

**House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Education and Employment**

School libraries and teacher librarians in 21st century Australia report

Australian Government Response

Introduction

The Australian Government notes the findings of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment *Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians*. The Australian Government believes that every student should have access to a world class education and has demonstrated a commitment to reforming the Australian education system to meet the needs of the digital age, through significant investment in several major initiatives.

The importance of the issues considered by the inquiry is revealed in the 387 submissions, including one from the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). DEEWR's submission outlined the Government's role and the national education reform agenda. As explained in the submission, the Australian Government provides educational leadership and works in partnership with state and territory governments and non-government school authorities, parents, educators and other organisations to provide high-quality teaching and learning to all Australian school-age children.

While the Australian Government plays a leadership role and supports Australian schools, the resourcing of libraries with books, information and learning resources, and the allocation of staff including teacher librarians, is a matter for individual state and territory education authorities. The Committee's report notes this division of responsibility in framing recommendations that fall within the scope of the Commonwealth's sphere of influence.

The Government recognises the important role teacher librarians can play in supporting students and teachers, especially as schools learn to integrate digital resources and technology into their learning programs. Information and communication technology is transforming the way learners and educators operate, learn and interact. Using digital technology, teaching and learning can become personalised and not restricted by place or time.

The Government considers that all teachers need the skills to understand, and adapt their teaching methods to embrace, technology; to improve student learning and prepare students for future study and work in an online world. The Government also believes that students should have access to teachers of the highest quality, including highly qualified staff, in all areas of the school.

Response to Recommendations

Impact of recent Commonwealth Government policies and investments on school libraries

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government partner with all education authorities to fund the provision of a core set of online database resources, which are made available to all Australian schools.

Response: *Agree to consider.* The Australian Government considers there is merit in exploring options for the provision of a core set of online database resources to all Australian schools. This recommendation has financial implications for the Australian Government as well as state and territory governments and would require the agreement of all parties. Implementation of the recommendation would need to be considered in light of other budgetary commitments and priorities.

The Australian Government will consult with state and territory government and non-government education authorities to determine how this recommendation might align with other initiatives regarding online resources for schools.

Recommendation 2

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 by teachers and principals.

Response: *Agree to consider.* The new Australian Curriculum includes a focus on seven general capabilities, including information and communication technology (ICT) competence. Continua of learning have been developed for each capability, to describe the relevant knowledge, understanding and skills at particular points of schooling. ICT competence, along with the other general capabilities, has been embedded where relevant and appropriate in each learning area and can be viewed explicitly in the curriculum online.

Australia is also engaged in the Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills Project, a not for profit collaboration between Cisco, Intel, Microsoft and five founding member countries: Australia, Finland, Portugal, Singapore and the UK. This project has identified ICT and information literacy as a key skill for working in the 21st century. This international project will develop an assessment framework, with teaching and learning resources, to help students develop 21st century skills.

The state, territory and Australian Governments have also agreed to implement the Digital Education Revolution initiative through the Digital Education Revolution National Partnership. This agreement recognises the potential of ICT to transform teaching and learning, and is designed to contribute sustainable and meaningful change to teaching and learning in Australian schools, preparing students to live and work in a digital world.

There is currently a Joint Ministerial Statement on Information and Communications Technologies in Australian Education and Training covering the period 2008-2011 that articulates the Commonwealth and state and territory commitment to digital and information literacy for 21st century learning (see <http://aictec.edu.au/about-aictec/joint-ministerial-statement>).

Agreement to renew the Joint Ministerial Statement and to develop national policies regarding digital and information literacy is a matter for the Ministerial Council. The Australian Government will seek to raise the matter in that forum.

Potential of school libraries and librarians to contribute to improved educational and community outcomes

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority include statistical information about the breakdown of all specialist teachers, including teacher librarians, on the My School website.

Response: *Agree to consider.* As part of its annual reporting requirements a school must provide information on teacher standards and qualifications (as mandated in the relevant jurisdiction) 6 months after the end of the program year (see Schools Assistance Regulations 2009 6.1 (1) (b)) and National Education Agreement Schedule E4 (b)).

