



Australian Library and
Information Association

Submission in response to the Australian House of Representatives Inquiry into the role of Technical and Further Education system and its operation

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Submitted on behalf of the Association:

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1. About us

The Australian Library and Information Association (www.alia.org.au) is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. On behalf of our 5,300 personal and institutional members, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support.

2. Purpose of our submission

We are responding to the *Inquiry into the role of Technical and Further Education system and its operation*, with the aim of:

- (1) encouraging acknowledgement of the important role of Australian TAFE libraries in supporting VET students, and
- (2) explaining the importance of a VET entry point for library and information professionals.

3. Overview

ALIA welcomes the House of Representatives *Inquiry into the role of Technical and Further Education system and its operation*. In common with other industry associations, we are proud that the Australian TAFE system has had a world class reputation for best practice, and we support any initiative that will help us reclaim our global standing.

Funding cuts have been at the root of many of the problems currently facing the TAFE system. For example, we campaigned alongside colleagues in the Victorian Association of TAFE Libraries in 2012, when the Victorian Government took a \$300 million slice off TAFE funding in the state, with \$170 million of that sum coming from TAFE libraries, student learning, counselling and disability support.

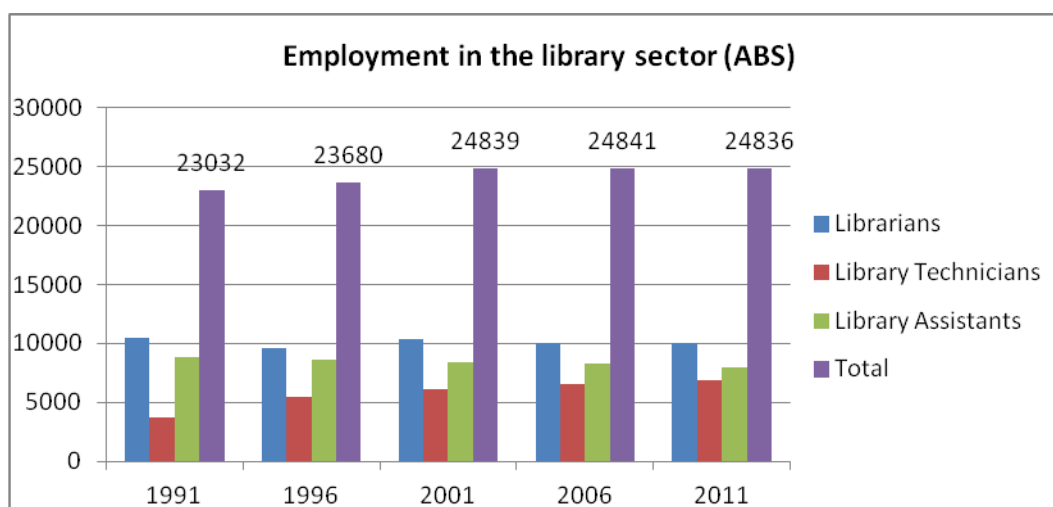
TAFE libraries

We are particularly concerned that federal and state and territory governments undervalue the important and complex role of TAFE libraries in supporting VET courses and the need for qualified library and information professionals to support students, especially with their research and digital information literacy. Without library and information professionals, there is no guarantee that TAFE teachers and students are accessing the very latest information – especially important when it comes to current standards and regulations.

TAFE entry point to the profession

ALIA is a professional association, with two categories of professional members, Associates (degree or higher) and Library Technician (certificate or diploma). Library Technicians play a significant role in the library and information sector and one which has increased over the last 20 years (see figure 1). It is imperative that there remains an affordable, achievable VET entry point to professional status in our sector.

Figure 1: Employment in the library sector



4. Acknowledgement of the important role of Australian TAFE libraries

People can create better futures for themselves and their families by extending their knowledge and understanding. This is where library and information professionals play a crucial part.

The role of library and information professionals is to find, share and connect. To connect people with ideas, books, information, knowledge, resources and the broader community. Our library services enable discovery and innovative thinking, and, as information professionals, we are trusted guides. In a global knowledge economy, our information skills have never been more important.

“The Library Resource Centre has a major role in making unrestricted access to recurrent vocational education a practical reality. Just as the need has been seen to improve the libraries of the universities, the colleges of advanced education and the schools, so it must be seen in technical colleges.” Kangan Report

Working with staff

TAFE library teams work closely with course teachers. We help staff keep up-to-date with the latest advances in their field and we help them identify and source the information and materials they need to deliver current, relevant courses.

