

Concluding comments

- 6.1 This inquiry was re-referred to the Committee in the 43rd Parliament with the same terms of reference and evidence that the former Standing Committee on Education and Training considered in the 42nd Parliament.
- 6.2 In order to complete the inquiry the Committee invited the former Chair, Sharon Bird MP, and the former Deputy Chair, Dr Dennis Jensen MP, to brief members privately on their thoughts relating to the inquiry.
- 6.3 The Committee also invited key stakeholders, including the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, the Australian School Library Association (ASLA), and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), to update it on developments, prior to completing the report.
- 6.4 This inquiry has elicited a large response from former and current teacher librarians, whom, between them, have an abundance of experience in the field. Evidence was also provided from school library stakeholders in New Zealand, Asia, and North America.
- 6.5 The Committee has been impressed by the level of passion of, and dedication of, Australian teacher librarians to their profession and their genuine interest in seeing that it continues to have a viable future.
- 6.6 It is indisputable that the value of teacher librarians' work has been eroded over the years and undervalued by many in the community, be it by colleagues, principals, parents or those in the wider school community.
- 6.7 The profession has unfortunately been subject to the many competing priorities that school principals find themselves contending with in an environment in which education budgets are ever stretched.

- 6.8 A situation has also ensued where fewer teacher librarianship courses and places are offered at a time when there is an apparent shortage of teacher librarians. This comes when there is a greater need for ensuring that students come out of schools equipped with the appropriate digital and information literacy tools that they need to succeed in the modern world.
- 6.9 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.
- 6.10 The Committee has been struck by the breadth of anecdotal evidence that it received demonstrating the significant contribution to learning outcomes in primary and secondary schools that a fully resourced school library, when staffed by a fully qualified and active teacher librarian, can make. This supports the findings of Australian and international research in this area.
- 6.11 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.
- 6.12 It strikes the Committee that there is a fundamental need to collate some hard data to ascertain how many teacher librarians there are in Australia's primary and secondary schools; to identify where the gaps are; and to start to extrapolate the links between library programs, literacy (especially digital literacy, which is as important as regular literacy and numeracy skills), and student achievement.
- 6.13 This data should be made more transparent and accountable as it becomes available. Including statistical information on teacher librarians on the My School website, similar to the NAPLAN results, may be a useful marker.
- 6.14 If teacher librarians are going to be expected to assist in major national initiatives, such as the national curriculum and one-to-one computer rollout, there will be a commensurate need for additional resources for their professional development and additional technical and clerical support.
- 6.15 The Committee also believes that a core set of online databases should be made available to all schools so that students have equitable access to key

online educational resources. The sum of money required to accomplish this goal (less than \$5 million) is relatively small, but the benefits seem manifold.

- 6.16 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.
- 6.17 This inquiry has started a conversation at the national level about what a teacher librarian is, does, and can do into the future.
- 6.18 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 for all.
- 6.19 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.
- 6.20 The Committee has repeated throughout the report the delineation of the responsibilities between the Commonwealth and states and territories and other education authorities in Australia's education system. The majority of teacher librarians' concerns and issues do fall to the states and territories.
- 6.21 This Committee is only empowered to make recommendations to the Commonwealth Government but will disseminate the report to all state and territory education authorities for their reference as well.
- 6.22 That noted, the Committee wishes to acknowledge the extensive degree of engagement and cooperation that already exists between the Commonwealth and states and territories on educational policy issues of mutual interest. This engagement and cooperation is reflected in the development of the national curriculum, national standards for teachers and roll-outs of the BER and DER, through the Ministerial Council and other consultative forums.
- 6.23 One very meaningful way to get the momentum started may be to establish a National Year of Reading program with a range of coordinated activities, supported by all levels of government, the peak library bodies, principals and teacher librarians alike.

- 6.24 The Committee learnt about some of the wonderful partnerships that exist between school libraries and state, local public and tertiary institution libraries. This is a sound foundation for building on.
- 6.25 There is also scope for teacher librarians and other education stakeholders in the public and private sectors to be more proactive in promoting the contributions of teacher librarians as individual practitioners, leaders in their schools, and in partnership with other bodies. The good stories need to be told.

Amanda Rishworth MP

Chair