

# The 2018 Softlink UK & Europe School Library Survey Report



*Findings from Softlink's 2018 UK & Europe School Library Survey into school library staffing, library usage, support and engagement, library services, and trends.*



Conducted by  
**Softlink**

[softlinkint.com/edu](https://softlinkint.com/edu)



## Introduction

The Softlink UK School Library Survey was first launched in 2015. A similar survey has been conducted by Softlink Australia since 2010. The first Softlink Australia survey was launched in response to the 2010 Australian Federal Governments request for submissions to the 'Inquiry into school libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian schools'.

Softlink has continued to conduct the survey annually, extending the scope to include New Zealand schools and initiating a Softlink UK School Library Survey in 2015. In 2018, the scope of the surveys was further extended to include schools in Asia Pacific and Europe.

The 2018 UK & Europe School Library Survey received responses from Germany, Ghana, Ireland, Isle of Man, Italy, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Scotland, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Trinidad & Tobago, Wales, UAE, and the UK.

Continuing the annual survey builds a critical reference point for understanding regional and global changes, impacts, and trends over time.

This report provides an analysis of the survey findings including resourcing, library usage and support, school library services, future trends, and challenges libraries are facing.

In 2018, questions pertaining to budget were removed from the UK survey as we were advised this would be covered by the Great School Libraries Campaign research questionnaire in early 2019.

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“School libraries need to be statutory requirement, included in Ofsted, with clear aims for development in schools.”

All text quotes included in this report are drawn from two open-ended questions in the survey - *What is the one thing you would you change about your school library or your role?* and *Do you have any other comments you would like to add?*

"The results of surveys like these need to be communicated to principals and academy federation staff.

Until the real benefits of a healthy cherished library are communicated directly to the people in a position to better resource them, it will always be a vicious circle - you can't see the potential of a thing that is underperforming because of a lack of resources."

## 1.0 Purpose of the survey

School libraries are central to a student's learning experience and their preparation for further education and school librarians play very important roles.

The annual survey provides a reference point for understanding changes, impacts, challenges and trends in school libraries over time.

## 1.1 About Softlink

Established in 1983, Softlink has school library and education department customers across 60 countries.

Our Oxfordshire-based UK office provides support for customers across the UK, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

Softlink works with school libraries and educators to provide solutions which engage students and support school library staff. Our flagship school library system, Oliver v5, is continually developed to meet the changing needs of libraries, educators and students. 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.

## 2.0 Survey findings summary

Key findings from the 2018 Survey include:

- 67% of respondents feel their library is not adequately resourced including staffing and budget.
- 85% of respondents indicated no change to their staffing levels from the previous year, 2% indicated it had increased, and 13% indicated a decrease.
- 25% indicated a high or very high level of support from the senior leadership team, 42% of respondents indicated a moderate level of support, 33% indicated a low or very low level of support.
- 22% indicated a high or very high level of teacher engagement in the library, 47% of schools indicated a moderate level of teacher engagement, 31% indicated a low or very low level of teacher engagement.
- 43% of respondents indicated that they include a percentage of eBooks in their collection.
- 54% of respondents indicated that they include a percentage of eResources - subscription databases in their collection.



## 3.0 School library staffing

Respondents were asked to provide information about staffing, including Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staffing levels and library role type.

Responses to these questions have been analysed by school type, education provider, and role type.

### 3.1 Staffing by school type

All-through schools reported the highest number of FTE staff with an average of 1.7 per school.

Primary/Preparatory schools reported the lowest number of FTE staff with an average of 0.8 per school.

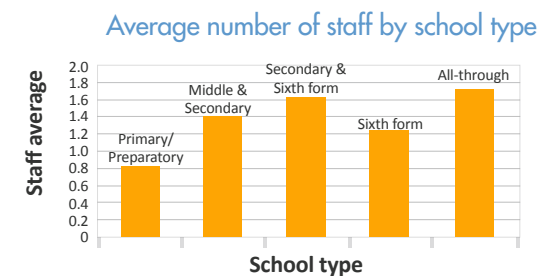


Figure 1: Average number of staff by school type

### 3.2 Staffing by education provider and size

When applying school size and education provider type, Independent/Private school libraries in the 1100+ category reported the highest FTE staff average of 3 per school.

State schools in the 200 - 399 category reported the lowest FTE staff average of 0.5 per school.

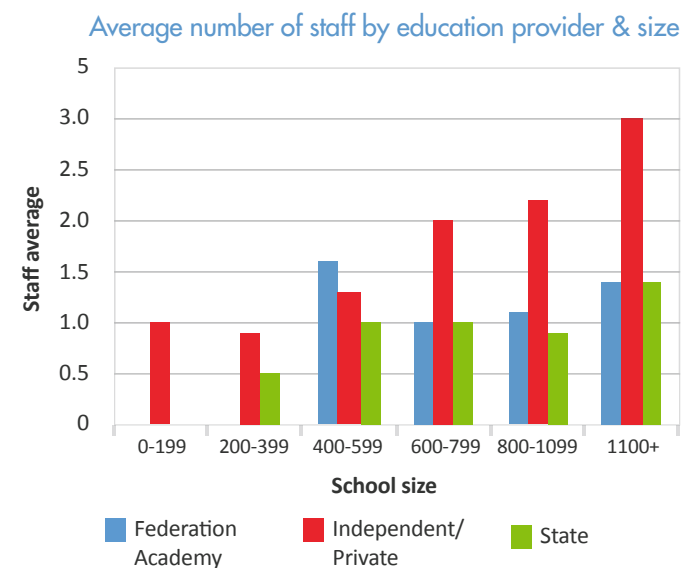


Figure 2: Average number of staff by education provider & size

"I would like the library to be more integrated into the curriculum."

