

ALIA FUTURE OF THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE PROFESSION SCHOOL LIBRARIES

Introduction

In 2013, we set out to investigate the big questions about our future.

- How will libraries remain relevant for users?
- What changes will institutions and individuals in the sector experience?
- Will 'library and information professional' continue to be a necessary and desirable occupation?

We received challenging, insightful, inspiring responses to our request for feedback at events held all around Australia. As a result, we were able to identify themes and develop actions to support positive outcomes. The findings from the project were produced as seven reports, available as pdf downloads from the ALIA website www.alia.org.au. These were published in May 2014, to coincide with ALIA's Annual General Meeting.

Three years on, we have reviewed the themes, actions and what we have learned since the original investigation. This is our May 2017 update.

Themes: Did we get it right?

There were six themes that emerged, specific to school libraries.

- 1. The most important job in the library and information sector**
School library staff encourage children to develop a lifelong love of books and reading for pleasure.
- 2. Deepening the divide**
Independent and Catholic schools continue to invest more in libraries than their government counterparts.
- 3. Easy and rewarding**
Affordable technologies will be needed to make the library experience as easy as, and more rewarding than Google.
- 4. Digital skills**
Staff will need new skills to manage digital collections and guide students through the online maze.
- 5. Parent power**
We will need to engage parents as advocates for school libraries.
- 6. Competing for attention**
School libraries will need to market their services, in competition with some of the world's biggest online brands (Google, Facebook, YouTube).

The issues identified during the 2013 consultation continue to challenge school library teams three years later. There is a deepening divide between government, Catholic and independent schools, and between different states and territories. For example, NSW schools are relatively well served by teacher librarians but there are hardly any employed in the Northern Territory. However, the NSW Department of Education's policy of requiring a librarian for every school library and supporting the retraining of teachers as teacher librarians through a Graduate Certificate scheme has ceased, and this is having a detrimental impact.

While library buildings benefited from the Building the Education Revolution investment by the Australian Government in 2009-2011, funding for staff and other operating expenses is often lacking. The success of the school library has become dependent on the decisions made by individual principals, and this is where the influence of parents is so essential.

Digital technologies have become an everyday part of school library programs and services. Ebooks can be found in many school libraries and the better funded libraries subscribe to several ebook platforms. Electronic resources and databases are common. Some libraries have introduced makerspaces and provide support for coding and robotics sessions. School library staff help students develop digital skills, use apps and social media, go to Google and beyond for authenticated information, and they educate students about cybersafety.

Scorecard: How did we perform 2013-2017?

This was the action list for ALIA.

<p>1. 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.</p>	<p>The inclusion of digital technologies and digital capabilities in the LIS curriculum has been an important element of the discussion between ALIA and educators around foundation skills. They have been a focus for the (bi-annual) Higher Education and (annual) VET LIS educator forums.</p> <p>ALIA continues to accredit teacher librarianship courses through Charles Sturt University and QUT.</p>
<p>2. We will continue to develop and deliver PD and training opportunities to support school library staff, especially around digital resources.</p>	<p>In 2013, ALIA Schools prepared a report¹ that identifies how teacher librarian practice can meet the Australian Institute for Teachers and School Leaders [AITSL] <i>Australian Professional Standards for Teachers</i>. The Group went on to create four films, which are illustrations of quality practice².</p> <p>The ALIA Schools Group continues to run regular PD sessions, and between 2015 and 2017, relevant ALIA Training courses included <i>YA – why not?</i>, <i>Digital DIY</i>, <i>Infographics 101</i>, <i>ANDS workshops on using and contributing to research data</i>, <i>Grow the Love</i> (library programs and promotion), and an annual <i>Digital Trends Round Up</i>.</p> <p>The ALIA Learning team worked with ALIA Schools to develop a set of competencies and a skills audit, which enabled the creation of a schools specialisation in the ALIA PD Scheme.</p>

This was the action list for school libraries.

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

¹ <https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/ALIA-Schools-AITSL-Standards-2014.pdf> accessed 4 May 2017
² <https://www.alia.org.au/groups/alia-schools> accessed 4 May 2017

Conclusion: What have we learned?

The funding of school libraries and the employment of qualified library staff rely on individual school principals. While principals are the decision-makers, key influencers are Departments of Education, management committees and parents. It is essential that regular and consistent efforts are put into advocacy for school libraries at national, state, territory and local level.

In 2015, ALIA helped initiate the School Library Coalition, which was formed to put a collaborative effort behind raising awareness of the value of school libraries staffed by library and information professionals.

On behalf of the coalition, ALIA ran the Great School Libraries campaign through our FAIR advocacy platform³. The list of more than 200 Great School Libraries was published in *Australian Teacher* magazine in March 2016.

Effective advocacy relies on having a strong evidence base. In 2016, ALIA produced *The impact of Great School Libraries* report⁴ and the School Library Coalition also commissioned the Australian Council for Education Research to produce a report entitled *What the staff in Australia's schools tell us about teachers working in school libraries*⁵.

More recently, in April 2017, we put together a document and poster *10 ways that libraries power high performance schools*⁶.

³ <https://fair.alia.org.au/greatschoolibraries> accessed 4 May 2017

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<https://fair.alia.org.au/sites/fair.alia.org.au/files/u3/Great%20Australian%20School%20Libraries%20Impact%20Report.pdf> accessed 4 May 2017

⁵ http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1026&context=tll_misc accessed 4 May 2017

⁶ <https://www.alia.org.au/node/184/school-libraries> accessed 4 May 2017