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Mr Justin Baker
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House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training
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Dear Mr Baker

Thank you for inviting the ACT Government to provide a submission to the Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools.

This submission responds to the matters raised by the Terms of Reference of the inquiry with regard to ACT public schools.

Importance of teacher librarian functions

The ACT Government and the Department of Education and Training recognise the important role that school libraries and teacher librarians continue to play in the ACT public school system. Teacher librarians combine curriculum knowledge and pedagogy with library and information management knowledge and skills. Their core teaching roles are to teach information literacy skills and support the study and appreciation of literature. This supports the current jurisdictional and national agenda for improving student outcomes in literacy.

The ACT Department of Education and Training Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2009-2013, the Council of Australian Governments Smarter Schools Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership, and the impending Australian Curriculum all impact on the work of teacher librarians in promoting literature and supporting literacy and English programs in schools, as well as information literacy and provision of appropriate, quality resources for all curriculum areas. Importantly through funding from the Smarter Schools National Partnerships and additional funding from the ACT Budget Initiative 'Enhancing Performance in Literacy and Numeracy', a total of 21 literacy and numeracy field officers over 2010-2014 will be engaged to support school literacy and numeracy.

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Effective teacher librarians have a high profile in their schools. They use explicit teaching, demonstrate sound information literacy practices, integrate information literacy and ICT skill development into teaching and learning, develop interactive and responsive teaching and learning environments, and practice core professional values of collaboration in partnerships with teachers and students.

The role of teacher librarians can extend to working with teachers and school leaders to plan, implement and evaluate curricula, learning outcomes and programs, with particular reference to the development of learners' research and information literacy. Their particular skills can enhance the literacy and learning programs across our schools from the early years through to our colleges.

Information literacy enables learners to access, process, organise, create, present and evaluate information in a range of meaningful ways. It is vital that information skills are embedded across the school curriculum, as information literacy can contribute to:

- learning for life
- the creation of new knowledge;
- acquisition of skills;
- personal, vocational, corporate and organisational empowerment;
- social inclusion;
- participative citizenship; and
- innovation and enterprise.

The ACT considers that all teachers have a responsibility to promote and facilitate the development of the information literacy of their students.

Staffing

As in other jurisdictions, one of the issues facing the ACT is how best to support school libraries and the key functions they provide in the promotion of information literacy, that has historically been the domain of qualified teacher librarians. Under the school based management approach that exists within the ACT public school system, principals have discretion in deciding priority staffing needs. It is up to the principal, in consultation with their staff and communities, to decide whether the employment of a teacher librarian is the most appropriate use of the school's resources at a particular time, when considered against other school staffing priorities.

Equally, the qualifications of staff employed to undertake teacher librarian functions are not mandated, so while public school libraries have historically been staffed with a qualified teacher librarian with dual teacher and librarian qualifications, this is not necessarily the case now.

Staffing choices made by principals in recent years may in part be a result of the difficulties encountered in filling teacher librarian vacancies with dedicated teacher librarians, due to a shortage of suitably qualified applicants. Some schools have chosen to use teachers to fill teacher librarian vacancies, or have employed library assistants and library technicians to maintain their library collection and catalogue.

A survey recently undertaken of current library staffing patterns in ACT public schools found that the employment of teacher librarians differs considerably across schools and across sectors.

The survey indicated that it was quite common in primary and early childhood schools for there not to be a dedicated fulltime teacher librarian. In the primary sector for example, 12 out of 46 schools had a full time qualified teacher librarian, while most other primary schools had appointed a teacher to the library, at least part time.

All ACT colleges (years 11-12) had a fulltime teacher librarian, just under half of ACT high schools had a full time qualified teacher librarian and most of the remaining high schools had part time teacher librarians or other staff performing these functions.

This survey demonstrated significant variability in the staffing decisions for libraries in ACT public schools. I am strongly supportive of principals making decisions that best meet the educational needs of their student population, in consultation with their broader school community.

Recruitment and qualifications

In line with their staffing decisions, principals identify teacher librarian or library assistant vacancies as part of their annual staffing process. The ACT recruits teacher librarians through the targeted teacher recruitment strategies, which includes an annual bulk recruitment round and ongoing recruitment in line with school staffing needs. While recruitment choices of some schools have been impacted by perceived changes to the role of librarians with new technology developments, access to tertiary trained librarians may also have been a factor.

