Australian Library and Information Association

ALIA VET LIBRARIES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

ALIA TAFE library survey 2019

About this survey

There are 246 TAFE libraries in Australia, supporting VET students in every State and Territory. At the beginning of 2019, ALIA's Vocational Education and Training Libraries Advisory Committee (VLAC), chaired by Brenda Burr, sought feedback about how changes in structure and funding have affected TAFE libraries and the library and information professionals who run them.

TAFE libraries were asked to complete an online questionnaire with 34 questions relating to budgets, staffing, collection formats, library space and size of customers served, library closures, changing user demands and the role of library and information professionals in the VET sector.

The survey ran in March 2019 and followed on from a similar survey carried out in 2016. Where possible, we have shown the results from both surveys to highlight similarities and differences. The 2019 survey data infers a sector reacting to both internally and externally driven circumstances. The survey results show a challenging environment in which TAFE libraries and their staff operate.

This report was produced by the ALIA VET Libraries Advisory Committee, with thanks to the survey respondents.

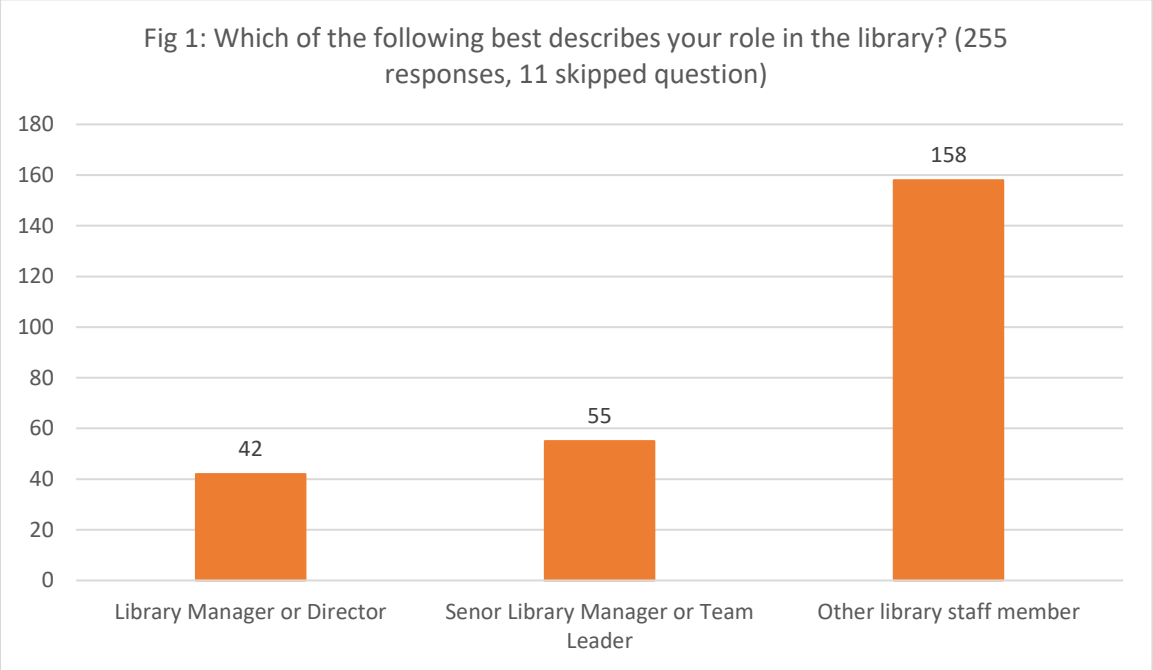
December 2019

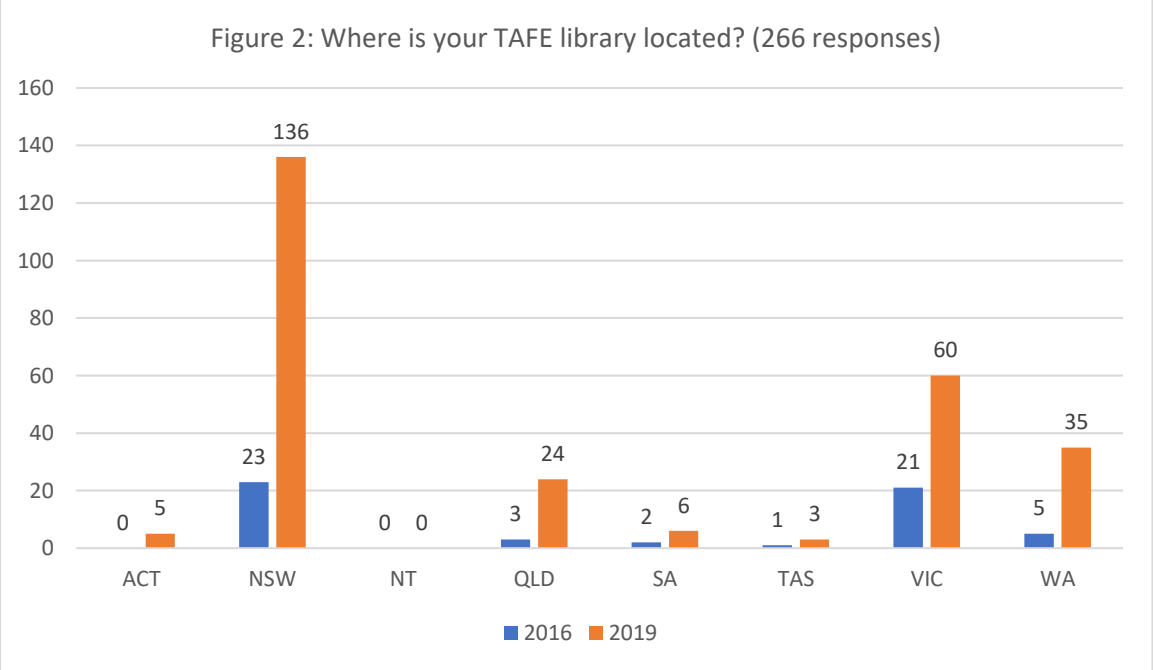
Contents

Respondents 3
Executive summary 4
Size of population 6
Usage 7
Expenditure 10
Major changes 11
Collection format 13
Services 16
Access 18
Spaces 19
Staffing 20
Future changes 24
APPENDIX – STATE BASED COMPARISONS 26

Respondents

In 2016, there were 55 responses from six states, with the ACT and Northern Territory not participating. By extending the survey beyond Library Managers or Directors in 2019, we received more than 250 responses from all jurisdictions except the Northern Territory. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of respondents by role in 2019, while Figure 2 shows the locations of respondents in both 2016 and 2019.





Executive summary

The previous three years (2016 – 2018) had been a period of significant change for TAFE libraries – some of it positive, some of it negative.

Some of the key findings from the survey included:

- 49% of respondents said that they had experienced a major organisational restructure
- 31% noted a new library
- 18% experienced the closure of a library
- 24% experienced the integration of the library with other TAFE services
- 18% saw their existing library refurbished
- 62% of respondents reported a decrease in annual expenditure and only 5% had either matched CPI or seen an increase
- At the same time, the majority of respondents reported new initiatives (55% providing access to new technologies, 44% providing new services to staff and 60% providing new services to students) or increases in support services provided to staff and students (55% reporting increase in number of students supported by one-to-one library support services, 36% reporting an increase in services to staff)
- The loss of positions for qualified staff (librarians and library technicians) was of concern with 31% reporting a loss of librarian positions and 26% reporting a loss of library technician positions and only 6% reporting an increase in librarian positions and 9% reporting an increase in library technician positions.
- More than half of respondents (52%) reported a decrease in access to professional development
- 58% said their role had undergone significant, major or radical change. The changes included an increase in copyright responsibilities (62%) and engagement with teaching and learning. The highest increase was for IT support (97%) and support for new technologies (92%).

Overall, the survey results continued to show a challenging environment, where library staff were doing their best to provide students with necessary services, introduce new technologies, take advantage of the opportunities offered by digital resources and online delivery, but without the investment in people and facilities to make this easy and sustainable.

Comparisons between 2016 and 2019 results needed to be treated with care, as there were many more responses to the latest survey (255 versus 55 in 2016), with this proviso, these were points of interest:

- **Funding appeared to have further declined.** 62% of respondents reported a decrease in annual expenditure (31% in 2016) and only 5% had either matched CPI or seen an increase (14% in 2016).
- **Staffing continued to be a serious concern.** Putting the different qualified positions together, 29% of respondents reported a decrease of librarian and library technician roles in 2019 compared with 31% in 2016, and 8% an increase, compared with 0% in 2016.
- **Demand for services remained high.** Physical visits to TAFE libraries across the country appeared to balance out in the 2019 survey, with a third reporting increases and a third decreases. However, there was a significant increase in one-on-one support for students (reported by 55% or respondents), in usage of electronic resources (54%) and in online visits (44%).

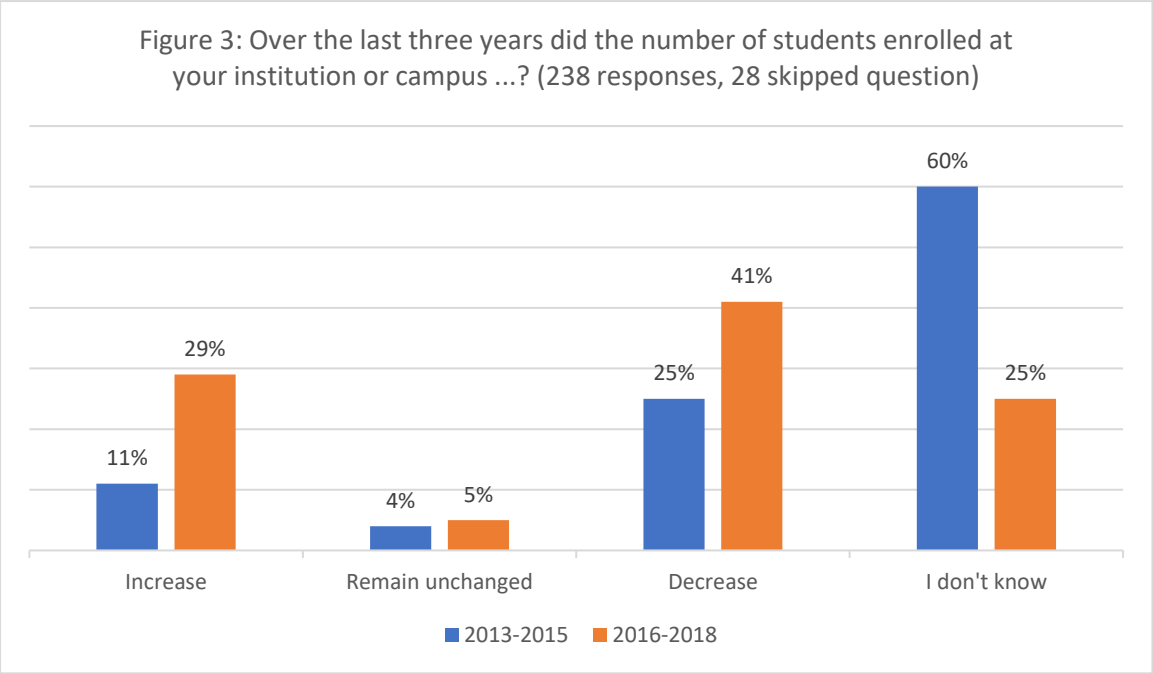
- **Pressure on physical space was a constant.** For 24% of respondents, the library floor area had decreased between 2016 and 2018, while only 3% reported an increase. However, the availability of group spaces balanced out, with 20% reporting an increase and 17% a decrease; the same was true for quiet spaces, with 13% increase and 17% decrease. The differences were broadly reflective of the 2016 survey results.

Looking ahead, more respondents in 2019 forecast a decrease in annual expenditure in the next 12 months (38%) than thought there would be an increase or the budget would remain unchanged (31%). Just over a half of respondents (51%) thought staffing would remain unchanged or increase, and 67% thought library space would remain unchanged or increase.

Size of population

The institutions represented by respondents had mostly seen a decrease in the number of students enrolled in the last six years (figure 3). This was reflective, for example, of the statistics in TAFE NSW *Annual Reports*, with 474,000 course enrolments in 2017-18[1], compared with 543,000 in 2016-2017[2].

NCVER figures also indicate a decrease in VET student numbers in Australia[3]



[1] https://www.tafensw.edu.au/documents/60140/283797/TAFE+NSW+2017-18+Annual+Report.pdf/14fb6103-0b12-3fbe-3bb6-ed57112b6f49

[2] https://www.tafensw.edu.au/documents/60140/76288/TAFE-NSW-2016-17-Annual-Report.pdf/24f6a68f-155e-6bbb-6aa7-8fb12e26e5e4

[3] https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/total-vet-students-and-courses-2018

Usage

While student numbers fell between 2013 and 2018, physical visits were not consistently reflective of this trend (figure 4), and online visits showed a significant increase (figure 5).

Figure 4: Over the last three years, did the number of physical visits to the library ...? (204 responses, 62 skipped question)

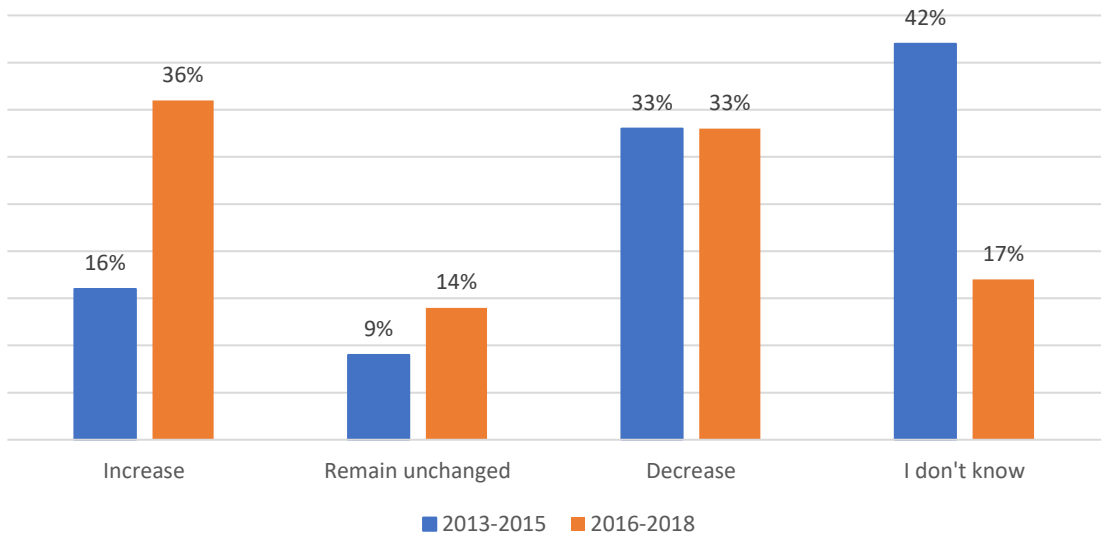
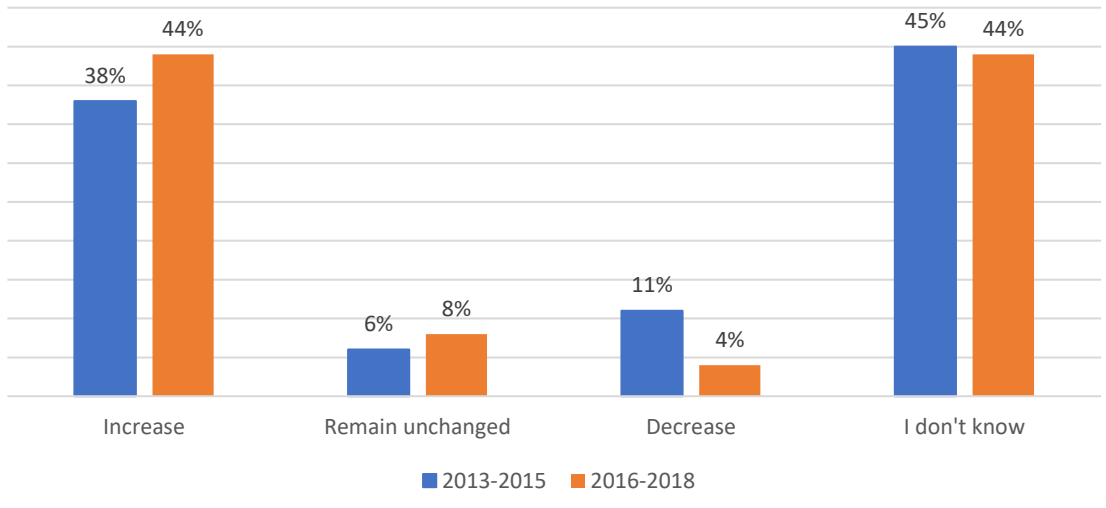
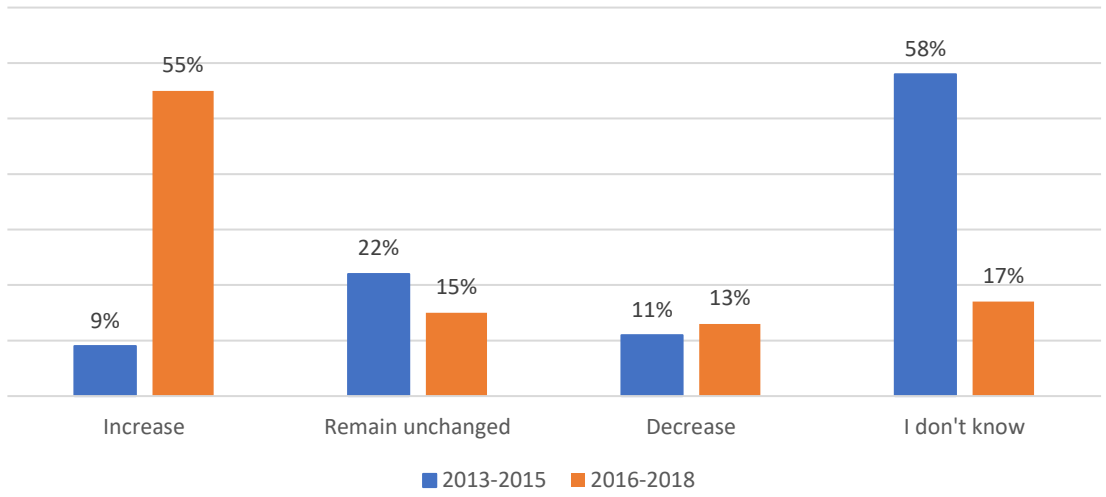


Figure 5: Over the last three years, did the number of online visits to the library (eg websites, online guides, LMS) ...? (204 responses, 62 skipped question)



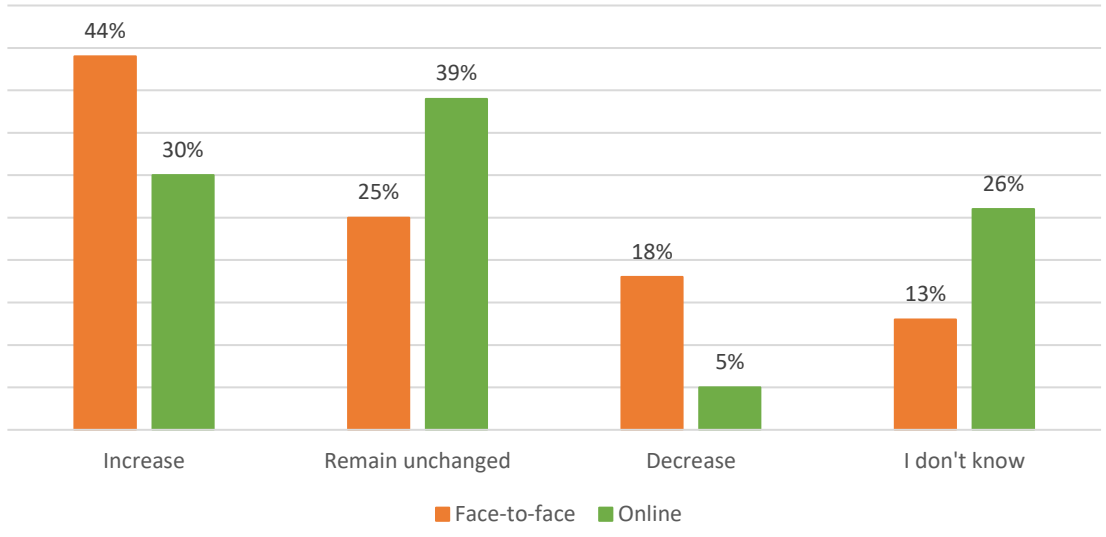
In 2016-2018, there was a significant increase in the level of one-on-one support given to students (figure 6) and in information and digital literacy face-to-face sessions (figure 7).

