2015 UK School Library Survey

Findings from Softlink’s 2015 UK School Library Survey into school library budgets, staffing, issues and trends.

Conducted by Softlink Europe Ltd. providers of Alice, Oliver & Scout to schools across the UK.
Executive Summary

Softlink is a world-wide leading provider of Library Management Systems to the education, legal, health, not for profit and government sectors.

In 2015 Softlink conducted the first UK wide annual school library survey. The survey results outline the initial key trends and issues facing UK school Libraries. Softlink will conduct the survey on an annual basis to develop detailed trend analysis.

907 responses were received and principal findings from the 2015 survey include:

- 54% of schools feel their library is not adequately funded.
- 36% of schools receive £5,000 or more for their library budget.
- 52% of schools library budget has not changed from previous years.
- 68% of school libraries have experienced no change in staffing levels from previous years.
- One third of UK school library staff work term time only.
- Teaching staff interaction with the library is one of the top challenges for librarians. Other highlighted challenges include reduced physical space for the library and competing with other school activities.
- The top priority for school libraries in 2015 is to raise the profile of the school library.
- Implementing eBooks and using online resources is a growing requirement for school libraries.
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1 Introduction

Softlink is a world-wide leading provider of library, content and knowledge management solutions, delivering Library Management Systems to schools and school library services across the UK.

The UK School Library Survey was launched by Softlink for the first time in 2015. The survey was developed to identify the trends and examine the issues facing UK school libraries to advocate the role of libraries in schools and those responsible for managing them. The survey will be launched on an annual basis providing the ability to compare changes and developments in the school library industry each year.

This report provides an analysis of the survey findings including budget, staffing levels, school library objectives, future trends and challenges libraries are facing.

1.1 About Softlink & our systems

Established in 1983, Softlink has 10,000 customers across 108 nations. The head office is located in Brisbane, Australia with regional offices in Oxford, UK and Auckland, New Zealand. The UK office provides and supports library management systems to customers across the UK, Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Softlink are proud supporters of school libraries and have provided library systems to schools for more than 20 years. Softlink provide online systems to schools that can be accessed via smart devices whether in the Library or at home and deliver streamlined digital integration with all leading eBook providers – offering schools a system that supports 21st century teaching and learning.
1.2 The Purpose of the survey

School libraries are central to students learning experience and their preparation for further education. School librarians, teacher librarians and volunteers play very important roles in a school. The survey is designed to identify the importance of libraries, trends occurring and the challenges facing those working in school libraries.

The survey will take place on an annual basis, developing a reference point for understanding changes, impacts and trends over time. The results will provide a solid advocacy base for school libraries.

1.3 Survey scope

The 2015 school library survey by Softlink was conducted online and open to all UK schools. It was supported by The School Library Association (SLA) Renaissance Learning, CRB Cunninghams, JCS Online Resources and Bibliographic Data Services (BDS).

The survey consisted of 25 questions covering the following topics:
- Your school library objectives
- Your school library resources – budgets & staffing
- The role of the library in the school and local community
- Challenges facing UK school libraries
- Emerging trends in UK school libraries

1.4 Survey analysis methods

It was determined that the type of school was the most suitable measurement for comparison. A comparison using the school library budget has also been included in some of the analysis.
1.4.1 Respondents

907 responses were received, with the largest responses from state schools.

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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*Figure 1. 2015 survey respondent’s breakdown by type of school.*

2 Survey findings summary

Key findings from the 2015 UK School Library Survey includes:

- 54% of schools feel their library is not adequately funded.
- 36% of schools receive £5,000 or more for their library budget.
- 52% of schools library budget has not changed from previous years.
- 68% of school libraries have experienced no change in staffing levels from previous years.
- One third of UK school library staff work term time only.
- Teaching staff interaction with the library is one of the top challenges for librarians. Other highlighted challenges include reduced physical space for the library and competing with other school activities.
- The top priority for school libraries in 2015 is to raise the profile of the school library.
- Implementing eBooks and using online resources is a growing requirement for school libraries.
2.1 UK school library budgets

52% of schools library budget has not increased in 2015 from the amount of budget they have received in previous years. A concerning 34% of schools library budget has decreased compared to only 14% experiencing an increase.

![Library budget changes](image)

*Figure 2: 2015 school library budget changes from previous years.*

The survey has concluded that school libraries require more funding to deliver their services effectively as 54% of schools feel their library is not adequately funded.

![Do you feel your library is adequately funded?](image)

*Figure 3: 2015 school library survey adequate funding for libraries*
36% of schools receive more than £5000 per year for their library budget. Independent schools receive more budget than any other type of school. 42% of schools receive £3,000 or less for their budget of which the highest number of these are state and academy schools.

Figure 4: 2015 school library budget allocation
2.2 UK school library staff

A total of 68% of schools reported that the number of staff working in their school library has not changed from previous years. A concerning 23% have experienced a decrease with only 9% experiencing an increase in staffing levels. Academy secondary schools are experiencing the highest number of decreases in staffing levels.

