Submission by SLANSW providing feedback on
Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a future school curriculum
NSW Curriculum Review Interim Report (NESA, October 2019)

The School Library Association of New South Wales (SLANSW) is a professional body whose mission is *"to promote the professional interests of teacher librarians and support staff in school libraries to equip students to become digital citizens and lifelong learners."* This submission is for and on behalf of this association.

The visionary interim report, *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion: Designs for a future school curriculum* (NESA, 2019) proposes much-needed and sweeping changes to the NSW curriculum. It recommends reforming content, particularly to reduce focus on it; restructuring curriculum and assessment, particularly to allow flexibility and foster high expectations; and reforming the senior curriculum to reduce focus on ATAR, and to introduce a major project that all senior students will attempt. Alongside these reforms is a focus on the skills that students need to function effectively in the workplace, such as deep understanding and applying knowledge.

The report is a blueprint for change that teacher librarians in NSW will be enthusiastic about, as the skills of deep understanding and applying knowledge across the curriculum are the ultimate product of inquiry learning, and the skills identified in the interim report, such as "critical and creative thinking, using technologies, interpreting information/data, collaborating and communicating" (NESA, 2019, p. xii) as well as reading and literacy, are skills that teacher librarians are highly qualified to teach.

The report also cites research providing evidence of the importance of inclusive, supportive learning environments for student well-being and success, and the benefits of collaborative learning environments in supporting teamwork, problem-solving and cross-disciplinary inquiry (pp. 45-46). For decades, school libraries have been utilised as a communal inclusive learning

environment for school communities and were one of the key infrastructure builds and/or upgrades as part of the Commonwealth-funded [Building the Education Revolution (BER)](#) (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008-2009) to improve the quality of Australian schooling. A thorough reading of the report, however, reveals no mention of school libraries or teacher librarians in contributing to the proposed curriculum reform, providing inquiry and project-based learning environments, resourcing a much-changed curriculum, or supporting student learning across the curriculum.

The expertise and role of the teacher librarian

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and Australian School Library Association (ASLA) joint [Statement on Teacher Librarians in Australia](#) (July 2016) clearly defines the expertise of teacher librarians (with formal qualifications in school librarianship *and* classroom teaching) and outlines the key roles of teacher librarians in learning and teaching, management, leadership, as well as collaboration and community engagement. More specifically these roles include:

- Designing and teaching learning activities across the curriculum with a focus on literature and reading promotion, literacy, digital and information literacy, inquiry--based learning, information and communication technology (ICT) integration and resourcing the curriculum.
- Providing physical and intellectual access to information and ideas, including library facilities, material resources and pedagogical programs and services physical and digital
- Managing the school library's physical and digital learning spaces where reading, inquiry, research, thinking, imagination and creativity are central to learning and teaching
- Leading and providing services and programs developed collaboratively with the principal, curriculum leaders, teaching colleagues, members of cultural, linguistic, indigenous and other unique groups within the school community.
- Being future-focused with an appreciation of emerging trends in education, technology and librarianship, which informs collaboration with, and professional development of teachers.

- Engaging with community through programming, collection development and outreach efforts that welcome diverse cultural, linguistic, indigenous and other unique groups into the school library's physical and digital spaces, collections, programs and services, and liaising with other libraries, information services, groups and individuals in the broader community to help support and implement the school's mission.

(Adapted from ALIA/ASLA, July 2016)

The need for specific recognition of school libraries and teacher librarians to help foster deep understanding and facilitate the application of knowledge is reinforced by the NSW Department of Education's Library Policy - Schools (2019), which states: "Teacher-librarians collaborate with teachers in planning, implementing and evaluating teaching and learning programs, including integrating Information Communications Technology and literacy" and "provide students with opportunities to develop information skills and to use these skills competently and with confidence for lifelong learning."

The above role statements and policy are underpinned by a compelling body of research that highlights the contributions made by school libraries and teacher librarians to facilitate the development of multiliteracies in young people that not only enhance academic achievement (Curry Lance & Kachel, 2018), but also enable full and effective participation in society (Freebody, 2013). To this end, teacher librarians working in well resourced libraries with diverse physical and digital collections are well positioned to assist young people to become adept interpreters, managers, and producers of multimodal texts through their capacity to collaborate with teachers to resource the curriculum and by promoting recreational reading in students (Merga, 2019).