Figure 6: Over the last three years, did the number of students supported by one-on-one support services (face-to-face, online, chat, etc) ...? (200 responses, 66 skipped question)



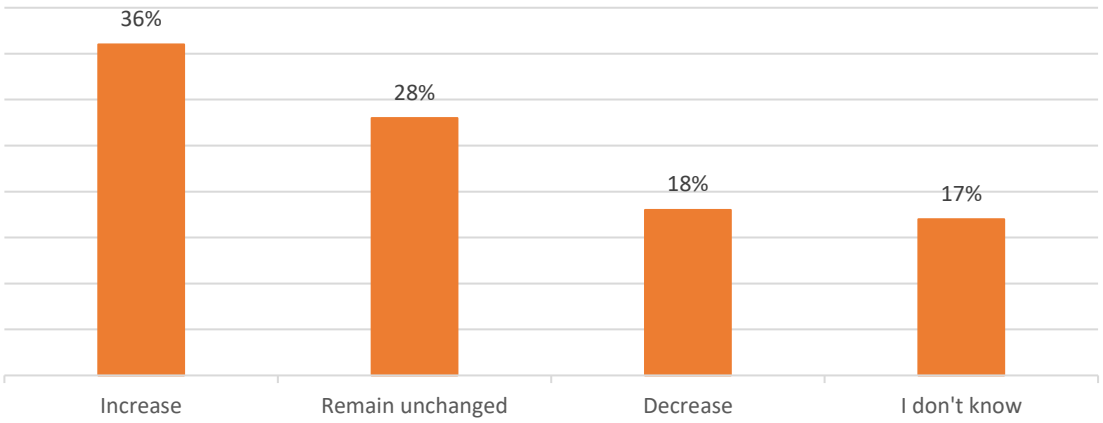
One response included, *"Our Information Literacy program has expanded to include 1:1 technology help as well assessment help. We have also added Digital Literacy sessions to our repertoire of sessions for class groups and individuals."*

Figure 7: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did information and digital literacy training ...? (198 responses, 68 skipped question)



For the last three years, respondents reported an increase in the number of staff receiving support from the library (figure 8).

Figure 8: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did the number of staff supported by services provided by the library (eg liaison, research, curriculum development, copyright, etc) ...? (200 responses, 66 skipped question)



Over the six years, 2013 to 2018, there was a clear decrease in the number of loans of physical items (figure 9) and in the last three years, a clear increase in the use of electronic resources (figure 10).

Figure 9: Over the last three years, did the number of loans of physical items (including books, AV, equipment, etc) ...? (214 responses, 52 skipped question)

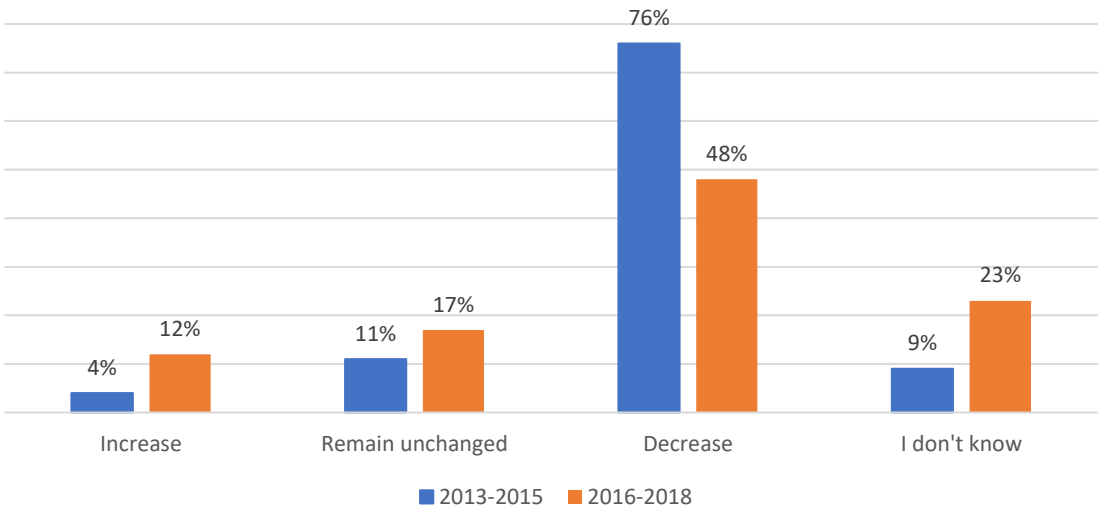
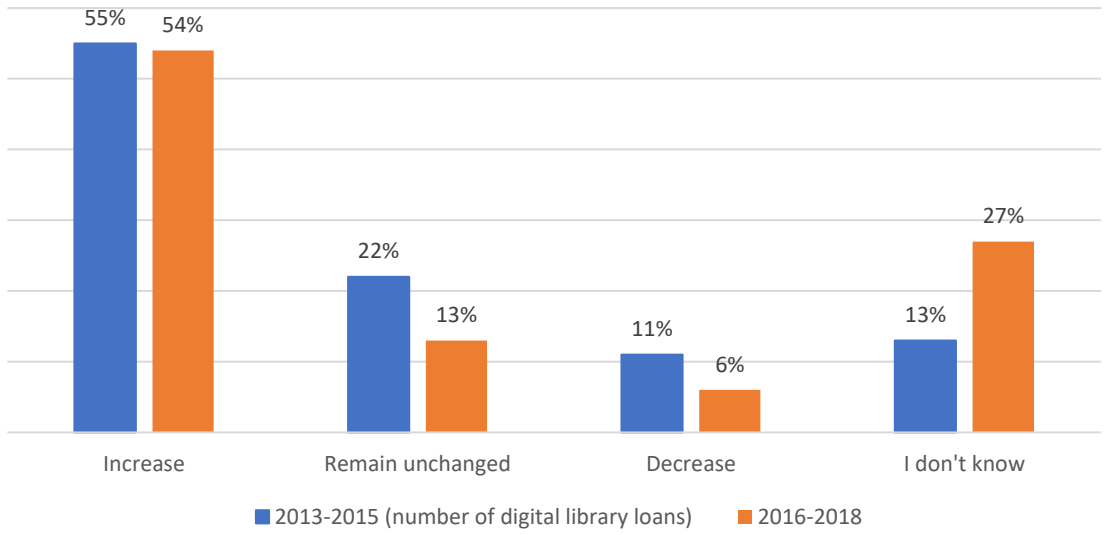


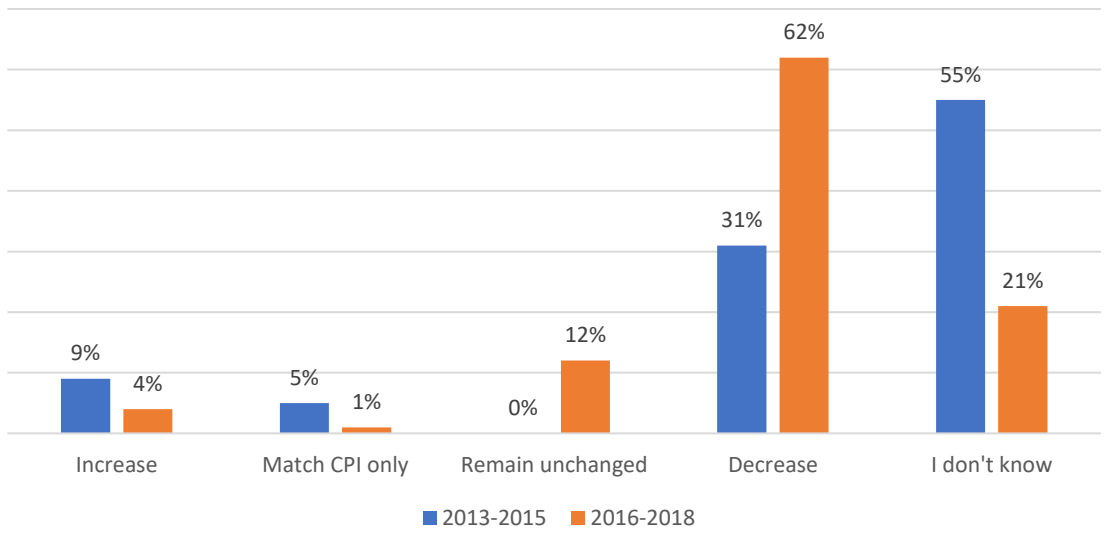
Figure 10: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did the usage of electronic resources ...? (215 responses, 51 skipped question)



Expenditure

Responses suggest a challenging financial environment over the two survey periods. A larger proportion of responses in 2019 indicated a decrease in annual expenditure than in the previous survey.

Figure 11: Over the last three years did your total library annual expenditure ...? (236 responses, 30 skipped question)



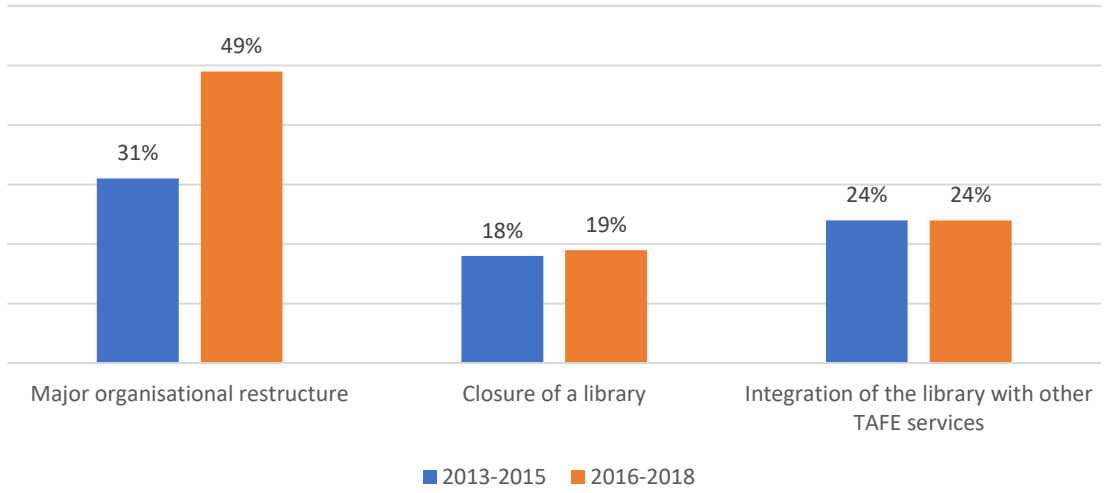
Note: In 2013-2015 there was no 'remain unchanged' option for total library annual expenditure.

One respondent noted that*, "Staff and budget cuts have meant that we have had to go back and just offer the basic services. "*

Major changes

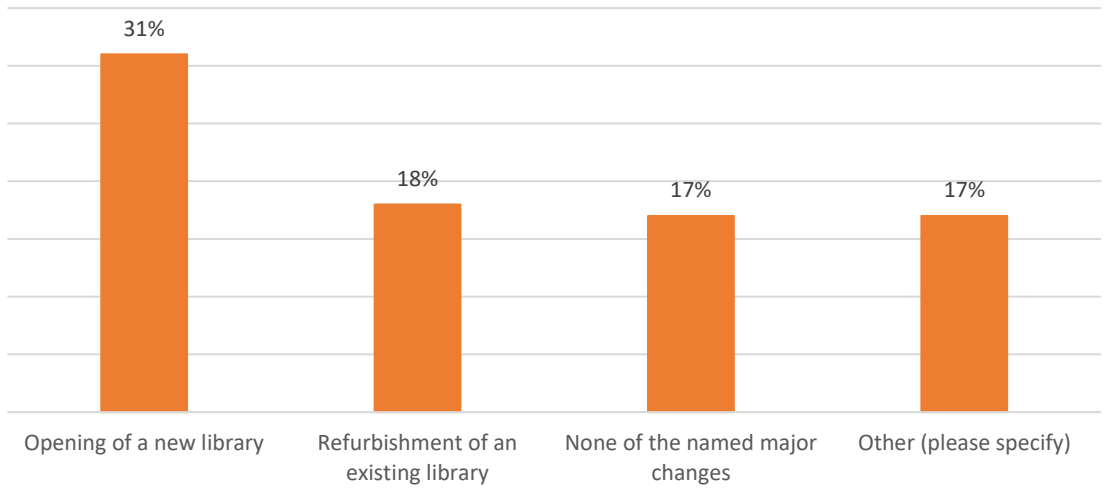
While library closures and integration of the library with other TAFE services was a constant theme between the two surveys, there was a significant increase in the number of respondents reporting major organisational restructure (figure 12). This was likely linked to the high number of NSW participants, with TAFE NSW in the process of becoming one TAFE. WA and Queensland also experienced state-wide restructures during the survey period. Respondents were able to select any changes that were applicable to their library.

Figure 12: Over the last three years did your library service experience any of the following significant changes?



In the 2016-2018 period, there was positive news about new library openings (31%) and refurbishments (18%) (figure 13); 17% of respondents said they had experienced none of the changes named in Figures 12 and 13, and 17% said they had experienced other major changes (Figure 13). These included amalgamations, co-location with other services, loss of library staff, reduced opening hours, removal of library space, switch from computer work stations to 'bring your own device' (BYOD), move to a temporary location, refurbishment and new building in progress, and natural disaster impact.

Figure 13: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did your library service experience any of the following significant changes?



More than a third of respondents reported that the status of the library in their organisation decreased (Figure 14), yet this was at the same time as the library was providing new services to staff and students and providing access to new technologies (Figure 15). Comments included: *"not seen as significant"* on the negative side, through to very positive statements such as *"it is and remains the focal point on campus," "the libraries and their expertise in technology and LibGuides creation have been greatly sought after"* and *"the academic staff have become very focal in stating their reliance and appreciation of library staff and services."* A number of comments expressed frustration with a lack of recognition, usually from management, for the services and support the library provided to students and staff.

Figure 14: Over the last three years 2016-2018, in your opinion did the status of the library within your organisation (eg relative position within the structure, representation on key strategic committees or working groups) ...? (202 responses, 64 skippe

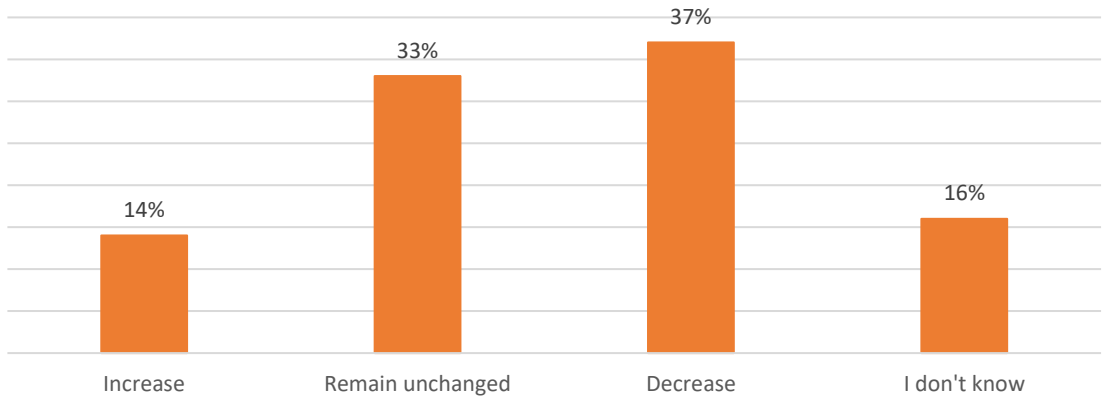
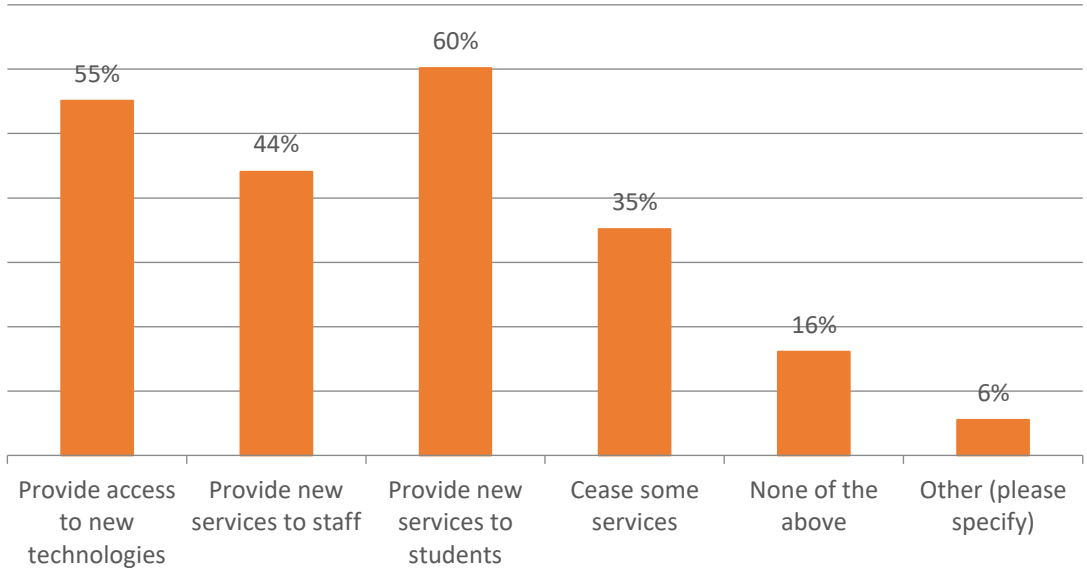


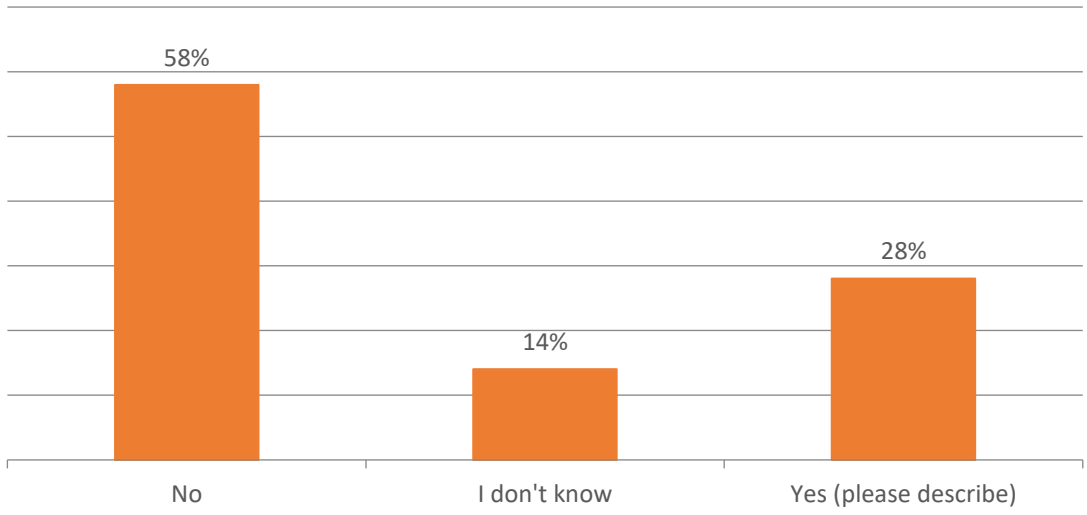
Figure 15: Over the last three years 2016 to 2018, did your library service do any of the following? (235 responses, 31 skipped question)



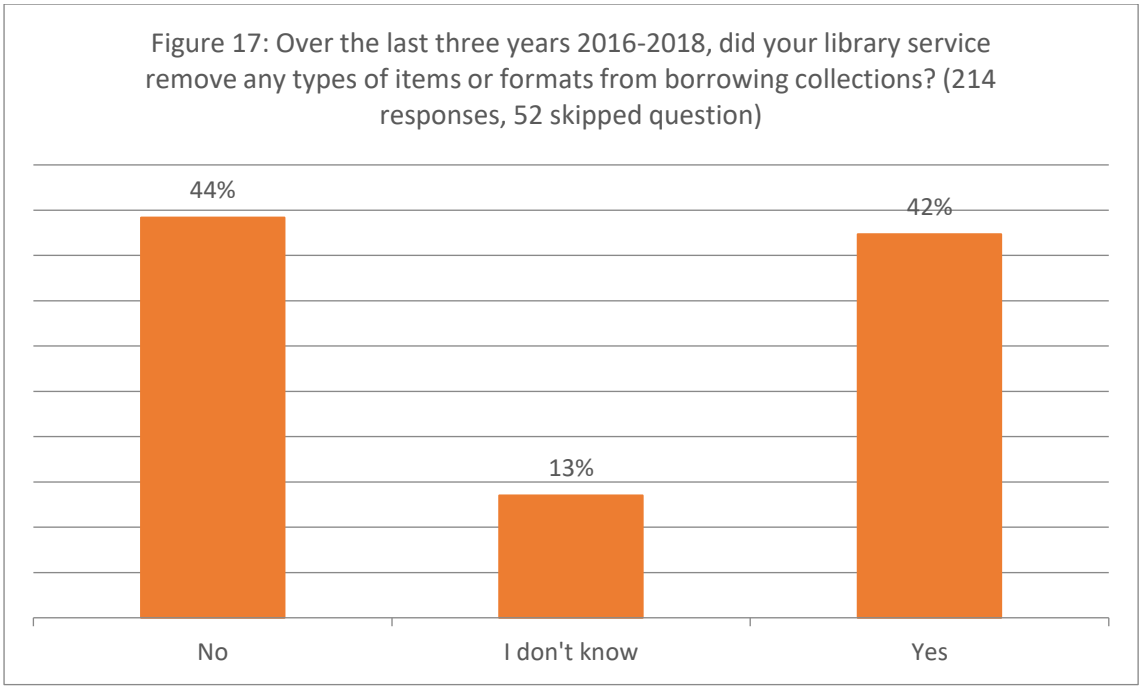
Collection format

New types of items and formats for borrowing (figure 16) included digital content (evideos, video streaming, online resources, software), digital equipment (virtual reality, laptops, tablets, portable device chargers), digital services (online courses, demand driven acquisition) and course-specific resources (board games, games to support ESOL learners, hairdressing mannequins and cameras).

