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The Australian School Libraries Research Project : A snapshot of Australian school libraries, Report 1

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Australian School Libraries Research Project

A snapshot of Australian school libraries: Report 1

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Summary

The Australian School Library Research Project (ASLRP) is an initiative of the Australian School Library Association (ASLA), the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and Edith Cowan University (ECU). This paper presents the preliminary findings from an anonymous Web survey, designed to collect data about the state of school libraries across Australia. It is part of a much larger data collection which examines the current state of school libraries around Australia.

The findings presented here are concerned with the state and resourcing of school libraries and does not include other resources that may be located elsewhere in the school or resources managed by someone other than the library or resources privately owned by individual teachers. The results of these findings include the following:

- **Age of library facilities**

- 44% of all school libraries in this survey are older than 20 years, with a further 11% between 15 and 20 years old.
- Few libraries reported recent refurbishment (8.5%) or new facilities (5.5%).
- NSW reported the highest number of older facilities, but this was high for all states except the ACT.
- Government schools had the highest number (10% more) of 20+ buildings.
- The Independent Schools sector reported more new buildings and facilities less than 5 years old.
- 49 libraries were housed in classrooms or temporary facilities
- Most school libraries were either a dedicated building (OLD and WA) or part of a building (TAS, VIC and ACT).

- **Space: seating and ICTs**

- 56% of school libraries have less than the recommended space for seating (<12%).
- Another 13% seat only 12% of their school population.
- Government and Anglican schools have the least amount of seating available and WA schools the worst in this dataset.
- 67.5% of all schools do not have the recommended space for ICTs (<14%) with a further 7% allowing 14%.
- SA and VIC are the worst states for ICT space.
- Space for ICTs is reasonably comparable across school sectors.

- **Annual Library Budget**

- 12.5% of all schools reported an annual budget of less than \$1000. A further 16.5% reported an annual budget of less than \$5000. Nearly a third of all school libraries received less than \$5000 to provide curriculum, recreational reading and access to virtual and electronic resources.
- Across the whole survey group 45.123% of schools received less than \$10,000 as their annual budget.
- Few libraries reported budgets over \$50,000 (8.296%), and these tended to be the large independent schools.
- Independent schools fared much better than government schools. 54% of government schools reported an annual budget of less than \$5000.
- Subscriptions to electronic database resources are few and depend on the school's capacity to pay rather than central sector provision. Independent schools provided these resources more often than government schools.

- **Professional Staff**

- The Independent Schools sector, particularly Anglican schools, reported much higher levels of professional staff than the government schools.

- In total, over 50% of schools in this survey had either no professional staff or less than one FTE working in their school library.
- Tasmania, Western Australia and Victoria reported lower numbers of TLs employed, but higher numbers of para-professional staff (Library Technicians) (Tasmania and Victoria) and Library Officers (Western Australia).
- Christian schools tend to employ Librarians more than the other groups in the Independent Schools sector, while government schools employ fewer para-professionals (Library Technicians).
- **TLs as Leaders**
 - 53% of the survey group indicating they were not leaders in their schools.
 - TLs from Western Australia, Victoria and Queensland were more likely to feel they were leaders than in other states.
 - TLs in government schools scored much lower than the Independent Schools sector.
 - Of the participants in the survey, 85.152% (585) indicated they were in charge of the library or the library coordinator.
 - Since only 71.179% of the survey group are TLs, this means that there are some school libraries that are being managed by either librarians, para-professional or non-professional staff.
 - Of the whole survey group over 60% indicated they teach classes in the library.

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Background

While many studies have been conducted overseas about the efficacy of school libraries and Teacher Librarians (TLs), there is little data about the state of Australian school libraries. The lack of national data about school libraries has long been recognized as a factor that limits the effectiveness of advocacy. Lonsdale (2003 p.32) in the ACER Report commissioned by ASLA on the *Impact of school libraries on student achievement: A review of the research* pinpointed the serious nature of this gap. Lonsdale commented:

Perhaps a useful starting point for Australian library professionals would be to gain a more accurate picture nationally of the current state of school librarianship ... Before embarking on a sustained and systematic program of research, or even a promotional campaign to highlight the positive contribution that school librarians can make to student learning, it would be useful to have an accurate snapshot of what is currently happening around the country in regard to school library staffing. Clearly national data collection should be a priority on the research agenda. (Lonsdale, 2003)

As a result, the ASLA/ALIA Policy Advisory Group (PAG) was formed to act on the recommendations presented in the Review. The PAG is a joint committee of the Australian School Library Association (ASLA) and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). It was formed in 2002 and part of its brief is to gather statistical information about the state of school libraries across Australia. In 2005, the PAG approached Edith Cowan University (ECU) to form a partnership to execute the research. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed in April 2007 and the Australian School Library Research Project (ASLRP) was created, with each partner contributing equally to the costs associated with the project.

The Australian School Library Research Project aims to build an accurate *snapshot* of school libraries across Australia by gathering useable and ongoing data about resource levels, budgets and personnel. This data will enable opportunities for evidence based advocacy for school libraries; to run a comparative study of resourcing in school libraries around the nation based on accurate data; and to investigate the roles of library personnel in schools. Thus, the survey data presented in this report is part of a much larger data collection, covering schools around Australia.

Method

The initial data collection for ASLRP consisted of two surveys:

- Survey 1: Australian School Libraries – State of the nation (completed by the person in charge of the school library); and
- Survey 2: Australian School Library Personnel and roles (completed by all school library personnel eg. teacher librarian, librarian, teacher, library technician, AV technician, library officer/assistant/clerk, library volunteers)

The survey was delivered as an anonymous Web survey and advertised via listservs such as OZTL_Net, flyers at the *ASLAXX Biennial Conference: Hearts on fire, sharing the passion* held in October in Adelaide 2007; and as an insert in *Curriculum Connections*, the Curriculum Corporation's newsletter that is posted to all Australia schools using the School Cataloguing Information Service (SCIS). The survey was initially advertised to run for three weeks in late October 2007, but extensive feedback from practitioners complaining of a lack of time meant that the survey was open from late October 2007 through to the end of January 2008.

The only dataset not collected using this method, was the data from the Northern Territory (NT) remote schools. Representatives from ASLA in the NT indicated that a lack of access to technology would prevent many remote schools from participating. ASLA in the NT had also collected the information required for the survey during the previous 12-18 months. As a result, NT ASLA Committee members completed the survey for 65 schools in hardcopy.

Issues that arose with the data collection in other states as reported in email feedback included a lack of time to complete the surveys and an inability to access the required information from the library automated catalogue.

Surveys

There are a total of nine surveys in in the ASLRP:

- State of the Nation survey (person-in-charge)
- TL survey
- Librarian survey
- Resource Teacher survey
- Library Technician survey
- AV Technician
- Library Officer survey
- Library volunteer
- General staff survey

The survey reported on in this document is the main survey, Australian School Libraries: State of the Nation. The main survey included the following datasets:

- Demographic information (including school size, staffing)
- Age of library facilities
- Seating and space in the library
- Resourcing and library budget
- *Collection development*
- Library staffing, role and title

This report does not include data about collection development from the first survey. This will be the focus of a second report as the dataset is extensive.

Preliminary Findings - Australian School Libraries

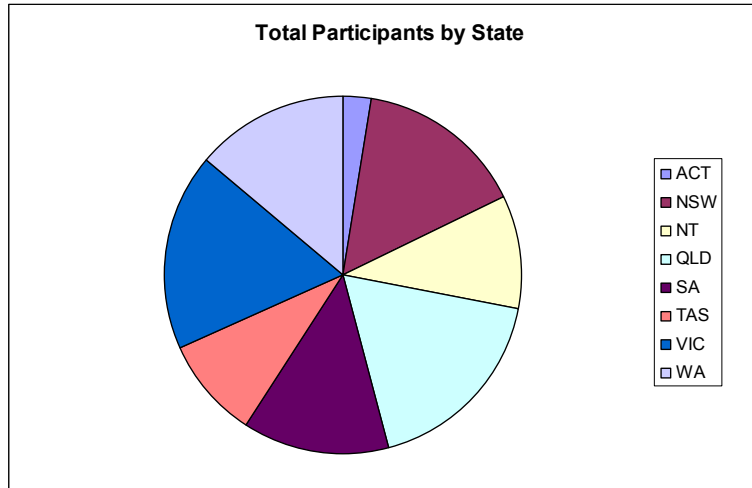
Demographic information

The main survey received 863 responses. Of these, 687 responses were complete. Three responses were later found to be incomplete but have been included in this dataset analysis due to a lack of time to rework the numbers. They will be excluded in future analysis and appear as NA in these findings. The number of participants is sufficiently large to provide a reliable snapshot of school libraries across Australia. The number of participants per state is provided in Table 1 and Figure 1 below.

