

Who supports Teacher - Librarians?

The management review of the New South Wales education system, known as the Scott Review, has, as its central philosophy, regionalisation of support structures to schools. Central structures, such as Library Services, Resource Services, and the Film and Video Library, have already been drastically reduced without any regional structures being created in their place. The School Libraries Section (NSW Group) is encouraging wide support to ensure that appropriate structures are established in the new regional arrangements.

The Section has sent a letter to ALIA members in New South Wales and produced briefing notes for lobbying purposes. These have been used by teacher-librarians and other concerned individuals in the preparation of letters to the NSW Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Dr Terry Metherell, the NSW Director-General of Education, Dr Fenton Sharpe, and other education-related personnel, and in meetings with Members of Parliament.

The NSW Section maintains that there are many State-wide functions that are managed most cost-efficiently from the centre, e.g. New South Wales support of the Australian Schools' Catalogue Information Service (ASCIS) database; production of the review journal *scan*; production of teaching resources. Restructuring of such services into a number of small regional units will result either in unnecessary duplication or in the lack of any effective service.

Many other services can be provided adequately from regions, but must be put in place. Since June this year, twelve central library support positions have been removed, but there has been no increase in regional support staff. There are only three full-time and three part-time library support positions across all ten educational regions of New South Wales. One region has indicated that the library consultant's position will not continue in 1990.

Central support

•Consultancy support

Library Services has lost 60 per cent of its staff and its consultancy role has been abolished. Library Services staff can no longer provide support for central and regional in-service activities or answer requests for information from

schools. Previously about 150 information requests were met each week. Enquiries are being referred to regions, but no additional staffing has been provided in regions.

•SCAN

The professional journal *scan*, now provided free to all Government schools, has been reduced in staffing and its frequency will be reduced for the remainder of 1989. Its future is most uncertain. If *scan* continues, it will probably be available only on subscription.

•OASIS

Involvement from Library Services in the development of the NSW Department of Education's automated library package, OASIS Library, has ended. No guidance will be available from Library Services to teacher-librarians on integrating OASIS into existing library and teaching programs. The handbook for school libraries will not be updated to include OASIS and library automation.

•Film and Video Library

Borrowing will still be available, but staff levels have been cut by almost 50 per cent and service to schools will be reduced.

•In-service Library

In-service Library staff cuts will slow services to users, including the circulation of HSC English materials.

•Resource Development

Reductions of staff in Resource Development will limit the provision of curriculum-relevant teaching materials available to schools through Resource Services Sales.

•Curriculum development

Library Services support for curriculum and syllabus development — in terms of providing an information skills perspective and in the production of bibliographies — may often not be possible now.

•ASCIS and NCIN

The New South Wales cataloguing contribution to the ASCIS and New South Wales Curriculum Information Network (NCIN) databases — formerly the largest State contribution — has been significantly reduced through a 20 per cent staff cut. At present, State and Federal Education Ministers propose to merge ASCIS with the Cooperative Curriculum Corporation. The State's position on this is still being considered. If New South Wales membership to ASCIS lapses, schools will be forced to pay higher membership and service charges for an increasingly less-relevant database.

In a letter to the Section, the Minister for Education stated:

'The Australian Schools' Catalogue Information Service (ASCIS) has been of considerable significance for Australian

education and represents a good example of cooperative federalism instead of coercive centralism.

'I am mindful of the significant part New South Wales has played in the establishment and management of ASCIS and do not wish to have our schools deprived of this service. At my request, the Department of Education is therefore investigating ways in which New South Wales government schools will retain access to the products and services of ASCIS.'

While the Minister's assurance of support for ASCIS is significant, the Department of Education should be encouraged to establish and maintain staffing levels that will guarantee a continuation of meaningful input by New South Wales to the database.

Other uncertainties

There are still many other unknowns:

- Who will help new schools establish their libraries?
- Who will provide advocacy for school libraries and teacher-librarians within the Department of Education hierarchy?
- Who will provide liaison with tertiary institutions and ensure that trainee teachers are aware of the importance and role of school libraries?
- How will library considerations be incorporated into school building codes and other resource provisions to schools?
- Who will liaise with tertiary institutions about courses for teacher-librarians?

No moves have been made to provide additional funding or consultancy staffing in regions or to schools to compensate for the losses outlined above.

Loss of support to teacher-librarians will mean:

- the availability of their time for cooperative teaching activities will be reduced;
- their skills in cooperative teaching will not be developed or refreshed;
- their ability to meet the information needs of classroom teachers and students will be reduced;
- untrained teacher-librarians (who form the majority) have no assistance.

Teacher-librarians provide valuable support for their classroom colleagues and the students in their schools. The NSW School Libraries Section is asking the question 'Who supports teacher-librarians?'

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