

ASLA ANALYSIS

*School libraries and teacher librarians
in 21st century Australia*

House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Education and Employment
March 2011 report as presented in
Parliament on 23 May 2011.

Introduction

The report presents a balanced, transparent and realistic impression of the state of play for school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools from the multiple viewpoints of stakeholders.

The terms of reference are addressed with specific focus on:

- the impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities;
- the future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy;
- the factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians;
- the role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians; and
- the impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.

The Committee acknowledged that the inquiry offered “a unique opportunity to bring stakeholders from government, peak bodies, and schools together to deliberate on what school libraries and teacher librarians contribute to education in Australia, as well as examine what more might be done to increase their value. Most importantly, the inquiry provides an opportunity to raise the profile and status of the contribution that teacher librarians can make to educational outcomes” (Overview, p. 4, 1.17).

Throughout the hearings the Committee did repeatedly make reference to the parameters of responsibility of the Commonwealth Government, i.e. that it is not responsible for the day-to-day-management of schools. This is also evident in the report – “In the government sector, issues of hiring, numbers, conditions and duties of staff within schools are the responsibility of state education authorities, or principals within self-managing schools. In the non-government sector those decisions tend to be very much the responsibility of the schools themselves (Overview, p. 5, 1.22). Even so, relationships exist between governments that will facilitate discussion of these issues that immediately affect school libraries and teacher librarians in each state / territory.

The inquiry and report provides the profession with an opportunity to apply a different lens to determine the future of school libraries and teacher librarianship in Australia.

Impact of recent Commonwealth Government policies and investments on school libraries

A comprehensive coverage of policies and investments are covered in the report.

Main concerns identified:

- staffing and resourcing commensurate with physical infrastructure
- technical support, e.g. computer/laptop roll-out under DER added to the role
- equitable access to quality online databases
- cybersafety
- devolution of management to school principals and implications for resourcing school libraries
- consultation on national curriculum and teaching standards
- leadership opportunities at the national level

Of these concerns, staffing and resourcing and devolution of management are the main areas that are not fully addressed in the recommendations identified by ASLA and ALIA in their submissions, i.e. Australia-wide staffing formula and new funding model for resource collection. **This will require targeted activity at the state and territory government and non-government level by the associations.**

The Committee did address the need for equitable access to quality online resources through recommendation 1.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government partner with all education authorities to fund the provision of a core set of online database resources, which are made available to all Australian schools.

As indicated in the report, the identification of a core suite of databases suitable for primary and secondary schools would need to involve relevant stakeholders, “including the Commonwealth Government, state and territory education authorities, the National Library and library associations, taking into account the new curriculum” (Chapter 2, p. 28, 2.82). It will be crucial to have practitioner input into the identification of suitable online resources. **A question to be addressed is, ‘Who will manage the subscription, support the information service delivery and address the information/digital literacy needs of the students?’** Access to online resources alone will not change the learning achievement levels of students. This links back to the staffing issues and the need for state/territory school library units to support schools. The recommendation identified by ASLA and ALIA in their submissions for a unit within DEEWR (and subsequently similar structures at state/territory level) has not been adequately addressed. (See Recommendation 10 for potential scope.)

In ASLA’s submission the recommendations for the development of “an Australian-wide 21st century student learning skills policy as a framework for national curriculum planning, implementation and delivery” and “a digital literacy learning

continuum as a support document for the Australian National Curriculum” has been accommodated in -

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government work with the states and territories to develop a discrete national policy statement that defines the importance of digital and information literacy for learning in the 21st century, which can be used as a guide by teachers and principals.

