



Australian Library and
Information Association

FUTURE OF THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE PROFESSION: **SCHOOL LIBRARIES**

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Australian Library and Information Association

Future of the Library and Information Science Profession: School Libraries

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ALIA FUTURES

*Initiatives for the future of the library
& information sciences profession.*



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ABOUT SCHOOL LIBRARIES

The Australian Bureau of Statistics' Schools Australia 2012 report stated the number of Australian government schools (6,697), Catholic schools (1,713) and independent schools (1,017), giving a total of 9,427 primary and secondary schools.

Almost all schools have a library of some description, but they vary enormously in terms of staffing, facilities and resources. At the lower end, there are schools with a few shelves of books and a member of staff whose responsibility it is to look after them, as part of a much wider teaching or administration role. At the high end, there are flagship library and IT hubs, with more than a dozen members of staff. Several of the team will be qualified teacher librarians. They will have a growing collection of print and ebooks and provide a range of services to students, including safer online experiences, group learning and study spaces, and more electronic resources.

ALIA School Libraries Advisory Committee and ALIA Schools Group (based in Victoria) liaise with the Australian School Library Association and the state-based school library associations to create a united voice for the sector.

Current services for users include:

- Books, ebooks and other resources in print and digital forms, for study and reading for pleasure.
- Fast, safe internet access on library computers, and wi-fi for students' own devices.
- Formal classes and informal learning opportunities for students.
- Quiet study spaces and rooms for group work.
- Resources and curriculum support for teachers.

The role of library and information professionals:

- Teacher librarians are valued members of the teaching community as well as being members of the library team.
- Library staff manage the print and online collections, provide information and help students develop their own research skills.
- Staff ensure all materials and the ways they are used are copyright compliant.

These are just some of the specialist skills library and information professionals bring to their roles:

- Understanding learners and their needs.
- Collaborating with teachers to plan and implement information literacy and literature programs.
- Ensuring the school library collection supports the school curriculum and community.
- Using technologies as teaching and learning tools.
- Creating effective learning environments.
- Participating in the school and wider learning community.



The impact of a teacher librarian

According to research carried out by Queensland University of Technology and the School Library Association of Queensland, published in 2013:

'At schools without a qualified teacher-librarian, school NAPLAN scores were consistently below the national mean score for NAPLAN reading and writing, and one principal relates declining growth in average NAPLAN reading scores to the lack of a qualified teacher-librarian.'¹

Statistics

Figures about the sector are hard to come by. The 2011 report from the Australian Government Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians stated:

'One of the dominant themes that emerged is a lack of hard data, especially collated at the national level relating to staffing issues, specifically determining the actual numbers of teacher librarians in Australian schools, their qualifications, and part-time/full-time status.'²

An Australian Council for Education Research survey of staff in Australian schools, carried out in 2010, suggests that there are some 5,600 library teachers in primary schools and 2,900 in secondary schools, making a total of 8,500³.

1 www.slaq.org.au/sites/default/files/School%20libraries,%20teacher-librarians%20and%20their%20contribution%20to%20student%20literacy%20in%20Gold%20Coast%20schools%20-%20Research%20Report.pdf

2 www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=ee/schoollibraries/report.htm

3 research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1013&context=tll_misc

THEMES

THEME 01

THE MOST IMPORTANT JOB IN THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SECTOR

Children's relationship with libraries is often shaped by their relationship with their school librarian. An inspiring, gifted professional in the school library will ensure that students go on to use libraries throughout their lives. However, it is easy to lose sight of this under the day-to-day pressure of managing a school library. There is never enough time and never enough money.

Cutbacks in state schools mean that many children will not have the opportunity to develop a love of libraries, books and reading for pleasure, and this will potentially impact on the literacy levels of future generations. In its submission to the ALIA Future of the LIS Profession consultation, the Australian School Library Association cited uncertainty of government commitment to school libraries as one of the top three issues facing teacher librarians and school libraries. The other two were teacher librarians' ability to address the National Professional Standards of Teachers, and information literacy and digital citizenship in the Australian Curriculum.

