

Mr Tom Duncan  
Clerk  
ACT Legislative Assembly  
London Circuit  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 15 May 2025, concerning petitions E-PET 015-25 and PET 026-25 regarding Libraries ACT and national standards. I am responding on behalf of Minister Cheyne as the Acting Minister for City and Government Services.

Minister Cheyne recognises the concerns raised by the community in these petitions and other representations made to Members of the Legislative Assembly regarding the sustainability and suitability of public library services in the ACT. Specifically, the alignment of Libraries ACT with national standards.

The national standards referred to in the petition are those developed by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). In considering the standards, it is worth noting that the document itself, in its introduction, stresses:

*There is, however, an inherent dilemma in attempting to produce national standards that apply to libraries of all sizes in all parts of metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Australia. The diversity of communities and governance arrangements across the country make it certain that not every national standard or guideline will be completely relevant in every library setting.*

Further, in describing how the Standards should be used:

*Library standards should only be used when they are interpreted within an appropriate context. Libraries and stakeholders are encouraged to take a rigorous and thoughtful approach to use of the standards to avoid the possibility of inadvertently compromising the integrity of library services. Most of the 2020 standards are presented as 'per capita' measures, which standardise library provision and use, and make the standards more applicable across library services of different size. Per capita analysis is based on the*

*population of the catchment area/Local Government Area (LGA) served by the library service. The ABS annually reports Estimated Resident Population by LGA. Use of the standards in setting targets for libraries should only occur with a clear understanding of the geographic, demographic, jurisdictional and service context in which the library operates.*

*Interpretation of the standards requires an understanding of the definition of the standard and its behaviour in different settings. Higher and lower performance against a standard may reflect the tension between service quality and service efficiency or productivity. 'Targets' are presented as the level expected to be achieved by a library service within its context (e.g. size, location). 'Enhanced' targets set a more aspirational goal for library services that have achieved the target level.*

Future actions and decisions relating to alignment with these standards must be made with this context in mind and need to be considered interdependently and not in isolation.

The government shares the petitioner's belief that ACT Libraries provide essential services to this community and are vital spaces of learning, connection, safety and belonging. As the responsible Minister, Minister Cheyne is committed to the sustainability of ACT Libraries.

I draw your attention to the Assembly resolution on 19 March 2025. Minister Cheyne addressed this resolution in the Assembly on 10 April 2025, in which she referred to the establishment of an Independent Working Group (IWG) tasked with exploring current issues facing Libraries ACT. The national standards are one element of this. The scope of the IWG was to examine the current service delivery model, identify budgetary constraints and actively consult with LACT staff at all levels to understand workforce and cultural influences that may have contributed to current circumstances. At the time, Minister Cheyne committed to working with and being guided by Libraries ACT staff on how to provide predictability and certainty for this vital community service.

The IWG Report was submitted to Minister Cheyne as the responsible Minister on 22 July 2025. As you can appreciate, and in line with Minister Cheyne's commitment to staff, the first priority with the release of the IWG Report is affected staff. Libraries ACT staff are deeply passionate about the work they do and the communities they serve. Minister Cheyne thanked all staff for their continued commitment to the library service and for engaging and providing valuable feedback to the Independent Working Group.

Engagement and consultation with staff, the unions, community and across government will be key over the coming months. At this stage, Minister Cheyne cannot pre-empt the proposed approach to the findings of the IWG Report or future considerations or decisions of government. A more fulsome response and approach to the issues highlighted in this petition can be expected by the end of 2025 after Libraries ACT, Access Canberra and the government have comprehensively considered the findings of the Independent Working Group.

Minister Cheyne would like to reiterate her commitment to providing a reliable and quality library service to the community. The ACT Government thanks the community for their continuing engagement with the public library service and looks forward to sharing next steps and actions over the coming months.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris Steel', with a stylized, cursive script.

Chris Steel MLA

Acting Minister for City and Government Services

25/08/2025