

Letter from Dr Julia Prendergast on behalf of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs

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University of Western Australia Chancellor: The Honourable Robert French AC

robert.s.french@uwa.edu.au

University of Western Australia Vice Chancellor: Professor Dawn Freshwater

University-secretary@uwa.edu.au

The University of Western Australia (M464)

35 Stirling Highway

Perth, Australia, 6009

Dear Honourable Robert French AC and Professor Dawn Freshwater,

I am writing on behalf of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP), the peak academic body representing the discipline of Creative Writing in Australasia. It is inordinately disheartening to hear that the University of Western Australia intends to withdraw support for the University of Western Australia Publishing (UWAP).

It is common knowledge among literary publishers and practitioners that UWAP has made a staggering contribution to Australian literary culture: in recent years publishing a Miles Franklin Award-winner as well as authors on the long and shortlists for highly esteemed prizes such as the Prime Minister's Literary Award, the National Biography Award, the WA Premier's Book Award for an emerging writer, and the Australian Independent Booksellers' Indie Book Awards. As you will be aware, UWAP also has a mesmerising poetry list.

What is perhaps less well-known is the impact that the University of Western Australia Publishing has had on new and under-represented voices. I am writing from Bangalore, India, where I have been lucky enough to take part in the Bangalore Literary Festival. My book would not be not be a book but for Terri-ann White and the team at UWAP. One of the panels I participated in included the author Deepak Unnikrishnan. Unnikrishnan's book *Temporary People*, a work of fiction about Gulf narratives steeped in the Malayalee and South Asian dialects, won the inaugural Restless Books Prize for New Immigrant Writing, the Hindu Prize and the Moore Prize. Unnikrishnan teaches at New York State University in Abu Dhabi. Terri-ann White contacted Unnikrishnan, months after originally meeting him in Chennai. He is a new addition to the UWAP list. Such is the scope of Terri-ann's vision.

There are not so many individuals or movements that are resoundingly referred to as visionary. UWAP is a movement—time and again, thinking and working with imagination and wisdom. So many times, I have quoted Terri-ann: to students, in interviews, among writers. When I sent Terri-ann my manuscript she said: 'Literary fiction is virtually impossible'. Yes, it is, and yet Terri-ann and the team at UWAP work tirelessly within this realm of virtual impossibility.

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AAWP are acutely aware that funding from the University of Western Australia has made this work possible.

There are so many superb writers with virtually impossible manuscripts that are not yet books. Who is reading them? Terri-ann is reading them. I know this to be true. The portfolio I manage for the AAWP executive is Partnerships and Prizes. Some years ago, I pitched a new prize: ‘Chapter One’—a prize for an emerging writer of literary fiction with a full-length manuscript (prose, poetry or a hybrid work). I approached a number of independent and “big name” publishers, suggesting a partnership with AAWP to make this prize a reality. Terri-ann accepted the proposal for partnership, immediately and without reservation. Each year, Terri-ann reads the winner’s work as a matter of priority, responding to the author’s work with a sharp eye and great care: intuitively addressing the impact of the writing and the themes at the heart of the manuscript. I know this to be true. I have been lucky enough to bear witness.

With inordinate gratitude for the contribution UAWP has made to the literary landscape, in Australia and internationally, and with deep appreciation for the financial support provided by UWA, without which this work is not possible, the AAWP respectfully requests that the decision to disband UAWP, in its current form, be revisited.

How inspiring it would be to see such a decision overturned. In recognisably challenging times, this would signify a continued investment in Australian literary culture, a legacy that would facilitate our faith in universities as a beacon for intellectual leadership—championing the immeasurable value of literary arts culture to the broader society, in Australia and beyond.

Best wishes,

Julia Prendergast.

Dr Julia Prendergast

Lecturer, Writing and Literature

Major Discipline Coordinator: Professional Writing and Editing

Swinburne University

Deputy Chair of the Executive Committee

Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP)

AAWP Portfolio: Partnerships and Prizes