Submission to the House Standing Committee on Education and Training

Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools.

The importance of the role of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools can not be underestimated. A well-equipped and well resourced library, staffed with fully qualified teacher librarians should be statutory for all our schools. An experienced teacher librarian with her extensive knowledge is best equipped to advise, encourage and inspire our children. The role of the teacher librarian, who has the responsibility and time to help students, is fundamental to the success of students becoming not only independent thinkers but life long learners.

As qualified and practising teacher librarians we ask the House Standing Committee on Education and Training to consider the following submission addressing four of the terms of reference.

This submission was prepared by the following representatives of the

Central Coast Teacher Librarian Network (Secondary)

Lidia Jeffrey - Head Teacher Secondary Studies & Teacher Librarian, Kariong Mountains High School , **Cherry Beckett** - Teacher Librarian, Gosford High School, **Carmel Taylor** - Teacher Librarian, Henry Kendall High School, **Tania Abbott** - Relieving Teacher Librarian, Tuggerah Lakes Secondary College, Berkeley Vale Campus, **Diane Gill** – Teacher Librarian, Umina Campus

Contact details:
Ms Cherry Beckett
Gosford High School, Racecourse Road, Gosford, NSW 2250

1.   The DER L4L initiative has increased the number of students using the library. Students have required support in using their laptops and an increase in the number of students requiring supervision has impacted on the demand for the teacher librarian. Simultaneously, PCs are still in high demand by other students.

2.   In the increased digital environment of schools, teacher librarians are generally not a priority in receiving professional learning in this area. This entails teacher librarians needing to develop skills in their own time in order to keep abreast with new innovations and the changing digital landscape. Professional learning is not directed towards the teacher librarian. Teacher librarians need to be extremely proficient in using the programs in L4L notebooks, in using Web 2.0 tools, in using Interactive White Boards if they are to maintain a leadership role in teaching and learning and continue to work collaboratively with the peers in their school.

3.   In a school world of competing financial demands, the DER has meant a redirection of funds towards IT budgets and IT needs. School libraries (Government schools) have suffered adversely as a consequence. The library as an 'information service centre' is a resource for the whole school encompassing the 'five interrelated domains' of "learners and learning, teachers and teaching, resourcing the curriculum, facilitating access to information [and] developing the physical environment."(ASLA & ALIA, 2001, Learning for the future: developing information services in schools, Curriculum Corporation, Victoria.) Whilst teacher librarians have adapted to decreasing budgets the central role of the library needs to be acknowledged and funded appropriately.

4.   With the increased number of computer labs remote from the school library and the L4L initiative further removing the need to go to the school library for research, there is a concern IF and HOW information skills are being taught. It is the teacher librarian who has a pivotal role in ensuring the consistent and explicit integration of information skills within KLA research topics. As a consequence, teacher librarians must take a more proactive role to ensure information literacy skills are still consistently and explicitly taught. This poses logistical problems: the need to link with key clientele (teachers) so that continued collaborative processes for research tasks ensure students do not miss out on this vital learning. Thus, the teacher librarian has to configure new ways of doing this while simultaneously promoting the physical library as a work place for research. Additionally, we must continue to promote a fundamental component of the information skills process: selecting those resources which best meet the information need. Frequently these are traditional print resources and these cannot be ignored.

5.   The focus on external, data driven emphases (e.g. NAPLAN) have influenced teaching and learning, leading to 'time poor' outcries (We don't have time to do this because ...) Research (as in students having a research task) sits within a constructivist view of learning, and hence requires more time. It takes longer to have students research a topic, engage with diverse resources and make meaning from these to answer a research question than it does for a teacher to teach the same information in a classroom. However, the experience of research embraces a wide range of skills, skills that are essential for living in a global society and are key competences with which we should equip students. Thus, there can be seen a dichotomy between the pressure from external data driven

performance and the need to invest time in allowing students to undertake research tasks and develop the associated skills required for our 21st Century world.

6.   Raising the school leaving age to seventeen has impacted on the teacher librarian on a practical level. There is an increase in the number of students and a change in the mix of students in the library during study periods. This has made for greater demands on the teacher librarian, raising issues of how to engage the broader mix and how to physically find the time to assist a greater number of students with their work while still fulfilling all their other roles and responsibilities. This also has implications for the need for a *teacher* librarian as we are also trained to manage student behaviour.