Figure 16: Over the last three years 2016 to 2018, did the library introduce any new types of items or formats to borrowing collections? (213 responses, 53 skipped question)



Making room for these new items and formats (figure 17), respondents reported the weeding of print materials and the removal of VHS, CDs, CD ROMs cassette tapes and other redundant tech.



It was clear from the increased proportion of the budget spent on print versus ebooks (Figure 18) and print versus ejournals (Figure 19) that the move to digital resources had been embraced by TAFE libraries. This was further endorsed by 46% of respondents noting an increase in the proportion of the budget spent on electronic databases other than journals (Figure 20) and 51% reporting an increase in the proportion spent on content streaming (Figure 21).

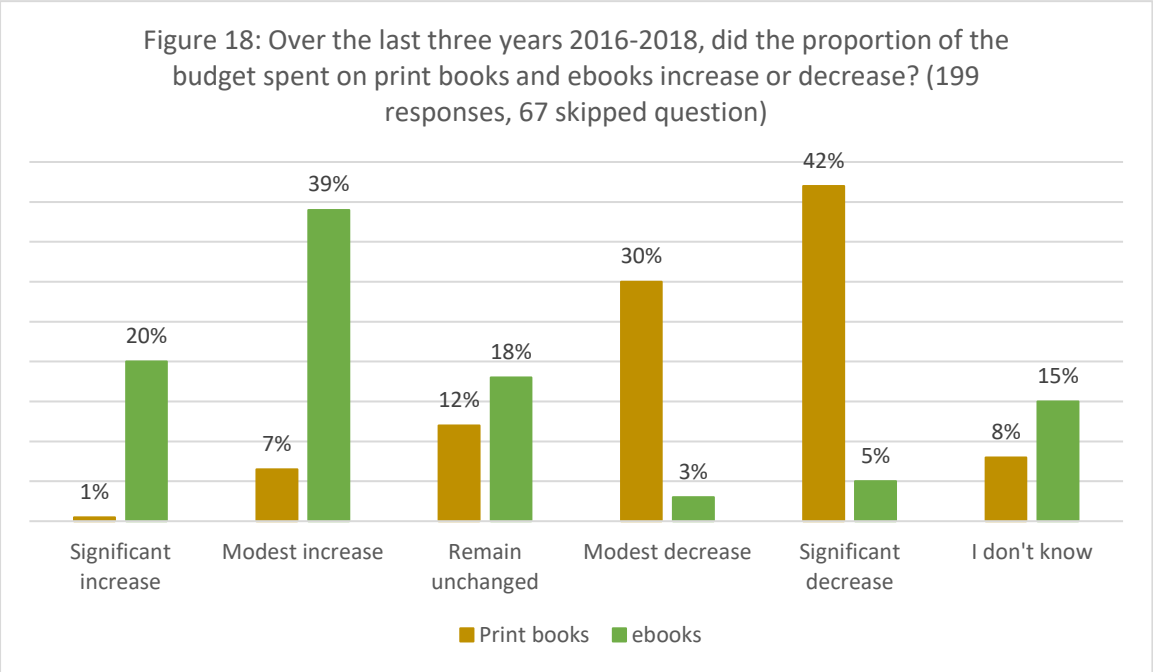


Figure 19: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did the proportion of the budget spent on print journals and ejournals (including database packages) increase or decrease? (199 responses, 67 skipped question)

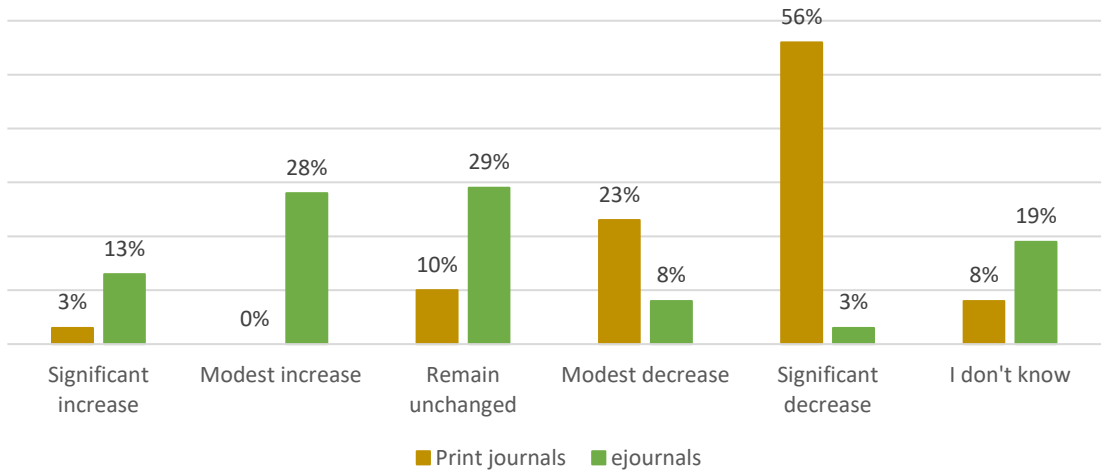


Figure 20: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did the proportion of the budget spent on electronic databases (other than journal collections) increase or decrease? (199 responses, 67 skipped question)

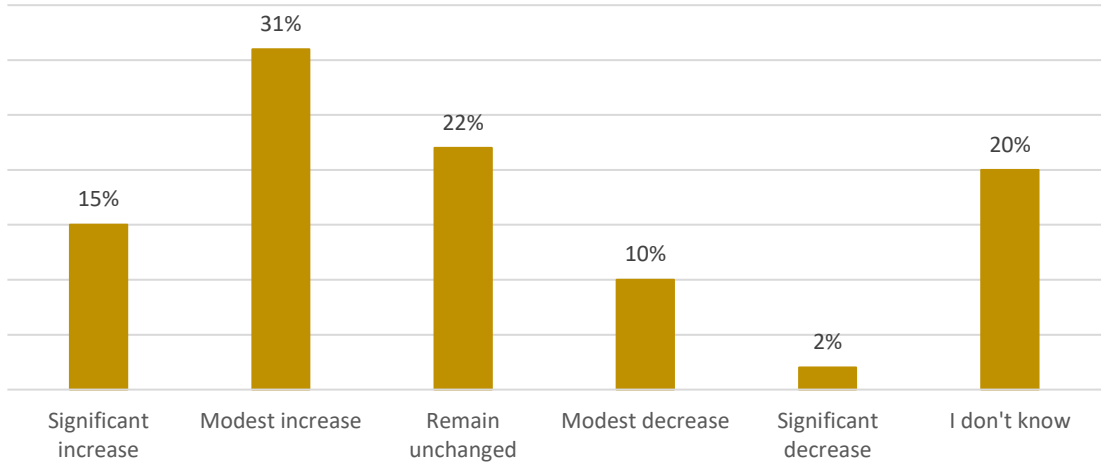
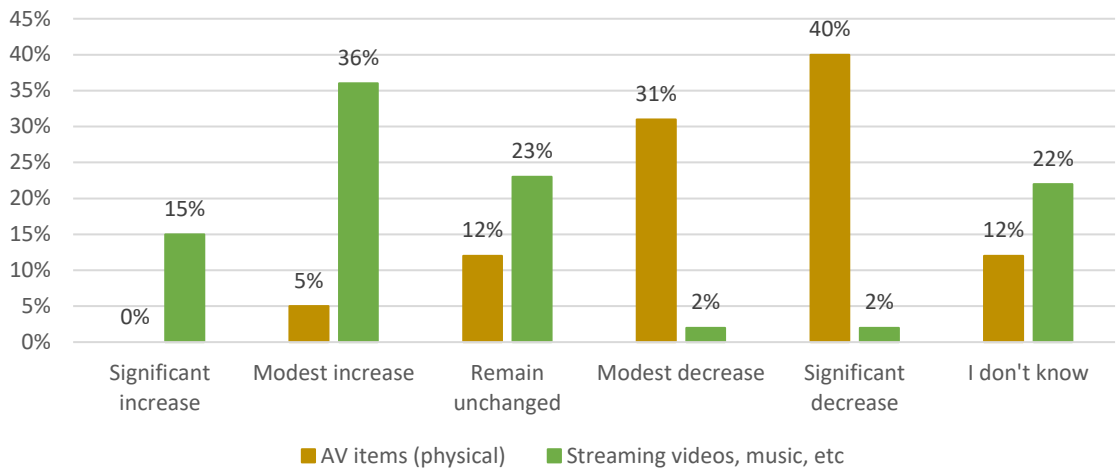


Figure 21: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did the proportion of the budget spent on AV items (physical) and streaming videos, music, etc, increase or decrease? (199 responses, 67 skipped question)

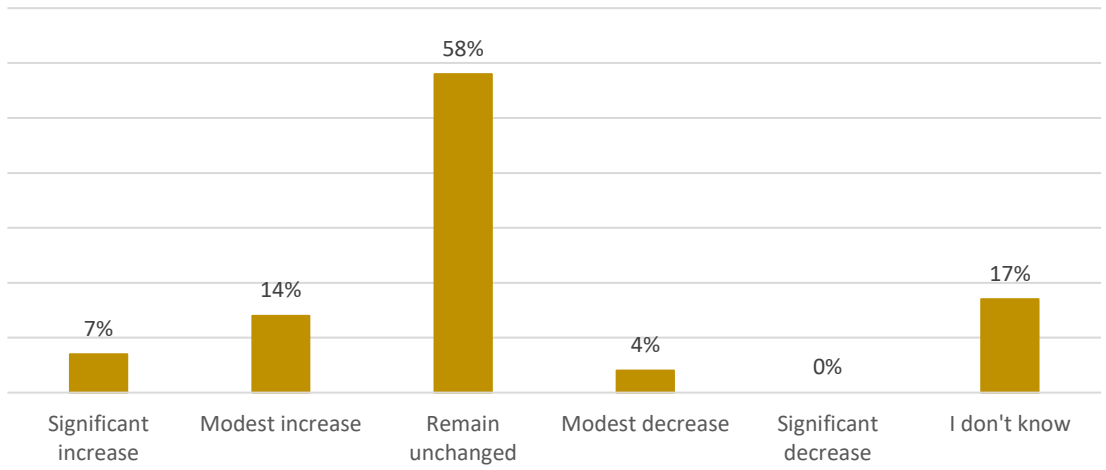


Services

Beyond the classic role of TAFE libraries, there were specific comments about added value services.

Australian Standards are an essential part of TAFE and other library collections but price increases over recent years have been a concern. More than a fifth of respondents reported an increase in the proportion of their budget spent on access to Australian Standards (Figure 22).

Figure 22: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did the proportion of the budget spent on access to Australian Standards increase or decrease? (199 responses, 67 skipped question)



Another concern is the affordability of devices for TAFE students needing to access the increasingly digital content provided by libraries. The level of investment by libraries in equipment for the use of their clients appeared to balance out, with a fairly even split between increase and decrease in figures 23 and 24. WiFi was reported by 99% of respondents to be available in their libraries.

Figure 23: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did the proportion of the budget spent on equipment for the use of clients increase or decrease? (199 responses, 67 skipped question)

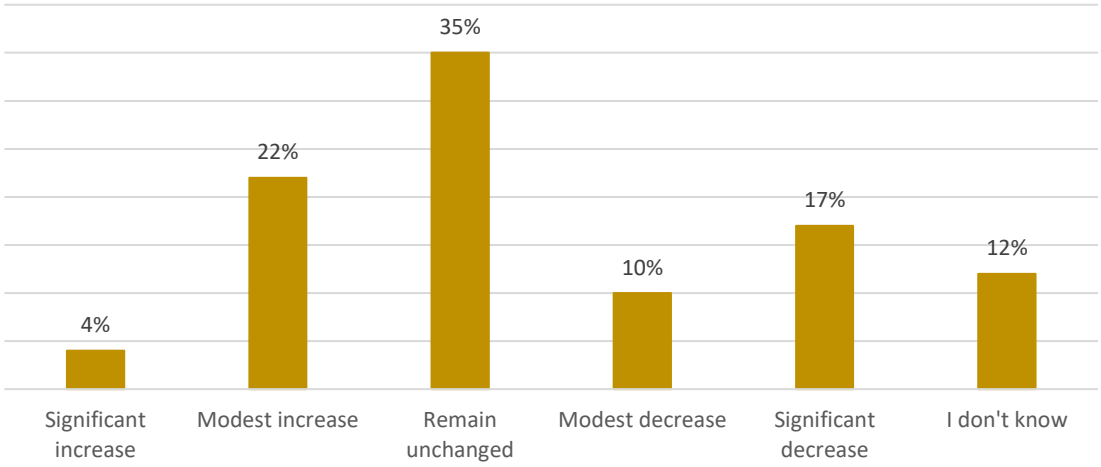
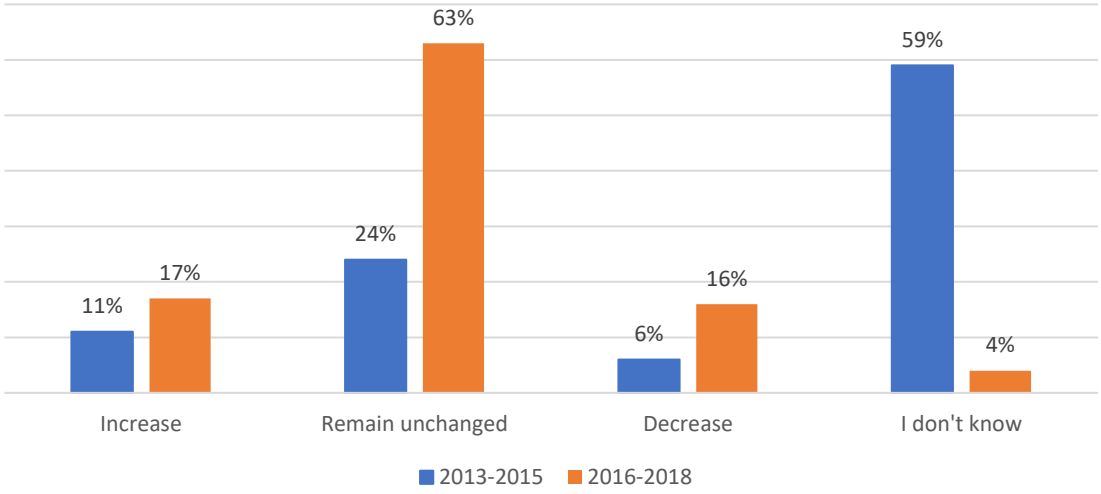


Figure 24: Over the last three years, did the number of computers or devices available to students in the library ...? (200 responses, 66 skipped question)



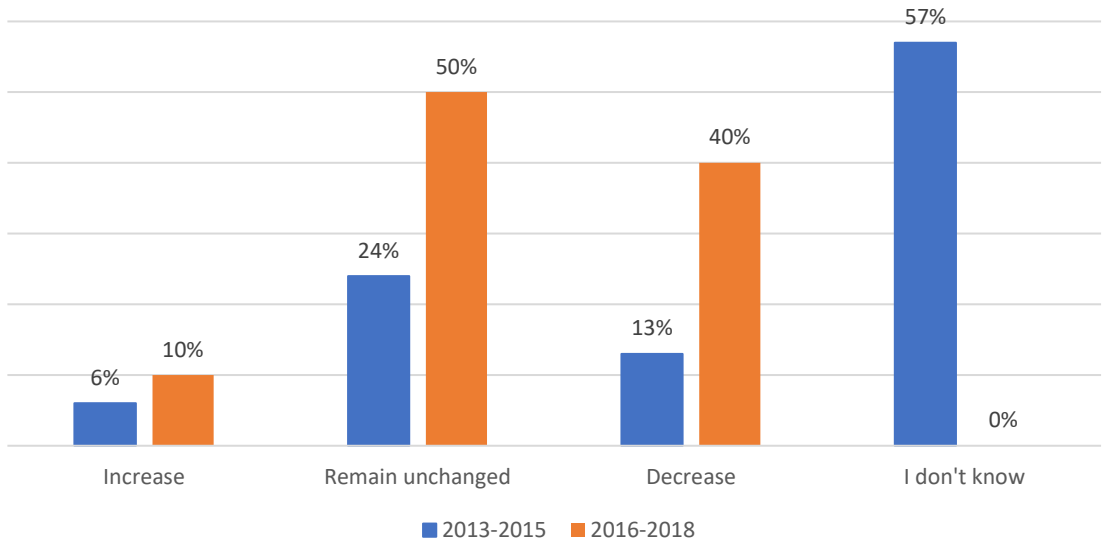
Other added value services were video conferencing for remote students; lunchtime tutorials in using online resources, information seeking and referencing; guest speakers; 3D printing; English conversation practice sessions; disability support and assistive technologies.

One response included the following comment, *"Delivering training using VC technologies has increased during the last 3 years and this year has seen a notable increase in library staff providing IT support to students and staff."*

Access

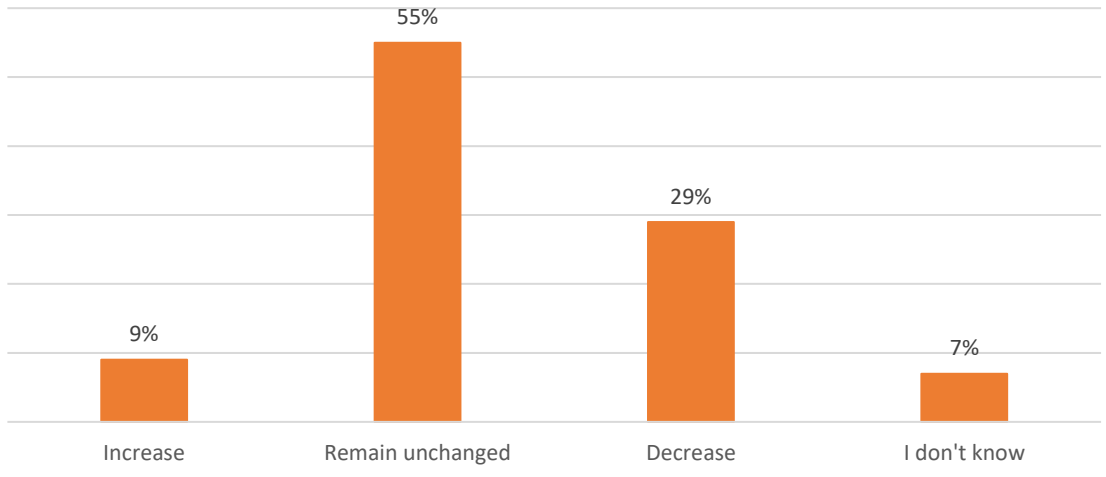
A significant percentage of respondents reported a decrease in library opening hours from 2016-2018 (Figure 25) and in the number of opening hours where library staff were available (Figure 26).

Figure 25: Over the last three years, did the library opening hours ...? (206 responses, 60 skipped question)



One responder commented that *"Reduced library opening hours, rationalised the number of campus guide, not able to be proactive with marketing, communicating to lecturers on a regular basis".*

Figure 26: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did the number of opening hours where library staff are available (not, for example, where the library may be open but unstaffed, or non-library staff and security presence only) ...? (206 responses, 60 skip



Spaces

While 24% of respondents reported a reduction in the size of the library over the three years 2016-2018 (figure 27), the availability of group spaces (figure 28) and quiet spaces (figure 29) was mixed, with a relatively equal balance between reports of increases and decreases. Group study spaces were said to be “heavily utilised” and there was a mention of library spaces being used as connected classrooms.