Table 1: Australian School Libraries: Demographics by State

State	Schools	Incomplete	Rev Schools	% Total
ACT	20	3	17	2.474
NSW	136	30	106	15.429
NT schs	5	1	4	
NT Remote Schs	65	0	65	
NT schs	70	1	69	10.043
QLD	147	25	122	17.758
SA	123	30	93	13.537
TAS	76	14	62	9.024
VIC	162	40	122	17.758
WA	126	30	96	13.973

Figure 1: Australian School Libraries: Survey 1, Participants by State, All Schools



Variables

It should be noted that the extremely small number of participants from the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) mean that the results for this subset are unlikely to be representative for all schools in the ACT. Similarly, the Northern Territory (NT) is comprised of two subsets which have different conditions. The largest subset comes from the Northern Territory remote area schools which were reported in hardcopy. Participant numbers for the other states are large enough to allow some conclusions to be made about libraries in the each state, while the total number of participants provides sufficient evidence to draw some conclusions about the overall state of school libraries across Australia.

A further breakdown of the demographic data indicates the number of participants according to school type and school level. The largest number of participants came from the state government school sector (60.07%), with the various independent schools providing information about the independent schools sector. These participation rates probably reflect the percentage of government versus independent schools across the nation (given the rise in the number of independent schools over the last five years). Figure 2 indicates the participation breakdown for school type. The independent school subsets include Anglican, Catholic, Christian and Other (as identified by the respondents). A further category of Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander (A/TSI) was included in the survey, however, this data was compromised when it became evident that a large number of respondents failed to answer this question and the survey defaulted to the first response which was A/TSI. Therefore, this subset has not been included in the analysis.

Figure 2: Australian School Libraries: Survey 1, Participants by School Type, All Schools

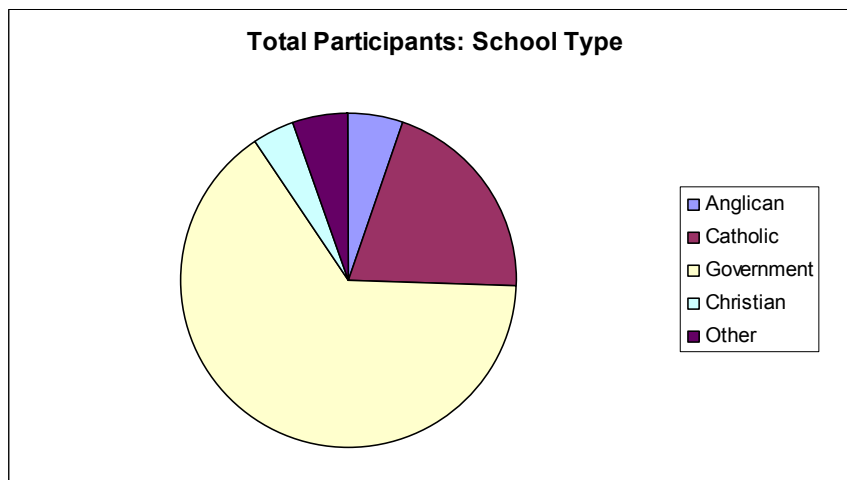
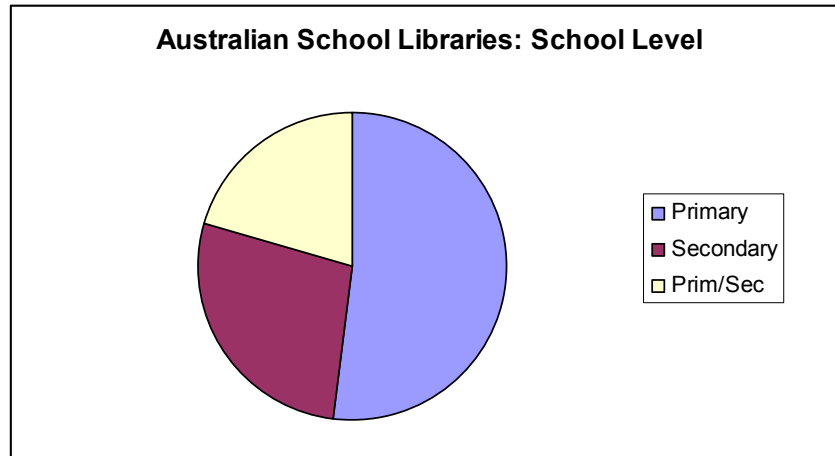


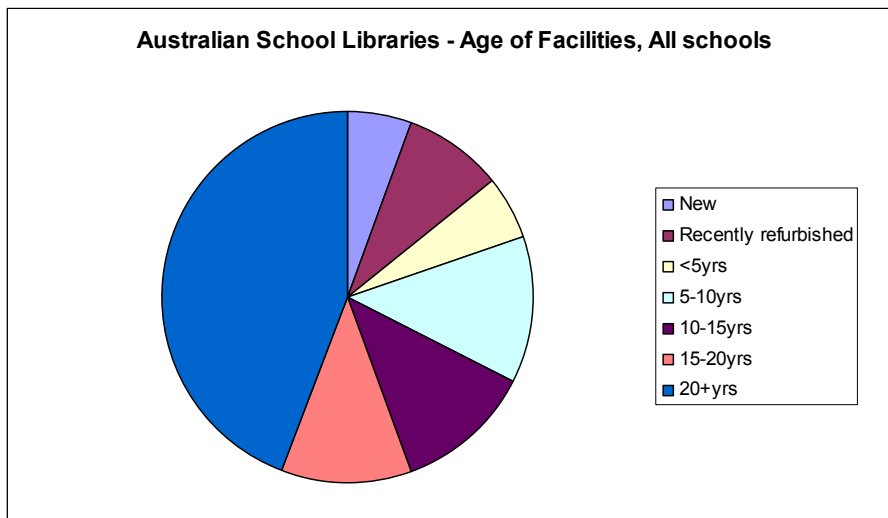
Figure 3: Australian School Libraries: Participants by School Level, All Schools



School Library Facilities

Figure 4 represents the age of school library facilities for all schools in this survey. The chart clearly indicates that the bulk of library facilities are over 20 years old (44.104%) and a further 11.353% between 15 and 20 years of age. Thus, over 55% of school libraries facilities across Australia are over 15 years of age. A small number reported new (5.531%) or refurbished facilities (8.588%).

Figure 4: Australian School Libraries: Age of Facilities, All Schools



When the data is broken down into subsets and viewed by state, similar patterns emerge for all states. This is also true for the government/independent schools data subset, although the independent sector appears to be ahead of the government sector with new buildings and facilities less than five years old. Government schools also appear to have the oldest number of 20+ buildings. The data shown in Figure 6 represents the percentage total per school type ie. the government schools column for 20+years is the total percentage of government schools represented in the survey older than twenty years.