While an aging workforce and reduced interest by younger teachers in the area are likely to have contributed, it is also fair to say that ascertaining qualifications in Canberra has also proved difficult in recent years. The teacher librarianship courses offered by the University of Canberra (UC) from 1972, ceased in 1990, and a large number of teacher librarians in Canberra have gained their librarian qualification through distance education.

More recently, an opportunity has been provided for teaching staff interested in gaining information literacy qualifications with UC providing post graduate study through the Master of Information Studies in 2009. The ACT Department of Education and Training strongly supports all teaching staff seeking further qualifications, and staff are able to apply for support funds and scholarships to undertake such study. Funding is set aside each year for teacher scholarships to assist interested teachers undertake courses leading to recognised tertiary or VET credentials.

A number of workshops and professional development activities for library support staff have also been provided by the ACT Department of Education and Training over recent years. These courses aim to develop participants' understandings of library databases, more effective use of the internet and audiovisual equipment.

Key investments in libraries and technology

Recent Australian Government investment in schools has resulted in improved library facilities through Building the Education Revolution (BER) and an increase in the number of computers and other information and communication technology (ICT) capabilities through the Digital Education Revolution (DER) and ACT Government funding. Library facilities and developments in technology in schools to support information literacy have been supported through significant investment by the ACT

Government, and have a major impact on the role of libraries and the promotion and strengthening of information literacy in schools.

Capital investment

Under the BER, 24 schools are having new libraries built or refurbished. A further five schools are having minor ACT-funded works undertaken in parallel with their BER works which will also impact on the function of their libraries, with projects such as the establishment of shared learning areas. Total funding for projects at schools where library developments are occurring under the BER (noting that not all the funding will be specific to the library related works) is over \$41m, which is being complemented by ACT government funding of over \$1.4m. These projects commenced in 2009 and will continue through until January 2011.

In addition to BER works, the ACT capital works program over recent years has contributed substantial funding to capital upgrades in schools across the ACT, including funding to improve libraries. In 2009 for example, works to provide a major addition to the resource centre at Narrabundah College were completed as part of a \$4.5m project at the College.

ICT investment in the ACT

The ACT is at the forefront of ICT in schools. ACT teachers and students are some of the most competent IT users in Australian education. ACT students scored the highest in computer literacy scores in Australia, according to the 2008 Information Communication and Technology Literacy Report. This is consistent with a long term trend of high performance.

ACT teachers are the highest per capita users of digital content from the Le@rning Federation, which is a national repository of digital learning resources. The ability for teachers and students to directly access information through the use of ICT has implications for information and resource access at the school level.

The ACT Department of Education and Training is providing a wide range of ICT tools and services that will impact on information literacy in schools. The significant increase in the availability and access to information via the internet will continue to have a significant impact on the way teachers and students research and discover content. Significant investments from both the Australian and ACT Government have been building on the already solid foundations for ICT access and information literacy in ACT schools.

The ACT agreed at the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to work towards achieving a 1:1 ratio of computers to year 9-12 students by 2011. Under the DER, the ACT is receiving more than \$22m over four years to roll out the devices to schools, and more than 4000 units have already been delivered. Further work is being conducted by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations within the DER program to cover professional development and the provision of digital resources.

In June 2006, the ACT Government committed \$20m to deliver ICT upgrades and enhancements to schools over four years under the *Smart Schools: Smart Students* initiative. A further \$7.7m was allocated in 2008 to provide fibre connections to the ACT Government network for ACT public primary schools.

The 2009-10 Budget provided a further investment of \$5m over three years to improve student access to ICT in ACT public primary schools by replacing old computers and installing new interactive whiteboards (IWBs). This initiative will deliver a ratio of one computer to every six students and one IWB to every two classrooms. In addition, \$407 000 has been provided over four years for the ongoing technical support of these new technologies.

One of the most exciting ICT investments in the ACT is the development of the new Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) planned for all public schools, being deployed to schools this year. The VLE will enable schools to access digital content to enrich their teaching and learning programs. The VLE will enable any teacher or student to search information via the Internet and use it for specific purposes of communication, collaboration and presentation. The VLE also provides teachers and students access to significant banks of quality assured digital content through the Le@rning Federation and from existing copyright free repositories of free to air television content. The availability of this content and resources directly to teachers and students will impact on the nature of the work of teachers and teacher librarians in ACT schools.

