Background and Objective

The Australian School Library Survey, conducted by Softlink on behalf of the Australian school library industry, examines key trends and issues impacting school libraries. Key analysis includes annual school library budgets, staffing levels in Australian school libraries and the relationship of budgets and staffing level to academic achievement and literacy.

Since 2010, the annual survey has identified positive links between school achievement and well-resourced libraries. The results help to advocate the role of school libraries and Teacher Librarians to education decision makers as well as through industry associations and networks.

Softlink has supported the education information and library management industry for 30 years.

Summary of 2014 Key Findings

The 2014 survey found:

- There was a positive correlation between annual school library budgets and NAPLAN Reading Literacy results.
- There was a positive correlation between the number of school librarians employed in school libraries and NAPLAN Reading Literacy results.
- Overall, fewer schools reported a budget decrease in 2013/2014 compared to the significant percentage of schools that reported a budget decrease between 2012/2013.
- Government Secondary and Government K – 12 schools had the highest percentage of budget decreases in the 2013/2014 comparison.
- Overall, 52% of respondents indicated that they felt that their school library was adequately funded, 48% of respondents felt that the opposite was true.
- The majority of school libraries had no change to their staffing levels.
- For school libraries that did change their staffing level, the more common trend was a decrease in staffing levels.

School Library Budgets

Changes in School Library Budgets by School Type

This year 81% of school library budgets either remained unchanged or decreased. The highest number of respondents (52%) indicated that their budgets remained the same, while 29% stated their budget had decreased. Overall, 19% of all respondents indicated that their budgets had increased. The results in Figure 1 show the changes in school library budgets for school type.
When comparing 2013 and 2014 reported budget figures, fewer school libraries received a budget decrease in 2014, with more school library budgets remaining the same. The percentage of reported budget increases was identical in 2013 and 2014.

Please see Figure 2 below for a comparison of budget changes.

The results above indicate that, overall, school library budgets have stabilised slightly in 2013/2014. In the 2012/2013 comparison the number of reported budget increases dropped by 7%, the number of reported budgets that did not change dropped by 4% and the number of budgets that decreased rose by 11% in the time frame. These budget losses do not appear to have been regained in the 2013/2014 year comparison but there has been some stabilisation.
Changes in School Library Budgets by Education Provider

Figure 3 below highlights the results of changes to School Library Budgets by Education Provider.

Again this year a higher percentage of Government school libraries experienced budget decreases than Catholic or Independent school libraries. Government Secondary Schools and K-12 reported the highest level of decreases, with 38% for each category reporting a budget decrease. Only 20% of Government Primary Schools reported a decrease; however budgets in this sector were traditionally low already. Overall, more independent school libraries received an increase in budgets during the past year than any other education provider group.

Figure 3: Changes in 2014 School Library Budgets by Education Provider

While Catholic and Independent school libraries reported a lower percentage of overall budget decreases than Government school libraries, the 2013/2014 comparison indicates that more Catholic and Independent schools had their budgets decreased from the previous year, whereas less Government schools indicated a decrease from the year before. This means that the percentage of schools who reported a budget decrease is more consistent across the three education provider types than it was the year before. See Figure 4. On the following page for this comparison.
The survey results identify a positive correlation between 1) school library budgets and literacy levels and 2) school library staffing and literacy levels.

Figure 5 compares the NAPLAN reading literacy levels published on the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy and My School website and the average annual library budget allocation to these schools. More information will be available in the 2014 Australian School Library Report which is expected to be published in February 2015. Please check the softlinkint.com website under “News” around this time.
The 2014 budget findings are more stable than the 2013 budget findings but a significant number of school libraries are still operating with limited and decreasing budgets. A higher percentage of schools reported a budget decrease than a budget increase across all education provider types.

There is still a substantial gap in financial investment in our school libraries.

The research supports that the capacity to deliver world class education to young Australians would increase significantly with additional funding provision to school libraries but that overall, this is not occurring.

**Staffing of Australian School Libraries**

A total of 25% of schools reported a decrease in library staffing in 2014. Only 6% of school libraries experienced an increase in staffing levels. The Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staffing at the majority of school libraries remains unchanged with 69% of all schools surveyed stating that there had been no change in staff during the past 12 months.

