

# ALIA Education and Workforce Summit 2008

## Working paper on School Libraries / Teacher-Librarianship

Jointly submitted by  
**Australian School Library Association (ASLA) and  
Master of Learning Innovation (Teacher-Librarianship), QUT**

### Introduction

This working paper addresses key education and workforce concerns relating to school libraries and the teacher-librarianship profession. As a joint submission by ASLA and QUT's Master of Learning Innovation (Teacher-Librarianship) course team, it reports both practitioner and educator perspectives of contemporary and emerging trends. This discussion takes place in a context of social, technical, technological change, which inevitably influences workforce needs and educational expectations and approaches.

In this working paper we respond to each of the five issues identified for discussion at the ALIA Education and Workforce Summit, and also raise further issues of particular relevance to the school libraries sector.

#### 1. Skills and attributes required by employers.

Teacher-librarians can play a significant role in supporting the current Federal government's national education priority – *A digital education revolution*. However, current funding priorities and limited awareness of the knowledge and expertise offered by teacher-librarians are adversely affecting professional employment opportunities for teacher-librarians.

Currently, within a **school-based context**, staffing priorities tend to be associated with general teaching and classroom management, in preference to employing qualified teacher-librarians. Therefore there is a crucial need to consider the broader context of applying teaching and librarianship within a whole school approach so the presence of the school library, supported by appropriate staffing, is strongly evident.

With regard to **school libraries**, highly effective teaching and learning outcomes draw on the dual **combination of teaching and librarianship**. Key teacher-librarian attributes and capabilities, as outlined in *Learning for the future: Developing information services in schools* (2001) include: knowledge of the curriculum, teaching strategies and pedagogical practices, information literacy, combined with resource management, information services and systems. Teacher-librarians can take an active role in and contribute to curriculum design and implementation. In addition, employers often access the information technology skills of the teacher-librarian within the context of ICT planning and integration, development of ICT and online research skills for students, and professional learning opportunities for staff.

**Demand for qualified teacher-librarians is high.** However, economic factors tend to dictate the school staffing allocations and this presents a limited business-oriented approach to the employment of teacher-librarians. Education delivery and teacher to student ratio are the first priorities considered by most employers in the employment of teacher-librarians and the lack of mobility of trained teacher-librarians reduces the supply to rural and remote areas.

**The lack of clearly defined career paths and minimal recognition of dual qualifications** limits the attraction of teachers to undertake a second degree to become a teacher-librarian. Currently, all education systems hold minimal data on staff with appropriate qualifications in teacher-librarianship for principals and relevant employers within the school sector to access to source qualified, quality teacher-librarians.

Staffing definitions as presented in *Learning for the future: Developing information services in schools* (2001) continue to provide parameters for the effectiveness of employing teacher-librarians and other para-professional staff in the school library context.

**A teacher-librarianship graduate** can be expected to support highly effective teaching and learning outcomes by performing multiple roles as outlined in *Learning for the future: Developing information services in schools* (2001). A qualified teacher-librarian is able to combine teaching and librarianship; for example, knowledge of the curriculum, teaching strategies and pedagogical practices, information literacy are combined with resource management, information services and systems. The teacher-librarian should take an active role in and contribute to curriculum design and implementation.

**A minimum expectation for a teacher-librarian** graduate is being able to manage a small library with no additional support and to administer the database, manage resources, develop the collection, teach information literacy and IT literacy skills.

The general feeling within the teacher-librarianship profession is that school leaders have a sometimes **limited and varied understanding of the knowledge and experience of teacher-librarians** and their potential effectiveness on student academic achievement within a school environment. It is essential to raise awareness, among school leadership and the community, to develop a higher consciousness of the skills, attributes, knowledge and expertise of a dual qualified, teacher-librarian through principals' associations, unions, departments of education, state and federal education ministers.

## 2. Defining the industry

'Industry' seems too confined a term to encapsulate the diversity of roles, contexts and endeavours of the LIS profession in general, and especially in a school-based environment. Possible alternative terms might be **'professional information community'** / 'professional information school community'. In defining the 'industry' it is important to acknowledge the special role and professionalism of teacher-librarians within the diverse LIS sector, recognising that school libraries are integral to the 'information-learning' environment.