Sample sizes of less than 5 have not been included



### 3.3 FTE staff by role and school type

Figure 3 shows the breakdown of school library staffing by role and school type.

The percentage indicates the number of respondents in each category with at least one of these role types.

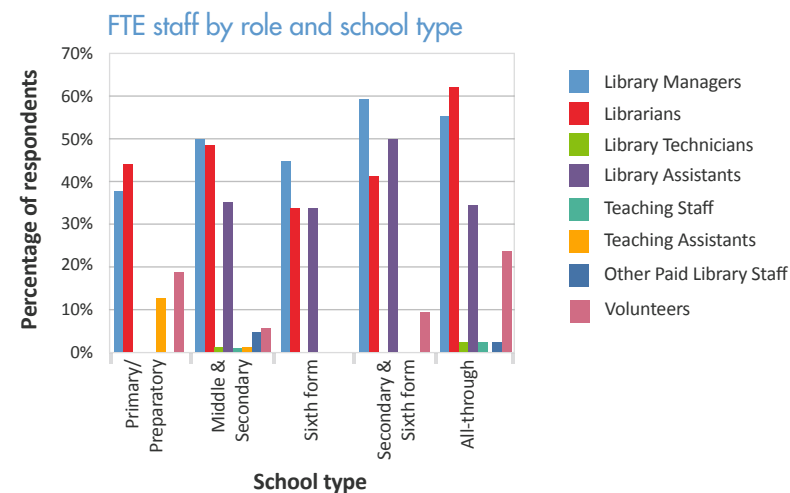


Figure 3: FTE staff by role and school type

### 3.4 FTE staff by role and education provider

Figure 4 shows the breakdown of school library staffing by role and education provider.

The percentage indicates the number of respondents in each category with at least one of these role types.

Sample sizes of less than 5 have not been included

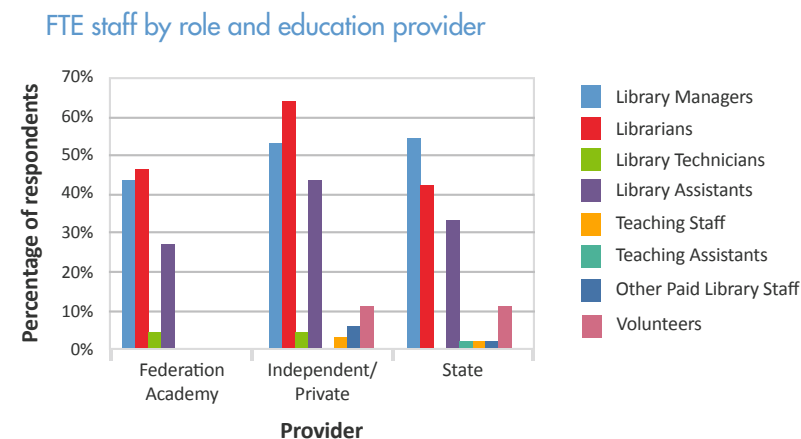


Figure 4: FTE staff by role and education provider



"I would like to have the opportunity to share experience and good practices with other librarians in Europe.

Then I have a dream: when I go back to Italy - my home country - I'd like to promote the 'school library concept' in the public schools which don't have any."

## 4.0 Changes in school library staffing

Respondents were asked to provide an indication of how their staffing had changed from the previous year.

Responses to this question are presented below.