We also work alongside learning support officers, disability support officers, social workers and counsellors, to give every TAFE student – school leavers and mature students, from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds – the best chance of success.

Working with students

TAFE libraries enable both supported and self-paced and self-directed learning. Students have access to qualified librarians and are surrounded by the resource materials they require. They have access to electronic resources and to the internet, through library PCs and via wifi. Often, students find it difficult to study at home. In the library, they have the space to work independently or in collaborative groups.

Our library teams help students develop information discovery skills. These will not only help them with their studies, but also be of value as an employability skill and in their working and home lives.

The case for investment in TAFE libraries

The Kangan Report set the baseline for the development of modern TAFEs and it described Library Resource Centres as central to the delivery of vocational training.

“The activities of the college centre should rest on the propositions: first, that college libraries constitute a natural core for their activities; second, that the quality of the learning process is strongly influenced by the range and quality of services available in or from resource centres; third, that to the extent that colleges are prepared to accept a substitute for the traditional formal teaching environment the central resource centres will grow in importance for self directed learning.” Kangan Report

Libraries were a focus of 10 of the 31 recommendations of the Kangan Report, and the Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education (ACTFE) recommended that at least 10 per cent of the recurrent expenditure grants for the states be allocated to training professional library staff and providing library resource materials and equipment.

It was intended that TAFEs should be different from, but not less than, universities.

*“Technical and further education has too often been thought of as something different from a tidy, mainstream of education – primary, secondary and tertiary. The proper perspective for the fourth quarter of the twentieth century is for technical and further education to be seen as an alternative – neither inferior nor superior – to the other stream of education, but so organised as to enable interchange without personal disadvantage.”*Kangan Report

However, TAFE libraries are poor relations compared with their university counterparts and there is a danger of TAFE students being further short-changed if investment in TAFE libraries is reduced (see figure 2).

The Australian Library and Information Association and the Victorian Association of TAFE Libraries have stated:

“We believe that TAFEs should be funded by government to provide people from diverse backgrounds with equal access to job-related training, without putting in place barriers in terms of reduced choice, financial hardship and lack of essential support.”

Figure 2: Comparison of TAFE and university library statistics (2010)

	Victorian TAFEs	Victorian Universities		Total library budget (\$)	Total students
Number of institutions	18	8	TAFE totals	11,421,311	433,240
Number of libraries	74	61	Average library budget amount per TAFE student \$26.36		
Number of librarians FTE	289	422	University totals - expenditure	180,462,545	392,583
Number of library technicians FTE	176	321	Average library expenditure per university student \$459.70		
Total qualified information professionals FTE	465	743			
Other library staff FTE	81	372		Total staff	Total students
Total library staff	546	1115	TAFE totals	546	433,240
Number of staff FTE	14,456	24,140	Staff student ratio 1: 793		
Number of students	433,240	392,583	University totals	1115	392,583
Total library customers	688,314	416,723	Staff student ratio 1:352		

5. The importance of a VET entry point for library and information professionals

We fear that under resourcing of TAFE will lead to the lowering of standards in vocational education. Each year, more than 2000 students graduate from TAFE Certificate and Diploma courses as Library Technicians and they go on to play a vital role in library operations.

Library Technicians have a strong focus on customer service. Typical tasks include assisting with loan and reference queries; database searches; maintaining library resources, records and systems; arranging inter-library loans; developing programs; undertaking copy cataloguing and classification. At a senior level, Library Technicians will supervise other staff and can manage a small library or head a section in a larger one.

We rely on high quality qualified professionals to perform these roles, and our sector provides employment and opportunities for individuals who may not have had the encouragement or the funds to undertake a university degree. For many, it is a second or third career choice. For some, it is the start of a learning journey that goes on to see them achieve a Masters, further enhancing their career prospects.

It is essential that there remains a VET entry point into library and information studies, both for the industry and for the students.

5. In conclusion

We welcome the Australian Government's commitment to investigating the best way forward for the TAFE sector.

We are pleased to describe libraries' contribution in this field, and seek the Standing Committee on Education and Employment's acknowledgement of the important role TAFE libraries play in supporting VET teachers and students.

We hope that this inquiry will result in a stronger, better resourced VET sector, which can produce the professionals we need for the continued success of the library and information sector.