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**Standing Committee on Education and Training**  
**[Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools](#)**

**RESPONSE FROM**  
**COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIANS (CAUL)**

This submission was prepared on behalf of CAUL (Council of Australian University Librarians) by Cathrine Harboe-Ree.

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## **Background**

The Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools.

CAUL is comprised of the university librarians or library directors of all Australian universities. CAUL's mission is to support its members in the achievement of their objectives, especially the provision of access to, and training in the use of, scholarly information, leadership in the management of information and contribution to the university experience.

In pursuit of this mission CAUL develops a national perspective on issues relevant to university libraries, provides a forum for discussion and collaboration and works to promote common interests.

The environment in which CAUL operates is characterised by:

- an increasingly diverse and technically literate student population, fostered by government efforts to increase participation, including lower socio economic status and indigenous students;
- changes in learning and teaching practices facilitated by evolving pedagogical theory and technology;
- changes in research practices facilitated by evolving technology and increasingly involving collaboration; and
- the transformation of scholarly communication including the emergence of alternative approaches to discovery, dissemination and access to scholarly information.

One of CAUL's primary goals is to facilitate its members' role in supporting and maximising learning and teaching outcomes and contributing positively to the student experience. University libraries make a major contribution to learning and teaching through the provision of facilities, services, resources and skills development programs.

## **Comments**

In submitting to this inquiry, CAUL addresses the following terms of reference:

- the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy
- the role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians
- the impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.

CAUL endorses the statement that "Teacher librarians make a significant contribution to the school community in a number of ways, including teaching information, literacy skills and providing access to information and resources to facilitate learning."

CAUL's interest in this inquiry is that CAUL members are responsible for the provision of library services to students who are the product of the primary and secondary education systems. CAUL members are acutely aware that western pedagogy and research depends on high levels of independent learning and information literacy skills. Better outcomes will be achieved when students progressively acquire these skills as they move through the education system. Within the university environment there is a growing body of evidence that students with high levels of information literacy skills do better in their studies.

CAUL members are concerned that many decision-makers in the education system believe that access to electronic information removes the necessity for providing library services. CAUL argues strongly that the opposite is true. Students (and teachers) now run the risk of being overwhelmed by the volume of information available to them, and by the huge challenge of identifying good quality information in the midst of all of this material. Increasingly, librarians in universities work in partnership with academics to embed information literacy skills development into coursework. CAUL argues that school librarians should be working in the same way with teaching staff. This requires school librarians to have high level skills in the area of teaching information literacy and an understanding of the value of integrated, compounding skills development within curricula. School librarians also have a critical role in training teaching staff in the use of information.

The Australian Government's objective to increase participation in higher education is more likely to be achieved where students are motivated and are confident in their ability to learn. School librarians have a critical role to play in achieving these outcomes. CAUL members are aware that students from lower socio-economic groups frequently require higher levels of information literacy and academic skills development support when they enter university. Many university libraries have extensive skills development transition programs across the range of student cohorts to meet these needs and facilitate student retention into later years. A whole-of-education approach to skills development would both improve graduation results and increase the likelihood of students entering university and completing their tertiary education.

### **Conclusion**

CAUL urges the Government to recognise the important role of school libraries and librarians in an increasingly complex information environment and recommends that appropriate funding and professional development opportunities are provided.

CAUL welcomes opportunities to work with schools and school librarians in the interests of providing seamless and successful transition from secondary to higher education.

Cathrine Harboe-Ree

CAUL President and Monash University Librarian

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