Figure 27: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did your library floor area, including staff workspaces ...?)205 responses, 61 skipped question)

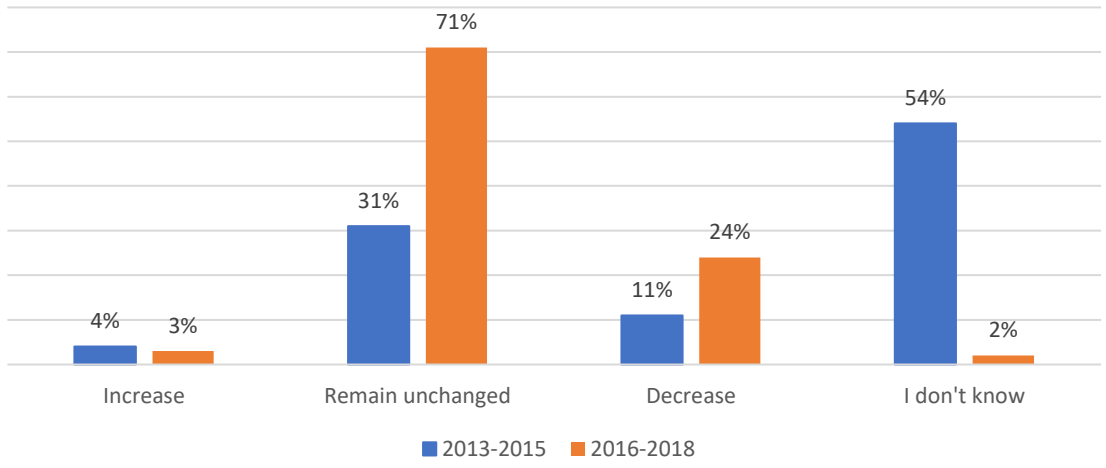


Figure 28: Over the last three years, did the availability of group meeting/ work/ study spaces ...? (205 responses, 61 skipped question)

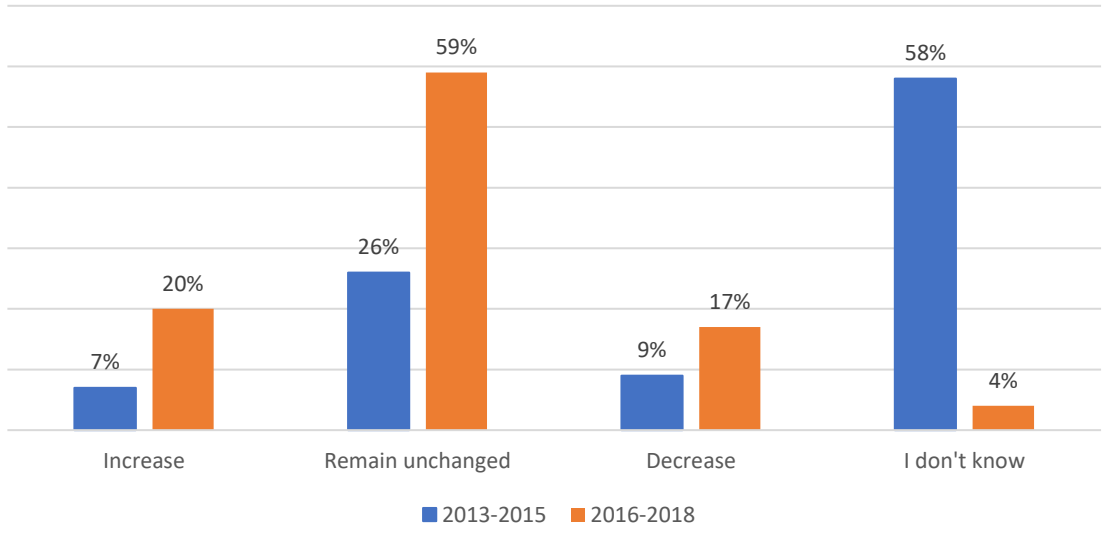
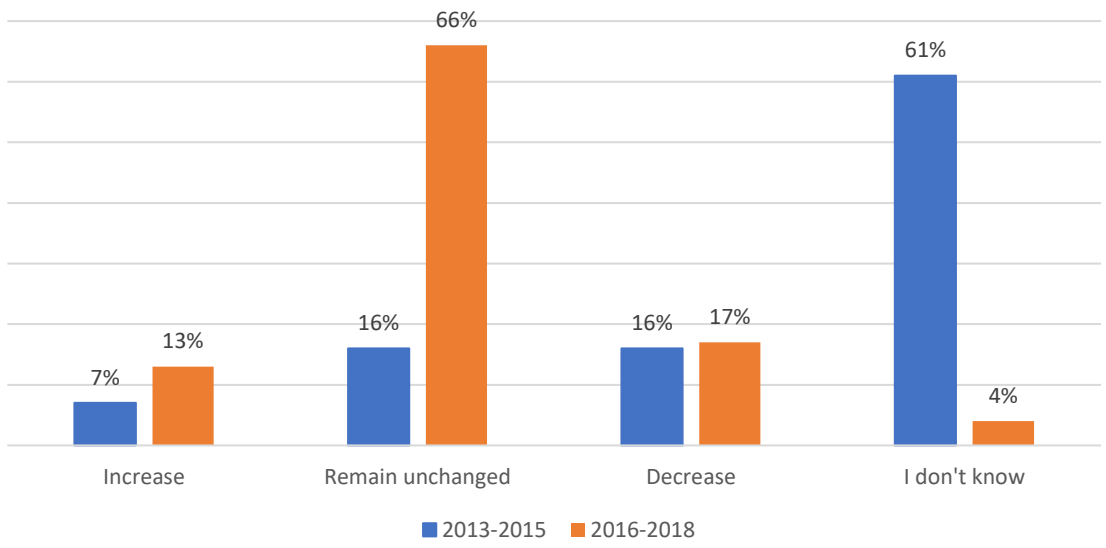


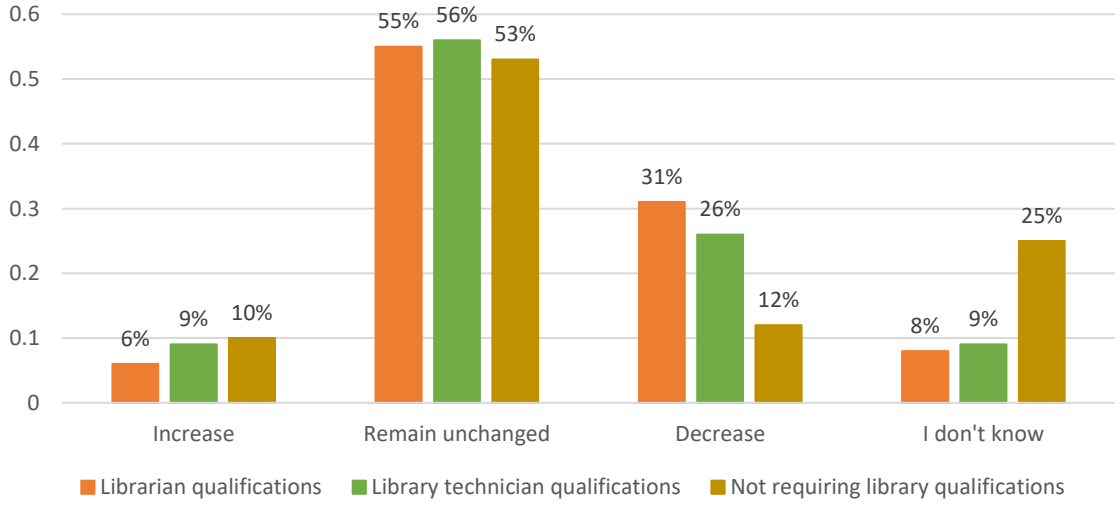
Figure 29: Over the last three years, did the availability of quiet work/ study spaces ...? (206 responses, 60 skipped question)



Staffing

A reported decrease of librarian positions by nearly a third of respondents and of library technician positions by a quarter of respondents in 2016-2018 reflected a worrying trend in the downgrading and loss of positions for qualified library and information professionals in TAFE libraries (figure 30). The trend was evident when comparing the 2016 and 2019 survey results in figures 31 and 32. One respondent commented, *"the trend of making roles available to less qualified staff at a cheaper cost continues."*

Figure 30: Over the last three years 2016-2018, has there been an increase or decrease in the number of full time equivalent (FTE) positions requiring the following ...? (203 responses, 63 skipped question)



One comment reflecting the impact on staffing in VET Libraries *"Staff and budget cuts have meant that we have had to go back and just offer the basic services."*

Figure 31: Over the last three years, has there been an increase or decrease in the number of full time equivalent (FTE) positions for librarians and/or library technicians? (203 responses, 63 skipped question)

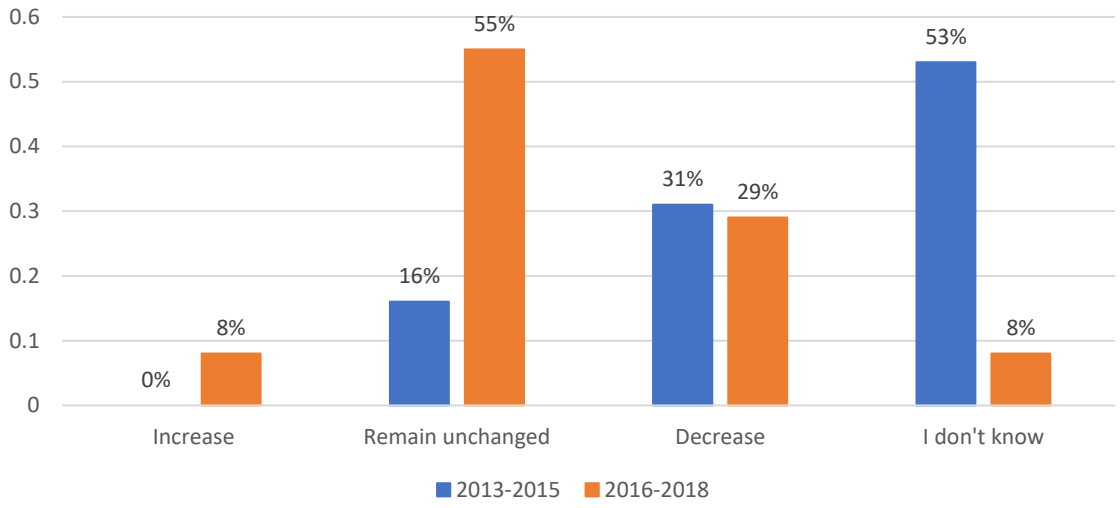
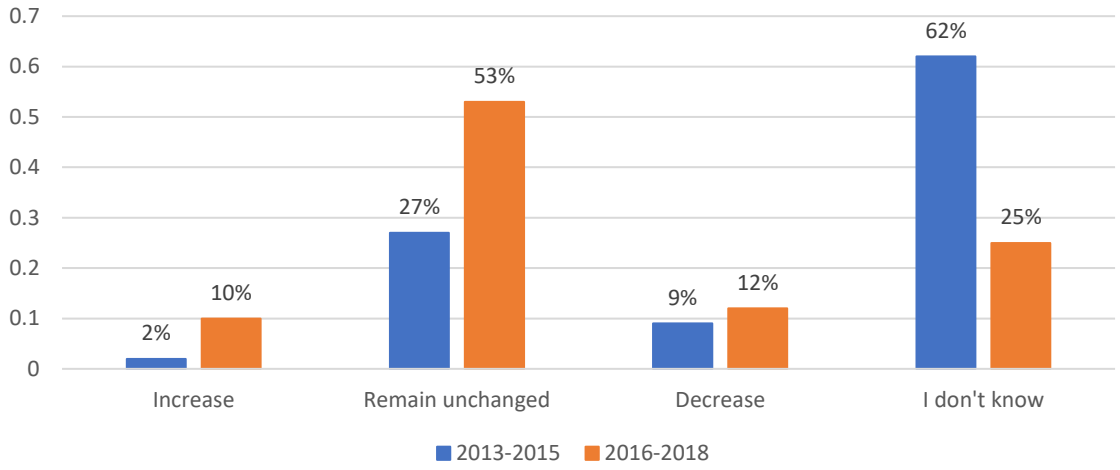


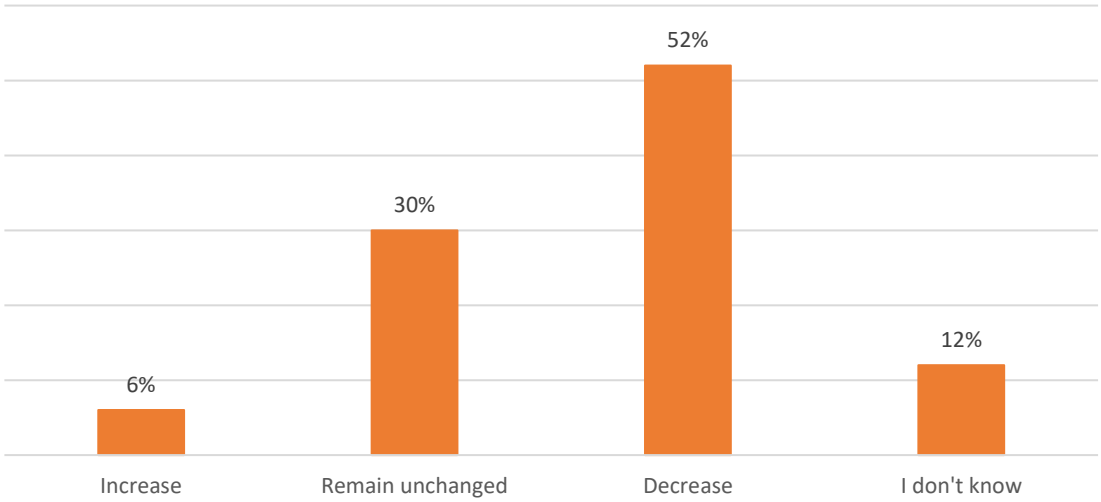
Figure 32: Over the last three years, has there been an increase or decrease in the number of full time equivalent (FTE) positions for staff without library qualifications? (203 responses, 63 skipped question)



More than half of respondents said that access to professional development had decreased in the three years 2016-2018 (figure 33), yet at the same time, 58% noted a significant, major or radical change to their job role (figure 34). This included 81% having increased or added responsibility for copyright (figure 35); 66% having increased or added responsibility for curriculum or course development; 92% having increased or added responsibility for online learning; 85% having increased or added responsibility for academic skills support (figure 36); 97% having increased or added responsibility for IT support and 92% having increased or added responsibility for support for new technologies (figure 37). Other changes to responsibilities included the addition of project management; staff coaching, mentoring, and supervision; more front of house customer service such as student support, enrolment enquiries and student loans management; community

engagement and partner liaison. On the other hand, there were mentions of less cataloguing and processing of acquisitions.

Figure 33: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did access to professional development by library staff (including funded, non-funded, time release) ...? (203 responses, 63 skipped question)



One respondent commented on the difficulties for regional staff to access professional development opportunities compared to metropolitan based staff, *"for regional staff there is always the added cost of travel and accommodation. As a result the answer is more often negative."*

Figure 34: Over the last three years 2016-2018, has your job role changed? (202 responses, 64 skipped question)

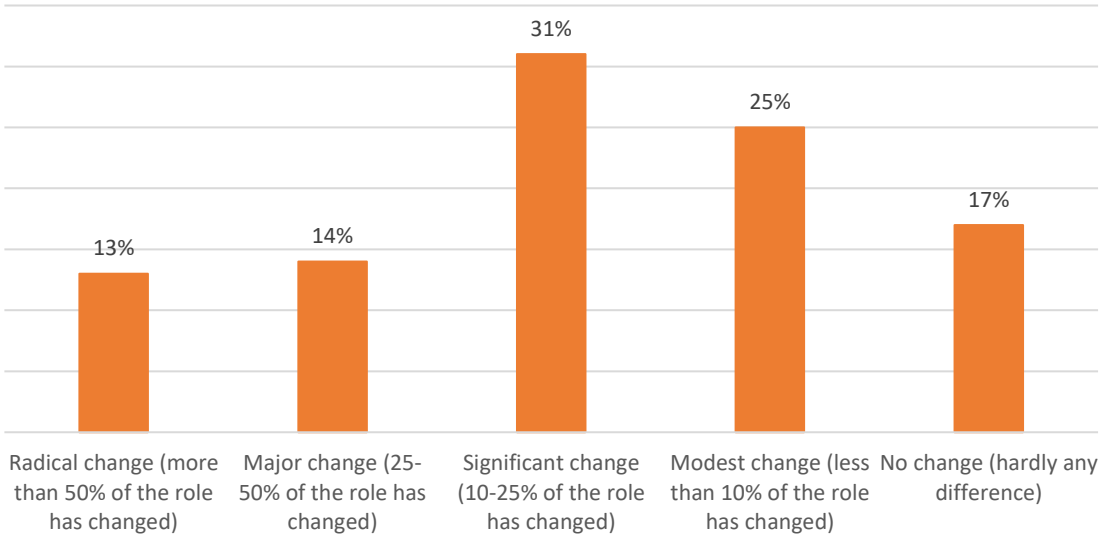


Figure 35: Over the last three years 2016-2018, if your role has changed, has it included copyright responsibilities? (161 responses, 105 skipped question)

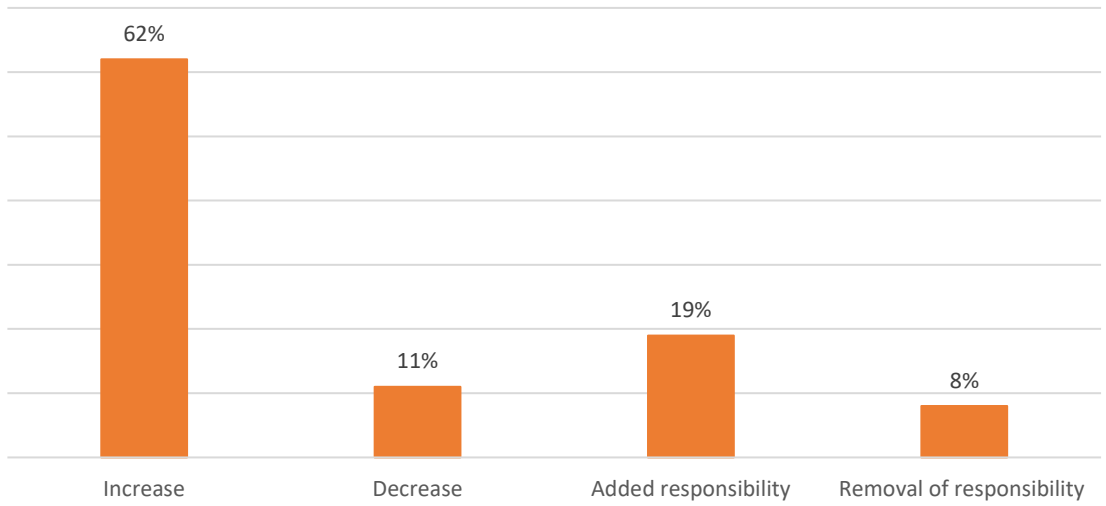
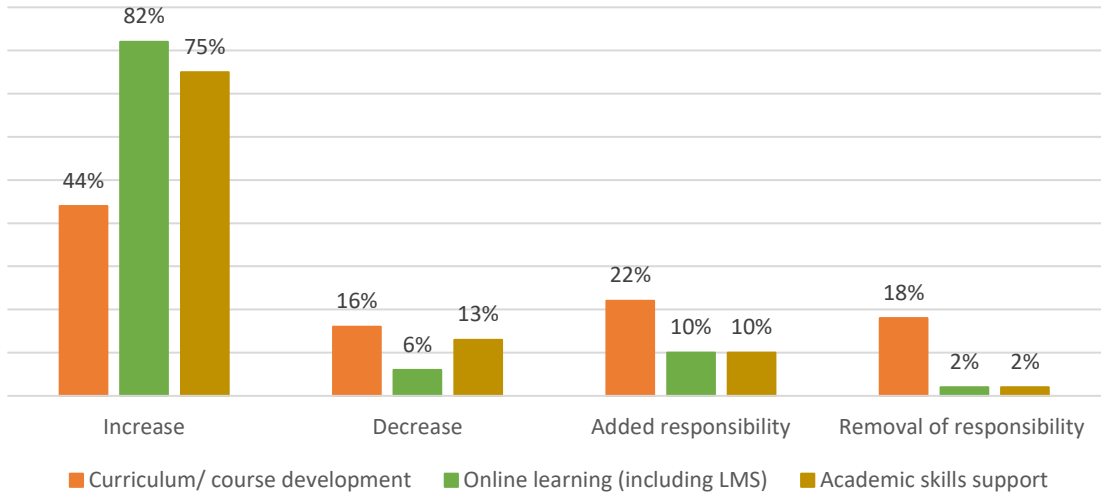
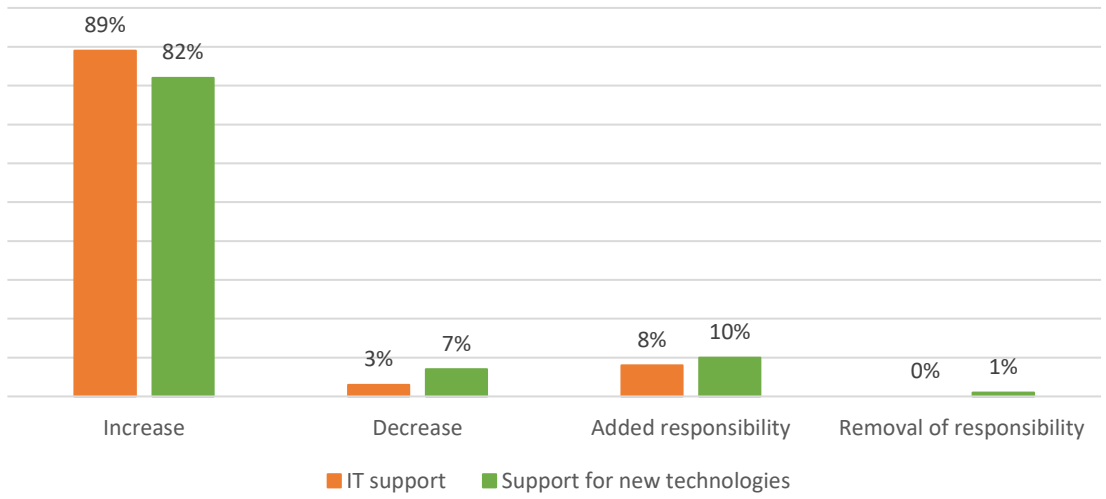


Figure 36: Over the last three years 2016-2018, if your role has changed, has it included curriculum/course development, online learning (including LMS) and academic skills support? (161 responses, 105 skipped question)



Particular frustration was expressed about the passing of responsibility for student IT support to library staff without the necessary training for staff. Comments included, *"library staff at all levels are increasingly being expected to know everything about IT. The problem is that IT often fails to communicate changes and management seems totally unaware of the issues that continually impact."* Also, *"increasing demands on library staff to troubleshoot IT and student access to online platforms," "students don't have the required skills to cope with blended delivery learning," "the reduction of IT support and the promotion of BYOD has meant a large increase in the amount of IT related issues", "increased need to support students with VC, Skype etc."*

Figure 37: Over the last three years 2016-2018, if your role has changed, has it included IT support or support for new technologies? (161 responses, 105 skipped question)



Future changes

Looking ahead, it seemed that respondents to the 2019 survey were less optimistic than in 2016, with 38% predicting a decrease in their total library annual expenditure (figure 38) – a rise of 20%; 30% anticipating a decrease in library staffing (figure 39) – a rise of 19%, and 19% forecasting a decrease in library space (figure 40) – a rise of 10% over 2016 responses.