The framework for information published on the *My School* website was agreed by all states and territories, and reflects research and expert advice that the most appropriate indicators to publish about schools are those that provide insight into three aspects of a school:

- student outcomes, including literacy and numeracy outcomes;
- the context in which a school operates, including the characteristics of the student intake; and
- the school's capacity, including the numbers of teaching staff and school income.

As an indicator of school capacity the proportions of teachers at each level of expertise will be published once the new National Professional Standards for Teachers are settled.

Reporting on other categories of school staff, including teacher librarians, could in principle provide a further indicator of school capacity, subject to the scope and feasibility of such a collection.

The Australian Government will consider seeking advice from the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) regarding the inclusion of specialist teachers, including teacher librarians, on the *My School* website once ACARA has implemented the current priority list of indicators agreed by education ministers.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government support additional initiatives to promote reading, such as a National Year of Reading. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations should collaborate with the Australian School Library Association, Australian Libraries and Information Association and other education stakeholders in developing these initiatives.

Response: *Supported, initiatives already in place.* The Australian Government is committed to delivering the highest quality education for all Australian students and has engaged states and territories in a challenging reform agenda for literacy and numeracy. The Government already provides significant funding for programs that support improved outcomes in numeracy and literacy, including reading.

The \$540 million Smarter Schools - National Partnership Agreement on Literacy and Numeracy will facilitate and reward the implementation of evidence based strategies. This National Partnership focuses on the key areas of quality teaching of literacy and numeracy, stronger school leadership and the effective use of student performance information. There is a priority focus on primary aged students most in need of support.

To help close the gap in literacy and numeracy levels between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students over the next decade the Australian Government is providing \$56.4 million of national funding over four years to trial and expand intensive literacy and numeracy programs in schools to assist Indigenous students who are not meeting national minimum standards.

The Australian Government has also invested around \$41 million in 30 pilot initiatives that are driving changes at the school level and building an evidence base of what works for

disadvantaged students. Over 400 schools are actively involved in finding out what works to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for students most in need of support.

Further information about these initiatives is available at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/Programs/LiteracyandNumeracy/Pages/default.aspx>.

National Literacy and Numeracy Week is a week-long celebration held in schools across Australia, which has run for over 10 years. As part of the week, schools are encouraged to be involved in three national mass participation activities:

- *Reach for the Stars* – a numeracy activity for all ages, developed by the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers;
- National Celebration of Literacy – a range of age appropriate activities including a mass reading day *Read for Australia*, jointly developed by the Australian Literacy Educators Association and the Australian Association for the Teaching of English; and
- The Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards – a poetry competition open to all Australian students from K-12 and developed by the Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society.

Further information is available at www.literacyandnumeracy.gov.au.

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) has received a grant of \$79,000 (excluding GST) as part of Adult Learners' Week 2011 national grant funding. ALIA will run a short story competition with the theme "*It's never too late to learn...to read*". Over 1500 libraries will publicise the competition and winning stories nationwide. Further information on Adult Learners' Week is available at www.deewr.gov.au/alw.

The Australian Government has provided funding of \$1.318 million to ALIA to directly support the National Year of Reading 2012, comprising \$1.03 million from the Arts portfolio and \$0.288 million from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

Office for the Arts has provided \$1.03 million (excluding GST) for the One Country Reading program and to support the National Year of Reading launch in February 2012 and the redevelopment of the Love2Read website. The One Country Reading program will be delivered throughout 2012 and is designed to encourage children, teenagers and adults across Australia to share a reading experience. The program includes three initiatives targeting children, teenagers and adults.

DEEWR has provided a grant of \$288,622 (excluding GST) through Workplace English Language and Literacy Program Strategic Projects grant funding. ALIA will run a national workplace literacy project, promoting the importance of reading and literacy to employees who are disconnected from formal learning environments. As part of this project, Australian Government funding will be used to promote the National Year of Reading in workplaces nationwide. Further information on Workplace English Language and Literacy Strategic Projects is available at www.deewr.gov.au/well.