Given the vision and purpose of SLANSW members closely reflect the long-term vision of the NESA Curriculum Review to design and implement a curriculum that can *"nurture wonder, ignite passion and provide every young person with knowledge, skills and attributes that will help prepare them for a lifetime of learning, meaningful adult employment and effective future citizenship"* (NESA, 2019, p. x), our Association considers the acknowledgement of the role of school libraries and contribution of teacher librarians in the proposed vision for the future of education in NSW as necessary. SLANSW offers the following guidance, therefore, as to how the above omissions could be addressed in the Final Report of the Review, with specific feedback relating to sections of the Interim Report.

Reforming the content of the curriculum: **Introducing an inquiry learning model to support cross-disciplinary learning and learning progressions**

All Australian schools currently have teaching units focused on inquiry, which include a research component and require that students receive information literacy instruction. Inquiry is already embedded in the General Capabilities of the Australian Curriculum, particularly in the Critical and Creative Thinking capability, and in the Inquiring strand of "identifying, exploring and organizing information ideas". The emphasis in the Interim Report (NESA, 2019) on the development of critical skills for deep understanding and applying knowledge further highlights learning by inquiry. It is our contention in this submission that early choice of an inquiry learning model in schools, to be applied across the school in an incremental fashion, led and facilitated by teacher librarians, will facilitate the senior project and the gradual development across each school of the critical skills so sought by this report (NESA, 2019).

Currently, inquiry skills are to be found at all levels in the syllabi of the Australian Curriculum, in outcomes/ content descriptions. Lupton (2014) notes, however, that:

> "elements of inquiry learning are not aligned across subjects and year levels and have some glaring omissions ...and it is ...apparent that the general capabilities do not necessarily align with the subject areas, and that the subject areas do not necessarily align with each other".

Lupton's conclusion, from her analysis of the Australian Curriculum, was the lack of an across-the-curriculum approach to inquiry learning. The NSW Department of Education, however, has a curriculum support document, [Information skills in the school: Engaging in construction knowledge](#) (2015) that provides teachers and teacher librarians with a scaffolded information process to assist with the teaching of inquiry- and project-based learning tasks in NSW schools. Our Association would firstly like to see this document and other existing documents of relevance be acknowledged in the Final Report as support documents for NSW schools, and secondly, either recommend that this be revised and updated as part of the new Curriculum Review process, or used to inform the development of an inquiry model that is unique to the new Curriculum.

Other inquiry models and processes exist which could also be used to inform the Curriculum Review process, specifically with regard to 21st century/employability skills' or General Capabilities. For example, Bonanno (2015) developed a scope and sequence across the curriculum K-10 aligning the Guided Inquiry Design (GID) process to the inquiry skills and capabilities in the Australian Curriculum, demonstrating the effectiveness of using an

information process or model to provide a framework for inquiry learning in schools. Some teacher librarians in NSW have been working on positioning themselves as guided inquiry practitioners, capable of leading their schools to embed an information process such as GID into the curriculum of their schools - (FitzGerald & Sheerman, 2019; FitzGerald 2019, 2015, 2011; McLean, 2011; Scheffers & Bryant, 2013; Sheffers 2008; Sheerman, 2011, 2013). This is particularly relevant to the proposed reform directions 2 and 3.

Reform Direction 2 argues that to *promote deep understanding,* mandatory 'core' content be identified for each subject that focuses on knowledge, skills and concepts to be developed over a number of years, where core aspects of learning are "incorporated into syllabuses in ways that promote their progressive development over time and accompanied by resources" (p. 78). SLANSW believes the role of the school library and teacher librarian are important contributors to promoting such deep understanding. This could be addressed in the Final Report of the Curriculum Review with the addition of the following considerations:

- Use/adapt an existing inquiry learning model (as identified above) or develop a new inquiry learning model to be integrated within the new curriculum, to help build a common understanding across schools and subject areas of the steps involved in effectively using information to both inform and form deep understanding
- Include research that provides evidence of how schools use inquiry learning models and scaffolded processes to effectively support students' inquiry- and project-based learning experiences, particularly to achieve cross-disciplinary knowledge, skills and values; consolidate learning across the curriculum; and develop a common way of approaching and understanding the development of 21st century skills/general capabilities.
- Information seeking, critical information use, and the transformation of information into understanding needs to be actively taught in a developmental sequence from K-10 such that by the time students reach the proposed senior project level (as per Reform Direction 13), students' experience of an inquiry learning model and scaffolded processes will have been practised and internalised, which ultimately will assist senior students in applying the model, processes and strategies instinctively when undertaking a major project as part of their senior studies.
- Utilise teacher librarians in schools as experts in resourcing the new curriculum, and as teachers of information literacy and inquiry learning, who can provide professional learning for, and collaborate with teachers in designing and implementing inquiry learning projects using the inquiry learning model.