Figure 5: Australian School Libraries: Age of Facilities, by State

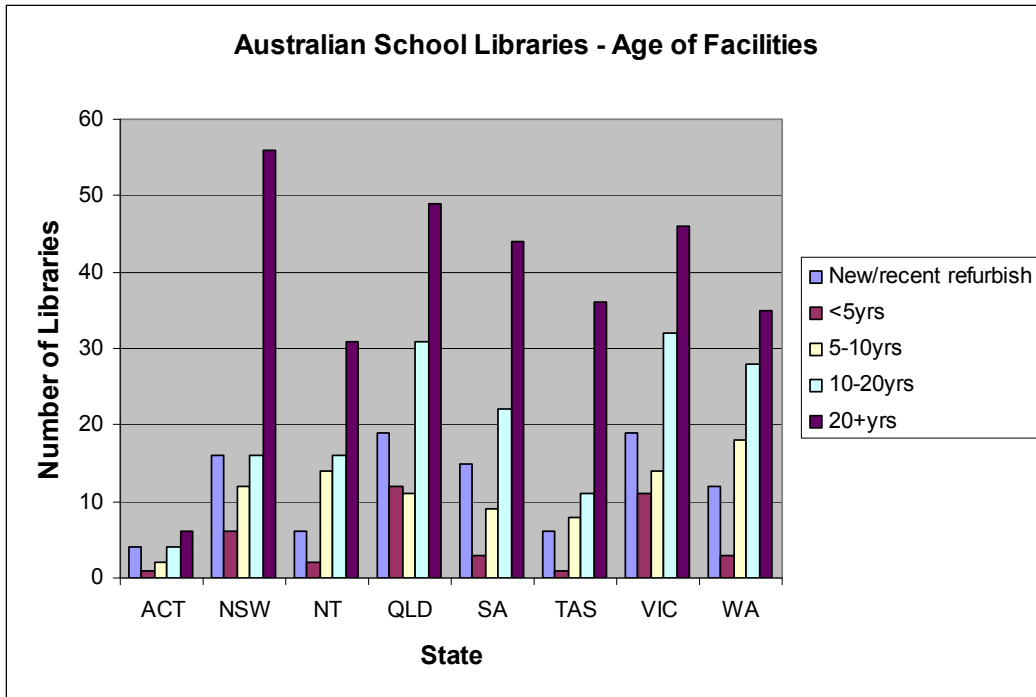
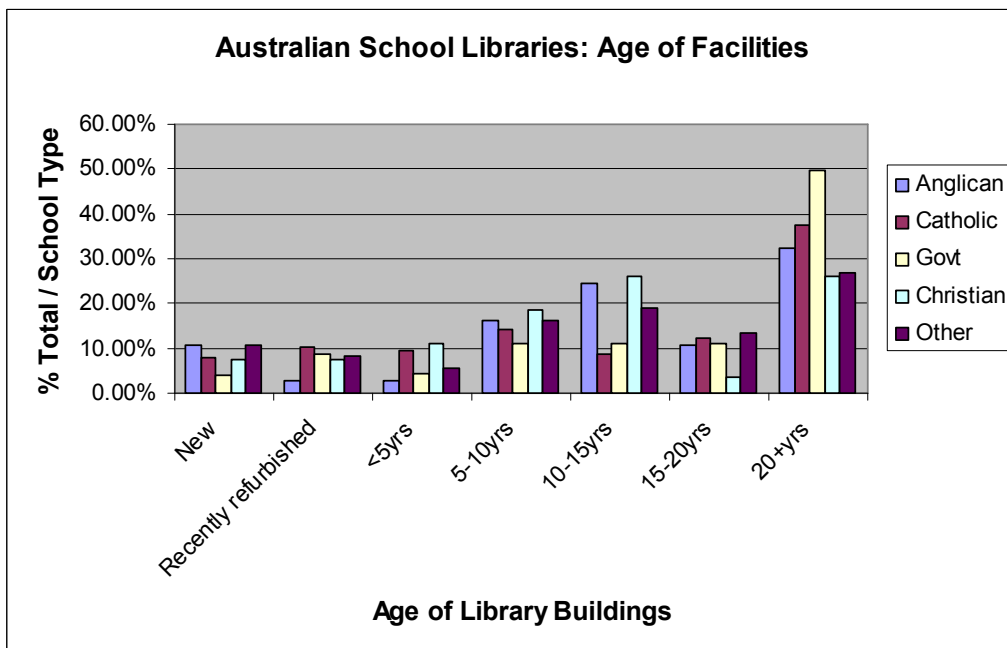


Figure 6: Australian School Libraries: Age of Facilities, by School Type



Only a small number of the libraries in this survey were described as multi-campus (ie. across 2 different locations) (61 or 8.879%). Of these, the Victorian participants scored the highest with 24 schools (39.344%) described as multi-campus. Most of the school library facilities represented in this survey also fall into two category types for structure:

- part of a building block; or
- a dedicated building.

There were 37 libraries (5.385%) located in classrooms and 12 (1.746%) in temporary facilities. The patterns for the whole survey population remained consistent across the states and when examined using the school type subset.

Figure 7: Australian School Libraries: Buildings – Structure, All Schools

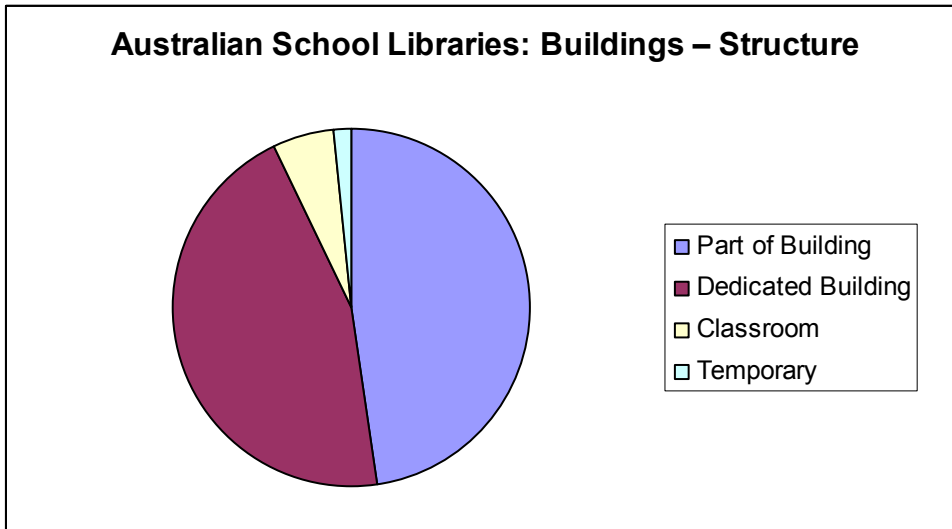


Figure 8: Australian School Libraries: Buildings - Structure, by State

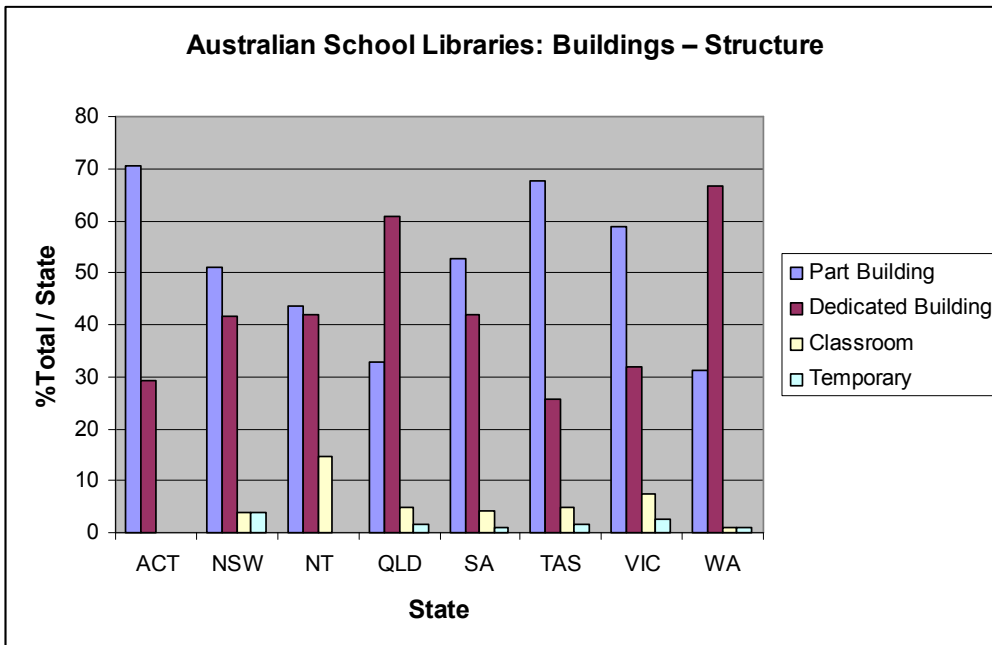
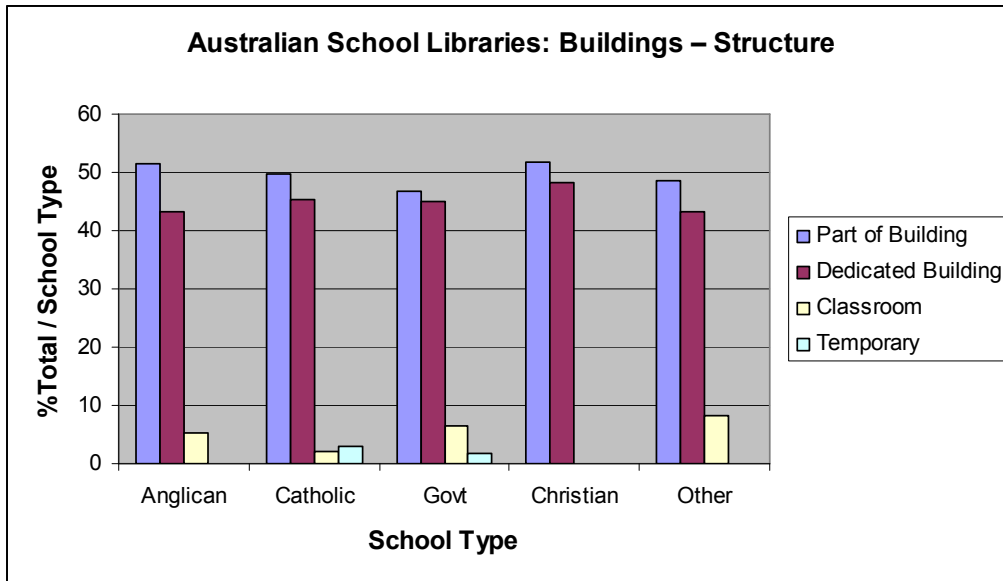