As ASLA has **already commenced a conversation with ACARA, this momentum needs to be maintained and actively pursued. In particular, the role of the school library and the teacher librarian in the delivery and support of such a policy needs to be paramount. In addition, the profession needs to be proactive in the provision of feedback to ACARA during the consultation process (mid June to end of July 2011) for the draft materials for the inclusion of general capabilities in the Australian curriculum.** The general capabilities include literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT) competence, critical and creative thinking, personal and social competence, ethical behaviour and intercultural understanding.

http://www.acara.edu.au/acara_update_24052011.html

In addition, having begun the development of a draft statement, as presented to ACARA on 29 March 2011 during the meeting, **should ASLA and ALIA progress with the development of a joint policy statement on 21st century learning?**

In the concluding comments, it states, “The Committee believes that leadership statements that help define and provide guidance for attaining the high standards of digital and information literacy and other 21st century learning skills required in our globalised economy are crucial. The consultative role of teacher librarians in this process is fundamental” (Chapter 6, 6.19, p. 119).

Potential of school libraries and teacher librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes

National and international research projects, evidence-based practice and reference to supporting literacy learning (NAPLAN) are covered in this section. The Committee appreciated the extensiveness of this material but considered that “documenting and highlighting examples of teacher librarians’ successes in improving educational and community outcomes is critical to illustrating the enormous potential of school libraries to help students achieve better results” (Chapter 3, p. 43, 3.23).

Under the banner of NAPLAN, the Committee considered that the inclusion of data on teacher librarians, with a link to NAPLAN results, would “more rigorously assess the contributions of teacher librarians and tease out the correlation between their efforts and student achievement. It would also help elevate the profile of teacher librarians in schools” (Chapter 3, p. 48, 3.46).

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority include statistical information about the breakdown of all specialist teachers, including teacher librarians, on the My School website.

This recommendation is monumental and would require the collaboration of teacher registration institutions/colleges to *share* their data so that a national database could be established. That being said, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AISTL) has commenced discussions around this topic. It is essential that 'self-identification' as a teacher librarian is minimised and the data is exclusively linked to the qualifications of the individuals' registration information.

Other distinctions include whether the individual is employed as a teacher librarian, working in the school library, or employed as a classroom teacher with teacher librarianship or librarianship qualifications. This distinction is required to contextualise DEEWR survey results (2006-2007) that indicate "approximately 6 300 fully qualified primary specialist teacher librarians and an additional 12 000-plus primary teachers who have undertaken some specialist library training" (Chapter 4, p. 85, 4.132). The DEEWR 2010 survey results are yet to be published at the time of this analysis.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government support additional initiatives to promote reading, such as a National Year of Reading. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations should collaborate with the Australian School Library Association, Australian Libraries and Information Association and other education stakeholders in developing these initiatives.

Both ASLA and ALIA supported recommendations for Commonwealth Government support for the National Year of Reading 2012 (<http://www.love2read.org.au/index.cfm>). Under this recommendation NYR is one example of literacy initiatives that can be developed. Currently, ALIA, as a founder for the National Year of Reading initiative and ASLA, as a partner in this project, are working on specific tasks to plan for and promote the initiative that will be launched on 14 February 2012. The recommendation does **provide the opportunity to open discussions with DEEWR to engage their support for the successful delivery of the event and to highlight the contributions of teacher librarians to literacy development. It will be essential to identify other literacy related events to maintain the momentum and connections with school libraries post NYR.**

In the context of recommendation 2 above (national policy statement) and the literacy agenda of the Commonwealth Government, the Committee acknowledged the evidence from Australian and international studies that linked the contributions of teacher librarians to student achievement. ASLA and ALIA recommended funding be provided for Australian-based research with ASLA specifically

requesting a “longitudinal study into how a strong school library program that is adequately staffed, resourced and funded can lead to higher student academic achievement and literacy levels” (ASLA submission).