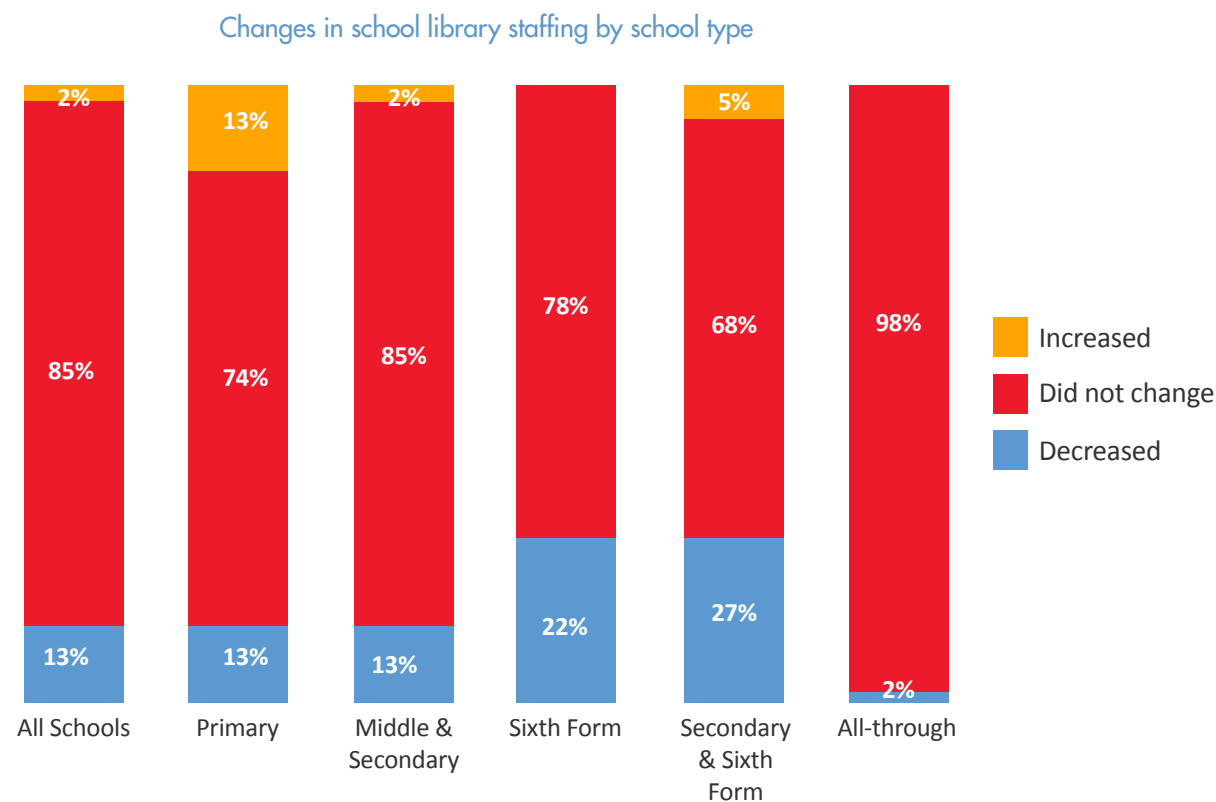


Figure 5: Changes in school library budgets by school type 2018



## 4.1 School library staffing comparison 2017 - 2018

Figure 6 compares staffing changes between the 2017 and 2018 survey responses.

When comparing library staffing changes between 2017 and 2018, fewer schools reported changes; the majority of respondents reported no change in library staffing.

School library staffing comparison 2017 - 2018

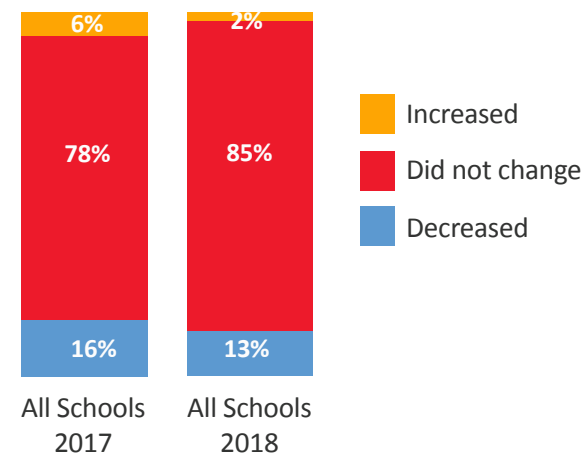


Figure 6: Comparison of 2017 and 2018 school library staffing changes

## 4.2 Do you think your library is adequately resourced including budget and staffing?

Respondents were asked if they felt their school library was adequately resourced including staffing and budget.

67% of respondents said no, 33% said yes.

Do you think your library is adequately resourced including budget and staffing?

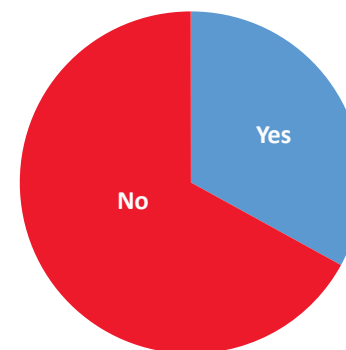


Figure 7: Do you think your library is adequately resourced including budget and staffing?

## 5.0 Library usage

Respondents were asked about library usage including average number of loans per month, number of active borrowers, and number of dedicated library sessions per term.

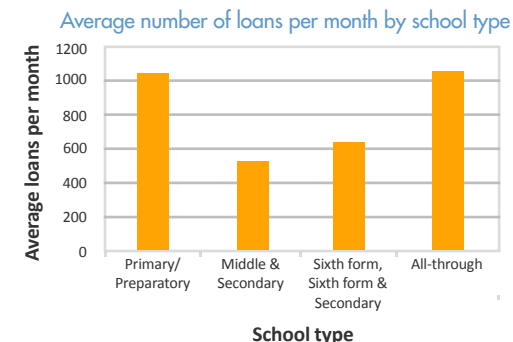
### 5.1 Average number of loans per month

Figure 8 shows the reported average number of loans per month by school type.

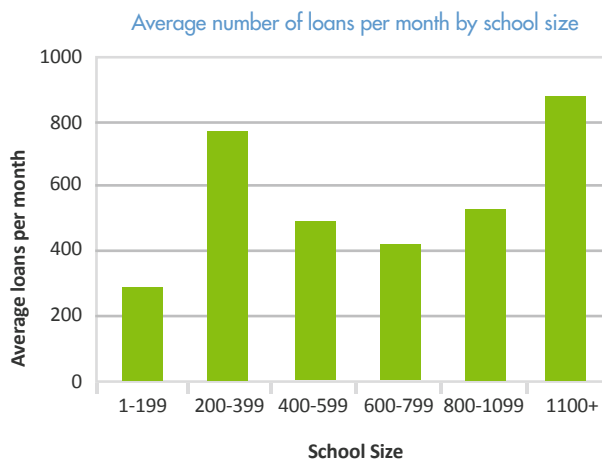
Figure 9 shows the reported average number of loans per month by school size.

Figure 10 shows the reported average number of loans per month by education provider.

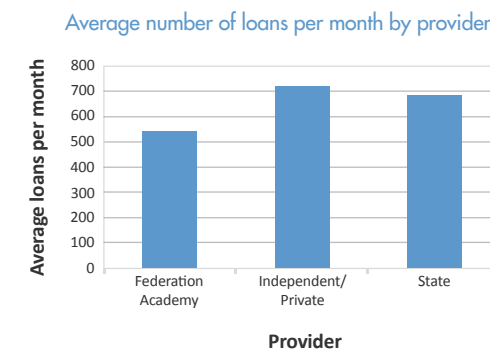
Sample sizes of less than 5 have not been included.



