



Dear Parliamentary Committee members,

This submission is written from my perspective as a teacher librarian in high schools for 18 years and prior to that an English/ Modern History teacher for 15 years. I have qualified with a Bachelor of Arts, Diploma of Education and a Post Graduate Diploma in Applied Science Information/Teacher Librarianship from UTS Kuring-Gai. At present I am working as a teacher librarian in a large North Shore Comprehensive Public High School with 1,500 students, 130 teachers and well utilised library.

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

The most recent investment in building new school libraries especially in primary schools would not be worthwhile unless there are qualified teacher librarians available to manage them to assist both staff, students and parents. Purchasing, organising, borrowing all types of resources, teaching students and assisting teachers plus managing budgets, computers and staff are certainly tasks that take many years to learn.

The school library has undergone rapid changes with rollout of new computers with new software programs, new technologies, digital media, changes to SCIS cataloguing, changes to Library databases, which necessitate teaching and professional learning on a constant basis. In order to cope with recent policy developments the teacher librarian needs to keep updating his/her knowledge and skills. In my case I have maintained professional membership of ASLA, participated in pilot projects at Macquarie ICT Innovations centre, hosted and organised library district meetings, participated annually in regional conferences and World library conferences. This year's IFLA 2010 conference is in Gothenburg Sweden. It is fascinating to hear what other countries spend (or not) on school libraries. It confirms that the best resources are still the people, who run the libraries. It is their motivation, enthusiasm, experience and professionalism that makes a difference.

The axing of teacher librarians in some schools in NSW ( eg Loftus PS) and in many other states of Australia strikes me as a crazy cost cutting measure with long term consequences for both staff and students. Perhaps this argument is best outlined in an article entitled : "School libraries : Making a difference" by Kerry Neary, a retired teacher librarian with 35 years' teaching experience. ( ACCESS volume 22 issue 3 2008 p5-7. Publisher Australian School Library Association.) His analysis is best summed up as "next time you..... might be thinking of no longer funding book purchases for the library, cutting the library budget further, deploying your teacher librarian to other roles in the school, not including a teacher librarian in your staffing formula, replacing your teacher librarian with an unqualified library manager or moving your library into cyberspace, remember that 14 years of replicated and validated research shows that school libraries do make a difference to student achievement. Such decisions are worst practice....." This American research has also been supported by Charles Sturt University research.

2. The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

It should be possible now as it was in the past to undertake university study as a primary or high school teacher librarian in MANY different universities around Australia and as a first degree. I believe entry now is limited to distance education at Charles Sturt University or Edith Cowan in WA. What a range of choices available ? My sister in law was recently considering being a teacher librarian. After looking at the limited options available and the many years of study to add to her Marketing degree, she was disappointed.

I strongly advocate assisting teachers already in schools to retrain, encourage universities to offer more courses, raise the profile of the teacher librarian as a profession. Provide financial incentives for older graduates to undertake post graduate study to be teacher librarians and organise a mentoring program to those newly graduated students so they are not overwhelmed by the challenges that they can face being a teacher and a librarian.

Over the years I have also learnt many other useful skills – computer fix-it, roofing expert, furniture designer, carpet and paint expert, purchasing expert, television and digital media organiser, pest control and expertise in crowd control with close to 200 students on a cold wet day in the library at lunchtime just to name a few.....In my spare time I also organised scripture programs for all the school and the purchase and installation of new air-conditioning for the library and half of the school as well. I can only wonder who will do those tasks if we are not replaced and how to develop such skills in the new recruits???????

Finally with the imminent arrival of a national curriculum it is essential for teacher librarians to promote and nurture a whole school focus on information literacy and its implementation. Our role of delegating, communicating, setting goals and consulting widely with staff and students will be more important in making fair, just and socially responsible decisions to provide school library services that have a positive impact on student achievement and meet their changing needs.

Thanks for reading my thoughts and recommendations.

Yours faithfully,  
Mrs Karen Jones Teacher Librarian