

# Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

## Part 1. Introduction and summary

### 1.1 Who we are:

The School of Information Studies at Charles Sturt University is the only dedicated Library and Information Studies (LIS) school located in an Australian university. With over 1,500 students studying in a range of Library and Information Studies (LIS) courses, the School accounts for well over half of LIS graduates in the country. This means that the School plays a critical role in shaping the future of the information professions, including teacher librarianship, and we take this responsibility very seriously, working closely with professional bodies and practitioners. Students study at a distance while located in every state in Australia and a range of international locations, using a modified form of the online learning platform Sakai.

Over 25% of the students in the School are studying in teacher librarianship courses: the [Master of Education \(Teacher Librarianship\)](#) and the [Graduate Certificate in Teacher Librarianship](#). Both these courses require applicants to have a teaching credential for admission. Graduates of the master's course are employed in school libraries across Australia and internationally. Graduates of the graduate certificate can be employed only in NSW government schools, as this course is designed specifically for the students sponsored by the NSW Department of Education and Training.

The teacher librarianship academic team responsible for this submission enjoy national and international reputations as highly respected and experienced educators and researchers. A number of experienced adjuncts assist this team with various teaching tasks, such as marking, online learning support and subject development. Further details about the teacher librarianship team, both permanent employees and adjuncts, can be accessed at <http://www.csu.edu.au/faculty/educat/sis/staff.htm>.

### 1.2 The focus of our submission

While we note that the inquiry uses the term 'school librarian', this submission will use the term '**teacher librarian**', to acknowledge the role of this professional as a specialist teacher in the school. The focus of the submission is on the **third term of reference** for the inquiry: '**The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians**', because this is our core business, but it will also address the other terms of reference to some extent because each of them impacts on our case in some way.

### 1.3 Key policy issues raised in this submission

We acknowledge and applaud the considerable investment that has recently occurred in Australian school libraries and learning technologies as part of the BER<sup>1</sup> and the DER<sup>2</sup> funding programs, and we support these initiatives because we believe the school library is an important part of school life. National policy is vital to realise the potential of the school library and the role of the teaching

professional who is responsible for the wise stewardship of this investment. We see the need for further policy measures related to this investment, and these policy recommendations are outlined here. These points are considered in greater depth across the remainder of the document.

**1.3.1 Every primary and secondary school in Australia should have fully qualified teacher librarianship personnel, staffed on a pro rata basis based on school enrolment. Our definition of a 'fully qualified teacher librarian' is *'a qualified teacher who holds a teaching qualification appropriate to the level of education within which they work, plus a specialist qualification in teacher librarianship, preferably a master's degree or a post-graduate diploma'*.**

**1.3.2 Every primary and secondary school should have library paraprofessional support staff, such as library technicians and library IT support, appropriately trained, to complement the teacher librarian position.**

**1.3.3 The role of the teacher librarian should be as an integral partner in curriculum design and teaching, in developing information and digital literacy capacities in students and teachers, in meaningfully integrating learning technologies across the curriculum, and in managing the provision of digital and physical learning resources.**

**1.3.4 Ongoing professional development in the field of teacher librarianship should be a required part of the practicing teacher librarian's professional learning, as offered by tertiary institutions and professional associations, and as required by teaching institutes.**

**1.3.5 Research in teacher librarianship is critical to inform sound policy and effective practice. Focused federal funding should be introduced to support an ongoing program of research for continuous improvement and sustainable development in Australian school libraries.**

## **Part 2. The third term of reference: *The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians (teacher librarians)***

Education as a whole must meet the needs and requirements of Australia's changing digitally-driven knowledge society. There is a need for students to function effectively in the complex informational and technological world beyond school. The 21st century school library is a key factor in meeting that need as a unique learning environment and an important part of school life. This facility requires a fully qualified teacher librarian to **lead** the school library program.