**Figure 8: Average number of loans by school type**



**Figure 9: Average number of loans by school size**



**Figure 10: Average number of loans by provider**

"I would love to make the space more flexible to suit collaboration and different learning needs at different times."



## 5.2 Number of active borrowers

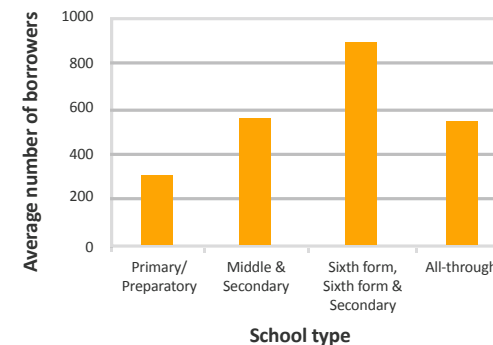
Figure 11 shows the reported average number of active borrowers by school type.

Figure 12 shows the reported number of active borrowers by school size.

Figure 13 shows the reported number of active borrowers by education provider.

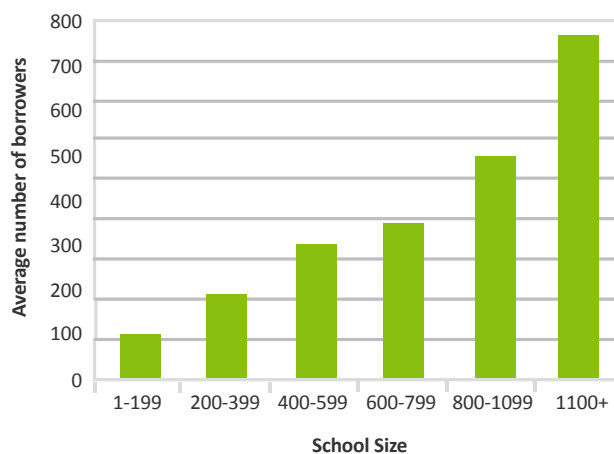
Sample sizes of less than 5 have not been included.

Number of active borrowers by school type



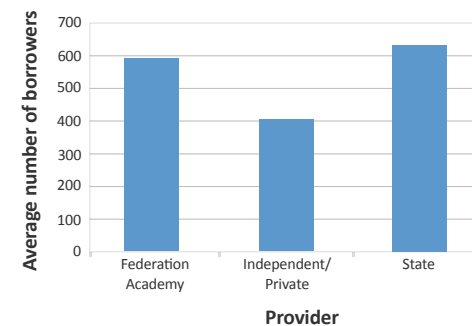
**Figure 11: Average number of active borrowers by school type**

Number of active borrowers by school size



**Figure 12: Average number of loans by school size**

Number of active borrowers by provider



**Figure 13: Average number of active borrowers by provider**

### 5.3 Number of sessions per term

Figure 14 shows the reported average number of sessions per term by school type.

Figure 15 shows the reported average number of sessions per term by school size.

Figure 16 shows the reported average number of sessions per term by education provider.

Sample sizes of less than 5 have not been included.

Number of sessions per term by school type

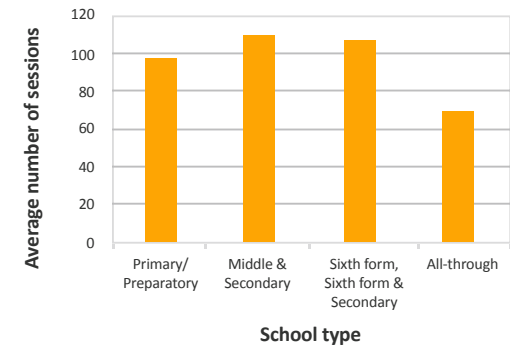


Figure 14: Average number of sessions per term by school type

Number of sessions per term by school size

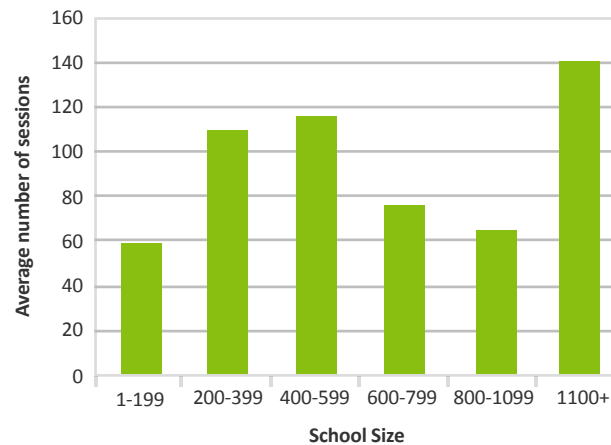


Figure 15: Average number of sessions per term by school size

Number of sessions per term by provider

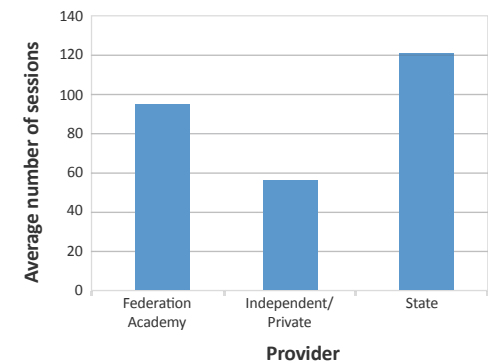


Figure 16: Average number of sessions per term by provider

"I would like better communication with academic departments so that my resources could better reflect the curriculum."

