



Submission in response to the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training Discussion Paper

5 December 2019

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. About school libraries

There are more than 9,000 government, Catholic and independent schools in Australia. Almost all schools have a library of some description, but they vary enormously in terms of staffing, facilities and collections. The ALIA handout, *10 ways libraries power high performance schools*, is provided as an appendix.

Private schools invest in libraries as visible symbols for fee-paying parents of their commitment to literacy, learning and academic excellence. Principals in less well-funded schools often struggle to employ qualified library staff and provide the appropriate budget for necessary resources. Yet the value of a successful school library in supporting teaching staff, building reading and information literacies, promoting cybersafety and digital skills, and providing access to recreational books as well as essential study materials, is the same for all students, and arguably more important for those from less advantaged backgrounds.

Recognising the imbalance between private and public school library provision, ALIA Schools is one of the founder partners of the [Students Need School Libraries](#) campaign, which has featured heavily in the media during 2019.

3. School libraries and Senior Secondary Pathways

3.1 Essential skills and knowledge for young people leaving secondary school

School libraries assist young Australians to become active and informed citizens. They play a critical role in building digital skills and the ability of young people to be confident and safe internet users. They provide carefully selected resources, encourage a reading culture, and are central to literacy development. They give direction and support for students dealing with information abundance, cultivating the critical thinking skills so necessary when

evaluating information authenticity and quality. These foundational skills are critical as the learner transitions to further study or to employment.

3.2 Barriers to allowing all students to have equal access to pathways

The disparity of school library provision between private and public schools means that students with less well-resourced school libraries may not benefit from the learning and skills described above. We know from our TAFE and university library members that staff in these institutions experience variable levels of study-readiness among first year students.

Members have reported that students undertaking VET courses in TAFE institutions often need help with basic IT and information literacy skills, and a study by university librarians found that: “While more than three quarters of students could construct a simple keyword search strategy, fewer than one third were able to demonstrate the understanding of journal article citations, peer-reviewed articles, or referencing.”¹

This supports the statement in the Discussion Paper (p8): “there is continuing criticism from employers and tertiary education providers that senior secondary graduates are leaving school without adequate foundational skills.’

4. Summary

We welcome this review and support comments in the Discussion Paper about the need for students to have basic literacy and numeracy, while also acquiring an enhanced range of capabilities, including digital literacy and critical and analytical thinking, all of which are supported by school libraries.

We support the notion of introducing mandatory, reportable minimum standards for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy (p8) and urge the review to make a clear link between these skills and the role of school libraries. Well-resourced school libraries, staffed by qualified professionals should be available to all young people in order to prepare them for future study and work.

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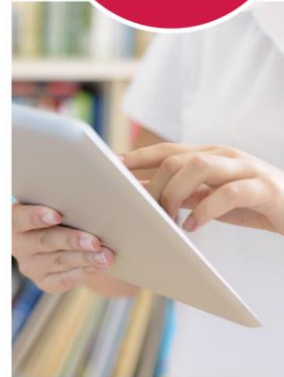
¹ Are they Ready? Exploring Student Information Literacy Skills in the Transition from Secondary to Tertiary Education <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048623.2011.10722203>

10 ways that libraries power high performance schools



AUSTRALIAN SCHOOL LIBRARIES

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MODERN LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

In many schools, the library is a flagship example of a modern 24/7 learning environment. With the expert help of information professionals, it provides a welcoming, flexible space that encourages individual, class and group learning. It reaches directly in to classrooms and students' homes through resource rich websites, authoritative databases, social media and online guides.

1

DIGITAL HUBS

School libraries play an important role in ICT, ensuring that all students have access to shared devices and resources, and in some cases acting as home to the tech support team. Many school libraries support students' project-based learning through training in coding, robotics, the use of apps and social media. Some have maker spaces, where students can experiment with the latest technologies.

2



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RESEARCH SKILLS

Library professionals help students develop the research and critical thinking skills they will need for tertiary education and beyond. Anyone can Google; not everyone can use specialist databases, find the most relevant information, identify credible sources and correctly cite their references.

3



READING FOR PLEASURE

Reading is an essential life skill. Libraries help students develop literacy skills. They encourage students to read for pleasure, expanding their horizons, building empathy, enabling them to see the world through others' experiences and to find answers to the issues they may face as children and young adults.

4



CURRICULUM SUPPORT

Beyond simple textbooks, library professionals not only support but also teach or team teach in the library and classroom. They ensure students have access to the wide range of contemporary physical and digital resources they need to complete their course work and to gain a broader understanding of the topic, enriching their classroom learning.

5



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CYBERSAFETY

Library staff help keep young people safe online, through advice, educational programs and access to support networks. Staff are also there for parents, who are concerned about the risks of cyberbullying and other inappropriate use of social media.

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Photo credit: St Margaret Mary's, Merrylands

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

Libraries are safe, neutral spaces, where everyone is welcome. Through the library, schools support students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. They do this by providing appropriate books, and other materials, and by running inclusive events that promote harmony and understanding.

7



PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS

Libraries enable all students to access the information they need. Library layouts, resources, equipment and policies are designed to support students with disability.

8



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SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Libraries are a central point for coordinating and hosting important cultural and education events in schools, including author workshops and literature festivals. These can be reading related – National Simultaneous Storytime and Children's Book Week – or relate to broader subject areas such as Science Week, NAIDOC Week, and Hour of Code.

9



Photo credit: Bibbie Island State School

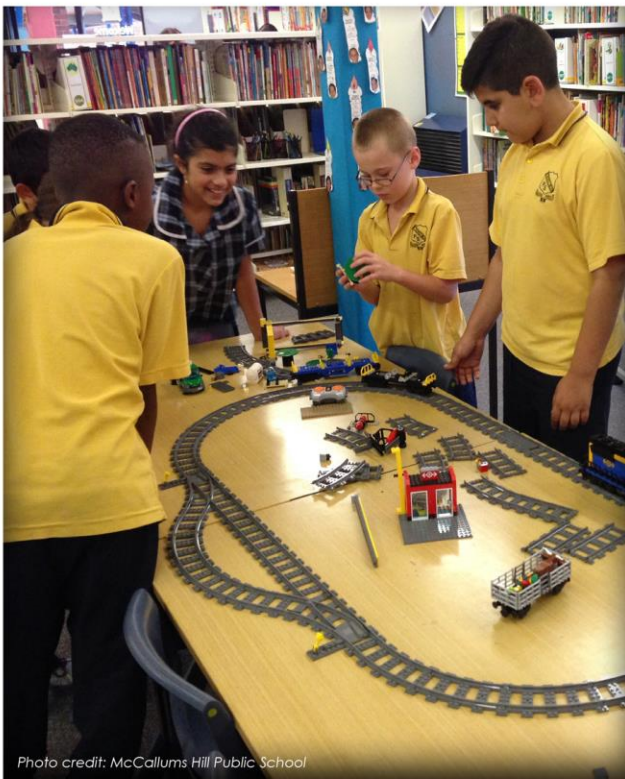


Photo credit: McCallums Hill Public School

BUILDING COMMUNITY

Libraries can act as exhibition spaces for students' artworks and design or digital technology projects, as meeting and event areas, as informal study areas. Some even have a café. Through professional expertise, the clever use of space, print collections, networked resources, programs and events, libraries create a focal point for community within the school.

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