Government of South Australia

Department of Education and
Children's Services

TO: THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

RE: THE INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND TEACHER LIBRARIANS IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

Summary and recommendations

This submission from the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) in South Australia recognises the importance of this inquiry because of the valued input of school libraries and teacher librarians on student learning outcomes.

DECS recognises that there are some issues relating to teacher librarians and the staffing of school libraries including:

- Replacing an ageing workforce with qualified teacher librarians.

- The provision of university courses which include teacher librarian qualifications as part of an under-graduate teaching degree and post-graduate studies.

Introduction

The Australian Library and Information Association and the Australian School Library Association state that:

> *As an integral partner in the school's teaching and learning team, the teacher librarian has a role in the planning, implementation and evaluation of education policies, curricula, learning outcomes and programs, with particular reference to the development of learners' research and information literacies.*

> *As a member of the school's management team, the teacher librarian has a role in ensuring the school community's access to an organised collection of teaching and learning resources and services. Such access to local, regional, national and international resources and services is designed to meet the educational, recreational and cultural needs of that community.*

> *Professional staff dually qualified in teacher education and librarianship, for both shaping and reflecting the school's objectives with respect to library and information programs and services.* [1]

Current research demonstrates that school libraries which are appropriately staffed and resourced have a positive impact on student achievement.[2]

Over the past decade there has been an apparent decline in the numbers of qualified teacher librarians employed in school libraries in Australia. The decline in numbers due to the natural attrition of an ageing workforce and lack of opportunity for new teacher

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[1] Statement on library and information services in schools Australian Library and Information Association and Australian School Library Association Statement, 2003.

[2] http://www.asla.org.au/research/

librarians to become qualified has seen some vacancies in the library filled with staff with no librarian training.

Qualified teacher librarians, who manage libraries and resources in a way that promotes positive student learning outcomes, make a crucial contribution in preparing students for living successful lives in the twenty-first century.

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

The Australian Government prioritised the construction of new school libraries in its **Building the Education Revolution** (BER) Guidelines. Hence a large number are being constructed or refurbished under the program. This has resulted in a total of 148 new or refurbished school libraries being built in South Australian Government schools at a cost of $266 billion.

The impact of the **Digital Education Revolution** (DER) providing one computer per student from Year 9 -12 has resulted in computing and funding infrastructure upgrades so that secondary schools are increasingly having wireless hubs. From this, the library has the potential to be a gateway to the world. Students need to be scaffolded by teacher librarians into accessing, selecting, evaluating, creating and sharing information in a global world: safely and constructively.

With four learning areas of the **Australian Curriculum** now in draft format, the ramifications for schools and particularly school libraries are becoming apparent. The three strands of the English learning area of Language, Literature and Literacy are very dependent on the resources in the library, involving the teacher librarian who has current knowledge particularly of literature appropriate to the diversity of all students. They can support students and teachers in supporting the cross-curriculum dimensions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dimensions, sustainable patterns of living, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia.

Literacy as a strand and a general capability covers all core learning areas of English, Mathematics, Science and History. More non-fiction resources for history will be required especially as it is a new learning area in primary schools.

Both critical literacy and information literacy requirements are evident throughout the English curriculum and teacher librarians have wide experience in these to support implementation. Their knowledge of resource based learning and learning using various technologies in a digitally connected online world will be crucial.

The **Research Project** is a compulsory Stage 2 subject of the new South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE). The research project provides a significant opportunity to allow individual students to pursue their own pathways, interests and capabilities. A number of individuals will be required to support, monitor and coach students through this requirement. The teacher librarian is able to provide support for students and other educators working with students.

The Research Project, in combination with the large number of SACE Stage 1 and Stage 2 subjects which include individual and collaborative investigation and research as part of their school-based and/or external assessment, has meant that schools and the community are facing an increasing level of student inquiry. Specifically, in schools, this

means a heightened awareness of the need for whole school, cross-curricula approaches to information literacy skills. The research process – locating, selecting, organising, presenting, evaluating and deciding, applies in all these cases.

