



## House Standing Committee on Education and Training

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

*I am a teacher librarian with more than fifteen years experience in libraries in Victoria and Tasmania. I have worked in primary and secondary school libraries, state libraries, tertiary, special and parliamentary libraries. I am currently employed by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) as the Local Liaison Officer for Tasmania. The views expressed in this submission are my own and not necessarily those of my employer.*

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This submission does not address all the criteria in the terms of reference, it focuses on the "factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians" and specifically relates this to the Tasmanian situation.

#### INTRODUCTION

Tasmania has 139 Primary Schools, 31 Secondary Schools (also known as High Schools, Years 7 to 10), 27 District High Schools (Kindergarten to Year 10), 8 Senior Secondary Colleges (Years 11 and 12) and 10 Special schools (for students with disabilities). In all, there are over 62,000 students enrolled in Tasmania's schools and colleges.<sup>1</sup>

In 2009 Tasmania's post-year 10 education system underwent significant restructure. The merger of TAFE Tasmania and the Senior Secondary Colleges created three new organisations – the Tasmanian Academy, the Tasmanian Polytechnic and the Tasmanian Skills Institute. Four of the eight Colleges, along with TAFE Tasmania were restructured and brought under the authority of the Tasmanian Academy and the Tasmanian Polytechnic; the remaining four Colleges are expected to make the move to the new structure by 2012.<sup>2</sup>

The number of teacher librarians employed in Tasmanian schools is in steady decline, and there is an urgent need for policies and programs to reverse this trend.

#### TEACHER LIBRARIANS IN AUSTRALIA

In 2003, Michele Lonsdale undertook a review for the Australian School Library Association (ASLA), *Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement: A Review of the Research*. She found that:

*"Existing research shows that school libraries can have a positive impact, whether measured in terms of reading scores, literacy or learning more generally, on student achievement. There is evidence to show that a strong library program that is adequately staffed, resourced and funded can lead to higher student*

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Education: *Tasmanian education system*. Accessed 13 April 2010.

<http://www.education.tas.gov.au/school/taseducation>

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. 1301.6.55.001 *Tasmanian Statistical News*, Mar 2010. Accessed 13 April 2010.

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/1301.6.55.001~Mar+2010~Main+Features~Hot+Topics?OpenDocument>

*achievement regardless of the socioeconomic or educational levels of the adults in the community.*"<sup>3</sup>

The situation in Australia was dismal:

- *"a general shortage of teacher librarians...*
- *the practice of schools using librarians rather than teacher librarians, or having staff with no library or teaching qualifications at all*
- *teacher librarians being used in classrooms as subject teachers to fill gaps in staffing*
- *an ageing profession, with retirees not being replaced by sufficient numbers of graduates*
- *added responsibilities for teacher librarians in terms of technology maintenance and student use of technology.*"<sup>4</sup>

## **TRAINING OF TEACHER LIBRARIANS**

There are currently ten universities that offer ALIA-recognised librarianship courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level; in 1990, there were sixteen.<sup>5</sup>

There are currently only four tertiary institutions that provide training programs for teacher librarians, Charles Sturt University, Queensland University of Technology, Edith Cowan University and the University of Tasmania.<sup>6</sup> Over the past two decades, this has decreased from 15 providers.<sup>7</sup>

There are no separate statistics for students enrolled in teacher librarian vs. library and information management courses. However, enrolments have decreased in both postgraduate and undergraduate courses. ALIA provides statistics from 1996-2005 showing total enrolments in courses leading to a librarian qualification. Postgraduate enrolments peaked in 1997 with 1,917 enrolments, and reached a low in 1999 (1,373 enrolments) due to the introduction of full-fee payment for courses. In 2005, enrolments reached 1,539. Undergraduate enrolments peaked at 1,745 in 1997 and reached a low of 811 in 2005. This low is a result of the reduction of courses over the previous three year period. A number of universities have discontinued both postgraduate and undergraduate courses since 1997, particularly in teacher-librarianship.<sup>8</sup>

## **STAFFING OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN TASMANIA**

During the 1980s and 1990s Tasmania's primary and secondary school teacher librarians lost their separate staffing entitlement.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> M. Lonsdale. (2003) *Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement: A Review of the Research*. Melbourne, Australian Council for Educational Research. ACER Cunningham Library. p.30. Accessed 13 April 2010. <http://www.asla.org.au/research/Australia-review.htm>

