School library staff share: Our wish list for the future

By Nikki Curtis
Director of Marketing, Softlink Education

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While the Oxford Living Dictionaries[1] simply defines the term *wish list* as 'a list of desired things or occurrences', both the Cambridge[2] and Collins[3] Dictionary definitions refer to 'things you know you cannot have or that are unlikely to happen'.

With this in mind, the decision to use *wish list* in the title of Softlink Education's most recent feature document (sharing feedback from school library professionals globally) was a difficult one.

The comments included in *School library staff share: Our wish list for the future*, represent the voices of passionate but practical school library professionals, whose understanding of current trends and best practice makes them look for pragmatic ways to improve outcomes at their schools.

It's true that the library space and resourcing are high on the agenda, but the responses by no means reflect a Mini-to-Rolls-Royce overnight overhaul, or things that school libraries shouldn't hope to have or implement.

The majority of comments describe incremental changes that respondents would like to make at their schools. Often small on cost but big on innovation, the wish list items represent the voices of school library professionals who simply want the tools, resources and opportunities to improve student literacy and performance through greater engagement with the library.

We hope that the feedback and ideas in *School library staff share: Our wish list for the future* resonate with principals and education managers, and provide school library staff with additional support to ensure their own ideas and initiatives become actualities.

This article presents background information and a selection of theme-based responses from the *School library staff share: Our wish list for the future* feature document. Additional resources and information about the 2018 Softlink Australia and New Zealand School Library Survey are also provided.

Background

Softlink has conducted School Library Surveys in Australia since 2010, with the first survey providing a response to the Australian Federal Government's 'Inquiry into school libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian schools'. Softlink Education has continued to survey schools annually, more recently extending the scope to include New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

The surveys provide a critical reference point for understanding changes, impacts and trends over time.

Open comments fields, in particular the 'what I would change' question, provide an opportunity for respondents to share ideas, reflections, insights and challenges. They present a diverse, ground-up perspective into the workings of a digital-era school library.

Softlink has produced multiple feature documents that share and mobilise this voice.

School Libraries Share: Our wish list for the future

The *School Libraries Share: Our wish list for the future* feature document includes respondent comments from two surveys: the 2017 Australia and New Zealand School Library Survey and the 2017 Softlink United Kingdom School Library Survey.

Comments are structured into five themes: Changes to the library space; More information literacy and research teaching opportunities; More access to available technology; Time and increased opportunities to collaborate; and Time and resourcing to provide a more comprehensive service.

Word cloud analysis was used to produce the themes and hierarchy for the wish list. While the feedback is anonymous, country attribution is applied.

The *School Libraries Share: Our wish list for the future* feature document is available from the Softlink web site Resources page.

Wish list theme 1: Changes to the library space

The growth of the digital library space and changes to school library services have made the physical library space a major feedback theme. School library staff are keen to make their libraries more flexible, comfortable and vibrant.

The following quotes, drawn from Softlink's *School Libraries Share: Our wish list for the future* feature document, demonstrate some of the ways they would do this and why.

'I would love to change the learning environment to allow for more computers to be installed and extra space to be created for those using laptops and iPads.

I would also love to have new shelving on wheels so it can be moved to create

Kardinia College Junior School Inquiry Centre presents a great example of a vibrant modular school library. Read more about the Kardinia International College on the Softlink Blog.

an open learning area for all students, and to have new furniture that allows for a more collaborative work environment for teachers and students.' **AU**

'I would change the furniture and furnishings. We have some shelving on wheels, I would like all freestanding shelving on wheels.' **NZ**

'I would like to make my library bigger, update the furniture, and rework the layout to allow for a greater variety of learning spaces.' **UK**

'I would change the physical space and furniture to allow for greater flexibility and to provide students and teachers with a significantly different experience to a regular classroom.' **AU**

'I feel really supported in my position as senior librarian. However, there is a very traditional approach to libraries here — they are seen as quiet places for study.

I'm trying to balance this traditional view with some of the new attributes modern libraries can be — vibrant and

fully engaged with technology and pop culture.' **NZ**

'I would like a more relaxed reading space and a more "central community space" feel.' **UK**

Wish list theme 2: More information literacy and research teaching opportunities

Information literacy and research skills are vital skill sets for students progressing through to higher education. Teacher librarians and school librarians provide pivotal expertise in these areas.

The following quotes present examples of both the challenges school library professionals face and the ideas they have for improving information literacy and research skills.

'I would like more involvement in planning with teaching teams, and to have an authentic role in teaching research skills and digital citizenship.' **AU**

'I'd like more hours — particularly to teach info lit to senior classes and transition to tertiary courses. **NZ**

'No time is allocated for library lessons which makes it more difficult for students to navigate the library and resources.

Library lessons are also needed to teach research skills including referencing, plagiarism, and online research.' **UK**

'I would love for the teachers to bring their classes down to the library for me to teach them how to research, locate and critically analyse information.' **AU**

'More "skill" teaching needs to be done on how to use technologies including internet search etc.

It's always assumed that students know these skills, but that is not the case.

Instead of going "back-to-basics" of the three Rs, we need to teach the "back-to-basics" in technology usage.' **NZ**

'Given the number of students now entering further education, the need for the school library to promote information literacy skills is greater than ever.

Students need to have, at least, a basic understanding of how to go about their own research, how to narrow their searches, and how to evaluate their resources.

It is here where the school library can be invaluable in setting them on the right path at an early age.

For those who do not go on to further education, the techniques for evaluating resources remain just as important so as to stop the acceptance of "fake news" items.' **UK**

Wish list theme 3: More access to available technology

The evolution of online publishing and available technologies (both hardware and software) continues at a rapid rate. Many school libraries struggle to allocate budget for online resources and to provide the integrated 24/7 online digital services that they would like to offer, and that their students are growing to expect.