**A possible uniting concept for defining the wider 'industry' is that of 'information-learning nexus'** which applies at all levels – formal primary/secondary/tertiary; workplace; community; life wide/lifelong learning.. While teacher-librarians are information-learning experts in school contexts, librarians in all information sectors are increasingly involved in the education process.

In reality **the school library extends beyond the 'LIS industry'** since it is integral to the wider school community. Teacher-librarians offer specialist knowledge and experience as educators, and information literacy and curriculum experts within this wider educational context.

*Learning for the future: Developing information services in schools* (2001) offers a **blueprint for teacher-librarianship**. The *ASLA/ALIA Standards of professional excellence for teacher librarians* (2004) represent the professionalism of Australian teacher-librarians. These two documents offer a proven model for ongoing discussion and development of the teacher-librarian and wider LIS profession.

The importance of **support staff** also needs to be included in the defining of the profession within a school library given the integration and use of emerging technologies.

**Evidence-based research / decision-based research is needed to define the** profession and school library staffing school needs. The traditional roles of librarians, information professionals and teacher-librarians need to be constantly reviewed to be flexible and responsive to social/technological/educational change. Perhaps we need an updated statement on how ALIA views the role and professional status of teacher-librarians through a revision of the joint ALIA/ASLA statements, e.g. *Teacher Librarians in Australia*, May 2003.

**Outside perceptions** still tend to focus on the literature / reading / library management and routine clerical tasks such as stamping and shelving books. These are not necessarily negative perceptions, for example, literature and reading (in all media) are essential to the school curriculum. Even so, members of the school community are often not aware that the teacher-librarian is also a qualified teacher and, as a result, is treated as a para-professional.

There has been ongoing debate about the use of **the term ‘library’**. No one brand can be identified; indeed, the notion of a ‘brand’ seems to oversimplify the diversity of information and learning contexts in which LIS professionals operate. This is particularly evident in school libraries with their multiple information-learning perspectives.

Library is a widely recognised and accepted term that implies physical and virtual social space that is associated with information and learning, access and connections. Perhaps we just need to emphasise the dynamic nature of libraries as “information-learning nexus.”

### **3. Recruitment issues – getting and keeping the best people in the library industry.**

The **identification of potential school leaders** needs to be fostered within a school community to encourage entry into a teacher-librarianship course/program. Career path options need to be explored within the school library sector that is reflective of the descriptive language, advocacy and culture of teacher-librarianship as a **curriculum leader, information specialist and information services manager**. Career path opportunities are a reality in the diverse or blended roles in middle to executive management in current school/college/tertiary environments. School library teams are beginning to emerge that consist of a wide range of information professionals – teacher-librarians, IT managers, computer technicians, resource teachers, librarians, library technicians, library assistants and teacher aides, museum/curators/archivists.

**Employers need to provide incentives** (financial, e.g. scholarships, and personal) and study leave to encourage entry into training programs and provide public acknowledgement of the work done by library staff and the vital role of the school library in the school community. Employers also need to understand that the school library is not an environment to appoint personnel who mistakenly see the school library as a place where they can engage in minimal teaching and classroom contact and only

engage in ‘managing’ the library. Should a vacancy arise in a school library, it is imperative the employer seeks the services of a qualified teacher-librarian or a teacher currently undertaking studies in teacher-librarianship.

**Rural and remote locations are often neglected due to the lack of mobility of trained teacher-librarians** and incentives to relocate to these areas. The pre-requisite requirement for entry to teacher-librarianship training, though essential, provides some supply limitations, as most teachers embark on a second degree later in their teaching career. Also, if any formula for staffing of school libraries is applied there is the lack of ongoing, guaranteed employment as a teacher-librarian.

Within the next 5 to 10 years quite a number of **teacher-librarians will retire from the profession** and the likelihood of their replacement is uncertain in some areas. Shortage of trained staff, changing educational structures and learning environments and limited funding will impact on staffing choice.