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government initiate an Australian-based longitudinal study into the links between library programs, literacy (including digital literacy) and student achievement, including their impact on improving outcomes for socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

This recommendation may need to be linked to recommendation 3 (capturing statistical information) to be effective. Currently ACARA has access to three years of literacy results. Dr Evan Arthur referred to a “major international project, of which Australia is a foundation country member, called the 21st Century Skills Initiative, which is in origin something sponsored by Intel, Microsoft and Cisco. It works in cooperation with the OECD and is designed to provide a testing regime similar to the PISA testing regime” (Committee Hansard, 11 February 2011, p. 26) which will test the 21 century learning skills of students. The potential for replication of longitudinal studies, such as those undertaken by Keith Curry Lance, is possible. The time frame for the delivery of this recommendation is certainly an unknown, especially considering the scope of the recommendation. **It would be important for ASLA and ALIA to have some input in scoping the study through engaging members who come with an academic/research background in this field of work.**

At the 11 February 2011 private hearing, ASLA and ALIA presented documentation and comment on the iCentre concept as espoused by Hay (*Access*, volume 24, issue 4 2010, pp.5-10). “The i-centre concept is in its infancy or at least the evidence on it came to the Committee fairly late in the inquiry process. Despite early results indicating their success and increasing popularity, currently only a minority of Australia schools are trialling their usage. As with other resourcing issues it will ultimately be up to schools to choose the sorts of computers they have in their schools” (Chapter 3, 3.71, p. 54). **This statement from the Committee gives an indication for the need to make clearer the iCentre concept to avoid mis-perceptions.** As Hay states, “The three principles of form, function and brand provide a useful framework for schools wishing to explore the convergence of facilities, resources, people, funding, policy, programs and services to develop an iCentre. TLs as information, technology and learning specialists can play a leadership role in building their school’s vision towards an iCentre approach” (*Access*, volume 24, issue 4 2010, pp.9). Together with iPad trial usage, the Committee did consider the iCentre concept as “very interesting and one worthy of further development. The Committee would like to see these trialled in schools across the country as well” (Chapter 3, 3.74, p. 54). (See Recommendation 6 & 9 for possible options.)

Consistently throughout the hearings and referred to in the report is the issue of *perceptions* and *promotion* of school libraries and teacher librarians. “The Committee shares ASLA and ALIA’s view that they need to capture and disseminate good

stories about teacher librarians' work. The Commonwealth Government can potentially play a supportive role in this regard. It is especially important to highlight where teacher librarians are in leadership roles in schools and to illustrate their potential for ushering in e-learning in schools" (Chapter 3, 3.98, p. 56).

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government support promotional activities undertaken by ASLA and ALIA that demonstrate to the school community the valuable work that teacher librarians are doing in respect of e-learning in their schools, including those that highlight their leadership capacity.

The potential of this recommendation is to not only limit the promotional activities to "capture and disseminate good stories" but to leverage the opportunity to develop the iCentre concept through a futures focus to address the "three principles of form, function and brand". In the first instance, the stories need to go beyond what teacher librarians do. The stories need to focus specifically on the demonstrated outcomes; the difference that happens because students and teachers have access to a qualified teacher librarian. **In 2009, Teaching Australia, in collaboration with Educational Transformations, conducted *The Futures Focused School National Workshop Series*. This model could provide a framework for the scoping of the promotional activities by ASLA and ALIA.** This recommendation has close links with Recommendation 9.

Recruitment and development of teacher librarians

In chapter 3, in response to the mandate for a teacher librarian in every Australian school, the Committee stated, "The Committee cannot recommend a quota system in each state in the system we currently have in Australia where state education authorities are responsible for staffing matters and principals are responsible for managing their school budgets to best suit their schools' needs" (Chapter 3, 3.96, p. 58).