### **2.1 Factors influencing the increasing need for qualified teacher librarians in schools include:**

- As a result of the BER program, installation of new school libraries in schools that currently do not have a teacher librarian position. These schools are lacking the expertise and leadership of a specialist in both information and in digital technologies.
- Diversity of the students' environments, in terms of access to technology, socioeconomic and

cultural background, and geographical location. The school library provides equitable, stable access to a common place within the school for investigating and experimenting with information, removing some of these barriers. In this environment, students are guided by qualified teacher librarians who provide appropriate instruction to effectively utilise information and appropriate technologies to support student achievement.

- Need for access to information outside of school, and thus extending the learning environment beyond the borders of the school and the school day. This access can be provided by school libraries as a learning commons for the school community.

*The school learning commons is the showcase for high-quality teaching and learning - a place to develop and demonstrate exemplary educational practices. It will serve as the professional development center for the entire school-a place to learn, experiment with, assess, and then widely adopt improved instructional programs. It is the keystone of literacy and technological programs of the school and the place where classroom teachers can collaboratively design, build, implement, and assess knowledge-building learning activities... [it] ...is now also available 24/7/365 as a virtual learning center. (Koechlin, Zwaan & Loertscher, 2008, p. 10).*

Since students will access and use information independently from any number of locations, students need to be educated in using information and digital technologies by someone who understands the provision of information within the educational context.

- The National Curriculum provides a uniform approach to education across Australia and a concomitant need for a uniform approach to staffing in school libraries, i.e. fully qualified teacher librarians.

## **2.2 Factors influencing the recruitment of teacher librarians**

The challenge in enabling Australian school libraries to play a central role in 21st century education is having fully qualified teacher librarians. We believe this can be achieved by providing appropriate tertiary courses to provide the knowledge and skills needed by these specialist teachers whose qualification is an empowered hybrid of the education and the information professions. They must be professionally recognised as teachers by a national teaching accrediting body (such as the new Australian institute for Teaching and School Leadership Ltd.) and as information specialists by the national professional accrediting body (Australian Library and Information Association).

A number of factors affect the recruitment of teachers to become teacher librarians:

- Demand for teacher librarians to replace those who will soon retire, due to the aging of the teacher librarianship profession (Lonsdale, 2003, p. 5).
- Demand for and creation of new positions for teacher librarians generated by the BER infrastructure and DER technology rollout programs in schools.
- Lack of financial support and incentives. There is a need for provision of a national scholarship program in teacher librarianship education, as well as lower fee-paying requirements through sponsorships.
- Lack of pathways available for school leavers, i.e. no undergraduate programs in Australian universities for those interested in teacher librarianship are currently available.

We believe all of the above can be achieved by providing appropriate tertiary courses to develop the knowledge and skills needed by these specialist teachers.

### 2.3. Factors influencing the development of teacher librarians

- Lack of education system support for initial education of fully qualified teacher librarians, including sponsorship by education departments and authorities for teachers to undertake teacher librarianship courses. A notable exception is the NSW DET sponsorship model. The federal government should encourage and support departments and authorities in providing full and part-time sponsorship of teachers to become teacher librarians.
- Lack of undergraduate courses in teacher librarianship to supplement the existing masters' programs in teacher librarianship to address the current shortage in qualified teacher librarians. Funding to support development and delivery of these courses is needed.
- Lack of adequate staffing of teacher librarianship education programs at the tertiary level. With an increased demand for teacher librarians in schools, funding to improve staffing ratios at the tertiary level is required.
- With the projected increase in numbers of teacher librarians, funding to provide professional development units within universities is required to support ongoing professional development.
- Lack of ongoing professional development for teacher librarians in regional and remote areas. Targeted funding to support development and delivery of multi-modal professional development by tertiary institutions is required. This solution addresses 4th term of reference (3.3).
- *"Teacher education and beginning teacher programs need to explicitly embed an understanding of the information process and how inquiry based learning is enabled through the school library"* (Hay & Todd, 2010, p. 38). Teacher trainees in all Australian universities should be provided with opportunities to work with qualified teacher librarians as part of their teaching practicum programs.

