

Politics with

The closure of Queensland government libraries and job losses in others, together with funding cuts on the horizon for Victorian TAFE libraries, have dominated the headlines for a couple of months.

Of course, these are not the only challenges the sector faces. Right across Australia, library and information professionals are feeling the pinch, but it's questionable whether saying so in a public forum will be helpful or not. If we suggest that many government libraries right across Australia are under pressure, there's a danger that we will let individual state governments off the hook, "we're only doing what everyone else is doing".

In October, we worked with members in Tasmania, Victoria, Queensland, and New South Wales, helping

to craft business cases, articulating the value of what they are achieving, and writing to back up their position on a particular issue. Often, our members need a third party to say something that, as employees, they are unable to say themselves. We are also able to pull in other supporters – retired members, associations representing user groups, and international organisations with an interest in the field.

Our members join ALIA because together we are stronger, and it's important that we use this strength to support each other. The team at ALIA House and our state and territory managers are just a phone call or an email away. If you have something you would like our help with, please get in touch.

ALIA calls on the Victorian Government to stop short-changing TAFE students

In May 2012, the Victorian Government announced \$300m in funding cuts for the state's TAFE sector.

This comprised \$130m in cuts per student contact hour (down to \$1.50 for some courses, compared with a national average of \$12.60), and \$170m from the abolition of the 'full service provider' allocation, which pays for student support services, including disability support, counselling, learning support – and libraries.

The cuts will force TAFE management boards to make tough decisions about how they allocate their reduced funding.

ALIA and the Victorian Association of TAFE Libraries (VATL) swung into action, releasing a prospectus and media release detailing our concerns, particularly in the following areas:

- (1) Any reduction in the number of library technician courses available in Victoria.
- (2) The impact of increased fees on current and future library technician students.
- (3) The likely impact on investment in TAFE libraries.

Our prospectus details the importance of LIS services to all students – not just those attending TAFEs. It reiterates our position that library and information professionals play a vital role in lifelong learning, and that libraries themselves are a safe, neutral, third space where anyone can come and learn.

Our media release included a number of responses from TAFE students, worried about their future and the future of their education:

"At the moment I feel we don't have as many

books as other TAFE or university libraries, I worry about the future with resources here. Compared to other places, we only have a couple of books for the number of students, it's so inconvenient for me to have to travel to borrow these books somewhere else. When I heard about the funding cuts, I knew resources would be the first thing that would go."

"We need the library. If the resources are not there, lots of people will just give up on education."

"Having unlimited and affordable access to the printers in the library became essential to my comprehension skills, as I needed hard copy to hand after I experienced Acquired Brain Injury as a result of several strokes. On occasions, librarians and support staff needed to physically turn the computer on and off for me when I couldn't even remember how to do that."

The prospectus and media release also raised fears about library technician courses, most of which are currently run through TAFEs. Cutting funding to support these courses – and removing the support of important resources – will directly affect the future of LIS education and may detrimentally affect the affordability of courses: that is, students may not be able to afford to become library technicians, and even if they can, they may not receive the education they need.

Our prospectus also reminds readers that the cuts are in direct contrast to the outcomes called for in the Kangan Report – a report that set the baseline for the development of the modern TAFEs. The Report

a capital P

describes Library Resource Centres as central to the delivery of vocational training.

The Report also noted that TAFEs should be different from, but not less than, universities, and that technical education should be valued as an alternative. However, the cuts proposed by the Victorian government will bring the TAFE numbers to a new low. These are our killer facts:

Library staff per student:

- Universities: 1:352
- TAFES: 1:793

Library expenditure per student:

- Universities: \$462:1
- TAFES: \$26:1

We are not suggesting that TAFE library staffing and expenditure should be on a par with universities. We are saying that the disparity in the number of library and information professionals and in the funding is at a level that means the government is seriously short-changing TAFE students.

In the prospectus, we state that this is an issue of social justice and we issue a joint call for a review:

The Australian Library and Information Association, representing more than 5500 library and information professionals, and the Victorian Association of TAFE Libraries, representing library and information professionals working in the state's 74 TAFE libraries, support the call for a review of the \$130m in reduced funding for courses and the reinstatement of the \$170m full service provider funding.

We have offered our support to the management boards of TAFE institutes and dual sector universities in their efforts to maintain funding for this vital student, teacher, and community resource, and we have urged them to maintain their provision of affordable courses for library technicians.

ALIA members and interested parties can get more information from the contacts below, and we will be keeping you up-to-date as developments occur.

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