



Interim Submission

April 2010

**Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in
Australian School**

Western Australian Local Government Association
Contact: Jessica Lenney

Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools

Introduction

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) is the united voice of Local Government in Western Australia. The Association is an independent, membership-based group representing and supporting the work and interests of all 139 Local Governments in Western Australia, plus the Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Island Councils.

The Association provides an essential voice for almost 1,400 elected members and over 12,000 employees of the local governments in Western Australia. The Association also provides professional advice and offers services that deliver financial benefits to local governments and the communities they serve.

Background

Public libraries have changed considerably over the years and many local libraries now offer a broad range of services to their communities to inspire lifelong learning, support education and study, and encourage community connections and social interaction. Some of the innovative programs offered by libraries include Baby Rhyme Time, Your Tutor, Better Beginnings, school holiday programs, events, writing workshops, philosophy clubs, local history programs, collections for people with different needs, and new technological resources .

Much of the governance and infrastructure that underpins public libraries in Western Australia, including the *Library Board Act 1951*, has changed little over the years. In 2007 the Joint Advisory Committee, comprising representation from key stakeholders in Western Australian public libraries, commissioned a review into the current model for the provision of public library services to recognise the changing role of public libraries. This review identified ten high level strategic outcomes for the State's public library services, which are stated below for reference:

- Well-informed, literate and learning communities
- Connected and resilient communities

- Community memory preserved and shared
- Accessible and relevant content
- Community destinations
- Skilled and innovative staff
- Continuous improvement
- Strategic partnerships
- Good governance
- Visible and valued

The full report can be downloaded from WALGA's website at:

http://www.walga.asn.au/about/policy/community_development/current-emerging-issues/libraries

In 2008, Dr Alan Bundy was commissioned by the State Library of WA and the WA Department of Education and Training to write a report on joint-use libraries. It arose from the concern that the WA joint-use libraries established since 1982 between the WA Department of Education and Training, TAGEWA, Murdoch University, and local government authorities had never been reviewed for how well they met the needs of their partners and users, or for how well they demonstrated the value of investment in the joint-use library concept.

The joint-use libraries identified for evaluation were:

- Bullsbrook (City of Swan)
- Donnybrook (Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup)
- Ellenbrook (City of Swan)
- Kununurra (Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley)
- Lake King (Shire of Lake Grace)
- Newdegate (Shire of Lake Grace)
- Rockingham (City of Rockingham)
- Cocos Islands (Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands)
- Eaton (Shire of Dardanup)
- Karratha (Shire of Roebourne)
- Lake Grace (Shire of Lake Grace)
- Lesmurdie (Shire of Kalamunda)
- Newman (Shire of East Pilbara)
- Warnboro (City of Rockingham)

The full report and evaluation can be downloaded from:

<http://pls.liswa.wa.gov.au:3080/pls/noticebd.nsf/22ea2ccd139e6f3f48256bdf001ef4d9/ea23e7289c907dc3c825751d0008c57f?OpenDocument>

Response to Terms of Reference

1. The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities

Existing WA Department of Education policies promote the community use of school facilities to promote maximal use of buildings, and a sense of ownership by the community. While WALGA does not have a formal position on joint use libraries, WALGA's 2008 Systemic Sustainability Study report, *The Journey: Sustainability into the Future* observes that

...collaborations with a variety of Departments have not been an active feature of Local Government strategy. There are a number of proposals contained in this paper which seek to reverse this trend, including:

- the repeated emphasis on initiatives to enhance and demonstrate the capacity of Local Government to be treated as a trusted and respected partner. These outcomes are key objectives of the reform process proposed by Local Government.*
- the shift to increased emphasis upon regional and statewide functional delivery platforms by Local Government which will better align with the reference points and spheres of interest and influence for State Government Departments.*
- the inherent challenges posed to State Departments from a more assured and strategic positioning by Local Government.*
- the ability this positioning will present for Local Government to pursue interests, if necessary independently of State Government, by direct approach to the Commonwealth Government for regional and statewide service and infrastructure needs.*
- the existing high levels of reliance upon Local Government for delivery of key infrastructure, most notably roads but also increasingly related to emerging themes such as public health and water resource management.*

In specific reference to the recent investment in school libraries, while WALGA acknowledges that the funding made available to primary schools under *Building the Education Revolution* has undoubtedly been well received by the community, the restrictive timelines for applications and building completion have generally not provided an opportunity for schools to consider a partnership with their local government.

