

School Libraries in South Australia 2019 Census

FACTSHEET

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2019 Census



School Library Association
of South Australia

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The School Libraries in South Australia 2019 Census was commissioned by the School Library Association of South Australia to answer two questions:

- What is the profile of school library staffing in South Australia?
- What are the factors that influence school libraries and their staffing?

Background

The 2011 Parliamentary Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in 21st Century Australia, recommended extrapolation of “links between library programs, literacy (especially digital literacy...) and student achievements.” This Inquiry highlighted the link between library programs and qualified teacher librarians, and learning outcomes, with special reference to digital literacy.

The Census was conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and comprises a literature review of previous research, a review of the public-facing websites of all 728 schools in South Australia and a census directed to the leadership of all primary and secondary schools in the public, private and Catholic school systems in South Australia. All but 50 schools responded to the survey, with these remaining schools contacted by phone to ensure the census was complete.

Profile of school library staffing in South Australia

- 94% of schools have someone to manage the library collection and to select resources, however only 23% of schools have a qualified teacher librarian fulfilling this role
- Staff are delivering library programs and services through a range of models including dedicated library space (94%), decentralised collections and support from community public libraries and mobile library services
- 55% of school libraries are managed on the equivalent of less than a half-time position, with only 19% of library managers funded full time and 26% funded between 0.6 and 0.9 FTE
- As part of their role, library staff are providing include curriculum support to teachers and selection and purchase of learning resources (88%), ensuring a safe place for students (91%) and providing a central learning hub and providing programs to nurture a love of reading (63%)

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Factors influencing school libraries and their staffing

1. School background and funding:

“Research argues that sustained investment in school libraries is essential for the advancement of literacy and better learning outcomes.”¹

A total of 98% of school libraries are funded via the school budget allocation, with 12% of schools undertaking additional fundraising to support their libraries. 20% of schools have actually reduced their budget from the previous year and 62% have maintained the allocation from the previous year.

The 18% of schools with a budget between \$2,500 and \$5,000 tend to be smaller schools with up to 400 students. Only 19% of school libraries have a budget allocation of \$10,000-\$20,000 and these are schools with more than 600 students.

2. Facilities, collections and access:

“The best school libraries have a combination of physical and digital resources in their collection and, consequently, there are a range of physical and digital tasks involved in providing high-quality library services.”²

The majority of schools (86%) indicated they have both a central library or resource centre and also provide access to reading, research and curriculum resources through other models including classroom libraries and digital resources, dedicated senior libraries, teacher reference libraries and multiple copy collections. Just under half of South Australian schools (48%) have dedicated space on-site for library activities and for a third of schools, this space has been under pressure for other uses, with 11% reporting space has been repurposed temporarily and 22% reporting it has been repurposed permanently.

3. Staffing:

“As teachers [teacher librarians] work with individual students, groups and classes to embed information literacy skills and literature-based teaching into inquiry units and class programs. They collaborate with teachers to plan, teach and evaluate these programs. They provide whole school leadership in literature programs that foster a love of reading, as well as information literacy, including digital literacy.”³

While smaller schools tend to have appropriate FTE teacher librarian staffing, 51% of staff managing South Australian school libraries are not library-qualified and 36% of staff are SSO/ESOs with neither teaching nor library qualifications.

Despite bigger schools having more dedicated space for library collections, they tend to be under-staffed, with larger schools (1000-2000 students) having an average of

¹ Softlink, 2018. *The 2017 Softlink Australian and New Zealand School Library Survey*.

² Godfree & Neilson, 2018. School libraries matter! The missing piece in the education puzzle. *Access*, 32 (1)

³ Australian Education Union, 2013. *School Library Staffing Policy*

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1.2 FTE qualified teacher librarians rather than the 2.5 FTE recommended by the AEUSA.

4. A culture of support:

Research indicates that knowledgeable principals who are supportive leaders recognise how libraries can contribute to learning. In effective schools, library managers are a respected and valued member of the school leadership team with the mandate to promote reading and library use, and directly drive school-wide programs to support reading and literacy.⁴

In South Australia, 60% of census respondents rate their library services and staff as “completely supported and backed by school leadership. Only 36% responded that their libraries were effectively funded and only 31% believed their school libraries were effectively staffed.

Where to now?

The School Libraries in South Australia 2019 Census represents the most comprehensive research into school library yet undertaken in Australia. The results indicate school libraries in this state are currently managed by a cohort of dedicated but underqualified staff, managing a complex array of library and information services, often in isolation and at levels below the AEU staffing recommendations.

There are significant challenges ahead, particularly for primary schools with declining enrolments and now with the disruption of COVID-19 and requirement for new approaches and significantly increased flexibility to support students and teachers in a dynamic hybrid learning environment.

Given the concerns raised by this survey regarding staffing and resourcing of school library programs, there is a need to replicate this research in other states of Australia to gain an understanding of national trends and needs to enable schools to meet these challenges.

There is a need to address pathways to qualification to build the cohort of qualified staff available and enable dedicated but unqualified school library staff to attain key competencies to better support their schools and develop their careers.

The School Library Association of South Australia has now developed a three step strategy to address the need to support schools without access to appropriately qualified staff, including advisory roles within the Department for Education, developing accelerated pathways for school staff to upgrade their qualifications and modifications to data collection

⁴ Ofsted, 2006. *Good School Libraries: Making a Difference*. International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2015. *IFLA School Library Guidelines* 2nd edition.

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to allow ongoing monitoring of school library resourcing. The ***Double the Value – Twice the Impact*** strategy is now available on the SLASA website.

Resources

- *School Libraries in South Australia 2019 Census: Executive summary: [link]*
- *School Libraries in South Australia 2019 Census: Full report: [link]*
- *Double the Value – Twice the Impact: How teacher librarians can support education outcomes and South Australia's recovery from the impacts of COVID-19: [link]*
- *School Libraries in South Australia 2019 Census: media release: [link]*

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