

Submission by The Queensland Teachers' Union of Employees to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training Inquiry into school libraries and teacher-librarians in Australian Schools

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## **The organisation**

The Queensland Teachers' Union of Employees' (QTU) represents over 46,000 state school teachers and TAFE teachers in Queensland. The vast majority of teacher-librarians in Queensland state schools are members of the QTU. The union has established a special interest group of teacher-librarians to address the industrial concerns of these members.

The Queensland Teachers' Union supports the submission to this inquiry that has been made by the Australian Education Union.

## **The impact of recent policies and investments on school libraries and their activities**

Until the establishment of the Building the Education Revolution (BER) capital works program in 2009, investment in school libraries in Queensland has been in steady decline.

During the 1970s, significant support was in place to make Queensland state school libraries world class. During this time, a School Library Services Unit/ Curriculum Services Branch existed within the Department of Education and Training (DET). This unit ensured that:

- appropriately qualified teacher-librarians set up and managed school libraries
- designated (or "tagged") funding allocated to schools and quarantined for library use was established
- teachers were given paid release time to access the post-graduate qualification in teacher-librarianship which enables them to be reclassified as teacher-librarians
- teacher-aide time was allocated to the library based on student enrolments.

However, since this time there has been little enhancement to the resourcing of school libraries.

The impact of this has been that the budget allocated to school libraries in Queensland has become part of the school's global budget and any allocation of funds to the library is subject to annual submissions of teacher-librarians to the school leadership and parents and citizens associations.

Additionally, the staffing resources to libraries changed. The specified teacher-aide time allocated to libraries has been removed and sits within the school pool of teacher-aide time. Teacher-librarians are no longer required to be appropriately qualified. The Queensland Teachers' Union has attempted to ensure that qualified teacher-librarians continue to exist in Queensland school libraries

Submission by The Queensland Teachers' Union of Employees to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training Inquiry into school libraries and teacher-librarians in Australian Schools through the relevant certified agreement. However, the agreement only prescribes that this specialist service be delivered by appropriately qualified

teacher-librarians at 1997 levels. DET (Queensland) is unable to inform the QTU of the current numbers of appropriately qualified teacher-librarians in Queensland state schools.

Additionally, DET no longer provides paid access to the graduate diploma in teacher-librarianship, placing the cost of qualification on the relevant teachers.

Further, teacher-librarians are currently allocated to schools as "flexible-staffing", which indicates to some schools that hours allocated for teacher-librarians can be "traded-in" for other forms of staffing. Regular reforms to teacher-librarian allocations include the establishment of a library co-ordinator (teacher-aide) or the trading in of the allocation for an ICT professional. The Union does not support these reforms, in line with the school-based management guarantees that exist in the *Department of Education and Training Teachers Certified Agreement 2010*.

The effect of these policy changes in Queensland has been to significantly under-resource school libraries and to devalue the work of teacher-librarians in schools.

### **The future potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved education and community outcomes, especially literacy**

As in all scenarios, the potential for school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved education and community outcomes, especially literacy, is dependent on the resourcing provided to librarians and libraries to achieve this.

While many qualified teacher-librarians actively engage in enhancing children's love of language and reading, where libraries are staffed by non-teaching professionals, this contribution will be limited.

The QTU is aware from its involvement on the state-wide Education Consultative Committee (a union/employer committee that is responsible for the implementation of certified agreements) that a number of schools no longer have appropriately qualified teacher-librarians managing school libraries. If school librarians and libraries are to contribute to literacy outcomes, qualified teacher-librarians should be employed to lead this intervention.

In recent years some new schools have established libraries that are accessible to the wider community. This has initially occurred on a trial basis in some low socio-economic status schools in an effort to engage the community in the school and in their children's learning. The success of these programs has been dependent on the school being able to receive additional resourcing to support the employment of additional staff across these hours.



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there exists no requirement to develop the skills of teacher-librarians in this profession.

With the exception of the following clause in the *Department of Education and Training Teachers' Certified Agreement 2010*, there also exists no industrial requirement for teacher-librarians to be appropriately qualified.