The WA Planning Commission's State Planning Policy 3.6 Development Contributions for Infrastructure (SPP 3.6) sets out the principles and considerations that apply to development contributions for the provision of community infrastructure in new and established urban areas. As part of this, local governments must produce community infrastructure plans to ensure the future needs of the community are met through strategic facilities planning. Any future funding opportunities should make consideration for alignment with existing community planning processes.

The potential for success in joint-use libraries was well-recognised by the 2008 Bundy Report, who reported that *...the WA group of joint use libraries is among the most successful and enduring in an Australian and international context which has seen many examples of dysfunctional, failed and dissolved joint use libraries* [page 18]. Future investment and policy development should work to ensure and enable the future success of joint-use libraries.

2. The future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy

The first of ten key outcomes identified by the 2007 *Structural Reform of Public Library Services in Western Australia* report was that WA libraries would be 'Well-informed, literate and learning communities'. The key message was as follows:

Libraries support formal and informal learning for life, and the development of a skilled, literate and well-informed community is central to the success of Western Australia into the future. There is a need for a more strategic approach to the development of literacy and learning through public libraries, and in particular for stronger partnerships at the State level to cascade co-operative action at the grass roots. There is an opportunity to emulate the very successful Better Beginnings program as a model for other target groups, including older persons, youth, persons from non-English speaking backgrounds and Indigenous communities. A deeper understanding of the return on investing in the very young and the economic and well-being outcomes that libraries provide in the development of a range of literacies and learning needs to be developed with decision makers. A stronger engagement with the e-learning agenda will also be required.

Investing in school libraries with appropriately trained and skilled staff who can partner with other agencies on early learning programs such as Better Beginnings supports COAG's National Reform Agenda in the priority areas of early childhood (supports families in improving childhood development outcomes in the first five years of a child's life, up to and including school entry) and literacy and numeracy (improving student outcomes on literacy and numeracy). Overseas research into factors that affect school readiness make it clear that children whose parents read with them have better developed emergent literacy skills and learn to read more easily when they begin school. A serious risk to children's emergent literacy is low levels of parental education and literacy as well as a lack of awareness of the value of sharing books, stories, rhymes and songs with children from the time they are born. Libraries and the programs they provide promote a key aspect of school readiness – parental involvement.

Library outreach programs have a consistent record of effectively fostering parent practice and improving young children's language development. Access to books is vital in supporting literacy and library resources for children and their families are a key asset in supporting children's reading needs. School libraries and teacher librarians are key to supporting families in this area.

In 2005, the State Library of Western Australia launched its Better Beginnings family literacy program that supports families and communities in providing quality early literacy experiences for children aged 0–3 years to ensure that they begin school ready to learn.

While many children enter school equipped with the skills to participate in learning, not all adults understand the importance of developing early literacy to ensure that children can become independent readers and learners who can understand and apply information within their daily lives. Better Beginnings makes this link between home and school recognising the importance of teachers and parents working together to promote literacy. A key message of Better Beginnings is that parent involvement doesn't end when school begins. As children begin to learn to read by themselves, it is vital that parents and children continue to read aloud together. School librarians are essential in conveying this message to parents as are school libraries in delivering resources to support the program.

To date, Better Beginnings has reached over 70,000 families in Western Australia. With the ultimate goal of raising literacy levels, findings from the ongoing independent evaluation by Edith Cowan University demonstrate that the program has had a significant positive impact on early reading practices, attitudes and beliefs. Eighty five percent of mothers surveyed reported that they read to their child after being involved in the program (only 14% of these mothers reported reading to their child beforehand) and 62% reported that their confidence in sharing books with their child had increased.

The State Library is currently partnering with the Western Australian Department of Education through its Office of Early Learning and Development on a 12 month pilot that extends the reach of Better Beginnings to provide support for children aged four and five years when they begin school. This pilot, funded by Rio Tinto, provides Australia's most extensive early literacy program, bringing together libraries and schools to provide sustainable literacy support for families and communities. The program recognises that families and teachers play a vital joint role in how well children do in school.