Figure 9: Australian School Libraries: Buildings - Structure, by School Type



56% of Australian school libraries seat less than 12% of their student population as reported by survey participants. Another thirteen percent seat only 12 % of their student population. Seating recommendations were first included in ASLA recommendations in the 1990s. Even though the NT remote area schools data skews this result, the number of school libraries seating less than 12% of students is reasonably consistent when the data is examined by State and by school type. It would appear that Australian school libraries across sectors are not big enough to cater for their students and do not match recommended guidelines.

Figure 10: Australian School Libraries: Buildings – Seating, All Schools

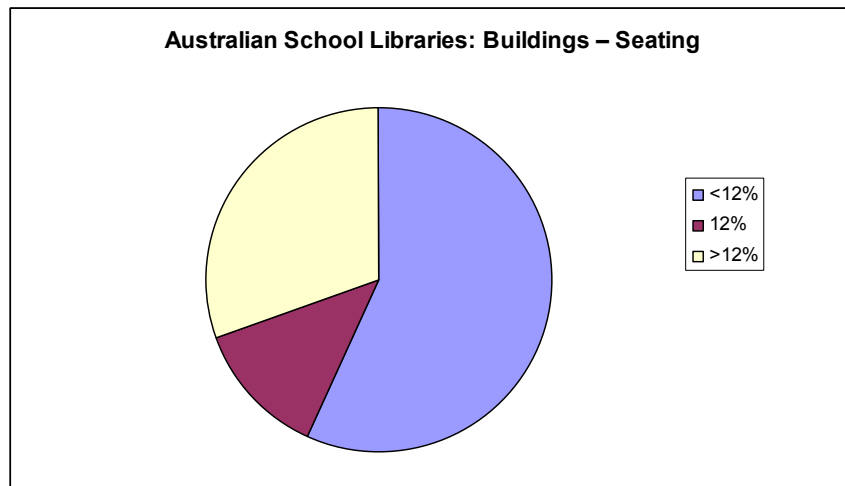


Figure 11: Australian School Libraries: Buildings – Seating, by State

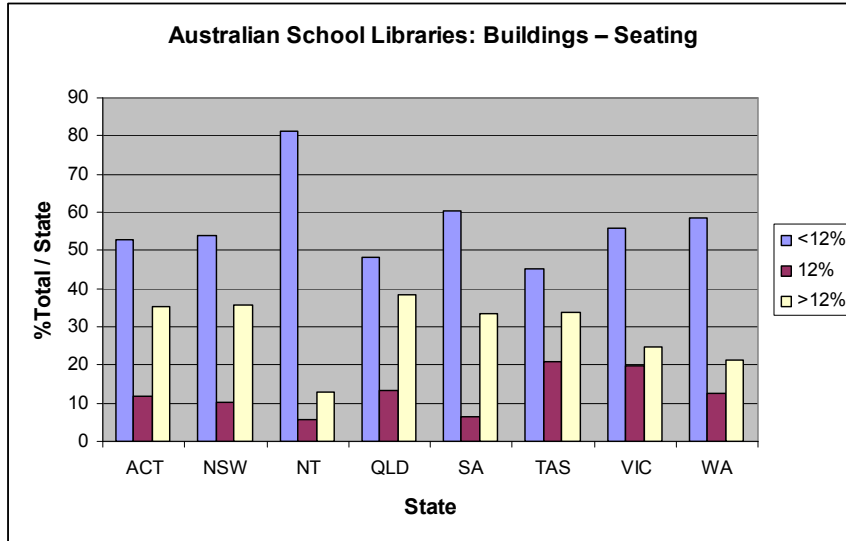
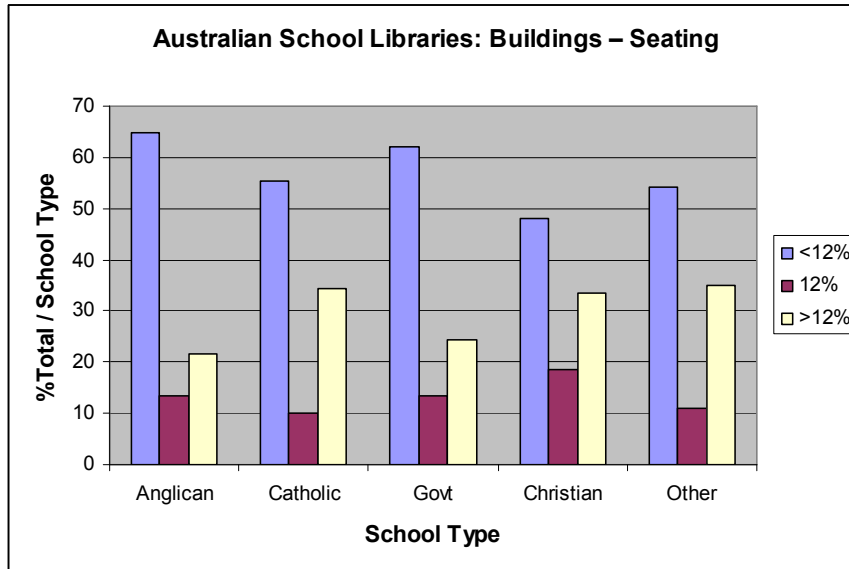


Figure 12: Australian School Libraries: Buildings – Seating, by School Type



A similar situation exists for the space allocated for ICTs. Results are similar across sectors with ACT school libraries having the most space allocation for ICTs.