### 2.4. Research

- In 2003, a report by Lonsdale for the Australian Council for Educational Research, entitled *Impact of school libraries on student achievement: A review of the research*, identified a need for further, specifically Australian, research into teacher librarianship practices and issues. While some ongoing research by the few Australian academics in teacher librarianship and by some practitioners who are interested in improving their practice based on evidence continues to be conducted, a real need exists for an extensive program of research to study such current issues as the impact of teacher librarians working with existing and emerging technologies. The goal of any such research would be to inform and improve practice and student learning.
- Establishing a national program for developing teacher librarians as evidence-based practitioners. This should be part of a targeted post-graduate qualification.
- Developing a database of current statistics regarding school libraries and teacher librarians. Conduct of research would be enhanced by a consistent way of gathering statistics about the nature and status of school libraries and teacher librarianship. This would provide opportunities to develop research programs at the national level regarding the effect of school libraries on student achievement using nationally collected school and test result data (similar to the school library impact studies conducted by Lance across the United States from 2000-2009).

We strongly support a nationally funded ongoing program of research for continuous improvement and sustainable development in school libraries to underpin decision making.

### 2.5 Paraprofessional support for teacher librarians

- Paraprofessional support in school libraries is critically needed, as this is an important factor in

the recruitment and retention of teacher librarians. Paraprofessionals are necessary to enable teacher librarians to carry out their professional teaching, management and leadership roles, making it possible for the school library to fulfil its potential in the school.

- Although the area of paraprofessional training for library technicians is not our domain, having people in the position is essential for teacher librarians to be able to do their job<sup>3</sup> (as per ALIA/AASL statement, 2009). We believe these staff members should hold TAFE qualifications at the diploma level in their respective area, either library or ICT technician. These people should be in a position to focus on the school library, not be drawn out to do other tasks across the school.

### **Part 3. The other four terms of reference**

Having addressed our core business and the third term of reference which deals specifically with it, this submission now discusses the way in which each of the other four terms of reference impact on teacher librarianship and our ability to prepare fully qualified teacher librarians.

#### **3.1. The first term of reference: *The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities***

The federal and state governments are making massive investments in buildings and technology, but the human component is currently missing from this equation. The teacher librarian can help schools maximise this investment to affect student outcomes.

Federal government policies that impact school libraries include:

- The *Building the Education Revolution* initiative includes the construction and renewal of primary libraries as a first priority.
- The *Digital Education Revolution* provides schools with such technological improvements as a laptop program and high speed and wireless facilities, creating an environment in which digital literacy will be an important element.
- Development of a national Australian Curriculum, in which, for example, students develop 'the capacity to undertake ... inquiry, including skills in the analysis and use of sources, communication and explanation' (ACARA, 2009a, p. 1). The 10 general capabilities identified by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority are: literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology, thinking skills, ethical behaviour, creativity, self-management, teamwork, intercultural understanding and social competence (ACARA, 2009b). Most, if not all, of these capabilities are important elements of the suite of literacies and digital citizenship to be discussed in section 3.2. This is an area in which the teacher librarian's expertise will be very important.
- NAPLAN: assessment in literacy and numeracy, where the school library plays a vital role in providing resources to build literacy (see section 3.2).

Examples of state government and education system policies that impact school libraries include:

- Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and Queensland, and some schools in NSW: In a move toward greater flexibility, principals determine their staffing complement in a school based decision making model. Under this model, however, many primary school teacher librarian positions have been lost when a school was forced to choose between gaining another classroom teacher versus keeping a teacher librarian. In many schools, libraries are run by library technicians, library officers or parents, none of whom are qualified to integrate the information literacy or

digital technologies into meaningful learning experiences for students.

