcome sign that the government was finally taking writing — generally the least funded of all arts forms in Australia — seriously. I have been heartened by this initiative, but Writing Australia's funding remains tight, and many writers, literary magazines, and literary organisations continue to miss out. I ask that the next cultural policy provides adequate funding for Writing Australia and, in turn, those who apply to this body for support.

Yours sincerely,

Associate Professor Jessica White.