The Australian Government will consider how the activities developed for National Literacy and Numeracy Week 2012 can connect with the National Year of Reading in 2012. In addition, the organisations are able to apply for funding which the Australian Government offers through grant or tender application processes for specific, targeted initiatives such as those outlined above.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government initiate an Australian-based longitudinal study into the links between library programs, literacy (including digital literacy) and student achievement, including their impact on improving outcomes for socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

Response: *Agree to consider.* Through the Smarter Schools National Partnerships the Australian Government has committed up to \$2 million to create an Evidence Base of effective literacy and numeracy strategies. The Evidence Base will be a central repository and structure to gather, organise and disseminate information about effective literacy and numeracy

strategies and will put in place the infrastructure and practices that will deliver sustained improvement in literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students, especially those who are falling behind.

The Evidence Base will include effective literacy and numeracy strategies that have been shown to improve outcomes for students. The scope of the strategies to be captured in the Evidence Base encompasses library programs that have been proven to be effective in lifting literacy outcomes for students, including socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

As this recommendation has financial implications it would need to be considered in light of other budgetary commitments and priorities. The Australian Government will explore whether there is additional funding available to conduct a library-specific longitudinal study.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government support promotional activities undertaken by ASLA and ALIA that demonstrate to the school community the valuable work that teacher librarians are doing in respect of e-learning in their schools, including those that highlight their leadership capacity.

Response: *Not supported.* The Australian Government commends the work of ASLA and ALIA and their support of teacher librarians. While the Government acknowledges the work of teacher librarians in respect to eLearning and leadership in their schools, the internal management of schools is the responsibility of state and territory government and non-government education authorities.

The Australian Government does not provide funding for the day-to-day work or promotional activities of any teacher professional associations. Teacher professional associations may apply for funding for projects where appropriate, through grant or tender processes related to specific programs.

From time to time the Government may also contract specialist organisations to work on particular projects, for example the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers and the Australian Literacy Educators Association receive funding to design and lead activities that occur during the annual Literacy and Numeracy Week (refer Rec. 4).

The Australian Government will consider opportunities for cross-promotion of activities associated with the annual National Literacy and Numeracy Week.

Recruitment and development of teacher librarians

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the rollout of the new national curriculum, which is to be made available online, include a component of training for teacher librarians.

Response: *Not supported, initiatives already in place.* The Australian Government notes the new learning opportunities for teaching professionals that will be provided by the online publication of the Australian Curriculum.

The online nature of the Australian Curriculum enables it to be used by all members of the Australian community; allows the curriculum to be linked directly to online resources that support teaching and learning; and provides for maximum flexibility in terms of how the curriculum is accessed and organised. This can provide teachers with a range of online professional learning opportunities.

Through the Digital Education Revolution initiative the Australian Government is making a major investment in information and communication technologies (ICT) in schools. The Government is currently funding several projects that aim to increase teacher proficiency in the use of ICT in teaching and learning to, among other things, support the effective delivery of the new online Australian Curriculum, provide tools for ongoing professional development in ICT and give principals and school leaders the tools and skills to plan for the use of ICT in their schools. This will benefit all teachers, including teacher librarians.

The Online Curriculum Resources and Digital Architecture Initiative aims to facilitate sustainable change in the use of learning technologies by supporting effective integration of digital teaching and learning resources and infrastructure. The Government has provided funding for this initiative through to 2012-13 to support the development of high-quality digital tools, resources and infrastructure. The initiative aims to enable jurisdictions and the broader education community to implement national reform in the schools sector, including the online delivery of the Australian Curriculum.

The ICT Innovation Fund will provide funding of \$16.3 million for four projects that will help teachers and school leaders achieve proficiency in ICT and work towards embedding these skills across the curriculum and teaching practices. The four projects supported will:

- improve the capability of pre-service teachers;
- enhance the capacity of in-service teachers; and
- drive innovation through leadership.

Further information about these initiatives is available at www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/DigitalEducationRevolution/Pages/default.aspx.

Implementation activity under the \$550 million Smarter Schools National Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality includes teacher professional development. States and territories set their own priorities within broad reform targets; some education authorities have explicitly identified support for implementation of the Australian Curriculum as a priority area. In addition, the Australian Curriculum is a priority area for activities funded under the Australian Government Quality Teacher Program, which is providing \$32 million from 2011-12 to 2013-14 for teacher professional development in the non-government sector. Further information is available at www.deewr.gov.au/smarterschools.

