Australian School Libraries and Teacher Librarians Inquiry – 16 April 2010

Metropolitan Association
www.plmnsw.org.au

Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools

Submission prepared by the
Public Libraries NSW Metropolitan Association
Sydney NSW

16 April 2010

1. Introduction

The Public Libraries NSW Metropolitan Association (PLM) is very pleased to make this submission to the *Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools*.

PLM is the peak body that represents and supports the interests of public libraries in the greater Sydney region. Its membership of 43 Local Government Councils and their libraries encompasses a population of 4.7 million people: two thirds of the NSW population (7 million) and 21% of Australia's population (22 million).

This submission presents comments on the Inquiry's five focus areas in its Terms of Reference:

1. Impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities.

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

3. Factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians.

4. Role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians, and

5. Impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians.

An important focus area for PLM members is No 4: *the role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians*.

2. Background Information

Public Libraries were recently described[1] as *"the jewel in the crown of civic life"*. Australia's public libraries impact on at least seven of the Australian Government's Ministerial portfolios[2] and are integral to the Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) agenda including the Australian Government's *Education Revolution*.

The Australian Public Library Sector

The Australian Public Library Sector provides a wide range of information, recreation and cultural services to the Australian community. These services encourage and support lifelong learning. Key characteristics[3] of the national sector include:

- The principal funder is Local Government. Around 84% of the total annual funding of AUD800 million to the Australian Public Library sector comes from Local Government. The remaining 16% is provided by State and Territory Governments.

- Access to Australia's public library services is provided through a network of over 1,500 service delivery points across the nation.

- Over 109 million visits to public libraries were made in 2008 (over 5 visits *per capita*).

- Over two thirds of public libraries are open for more than 30 hours each week with nearly one third of all public libraries open for more than 45 hours per week. In 2006[4], 1.5 million children visited an Australian public library outside of school hours.

- Public libraries support the growing demand for access to information technology and associated resources. In 2008, a total of 7,821 terminals with Internet access and a further 1,566 public access computer terminals for Word Processing were available to Australia's public library users.

The New South Wales Public Library Sector

Characteristics[5] of the NSW Public Library Sector include:

- A 17.5% increase in visits to NSW public libraries occurred over the past five years.

- The annual investment into NSW public libraries is AUD300 million. Around 93% of this investment comes from Local Government in NSW with the remainder from the NSW State Government.

- There are over 3 million public library users (approaching 50% of the NSW population) that annually borrow 50 million items and make 36 million visits to NSW public libraries.

- There are nearly 400 service points from which public library services are delivered.

- Contributing to five key areas of the NSW State Plan and supporting and enabling NSW State Government initiatives including the NSW Premier's Reading Challenge, and the wider communities' ability to access Australian and NSW State Government Agency websites and information.

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[1] Radio National Program 23 March 2010
[2] FOLA 2008. *Investing in Australia's Future through its Public Library System*. www.fola.org.au
[3] Australian Public Libraries Statistical Report 2007-08. http://www.nsla.org.au/publications/statistics/
[4] Children's Participation in Culture and Leisure Activities, Australia, April 2006 (cat. no. 4901.0)
[5] Australian Public Libraries Statistical Report 2007-08. http://www.nsla.org.au/publications/statistics/

- Ongoing and evolving relationships between public libraries and services' providers including businesses and industry vendors, schools, community organisations and governments, in tailoring services to communities' needs and providing specialist services to children, young adults, seniors, indigenous and multicultural groups.

In 2008, the Library Council of New South Wales released a report titled *"Enriching communities: the value of public libraries in New South Wales"*[6]*.* The NSW Public Library Network Research Committee, on behalf of the Library Council of NSW, commissioned research which measured *the economic, social, cultural and environmental value* of public libraries.

The study found that public libraries contribute positively in terms of economic value, benefit and activity. Key findings from the study include:

- For each dollar expended on public libraries, $4.24 of economic benefit is generated.

