

[House Standing Committee on Education and Training](#)



## **Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools**

On Wednesday 10 March 2010 the Minister for Education, Hon Julia Gillard MP, asked the Committee to inquire into and report on *school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools*.

### ***Terms of Reference***

To inquire into and report on the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia's public and private schools. Specifically, the committee should focus on:

- the impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities;
- the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;
- the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;
- the role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians; and
- the impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.

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16<sup>th</sup> April 2010

## Summary of submission points:

### *Terms of Reference*

To inquire into and report on the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia's public and private schools. Specifically, the committee should focus on:

- **the impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities;**

Technology  
Change of activities in libraries  
IT skills  
Buildings

- **the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;**

Teacher librarian as school leader  
Information literacy and digital literacy  
Copyright  
Accessing hidden information  
Professional development  
Reading habits and influence  
New technologies  
Expert consultants

- **the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;**

Age  
Skills  
Support  
Review  
Training

- **the role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians;**

State Library  
Professional Associations

- **the impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.**

Accessibility  
Professional Support  
New procedures and resources

## **Terms of Reference:**

**To inquire into and report on the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia's public and private schools.**

**Specifically, the committee should focus on:**

- **the impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities;**

**Technology.** Increased numbers of computers in school has enabled an increase in access to digital information available for students and teachers 24 hours per day. This information is often filtered for inappropriate content, but not for inaccurate content. Students and teachers need a new set of skills to enable them to discriminate for relevant, accurate and appropriate information for their education purposes. Teacher Librarians teach these skills and promote awareness of potential conflicts. They also direct clients to resources that meet their requirements. Teacher librarians must have high level ICT skills to facilitate this and provide technical support to users.

Students have increased access to computers in locations other than their school libraries. This has altered the use of these libraries to less computer-centric activities. Out of class hours see the library still fully occupied, but more emphasis is placed on written work, group work, study and reading. This has provided an opportunity to more actively engage with students and teachers on a face to face basis.

The increased presence of computers in classrooms, and student access to uncontrolled content, has led to an increased demand for Information Literacy skills. Students commencing tertiary studies are confronting requirements for citation skills and research skills often for the first time if this issue has not been addressed during primary or secondary schooling years.

Many classroom teachers are not confident to teach these skills and it is commonly done in a team setting with the teacher librarian and in context with the subject being taught.

**Buildings.** The new libraries that are being built for many primary schools will provide a venue to foster reading competency and build foundation information literacy skills. In order to succeed, they must be more than rooms filled with shelves of books. Specialist activities and programs will ensure best value is obtained from these investments. Primary Teacher Librarians are trained to create stimulating areas that encourage students to investigate new books to read, think about new things and discover a joy from reading that will be nurtured throughout their school years. Teacher Librarians work with teachers to enrich the classroom curriculum by extending the learning in the library and beyond. Teacher Librarians utilize selection criteria and collection management techniques to manage and develop this valuable collection of resources. Adequate operational and bookstock funds are needed to deliver this.

Many existing libraries require refurbishment and collection reviews to bring them up to the standard of a modern school library. To be recognized as centres for modern learning, school libraries must appear modern in their aesthetic and layout. This requires an understanding of user behaviour, merchandising techniques and design as well as active promotion and marketing. It also requires engagement with and awareness of current and future events both at the school and in the wider community.

- the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;

### **The teacher librarian as a leader in many areas:**

Information literacy and digital literacy - especially as our information seeking and recreational reading moves to a digital format.

Copyright - expertise is essential with relation to copying and distribution of digital content within an educational organization.

Locating suitable resources – often in the 'hidden web', behind password protected barriers or in places not searched by search engine 'spiders'.

Expertise in children's and youth literature, and promotion of this. Active promotion of reading is often lacking in schools. Those with successful reading programs included in the timetable are demonstrating markedly higher results in English and other subjects. In a successful program students are expected to read widely and have weekly discussions with a teacher librarian who monitors their progress and stimulates their interest in reading beyond their 'comfort zone'. Students actively involve themselves in the reading culture by suggesting new titles, participating in book clubs, networking with reading groups in other schools, attending author talks. This promotion relies on the professional expertise of the Teacher Librarian, often working with a skilled and proactive Library technician to generate displays and coordinate events.

Teacher librarians must keep up to date in this area and this is often done outside of normal school hours. Peer discussions, networking with teacher librarians in other schools, discussions with book suppliers and publishers, attendance at author talks in bookshops and other venues, lectures, reading conferences, writers festivals, book clubs, book reviews and specialist publications are some of the methods employed. When good relationships are built this brings many benefits to the school. Encouraging reading to members of the entire school community has many benefits beyond the library.

**The future.** Students who read influence the reading habits of their parents by bringing a reading culture back into the home. Many of our students enjoy discussions

about books with their parents. As regular readers and public transport travelers, our students are contributors to the strong culture of reading on public transport.

New communication and social networking technologies will be used to promote literacy and books to parents and students. They can also include links to articles on topics of relevance. New Web2.0 technologies allow us to delivery this information to the reader via RSS feeds, Facebook, Twitter etc

New devices - the *iPad* and similar tools will significantly impact on reading habits and have the potential to engage a whole new group of readers. School libraries should be prepared for leaps such as this and have content ready for access by clients with these devices. A teacher librarian with expertise in these types of devices can guide users to incorporate content that supports their learning and reading.....leading to improved literacy. These are exciting opportunities that must be embraced and require preparedness.

