

An update on the New Zealand school library landscape

By *Miriam Tuohy*

Snapshot

Miriam Tuohy reflects on the current state of school libraries in her country considering the New Zealand Covid Recovery programme, the impact of upcoming curriculum changes and drawing on the 2021 national survey of school libraries in Aotearoa.

This article about the New Zealand school library landscape includes findings from our 2021 [national survey of school libraries in Aotearoa](#), how school libraries are involved in New Zealand's Covid Recovery programme, and what upcoming curriculum changes will mean for our school libraries.

2021 national survey of school libraries

In 2020 I shared what we'd learned from our first two national surveys of school libraries in Aotearoa New Zealand. In November last year we repeated the second survey, with extra questions about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. We found many trends from the early surveys continued.

Staffing and employment matters

Almost all school library staff in New Zealand are employed during school term time only. Those working in composite schools (years 1-13) are more likely to be employed through the full year. Most primary school library staff work part-time. For intermediate schools (years 7-8) and composite schools approximately half of school library staff work full time. And in secondary schools, most library staff (69%) work full time. Table 1 shows average figures from the 2021 survey for roll size, paid library staff hours and minutes per student per week.

Table 1: Average school sizes and paid library staff time per week by school type

School type	Average roll	Average paid hours per week	Minutes per student per week
Primary	337	15	2.67
Intermediate	561	27	2.87
Secondary	920	45	2.92
Composite	503	36	4.33

Most school library staff respondents feel their work hours are secure. About a third said they don't think their hours need to change, but more than half said they would like more paid hours, and the main reasons for this were:

- a lack of time to get things done, currently
- to provide better support for teaching and learning
- to reduce current levels of unpaid work.

We asked library staff to compare their skills and pay with the requirements and responsibilities of their current role.

- Almost half the respondents (49%) said their skills are just right for their current role. 45% of respondents said their skills are higher than what their job requires.
- A little over half the respondents (55%) do not agree that their pay is appropriate considering the role and responsibilities.

Many respondents shared why they feel their pay isn't appropriate. The main themes to emerge are:

- pay rates do not recognise the individual's skills, qualifications, or experience
- pay grades and rates do not reflect the responsibilities inherent in the role
- disparity with other support staff roles (e.g. teaching assistants) while the school librarians' pay equity claim is unresolved.

Responses from school library staff about their qualifications show wide variation — ranging from sub-degree level certificates or diplomas to doctorate level, both in Library and Information Studies and other fields. A quarter of respondents say they have no qualifications.

There is potential for considerable library staff turnover in the next few years, with about 20% of respondents planning to retire, and 10% currently looking for work outside of libraries.

We asked respondents about support for their role from their school's leadership team. Over half feel they are well supported, but over a quarter do not.

A sample of the comments about employment matters illustrate the complex relationships between all these factors.

We asked respondents about support for their role from their school's leadership team. Over half feel they are well supported, but over a quarter do not.

“...I am full time with multiple roles and how many hours spent doing library tasks depends on other jobs and library tasks.”

“If the pay rate goes up with the equity deal the union is working on, my hours will be cut.”

“I expect staffing to continue to be stable, but we will have a new principal later in the year who might have a different idea.”

“I would like to study more but financially I cannot support this and I can't progress wage-wise so there is little motivation.”

“Money is the main factor, while my kids are small, and the hours mean I am not paying after school care then I can justify the low pay. But once my children are older if my pay does not increase then I will be forced to look at other options [...] I have loved working in the school library, it is the best job I have ever had.”

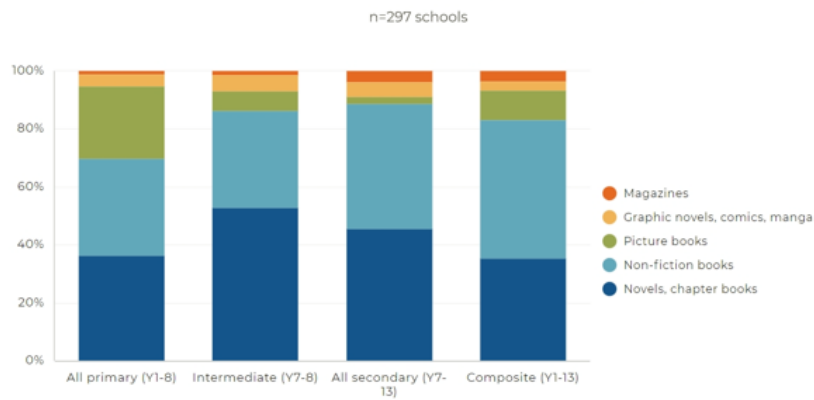
Library collections

We asked about current library collection holdings and expected changes across a range of formats and types:

- print resources including fiction and nonfiction texts, and graphic formats
- digital resources including eBooks and eAudiobooks, free and paid content
- physical items including mobile devices, objects and artefacts, tools and other equipment.

