



MEDIA RELEASE

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New school library buildings are springing up all over Australia – but how will they be staffed?

School libraries and teacher librarians are under review by the Federal House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training. Worldwide, research shows that school libraries and teacher librarians play a significant role in educational achievement both by individual students and by the schools overall. But that can only happen if the school libraries are adequately resourced and staffed.

“This inquiry has come at a time when there are new school libraries opening, funded through the federal Government’s Building the Education Revolution (BER) program, but we have no indications how they will be staffed and resourced to suit the learning needs of the school community,” Australian School Library Association (ASLA) Executive Officer Karen Bonanno said today.

ASLA approached Minister for Education Julia Gillard just last November to undertake a review of school libraries, but her office responded at the time that this was the job of the “government and non-government education authorities in each state or territory”.

“Despite that initial response, now we have a federal level inquiry,” Ms Bonanno said.

“It is an ideal time to really make a difference on a national level, but there’s a lot of work to be done and we hope there will be support for coordination from the Federal Government,” she said.

“There is also a need for more in-depth research and nationally focused solutions that will provide for ongoing development and implementation of standards for resourcing and staffing.”

And it’s not only Australia’s teacher librarians who want to know the outcome of this inquiry.

“News of the inquiry and Australia’s best practice teacher librarian model are being discussed by policy makers and professional groups overseas, as recent articles in the London Times show,” Ms Bonanno said.

“The infrastructure investment in school libraries through BER has been enormous and now we have the chance to work with the Government and our professional colleagues to put the rest of the pieces in place to ensure a significant return on that investment for our community.”

The Australian School Library Association and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) are working together to prepare submissions to the inquiry, and ALIA Executive Director Sue Hutley says there will likely be submissions from many of the professional groups involved in the education, and library and information sectors.

“It is critical that all those involved in the education of our young people, especially in literacy and numeracy, use this opportunity to talk directly to Government,” Ms Hutley said.

“The best outcomes will be achieved by the library and information sector doing what it does best – working together, sharing information, and ensuring that information and services are of the very highest quality,” she said. “It is imperative that public libraries, school libraries and academic libraries collaborate in maintaining the highest possible quality of services for our clients”.

The *Snapshot of Australian School Libraries* and *Snapshot of Australian Teacher Librarians* studies published by Edith Cowan University in 2009 show that Australian teacher librarians are under pressure and Australian school library funding is being eroded.

“While that report is only a snapshot of the situation, it’s telling us the quality of education in Australia is under very real threat and the threat is real now, not something to be worried about in the future,” Ms Hutley said.

“Which means it is time for all levels of Government to step up to ensure equitable and quality educational outcomes for young Australians.”

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For further information

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The Australian School Libraries Research Project, Edith Cowan University
<http://www.chs.ecu.edu.au/portals/ASLRP/publications.php>

House Standing Committee on Education and Training. Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians
<http://www.apf.gov.au/house/committee/edt/schoollibraries/index.htm>

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The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the professional association for the Australian library and information services sector. It seeks to empower the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support. ALIA represents the interest of 6,000 members, the profession and Australia's 12 million library users.

<http://www.alia.org.au>

<http://www.alia.org.au/schoollibraries>

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The Australian School Library Association Inc (ASLA) is the national authority and peak forum in the field of teacher librarianship and school library resource services. Its aim is to maximize opportunities for students to obtain independent lifelong learning and decision making skills.

<http://www.asla.org.au>