K-12 school libraries had the highest number of FTE staff with an average of 3.46 per school. The average for secondary school libraries was 2.96. FTE staff for primary school libraries was 1.52. These averages are slightly higher than findings in 2013, which appears to be a result of the larger sample size (1380 as opposed to 800).

**eBooks and Your School Library**

The survey found that more than a quarter of respondent schools have purchased eBooks in the past year (30%). This is slightly higher than last year’s result (28%), which was slightly higher than the 2012 (25.5%) result. This indicates a steady increase in the take up of eBooks.

On average 22% of respondent schools indicated in 2014 that eBooks or eResources now make up 5% or more of their collection. Again this year, it is noted that there is a strong intention by school libraries to continue to extend their collections and services with digital titles, with 55% of respondent teacher librarians indicating they will “definitely” or “most probably” purchase eBooks within the next 12 months.

**Accessibility and Your School’s Library**

The survey investigated the broader trend towards personal mobile device ownership again in 2014.

This year, 43% of respondents said half or more of their student population have a personal mobile device (iPod, iPad, smart phone or other tablet) a very similar response to the 2013 survey.

In terms of use of personal devices and accessing the library resources this year’s findings reflect a continued trend of student device ownership and changes in libraries to manage student driven demand. These findings include:

- 37% of schools allow personal digital device use at school. This includes 24% of schools that ‘encourage the use of personal mobile devices at school from within and outside the classroom’, while another 13% stated they ‘encouraged use at school but only outside of classroom’.
• 76% of schools provide access to resources from outside the library. 49% now provide access from both outside and within the school, while 27% provide access outside the library from within the school only. These figures are very similar to the 2013 results, with a small increase in the percentage of schools who offer access to the library from outside and within the school.
• 78% of librarians believe it is important to provide access to the school library (catalogue, electronic resources, e-books etc.) from outside the school and outside school hours.

Feedback Themes

Recurring response themes to the question, “What exciting trends are emerging that could impact the library in the near future?”, included:

• eResources – greater use of eBooks, the development of eTextbooks and more open platforms for sharing eResources.
• BYOT and BYOD – continued impact on how school libraries operate.
• Access – being able to offer 24/7 service with general mobile and web access from anywhere.
• Space for creativity and innovation – developing the library as a central hub for creativity and innovation, including 3D printing and MakerSpace. Using the library as a centre for learning, innovation, social activity and events.
• Flipped Learning – what role libraries, library resources and collections play in learning delivery.
• Value of Teacher Librarians – Teacher Librarian technical training and recognition for their skills, expertise and value to student achievement.
• Collaboration – with teaching staff to support curriculum and provide high quality teaching and learning programs.

Many of these comments referenced funding, physical library space and staffing resources, including impacts on time available for library innovation and management versus teaching requirements as an immediate challenge to these potentially exciting opportunities. A well-resourced school library is better equipped to enhance teaching and learning outcomes. Softlink will publish further findings from comment based questions in early 2015.

About Your Detailed Analysis Report (also attached)

Please also find attached an Analysis Report detailing staffing numbers and budget ranges for schools of a similar size to yours based on enrolment numbers. We hope that this information may assist you to advocate the value of your school library and its contribution to your school.

There are two components presented in the detailed analysis:
1. The Total Financial Budget (TFB) – This is an analysis of the responses to the question asking about the budget for the financial year including, 31 March 2014. The data is presented as a median result to remove the distortion of average data from highly funded school libraries.

2. The Total Staffing Numbers (TSN) – This is an analysis of the responses to the question asking about the staff numbers employed within the school library. The data is presented as a mean average of the total staff. This is measured in full time equivalents.

These two components are presented in a total format with quartile markers for your reference. There is also median and average analysis by school type, education provider and state or territory. This will allow you to benchmark your school library’s TFB and TSN against other like schools.

It would be great to hear from you about the value of these reports. Please contact us via marketing@softlinkint.com to provide your feedback.

**How does Softlink help?**

We thank you for taking the time to respond to the Softlink 2014 Australian School Library Survey. Your willingness to participate and share information about your school library means that once again we can provide this valuable, annual analysis of school libraries Australia-wide. The survey results provide a critical reference point for changes, impacts and trends across Australian school libraries.

Softlink will continue to work with industry associations to help advocate the role of school libraries and Teacher Librarians to education ministers, departments and decision makers as well as through industry networks.

Softlink is proud to continue to sponsor this Australia-wide initiative.