For all responding schools, print resources still dominate collection holdings. Secondary school libraries are more likely to have digital resources, and in greater quantities than other school types.

Print format holdings by school type



Over 100 respondents commented on the size of their library collection. The main points to note from these were:

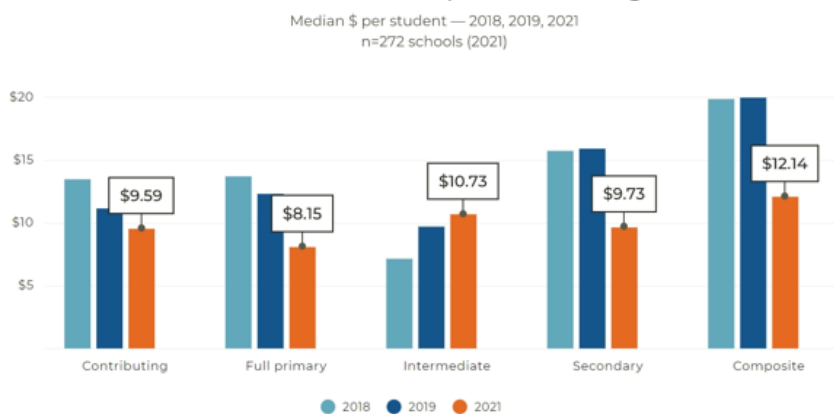
- 37% said the size of the collection was adequate or appropriate for their school roll
- for some schools, collection size is limited because of the physical space available
- buying budgets limit the ability to meet demand, for example, for graphic novels.

There is more uncertainty about digital formats. Format holdings most likely to decrease are print nonfiction, magazines and DVDs.

Looking at future changes, we found that as in the previous survey, respondents expect most print holdings will stay the same or grow (especially graphic novels, comics and manga). There is more uncertainty about digital formats. Format holdings most likely to decrease are print nonfiction, magazines and DVDs.

Across all responding schools, average collection development funding was \$11.48 per student, down from \$13.97 in 2019.

Collection development budgets



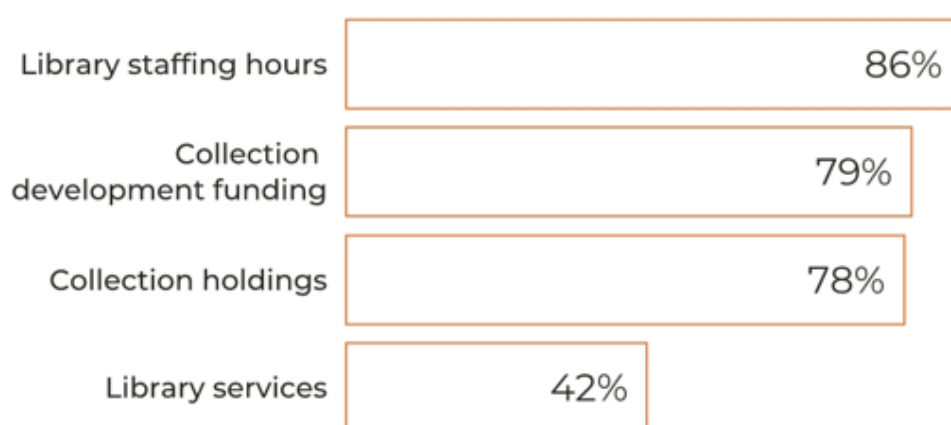
There is no data for 2020, however, we asked participants to compare their 2021 budget with the previous year. Responses show that for most schools (63%) 2021 funding was the same as 2020. 25% said they received less funding for collection development, 12% said they received more than in 2020.

Impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic

The 2021 survey captured the impacts of the first 20 months of the pandemic, with responses collected in November during New Zealand's Covid-19 Delta outbreak.

We asked about impact on four aspects of library provision: library staff hours, collection development funding, collection holdings, and library services. The key finding is that most respondents reported no change because of the pandemic. It is important to note that government-funded operational grants to schools remained the same throughout the pandemic. Most schools pay their library staff and collection costs from this grant and so could continue as normal. Some school libraries rely more on other sources of funding and may have faced hours or budget cuts due to the loss of fee-paying students, for example.