- Recognise and facilitate programs run through the school library which develop literacy skills in both reading for pleasure and reading for understanding using a diverse range of resource types and formats.

Reform Direction 3 calls for designing a new curriculum with greater emphasis on *building skills in applying knowledge*. This is particularly relevant to the work of teacher librarians as they collaborate with teachers and teach students across the curriculum and across year levels. As such, SLANSW believes the role of the school library and teacher librarian should be identified in the Final Report as important contributors to building skills in applying knowledge. This could be addressed in the Final Report of the Curriculum Review with the addition of the following considerations:

- The use of an inquiry learning model extends to the synthesis of information into understanding, that is, the model includes steps that scaffold the development of deep understanding, and to find viable solutions to real world problems.
- Actively foster collaboration with teacher librarians to create a powerful series of inquiry learning projects across the school, arising from the curriculum, which explicitly develop 21st century skills involved in an organised and age appropriate way.
- Use the expertise of teacher librarians in digital learning to design inquiry- and project-based units that integrate appropriate technology solutions to stages of the inquiry process.

Reforming the senior school curriculum: Introducing a major project
This section calls for a more integrated curriculum for the senior years. SLANSW fully supports Reform Direction 13 of the Interim Report which refers to the introduction of a major project component for every student to undertake as part of their senior years of schooling. This specifically requires the application of learning to a complex problem demonstrating deep understanding, and SLANSW believes this new curriculum initiative will require significant support from the school library and the teacher librarian. As suggested above, it would be beneficial for students to have experienced the support of a school-wide inquiry model, with explicit teaching of information and inquiry skills and strategies appropriate to each of the steps of the model from an early age, and for application of that process to reach expert level in the senior years with the major project component.

Skills such as searching for information, bringing critical literacy skills to the task of evaluating the quality and veracity of the information found, extracting what is relevant, sorting it and transforming it into understanding, are developed over time and are not instinctive. Use of the teacher librarian in a planned progression of information- and inquiry-based instruction is critical, so that by the time students have reached the major project stage in senior years, they will have experienced information processes and strategies within the framework of a staged inquiry model in a steady progression from K-10. They will understand its steps, have used and synthesised information and research scaffolds which support each stage of the inquiry, and feel confident engaging with inquiry projects that are complex, open-ended, and cross-disciplinary, with real world applications and implications.

Of particular note, teacher librarians can work with senior students in the context of the proposed major project to:

- Use the scaffolding provided by the steps in an inquiry model and information processes to shape the major project, that is, explicitly plan, deliver and assess the unit of work, using its steps.
- Involve the teacher librarian as an equal teaching partner from the planning, to the delivery, to the assessment of the major project, utilising their understanding of learning with information and through inquiry.
- Consider the resourcing of the major project component of the senior curriculum, with every student in the school investigating a different topic or issue, teachers and students will need to draw upon the expertise of the teacher librarian in locating the appropriate resources for each stage of the inquiry process that students are experiencing, such as providing an overview of resources early in a project, and locating specific, detailed resources in the later stages, which are likely to be very different for every student, or group of students, depending on a range of possible topics from across the curriculum.
- Consider the focus given in inquiry learning models, such as Guided Inquiry's use of inquiry circles, particularly if the senior project encourages working in groups. Guided Inquiry pedagogy has much to offer in addressing common pitfalls in group work, such as uneven balance of contributions from group members, and the expected cries of unfairness that arise from group members.

In conclusion, SLANSW recommends consideration of ideas expressed in this submission, and is available for further consultation as required. As demonstrated through this feedback, teacher librarian expertise is vital to resourcing the very different and wide-ranging curriculum proposed in *Nurturing wonder and igniting passion* (NESA 2019); ensuring students are supported by an inquiry model with which they become familiar over a planned progression; and by actively teaching information and inquiry skills.

We look forward to your response.

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