Concepts, such as safe and ethical practices for communicating with persons outside school, constructing practical focus questions and meaningful and useful survey and interview questions, decoding and deconstructing agendas and being critical in evaluating sources and results gleaned, need to be taught explicitly across all subjects at all year levels.

Such an approach to information literacy needs to be coordinated across the school, in combination with the use and management of information resources. The role of the teacher librarian in managing this coordinated approach to information literacy carries significant responsibility.

The ubiquitous nature of technology has impacted on learning significantly and must be considered central to the role of school library managers. The notion of information management and the development of an understanding of ethics, reliability and context is of increasing importance.

Without excellent school library facilities and a teacher librarian, the benefit of the huge capital investment in school libraries, library facilities and resources and associated technology, and recent policies and investments may not be fully maximised.

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

The importance of a fully literate society is being increasingly realised and school libraries and teacher librarians can play an important role in improving literacy. Teacher librarians have an excellent knowledge of literature and are responsible for the selection of resources to suit the needs of the school clientele as well as promoting resources to teachers and students to encourage literacy. Information literacy is also a major part of this role.

The Premier's Reading Challenge is a literacy program which most schools in South Australia participate. In a large majority of schools the program is organised through the school library. A teacher librarian, along with the child's teacher, who can promote the right book to each child, can have an impact on the interest of students in reading and achieving in this and other literacy programs.

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians.

As with teachers in general, the teacher librarian profession has an ageing workforce, where many of the most experienced people are retiring or plan to be retiring within the next five years.

For many years, the number of newly qualified teacher librarians has been diminishing due to a variety of reasons, including:

- Difficulty in gaining the dual qualifications of both a teacher and a librarian in an undergraduate teaching degree.

- The cost and time involved in a teacher doing post-graduate studies to qualify as a teacher librarian.

- The increasingly limited options provided by universities to do post-graduate teacher librarian studies.

- The perceived lack of employment opportunities as teacher librarian vacancies are filled by other staff so that very few positions are advertised.

In South Australia, a new course began in 2009 at the University of South Australia based in the Business and Information Management faculty providing Library and Information Management post-graduate courses. The teacher librarian options are working towards achieving Australian Library and Information Association accreditation.

In South Australia all professional development for teacher librarians is provided by the professional association School Library Association of South Australia, which is a member of the peak national body, the Australian School Library Association. It relies on members to voluntarily give their time to organise conferences and professional learning opportunities including awareness of current literature, professional development for teaching in an online world and introducing web 2 resources such as blogs, wikis and moodles and an awareness of latest information literacy teaching models such as Guided Learning. The next conference day in April is for new library staff as the School Library Association of South Australia recognises that staff placed in libraries may not be qualified teacher librarians.

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

In South Australia, especially in regional areas, there are many school-community libraries working as a partnership between school and local government making these very successful ventures. Ensuring there is adequate teacher librarian and public librarian staffing is essential and sometimes a challenge.

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

School libraries will continue to grow into the role of a digital hub of the school and local community, providing the school community with digital access, resources and advice. The skill sets of teacher librarians will need to continue to evolve as the potential for emerging technologies to impact on teaching and learning is realised.

Teacher librarians are going to have to play an increasing role in the area of information literacy. The repertoire of literacies our children and young people need to fully participate in society is continually expanding. New media literacies build upon and reinforce the more traditional literacies, for example a blog can provide a meaningful context for a student to develop their print text skills. More recently, what is very different, however, is the participatory nature of the new media culture. The significance has been described as:[3]

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[3] Jenkins, et al 2008:4

Participatory culture shifts the focus of literacy from one of individual expression to community involvement. The new literacies almost all involve social skills developed through collaboration and networking. These skills build on the foundation of traditional literacy, research skills, technical skills, and critical analysis skills taught in the classroom.

In a recent newspaper article in *The Advertiser,* South Australian Secondary Principals Association president, Jim Davies, acknowledged that teacher librarians were crucial in schools to assist students with the increase in electronic resources.

Recommendation

The Department of Education and Children's Services supports the provision of appropriate accreditation and professional learning pathways for library staff in all states working towards qualified teacher librarians. This will contribute towards maximising the Australian Government's investment in school library buildings through the Building the Education Revolution and the Digital Education Revolution and support teaching and learning in schools.