For secondary school librarians the prime objectives are reader development and the growth of information skills. It seems obvious that librarians make a huge difference to student outcomes, but the point is made that schools are driven by data and that decisions, especially with regard to budgets and staff, are often based on evidence of improvement, achievement and impact within the school community. Generally, library quantitative evidence is not of this kind – it tends to relate to circulation statistics, departmental usage, additions of resources and database purchases - while the decision makers are looking for impact and outcomes.

Lancaster describes his method for meeting this need. He begins each year with data collection on Year 7 students to set up a tracking sheet, with basic personal details and records of achievement (or otherwise) from their previous schools. Sometimes there will be a behaviour or effort notation. Reading for Year 7 in the first term is for enjoyment, and one hour per week is spent in the library involved in engaging activities using creative writing, constructing book trailers and the like. These lessons and conversations in reading for enjoyment lessons build up soft data which are entered in the tracking sheet. A formal reading test is applied half way through the term. Attitudes to reading and motivation are assessed frequently; this does not necessarily correlate to reading ability but is also important. Thus both soft and hard data are entered into the sheet, allowing positive and negative changes to be readily visible. Attendance is also recorded together with short interview reports.

The variables need to correlate to the school’s mission and objective statements so that reporting conforms to that of the rest of the school. Thus results have an in-school context which is meaningful to others in any area of the school. The librarian has evidence to show the library’s contribution to raising attainment and achievement alongside other departments of the school. The author recommends scaffolding charts in pyramid form. A large number of intervention strategies might have already been used (e.g. provision of specific genre resources, audio books, graphic novels, easy reading novels, etc), but new needs will be highlighted. By centralising the data it becomes evidence indicating patterns of work and gaps in meeting some needs. Later programmes in the year involve a focus on non-fiction and an introduction to library technologies such as Kindles, iPads and other digital systems, and these different programmes often produce different results.

The work contains a sample Year 7 Reading Survey form, an assessment sheet for student attitudes to reading, a scaffolded pyramid with selected variables for recording and a scaffolded pyramid with intervention strategies. The tools offered...
in this publication are extremely practical and worthwhile; and in the current workplace environment where accountability and evidence-based reporting has become a requirement, it offers the librarian highly relevant tools.

Heather Fisher
New England Girls’ School