

**Note:** The sections in the Paper which are headed “What this tells us” will be the basis for the Panel’s recommendations.

Where questions are broken into life stages (early years, school years and adult years), you can provide responses to any or all life stages.

Please indicate clearly at the beginning of any responses you wish to remain confidential.

Unless indicated as confidential, responses will be treated as public information and published on our website. Please see the [Public Submissions Policy](#) for further information.

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**Organisation: ASLA (Australian School Library Association)**

This report was prepared by board members of ASLA with assistance and contributions from several Tasmanian Teacher Librarians, Librarians, and Library Technicians, and has approval from the ASLA board.

**Question One: Are there any key themes we have not identified to improve literacy across:**

**The Early Years (0-4 years-old)**

**Access to local school libraries for local families through school run pre-school programs even if short.**

**The School Years (5-17 years-old)**

**School Libraries, the key theme that hasn’t been identified.**

It’s hard to comprehend, but arguably there is only one mention of school libraries in this entire document. The key role that school libraries can and do play to improve literacy during the school years has not been identified.

School libraries are the hub of school literacy, an essential resource and support for students in their learning journeys, and for the increasingly stretched teacher workforce. One of the largest library sectors in Australia, school libraries occupy a unique place in the library and information sector (LIS) (Hay, 2023).

In the section 'Information to support development of recommendations for the early years, school years, adult years and whole of community' there is no mention of, or role for, school libraries! There is a great outline of formal and explicit teaching of the skills of reading. However, with no mention of well resourced school libraries (27-33) one wonders how students are going to engage in the well intentioned 'gradual release model' of gaining self reliance in reading practice suggested by the report.

Trained, qualified and professional Library staff are also not identified as a key theme for supporting the improvement of our student's literacy skills. The value and importance of trained, qualified professional staff in schools is mentioned, with a sample of types of staff, yet library staff are not included. Merga, one of the authors referenced in the report states that 'Well staffed and resourced libraries have a positive impact on students' academic achievement (2019). Students who attend a school which has a teacher librarian have improved literacy scores and gain up to an additional 2 months of learning in one year. Learning gains are particularly evident for Year 9 students (Dix et al., 2020). While we have a few excellent Teacher Librarians, Librarians, and Library technicians in our Tasmanian schools, we have many schools which have no trained library staff, and sometimes no libraries. In fact it could be argued that because school libraries in Tasmania are so underfunded, they should, as a group, not be used to measure the value of school libraries.

Fluency, vocabulary and comprehension are all skills which self selected reading can enhance by voracious practice. This self selection of reading material requires the support of trained library staff, and their advice, and a well resourced school library. Self selected reading of books from a school library provides a perfect example of the gradual release model the report promotes, even though it doesn't discuss a method. Self motivated reading for pleasure is the best way for students to get more reading practice in (students are effectively doing reading homework without having to be told, or forced) Jang, B. et al (2015).

The report mentions equity and the right to read and that access to books at home is correlated with student success. While not at home, well resourced school libraries can counteract that inequity - children are there, at school going to their library in class. With a quality school library, students can take books home, they can have books at home, even if their parents don't have the resources, or the will. They should also be able to go on their own before and after school, and lunch and recess, if their library has a well resourced and staffed school library.

Margaret Merga , an Australian, leading global authority on school libraries, cited by the report has written a whole book 'School Libraries Supporting Literacy and Wellbeing' (2022) on the value that school libraries can bring to schools and their students regarding student wellbeing. It's not possible to go into all the detail here, but she outlines the research supporting both reading and the library as a space for wellbeing.

### **The Adult Years (18+ years-old)**

**Question Two: What are the three main things we should prioritise doing in:**

**The Early Years (0-4 years-old)**

**Create school based, pre school, programs where children/families can also use their local school libraries, even if these are 1-2 hour programs per week**

**The School Years (5-17 years-old)**

**Prioritise School Libraries**

- 1) Trained and qualified staff,
- 2) Dedicated buildings and/or rooms,
- 3) Resources and programs
- 4) Mandatory minimum staffing levels, funded centrally.

P31-32 of the report notes the importance of using children's literature to add to the enjoyment of reading, and p40 refers to the importance of literacy rich environments, both of which are a key focus area for school library services. Therefore, school libraries should be a critical strategy listed in the "what does this tell us" section on pages 31-32 and p40.

Resource school libraries with quality staff, books, buildings and programs. According to the science of reading students need to be read to, and to have opportunities to self select books.

Students need libraries and books also for improved wellbeing. Places which are safe, encouraging, and inspiring.

School libraries should be the focal centre of the literacy program in the school, not an add on extra for schools with spare resources.

Although expensive if considered alone, when part of a school where all the library resources from the building, to staff, to reading and other resources, are shared, not stuck in a particular classroom and then duplicated, libraries are very cost effective.

While it's great that on pg19-20 the state library offers to support schools without school libraries or qualified staff, there shouldn't be any schools in that situation. Even the smallest schools should be resourced to provide a library space, resources and trained library staff, so that students can have dedicated class time to visit, plus time to visit on their own initiative. This shouldn't be left to principals and their general budgets, but funded centrally with standardised minimum staffing levels. Schools should offer access to the community to their libraries at least to preschool children and their families through weekly programs.

Adequately resourced school libraries are well placed to create literacy rich environments, support equitable access to quality literature and cultivate an enjoyment of reading. Experience on the ground shows regular classroom teachers have little time for keep up to date with and read contemporary children's literature, whereas school library staff can.

**The Adult Years (18+ years-old)**

**Question Three: Are there any data sets not considered in this paper that should be used to monitor literacy achievement in:**

**The Early Years (0-4 years-old)**

**The School Years (5-17 years-old)**

Teens get less support for reading for enjoyment. This should be addressed as a key theme. There has been no mention of reading for enjoyment/ leisure by students in secondary school.

Not sure if the panel is aware of the current research project being conducted by the Queensland University of Technology and Deakin University: The Teen Reading project - survey surveyed 9500 secondary school students in 2022 across 57 schools from government, Catholic and independent sectors in Queensland, NSW, Victoria and Western Australia. A quarter of students survey reported they don't read at all. And when asked how often participants read in a school week more than 40% indicated they don't read or read less than once a week.

<https://teenreading.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/250/2023/03/2022-survey-data-highlights.pdf>

**The Adult Years (18+ years-old)**

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<b>Question Four: If you are a provider of a service, what kinds of guidance would you hope to see in the Community-wide Framework?</b>
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<b>Question Five: Are there any other comments you would like to make?</b>
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In the survey responses to the initial report, there was significant mention of school libraries by at least the president of the Network of Educational Associations of Tasmania. It is shocking that school libraries are then still disregarded in the subsequent report. How is this even possible when school libraries and school library services are paramount in the overall holistic education of children? It is negligent that school libraries are still disregarded in the second report despite attention being drawn to the error in the first report. Libraries are integral and paramount for the education of children in Tasmanian schools. This is a matter for urgent attention.

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