- NSW DET Release from Face to Face (RFF) -- a state based education system policy that over time has seen primary school teacher librarians charged with taking on the role of providing this release time, eroding the hours per week that the person in the teacher librarian position is able to invest in carrying out the many and varied responsibilities of the role. Teacher librarians must be enabled to focus on their role, rather than being syphoned off to other tasks, to result in an effective school library program.
- NSW sponsors teachers to gain a Graduate Certificate in Teacher Librarianship in order to cope with the shortage of teacher librarians in NSW. These teachers receive full sponsorship for four specified subjects of a nine-subject master's course, and can be employed in NSW government schools as teacher librarians. By completing the second half of the course, these students can be employed in any school library in Australia. However, what is learnt in the course is compromised by administrative determinations in schools such as RFF.

These policies and practices influence what we do as the main provider of teacher librarianship education, in terms of our teaching, our curriculum, and negotiating courses with education authorities such as NSW Department of Education and Training. The effect of inconsistencies across states, based on state policies, is a lack in equity of education for school children across Australia. The more national approach encouraged by the current federal government could alleviate the inequities through appropriate and effective policies.

### **3.2. The second term of reference: *The future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy***

- The school library provides access to a collection of literature in a range of print and digital formats, providing the fodder for developing literacy in students. Lance (2000-2009) has conducted many U.S. based research studies that shows that a well stocked library staffed by a fully qualified teacher librarian is associated with better reading achievement in students. Krashen summarises extensive research that overwhelmingly shows that children learn to read and develop their vocabulary by reading widely (2004). Scholastic and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation conducted a survey of 40,000 American teachers, which found that 83% of students get their books for independent reading from their school libraries (2010, p. 75). This is supported by results from an Australian study which surveyed 6718 students in Years 5-12 from 46 Queensland and Victorian public schools in 2004 about how their school library supported their learning, where "almost 85% of students indicated that the library has offered help in relation to increasing their reading (Q52), with 81.1% of students indicated that the library has contributed to their progress in reading (Q53), and 81.4% of the students said that the library helped them enjoy reading more (Q54)" (Hay, 2005, p. 26). The school library is vital in building traditional literacy, the type that will be tested by the Australian assessment program known as NAPLAN, which tests reading, writing, and language conventions (NAPLAN, 2010).
- Traditional literacy provides a foundation for all other literacies. Teacher librarians have expertise to assist teachers and students in going beyond traditional literacy into developing information literacy, digital literacy, and critical literacies, as articulated in draft National Curriculum documents (ACARA)(as cited in section 3.1). This crucial element of students' education develops their skills, understandings and ethics as digital citizens, helps to meet the needs and expectations of employers, and prepares students for future employment and careers.
- The above development of a range of literacies occurs through integration into the curriculum, through the key collaborative role played by the fully qualified teacher librarian in partnership

with teachers to provide meaningful learning experiences.

- The teacher librarian plays an integral role in promoting the conscious transfer of literacies across the curriculum (Herring, 2010; Williamson, McGregor & Archibald, 2009) from school to work and to further education, to being productive and informed citizens in their communities.
- Findings published in the *School Libraries 21C: School Library Futures Project report* commissioned by the School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit of the NSW Department of Education and Training in 2009 identified key impacts of a future school library on student learning as:
  - *contributing to student development of reading for comprehension*
  - *moving beyond information acquisition to deep critical thinking*
  - *moving beyond the superficiality of skills development to deep knowledge development, and*
  - *the ability to apply new skills and knowledge across discipline areas and grade levels.* (Hay & Todd, 2010, p. 36)

Having fully qualified teacher librarians will enable the above to happen.

### **3.3 The fourth term of reference: *The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians***

- This submission has focused on what fully qualified teacher librarians are able to achieve and how we as a leading provider of teacher librarianship education can educate these qualified teacher librarians. As a leading provider of teacher librarian education, we implore the government to provide initiatives that will support the development of further partnerships between education authorities and tertiary institutions which provide teacher librarianship education.
- Investment of funding is necessary by different levels of government into a research program that involves research partnerships between teacher librarian academics/researchers, principals, teacher librarians, teachers, students, the wider school community, and professional associations.
- The re-establishment and/or creation of central school library support units (such as School Libraries and Information Literacy Unit, NSW DET; Curriculum Materials Information Services CMIS, WA DET) and school library consultants within education departments and authorities in every state. We see this as essential in developing a strong infrastructure to support teacher librarians and build strong school library programs.