Figure 38: Over the next 12 months, do you anticipate your total library annual expenditure will ...? (200 responses, 66 skipped question)

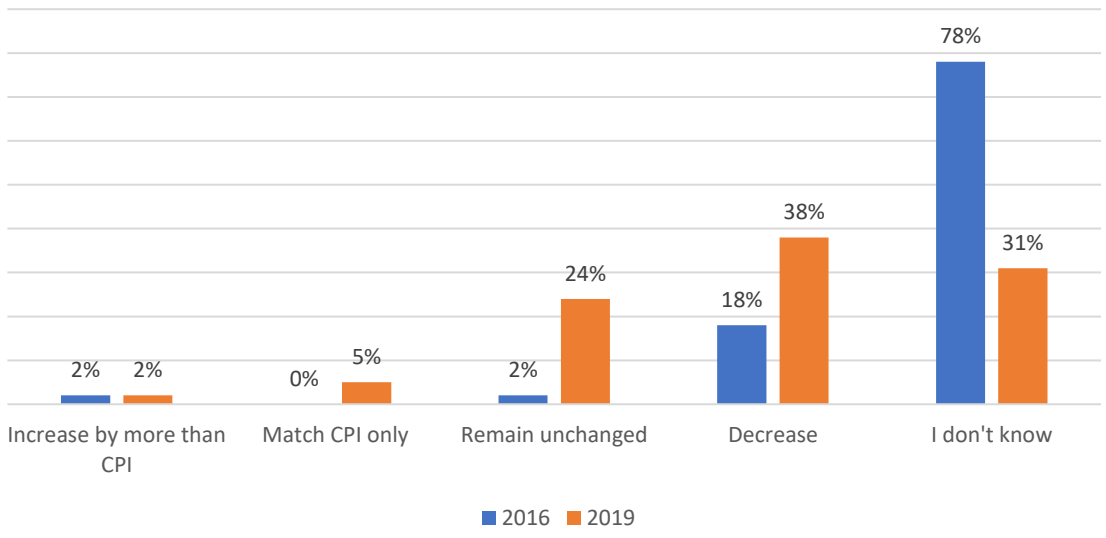


Figure 39: Over the next 12 months, do you anticipate your library staffing (library qualified and other staff) will ...? (200 responses, 66 skipped question)

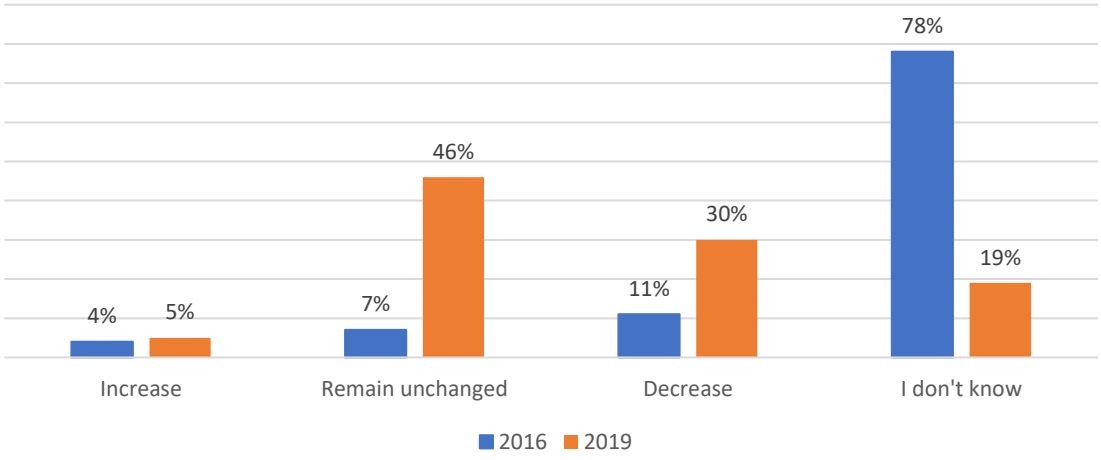
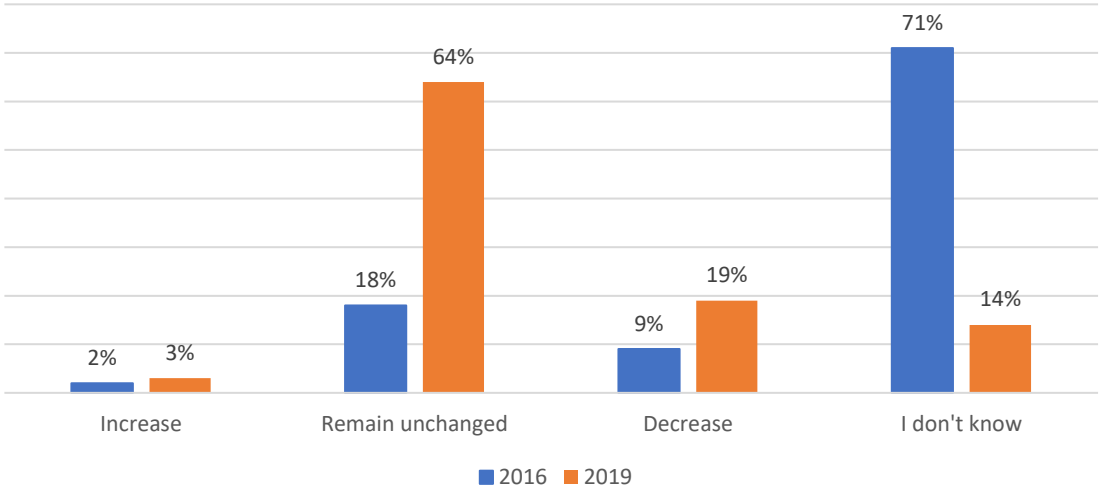


Figure 40: Over the next 12 months, do you anticipate your library space, including staff work areas, will ...? (200 responses, 66 skipped question)

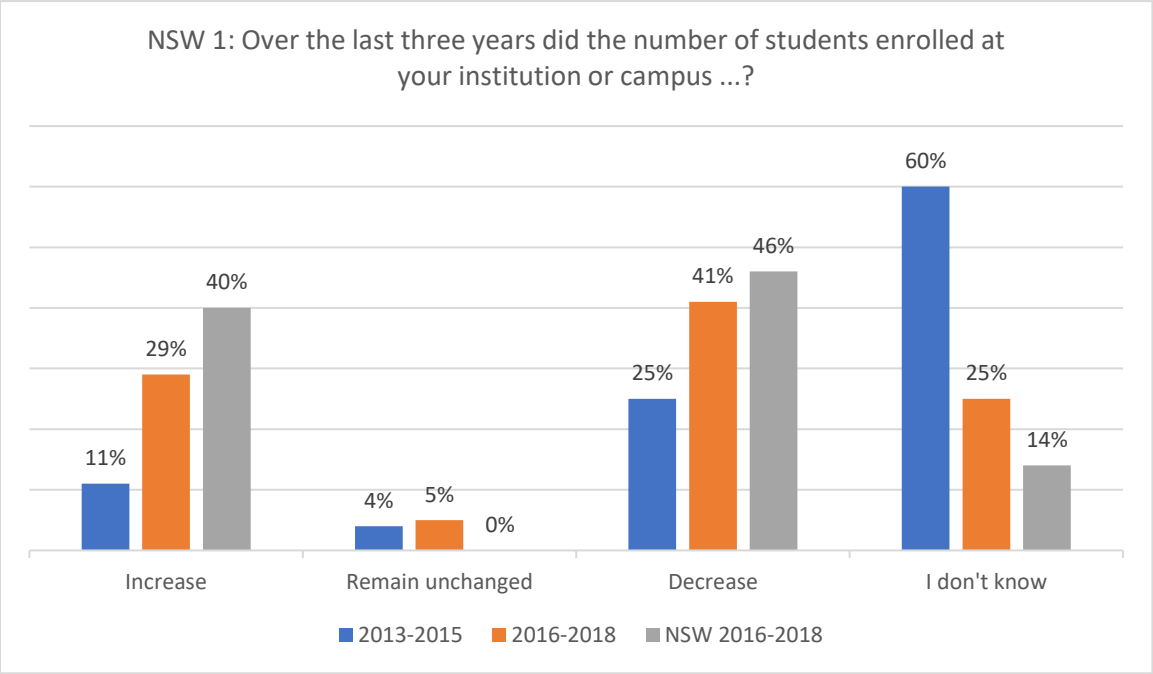


APPENDIX – STATE BASED COMPARISONS

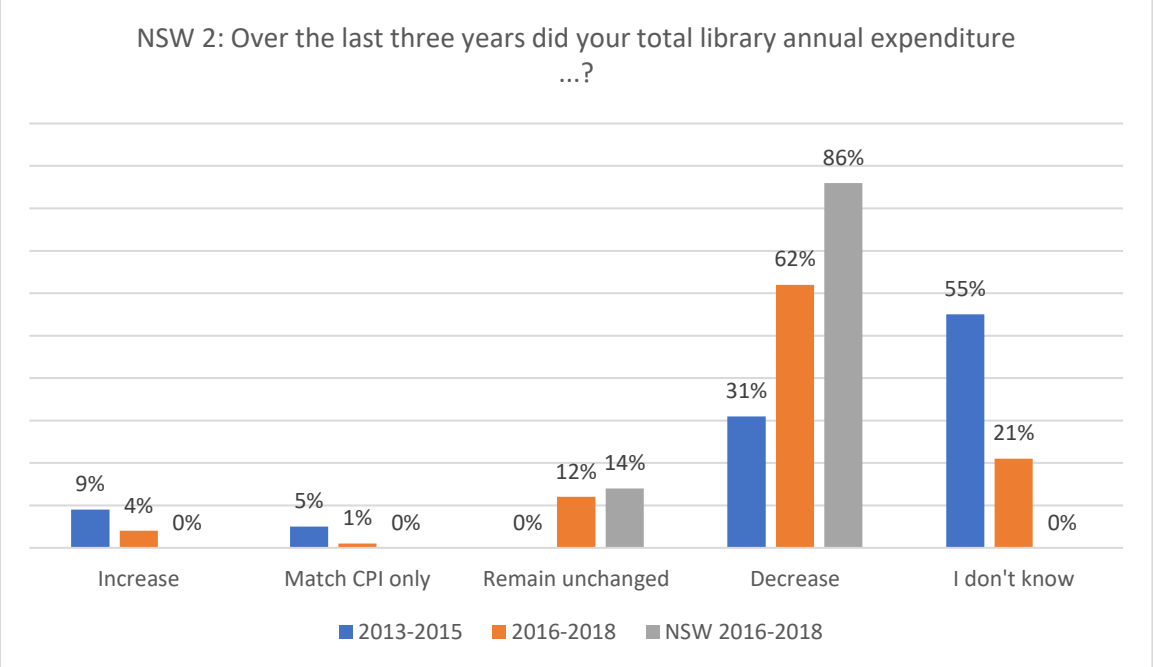
Selected results by State and Territory compared with national data, based on responses from Library Managers or Directors. Sufficient data for a comparison was only available from NSW, Victoria and WA.

