<u>Submission to the Committee to Examine School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools</u>

At a series of workshops on resource-based learning in Adelaide in 1986, Canadian library educator Professor Ken Haycock warned the audience of teacher-librarians, 'If you always do what you've always done, then you'll always get what you've always got'. In 2010, many teacher-librarians and their professional associations are highly dissatisfied with what is seen as the lack of understanding of their role by education system administrators and school leaders. Similarly, many principals believe that teacher-librarians are irrelevant in the current educational context and hence are using the time allocated for the employment of teacher-librarians for other purposes. Some principals are placing the management of the school library in the hands of teachers with no qualifications in librarianship, or school support officers.

The review commissioned by the Deputy Prime Minister 'to inquire into and report on the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia's public and private schools', with its five wide-ranging Terms of Reference (TOR) is therefore timely.

While much has been written about the contribution of teacher-librarians to the school's teaching and learning programs, how they operate in practice in Australian schools in the early 21st century frequently presents a very different picture. Teacher colleagues and school leaders see teacher-librarians undertaking tasks which are professional by neither educational nor librarianship definitions. To change that perception, the time has come for school libraries to adopt the three-tier management system which has been in place in many other libraries for some time:

- Librarians with professional qualifications in librarianship which are recognised by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)
- Library technicians with library technician qualifications which are recognised by ALIA
- Library assistants, usually trained in house.

In the case of teacher-librarians, professional qualifications are required in both education and in teacher-librarianship. In the case of library technicians working in schools, the qualifications should include some focus on schools.

Very few Australian school libraries currently operate in such a three-tiered structure which is educationally effective and financially efficient. (Any increase in the overall number of staff may be offset by the lower salaries paid to library technicians and library assistants.)

Teacher-librarians must focus on the professional tasks of working with teachers, school leaders and students in the areas specified in the TOR of:

- Literacy (TOR 2)
- Digital technologies (TOR 5).

Literacy
For the purposes of this submission, literacy (TOR 2) is seen to encompass information literacy and digital literacy (TOR 5) as well as reading, and, to a lesser extent writing and listening.

In the mid 20th century, teacher-librarians were traditionally seen as at the heart of students' reading. With the advent of technology and the time required by teacher-librarians to implement and manage the various technologies in school libraries such as photocopiers, microfiche readers and automated check out systems, in many schools reading for pleasure and research slipped through the cracks; the responsibility of no one. Current national testing of literacy (TOR 1) is now seeing a reversal of attitudes to reading. In the three-tier structure described above, teacher-librarians will work with teachers to develop programs which ensure that students access a wide range of quality reading material.

The large injection of Commonwealth funding for school libraries in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in the building of many new libraries and the establishment of large collections of books and multimedia. Newly trained teacher-librarians began working with students and teachers to develop information literacy skills which enabled them to make best use of the mainly print resources, in programs described as resource-based learning/inquiry method. The five basic steps of the information process developed at that time— Defining, Locating, Selecting, Organising, Presenting, Assessing—still apply to the effective use of information, whatever the medium. The Research Project in the new SACE (TOR 1) calls for high level information literacy skills.

Digital literacy (TOR 5) which focuses on information literacy to enhance learning in the digital environment is one of the Statements of Learning published in 2006 by the then Ministerial Council for Education, Employment and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). The Statement covers the levels of expertise required by students at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in Inquiring, Creating, Communicating, Ethics and Operating with information and communication technologies (ICT). The Statement is the basis for the national testing in ICT (TOR 1). Teacher-librarians have a major role to play in working with teachers to develop programs which ensure that students become good digital citizens, able to use information to meet their learning needs at school and elsewhere.

Cyberbullying (TOR 5) which involves the unethical use of ICT, specifically the Internet, is now one of the most serious concerns in communities across the world. Education plays an important part in helping students to keep safe while using the Internet and other online technologies. The programs developed by teacher-librarians should emphasise this aspect of information literacy throughout the school.

Recruitment and development of 'school' librarians (TOR 3)
Partly because of the perception by higher education institutions that school education systems are employing a decreasing number of teacher-librarians, there are very few opportunities for pre-service teachers to study to become teacher-librarians. Similarly, a limited number of universities now offer post-graduate courses for teachers to add teacher-librarianship qualifications to their education qualifications. Issues relating to role clarity as described above need to be resolved before an increase in the number of new teacher-librarians is advocated.

Nonetheless, current courses and the schools of librarianship in which they exist need to be reviewed by ALIA in the context of the forthcoming teacher standards to ensure that graduates are able to function effectively in the role described in this submission.

At this time, given the age profile of Australian teachers including teacher-librarians, education systems need to focus on the development of existing 'school' librarians rather than recruitment. Anecdotal information suggests that there are many teachers with librarianship qualifications not currently working in school libraries. These people could provide a valuable resource to staff the large number of new libraries being built under the Building the Education Revolution initiative (TOR 1). However many former teacher-librarians would need professional development to meet the requirements of the updated role.

With the demise of central school library support services in the 1990s, professional development became the responsibility of professional associations such as the Australian School Library Association (ASLA) and ALIA. Both organisations have branches in each state and territory. In South Australia the Department of Education and Children's Services provides some funding to support teacher professional associations to offer professional development programs. Although many professional development activities occur, being dependent on the good will of busy practitioners often means that the programs lack cohesion or long-term vision.

Professional development should be outsourced to the schools of librarianship working collaboratively with education system representatives, practitioners and the professional associations.

Managing school libraries
The overall management of the school library including policy, direction setting, and budget should be the responsibility of the teacher-librarian working as part of the school leadership team. In this role, teacher-librarians need to act as strong advocates across the school community for the library and its services.

The day to day operation of the school library should be the responsibility of library technicians whose training and expertise make them the most appropriate people for these technical tasks. Particularly time consuming is the management of the myriad of technologies which 'enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians (TOR 5)', eg photocopiers, computers, security systems, electronic catalogues, digital resources, circulation systems. The information technology technician has a shared responsibility in this area.

Central education authorities need to provide state-wide support in the selection, maintenance and upgrading of these expensive services and systems, as has occurred with Digital Education Revolution computers in New South Wales. Central purchasing should occur of cataloguing data (SCIS), metadata, and other expensive online resources.

Conclusion
In some Australian schools teacher-librarians already focus on the educational outcomes described above. However even in those situations, many teacher-librarians also undertake the technical tasks which should be the responsibility of library technicians. Little wonder then that teacher-librarians feel overworked and under appreciated, and

that their teacher colleagues see them performing tasks similar to those which, in other parts of the school, are carried out by school support officers.

It's time to change!!

Recommendations

1. Education systems should
   a. formalise the position of library technicians in the employment structure including providing a career path for them
   b. provide a focus group at the central level to support teacher-librarians, particularly in liaising with universities re professional development
   c. provide state-wide support in the selection, maintenance and upgrading of the systems, services and resources required to 'enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians' .

2. Principals should review the role and related management of the school library in light of the three-tier structure described above.

3. Teacher-librarians should
   a. ensure that their job and person specifications and work practices reflect the emphases described in this submission, focusing at all times on the learning outcomes of the students in the school
   b. ensure that they are aware of new directions in Australian education and capitalise on the opportunities offered
   c. update and extend their qualifications and expertise where necessary.

4. Universities should
   a. review the teaching of school librarianship for both pre-service and in service teachers
   b. work with education system representatives, practitioners and professional associations to deliver professional learning programs appropriate for teacher-librarians seeking to extend and upgrade their expertise in fulfilling the role described in this submission.