Principals identified the following reasons for not having a qualified teacher librarian in their school:

- the unavailability of qualified teacher librarians;
- insufficient staffing points to cover a librarian within current staffing arrangements/entitlements/points too tight to maintain a teacher librarian;
- insufficient funding/unable to finance;
- school population being too small to sustain a teacher librarian;

- a teacher librarian not considered a priority due to conflicting pressure from other areas like Learning Assistance;
- and lack of provision in the current staffing points for the amount of administration time required for a teacher librarian to adequately undertake this role (Chapter 4, 4.17, p. 63)

The Committee's response to these issues is the most disappointing. The requested recommendations from a number of submissions for staffing formulas, new funding models for recruitment, marketing campaigns and sponsoring retraining programs has not been specifically addressed. The response of the Committee is, "It is worth restating that the responsibility for determining staffing allocations for schools, including school libraries, rests with various education authorities across jurisdictions and not the Commonwealth Government" (Chapter 4, 4.86, p. 76). **This will require targeted activity at the state and territory government and non-government level by the associations. The ASLA and ALIA "what a difference a school library makes" advocacy campaign (<http://schoollibraries2011.wikispaces.com/>) is a starting point for this targeted activity. Further scoping of this campaign needs to be addressed.**

In this section the Committee identified three overarching themes:

- a fundamental lack of quantitative and qualitative data to use as a basis for decision making (something already alluded to in chapter three);
- a need to define the role of teacher librarians into the 21st century; and
- a need to reposition the status of teacher librarians in school libraries and the broader community Australia-wide (to some extent this has also been discussed in chapter three) (Chapter 4, 4.6, p. 60).

A high priority for ASLA and ALIA is to clearly establish a nationally agreed to role statement of the teacher librarian in the 21st century. It is highly unlikely that this will be an item addressed by the Commonwealth Government. It is essential, given the work of AITSL and the **need for ASLA and ALIA to cross-map the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* (<http://www.teacherstandards.aitsl.edu.au/>) with the *Standards of Professional Excellence for Teacher Librarians* (<http://www.asla.org.au/policy/standards.htm>) and, in due course, to present a proposal to AITSL for endorsement of these standards for a specialist area.**

Requests for inclusion of teacher librarians in ongoing professional development, especially learning events linked to the rollout of Commonwealth Government initiatives, was acknowledged.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the rollout of the new national curriculum, which is to be made available online, include a component of training for teacher librarians.

This recommendation provides an opportunity for discussions with DEEWR for the profession to have input into the development of a component of training. It would be visionary to have content in this component to be inclusive of material from the *Learning in a Changing World series* and, therefore, relevant to other educators. The link with Recommendation 2 needs to be highlighted here together with the related actions to capitalise on the engagement of the profession in the general capabilities consultation process.

“One of the dominant themes that emerged is a lack of hard data, especially collated at the national level relating to staffing issues, specifically determining the actual numbers of teacher librarians in Australian schools, their qualifications, and part-time/full-time status” (Chapter 4, 4.125, p. 84).

The Committee indicated it is difficult to address the staffing issues without adequate evidence of the teacher librarian workforce across Australia. DEEWR stated that a random survey in 2006/2007 indicated there was no shortage in the teacher librarian sector at that time. Another random selection survey of schools in 2010 was conducted and data will not be available until mid 2011. ASLA expressed concern that self-identification of personnel working in school libraries could skew the data and requested DEEWR to include a capture of the qualifications and whether the individual was working part-time or full-time.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government commission a thorough workforce gap analysis of teacher librarians across Australian schools.

This recommendation can also be connected to Recommendation 3.

In addition, “the Committee believes that there is scope for DEEWR, together with other stakeholders, including state and territory education authorities and the library associations, to conduct a range of forums across the country with interested parties, and relevant stakeholders about what a contemporary school library and teacher librarian does and should do in a 21st century learning environment” (Chapter 4, 4.153, p. 89).

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, through the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, establish a national dialogue, including with tertiary providers, on the role of teacher librarians today in schools and into the future. The dialogue should include an examination of the adequacy of the pathways into the profession and ongoing training requirements.

There are a number of elements within this recommendation that can be linked to Recommendation 6. Also the following elements need to be considered -

- developing a national role statement,
- articulating clearly the iCentre concept,
- recruiting and training,
- identifying and marketing career pathways and continuing professional learning opportunities, and
- linking to the national teaching standards.