- For each dollar expended on public libraries, $2.82 of real economic activity is generated.

- The top five outcomes from public library use were:

  1. Enhanced quality of life
  2. Enhanced enjoyment from hobbies
  3. Ability to obtain information not available elsewhere
  4. Facilitation of lifelong learning, and
  5. Support for children's education.

- The top five contributions to the community were:

  1. A safe and pleasant place to visit
  2. Supporting educational facilities
  3. Facilitating lifelong learning
  4. Encouraging responsible social behavior, and
  5. Ensuring access to the Internet for all.

In November 2009 PLM hosted the largest Public Libraries Conference & Exhibition that had been held in Australia for many years. The theme **SWITCH: Public Libraries in a Changing Environment** focused on the role of public libraries in contributing to economic, social, cultural and environmental sustainability.

Output statements from the SWITCH event and its four sustainability themes are found as Attachment 1 to this document.

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[6] http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/services/public_libraries/publications/docs/enriching_communities.pdf

3. Comments on the Inquiry's Five Focus Areas

3.1 Recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities

Research[7] undertaken by the Edith Cowan University indicates that the funding for resources such as books in Australia's school libraries is around $5,000 per annum. This relatively low level of investment into school library resources has had implications and impacts for the Australian Public Library Sector.

In NSW a major impact has occurred with both *The Premiers Reading Challenge (PRC)* and access to *online resources* that support senior high school study. In the ten years of the PRC, no financial support has been provided by the NSW Government to NSW public libraries even though the demands on libraries' staff time and book resources have increased as a result of the initiative.

Current government policies for the improvement of library infrastructure and buildings ignore key elements of school library services such as:

- Access to a sustainable source of Teacher Librarians
- Access to a sufficient range of both physical and virtual resources that cater for different learning styles, reading levels and curriculum areas.

3.2 Future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes, especially literacy

Professional staff required in school libraries should be qualified Teacher Librarians. Teacher Librarians possess a formal teaching qualification, experience in the classroom and a postgraduate qualification in Information Science. The Information Science qualification enables Teacher Librarians to:

- Provide access to a range of resources including digital resources that support curriculum and students learning outcomes
- Design programs that assist students in the effective, efficient and appropriate use of all resources including the increasing volumes of digital resources.

3.3 Factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

There is a current shortage of qualified Teacher Librarians across Australia. This is influenced by the aging Teacher and Librarian professions, and the availability of recognised courses for developing Teacher Librarians.

Three universities in Australia offer recognised Graduate Diploma and Masters Level courses that prepare Teacher Librarians: Charles Stuart University, Edith Cowan University and the Queensland University of Technology.

A current project, "*Educating our future profession: towards cohesive and sustainable library and information science education in Australia*"[8] is being coordinated by the Queensland University of Technology and is giving consideration to the future supply of and demand for library and information professionals in Australia, and associated education and training requirements.

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[7] http://www.chs.ecu.edu.au/portals/ASLRP/publications.php

[8] http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=741263529932206;res=IELHSS

3.4 Role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians

Several papers presented at the ***2009 SWITCH Conference & Exhibition*** focussed on public libraries' roles in social and cultural development including collaboration and partnerships with schools, community groups, government and businesses including information industry vendors.

Local Government is an active community partner with local schools through initiatives and programs delivered by its Public Libraries, Community Services and Environmental Services teams.

Australia's public libraries operate in wide ranging collaborative partnerships with both primary and secondary schools and their students. There are joint use libraries that exist between public libraries and schools and notably in South Australia[9].

Public libraries in the greater Sydney region:

- Provide services to school students for longer hours than school libraries are able to provide.

