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Australia Council invests \$1.5m in new writing

The Australia Council for the Arts has invested \$1.5 million in Australian writers to create new works for a range of audiences.

Australia Council Director Literature Jill Eddington said grants had been awarded to emerging, developing and established writers of poetry, fiction and non-fiction as well as playwriting and digital and new media.

“The Australia Council recognises the importance of supporting the life of the artist, which is why supporting writers at various stages of their career is crucial,” Ms Eddington said.

“The Australia Council is pleased to support 10 emerging authors, including Fiona McFarlane and Courtney Collins, so they can write their second book. Both have received critical acclaim and award recognition for their debut novels.”

Fiona McFarlane, who won the Voss Literary Prize, a NSW Premier’s Literary Award and shared the Barbara Jefferies Award for her debut novel *The Night Guest*, said writing a second novel was daunting.

“Before *The Night Guest* no one had any expectations of my work and now I’m asked constantly when the next thing is coming, which is great of course, but also potentially intimidating,” Ms McFarlane said.

“The Australia Council funding will give me the space and time to really enter into the world of my second novel, so I can shut out every voice but that of the work itself, and spend time alone with it before it’s ready to meet the world.”

For her next book, Ms McFarlane will explore an overlooked aspect of Australian history and interrogate national narratives about race, immigration and war.

Courtney Collins’ debut novel, *The Burial*, was highly commended for the Scribe Fiction Literary Award, and shortlisted for the Stella Prize, the NSW Premier’s Literary Awards, the Australian Vogel Literary Award and Nita B Kibble Literary Awards for Women Writers. It has also been optioned by Renegade Films/Pure Pictures, with shooting expected to begin in late 2015.

Ms Collins said writing a book takes a lot of time and she spent seven years working on *The Burial*.

“This grant from the Australia Council means that my second novel need not take seven years of balancing a full-time job and writing, so it saves a few gasps,” Ms Collins said.

“The money affords me the simple but powerful resources of time and focus.”

Ms Collins second book, *The Walkman Mix*, is about someone who is looking for love in all the wrong places in a fictional mining town in NSW in 1992.

Celebrated Australian writer Thomas Keneally said the Australia Council was integral in helping him establish a career as an author.

“I was started in my career by a \$4,000 grant from [the Australia Council’s] predecessor, Commonwealth Literary Fund, and am passionate in the argument that grants generate wealth and employment and the imponderable benefits of a writing industry,” Mr Keneally said.

To see the full list of recipients, go to: <http://2014.australiacouncil.gov.au/grants/grant-decisions/reports/literature2/Literature-Assessment-Meeting-Report-September-2014>

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