Under the *National Education Agreement* and the *Schools Assistance Act 2008*, education authorities are responsible – and funded – for implementing the Australian Curriculum, including identifying and making available appropriate professional learning for teachers as part of their curriculum implementation process. All jurisdictions should have in place a plan for professional support for teachers linked to the Australian Curriculum.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government commission a thorough workforce gap analysis of teacher librarians across Australian schools.

Response: *Agree to consider, initiatives already in place.* As the Australian Government does not employ school staff, it does not have direct access to teacher workforce data. However, the Australian Government realises the importance of workforce data for planning and policy development, across the whole teaching profession, and is already leading a range of national activities to address the need for better teacher workforce information.

One of the agreed reforms under the Smarter Schools National Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality is to improve the quality and availability of workforce data. This includes two key projects: the National Teaching Workforce Dataset and the Longitudinal Teacher Workforce Study. The projects are overseen by the Teaching Workforce Dataset Working Group, comprising representatives of state and territory government and non-government education authorities.

The National Teaching Workforce Dataset will include data about areas of current teaching, teacher supply, teacher qualifications and professional development and teacher need (such as vacancies and shortages). The scope of this project will be able to encompass information about school staff with librarianship qualifications. At this stage, it is intended that an initial National Dataset will be established by the end of 2011, to be revised in the first half of 2012, along with a draft national report on the data contained in the National Dataset.

In addition, the Australian Government has funded two national *Staff in Australia's Schools* (SiAS) surveys, seeking workforce data from teachers and school leaders. The first, conducted in 2006/07, included information about teacher librarians in primary schools. The report is available at: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/Pages/Teacherworkforce.aspx>. A second SiAS conducted in late 2010 includes information about secondary as well as primary teacher librarians. The report of the 2010 SiAS is due to be published later in 2011.

The Australian Government will consider if there is a need for a further workforce data project specific to teacher librarians, and if there is additional funding available.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, through the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, establish a national dialogue, including with tertiary providers, on the role of teacher librarians today in schools and into the future. The dialogue should include an examination of the adequacy of the pathways into the profession and ongoing training requirements

Response: *Agree to consider, initiatives already in place.* In their capacity as the major employers of teachers, all state and territory government and non-government education authorities have processes for monitoring teacher demand and supply in their jurisdictions and identifying workforce priorities. As such, it is primarily the responsibility of state and territory government and non-government education authorities to decide the adequacy of pathways into the teaching profession and ongoing training requirements.

The Australian Government is working with state and territory education authorities to improve pathways into the teaching profession and teacher training through the Smarter Schools National Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality, which targets all teachers with an emphasis on strategies to attract, train, place, develop and retain quality teachers and school leaders.

Agreement to consider further dialogue on pathways into teaching is a decision for the Ministerial Council. The Australian Government will seek to raise the matter in that forum.

Partnering and supporting school libraries and teacher librarians

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government, through the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood and Youth Affairs, discuss ways to enhance partnerships with state and territory and local levels of government to support school libraries and teacher librarians.

Response: *Agree to consider.* The management of schooling in each jurisdiction is primarily the responsibility of state and territory government and non-government education authorities. In this context, enhanced relationships between state and territory and local levels of government would be best pursued at a state and territory and local government levels.

Agreement to consider this recommendation is a decision for the Ministerial Council. The Australian Government will seek to raise the matter in that forum.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government partner with ASLA and ALIA to produce a document that showcases some of the successful partnerships and programs between school libraries and other libraries, and joint-use libraries. The document should be made available to government and non-government education authorities and school principals.

Response: *Not supported.* The Australian Government commends the work of teacher librarians and the successful partnerships between school libraries, other libraries and joint-use libraries. As noted at Recommendation 6, the Australian Government does not provide funding for the promotional activities of teacher professional associations. However, if ASLA and ALIA were to produce a document showcasing successful partnerships the Australian Government would consider endorsing it.