New South Wales

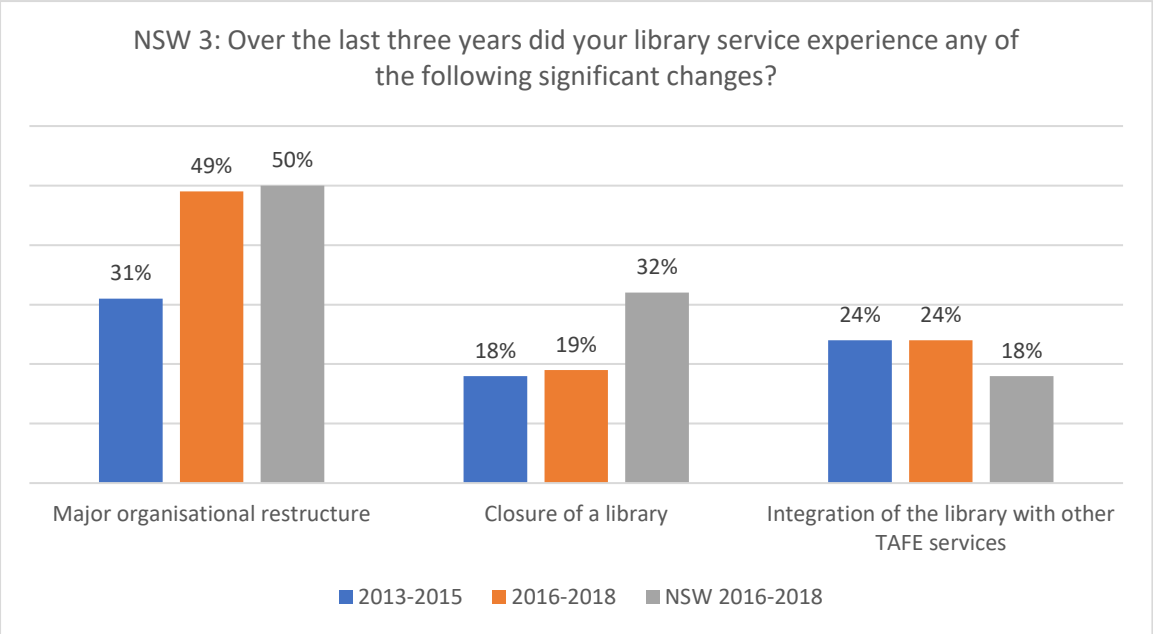
1. Size of population

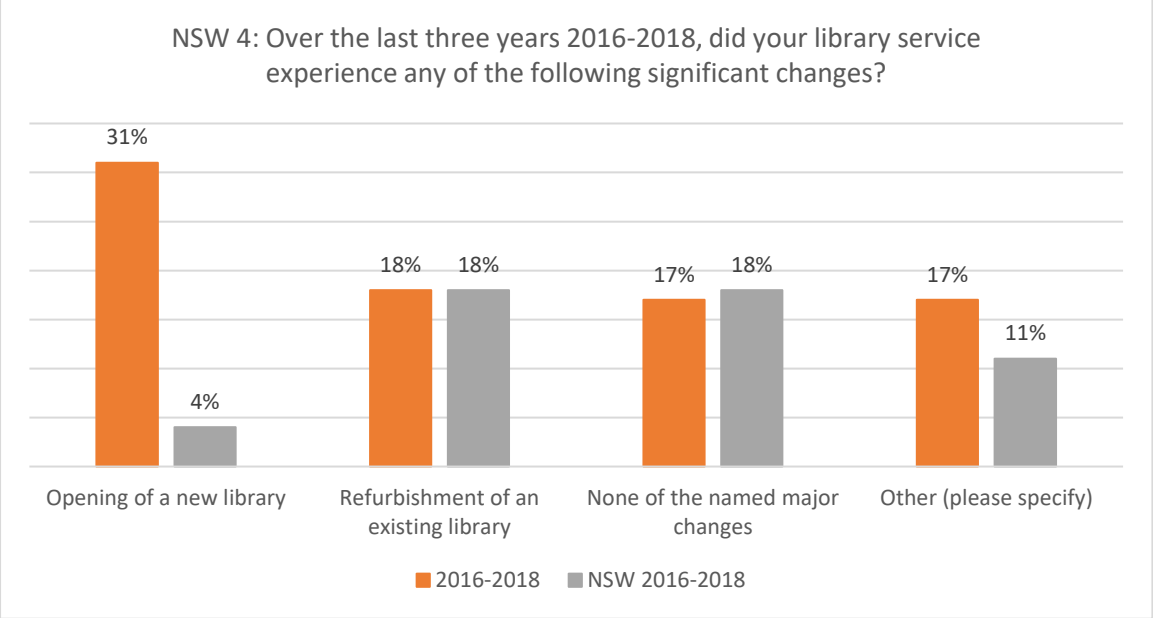


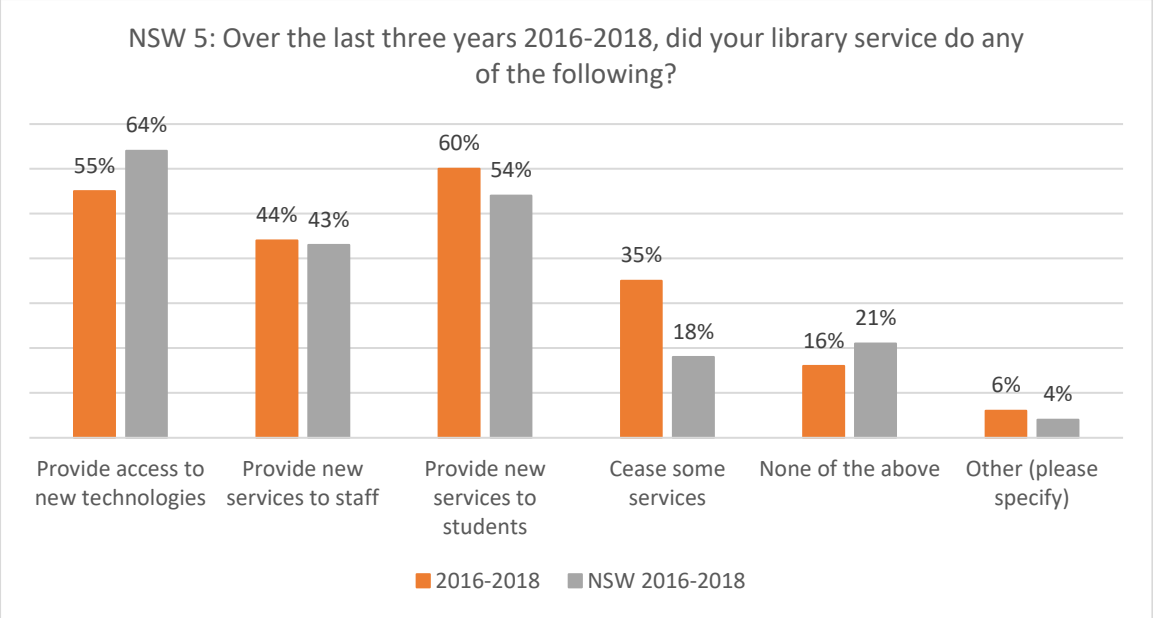
2. Expenditure

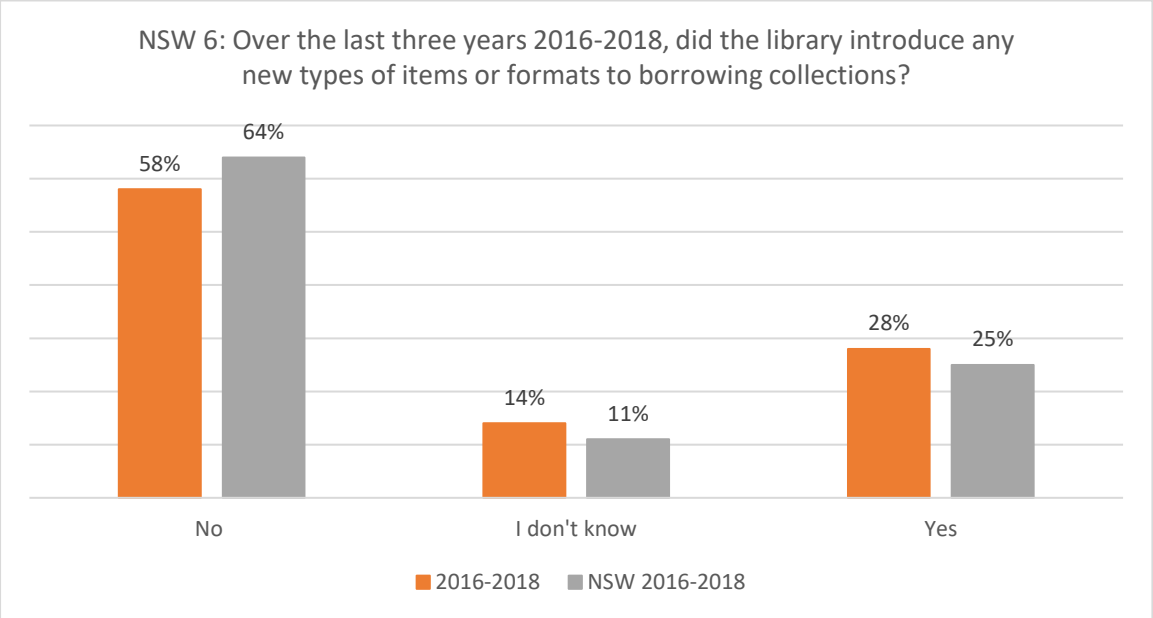


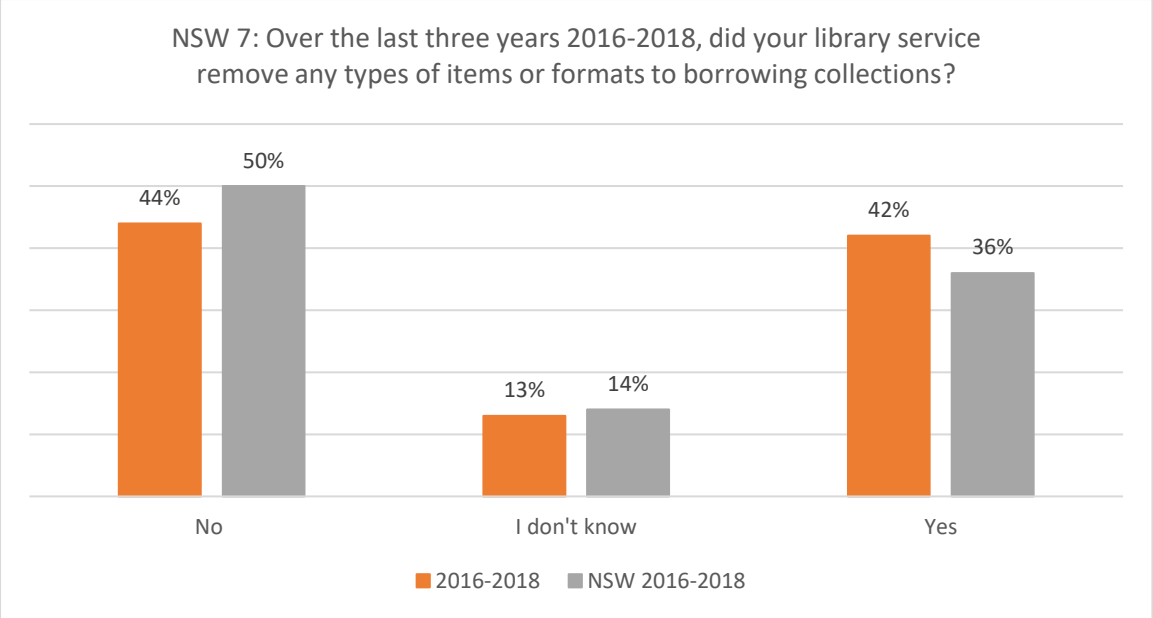
3. Major changes



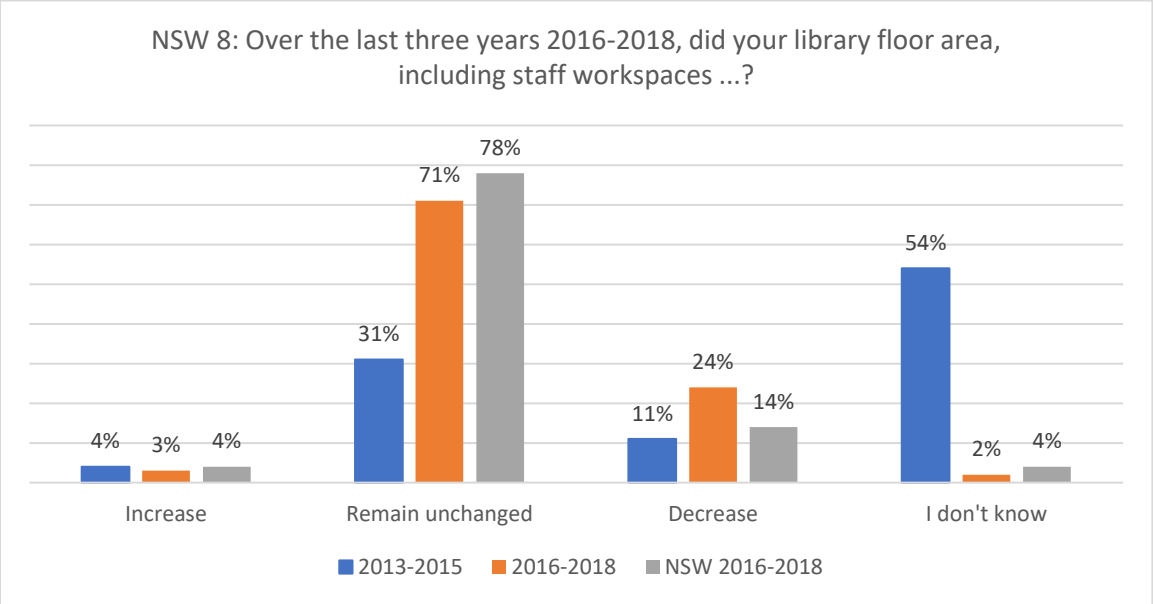



NSW 5: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did your library service do any of the following?
55%
64%
44%
43%
60%
54%
35%
18%
16%
21%
6%
4%
Provide access to new technologies
Provide new services to staff
Provide new services to students
Cease some services
None of the above
Other (please specify)
2016-2018
NSW 2016-2018

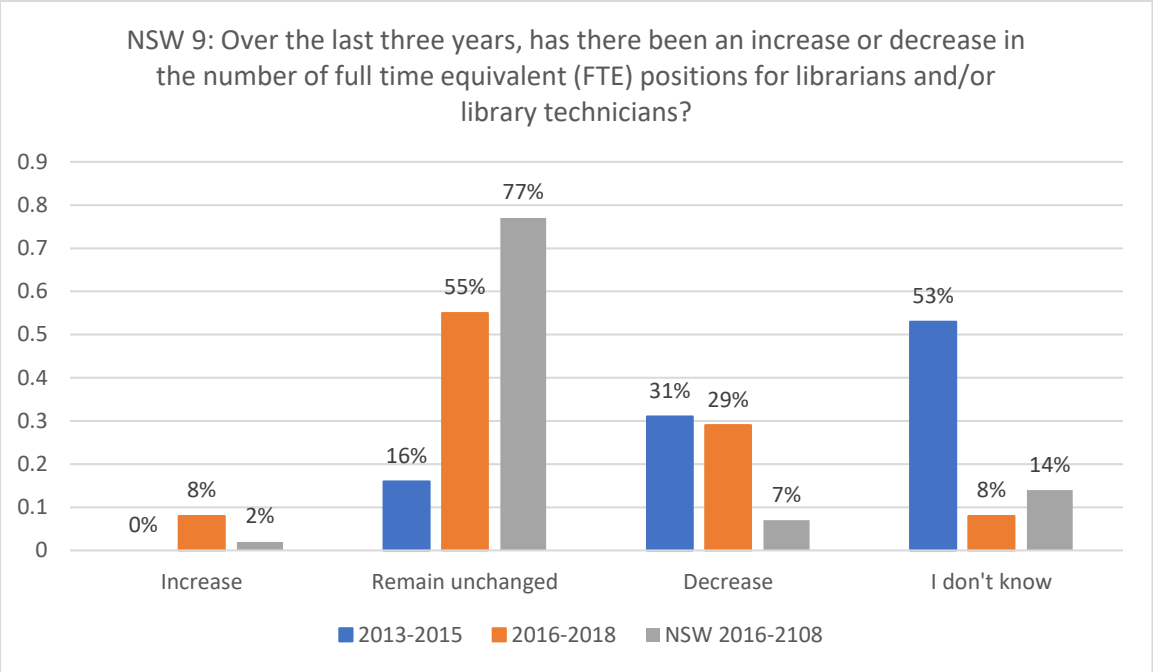

NSW 6: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did the library introduce any new types of items or formats to borrowing collections?
58%
64%
14%
11%
28%
25%
No
I don't know
Yes
2016-2018
NSW 2016-2018

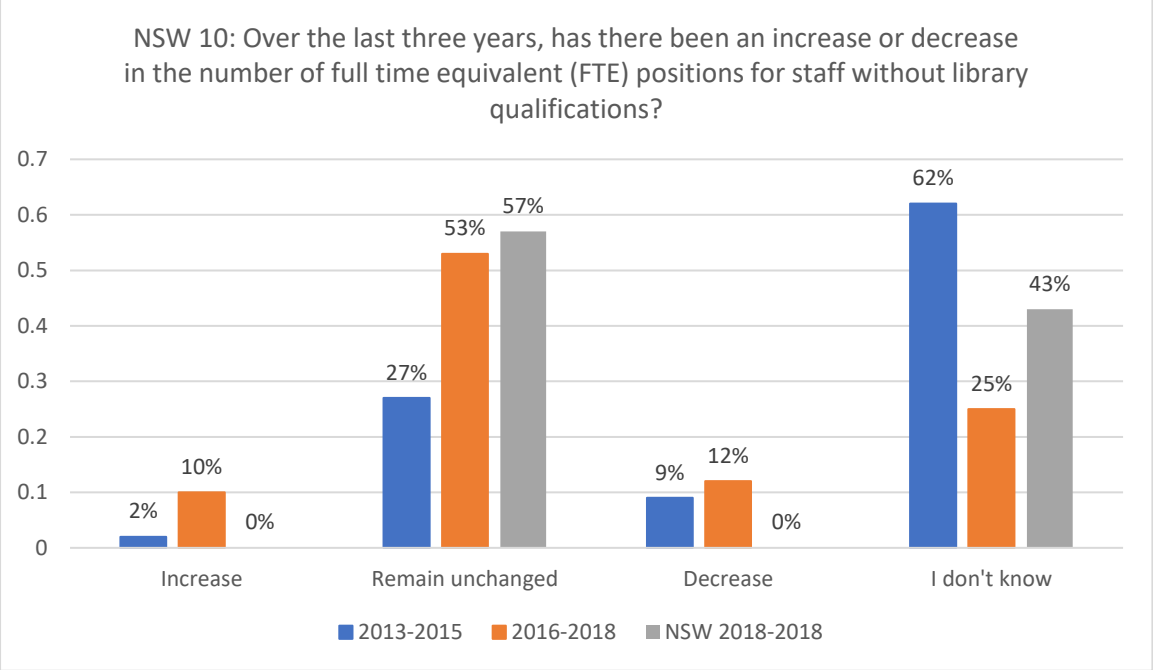

NSW 7: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did your library service remove any types of items or formats to borrowing collections?
44%
50%
13%
14%
42%
36%
No
I don't know
Yes
2016-2018
NSW 2016-2018

4. Spaces


NSW 8: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did your library floor area, including staff workspaces ...?
4%
3%
4%
31%
71%
78%
11%
24%
14%
54%
2%
4%
Increase
Remain unchanged
Decrease
I don't know
2013-2015
2016-2018
NSW 2016-2018

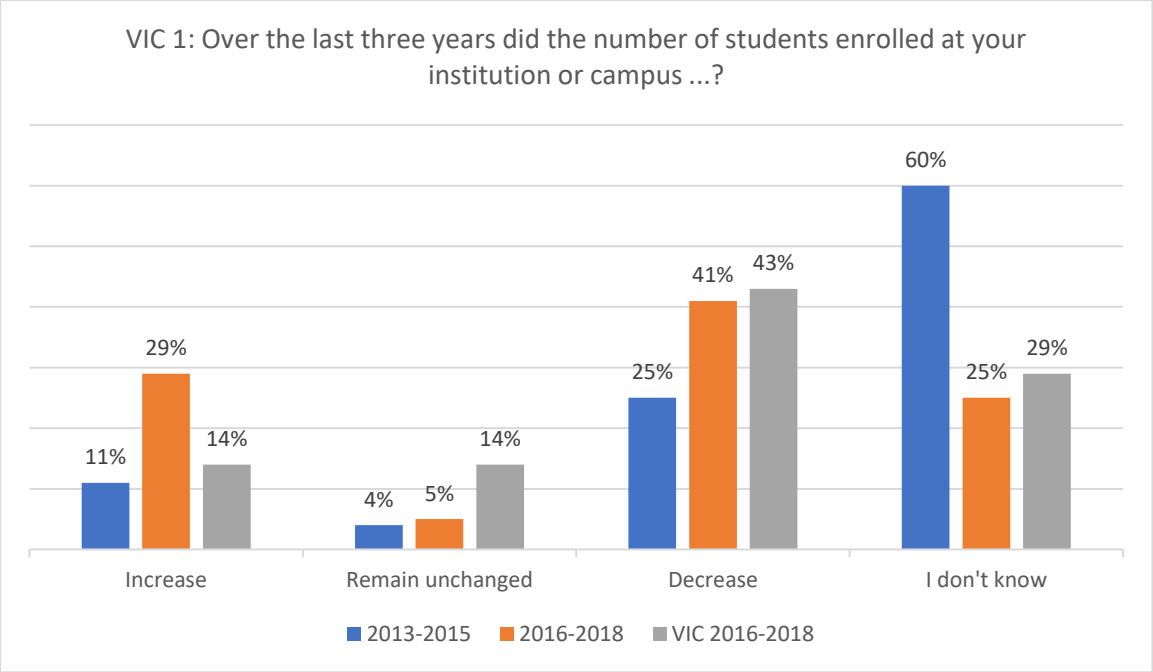
5. Staffing


NSW 9: Over the last three years, has there been an increase or decrease in the number of full time equivalent (FTE) positions for librarians and/or library technicians?
0.9
0.8
0.7
0.6
0.5
0.4
0.3
0.2
0.1
0
0%
8%
2%
16%
55%
77%
31%
29%
7%
53%
8%
14%
Increase
Remain unchanged
Decrease
I don't know
2013-2015
2016-2018
NSW 2016-2108

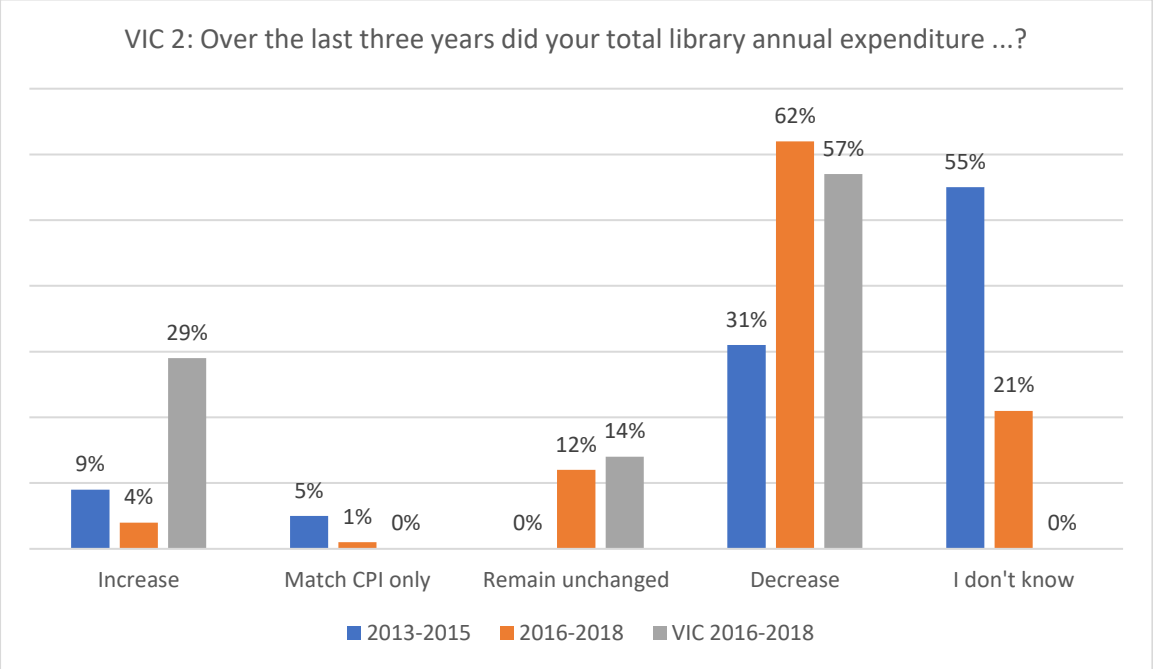

NSW 10: Over the last three years, has there been an increase or decrease in the number of full time equivalent (FTE) positions for staff without library qualifications?
0.7
0.6
0.5
0.4
0.3
0.2
0.1
0
2%
10%
0%
27%
53%
57%
9%
12%
0%
62%
25%
43%
Increase
Remain unchanged
Decrease
I don't know
2013-2015
2016-2018
NSW 2018-2018