## 6.0 Level of support from the senior leadership team

Respondents asked about the level of support they receive from the senior leadership team. Overall, 25% indicated a high or very high level of support, 42% indicated a moderate level of support, 33% indicated a low or very low level of support.

Figures 18 and 19 show the reported level of support by education provider and school type.

Sample sizes of less than 5 have not been included.

Level of support from the senior leadership team - all schools

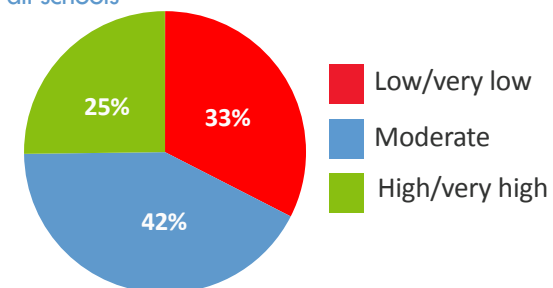


Figure 17: Level of support from the senior leadership team -all schools

Level of support from the senior leadership team by education provider

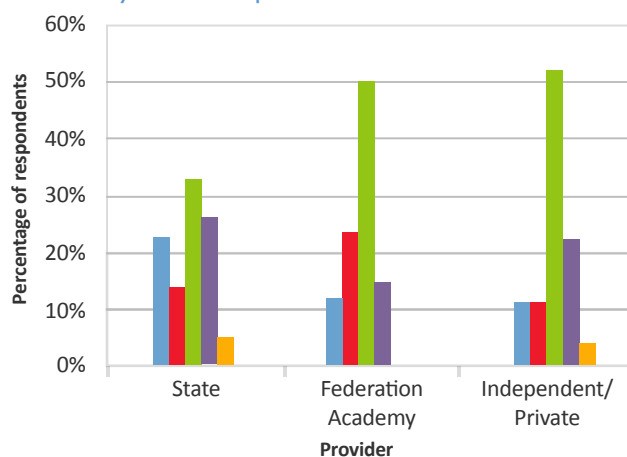


Figure 18: Level of support from the senior leadership team by education provider

Level of support from the senior leadership team by school type

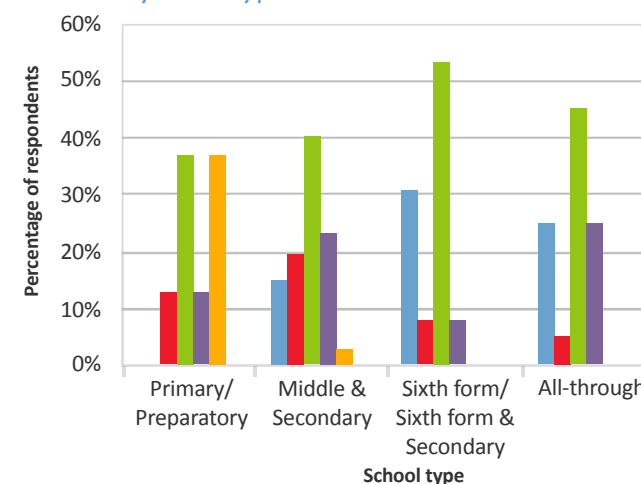


Figure 19: Level of support from the senior leadership team by school type

Very low Low Moderate High Very high

## 7.0 Level of teacher engagement with the library

Respondents asked about the level of teacher engagement with the library. 22% indicated a high or very high level of support, 47% indicated a moderate level of support, and 31% of respondents indicated a low or very low level of support.

The following charts show reported level of teacher engagement with the library by school size, school type, and education provider.

Figures 21 and 22 show the reported level of teacher engagement by education provider and school type.

Sample sizes of less than 5 have not been included.