The ACT Department of Education and Training is centralising all school library systems to enhance the efficiency, consistency and availability of existing library catalogues. This project will standardise the library software across all schools and remove library servers from schools to a single central location. This will enhance the reliability and accessibility of school library catalogues in the ACT.

The impact of technology on Libraries for schools in the 21st Century

Following significant investment and as a result of the ongoing developments in ICT, digital technologies are having an increasingly important role in enhancing and supporting the learning environment for students and providing access to information both within and beyond the school community.

All schools require access to level of specialised knowledge to make best teaching and learning use of technological developments, vital to leverage from ICT investment. Increasingly, access to information is being delivered in the classroom, and preferred design and function of library spaces continues to develop and change.

In refurbishments and particularly in the development of new schools and library buildings, the ACT will continue to use evidence based approaches to establish some of the most modern classrooms and library facilities in Australia.

Gungahlin College

The new Gungahlin College, due to open in 2011, provides an example of best practice facilities to support student learning. Originally announced on 13 December 2006 as a part of the *Towards 2020* schools renewal initiative, Gungahlin College will accommodate 900 year 11 and 12 students and establish a standard for providing modern, quality education in Australia. It will provide facilities which encourage best practice approaches to teaching and learning, and the flexibility to ensure the facility can adapt to new approaches and technologies in the future.

The total project budget is \$72.4m comprising funding for a new secondary college, a Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) learning centre and a joint college and

community library. The design of the college is in step with new education facility designs in Australia and overseas, and reflects the latest research on how students learn and the advice of an internationally renowned education consultant, Dr Kenn Fisher.

Dr Fisher proposed that the library and the learning areas should not be seen to have distinct functions. He argued for a strong focus on resource based learning – an educational model designed to engage students with multiple resources, including both print and electronic forms. This emphasis resulted in a large part of the library space being distributed into spaces called "resource nodes".

In a contextual paper provided by Dr Fisher in the planning stages of Gungahlin College, he emphasised the importance of the physical space to ensure that the learning environment does not place undue limitations on resource based learning.

Modern learning environment design is beginning to acknowledge the importance of connectivity and collaboration through shared spaces. This is changing the way that learning communities and design teams view the presence of the 'library', challenging it to meet the needs of learners and teachers in the 21st Century. Often the conclusion is that the entire campus should be a library where access to resources, learning settings, media specialists, technologies and experts can occur in correlation with any given learning activity.

It is worth noting that Dr Fisher does not refer to librarians, but "media specialists", acknowledging that a librarian is someone whose knowledge of a wide variety of resources in multiple formats is essential to student learning. Furthermore, the involvement of such staff extends beyond the boundary of the library into any space where learning occurs.

The planning and development of Gungahlin College illustrates the importance the ACT places on seeking advice on best practise in the use of school libraries as key places of student learning, and implementing that knowledge to provide environments that engage and motivate both students and teachers.

Shared facilities and community collaboration

As with the libraries at Erindale and Lake Tuggeranong Colleges, the Gungahlin College library will be joint-use. In addition to being accessible to their staff and students, the library will also be accessible to the general public. These libraries are jointly funded and staffed by the ACT Department of Education and Training and the ACT Library and Information Service. They provide examples of the ACT focus on working with the community and across sectors in educational developments. The development of a new library for Hughes Primary School under the BER is another example where the library will also be joint-use.

As with all BER projects, for school library developments the ACT Government has been careful to ensure that each project has the support of its school community. While the ACT Department of Education and Training has coordinated each of the BER projects on behalf of ACT public schools, project preferences and priorities for projects were identified by each school community and were endorsed by the school

principal, the school board chairperson, and the school's Parents' and Citizens' Association chairperson.

I would also like to highlight a unique collaboration occurring across sectors between Catholic and public schools. Holy Spirit Primary School and Gold Creek Primary School are the ACT's first shared facility schools and are located next to one another on a campus in the suburb of Nicholls. Both education systems funded the building of the shared facilities, which include a hall, canteen and playing areas, but importantly the library/resource centre.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry. Developments at the national level regarding technology in schools and the national curriculum make this an interesting time for information literacy. The ACT Government and the Department of Education and Training look forward to the findings of the inquiry, recognising the important role that libraries and teacher librarians play in the ACT school system.

Yours sincerely

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