Victoria

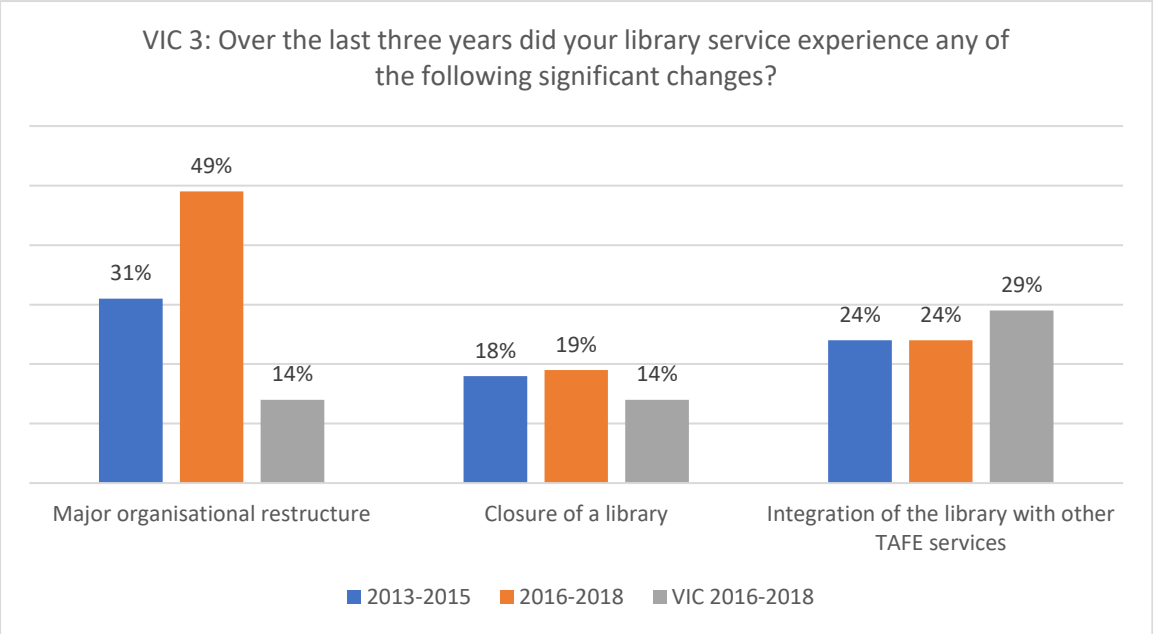
1. Size of population

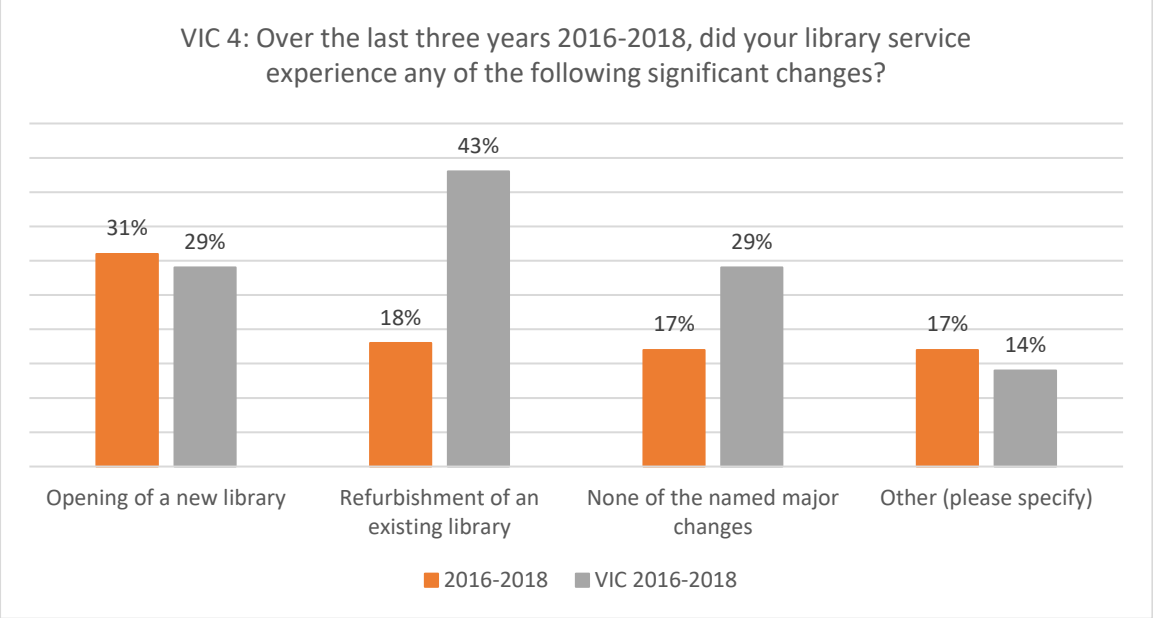


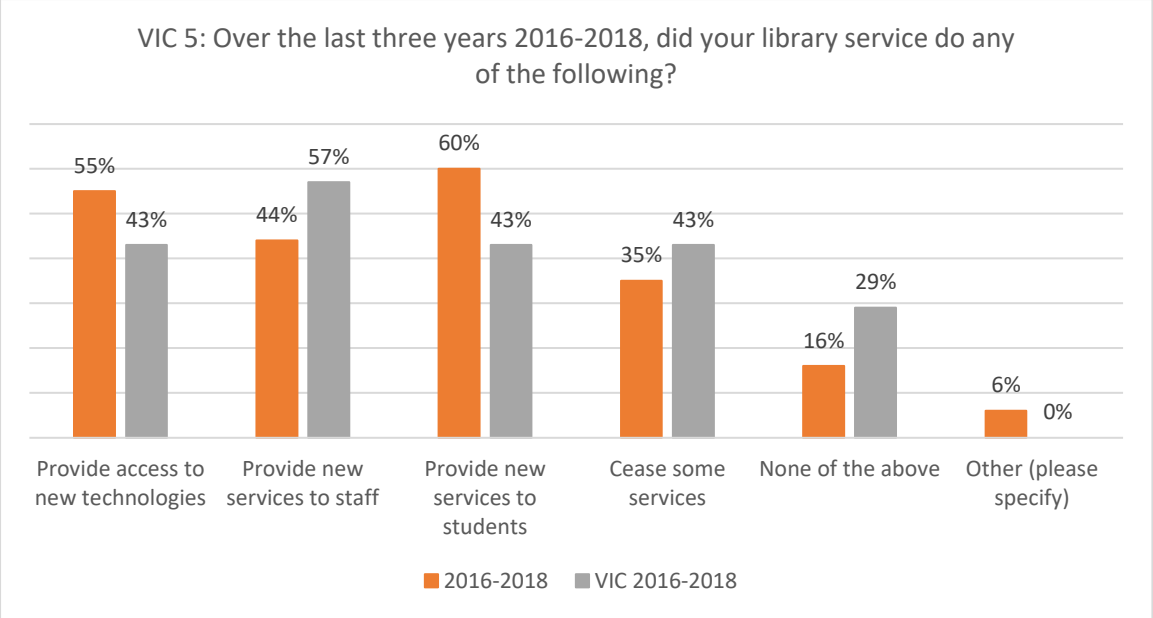
2. Expenditure

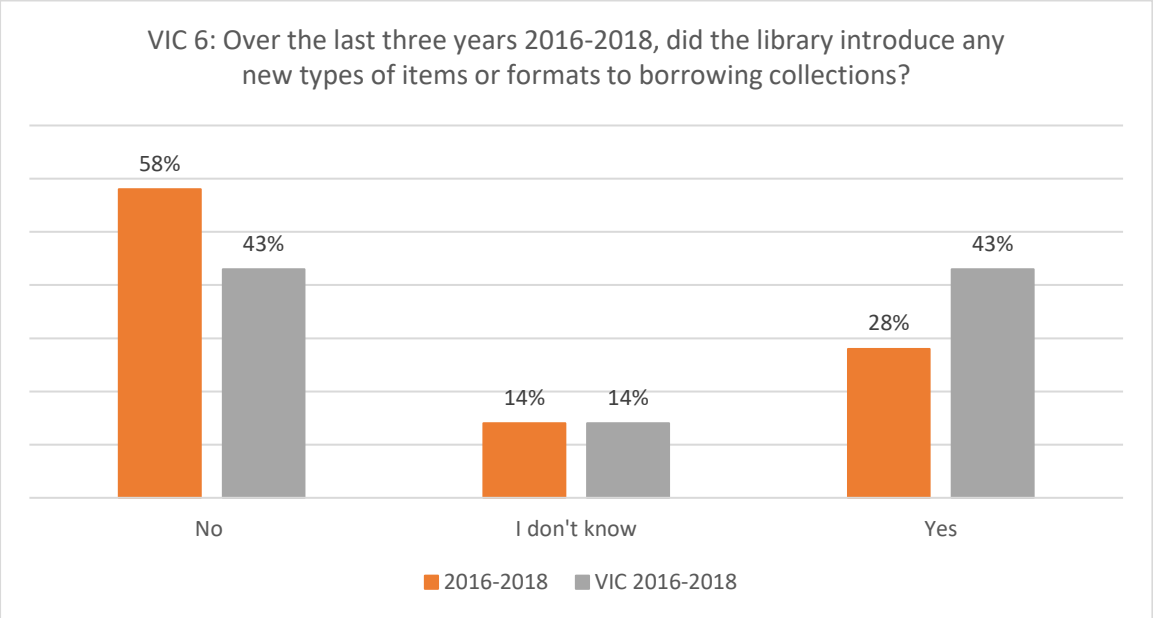


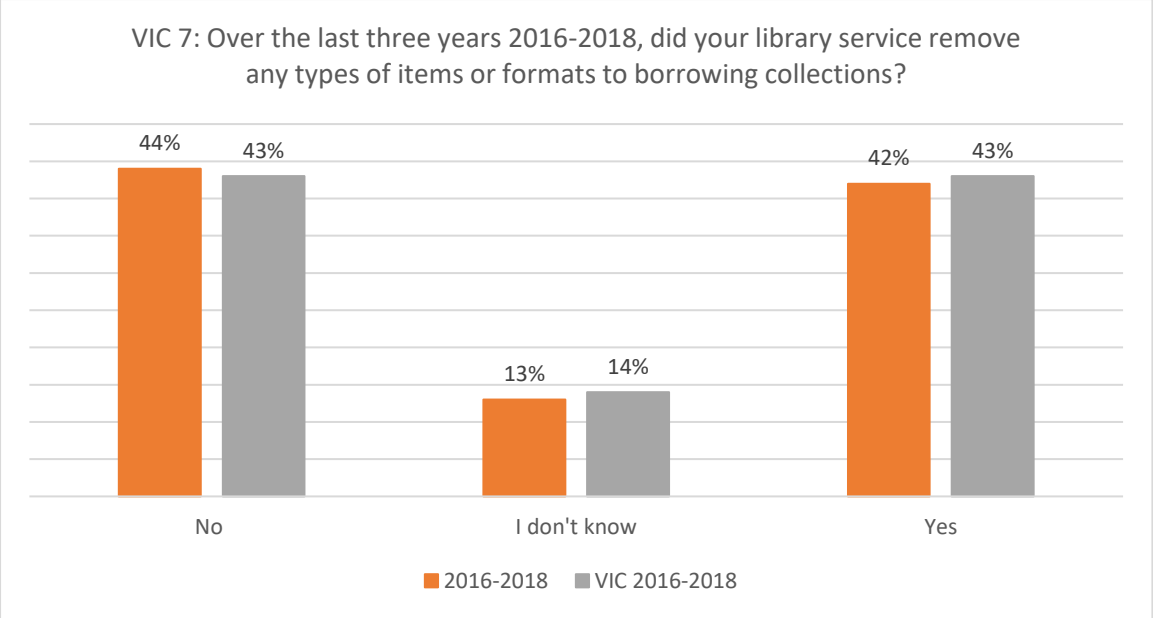
3. Major changes



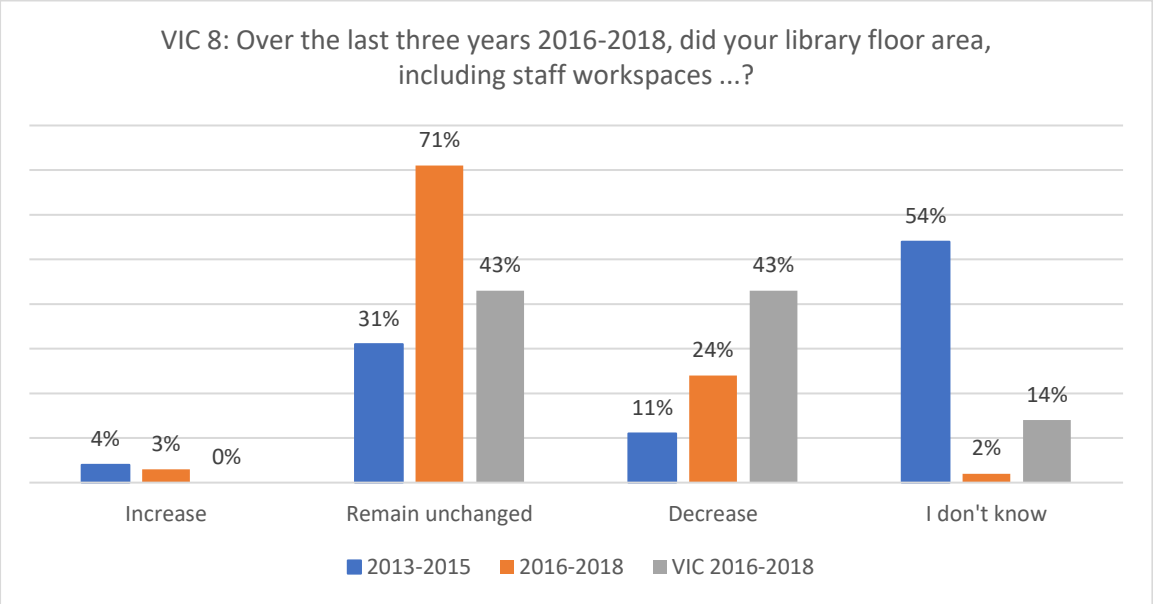



VIC 5: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did your library service do any of the following?
55%
43%
44%
57%
60%
43%
35%
43%
16%
29%
6%
0%
Provide access to new technologies
Provide new services to staff
Provide new services to students
Cease some services
None of the above
Other (please specify)
2016-2018
VIC 2016-2018

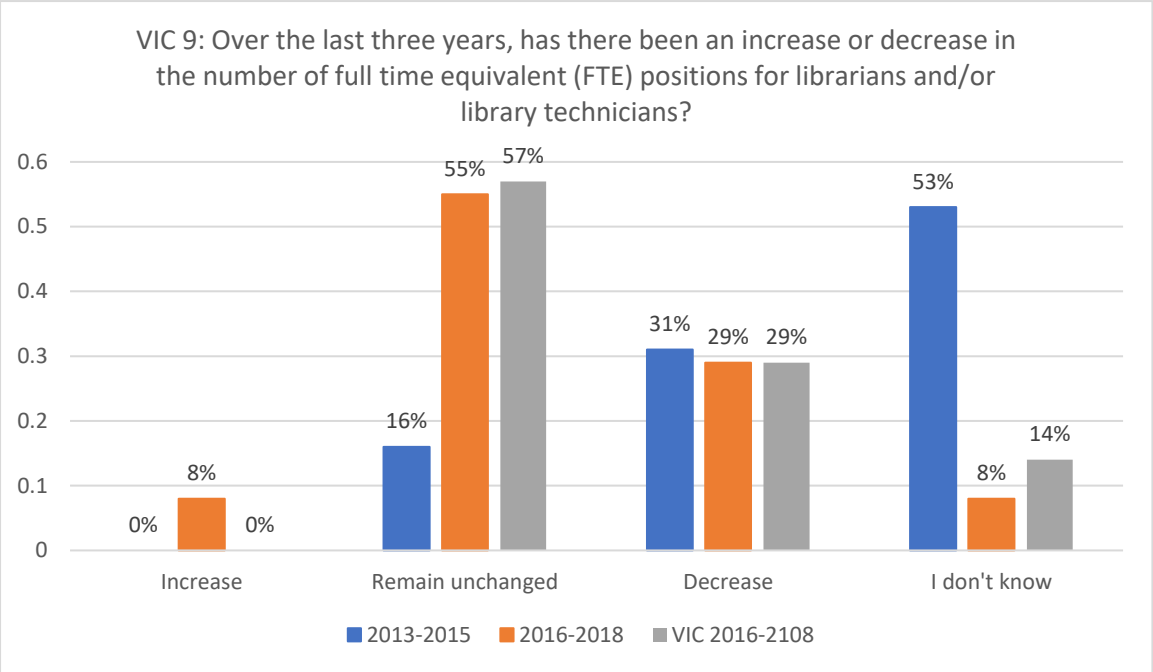

VIC 6: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did the library introduce any new types of items or formats to borrowing collections?
58%
43%
14%
14%
28%
43%
No
I don't know
Yes
2016-2018
VIC 2016-2018

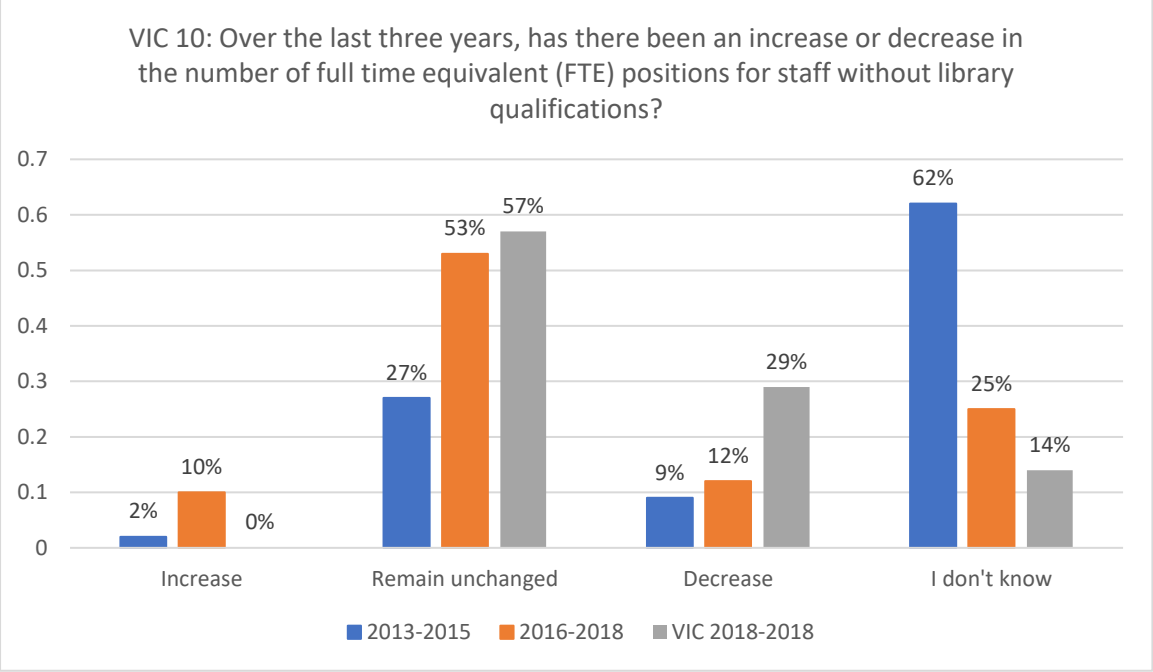

VIC 7: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did your library service remove any types of items or formats to borrowing collections?
44%
43%
13%
14%
42%
43%
No
I don't know
Yes
2016-2018
VIC 2016-2018

4. Spaces


VIC 8: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did your library floor area, including staff workspaces ...?
4%
3%
0%
31%
71%
43%
11%
24%
43%
54%
2%
14%
Increase
Remain unchanged
Decrease
I don't know
2013-2015
2016-2018
VIC 2016-2018

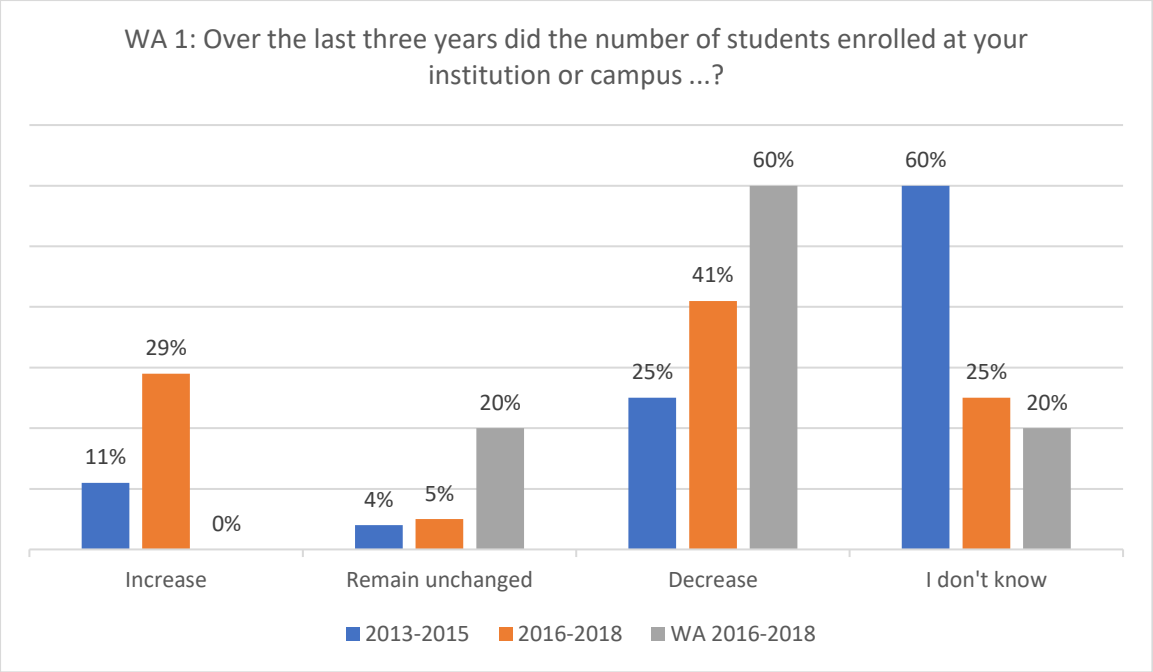
5. Staffing


VIC 9: Over the last three years, has there been an increase or decrease in the number of full time equivalent (FTE) positions for librarians and/or library technicians?
0.6
0.5
0.4
0.3
0.2
0.1
0
0%
8%
0%
16%
55%
57%
31%
29%
29%
53%
8%
14%
Increase
Remain unchanged
Decrease
I don't know
2013-2015
2016-2018
VIC 2016-2108

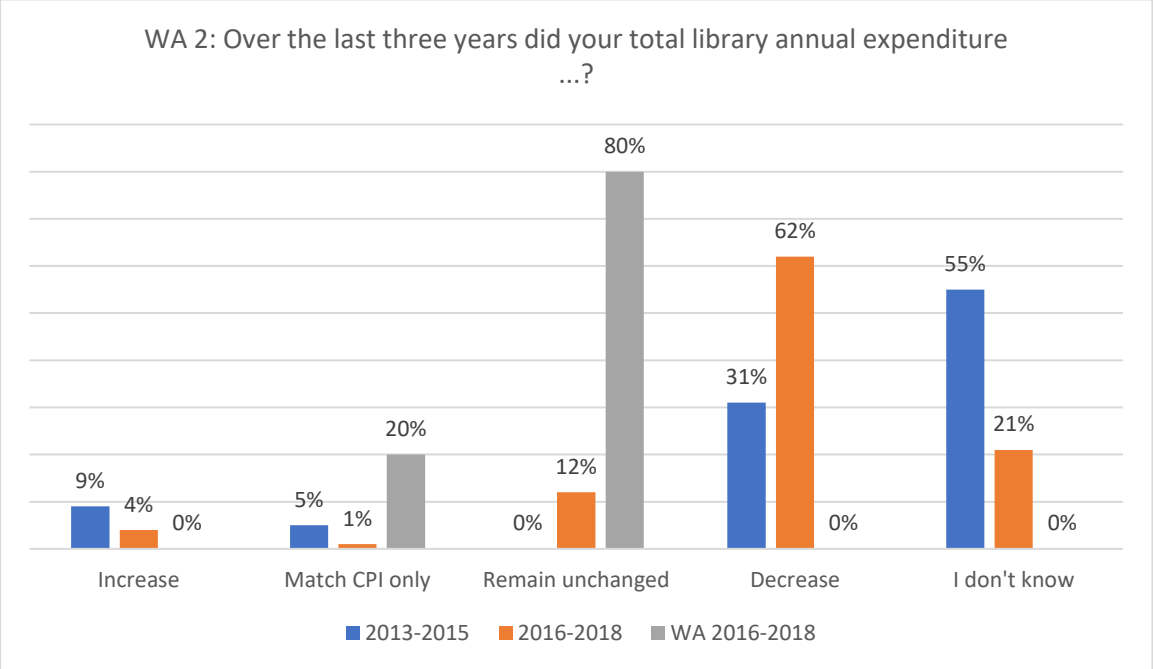

VIC 10: Over the last three years, has there been an increase or decrease in the number of full time equivalent (FTE) positions for staff without library qualifications?
0.7
0.6
0.5
0.4
0.3
0.2
0.1
0
2%
10%
0%
27%
53%
57%
9%
12%
29%
62%
25%
14%
Increase
Remain unchanged
Decrease
I don't know
2013-2015
2016-2018
VIC 2018-2018