Figure 13: Australian School Libraries: Buildings – Space, ICTs

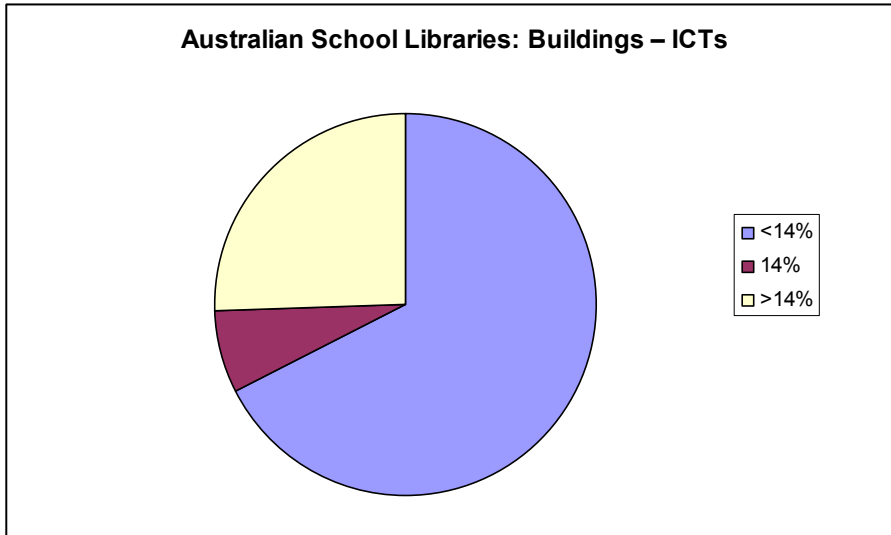


Figure 14: Australian School Libraries: Buildings – Space, ICTs, by State

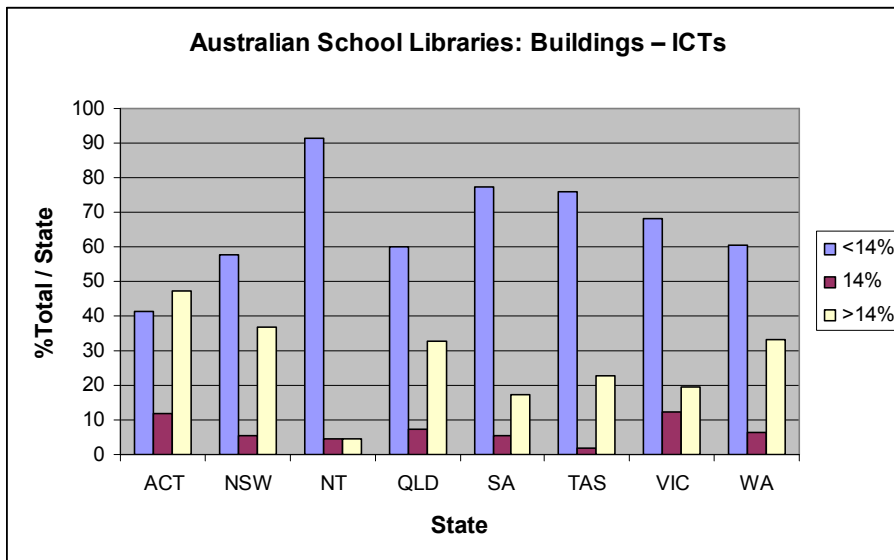
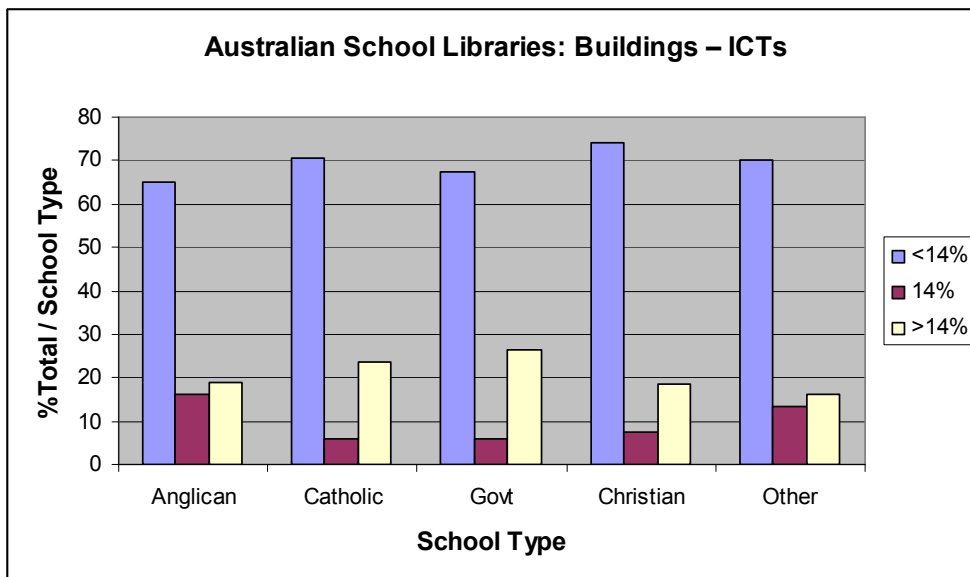


Figure 15: Australian School Libraries: Buildings – Space, ICTs, by School Type



Annual School Library Budget

In this survey 86 (12.518%) of the schools reported an annual library budget of less than \$1000. A further 113 (16.448%) schools reported an annual budget of less than \$5000. In all nearly a third of the survey participants (28.996%) received less than \$5000 for their school libraries. Across the whole survey group 45.123% of schools received less than \$10,000 as their annual budget. In view of the average prices quoted earlier, these figures indicate that school libraries across Australia are poorly resourced, particularly when the cost of electronic resources are considered. Subscriptions to large databases can run into the tens of thousands of dollars. Few libraries reported budgets over \$50,000 (8.296%), and these tended to be the large independent schools. Figures 15-17 illustrate the annual budgetary support for school libraries in Australia.

