

Teacher librarians ramp up campaign

By **Natasha Egan**

The government is preparing to respond to the school libraries and teacher librarians' inquiry report more than four months after it was presented in parliament.

The Minister for Education, Peter Garrett, confirmed to *Education Review* the government's response to the 11 key recommendations "will be tabled shortly".

And while advocates acknowledge there has been action around some of the issues raised by the inquiry, they are not backing down from their campaign for fear it will be put on the back burner.

Australian School Library Association (ASLA) executive officer, Karen Bonanno, said they would maintain the pressure to get a response from government otherwise it could be two decades before another opportunity emerged.

"We're going to be continually lobbying the government advocating for teacher librarians in schools until we get some action from the inquiry," she told *ER*.

Bonanno said not addressing the recommendations would be short sighted and affect the literacy levels of future generations and economic productivity.

Chair of the Standing Committee on Education and Employment and leader of the inquiry, Amanda Rishworth, told *ER* the educational benefits of a properly resourced and staffed school library were manifold.

"Yet the value of the work of teacher librarians has without doubt been eroded over the years, at a time when the skills they provide in terms of information seeking and processing are in increasing demand as a result of advances in technology," she said.

Evidence of the declining numbers of

teacher librarians in schools was tabled in the inquiry report and it said many of the libraries built under the Building the Education Revolution (BER) are not properly staffed.

The report quoted a 2008 study that found 54 per cent of government schools had library material budgets of less than \$5000. Many school libraries had budgets below their 1975 levels.

Rishworth said the inquiry started a national conversation within the profession, the wider community and different levels of government about the role and importance of teacher librarians.

However, she too was unable to provide a date for a formal response. "The Federal Government is considering the Committee's recommendations and I look forward to its response," she said.

That was a response the Shadow Minister for Education, Christopher Pyne said was overdue. It is disappointing that despite this report being released almost six months ago that the Government has not yet responded, he told *ER*.

This delay was also noted by co-founder of advocacy group The Hub, Georgia Phillips, who recently called for the next round of debate to start.

"It's been four months, we were hoping to get something after three months and there's only a limited amount of time really while the report is fresh," Phillips told *ER*.

Rishworth opened ASLA's national conference in Sydney on October 2 and Bonanno said her speech made it obvious that the committee, parliament and current government recognised the importance of teacher librarians, particularly in the digital environment.

Bonanno said there had been some recent wins including support of literacy programs delivered through

libraries that received \$1.3 million in commonwealth funding for next year's National Year of Reading.

Further, she cited e-learning and leadership programs developed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) called Leading Curriculum Change, which teacher librarians could take advantage of.

Partnerships was the third issue already being addressed. Bonanno said AITSL had developed projects requesting professional associations, including the ASLA, to develop documents which give examples of practice.

Despite this action, Bonanno said they are disappointed there hadn't been robust debate around the big issues.

The biggest area of disappointment was the lack of leadership around the workforce gap analysis, training of personnel and the staffing formulas for schools recommendations, she said.

While they are very conscious the federal government could not tell the state governments what to do, Bonanno said they wanted them to facilitate discussion.

"What we would be looking for the

government to do is to take a strong leadership position and look at the negotiation that would need to take place for being able to have those state governments developing those particular formulas.

"And get the ministers of education together to be able to discuss these terms, to come to some national conclusion of how that would happen."

On the recommendation of a thorough workforce gap analysis of teacher librarians across Australian schools, Pyne said it was "a proposal that may well have merit and is consistent with the Commonwealth's role to research workforce issues more seriously."

Pyne also noted that as per the report, responsibility for teacher librarian salaries and staffing in government schools lay with the states but he said "the Coalition does share the view that all staff need to be appropriately rewarded and supported in order to deliver the best possible educational outcomes."

The other areas Bonanno said needed addressing were the implementation of the national curriculum and national standards for teachers.

On the recommendation of the national curriculum including a component of training for teacher librarians, Pyne said "Labor has not committed any funding for teacher professional development or training for the national curriculum to date." ■

Associations gear up for resources

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outlined by Schools Minister Peter Garrett in his media release, raised some concern.

"I'm a little nervous about the kinds of examples provided in the media release because our assessment is that in maths people need content and math specific pedagogical support as the two major drivers with the Australian curriculum. Logically what we're talking about could fit in with the online professional learning resources, but the other examples don't seem to be pointing in that direction," he said.

Morony did, however, praise the \$9.8 million that, according to Garrett's statement, would "link each part of the curriculum to relevant resources". He said he believed this referred to ESA's Australian Curriculum Connect initiative, which would enable a teacher to click on an area of curriculum content to link to related teaching materials.

However, he said early trials had identified issues with how the materials had been arranged and tagged, and substantial modification of the tagging was required to more closely align with the content of the curriculum.

More broadly, Morony said he hoped there would be a mechanism for national professional associations like the AAMT to put forward solid proposals for "more logical funnelling of the funding than if it went through departments".

He said when professional development support was delivered through associations the government gets "a lot more bang for its buck" than if it goes through the jurisdictions.

Bayly-Jones echoed this. "This is a far more efficient use of money than the states and territories all doing their own thing," he said.

The Australian Secondary Principals Association (ASPA) agreed and said providing the funding to ESA was logical, given it was so heavily involved in working with AITSL and ACARA in developing the educational architecture. "We've invested all this money in technology and infrastructure so it makes sense that teachers can maximise these resources in delivering the curriculum," said ASPA president Sheree Vertigan.

A spokesperson for ESA told *ER* that an expression of interest phase would soon be launched. The spokesperson said that "a key part of the program was supporting partnerships with professional development associations who can work with ESA to procure resources to support the Australian Curriculum".

The government's funding announcement follows strong criticisms from teacher associations, such as the AAMT and AATE, when they raised concerns over the lack of development of national resources, in an article in the June issue of *Education Review*.

Their concerns were followed weeks later by a call from primary principals for a "cohesive implementation plan" ahead of the national curriculum roll out (*ER*, July 7). ■

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