<sup>4</sup> M. Lonsdale. (2003) *Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement: A Review of the Research*. Melbourne, Australian Council for Educational Research. ACER Cunningham Library. p.5. Accessed 13 April 2010. <http://www.asla.org.au/research/Australia-review.htm>

<sup>5</sup> G. Hallam, 'Education for library and information service' in *Libraries in the twenty-first century: Charting New Directions in Information Services*. (2007) Ed. Stuart Ferguson. Wagga Wagga, NSW, Centre for Information Studies, p.316-7.

<sup>6</sup> ALIA Education: *Teacher Librarian*. Accessed 13 April 2010. <http://www.alia.org.au/education/qualifications/teacher-librarian.html>

<sup>7</sup> *The Hub: Campaign for Quality School Libraries in Australia*. Accessed 13 April 2010.

<http://hubinfo.wordpress.com/2010/03/19/points-to-consider-for-house-committee-inquiry-submissions-27-days-to-go/>

<sup>8</sup> ALIA: *Enrolments in library and information management courses*. Accessed 13 April 2010.

<http://www.alia.org.au/employment/enrolment/courses/>

<sup>9</sup> *AEU Teacher Librarians and School Libraries Policy 2008*. Accessed 13 April 2010.

[http://aeutas.org.au/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Policies/AEU\\_Teacher\\_Librarians\\_and\\_School\\_Libraries\\_Policy2008.pdf](http://aeutas.org.au/fileadmin/user_upload/Policies/AEU_Teacher_Librarians_and_School_Libraries_Policy2008.pdf)

A State Library of Tasmania report found that “in the four years 1996-2000, there has been an almost fifty per cent decline in the number of teacher librarians” in Tasmania.<sup>10</sup>

The *Australian School Libraries Research Project. Australian Teacher Librarians: Report 1* found that over 55% of teacher librarians are aged 55 and older, and Tasmania is the worst state with only 2.04% of the teacher librarian workforce aged under 40 and 73.5% aged over 50.<sup>11</sup>

There are currently 29 teacher librarians in government High Schools and Secondary Colleges and another 9 in the Tasmanian Polytechnic.<sup>12</sup>

Statistics indicate that by 2015, if there are no more teacher librarians recruited, there will be only 15 teacher librarians remaining in Tasmanian government school libraries.<sup>13</sup>

Independent schools, in contrast, take pride in their libraries and often use their new library facilities, teacher librarian staff and library programs in their advertising as incentives to parents selecting schools.

If current trends continue government schools will become poor cousins to independent schools.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Adopt a national standard for school library staffing based on student/staff ratios. An existing model is set out in *Learning for the Future: Developing Information Services in Schools*.<sup>14</sup>
2. Offer scholarships to existing teachers to gain librarianship qualifications in order to increase the numbers of teacher librarians in schools.

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<sup>10</sup> State Library of Tasmania. (2000) *Enhancing Student Outcomes with Improved Information Services and Provisioning, Discussion Paper*, p.10

<sup>11</sup> B. Combes. (2008) Australian School Libraries Research Project: A snapshot of Australian school libraries, Report 1. *Australian School Library Research Project*, ASLA, ALIA & ECU, p.1. Accessed 13 April 2010.  
<http://www.chs.ecu.edu.au/portals/ASLRP/publications.php>

<sup>12</sup> Email correspondence with Lorene Furmage, Executive Officer, ASLA Tasmania, 12 April 2010.

<sup>13</sup> *AEU Teacher Librarians and School Libraries Policy 2008*, p.4. Accessed 13 April 2010.

[http://aetas.org.au/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Policies/AEU\\_Teacher\\_Librarians\\_and\\_School\\_Libraries\\_Policy2008.pdf](http://aetas.org.au/fileadmin/user_upload/Policies/AEU_Teacher_Librarians_and_School_Libraries_Policy2008.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> *Learning for the Future: Developing Information Services in Schools* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2001) Australian School Library Association and Australian Library and Information Association. Carlton South, Vic., Curriculum Corporation. p.68.