Figure 16: Australian School Libraries: Annual Budget, All Schools

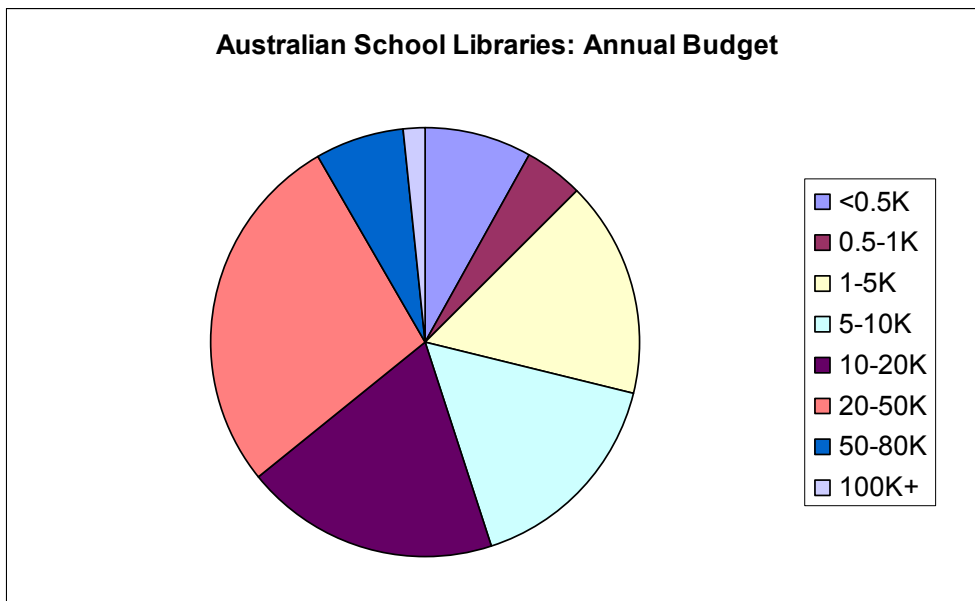


Figure 17: Australian School Libraries: Annual Budget, by State

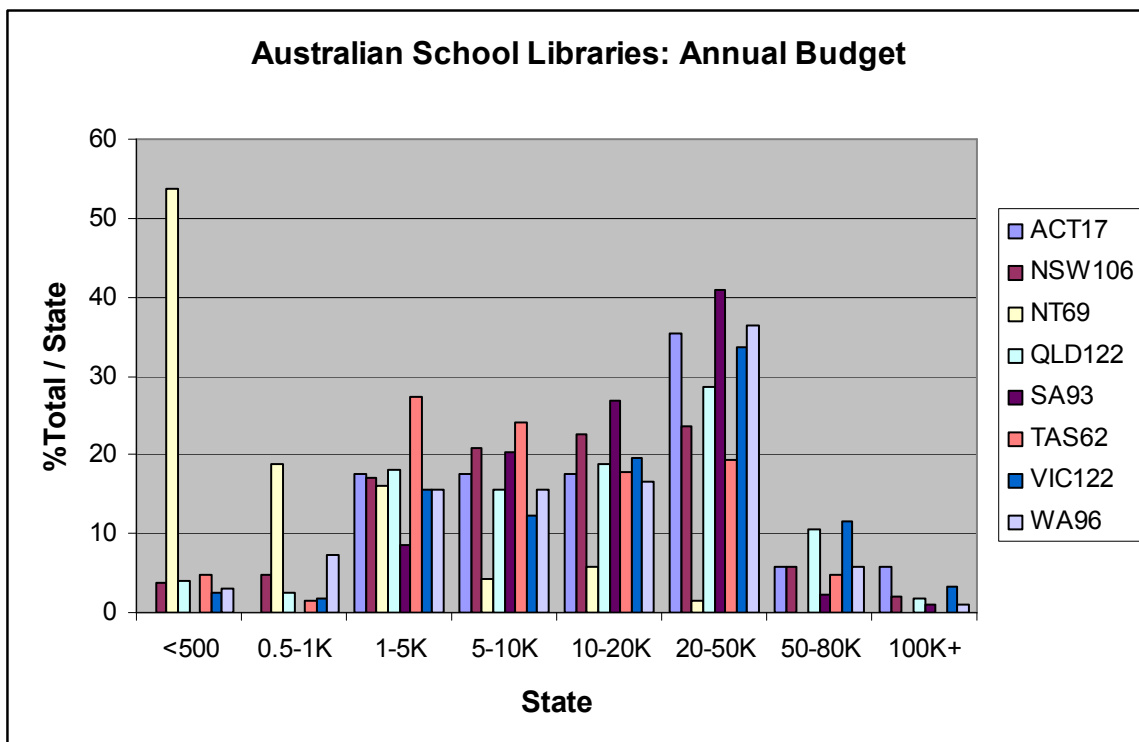


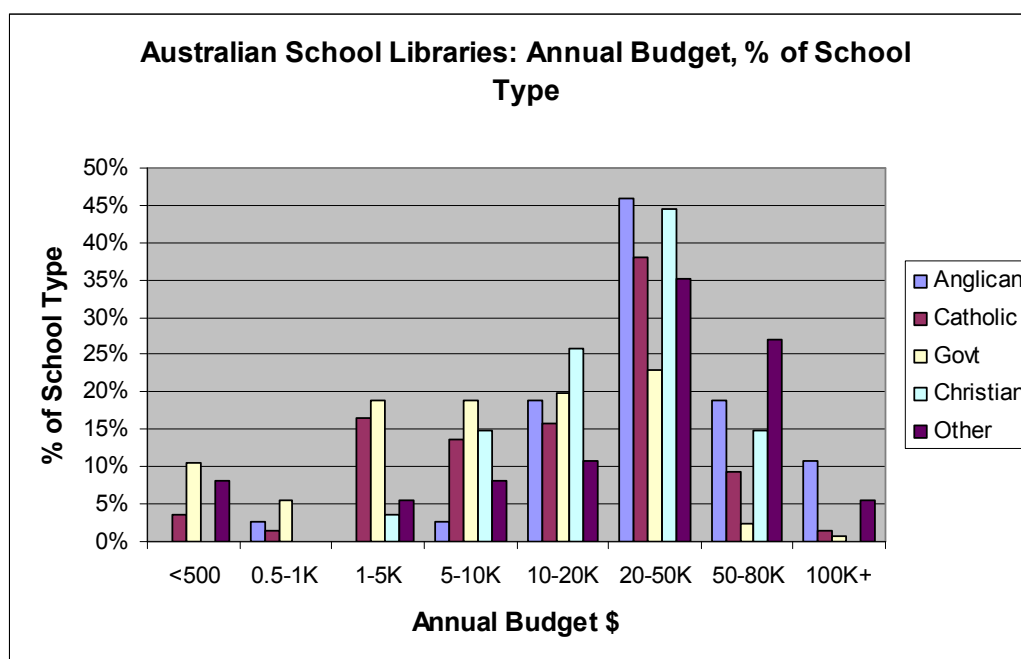
Figure 18: Australian School Libraries: Annual Budget, by School Type

Figure 18 indicates a higher commitment to school libraries by the independent schools sector. It could be argued that school size and level will have a major impact on the provision of expensive resources and overall budget. Using the NSW dataset (106 schools), table 2 below indicates that schools generally provide the funds for the bulk of electronic database subscriptions which are very expensive. Few of these resources are centrally funded, and as expected, primary schools and smaller secondary schools appear to be missing out on access and the opportunities afforded by these resources. These results also indicate a lack of central provision for these resources by systemic education sectors.

Table 2: NSW - Subscriptions for electronic resources, by school size, level and type

School Type	Primary (55 schs)								Secondary (51 schs)							
	Lib funded				Centrally funded				Lib funded				Centrally funded			
Sch Pop	<100	100-500	500-1000	1000+	<100	100-500	500-1000	1000+	<100	100-500	500-1000	1000+	<100	100-500	500-1000	1000+
No. Schs	8	27	18	2	8	27	18	2	0	11	22	18	0	11	22	18
Anglican 8schs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	2	-	-	-	-
Catholic 31 schs	-	1	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	2	7	-	-	3	1
Govt 60 schs	-	3	5	-	-	2	1	-	-	1	2	1	-	1	2	-
Christian 3 schs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Other 4 schs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	1

School Library Staffing

Figures 18-20 show that school libraries are under pressure with large numbers of schools in Tasmania, Victoria, the Northern Territory and Western Australia having no or limited (<1.0 FTE) professional staff in their libraries.

Figure 19: Australian School Libraries: Staffing, All Schools

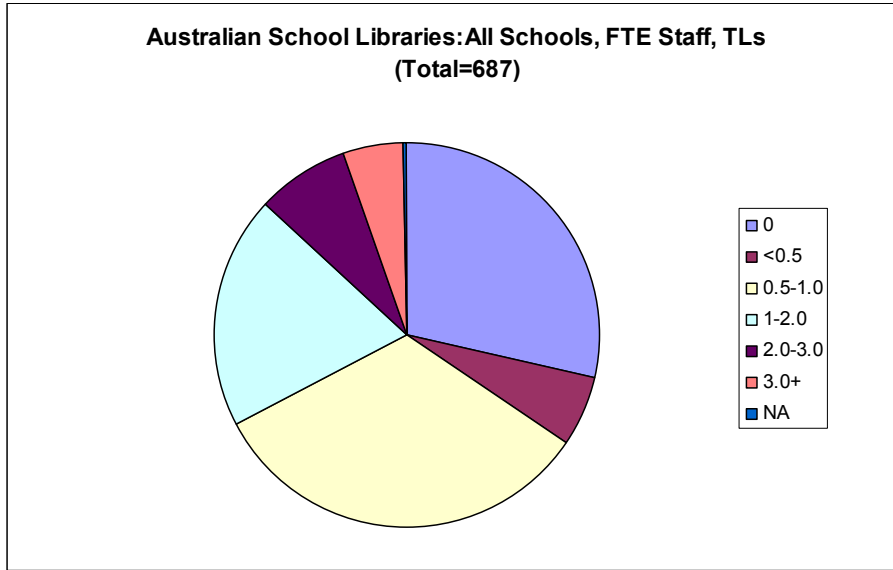


Figure 20: Australian School Libraries: Staffing, by State

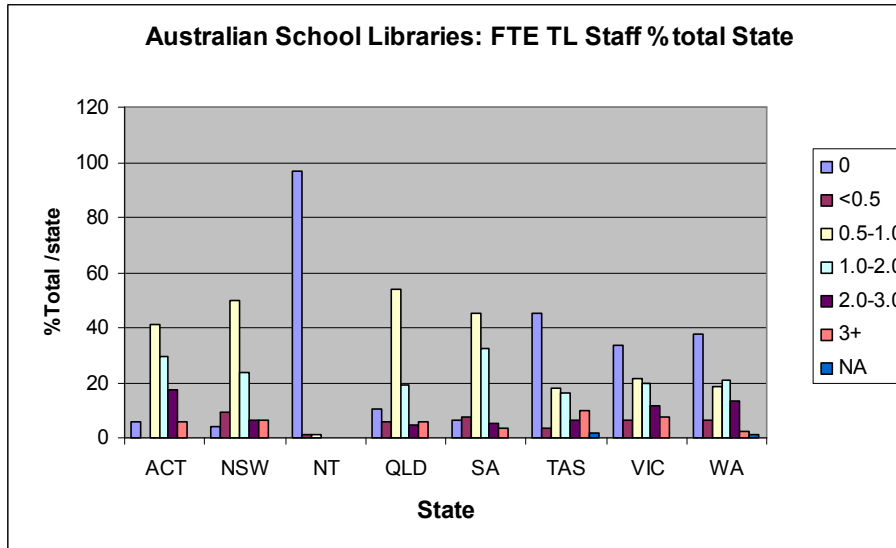


Figure 21: Australian School Libraries: Staffing, by School Type

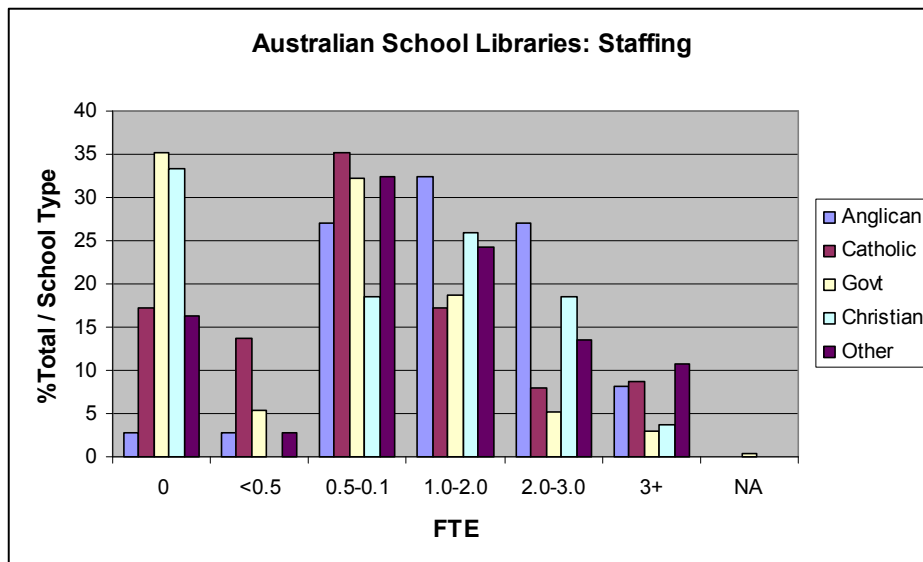


Figure 21 above indicates that the Independent Schools sector, particularly Anglican schools are generally better staffed than government schools. Figures 22-23 below represents the different staff types employed in school libraries around Australia. If the Northern territory dataset is removed, there are still 18.777% of schools in this survey with no professional staff. A further 38.573% of schools reported professional staffing levels less than one FTE. In total, over 50% of schools in this survey had either no professional staff or less than one FTE working in their school library.

