



CASE STUDY

School Libraries and the role of the Teacher Librarian

The role of ALIA

- Assist the sector to create a core set of agreed messages
- Act as a lead body in negotiations with Federal Government
- Give focus
- Provide access to research
- Identify and develop partnerships with other organisations to extend our reach and profile
- Create events and collateral
- Facilitate communication
- Enable all our members to participate

The genesis of this case study dates back over years, as the investment in Australian school libraries and the role of teacher-librarians has been gradually eroded, in attempts by leaders in education to make budget cuts in some areas and fund development in others.

In a 2007 study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Australia had slipped from second to sixth place in reading literacy, out-performed by Finland, South Korea, Hong Kong, Canada and New Zealand.

In May 2009, two studies were published, showing that Australian school libraries were desperately under-funded, while professional staff were under pressure to spend more and more time outside the school library.

Carried out by Edith Cowan University, the Australian School Libraries Research Project (<http://www.chs.ecu.edu.au/portals/ASLRP/publications.php>) revealed that something like 50% of Australian school libraries were trying to do their job on an annual materials budget of less than AU\$10,000 per annum.

The overall picture was one of very dedicated staff playing a critical role in teaching children the information literacy skills that will last them a lifetime but facing enormous pressures.

ALIA and the Australian School Library Association (ASLA) formed an alliance to communicate these findings throughout the library world and to deliver key messages to government. There was extensive coverage of the issue and from this a pressure group was formed, called The Hub (<http://hubinfo.wordpress.com/>), promoting the Campaign for Quality School Libraries in Australia.

The Hub lobbied the Department of Education, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard, and this combination of formal approaches through ALIA and ASLA, and informal pressure group activity, was successful in prompting a Government Inquiry



**Australian
Library and
Information
Association**



into school libraries and the role of teacher-librarians, announced early in 2010.

This campaign occurred at a time when the Federal Government was engaged in the Building Education Revolution – a stimulus package designed to protect Australia from the worst excesses of the Global Financial Crisis and to do so by investing in the education infrastructure.

Our key message to Government was that it was one thing to build new school libraries, but without equipment, materials and qualified staff, they were in danger of becoming empty shells.

The ALIA school libraries group, together with ASLA, the School Library Association of Victoria, and other associations, held regular teleconferences throughout the period of the lead up to the Government Inquiry, which took place at three locations at the end of April 2010 – Sydney, Melbourne and Hobart – followed by Canberra in May. Further hearings will be taking place around the country in July. ALIA gave evidence at the Melbourne hearing and has been recalled to give evidence again later in the year.

All the associations made separate submissions, but the key messages and recommendations were the same, including:

- Funding for research in school libraries to cover statistics, standards for resourcing and staffing, best practice, and resources for the school library community
- The development of a new funding model to ensure that there is a teacher librarian in every school
- Support for professional development opportunities for teacher librarians and other school library staff

ALIA provided members with the opportunity to participate in the lobbying activity, with a template letter available on our website for people to sign and send to their local Federal MP and others with influence. We also asked for signatures for a letter of support and received more than 700 responses.

For the latest outcome <http://www.alia.org.au/schoollibraries/>