



Australian Library and
Information Association

Submission in response to the Productivity Commission Issues Paper: National Education Evidence Base

25 May 2016

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1. About us

The Australian Library and Information Association is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. On behalf of our 5,000 personal and institutional members, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support.

2. Introduction

This paper is submitted as feedback to the Productivity Commission's Issues Paper relating to the National Education Evidence Base.

We come to this from a number of perspectives:

- As a member of the informal coalition of organisations promoting a national early literacy strategy for Australia;
- As the peak body for libraries, with members in the school, academic and public library networks; and
- As an Australian Research Institute supporting deeper knowledge and evidence-based practice in the library and information sector.

Strengthening educational research to inform changes in education is commendable and we welcome this opportunity to contribute to the discussion.

3. Libraries as data users

We use data relating to literacy and student outcomes to help us manage our libraries and shape our services to best meet the needs of our communities.

3.1 Public libraries

Public libraries use the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to identify the need for additional support for early literacy through storytimes and rhymetime sessions, in English and in other community languages.

NAPLAN results are an indication of the level of need for homework clubs, reading programs, maker spaces, cybersafety support and other services for school age children.

In general terms, the ABS Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia, and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) provide a picture of the level of youth and adult literacy and life skills across the nation.

3.2 School libraries

Similarly, school libraries use the AEDC, NAPLAN and PIRLS data to drive program and service delivery. They also benefit from Department of Education statistics and data produced by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

4. Libraries as data generators

4.1 Public libraries

Public libraries are particularly good at input and output measures. National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) collates data from libraries across the nation and generates an annual report covering statistics on Australia-wide staffing, collections, expenditure and activities¹. These reports confirm the high usage of public libraries:

- In 2013-2014, there were 1,530 public library service points;
- Over 171 million items were lent to 8.6 million members;
- There were more than 112 million customer visits in the year; and
- Expenditure was just \$44.66 per capita.

Public libraries do not currently report on early literacy initiatives but this information is gathered in most jurisdictions and it would be possible to include this in the national report.

The latest figures from NSW are for 2013-2014 and show that there were 36,623 storytimes held in the state, with 1,031,002 attendees (under fives and their carers). For Libraries ACT, the 2015

¹ Australian public libraries statistics, NSLA, 2013-2014 <http://www.nsla.org.au/publication/australian-public-libraries-statistics-2013-2014>

statistics are equally impressive – 782 giggle & wiggle and storytime sessions, with 57,935 attendees.

4.2 School libraries

There is very little data about school libraries captured at a State, Territory or national level.

The 2011 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment report on *School Libraries and teacher librarians in 21st century Australia* commented specifically on the lack of data relating to school libraries, staffing levels and impact.

5. Gaps in available data

5.1 Mapping early literacy interventions against AEDC and NAPLAN results

In March 2016, more than 120 leaders from early childhood, libraries, education, playgroups, and so on, gathered in Canberra for the ALIA National Early Literacy Summit.

One of the factors emerging from the discussion was the importance of research to provide the evidence which will help improve the quality and appropriateness of early literacy interventions. There are many different programs operating across Australia and more could be achieved by sharing data about their effectiveness for communities and families with particular needs. Instead of 'reinventing the wheel', we could move forward on the basis of this acquired knowledge and experience.

5.2 Longitudinal study of the impact of school libraries

School Libraries and teacher librarians in 21st century Australia recommended "that the Commonwealth Government initiate an Australian-based longitudinal study into the links between library programs, literacy (including digital literacy) and student achievement, including their impact on improving outcomes for socioeconomically disadvantaged students". This recommendation has not been adopted and Australian school libraries continue to lack evidence of their effectiveness and impact, despite extensive research from overseas supporting their role².

5.3 School library staffing

The downward pressure on school library budgets and staffing also led ALIA, the Australian School Library Association and the state-based school library associations to commission research by ACER³ based on its Staff in Australia's Schools (SiAS) surveys. In summary, ACER found that:

² School Libraries Work! A compendium of research supporting the effectiveness of school libraries, Scholastic, 2016 edition <http://www.scholastic.com.au/assets/pdfs/school-libraries-work.pdf>

³ What the Staff in Australia's Schools surveys tell us about teachers working in school libraries, ACER, Paul Weldon, January 2016 http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1026&context=tll_misc

- In 2013, only 4-5% of primary teachers and 2-3% of secondary teachers were working in a library role. This compared with 5% of secondary teachers involved in Languages Other Than English, 5% computing and 6% special needs.
- Fewer early career teachers were entering library roles in schools and more than a third of primary teachers, and a quarter of secondary teachers in a library role, had not undertaken any tertiary study in library and information science.
- Students who most need teacher librarians are the least well served, "Between 2010 and 2013 there is evidence of a greater number of teachers in library roles in high socio-economic (SES) schools and correspondingly fewer in low SES schools."
- There needs to be a significantly increased emphasis on attracting, training and employing qualified teacher librarians in primary and secondary schools if the desired student outcomes were to be achieved.

Our ALIA Schools Advisory Committee has strong views on the need for national data on staffing in school libraries and the committee's views are contained in the appendix.