In Tasmania, Western Australia and Victoria which reported lower numbers of TLs employed, we see high numbers of para-professional staff (Library Technicians) (Tasmania and Victoria) and Library Officers (Western Australia). The Christian schools tend to employ Librarians more than the other groups in the Independent Schools sector, while government schools employ fewer para-professionals. Government schools also use fewer volunteers. A further dataset that examines the number of TLs per student ratio will be extracted at a later date.

Figure 22: Australian School Libraries: Staffing, by State/Staff Type

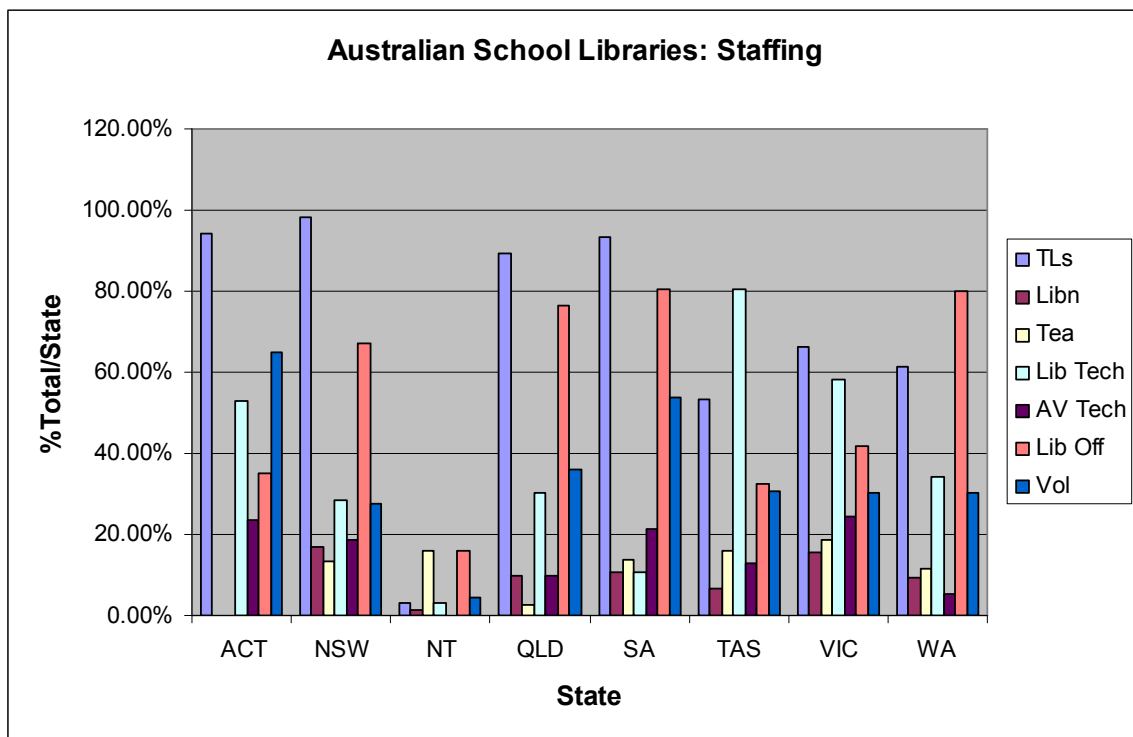
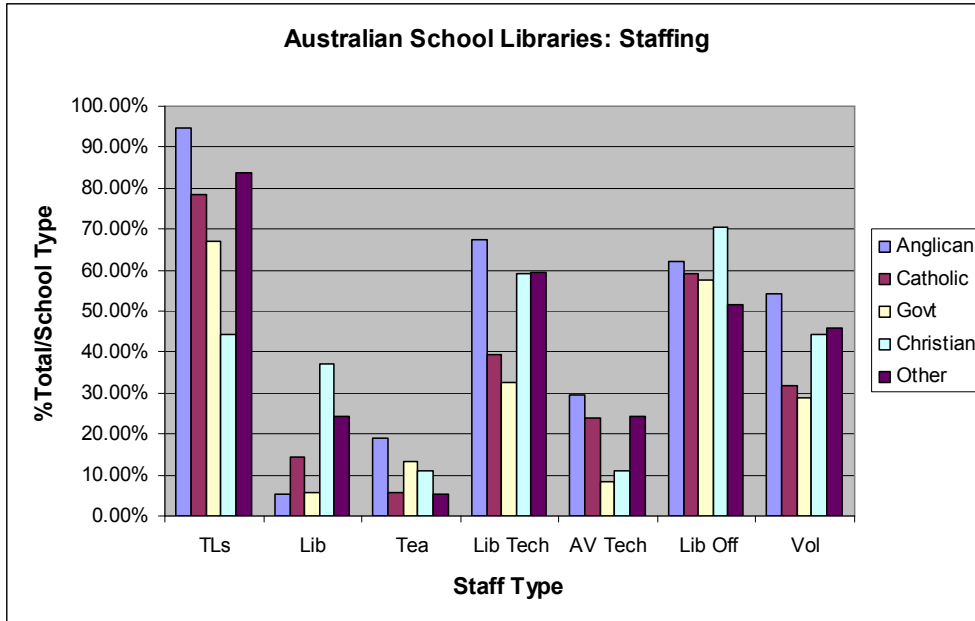


Figure 23: Australian School Libraries: Staffing, by School Type/Staff Type



Perceptions and leadership

The survey also asked respondents to indicate whether they felt their role was considered to be a leadership position within the school. Figures 24-26 indicate that the role of TL is not considered a major leadership position in most schools, with over 53% of the survey group indicating they were not leaders in their schools. Tls from Western Australia, Victoria and Queensland were more likely to feel they were leaders than in other states. However, Tls in government schools scored much lower than the Independent Schools sector. This may indicate that the role of TL is valued much more in the Independent Schools sector and ties in with previous results in this survey which indicate that libraries in independent schools are better resourced (budget), have higher numbers of professional and para-professional staff and seat more of their students in the school library facility.