#### **4. Basic professional qualifications**

Within the school based environment it is still crucial to retain **dual qualification linkages**. For example, undergraduate degree in education with graduate certificate in library/information studies or master’s level qualifications in library studies (teacher-librarianship).

**Professional learning at all levels** needs to foster responsive, flexible learners for the changing social/technological environments. LIS and teacher-librarianship education needs to promote continuous professional learning **beyond ‘training’**. Postgraduate courses might be underpinned by the concept of ‘mastery’ – theoretically based learning that builds on real world experience that widens conceptual understandings beyond standards to support developing professional practice.

**Teacher-librarianship courses should continue to include professional practice in school libraries** - and also non-school environments – in order to extend the professional understandings and opportunities of their graduates. Similarly, students from ‘general’ LIS courses might benefit from some experience in school libraries to support their learning as educators/information literacy specialists.

**Systemic professional development** is crucial for curriculum design, development and delivery as it extends the knowledge base and expertise in a number of related discipline fields, e.g. literature studies, cyber studies, digitally mediated library services.

School library staffing should be within **a team based focus** for delivery of teaching and learning, information management and services within the complex information landscape. Where possible, support for library technicians (library assistants/aides) to upgrade their qualifications needs to be nurtured.

#### **5. What should be the role of ALIA in library education and workforce development?**

**ALIA recognition of LIS and teacher-librarianship courses is important**. The accreditation process offers the opportunity for peer review in a wider professional context and promotes the quality and viability of courses. However, it is important to consider the potential challenges associated with peer review in a competitive tertiary education environment.

From the educator's perspective, **the accreditation process** raises the profile of the course within the parent institution, as well as across the wider professional community. It strengthens the marketing and recruitment potential of the course. From the students' perspective, it represents a quality indicator of the course. From ALIA's perspective, it offers a significant opportunity to demonstrate and provide support for its educator members and to foster professional learning.

The accreditation process might be reviewed and streamlined in the interests of ALIA, the accreditation panel members and the educational institutions involved. The following **recommendations to ALIA** are based on the MLI (TL) course's recent accreditation experience:

- Foster a professional, collegial consultative approach, based on mutual listening and problem-solving among all stakeholders
- Recognise and celebrate diversity among LIS and teacher-librarian courses and their specialities
- Capitalise on the process and its outcomes to foster collaborative research and teaching approaches, and enhance innovation generally within the professional information community
- Treat the accreditation process as an opportunity for advocacy with university senior management to demonstrate ALIA support for and commitment to the staff and courses in library education courses
- Revise accreditation guidelines, outlining the intended accreditation process and outcomes
- Adopt a project management approach that includes: clearly defined evaluation criteria, a shorter timeframe, transparent investigation and reporting, predetermined contingency plan where further information or revisions are required
- Centre the evaluation on the conceptual underpinnings of the course and the alignment of objectives, assessment and outcomes
- Recognise the intensive online nature of courses and their interactive qualities
- Evaluate the course make-up, requirements and duration in line with the Australian Qualifications Framework, recognising that “there are a range of pathways to the Master's degree, with entry based on evidence of a capacity to undertake higher degree studies in the proposed field” [<http://www.aqf.edu.au/masters.html>]
- Respect/acknowledge the internal course accreditation process within institutions, recognising that universities adhere to rigorous quality control and are already accountable to various agencies
- Involve ASLA in the accreditation of teacher-librarianship courses
- Consider joint ALIA/ASLA accreditation

## **6. General observations**

ALIA and ASLA can play a vital role in fostering partnerships, shared experiences and opportunities, enabling a multidirectional flow between libraries, schools and other information environments.

To attract teacher-librarians as members it is essential to review and promote the benefits of ALIA membership, in addition to ASLA membership. For example, ALIA could be more accommodating of teacher-librarians by:

- Recognising and actively promoting specialist strengths and interests of teacher-librarians as teachers, educators, managers and communicators
- Demonstrating the benefits of ALIA membership with regard to teacher-librarian professional and learning needs
- Encouraging inclusion of school and learning perspectives in its publications, events, etc.
- Considering the school year and teacher-librarian workplace commitments when scheduling events.