Everybody knows the sports master in their school,
but do they know the librarian?

— DARWIN ALIA FUTURE OF THE LIS PROFESSION WORKSHOP NOTES

THEME 02

DEEPENING THE DIVIDE

For independent schools, the library is often a symbol of the institution's commitment to knowledge and learning. It is a part of the school that is a source of pride to the school community and contributes to its competitive edge. As a result, the library benefits from investment in the fabric of the building, in the staffing levels, in the collection, and in the technology available to students.

By contrast, in state schools, the library can be seen as a cost burden, despite the important role it plays in supporting literacy, study and research skills. Where there is this difference in attitude, and therefore support and investment, it deepens the divide between young people in government schools and those in independent schools, and increases the likelihood of poorer educational outcomes. Ironically, many government schools benefited from new school library facilities as part of the Building the Education Revolution program, but don't have the staff and collections to make them work effectively.

Schools need to keep supplying resources and that won't change, but the technology will change extensively. How do we support all the devices and keep up with all of them?

— ALIA FUTURE OF THE LIS PROFESSION REGIONAL TELECONFERENCE WORKSHOP NOTES

THEME 03 EASY AND REWARDING

'Google bashing' was one of the colourful terms used to describe students' (and teachers') simplistic search skills, in the SCIS School Library Survey 2013. Respondents were concerned that the quality resources in the school library were being bypassed in favour of internet searching. Part of the reason for this was that library resources could not be accessed outside the school. In the very near future, school libraries need affordable technology solutions that make it as easy for teachers and students to search the library catalogue as it is for them to put keywords into search engines — and ultimately more rewarding.

Also, in common with public libraries, school libraries seek an ebook platform that feeds directly into their library catalogue, without requiring students to search in different places.

THEME 04 DIGITAL SKILLS

Managing digital resources effectively was another concern raised in the SCIS survey — audiobooks, subscription databases, digital videos, apps, ebooks and other items — all require new skills. There is the further dynamic of the rapid growth in BYOD (bring your own device), which brings its own challenges. Training and professional development will be a continuing focus for school library staff.

THEME 05 PARENT POWER

Outside of government, parents will be the most effective advocates for investment in school libraries and it will be essential for the future success of school libraries to raise awareness of what can be achieved with a well-staffed, well-resourced library. ALIA and school library association partners created the What a Difference a School Library Makes⁴ campaign in 2011, providing parents with a 10-point checklist to judge whether their children's school was investing where it counts. We also collaborated on Project 13⁵, an initiative focusing on the role school libraries play in promoting cybersafety.

4 schoollibraries2011.wikispaces.com/checklist+for+parents

5 www.alia.org.au/advocacy-and-campaigns/advocacy-campaigns/13-project-0

THEME 06

COMPETING FOR ATTENTION

While the overriding branding is that of the school, the school library also needs to create a distinct identity through its service culture, key messages, tone of voice, imagery, physical and online presence. Young people are sophisticated consumers and libraries compete for their attention, especially in the internet environment, with high profile brands such as Google, YouTube and Facebook. School library staff will need to take a more proactive approach to developing and marketing their brand.

ACTIONS ARISING

Government support for school libraries will be essential if we are to develop information and digital literacy skills, and a love of books and reading, in future generations. This is the single biggest challenge facing school libraries going forward.

ALIA

- We will work with educators and employers to ensure that professionals graduating from LIS courses have the skills needed to work in tomorrow's school libraries.
- We will continue to develop and deliver PD and training opportunities to support school library staff, especially around digital resources.



Advocacy

- We will actively advocate for federal, state and territory governments to make clear commitments to well-staffed, well-resourced libraries in every school.
- We will leverage 'parent power' to get our message across to government, education departments and principals.



Professionals and their organisations

- Library managers need to work with vendors to find technology solutions that allow for easy access to library resources.
- School libraries need to be smarter about their physical and online branding.