- Provide services and resources including the funding of public library roles that support the achievement of learning outcomes:

    o Homework support resources: after school tutoring services including the online yourTutor homework assistance service (The University of Western Sydney has recently financially assisted two western Sydney Public Library services to continue to provide this service)
    o Information literacy and research training
    o LOTE for Schools: Languages other than English books that are bulk loaned to language teachers and students from the State Library of NSW via local public libraries
    o HSC lectures and workshops
    o Provision of after-school study space which is very important in highly urbanised areas
    o Free computer and wireless access for research and access to online databases.

- Provide resource and program support for reading throughout the year eg National Simultaneous Storytime, the NSW Premiers Reading Challenge, Reading Clubs, and regular local Storytimes including multicultural Storytimes.

- Continue literacy and reading support and resources over school holiday periods eg the Summer Reading Program and the NSW Premiers Reading Challenge.

- Participate in Teacher Librarian meetings and networks.

Several examples of collaborative programs and initiatives involving Sydney's public libraries and local primary and high schools are presented below:

- The Warringah Library Service in Sydney has implemented partnerships with local primary and high schools. This has involved communication with the schools, developing tailored services in partnership with the schools and school librarians, and developing relationships based on service delivery and information exchange.

    Some of the current services being delivered to local primary and high schools in the Warringah Shire (Local Government Area population of 141,686) include:

    o Database and citation training that supports the *"All my own work"* component of the senior high school curriculum.

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[9] http://www.lga.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=278

- o Picture Warringah: Duke of Edinburgh students photographically document the Warringah local area for historical purposes, giving the students a sense of history and community.

  - o *Inside Break* which is a cooperative venture between the Manly, Pittwater and Warringah library services (these three Local Government Areas represent a collective population of 240,000) to provide a website which promotes and provides HSC resources to high schools in Sydney's northern beaches area. This resource is now being utilised across the state of NSW.

  - o *Word Play*: a writing competition that proactively involves local schools from Years 1-12.

- ▪ The Blacktown City (Local Government Area population of 291,612) Libraries Service:

  - o Has existing partnerships with local schools eg the Blacktown City Libraries/Hebersham[10] Public School Information Literacy program, *Beyond Google,* which is targeted to Year 6 students.

  - o Participates in the Western Sydney Young People's Literature Project, a Children's and Youth Literature Centre. There are three such centres in Australia. These Centres exist to further develop reading and to bring high quality materials to children and young people in their communities. They enhance the work undertaken by School Libraries and Teacher Librarians and by the Public Library Sector.

    The Western Sydney Young People's Literature Project has established itself as a significant resource for both teachers and Teacher Librarians. Creative Writing workshops and Author presentations are two activities that occurred in the first two years of the Project's existence.

    The Project is financed by the NSW Government through grants from the Ministries of the Arts and Education. The Advisory Group and staff of the Centre believe that it is fulfilling a need in Western Sydney which has the largest population of young people in Australia.

3.5 Impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians
Education publishers are providing more of their materials in digital format. There is a greater need for schools to have access to trained persons that can access and evaluate such materials. The web enables cross-sectoral partnerships and provides online delivery of learning opportunities for children.

The Australian Government's *Computers for all Students* Program does not include training for teachers or students. Teacher Librarians typically provide:

- ▪ Specialist knowledge, support and professional development training for staff in how to use digital technologies in the curriculum
- ▪ The infrastructure and policy development required for acceptable and appropriate use of a wide range of digital resources and technologies
- ▪ The educational rationale for the effective inclusion of digital technologies in the curriculum
- ▪ Access to a range of digital resources and delivery formats which support the development of high quality literacy programs in schools.

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[10] http://www.slideshare.net/PublicLibraryServices/hebersham-project-presentation

4. Summary and Recommendations – Strategic Opportunities

The Australian School Library and Public Library Sectors have similar challenges and opportunities.

The principal challenge is *resourcing*, both from financial and suitably qualified staffing perspectives. The impact of recent economic conditions and the aging Librarian and Teaching workforces compound this challenge.