Figure 24: Australian School Libraries: Leadership, All Schools

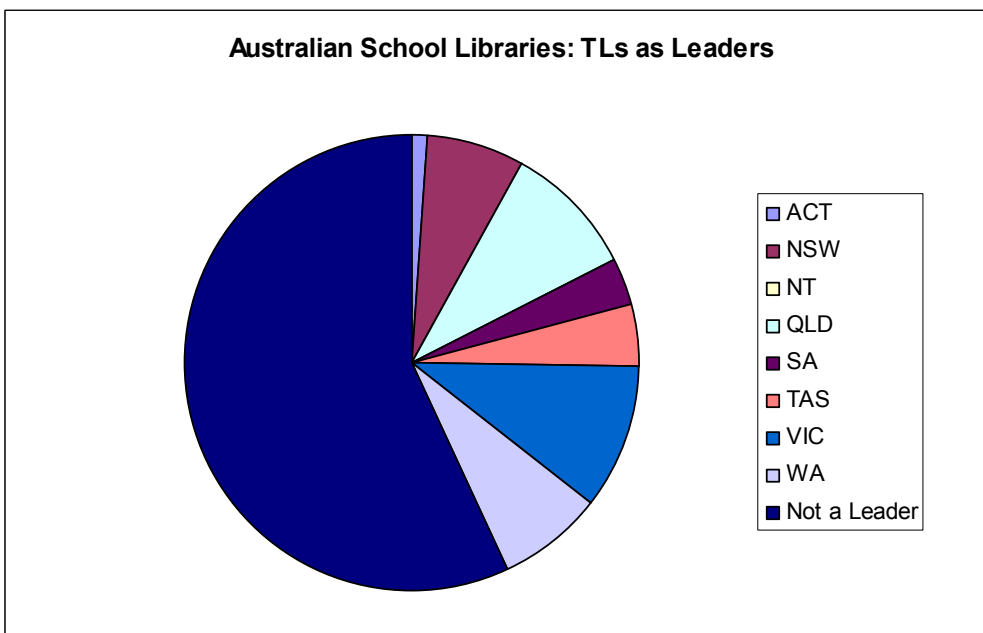


Figure 25: Australian School Libraries: Leadership, by State

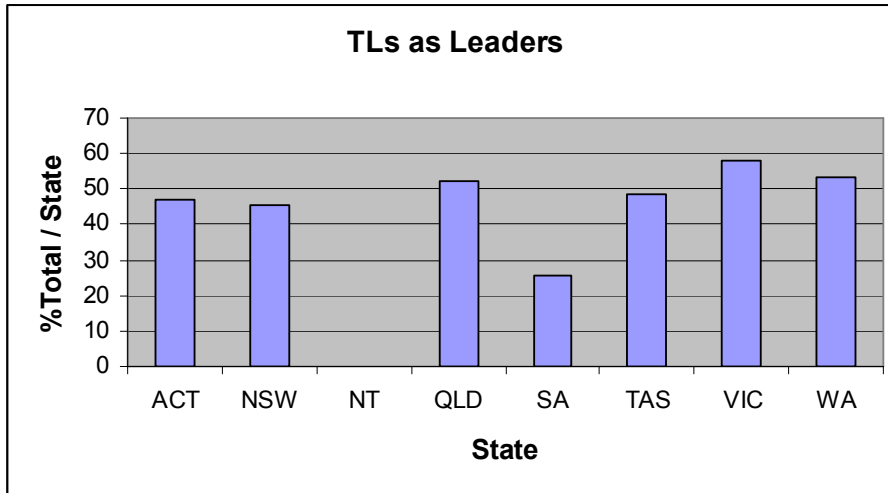
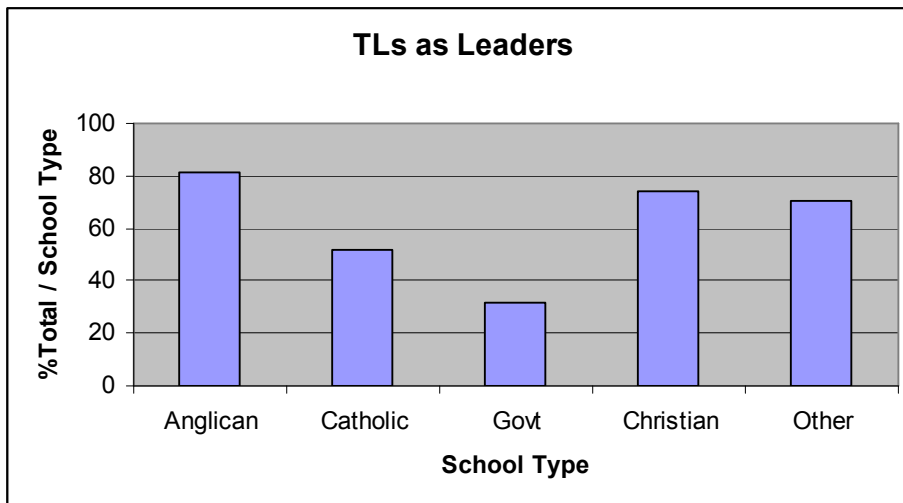


Figure 26: Australian School Libraries: Leadership, by School Type



Comments from participants

Participant #212:

It is a very isolated position, I am not part of the admin team, not part of a faculty area. There is very little recognition for the responsibilities and the roles that I carry out.

Participant #525:

It is undervalued by many traditional teachers who use textbooks. Despite PDs, offers of collaboration, information dissemination and promotion by the Head of School, many teachers are reluctant to embrace the opportunities I offer on a regular basis.

Participant #232:

Still seen as not a teacher by those who do not take the time to find out what we do.

Participant #343:

While many schools and principals value and appreciate the role of the teacher librarian in schools teacher pupil ratio/budget restraints from the Department restrict how much time can be used to employ them in primary schools.

Participant #336:

It is a very complex and demanding role. I do not work the same lines as other coordinators and am always on duty, except for 2 lunch hours.

Participant #564: Every year have to renegotiate staffing levels. SA documents allow for 1.0 TL time, then this is lowered to allow for "contribution to teaching" which always means taking a formal class out of library.

Participant #87:

Often left out of the loop of information which could certainly improve in all areas of the school - admin and committees need to disseminate info better.

Participant #327:

The role is critically dependent on the Principal's understanding of documents such as the ASLA Standards of Excellence for T/Ls.

Participant #407:

There is a lack of support from many education administrators for the Library and the role of the Teacher-Librarian. This is reflected in dwindling aide time and budget allocations. State education in particular has been left to squabble over crumbs as public funds get redirected to the "private" sector. School libraries therefore become easy targets as they are perceived as being the line of least resistance.

Participant #349:

Overburdened and drowning school administrative tasks. It seems that the most capable people have the highest workload and more roles placed upon them. Government schools are largely understaffed and under-funded and administration is always looking for ways to address the shortfall.

Participant #643:

Undervalued, overworked, frustrated by the lack of specific guidelines governing my role...should not be subject to the principal's discretion. LOVE my job!!

Participant #252:

Too much time is allocated to teaching, very little to library tasks - this is the norm in the ACT. Running a library is expected to be done outside of school hours.

Participant #569:

Because of staffing reductions I cannot do all that I want to do.

Of the participants in the survey, 85.152% (585) indicated they were in charge of the library or the library coordinator. Since only 71.179% of the survey group are TLs, this means that there are some school libraries that are being managed by either librarians, para-professional or non-professional staff. Of the whole survey group over 60% indicated they teach classes in the library. The perception that TLs are non-teaching staff is not supported by this data.

Figure 27 provides a comparative view of the percentage of respondents by state who indicated they were the library coordinator, the percentage of TLs, the percentage of libraries with no TL and the percentage who teach in the library. Figure 27 indicates that the respondents in independent schools in this survey teach more than those in government schools. However, in this survey there are more TLs in independent schools.

Figure 27: Australian School Libraries: Library Coordination and Teaching

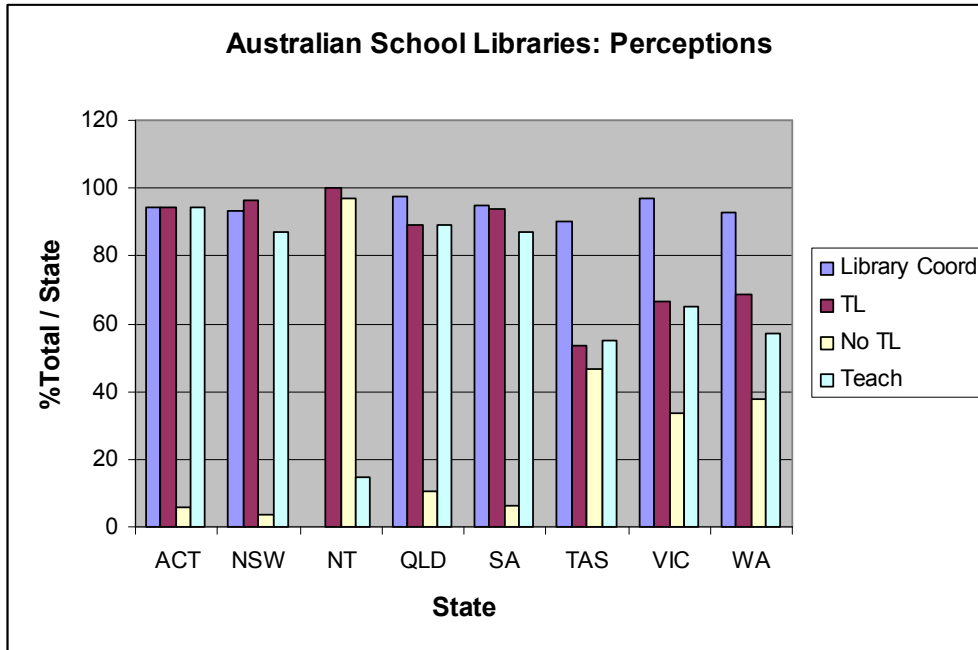


Figure 28: Australian School Libraries: Teaching by School Type