Western Australia

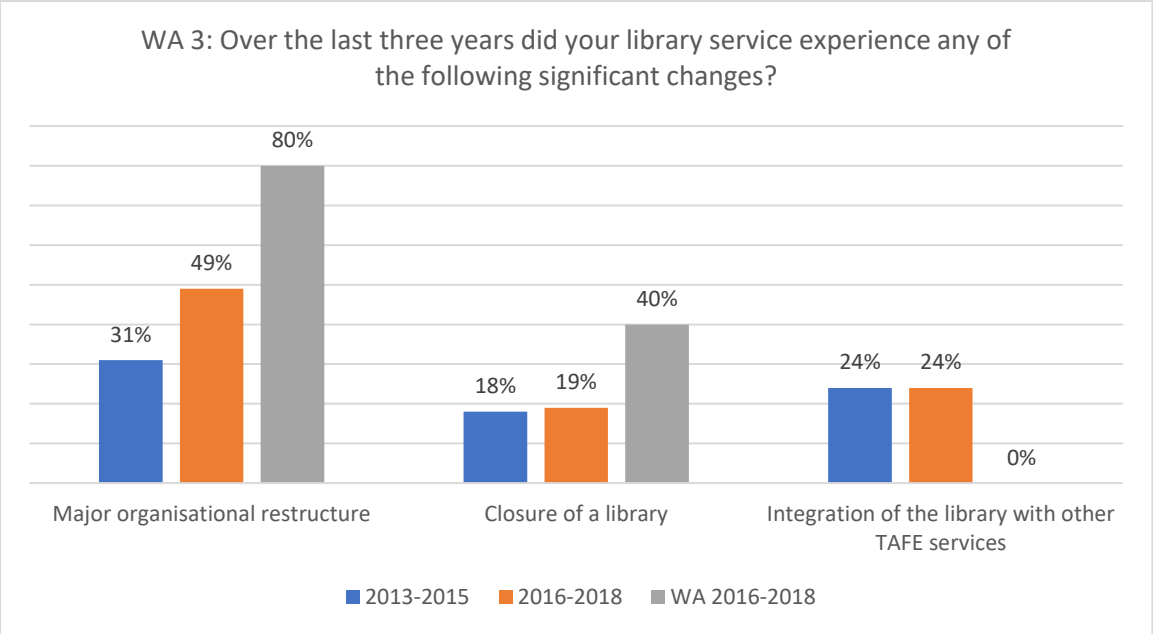
1. Size of population

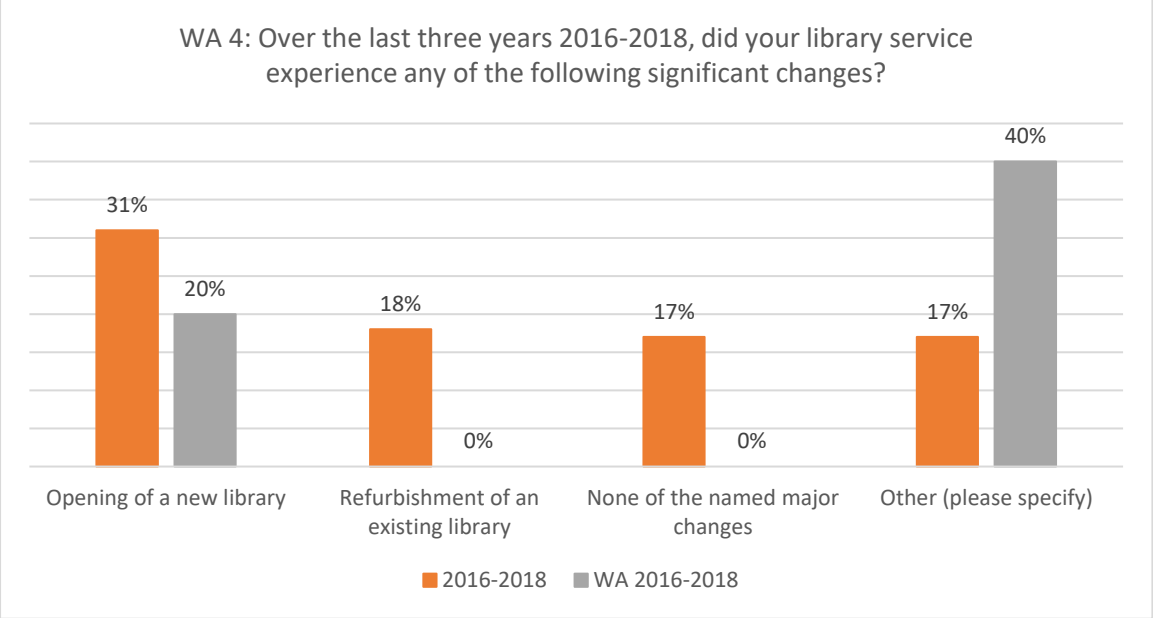


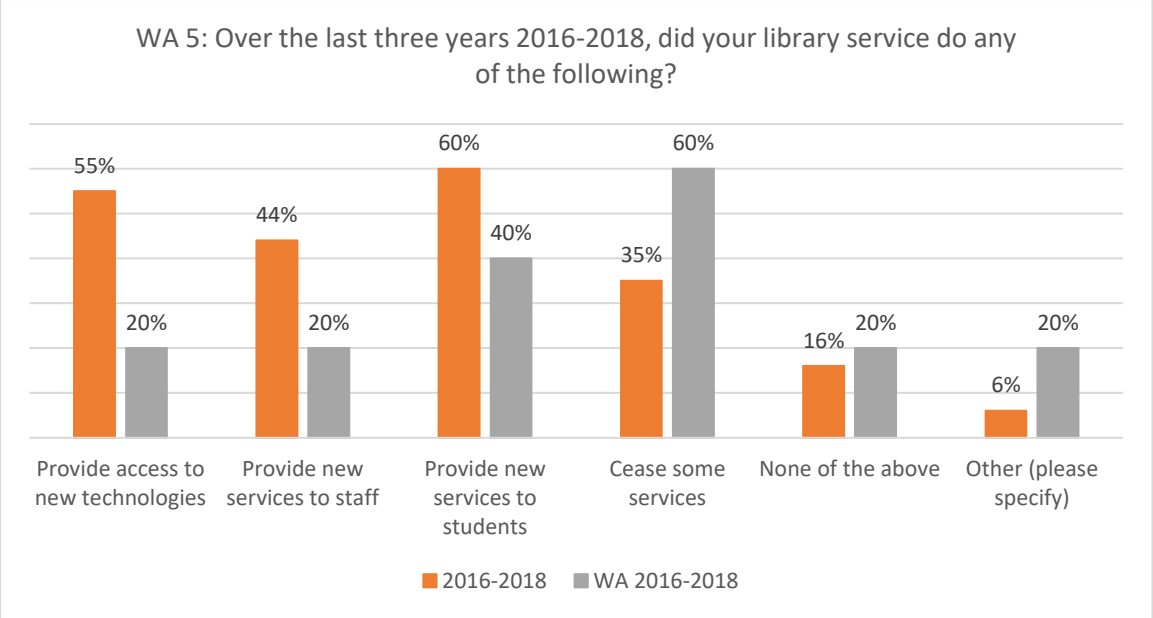
2. Expenditure

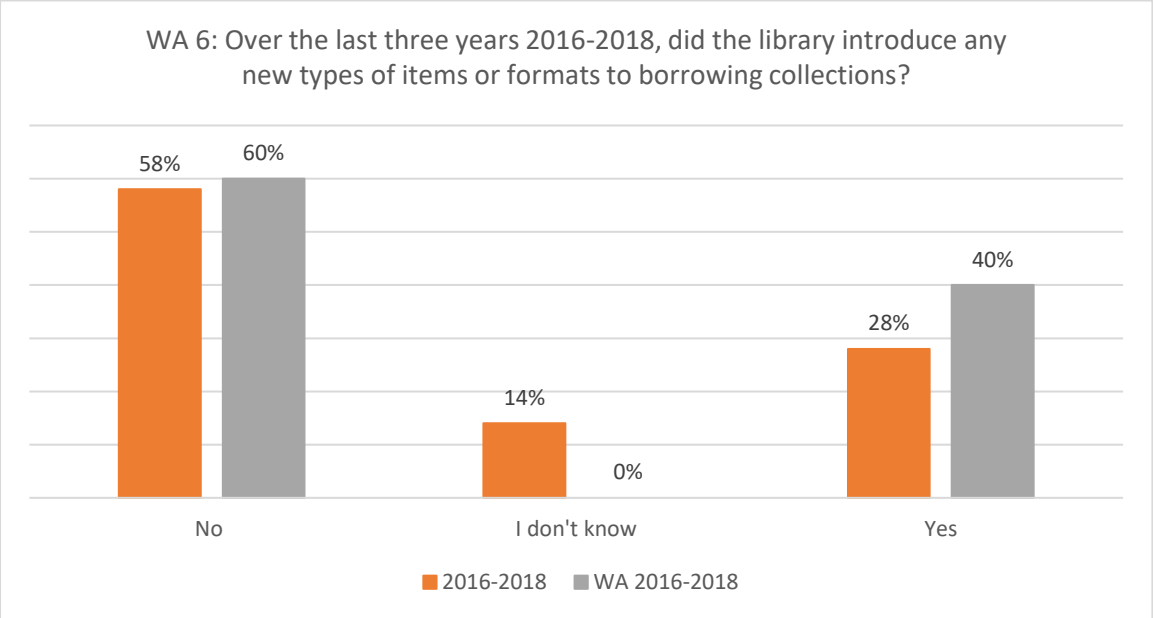


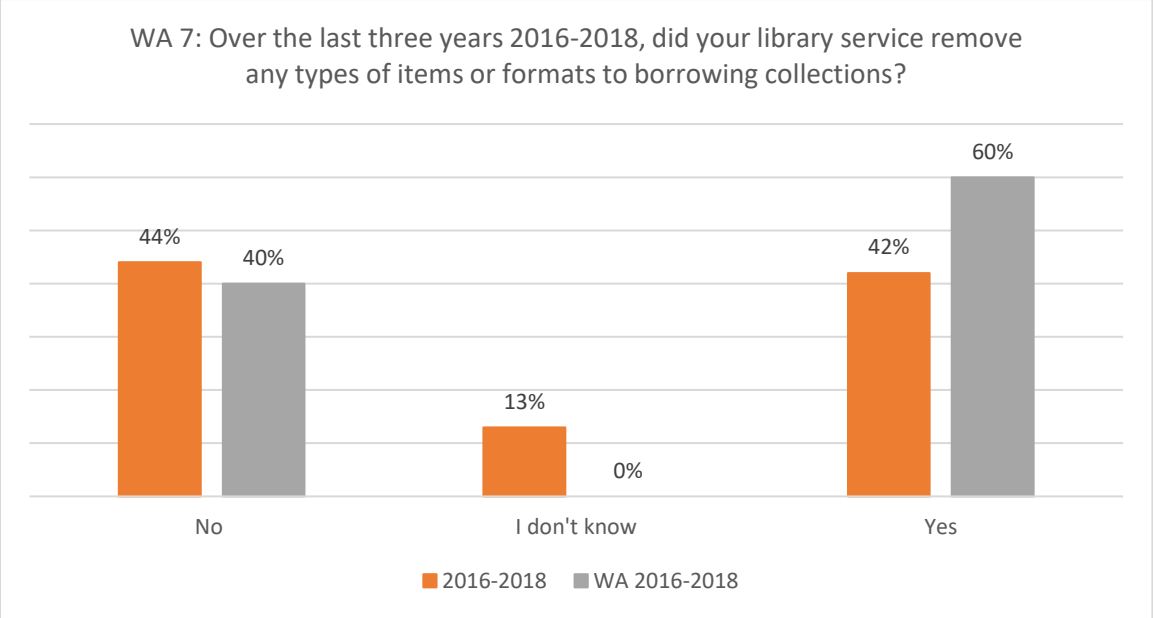
3. Major changes



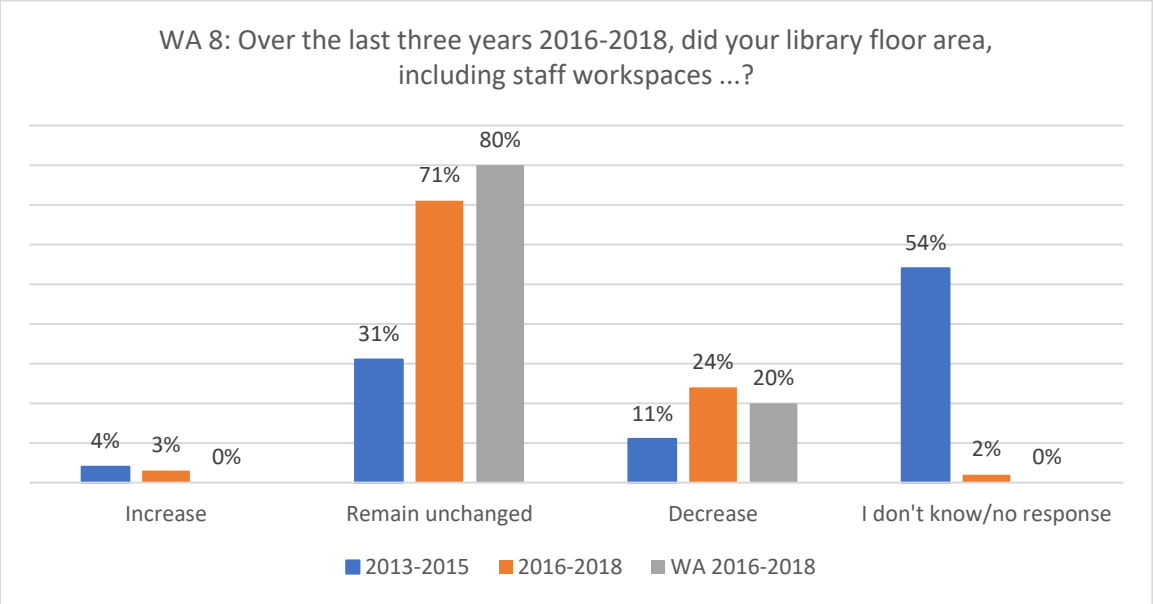



WA 5: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did your library service do any of the following?
55%
20%
44%
20%
60%
40%
35%
60%
16%
20%
6%
20%
Provide access to new technologies
Provide new services to staff
Provide new services to students
Cease some services
None of the above
Other (please specify)
2016-2018
WA 2016-2018

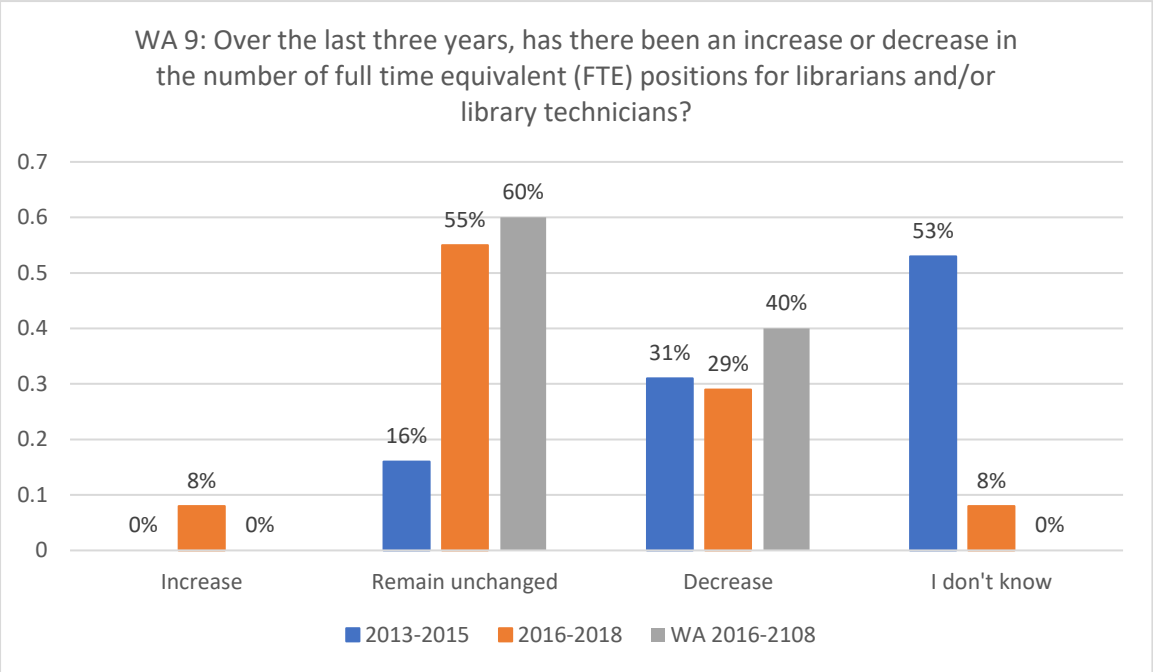

WA 6: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did the library introduce any new types of items or formats to borrowing collections?
58%
60%
14%
0%
28%
40%
No
I don't know
Yes
2016-2018
WA 2016-2018

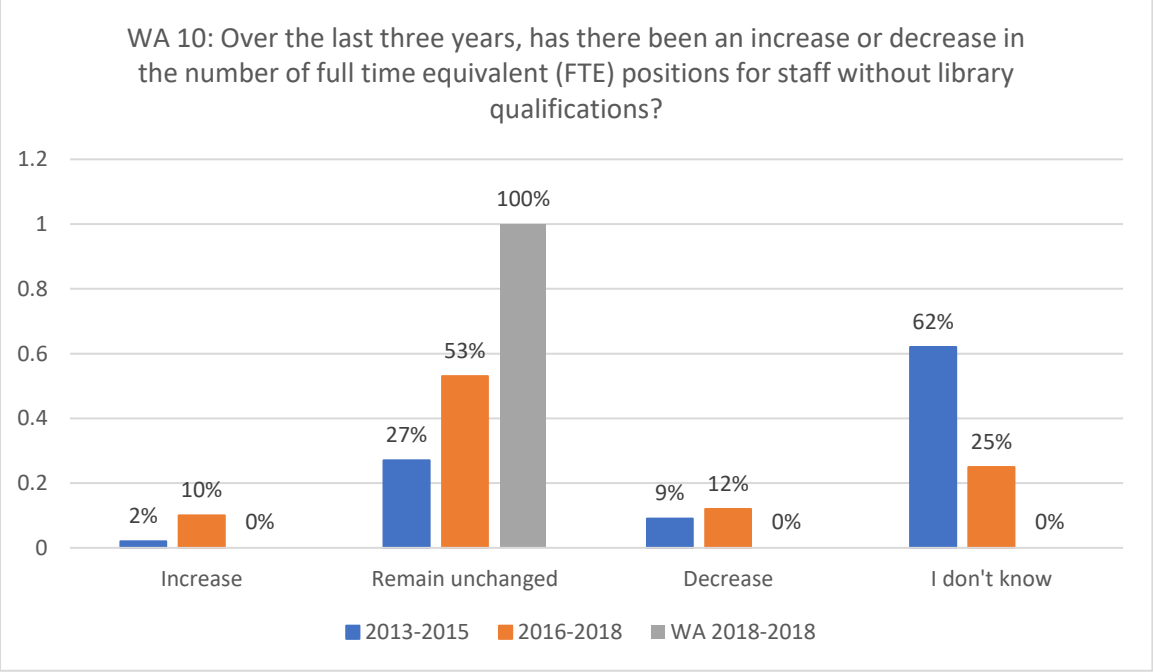

WA 7: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did your library service remove any types of items or formats to borrowing collections?
44%
40%
13%
0%
42%
60%
No
I don't know
Yes
2016-2018
WA 2016-2018

4. Spaces


WA 8: Over the last three years 2016-2018, did your library floor area, including staff workspaces ...?
4%
3%
0%
31%
71%
80%
11%
24%
20%
54%
2%
0%
Increase
Remain unchanged
Decrease
I don't know/no response
2013-2015
2016-2018
WA 2016-2018

5. Staffing


WA 9: Over the last three years, has there been an increase or decrease in the number of full time equivalent (FTE) positions for librarians and/or library technicians?
0.7
0.6
0.5
0.4
0.3
0.2
0.1
0
0%
8%
0%
16%
55%
60%
31%
29%
40%
53%
8%
0%
Increase
Remain unchanged
Decrease
I don't know
2013-2015
2016-2018
WA 2016-2108


WA 10: Over the last three years, has there been an increase or decrease in the number of full time equivalent (FTE) positions for staff without library qualifications?
1.2
1
0.8
0.6
0.4
0.2
0
2%
10%
0%
27%
53%
100%
9%
12%
0%
62%
25%
0%
Increase
Remain unchanged
Decrease
I don't know
2013-2015
2016-2018
WA 2018-2018