### **3.4 . The fifth term of reference: *The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians***

Not only do digital technologies enhance and support the roles of school libraries and teacher librarians, they have transformed the teacher librarian's role. Twenty-first century school libraries are hi-tech learning laboratories that utilize desktop and laptop computers, video technology and wireless devices, to support a rich suite of multimedia creation and learning software programs, and access to full-text online databases, subject-based resource portals and a range of Web 2.0 collaborative learning tools.

- The core function of a 21st century school library is "to support student development in critically engaging with an increasingly complex world of information, and implementing innovative pedagogy centring on inquiry" (Hay & Todd, 2010, p. 35). Because of that complexity, the work of the teacher librarian has evolved into an increasingly technology-intensive function, going well

beyond supporting students and teachers in learning to use technology, into effective application of technologies as learning tools within the curriculum.

- Providing support for school staff by teacher librarians who are technology and learning innovators, the school library is a place which encourages the trialling and testing of new learning technologies and new teaching strategies.
- With the increasingly socially networked world, the teacher librarian is a solution for a school in terms of providing professional learning support for staff, as well as flexible, open, dynamic learning environment that allows students to be active learners and creators of knowledge and ideas within a blended learning environment. Schools need to develop strong digital citizenship programs across the curriculum as defined by ACMA's 'cybercitizens' profiles centred around the four key capabilities of digital media literacy, positive online behaviour, peer and personal safety, and e-Security (ACMA, 2009). The teacher librarian is uniquely positioned to provide the necessary expertise and leadership in developing such a digital citizenship program within schools and work with teachers to effectively implement such a program.
- Given all these factors, teacher librarians need more professional development (see Key Policy Issue 1.3.4), not only in keeping up-to-date with new and emerging technologies, but learning together with teachers and other school staff to enhance learning and teaching in the schools. Professional development for learning teams of teachers and teacher librarians together will support the development of new ideas for integrating technology effectively into the curriculum to provide engaging, meaningful learning experiences for students.

## Part 4 Conclusion

This submission sees a future where all school libraries are well resourced, with the introduction of guidelines or standards within systems and nationally to ensure a consistent and professional approach to the resourcing of school libraries with fully qualified teacher librarians. If provided with the above support, appropriate funding and policies, school libraries can meet their role in society to produce more informed, productive, empowered citizens. **Failure to address and support the professional education of teacher librarians could undermine much of the investment currently being made in school library infrastructure, IT programs and national curriculum development.** We commend Julia Gillard for launching this inquiry, which we believe can produce far-reaching positive results, enabling us as the leading provider of teacher librarianship courses in Australia to produce the best teacher librarians possible and in turn, an informed, well educated citizenry and a productive, sustainable knowledge economy. We look forward to working with the House Standing Committee on Education and Training in any way necessary and invite your further questions.

Signed:

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## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Nation Building Economics Plan: Building the Education Revolution (BER). Retrieved from <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/BuildingTheEducationRevolution/Pages/default.aspx> and National Coordinator's Implementation Report. Retrieved from <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/BuildingTheEducationRevolution/Documents/NCIReport.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> Experience the Digital Education Revolution (DER). Retrieved from <http://www.digitaleducationrevolution.gov.au>
- <sup>3</sup> "Paraprofessional staff, using their specialised technical training, manage the processes and operate the required library systems and methodologies to ensure full and complete access to educational resources. Staff without such recognised qualifications provide the clerical support needed to maintain the efficient functioning of library and information programs and services" ALIA/ASLA joint statement on library and information services in schools. Located at <http://alia.org.au/policies/services.in.schools.html>