

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools

On 11 March 2010 the Federal Minister for Education, the Hon. Julia Gillard, MP called on the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training to conduct an inquiry into and a report on the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia's public and private schools. The Committee is to focus on the following Terms of Reference:

- 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 libraries;
- the role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school libraries;
- the impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.

The Committee invited interested organisations and individuals to make written submissions to the inquiry, addressing the terms of reference. These submissions were due by 16 April 2010.

Public hearings

Subsequent to the submission date, three public hearings were scheduled with more to follow. The first hearing was held in Sydney on 28 April, the second in Melbourne on 29 April, and the third hearing in Hobart on 30 April. Future hearings have been scheduled in Perth, Darwin, Brisbane, and Adelaide.

ALIA and ASLA lodged a substantial submission. ALIA staff worked in partnership with ASLA staff, ALIA Schools Group, and the ALIA/ASLA Policy and Advisory Group to prepare the submission which addressed all of the Terms of Reference.

ALIA Executive Director, Sue Hutley was invited to appear at the Melbourne hearing. Sue Hutley invited Anne Girolami and Sandra Ryan, members of the ALIA Schools Group, to appear as witnesses. Sue Hutley made the opening statement to the Committee. Members of the Committee indicated that they were appreciative of ALIA and ASLA's very extensive submission which provided important and useful information for the inquiry. The ALIA representatives answered questions from the Committee for about an hour, including:

- How do teacher librarians improve principals' and teachers' understanding and perceptions of their role?
- How can the teacher librarian profession advocate for and provide for recruitment of more members?
- What model is used to deploy staff to the school library?
- What role should the library have with regards to cyber safety issues?

In addition, the Committee has asked for further information on the following issues:

- ALIA is to ascertain statistics about the number of people who are turned away from tertiary teacher librarianship courses each year.
- ALIA is to identify the models for deploying staff in Government, Independent, and Catholic schools

ALIA recommendations

Towards the end of her opening statement, Sue Hutley highlighted the main recommendations in the ALIA submission:

- the establishment of a school library unit within the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. The unit would initially serve to coordinate

and implement the recommendations of the inquiry in collaboration with ALIA and ASLA;

- the development of a new funding model to ensure that there is a teacher librarian in every school;
- support for a marketing campaign to recruit currently qualified teaching and librarianship graduates into teacher librarianship;
- Federal Government funding for digital resources to comprehensively fund the National Library of Australia's Electronic Resources Australia Project to ensure digital access for all Australians;
- support for ALIA's coordination of the National Year of Reading campaign in 2012.

To read the transcript of the hearing, visit <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/edt/schoollibraries/hearings.htm>.

The Committee has requested that ALIA attend a second hearing to discuss other issues, particularly the Australian Curriculum. This will occur towards the end of the inquiry.

Reflection on the inquiry

In reflecting on the experience at the inquiry, we have identified the following challenges as requiring immediate attention:

- There needs to be national data about school libraries and their staffing to provide a firm basis for future planning.
- Teacher librarians at the local level are the best advocates for their profession. It is vital for them to work with their school communities to develop a clear understanding about the difference that a well managed, well resourced library can make to student learning outcomes.
- Demonstrating leadership is also essential for teacher librarians. They need to position themselves strategically within their school committee structures. In this way teacher librarians can show effective leadership and enhance their credibility.
- Teacher librarians need to build their skills as practitioners of evidence based practice because it is essential that they provide evidence that their programs make a difference to student learning.
- Build on the research base about the connection between school libraries and student learning will strengthen the advocacy voice of teacher librarians.
- The Promotion of teacher librarianship as a career encourages more people into the profession through study leave and scholarships
- Seeking funding for additional university places for teacher librarians will allow greater numbers of teacher librarians to be trained.
- Partnerships need to be strengthened between ALIA, ASLA, and other stakeholders such as principals.

This is an exciting time for school libraries and all who work in the information industry. All participants look forward to the outcomes of this inquiry.

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