Level of teacher engagement with the library - all schools

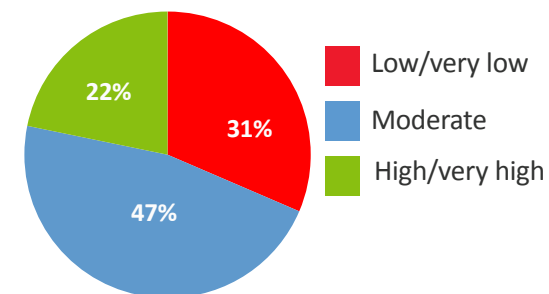


Figure 20: Level of teacher engagement with the library - all schools

Level of teacher engagement by education provider

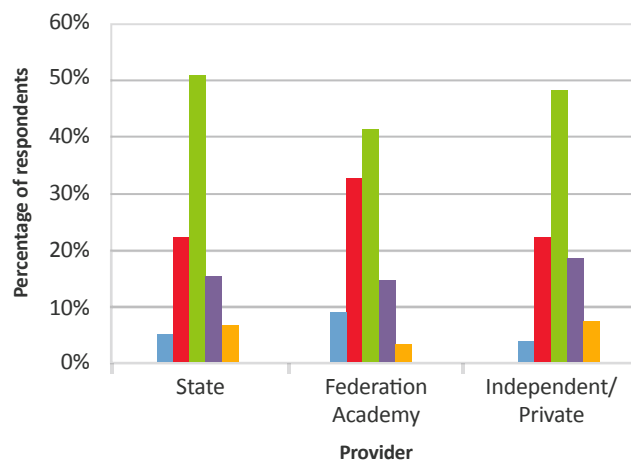


Figure 21: Level of teacher engagement by education provider

Level of teacher engagement by school type

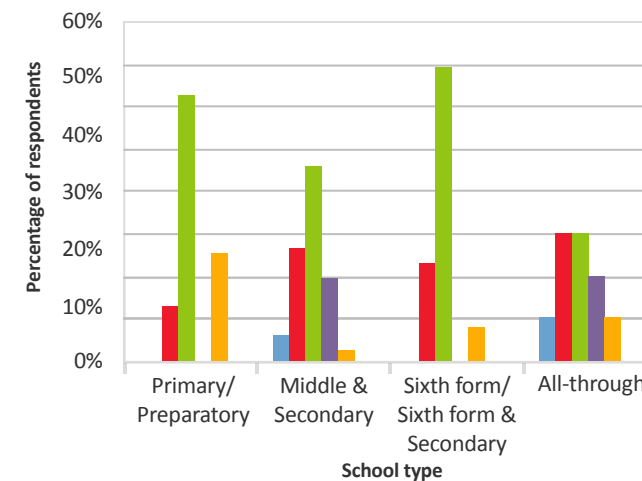


Figure 22: Level of teacher engagement by school type

Very low Low Moderate High Very high

"Every time I put in an extra table, someone comes and sits at it and we are full again. Demand for school libraries as places to be is not dying.

Make a good space and the users will come!"

"I would like to help develop a whole school reading program which would involve classes coming regularly to the library to borrow books for reading for pleasure."



## 8.0 School library services

Respondents were asked to select 5 services/objectives that are the main services their library provides. They were also asked to select 5 services they would like to provide more of.

### The top 3 services respondents currently provide included:

1. Promoting and supporting reading for pleasure (94%)
2. Providing an engaging and welcoming space for learning and leisure (86%)
3. Library administration – circulation management (76%)

### The top 4 services respondents would like to provide more of included:

1. Developing or teaching information literacy programs (56%)
2. Collaborating with other school departments (51%)
3. Curating relevant information and resources to support topic-based learning and curriculum (47%)
4. Developing or teaching research skills programs (47%)

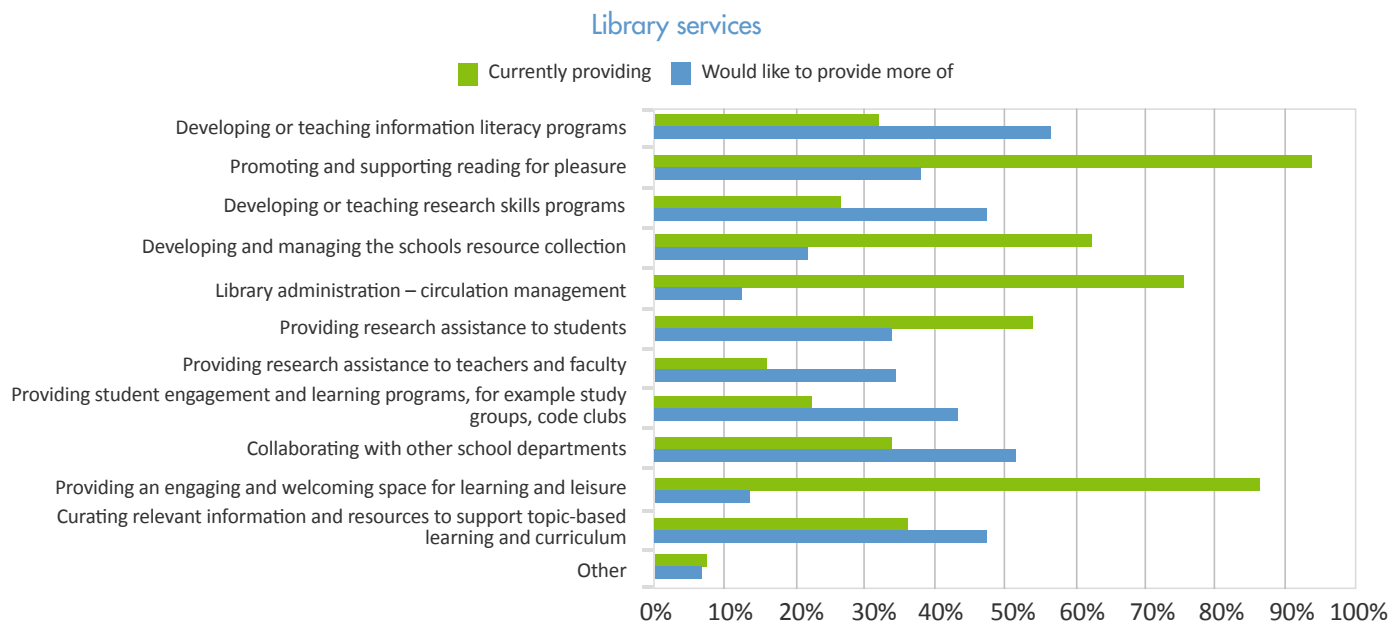


Figure 23: Library services 2018



## 9.0 What do you see impacting school libraries most in the future?

Respondents were asked to rate the following in relation to how they will impact school libraries in the future.