7.   The pilot program of flexible staffing with the 'increased school decision making on recruitment, staffing mix and budget' has engendered a significant concern for teacher librarians. The example of Loftus Public School to not employ a teacher librarian for the duration of the pilot program on staffing, has demonstrated the degree to which teacher librarians can be perceived as expendable and their role subsumed by others who do not have accredited qualifications (ALIA). Schools will always have pressing needs that need to be addressed in management plans; however, the funds allocated to employ a teacher librarian should not be used to fund these priorities. Not only that, it highlights a lack of real understanding of the unique role of the teacher librarian in its many facets.

8.   The increased investment in technology puts further emphasis on the teacher librarians' role to facilitate life long learning as both an intellectual and cognitive exercise. ASLA recognises a "pivotal role of school information services, and specialist teachers such as teacher librarians as key factors in the delivery of agreed curriculum outcomes and attainment of the goals of education. The richness of the school's information services will influence and may even determine whether or not teachers and students are empowered to be independent learners both today and for the rest of their lives" (ASLA & ALIA, 2001, Learning for the future: developing information services in schools, Curriculum Corporation, Victoria.)

9.   The library is often the heart of the school where students' work is showcased and is a constantly changing, adapting, revitalised space that affects and reflects the whole school culture. By providing a dynamic area to display student's work we are showing we value the work the students produce which in turn allows our students to value their own work. New libraries need to be physically large enough to provide for this.

1.   Teacher librarians improve literacy through promotion of literature and reading to students. Teacher librarians must read widely and voraciously as part of their homework. This enables them to develop a literature collection that is relevant to their users and to link students with specific works. By knowing the trends and tastes of their students, teacher librarians are able to guide students, enriching their reading experience. Who else in the school will promote this broad knowledge of literature and wide reading? Who else promotes reading so effectively and widely in the community? There is a direct correlation between student reading and literacy levels.

2.   Teacher librarians improve literacy through the promotion of literature, including picture books and non-fiction texts, to teachers to use in the classroom lessons. These are used as introductions to topics/concepts, to enhance a theme and to read to classes. For example, a unit on evolution can effectively be introduced with the non-fiction picture book, *When Elephants Lived in the Sea*; a unit on multi-culturalism can be introduced with the picture book *Speak Chinese Fang Fang*; multiple perspectives on Australian history can be conveyed through texts such as the novel, *Serpent Dust*, the non-fiction picture book *Too Many Captain Cooks* and the picture book, *Home and Away*. Through this divergent approach to introducing concepts or contributing to core content areas in the curriculum, teacher librarians influence student engagement with concepts and content, contribute material that demonstrates the problematic nature of knowledge and provide support for differing learning styles.

3.   There appears to be an increase in the use of secondary teacher librarians (NSW) having timetables classes, providing release for teachers elsewhere in the school. The detrimental impact of this is self-evident. This removes the flexibility of the teacher librarian to work in collaborative practice with classroom teachers to maximise student outcomes in research tasks. There is evidence where collaboratively planned teaching programs to take place in the school library with teacher librarians have had to be abandoned by classroom teachers because the teacher librarian has been on her own timetabled class and therefore unable to deliver her component of the collaboratively planned unit. Best practice for the development of information skills is cited as being in collaboratively planned and taught research based units of work. The issue begs the question of principals and how they view the role of the teacher librarian and how their work is valued rather than being an expedient means to an end of releasing another teacher elsewhere on the timetable. In NSW, teacher librarians are employed in addition to the school staffing formula which further adds to the questioning of principals decisions in placing the teacher librarian on the timetable.

4.   All the teacher librarians in our submission group can confirm an increase in the number of books being borrowed and in the number of students borrowing from our school libraries. The students' use of technology has increased their desire to read, especially fiction. However the book is still the preferred method of reading fiction with only a 5% uptake of e books. Popular fiction is alive and well, the teenage fiction market is booming and students are borrowing heavily from their school library collections. The teacher librarian knows the students, understands the local context of their clientele and is

therefore able to focus on the development of a rich literature collection catering for their students' needs.