## *Part 11 – School-based management guarantees*

### *11.1.3 (e) Specialist services*

*The department is committed to the provision of specialist services to assist in the delivery of curriculum based on the eight key learning areas. Further, the department will endeavour to provide opportunities to increase the specialist pool. Those specialist areas include:*

- I. instrumental music*
- II. guidance*
- III. advisory visiting teachers*
- IV. teacher-librarians*
- V. languages other than English (LOTE)*
- VI. music*
- VII. learning support*
- VIII. health and physical education.*

*These services will continue to be provided by teachers with specialist training and/or qualifications to at least the extent to which this currently occurs.*

*The principals in consultation with the Executive Director (Schools) will determine the provision of support services in accordance with provisions of this agreement relating to job security and flexible staffing.*

The provision of services as “this currently occurs” refers to the levels that existed in 1997, when this provision was first included in a certified agreement.

When staffing flexibility reforms occur in schools, it is often an attempt to convert teacher-librarian positions to non-library roles or to enhance the duties of the teacher-librarian. Common conversions are to put a teacher-aide in charge of a library and use the funds release from the teacher-librarian salary to fund ICT support.

In school communities where a full-time teacher-librarian is available, the teacher-librarian will be directed to take on duties additional to their role of teacher-librarian, such as the head of curriculum role or the ICT co-ordination/support officer role in the school.

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By redirecting the focus of school teacher-librarians from that of their core responsibilities, reducing the number of teacher-librarians in schools and not requiring teacher-librarians to have the relevant professional qualification, the role of the school librarian is consequently being devalued. This significantly impacts on the recruitment and development of school teacher-librarians.

### **The role of different levels of government and local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians**

In Queensland state schools, there exist in some regions very active teacher-librarian networks. However, release for attendance at these meetings is limited to agreement between the teacher-librarian and the school principal.

Further many libraries attempt to bring the local community into the school library by having book fairs (using books available through the Scholastic Book Club) or by having "authors in residence" for a period of time during a year. However the capacity for school librarians to organise such events is dependent on the support of the school leadership and the local parents and citizens (P&C) committee at the school.

There have been instances in Queensland of the establishment of new school campuses where the school library is more accessible to the local community. One of these is the State School of Tomorrow in Innisfail in Far North Queensland, where links with TAFE and the local high school enable the broader local community access to the library.

In Centres of Continuing Secondary Education, where adults are able to attend courses on a part-time basis to assist them in completing their secondary education, the libraries are also more widely accessible. However, where Queensland had a significant number of Centres of Continuing Secondary Education in the 1970s, their numbers have dwindled to just four centres across the state.

Additionally, under the Low Socio-Economic Status Schools National Partnership Agreements, some reforms have been employed to make the school the "hub" of the local community, therefore encouraging a broader use of the school's library facilities.

However, the examples listed above are not implemented state-wide and are not evident in a significant number of Queensland state schools. In most cases, the QTU would suggest that the role of the different levels of government, local communities and other institutions in partnering with and supporting school librarians is very limited.

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### **The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians**

Many teacher-librarians report regular engagement with digital technologies. Where this is appropriately resourced, school libraries and teacher-librarians can provide a valuable resource to classes within their school. However, the management of digital technologies has in many cases become an “add-on” to the teacher-librarians role.

Increasingly teacher-librarians are required to take on other responsibilities meaning that they have less time to concentrate on matters that are the “core business” of their role. With these responsibilities, however, appropriate training and resource support is necessary.

If school libraries and teacher-librarians are to utilise the ever changing digital technologies to support and develop students' enjoyment of reading and research and to engage them in learning, networks that link the school resource centre/library with the school classroom should be established. Additionally, teacher-librarians should be supported in gaining qualifications/in-service training on the use of these digital technologies. Further, if the use of digital technologies is to provide broader learning opportunities for students, those qualified to develop such programs (i.e. teachers/teacher-librarians) should be present in every school community. In the absence of appropriately qualified teachers developing learning programs with library interface, the potential positive impact on students' learning is limited.

### **Conclusion**

It is timely that the House of Representative hold an inquiry into the status of school libraries, given the significant investment made by the federal government through the Building the Education Revolution capital work program.

School libraries and teacher-librarians have the capacity to make significant contributions to student learning and to embrace the use of digital technologies in schools. However, school libraries and teacher-librarians need additional resource support to enable these contributions.

It is the Queensland Teachers' Union's submission that in order to ensure that school libraries are valuable community resources appropriately qualified teacher-librarians should be employed in Queensland schools and that additional funding to support programs in digital technology and student learning is necessary.

In order to achieve this, school budgetary allocations that are specifically directed to the professional development of teacher-librarians, the engagement of library support staff and library programs is necessary. Until such an investment is made, the true value of school libraries and teacher-librarians will not be recognised or utilised.