5.4 Linked data

Data exists outside schools, in the early learning sector, which would provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of early interventions on later student outcomes. However, there are issues around how to access, link and analyse this data.

Consistency is a major issue. For example, at present there are varying definitions of "early literacy" – for some organisations, this means pre-school, for others birth to eight years – and when people talk about metrics, on some occasions they use student numbers and on others student FTE.

Another barrier to linked data is privacy. There is national privacy legislation as well as State/Territory privacy legislation. Together, these laws make it difficult to share data about children and young people between organisations. Consent is sought for the collection of this data but its further use may not be possible without the express consent of parents or guardians.

5.5 Other literacies

There is a delay in including new literacies as part of our investigation into early childhood development, specifically through the language and cognitive skills domain of the AEDC.

The absence of digital literacy means we are not keeping pace with the reality of children's lives, in homes where smartphones, tablets and screens may (or may not) be part of their everyday experience. This information will become essential as governments strive for equity in terms of digital skills and move further along the path of digital transformation. At the same time, information literacy is essential for successful student outcomes in complex information environments.

6. Summary

Libraries are data generators and data users. Existing products such as the AEDC and NAPLAN are valuable assets but, as we have described, there are significant gaps in our knowledge and evidence base and there are barriers to overcome.

APPENDIX – ALIA SCHOOLS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

With reference to the ACER SiAS survey

We are writing to support the continuation of the SiAS survey and to request that additional data about staffing in school libraries be gathered. Currently there is no national data available on:

- Non-teaching library staff;
- School level data on libraries; and
- Library staff in training.

SiAS

Commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Education (and its predecessors) the SiAS survey was first conducted in 2007 and subsequently in 2010 and 2013. It is a teacher workforce survey, and its intention is to provide a detailed picture of the Australian teacher and school leadership workforces.

Late in 2015, under the auspices of Freedom of Access to Information and Resources (FAIR), ALIA partnered with school library associations to commission an analysis of SiAS by Dr Paul Weldon of the Australian Council for Educational research (ACER). The report focussed on the results of the SiAS surveys in relation to the teacher workforce in school libraries. This is the first report to analyse national data about teachers working in Australian primary and secondary school libraries. *What the Staff in Australia's Schools surveys tell us about teachers working in school libraries* http://research.acer.edu.au/tll_misc/25 was published in early 2016 and some of the key findings include:

- Teacher numbers are declining in primary school libraries;
- There was evidence of a greater number of teachers in library roles in high SES schools and correspondingly fewer in low SES schools; and
- Over one third of teachers working in primary school libraries have not completed tertiary study in the field and in secondary school libraries the figure is approximately one quarter.

This information is essential to workforce planning as well as identifying trends. Re the latter, there is clear evidence in the report of inequities in the provision of library services to students in low SES schools. This has a detrimental effect on students in those schools as there is ample

research on the positive effects of appropriately staffed school libraries on student learning⁴. These identified inequities will be of great concern to the Australian public.

On the issue of how to address the adverse findings of the report, ALIA and the school library associations have an advocacy program in place, the recent and very successful [Great School Libraries campaign](#) being an example. Just as there is a great need for this advocacy work to continue it is also essential for the SiAS survey to continue.

The SiAS survey provides the only national data on the teacher workforce in Australian school libraries as neither ACARA nor Myschool provide data on school library personnel. This invaluable data is essential for planning and the identification of trends about the teacher workforce in Australian primary and secondary school libraries. Without it there can be no correlation with other research or benchmarking, hence our support for the continuation of the SiAS survey.

Non- teaching library staff

Non-teaching library staff are not counted anywhere at the national level. Many school library buildings were built as a result of the Building the Educational Revolution funding. The level of staffing in these facilities is unknown. The education sector is responsible for workforce development and provides training for bursars, disability aids and other ancillary staff, however, this is not available to library staff.

School level data on libraries

Due to the paucity of information, ALIA is unable to identify which schools do not have a staffed library and, as a result, which children are disadvantaged. Therefore it is difficult to address the inequities identified by the previously mentioned report *What the Staff in Australia's Schools surveys tell us about teachers working in school libraries*.

Library staff in training

What the Staff in Australia's Schools surveys tell us about teachers working in school libraries found "The data indicate that teachers involved with library work at primary level are likely to be slightly older than the average. At secondary level, teachers involved in library work are about 6 years older on average than the general teacher population". This makes data about library staff in training essential because the replacement of an ageing library workforce has become an important issue.

The role of the teacher librarian and the school library in improving literacy levels is well documented. Information about library teaching staff, non-teaching staff, school level data and library staff in training is essential for planning, identifying trends, addressing inequities and ensuring that appropriately trained staff is available. When all this data is available further work can take place on correlating with other research and benchmarking.

⁴ US: Library Research Service (2013). *School library impact studies*. Denver: Colorado Department of Education.<http://www.lrs.org/data-tools/school-libraries/impact-studies>

UK: Williams, Wavell & Morrison (2013). *Impact of school libraries on learning*. Aberdeen: Robert Gordon University. http://scottishlibraries.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/SLIC_RGU_Impact_of_School_Libraries_2013.pdf