### **Future support for teacher librarians**

There is a need for expert consultants to assess current school library facilities and evaluate buildings, staffing, resources and technology in schools where the library is considered to have fallen behind the standard expected in a modern school.

This is an ideal opportunity to utilize the skills and experience of current teacher librarians to consult to schools as library advisors. While reaping their knowledge before they retire, it also provides employment opportunities for those considering entering the profession.

- **the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;**

**Age.** There is an urgent need for young people to enter the profession of teacher librarian.

It is an unfortunate fact that many school library staff are aged in their mid 50s or beyond and fit the stereotypical image. Low budgets can be seen by some to be a reason to have little change. In vibrant, successful school libraries these staff are certainly not behaving in the stereotypical manner. In these libraries, you are more likely to hear: "can I help....", "have you tried...", "this is new...".

**Skills.** There is often little understanding of the skill and effort required to create a successful school library. Positive relationships are core to this success. All Library staff must be able to demonstrate their competence and conduct themselves as professionals.

**Support** from and to the leadership team of a school is vital to the success of the school library. This takes the form of Position of Responsibility for Department Head, adequate budget allocations and staffing levels and inclusion in major decision making

committees of the school – eg Curriculum, Teaching and Learning and ICT.

**Review.** Long durations of employment at a single school has the potential to limit exposure to new practices. As a specialist area of the organization, school libraries should be regularly (every 5 years) reviewed to ensure a desired level of performance is being achieved and input of staffing and resource / capital \$\$ is delivering acceptable output. This accountability is often overlooked but is particularly important where little staff turnover has occurred. Libraries must avoid being perceived as areas of the school that have it easy.

**Training.** The joint qualifications of teaching and librarianship are adequate for accreditation to work as a teacher librarian. The qualifications should enable recognition in both teaching and librarianship employment opportunities. This will facilitate easier movement between the school and non-school sectors of the profession.

Information literacy skills should be included in all teacher training. This removes the responsibility from the Teacher Librarian to be the sole deliverer of this content and puts it squarely within the normal processes of research and assignment preparation. As information literacy experts, the Teacher librarian can provide advice to teachers and students.

There will be a shortage of teacher librarians as the bubble of those TLs aged 55+ reach retirement age. The new TL specialists will have a whole new skill set and the courses they do must equip them to manage and teach in this new and different learning environment.

Tertiary courses should be delivered by specialists in subject areas needed for the school library of the present and the future. Are there sufficient young lecturers in this field to allow a mix of experienced and youthful course content delivery?

- the role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians; and

### **Victorian State Library (VSL)**

Positives: Recent initiatives have been significant in supporting school libraries and librarians. Tours and courses for students are well utilized. Our school will have 750+ students visit the State Library in 2010. The displays on Victorian History are now integral to the teaching of this subject and extend into English novel studies as well. Familiarity with the State Library has had the flow-on effect of students utilizing the VSL Website for information databases and other online support services. Many of our VCE students use this venue for private study during out of school hours. We encourage all

VCE students to have a personal membership – and use it.

Centre for Youth Literature (VSL) provides support via school visits by specialist and professional development opportunities for teacher librarians and teachers.

The Reading Matters conference brings authors to Melbourne. We are able to access these with our students for affordable costs. In comparison, a half-day session with a visiting author to a school, booked through an agency, currently costs over \$600.

Age Writers Festival – stimulating PD for library staff and others. Promotion of this event amongst staff and students of the school generates wonderful discussion.

Wheeler Centre for Books provides opportunities to listen to authors and be involved in professional development workshops.

The recent initiatives of this organization have created a vibrant and successful centre to celebrate reading, writing, publishing and ideas. Most events are free of charge.

Negatives: None.

### **School Library Association of Victoria (SLAV) / Australian School Library Association (ASLA).**

Positives: Provide essential support for Teacher Librarians often working in isolation from peers. Provide a voice for the profession via promotion and advocacy. Provide publication, professional development and conference opportunities, visits to regional groups. Knowledgeable and efficient office staff who are always professional in their approach.

Full day conferences for Library Technicians has been a very successful initiative of this group.

Negatives: Some teacher librarians can become dependent on this association to meet all their professional development needs.

### **Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)**

Positives: Provides the essential role of accrediting the education courses offered for entry to the profession.

Provides essential advisory and advocacy services to members of the LIS profession.

Supports all librarians by facilitating access to information across all sectors.

This National Association is often undervalued in Schools. There is much benefit to be gained from awareness of issues impacting on libraries in general and many strategies that can be incorporated into improved school library practices.

Negatives: membership cost is often not seen as value for money by Teacher Librarians who may already be members of Teacher Librarian Association and a Teachers Union.

- the impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.

**Accessibility 24/7.** Digital resources from around the world can be made available to clients 24 hours a day. Communication technologies allow us connect our clients with the information they need.

**Professional support:** Blogs, wikis, online conferences, discussion forums, RSS feeds all serve to improve professional networking and reading and provide insight into current best practice of the profession.

**New procedures and resources.** Video streaming and fast internet speeds has allowed labour intensive processes to be replaced with distributed digital video content for all teachers, accessible both at school and at home. These storage and distribution programs, such as ClickView, also incorporate podcasts, images, in-house videos and subscription video libraries, and the content can be accessed over a wireless network connection and incorporated with a Learning Management System.

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