The opportunity is a change to the model in which School Library services are delivered. The Australian Public Library Sector has an ongoing role in this model, with potential changes to its own service delivery model and funding arrangements.

Collaborative and partnership activities, shared services and resources, standardization and centralisation are major considerations to a future service delivery model for both the School Library and Public Library Sectors.

Strategic opportunities exist including consideration to funded (Australian, State/Territory and Local Governments) collaborative and partnership activities and programs between local primary and high schools and their libraries, and Local Government including its public library services, and specifically further exploring:

1. Cross-sectoral partnerships and activities that lead to efficiencies in sourcing library resources and delivering educational services. These partnerships would involve Schools and School Communities, Local Government (Public Libraries), Businesses and Community Groups.

2. State, Territory and/or Australian Government funding of primary and secondary school student oriented initiatives that are delivered through and supported by the Public Library Sector eg access to information and communication technologies; access to online data bases; after school homework assistance service.

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16 April 2010

Attachment 1:
SWITCH: Public Libraries in a Changing Environment

2009 NSW Public Libraries Conference & Exhibition
<u>Output Statements</u>

Key Facts about the NSW Public Library Sector

1. **NSW public libraries:**
   - **Generate over $4 of real economic benefit and $3 of real economic activity for every dollar invested.**
   - **Contribute to 5 key areas of the NSW State Plan and support and enable NSW State Government initiatives including the NSW Premier's Reading Challenge and communities' ability to access Australian and State Government Agency websites and information.**

2. **372 public library delivery points in NSW provide services and access to over 50% of NSW's now 7.1 million population (which is one third of Australia's population).**

3. **Visits to NSW public libraries increased by 17.5% over the past five years and notably in the last two years during the GFC.**

4. **Over 90% of the annual funding for NSW public libraries is provided by Local Government, with the remainder provided by the NSW State Government.**

5. **The NSW State Government's $3.50 per capita contribution to the NSW public library sector is the smallest contribution made by any Australian state or territory government to a public library sector.**

In late 2009, the Public Libraries NSW Metropolitan Association www.plmnsw.org.au hosted the largest public libraries' conference and exhibition held in Australia for many years - **SWITCH: Public Libraries in a Changing Environment.**

SWITCH provided an ideal forum for over 300 conference delegates from across Australia's local government and public library sectors to consider **the current and future roles of public libraries in their communities'** *economic, social, cultural* **and** *environmental* **sustainability**.

The 152 NSW Local Government Areas were widely represented by their Library Managers, Library Staff, Councillors and Council Executives.

Over 60 representatives from 40 local, national and multinational library sector vendors interacted with and exhibited their products and services to delegates.

Michael Pascoe (Economics and Finance Commentator), **Hugh Mackay** (Author and Social Researcher), **Frank Panucci** (Australia Council for the Arts) and **Professor Tony Masters** (University of Sydney) each contributed valuable insights and facts relevant to the four sustainability themes.

Together with **seventeen conference speakers** from the Australian local government and public library sectors, the State Library of New South Wales, library industry vendors, and from the American Public Library Association, and with interactive, facilitated discussion between these speakers and the conference delegates, the following **key messages** were identified from **SWITCH 2009 - the NSW Public Libraries Conference & Exhibition.**

Key Messages

1. Economic Sustainability
Public libraries: Engaged in a dynamic, changing environment in which their partnerships with all levels of government and business are integral to their local communities' economic and social development.

Michael Pascoe presented an optimistic future for the Australian economy, acknowledging the impact of the recent global financial crisis.

Speakers commented on the changing landscape in which local government and public libraries are operating, which is initiating new service delivery models. Partnerships with all levels of government, with the corporate, commercial and not-for profit sectors, will be integral to these models.