The impact of the pilot extension is being evaluated by Edith Cowan University, with results available in late 2010.

Rio Tinto is funding an extension of Better Beginnings, building on and embedding the program's effective strategies to provide support for children aged four and five years when they begin school. The State Library of WA is working with public libraries and the Department of Education to implement this pilot.

The expanded program will deliver early literacy resources and information to over 6,000 four and five year old children and their families in selected remote, regional and metropolitan communities during 2010.

Children and parents will receive a reading pack, backpacks for families to borrow resources from libraries and a range of materials that introduce children and their parents to effective and safe online

literature search skills and electronic books and these will be supported through joint reading initiatives in public libraries and schools.

To date, 76 schools (approximately 5,900 children) have accepted the invitation to participate in this pilot. Libraries in 20 remote, regional and metropolitan local governments will work with these schools to facilitate the delivery of the program's strategies. In addition 11 remote communities in the Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne and Western Desert will also be participating in the pilot.

Metropolitan

Armadale, Belmont, Canning, Fremantle, Gosnells, Mandurah, South Perth, Stirling, Swan, Victoria Park, Vincent and Wanneroo.

Regional

Broome, Carnarvon, Dardanup, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Kununurra, Narrogin and Port Hedland.

Remote

Strelley (Port Hedland), Kulkarriya (Nookanbah), Parnngurr (Newman), Yakanarra (Fitzroy Crossing), Wulungarra, (Fitzroy Crossing), Balgo (Halls Creek), Ardyaloon (One Arm Point), Tjuntjuntarra (Western Desert), Mulan, Marble Bar, Burringurrah, (Meekatharra).

In addition, the School of the Air will also participate in Carnarvon, Geraldton and Kalgoorlie.

A national program to strengthen our children's early literacy skills and maximise reading and school readiness is needed and Better Beginnings provides a best practice model for a national family literacy program, coordinated by libraries, to provide a key resource in addressing the national drive to support literacy and learning.

3. The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

Another key outcome identified by the 2007 *Structural Reform of Public Library Services in Western Australia* report was that WA libraries would develop a 'Skilled and innovative workforce'. The key message was as follows:

The level of skill of our workforce is the moment of truth in the public library. There is a need to identify the new and emerging skills required and to work with learning providers to develop these skills. Advisory and support services and a range of specialist advice are still required from the State Library, especially for regional and rural libraries and these need to be delivered in the most cost efficient way. Greater clarity of the nature and scope of consultancy and support services from the State Library is now required, as well as clarification of the responsibilities of Regional librarians to staff in their region. Opportunities to share training opportunities at the local level should also be maximised. Training for rural and remote communities continues to be an issue. Opportunities for online training packages and the use of teleconferencing need to be further pursued. Additionally, more efficient solutions need to be found for the site visits currently undertaken by State Library to smaller libraries to ensure the local authority receives the maximum benefit. Strategies to attract staff to small remote communities also need to be developed.

The 2007 *Structural Reform of Public Library Services in Western Australia* report identifies a lack of professional staff in even metropolitan public libraries. This presents planning challenges for the Department of Education and Training and the Library Board of WA in particular. It also provides program and student recruitment opportunities for the Curtin and Edith Cowan Universities, and for TAFEWA.

Bundy's research suggested there is one thing which the joint use library literature and experience shows consistently it is that, to use the words of a member of the board of management of the Kununurra Community Library: *Good joint use libraries are personality driven. Appointment of the right staff is critical* [page 29].

This sentiment can also be seen in the following comments provided by a Local Government manager:

Case Study – Staffing Joint-use Libraries

The main problem we have noticed with having a joint library is the number of staff provided in the library by the College, because school enrolments dropped, the hours for the second college library staff member were reduced, the College Librarian has also had to take more classes, this means that Council library staff are filling the gap and providing more counter service time to both the public and college students as well as more assistance to the students.

The biggest issue we have come across with a joint library is the staffing structure and getting them to work in well together as one team, a lot of hard work, but we finally got there once we employed the right people.