Partnering and supporting school libraries and teacher librarians

The Committee acknowledged the value of the partnerships ASLA has with various national education agencies, e.g. Education Services Australia (EdNA, SCIS), AITSL and ACARA, but indicated there is further scope for innovative partnerships.

ASLA and ALIA recommended the establishment of a unit in DEEWR to focus on school libraries and teacher librarian, to coordinate policy and benchmarks for 21st century learning skills. At present there is no designated area within DEEWR that deals specifically with issue for school libraries and teacher librarians. The current organisational structure deals with broader issues, e.g. teacher quality, curriculum and ICT. Both associations also indicated there should be a flow-on effect whereby school library support units be established at state government and non-government level. This was supported by other submissions.

“ASLA emphasised that it was highly desirable for support personnel within education authorities to work with teacher librarians to develop the library and information services, and teaching and learning programs of the school library to achieve higher educational outcomes for students:

In most cases, the teacher librarian is the only qualified personnel working in the school library. Having access to these support services means the school library is kept up to date as the teacher librarian is informed of changes in teaching and learning principles, learning space design, pedagogical practice, effective school library management, and new and emerging technologies. Those located in regional or remotes school settings in particular are able to participate and benefit by being part of a collaborative community” (Chapter 5, 5.46, pp. 102-103).

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government, through the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood and Youth Affairs, discuss ways to enhance partnerships with state and territory and local levels of government to support school libraries and teacher librarians.

The case study, *Productive Partnerships – Learning for Life*, involving Mackay West State School and Mackay Regional Council Libraries has been included in the report as an example (Chapter 5, pp. 107 – 109). This project has been recognised nationally and internationally as a program for replication.

“The Committee thinks that the Commonwealth Government in partnership with ASLA should produce a document that highlights the successes and lessons learnt from partnerships between school libraries and other libraries, and joint use libraries that are in existence. Such a document could prove useful to government and non-government education authorities alike as they consider ways to enhance their library services” (Chapter 5, 5.95, p. 116).

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government partner with ASLA and ALIA to produce a document that showcases some of the successful partnerships and programs between school libraries and other libraries, and joint-use libraries. The document should be made available to government and non-government education authorities and school principals.

Recommendations 10 & 11 provide the opportunity to discuss:

- replication of successful collaborative projects,
- documentation of *best practice* models for joint-use libraries,
- development of school library standards to address primary, secondary, joint-use,
- evidence-based practice research projects, and
- development of a proposal for a new framework to accommodate the notion of regional library advisers.

Summary

“A vicious cycle has resulted from under-resourcing school libraries and having insufficient numbers of appropriately qualified staff in them, leading to a poorer quality service, which reduces the demand for teacher librarians as well as the attractiveness of the profession to prospective students” (Chapter 6, 6.9, p. 118).

The Commonwealth Government has the potential to “break” this cycle and to put the “brakes on” to avoid the exponential decline of school libraries and teacher librarians in schools as being experienced in other countries such as the USA.

“It is also clear, at least anecdotally, that teacher librarians can play a vital role in educating future global citizens, who need to be not only technically savvy but also responsible cyber citizens, able to discern the value and merit of the overwhelming amount of information that they encounter online” (Chapter 6, 6.11, p. 118). “While the teacher librarians’ role appears to be rapidly changing in an ever evolving digital, online and e-learning environment, it is not always clear exactly what role they should and could play in schools to those outside, and even within, the

profession” (Chapter 6, 6.11, p. 119). **It is imperative that a national role statement is developed to address this concluding comment by the Committee.**

The Inquiry has started a conversation at the national level and it is extremely important that ASLA and ALIA continue the conversations with various stakeholders. The rhetoric needs to resonate with the audience in a positive, professional, productive and progressive way.