5.   Teacher librarians have an imperative role in integrating and explicitly teaching information skills in collaborative practice in student research tasks. Information literacy is a key outcome in all syllabus documents (NSW). The key competences in syllabuses are explicit in relation to information skills. For example embedded in the Physics Stage 6 Syllabus (NSW) are the key competencies of '*collecting, analysing and organising information* and *communicating ideas and information*' as well as '*using technology*'. KLA specific syllabus outcomes also explicitly address information skills. The teacher librarian provides the pedagogical framework for information literacy skills development across all KLAs, providing uniformity across KLAs and across the curriculum and ensuring information literacy skills are embedded in research tasks. U.S. and Australian research using evidence based practice confirms that classes who come regularly to the library to work with the teacher librarian in collaborative practices with classroom teachers develop greater skills and competency in research and have improved outcomes.

6.   Teacher librarians have an integral role in student achievement in independent research projects. This includes, for example, students undertaking research for GATs projects or PIPS (Personal Interest Projects for Society and Culture (Stage 6 NSW) or Community and Family Studies independent research tasks (Stage 6 NSW).

7.   Budget cuts have affected our purchasing power. Most librarians have found their budgets reduced as funds are redirected towards technology. The cost of books has not changed and in many cases has increased therefore we unable to purchase as many good quality books. Public library borrowing has increased as global economic downturn parents do not buy 'luxury' items such as books.

8.   Teacher librarians improve literacy by collaboratively planning and teaching with classroom teachers through Literature Circles and using graphic novels and picture books to develop student's visual literacy skills. Research in 200/1 shows that NSW has higher literacy than countries with no teacher librarians and is on a par with Canada.

9.   Teacher librarians develop information skills strategies to assist students to become competent navigators of the online world and to become discriminating users of information rather than users of 'cut and paste' tools where there is no construction of knowledge. Strategies can include, for example: use of online mind mapping tools to define the topic for research, the development of scaffolds for note taking from the Internet to minimise plagiarism; teaching how to develop search strings; teaching how to evaluate Internet sites and information sources and much more. This development of information skills is vital as ASLA & ALIA acknowledge "The need to be able to use information effectively has in many cases become more important than the acquiring of factual knowledge itself".

10.   Teacher librarians are available to students outside class lesson time to assist with research and information needs. Recess and lunch times and, for seniors on study periods, the availability of a teacher librarian to assist them with school work is an indirect yet vital way in which teacher librarians assist student achievement of educational outcomes.

11.   Teacher librarians provide for resource based learning and as trained and competent teachers have the knowledge of how students learn and learning styles and a knowledge of all KLA syllabuses. Consequently, we are in a position to purchase and provide resources that meet students' diverse academic ability and diverse learning styles. The school library is the only place where diversity of resources to match each learner is available. By ensuring the intersection of student information needs to resources, teacher librarians enhance student achievement of outcomes.

12.   Teacher Librarians promote and monitor the Premier's Reading Challenge (NSW) in schools. We do this because we value promotion of reading as an enjoyable experience and understand how this enriches student's lives.

13.   When purchasing resources the teacher librarian is able to match resources to the curriculum and to the students of the school. Our role in selecting resources to support our school's individual context and emphases, including digital and traditional format resources, is unique. Our knowledge of learning styles, diverse academic abilities and various syllabuses makes us indispensable in the developing both a physical and virtual collection. We keep up-to-date with what is available both in print and on the internet and provide colleagues with accurate, current and relevant resources to ensure our students have resource equity. Teacher Librarians are uniquely qualified to match students to resources and work with teachers as the resource manager. This is the only place in the school where this happens.

14.   Teacher librarians know the trends and tastes of our students and are able to guide students enriching their reading experience. Who else in the school will promote this broad knowledge of literature and wide reading? Who else promotes reading so effectively and widely in the community?