In hindsight, it would have been better for the Shire to employ all the staff including the College Librarian and library officer and be reimbursed for the wages, I understand this has been done at a few of the newer joint libraries, this cuts out the ‘them and us’ and makes reporting to the Senior Librarian much easier, than staff reporting to their own librarian.

4. The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians

The 2008 Bundy Report developed a number of recommendations for the future development of joint-use libraries, which are listed below:

1. *A Western Australian Joint Use Libraries Committee, comprising senior officers of the Western Australian Departments of Education and Training including TAFE, Culture and the Arts, and Local Government and Regional Development is established to*
 - 1.1 *Oversee all joint use libraries between educational institutions and public library authorities, and between public educational institutions.*
 - 1.2 *Provide advice to DET, the Library Board of WA, WALGA and local government authorities on joint use library issues.*

- 1.3 *Provide guidelines and standards for joint use libraries.*
- 1.4 *Approve proposals for new joint use libraries.*
- 1.5 *Identify opportunities to improve regional public, school and TAFE library services through joint use libraries.*
- 1.6 *Consider proposing to the State Government an infrastructure and recurrent funding strategy and quantum to enable this improvement in library and related services for regional West Australians.*
- 1.7 *Promote cooperation between educational institutions and public libraries throughout the State.*
2. *DET and SLWA convene a facilitated joint use library issues workshop, the participants to include the recommended Joint Use Libraries Committee, representatives of joint use library boards of management, joint use library managers, WALGA and Loclib.*
3. *DET, TAFEWA and SLWA develop a staff development and training program for joint use library staff and boards of management.*
4. *DET, SLWA and Loclib promote and foster information sharing and networking between the State's joint use libraries.*
5. *DET and SLWA develop an interactive website containing the joint use library guidelines and standards, information on each WA joint use library, and Australian and international information and links specific to joint use library issues and development.*

Due to the limited time for consultations, WALGA has been unable to gather further information on how these recommendations have been progressed to date. Further information should be available from the Department of Education or State Library of WA.

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

One of the recommendations of the 2007 *Structural Reform of Public Library Services in Western Australia* report that a state-wide technology strategy be developed, including opportunities to

maximise technology for labour efficiencies (such as self-check technology) and that access to online content be improved through the identification of access gaps through a statewide audit of ICT capabilities, and by increased upskilling of staff, and promotion of online databases.

At the end of 2009, WALGA put forward a business case to the WA State Government for funding for public library services which included \$6.0 million over 3 years for Public Library Innovation and Development. This investment would enable the establishment of competitive grants that would leverage other funding sources to deliver programs and projects that support and achieve the structural reform objectives identified in the 2007 report.

Successful projects would deliver:

1. Outreach programs to increase accessibility of public library services to specific demographic groups in the community such as the highly successful Better Beginnings program which is contributing to an improvement in early literacy. Other demographic groups that require innovative approaches in service delivery include seniors, indigenous communities, children and young adults;
2. Projects that deliver state-wide benefits to public library users including information technology advances such as a single-library card; integrated databases and catalogues of library materials; and
3. Programs and projects that support and achieve structural reform of public library services both at a state-wide and local level.

An example of how current digital initiatives can support schools is Yourtutor, a program offered by many local government public libraries in WA. Yourtutor is an online learning service that connects students via Internet to qualified, expert tutors for individual assistance with homework, assignments, exam preparation and study questions. Students in years 4-12 can connect instantly to tutors for a one-to-one, secure, anonymous and free online tutoring that covers core subjects including: Maths, Chemistry, English, Physics, Biology, Science and Study Skills.

The sector is currently waiting for the announcement of the State Government's 2010/11 budget and if WALGA has been successful in securing funding for development and innovation grants for public libraries in WA.

Conclusion

- There should be stronger engagement and alignment between school libraries and the structural reform of public library services.
- Further guidance should be given in the area of best practice examples for joint-use libraries across Australia.
- Current training and professional development for teacher librarians and librarians should engage with current technologies, and best efforts should be made to ensure this level of technology is provided in school and public libraries.

Thank you for providing WALGA with an opportunity for comment.