The following comments are in response to the *Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools*.

These comments are requested to be confidential.

They are based on twenty years experience as a Teacher Librarian in NSW Department of Education and Training High Schools.

Summary

This submission comments on the following:

- The complexity of the role of Teacher Librarian and the need for this to be recognised.
- The need for Teacher Librarians to be able to contribute to strategic planning within the school.
- The need for the school library to be appropriately resourced to be able to perform managerial and teaching activities which build and deliver services to support learning.
- The need to maintain autonomy and flexibility of the role of Teacher Librarian as this best reflects how students' literacy is acquired and so is best able to support the continued development of literacy skills.
- All of the above are amplified with the adoption of digital technologies.

Submission

Comments are made in relation to professional experience outlined previously and to DET documents which endeavour to clarify policy and responses best able to empower Teacher Librarians and so school libraries to fulfil their role to support the teaching and learning programs of the school. Both *School libraries-policy* (1987) and *Information skills in the school: engaging learners in constructing knowledge* (2007) suggest the role of the teacher librarian is both as a teacher and resource manager. Current research identifies the potential of Teacher Librarians and school libraries to be more, and to maximise and 'build capacity' of student learning.

The ability of teacher librarians to be able to achieve the potential of their role is very much dictated by parameters of context. In this way the trend towards school based decision making on recruitment, staffing mix and budget will be critical to the extent to which school libraries can contribute to education and community outcomes. The following are factors which impact on the effectiveness of the role.

Of prime importance is educational leaders' understanding of the scope, complexity and potential of the role of Teacher Librarian. Greater awareness of this at executive level within schools and at district and state levels is needed to develop a more broad based level of support. Such representative structures as the School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit within the NSW Curriculum Directorate need more support available to them to be able to facilitate the effectiveness of Teacher Librarians and school libraries.

At present, diversity between how schools utilise the Teacher Librarian role and the level of school based support for the Library can lead to compromising existing support. If Teacher Librarians are to

be the leaders they have the potential to be, are in many cases, and will need to be to reconcile existing library contexts with the dynamic, flexible and responsive learning communities libraries can become, Teacher Librarians need greater access to a voice at executive level within schools. Their role needs to be authenticated as being able to contribute to strategic planning for the whole school. The effectiveness of the Teacher Librarian role would benefit from being acknowledged as an executive or Head Teacher role. The complexity of the role necessitates recruitment of experienced teachers and the utilisation of professionally trained teacher librarians in this role in every school.

To be able to be flexible learning spaces responsive to different learning styles and needs , school libraries need to be adequately resourced. Inadequate resourcing particularly compromises the teaching component of the role. This is especially the case as library services become more diverse and able to more closely match the needs of the individual. Delivery of such services often involves more explicit teaching of individuals which may not so readily be able to be replicated to other information inquiries. As responsiveness of context is at the core of students' acquisition and building of literacy skills, the flexibility and autonomy of the Teacher Librarian remains vital in developing literacy skills within the school community.

Resourcing can be viewed on many levels. Most importantly the need encompasses consideration of adequate use of human resourcing which enables the Teacher Librarian to perform the role. This include being able to negotiate adequate administrative support and professional training for library personnel including the Teacher Librarian. It is particularly pertinent when libraries adopt new digital technologies and need to build associated new services. As the library is repositioned, adequate resourcing includes support for this change. This includes training in new technologies, support for building new relationships that position these appropriately and the opportunity to contribute to a shared view of how best new technologies will be integrated into the school. It necessitates the understanding that new services will take time to learn and develop and not necessarily be an opportunity to reduce the need for administrative assistance.

To adopt the potential of digital technologies adequate resourcing includes the library having enough support in terms of flexibility, time and administrative assistance to manage resources on which service delivery is based. This includes being able to perform managerial tasks such as stocktaking and reviewing existing parts of the collection, the age of which increasingly compromises equitable user access to a relevant collection. More hours of access will need more staff to support them as digital technologies do not necessarily mean the teacher librarian has more available hours.

Adequate resourcing includes appreciation of the expanding scope of the teacher librarian role. Repositioning of this awareness will require review of the notion of the teacher librarian's flexible capacity to supervise. The role of Teacher Librarian would be helped by schools reviewing some practices which may be historically associated with the school library. For instance, the range of learning options for seniors students and the necessity for senior students to stay longer at school may result in the Library accommodating more senior students who have untimetabled classes. Supervision of senior students would best be considered as a whole school responsibility. Similarly, the Teacher Librarian role may further be compromised by services established historically but not central to the role of the Library. Examples include supervision of exams for students who missed the formal exam period, welfare responsibilities where the Library is a 'safe area', general

administrative jobs such as photographing new students for their school ID cards and administering distribution and collection of the work of students enrolled in Open High School.

Teacher Librarians need to be empowered to be able to deliver the promise of new technologies and build the school library as the context for dynamic, flexible learning experiences. Associated with this is the need for schools to reconfigure their awareness of the potential of the role of the Teacher Librarian and the school library while acknowledging the existing complexity of managing services and delivering teaching opportunities. As such, the *Inquiry into school libraries in Australian schools* is not only timely, but essential.