The factors influencing recruitment and development of school librarians

1.   Following recent events, such as the non-replacement of the Teacher Librarian at Loftus Pubic School, there is widespread concern over the future of our profession. What are the prospects for permanent employment? Is the teacher librarian position safe? Most teachers who decide to study for their Masters Degree in Education (Teacher Librarianship) do so whilst still working as teachers and currently have no financial assistance from the Department. If we are to continue to attract and support experienced teachers to become qualified in this valued professional position then we support the return to the provision of scholarships. The one year full time paid scholarship for qualified teachers should be reintroduced. The recruitment process should include some form of screening (through interview/referees) to ensure the best candidates are chosen, who have a passion for teaching and for the role of teacher librarian.

2.   The role of the teacher librarian is a unique position within the school and as such can only be effectively held by a fully qualified practitioner. The role is much more than a custodian of books or a library technician and it should therefore be mandatory that the position is filled by a person with recognised teaching qualifications and qualifications in librarianship. The failure to appoint properly qualified teacher librarians leads to a deficit in the delivery of a school's library program. The school librarian's role is so much greater than placing books on shelves, but is an active role in promoting reading and in ensuring students are well equipped with information skills learnt through explicit teaching and integration into KLA programs and research based units of work.

3.   The multifaceted role is covered elsewhere in the submission, but it is important to support the teacher librarians' development of their role as curriculum leaders, information specialists and information service managers by providing adequate time, funding and support for ongoing professional development opportunities.

4.   Teacher librarian's work, in collaboration with teachers to ensure the integration of information resources, is one of our most valued roles within the education profession. We support the need to promote the importance of the acquisition of information skills and resource based learning for students to all new teachers and recommend that an introduction to and understanding of the role of the teacher librarian be included in new teacher training courses.

5.   Every year there are Premiers Teaching Scholarships (NSW) available for teachers to apply for to develop and enrich their skills and knowledge in a particular area. The scholarships cover 16 curriculum areas. There is currently no category for teacher librarians. A category in the scholarships aimed at developing the skills, knowledge and international networks for teacher librarians would be an effective way forward in the development of our profession.

The impact and potential of digital technologies to enhance and support the roles of school librarian and librarians

1. One of the main impacts of digital technologies has been to emphasise the teaching component of our work. There is a clear distinction between information and knowledge and whilst our students have access through the internet to a vast amount of information they need to be taught a variety of specific skills to turn that into effective knowledge acquisition. It is the teacher librarian, through the explicit teaching of the Information Process, who arms students with the skills they need to become effective users of information. Information literacy is even more vital for today's students and we are the teachers who show them how to evaluate information on the internet objectively and effectively. Even though there is an array of new tools available through new technologies, it is the skills that underpin our teaching framework in information skills that remain relevant and even more critical as students are inundated with information.

2. Equitable access to information is essential. Knowledge is power and there is currently a clear divide between public and private school access to databases for all students. There should be government funded access to educational databases, such as Jstor and Proquest to redress the inequitable situation between private and public schools that currently exists.

3. Teacher librarians as educators embrace the use of emerging digital technologies but in order to use these new technologies must be given time and funding to continue to up skill themselves. Our role in this emerging area must be acknowledged and valued by the provision and promotion of professional learning opportunities.

4. The opportunity for teacher librarians to support students' information needs through an online 'e-reference librarian' link to individual school library web pages has enormous potential. Students ability to email questions relating to an information need (e.g. assisting in clarifying a question; providing a search strategy or string) any-time and any-place and having the school's teacher librarian respond to query in a timely fashion is a 21st century online trait. It is essential that each school's teacher librarian is responsible for this, rather than outsourcing the 'e-reference librarian' as she has knowledge of the school's context, the faculty teachers, the research tasks set and knowledge of the students, thus fostering relationships between students and the teacher librarian.

5. Teacher librarians are investigating the role of e books as part of the collection of school libraries. This is further testimony to find that intersection between the real world inhabited by students and the world of the school.

6. Teacher librarians need to develop an individual school library web presence that is dynamic and responsive to the needs of the clientele of each school. Clientele includes both teachers and students.

7. The teacher librarian currently works in collaboration with classroom English teachers on Book Raps through email. The potential for students to share and collaborate through email with students from other schools, other countries as well as with experts in industry is huge. For example at one of our schools there is a focus on biosciences. With the library and the teacher librarian as the centre for the integration, the aim is to develop

online contacts with experts in various parts of the world to become part of the learning community at the school.