The top 3 included:

1. Government funding and policies (63%)
2. Cloud-based technologies increasing library accessibility (61%)
3. Digitisation of resources (59%)

### What will have the biggest impact on school libraries in the future?

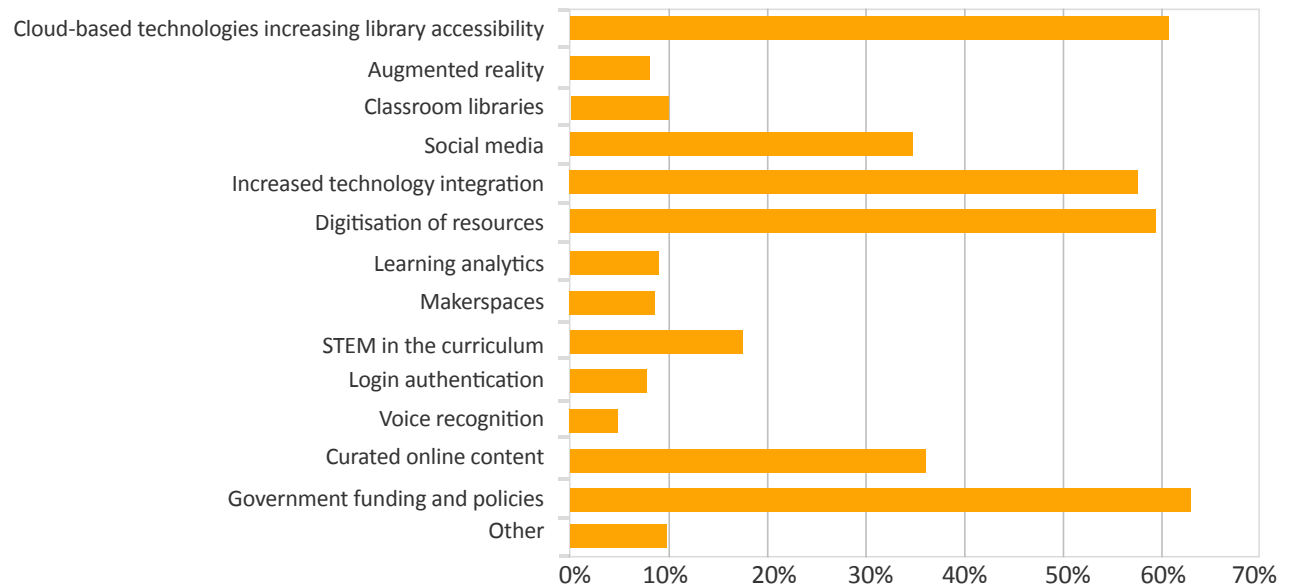


Figure 24: What will have the biggest impact on school libraries in the future?

Open fields provided opportunity for respondents to include other emerging trends not listed. Responses included lack of qualified librarians, individual school budget distribution, flexible library spaces, critical literacy, and SLT and Teacher involvement in the library.

“Libraries should be less concerned about perceived threats than about innovation and curation of collections which reflect the user groups and society as it is now.

We are not becoming less relevant, we are more relevant than ever before. We need to demonstrate this in all we do.”

## 10.0 eResources

Respondents were asked what percentage of their collection was made up of eBooks and other multimedia and what percentage of their collection was made up Subscription databases. Figures 22 and 23 show this percentage for all school types, figures 24 and 25 (on the following page) show the distribution by school type.

Percentage of collection made up of eBooks and other multimedia

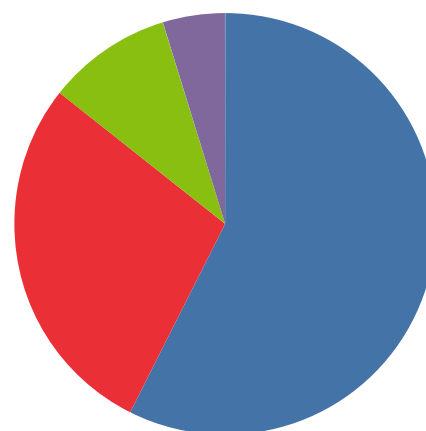


Figure 25. Percentage of collection made up of eBooks and other multimedia

Percentage of collection made up of Subscription databases

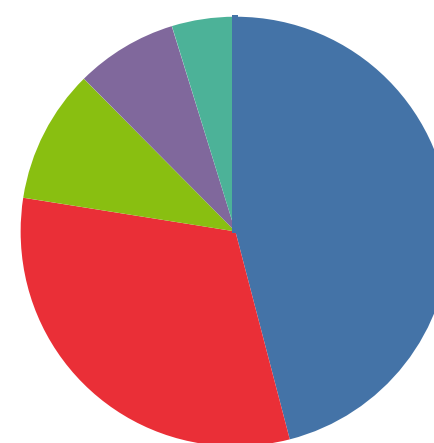


Figure 26. Percentage of collection made up of Subscription databases

"I would like more funding and time to put into my library so it can be up-to-date and serving its purpose successfully."

Percentage of collection made up of eBooks and other multimedia by school type

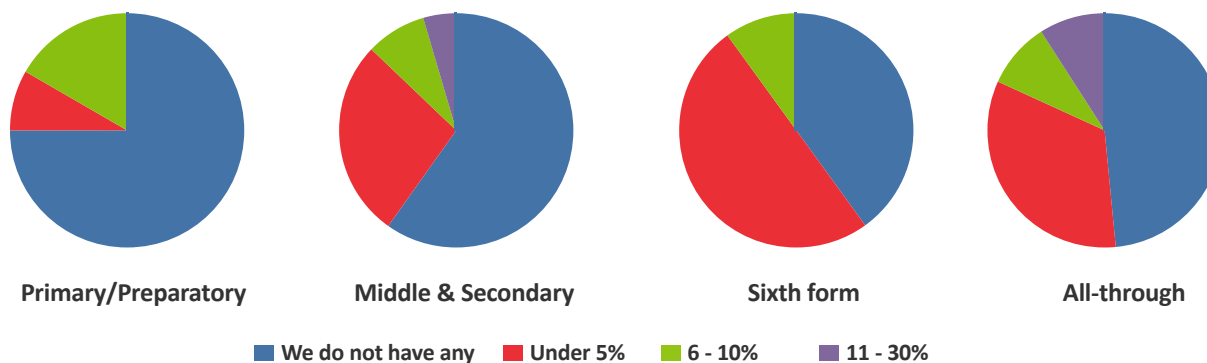


Figure 27: Percentage of collection made up of eBooks and other multimedia by school type