Oliver Freeman of the Neville Freeman Agency, presented an overview of the strategic alternative futures project undertaken in 2009 for the NSW public library sector, titled *"Bookends Scenarios – Alternative Futures for the Public Library Network in NSW in 2030".*

John Ravlic, CEO of Local Government Managers Australia, commented that local government in the future will deliver a range of community services, and in some instances will act as a broker and partner for other organisations to deliver services that assist in achieving social inclusion and community development outcomes.

Kathleen Chau, American Public Library Association, commented on the importance of advocacy for funding, and the work of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in assisting US public libraries to develop and fund their public access computing capability.

Stephanie Kelly, Manager, Economic Development, City of Canada Bay, discussed the partnership between the library and local businesses, which are themselves encouraged to use the library to promote their enterprises, conduct meetings and seek business related information and advice.

2. Social Sustainability
Public libraries: A respected, collaborative partner and service provider that enhance local communities' social inclusion and education.

Hugh Mackay spoke of the changing face of Australian society and how these changes affect the way we live our lives. Regardless of the increase in online social networking, people will continue to crave the social interaction that comes with a public community and cultural space such as the local library.

George Osborne, Program Director, Hume Global Learning Village in Melbourne, with Dr Leone Wheeler from RMIT, commented that the Hume Council takes the view that both economic and social development are inextricably linked and that partnerships and innovative collaboration benefit the community.

Laurence McDonnell from the Warringah Library Service in Sydney outlined a very successful collaborative initiative between several public library services and local high schools, which has enhanced students' research capabilities and their access to a wide range of online information resources.

Tony Iezzi, Vision Australia, presented on a virtual global library service that will increase access to relevant library materials for people with print disabilities.

Suzanne Lipu of the Charles Sturt University discussed social inclusion and its link to empowered communities, increased social capital and cultural growth.

3. Cultural Sustainability
Public libraries: Operating in strategic partnerships that enrich the cultural fabric of local communities.

Frank Panucci, Australia Council for the Arts, commented on the importance of engaging communities and working with community organisations and individuals to *"co-create the future"*.

Frances Sims, State Library of New South Wales, provided an update on a range of key projects and initiatives that are assisting NSW public libraries and their services to local communities.

Penny Amberg, Bega Valley Shire Council and a former Australian Government Cultural Attaché to Washington DC, provided insightful comment on Local Government, the government closest to the community, which recognises the importance of libraries to the cultural vitality of communities, and which strategically places libraries in Cultural Plans to support community cultural development.

Paula Kelly, State Library of Victoria, provided perceptive contribution on the importance of reading to babies at an early age and the consequent improvement in their literacy levels in later years.

Anne Hall of Sydney's Fairfield City Council discussed the website www.mylanguage.gov.au that provides access to search engines, web directories and news in over sixty different languages – a most valuable tool in promoting information services to diverse cultural communities.

Marvis Sofield, Library Manager from Broken Hill in NSW's far west, emphasised the social and cultural importance of public libraries to regional areas and how Broken Hill has maintained, with government financial support, a successful Writer's Group.

4. Environmental Sustainability
Public libraries: An established information network that enables all levels of government to reach local communities, and an example of sound, implemented environmental management practice.

Professor Tony Masters, University of Sydney, spoke passionately and entertainingly on climate change which has been recognised as a scientific reality for centuries. The effects of man on climate in the last 150 years, some would say, have been catastrophic. Professor Masters encouraged librarians as information specialists to continue to provide ready access to communities to factual information on this important subject.

Michelle Kline, Randwick City Library Service and Joanne Smith, Lake Macquarie City Library, presented on their respective Environmental Management initiatives that involve collaborative activity between Council Departments and the library service in involving, informing and educating communities.

David Sharman, City of Sydney Library Manager, discussed the new Surry Hills Library and Community Centre in the context of the environment being a core part of the *"2030 Vision for a Sustainable Sydney"*. The aim of this vision is to create a green, global and connected Sydney.

Richard Siegersma, Executive Chairman, DA Information Services, discussed the changing environment, including that in the publishing industry and the implications and opportunities for public libraries and their communities.