The following example quotes illustrate this.

'I would like online subscription databases that meet the research needs for units of work across the curriculum, especially for Years 10–12.' **AU**

'If my budget was bigger I would get eBooks and audio books.' **NZ**

Buninyong Primary School is using vibrant, affordable cushions and bean bags to provide a comfortable, functional space for the whole school community to enjoy. Read more about Buninyong Primary School on the Softlink Blog.

'I would like a bigger budget to allow for more new resources to be brought in.

I would also like to offer a wider variety of resources such as magazine subscriptions and digital media, which we currently do not have.' **UK**

'I would like to see more investment in e-reading and to offer the use of tablets as an option.' **AU**

'I would like a small suite of computers, so students can look at the catalogue — at the moment we only have one issuing computer.' **NZ**

in achieving or implementing their collaboration goals.

The following example quotes represent this.

'I would have more hours so that I would be able to collaborate with colleagues to plan, teach, and assess the curriculum.' **AU**

'I would like to work with other staff to develop a school-wide inquiry and information literacy plan.' **NZ**

'I would like extra staff to assist with the admin. This would free up my time

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Wish list theme 4: Time and increased opportunities to collaborate

The benefits of collaboration have been widely discussed in the last 5 to 10 years. Softlink included a specific question on the topic in the 2017 School Library Survey. Respondents were asked 'How do you currently collaborate, or what ideas do you have for greater collaboration between the library and the rest of the school?'

Responses specific to this question were included in a feature document, *School Libraries Share: Ideas for school-wide collaboration*, which is available through the Softlink web site (Resources).

The question drew lots of great examples and ideas, but it also indicated the struggle some school library professionals have

to collaborate more with subject leaders and work as a team to provide better resources for students.' **UK**

'I would like to work with staff whilst the assessment tasks are being written to ensure tasks include the use of information skills.' **AU**

'It would be great if the library was informed the term before an inquiry topic was started so we can enhance the collection in those areas.' **NZ**

Wish list theme 5: Time and resourcing to provide a more comprehensive service

In a recent Softlink Blog, Relationship-based Teaching & Learning — the school librarian's superpower (and how to boost

it), we explored how school librarians are in a unique position to build relationships with students in which their interests, rather than just literacy and assessment objectives, can provide the focus for active and engaged learning.

book that inspires them to become readers!' **NZ**

'I would like additional help with day-to-day running so I can focus on the bigger picture.' **UK**

'I would like to work with staff whilst the assessment tasks are being written to ensure tasks include the use of information skills.' AU

'It would be great if the library was informed the term before an inquiry topic was started so we can enhance the collection in those areas.' NZ

Responses to the 2017 (and earlier) Softlink School Library Surveys indicate that many school library professionals struggle with the balance between managing and resourcing their library and finding enough time to engage as much as they would like with students and staff.

The following selection of quotes represents this.

'I would like more time or help with administering and curating the print and digital resources to make the library more responsive to student and staff needs.' **AU**

'I would like less time spent on library administration duties and more time available for pupil assistance.' **NZ**

'Additional staffing would help to spread out the workload which would enable me to dedicate time to improving and updating the service.' **UK**

'With increased funding I could provide more adequate facilities, resources, and staffing to better service the school community.' **AU**

'I wish that I had more time to spend supporting students to find that perfect

Additional resources

1. The 2017 Softlink Australian and New Zealand School Library Survey Report presents findings into school library budgets, staffing, library services, and trends. The report is available from the Softlink web site Resources page.

2. A number of feature documents presenting the voice of school library survey respondents are available from the Softlink web site Resources page. Topics include the Top 7 Challenges for School Libraries (2014), 5 Most Important Opportunities for School Libraries (2014), What's Trending #SchoolLibraries (2015), The Ongoing Importance of School Libraries (2015/2016) and School Libraries Share: Innovative Ideas (2016). The School Libraries Share: Ideas for school-wide collaboration (2017) mentioned above is also available.

3. The Softlink Blog includes a number of guest blogs from innovative, inspiring teacher librarians. Visit the Softlink Blog or follow us on Twitter @SoftlinkEdu for updates.

2018 Softlink Australia and New Zealand School Library Survey

The **2018 School Library Survey will be launched on Tuesday 4 September.** Please keep an eye out for the survey and lend your voice. The survey takes about 15 minutes to complete and is open to all school libraries across Australia, New Zealand and the Asia Pacific region.

We also look forward to hosting a webinar, **The secret to supercharging student success** *is simple: start with a great school library* with teacher librarian (and campaign lead) Holly Godfree on 19 September 2018. Holly will be discussing the new 'Students need school libraries' campaign and sharing how school library advocacy is gaining momentum in Australia.

Further information and links to register for the webinar are available from the Events page of the Softlink web site.

Softl**i**nk

About Softlink

Established in 1983, Softlink is an Australian company with global influence including school library and education department customers in almost 70 countries.

Softlink works with school libraries and educators to provide solutions which engage students and support school library staff. Our mission is to equip both individual schools and districts with the most comprehensive and effective solutions to engage their students, improve literacy outcomes and promote student achievement.

Our flagship school library system, Oliver v5, is continually developed to meet the changing needs of libraries, educators, and students and our new information curating tool, LearnPath, provides an easy to use platform to guide students, support the development of research skills and promote the value of school libraries and resources.

Softlink products offer deep digital integration with eBooks and streamlined integration with virtual learning environments and school administration systems.

We have had a long partnership with the library and information industry and understand the challenges and opportunities the 21st century learning and teaching environment presents for school libraries.

References

1. English, Oxford Living Dictionaries:
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2. Cambridge Dictionary:
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3. Collins Dictionary:
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