Percentage of collection made up of Subscription databases by school type

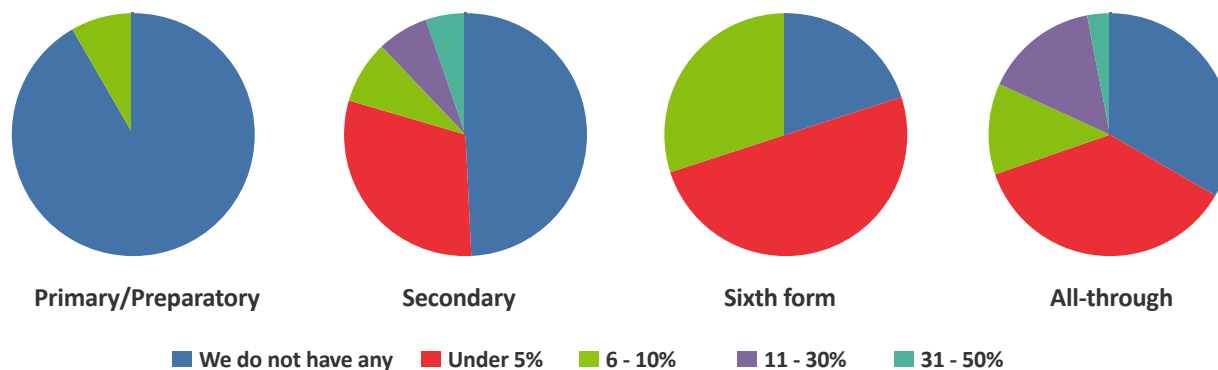


Figure 28: Percentage of collection made up of Subscription databases by school type

## 11.0 Feedback themes

Respondents were asked two open-ended questions about the library and their role. They were also asked to share ideas for promoting the library, the services it provides or the role and skills of the school library staff. We had a number of respondents share these ideas, which you can read in our whitepaper [“School libraries share ideas for promoting the library”](#) available on our website.

Recurring themes include:

### The library space

Respondents indicated that they would like a bigger library space to house resources and facilitate learning. They also indicated they would like the library to be more central to the school, and to be able to provide a dedicated room within the library for study.

### Integration

Respondents indicated that they would like the library to be more integrated into the school and the curriculum. They would like to take a ‘whole-school’ approach to learning, rather than have the library viewed as just a good space that is only beneficial for some students. They also indicated that they would like to develop better partnerships with teachers to support student learning.

### Student use of the library

Respondents indicated that their library is well-used and popular among students. They indicated that they would like more funding and time to provide better services for students. They also indicated that they would like the senior leadership team to see how important the library is to students.

### Raising the library profile

Respondents shared the importance of promoting the school library and the services it provides to the staff, students, and broader community. They indicated a lack of knowledge of what they can and would like to do within the school, the importance of a proactive approach to raising the library profile and the success they have had when taking a proactive approach.



## 12.0 Survey scope

The 2018 Softlink UK and Europe School Library Survey was promoted and conducted online with the generous support of our partners JCS online resources and Schools Catalogue Information Service (SCIS). Invitations were open to all UK school libraries and consisted of 28 questions that covered the following topics:

- School library staffing
- Library usage and support
- School library services
- Emerging trends
- School library collection
- Viewpoints on opportunities, challenges and promoting the survey

## 13.0 Respondents

This year the survey received 364 responses. Table 1 below shows the breakdown of survey respondents by education provider and school type.

Type of School	Education Provider					TOTAL
	Federation/Academy	Free	Independent/Private	SEN	State	
Primary/Preparatory	3	1	11	0	7	22
Middle	2	0	0	0	2	4
Secondary	55	5	57	4	112	233
Sixth form	8	0	4	0	2	14
Secondary & Sixth form	5	0	11	0	6	22
All-through	3	0	44	2	20	69
TOTAL	76	6	127	6	149	364

Table 1: 2018 Survey respondents by education provider and school type

“If we had bigger budget I would implement things such as audiobooks and eBooks.

Not only that, I would be able to create reading nooks and attractive, comfortable places for the students to be able to sit and read.”

## 14.0 Conclusion

The 2018 UK School Library Survey provides insight into the school library industry and a basis for comparing with past and future surveys.

In 2018, 67% of respondents indicated that they do not believe their library is adequately resourced. This represents a 2% change from 2017 survey responses when 65% reported inadequate resourcing.

There was a drop in the number of reported staffing increases between 2017 (6%) and 2018 (2%), however reported staffing decreases also dropped from 16% (in 2017) to 13% (in 2018) with more overall stating their staffing remained the same.

In 2017 34% of respondents reported a high or very high level of support from the senior management team, this dropped in 2018 when 25% reported a high or very high level of support. There was a rise in the number of respondents reporting a low or very low level of support from 26% in 2017 to 33% in 2018.

The survey identified that school library staff continue to struggle with budget, staffing, and library space.

Open-ended comments reveal a high level of student engagement in the library.

Despite the challenges the survey has identified, school library staff continue to show great enthusiasm for the role and ingenuity in using the resources that they have available. These ideas have been collated in the feature, [School libraries share ideas for promoting the library](#), available on our website.

## Thank you

A special thank you to everyone who participated in and shared the 2018 Softlink UK & Europe School Library Survey.