![School library staff changes](image)

**Figure 5: 2015 school library staff changes**

62% of schools have one full time staff member working in their library. 31% are term time only and 27% of school library staff work full time all year round. 35% of schools have 2 or more staff working in their library, this is not full time equivalent - the staff consist of a mixture of teaching staff, teaching assistants, volunteers and pupil librarians. (As displayed in figures 6 and 7 on the following page.)
Figure 6: 2015 school library survey, number of library staff. This chart displays the total number of staff including full time, term time and part time.

Figure 7: 2015 school library staff working styles
19% of staff working in school libraries have other responsibilities in a school as shown in figure 8 below. 5% are volunteers and 76% are experienced librarians. The survey findings identify that the highest number of staff working in school libraries are experienced in working in libraries.

![Types Of Library Staff](image)

*Figure 8: 2015 school library survey types of library staff Library*

The survey findings supported how library staff add value to the learning of students as 60% of library staff deliver lessons to students in the library.

Respondents shared what the most important services school libraries deliver including:

- Providing a safe, welcoming, comfortable and flexible environment for students to carry out research and study.
- Providing an area for learning to support independent study.
- Assisting and guiding students with the development of learning and research skills.
- Delivering access to a range of learning resources both printed and online.
- Supporting the school curriculum.
- Enhancing literacy across the school.
- Enabling independent learning for preparation for university was a common theme.
3  UK school library objectives
The top 3 most important objectives the survey has identified across school types are:

1. **Raising the profile of your school library.**
   77% of respondents felt this was very or most important for 2015.
2. **Encouraging teaching staff to use the library and / or learning resources for lessons.**
   76% of respondents felt this was very or most important for 2015.
3. **Developing student research skills.**
   90% felt this was very or most important for 2015.

4  UK school library challenges
Respondents were asked to rate how challenging particular areas were for their school library and in their role as a librarian. The 7 main challenges identified were:

1. **Engaging students in the library** – Academy secondary and state secondary schools find this to be their biggest challenge.
2. **Integrating the library with the school curriculum** – 88% of schools find integration with the curriculum a challenge with 30% finding it very challenging.
3. **Teaching staff engagement with the library** – 89% of respondents found this to be a challenge for their school. This was indicated across all school types.
4. **Time limitations for daily duties** – 36% of schools felt time was very or most challenging.
5. **Awareness of digital resources** – 74% of schools found this a challenge or very challenging.
6. **Library budget reductions** - this challenge was indicated most by academy and secondary state schools who have between 501 and 1000 students.
7. **Library staff reductions** – 54% of schools see this as a challenge.

The schools shared some additional challenges they are facing:

- Competing with other school activities during breaks and extra-curricular time.
- Limited physical space for the library - in some instances the library is spread across different rooms or in the school corridor.
- Rising costs of online subscriptions and databases.
- Cost-effective eBook solutions.
- Lack of involvement and support from senior management.
• Reduction in the use of physical books by students with increasing interest and reliance on online resources.
• Remaining in line with latest technology and trends.
• A lack of teaching staff scheduling library lessons for students as part of their timetable.

5 Future trends in UK school libraries

Schools were asked to share any future trends they see emerging in school libraries. There were a number of common themes surrounding digital technology and online resources.

• eBooks and online resources - this was the most common theme. A concern highlighted was making the right choice of an eBook provider and the need for this to be a cost effective / affordable model.
• Accessing online resources easily using new technology and apps.
• The flexibility to access learning resources from different devices, with the increasing use of tablet devices in schools.
• Supporting students to develop research and independent study skills to prepare them for further and higher education with a growing requirement for students to begin university with research skills in place.
• Using social media to promote library services, encourage reading and making the library and reading more engaging.
• There is a growing requirement for the library to be included in OFSTED inspections and reports, to highlight the value the library provides and to be part of the curriculum.
• The growing use of cloud based Library Management Systems with the ability to use digital technology to access the library.
Conclusion

The 2015 UK School Library Survey has provided an informative insight into the school library industry and a basis for comparing with future surveys. By comparing these survey results with those that will be gathered in 2016, the identification of trends and changes will be possible.

Continued investment in school libraries is important to the learning of young people. The role of the librarian and library staff play an important part in the academic development of students today. There is a clear identification of the growing requirement for more digital and online resources to be part of the library as well as school-wide integration and engagement.

It is apparent from the survey that school libraries are facing many challenges, including gaining support of the role of the library from school management, teaching staff and students. Engaging students and encouraging them to interact with the library is important to their development for future study. It is important that the library is seen as a welcoming place to study and research information, this is one of the key objectives librarians are clearly aiming to achieve. Many schools experience a lack of interaction from teaching staff; the services a school library delivers supports teaching and learning in many ways and it is vital teaching staff recognise this.
A special thanks to The School Library Association, Renaissance Learning, BDS, JCS and CRB Cunninghams who have been strong supporters of the UK School Library Survey 2015.

For more information on the UK School Library Survey or if you would like to discuss how Softlink can help school libraries overcome their challenges, contact Softlink on 01993 883 401 or alternatively e-mail marketing@softlink.co.uk

Softlink Europe Ltd, providing UK school libraries with...