% of comments indicating **no change** as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic



Of the four impact areas, the only one to show significant impacts from the pandemic was school library services. Some of the comments described flow-on effects or consequences of the pandemic on the library or library services, such as reduced access due to complying with physical distancing requirements. But there were also comments about schools being proactive — changing their library services to mitigate the pandemic's effects. The main changes to services evident in the comments were:

- increased promotion, access, or use, of digital content and platforms
- changes to print services — outreach, flexible borrowing limits and extended loan periods
- greater support for online learning (including enabling access to mobile devices)
- a focus on supporting wellbeing.

New Zealand is still managing the Omicron outbreak, and although some public health protection measures are being removed, the effects of the pandemic continue to roll on. In future surveys, we may return to these questions to find out how school libraries continue to adapt and manage the uncertainty of Covid times.

New Zealand libraries and the Covid-19 recovery

In May 2020 the government announced almost \$60m within their Covid-19 response funding would be for libraries to provide additional community support as part of the country's economic recovery. These funds have been managed by the New Zealand Libraries Partnership Programme (NZLPP) led by the National Library of New Zealand Aotearoa (NLNZ).

\$13.3m of NZLPP funding was targeted for the provision of specialist library services for schools and young people via NLNZ Services to Schools' Kōkiri Whakamua programme. This funding allows for improvements across the sector with a focus on providing school communities and young people with greatest need with equitable access to library services, resources and support.

A further series of strategic partnership grants funded by the NZLPP that involve and support the work of school libraries include:

- *Strengthening the Library and Information Workforce: Tertiary grants* — open to applications from school library staff to begin or continue library and information studies.
- *Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako and School Libraries Collaboration Pilot Programme* — funding for a school librarian role within two Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako (local school clusters/networks), supporting libraries within each community.
- *School Librarians Collaboration with Many Answers Pilot Programme* — funding to train school library staff as contributors to Many Answers (creating guides to websites and other resources, for popular questions on the AnyQuestions site – a free online reference service for New Zealand school students).
- *A Bit Sus, a misinformation education programme involving school libraries* — delivered by Tohatoha Aotearoa Commons (formerly Creative Commons Aotearoa New Zealand), including professional development for school library staff.

NZLPP future sustainability-focused projects that will continue to benefit the sector including school libraries include:

- creating a workforce capability framework — to assist the sector to create development pathways for library staff
- developing a data, research and evidence strategy — with the aim of demonstrating the value of the library sector.

Curriculum changes on the horizon

From 2021 to 2025, *The New Zealand Curriculum* will be refreshed 'to make sure every child experiences success in their learning, and that their progress and achievement is responded to and celebrated.' (Refreshing The New Zealand Curriculum, 2022). Changes will be phased in, beginning with the new [*Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories curriculum \(ANZHC\)*](#) released last month.

The ANZHC presents a major shift in NZ's curriculum design – still allowing for flexibility but including more clearly defined learning progressions and content that shows 'histories learning that can't be left to chance' (Aotearoa NZ's Histories in Our National Curriculum – Consultation Open, 2021). The new curriculum will help school library staff tasked with resourcing learning by clarifying the breadth and depth of content at levels appropriate for each of the progressions. The ANZHC uses a new framework for learning:

- Understand — the big ideas of Aotearoa New Zealand's histories
- Know — national, rohe (regional), and local contexts
- Do — thinking critically about the past and interpreting stories about it.

School library staff will play an important part in supporting the teaching of ANZHC and Te Takanga o te Wā (Māori history):

- as resourcing experts — connecting learners with information, stories, people and other organisations to support learning
- using their expertise around critical inquiry practices — part of the 'Do' thread of the ANZHC.

Hot on the heels of the ANZHC came the release of the *Literacy & Communication and Maths Strategy and Hei Raukura Mō te Moko-puna* (for Māori language education). Following on from the strategy, action plans will be developed that provide more information about how the transformational system-wide shift that's required will be achieved.

The National Library of New Zealand Aotearoa is identified as a partner in the Literacy & Communication strategy within the focus area 'Educationally powerful connections that support and enhance learning'. Our work with schools around reading engagement, digital literacy, and school library development will continue to help move us towards a future state where 'there is an engaging literacy & communication culture in communities that is connected to curriculum learning and promotes wellbeing and engagement.' (Literacy & Communication and Maths Strategy, 2022a).

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Miriam Tuohy joined the National Library of New Zealand's Services to Schools as School Library Development Senior Specialist in 2016. Her involvement in the New Zealand education system spans early childhood education, primary and secondary school and tertiary libraries. Miriam was a member of the School Library Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (SLANZA) National Executive from 2010-2016 including a year as President in 2015-16. As part of her current role, Miriam has contributed to the publication of Services to Schools framework for school library development, the 2018 and 2019 reports of the nationwide surveys of New Zealand school libraries. She is also involved in developing and delivering professional development for school library staff and teachers and is a regular contributor to the National Library of New Zealand's Libraries & Learning blog.