

Australian Coalition for School Libraries

By Jacqui Lucas

Snapshot

ALIA's Professional Learning Teacher Librarian, Jacqui Lucas, describes how the Australian Library and Information Association's (ALIA's) Sector Committee, the Australian Coalition for School Libraries (ACSL) is progressing.

Did you know that there is no national data on how many school libraries are in Australia and how they are staffed? We do know that there are 9,653 schools (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2025). in Australia and can safely assume that the number of school libraries is considerably higher than the number of public libraries – which we do have national data on – 1,714 service points to be exact!

This data void impacts the interpretation of trends in student progress and outcomes and hinders the full evaluation of interventions to improve academic achievement and student wellbeing. It is also a significant barrier to school library advocacy.

Considering the significant positive impact that a well-resourced school library has for students and the wider school community, it's essential that we work together to secure their future.

Without data, it can be hard to get decision makers' attention, or to build a convincing case for the scale of the problem. We may know from our networks about the growing gap in student outcomes between those attending a well-resourced school with a library team and those with limited resourcing and staff, but its challenging to make the case without hard data.

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ALIA and ACSL

As the peak national body for libraries and the library and information workforce in Australia, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is dedicated to providing a united and professional voice to advocate for Australian school libraries. The consolidation of the Australian Coalition for School Libraries (ACSL) as an ALIA Sector Committee in December 2023 was a major step in this endeavour and a massive win for school libraries and school library staff around the country. A relatively informal coalition had been in existence since 2015 but signing of a Memorandum of Collaboration formalised the Associations into a respected national voice. Members of ACSL are ALIA, Queensland School Library Association (QSLA); School Library Association of New South Wales (SLANSW); School Library Association of South Australia (SLASA); School Library Association of Victoria (SLAV); Western Australian School Library Association (WASLA); and the Australian School Library Association (ASLA).

In communicating with State and Federal Government, and developing policy and resources, it is critical that ALIA receives advocacy advice and contributions directly from professionals active in the school library sector. Building strong and trusted relationships with colleagues who are keenly aware of the needs of the school library workforce in their state or territory means that we can prioritise, and more importantly, move on strategies and actions.



The ACSL logo (above) represents the connection between the members with the continuity of the line through the letters, and the ACSL (play on the word 'axle') as a connecting rod to the wheels of each Association. The image invites movement and appears to be ready to 'get the wheels turning'. The magenta/purple colour is symbolic of the wisdom and dignity of the group and the creativity and magic of school libraries.

ACSL and SLAV

SLAV played an integral role in the realisation of ACSL by chairing the Working Party meetings to develop a Memorandum of Collaboration that brought the five State Associations and ASLA together as a Sector Committee of ALIA.

SLAV remains an important and much-admired State Association (especially renowned nationally for great professional learning offerings!) and is now strengthened through friendly and supportive connections to ALIA and the other State Associations in ACSL. By working as part of a dynamic sector committee within the national peak body for library and information services, the voice of SLAV, and the voices of people working in school libraries around Australia is both unified and amplified.

Through dedicated involvement with ACSL, SLAV has already helped to shape four major policies for school libraries and advised on media releases and letters to government. Plans for further statements and resources for school libraries are in the wings. By the strength of a unified and respected professional voice we hope to achieve the goal in the not-too-distant future of access to nationally consistent data on student access to school library services via a central register and all Australian students having access to adequate school library services regardless of postcode or socio-economic status.



Committee members of ACSL at the 2024 face to face meeting in Adelaide, 4 – 5 May 2024.

Back row: Trish Hepworth (ALIA); Rebecca Keshwar (WASLA); Dr Lyn Hay (SLANSW); Rhonda Powling (SLAV); Jacqui Lucas (ALIA); Bernadette Power (QSLA); Di Scott (SLASA); Dr Helen Weston (ALIA)
Front row: Di Ruffles (SLAV); Kelly Burrett (QSLA); Rebecca Murray (WASLA); Dr Di Laycock (SLANSW); Hajnalka Molloy (SLASA); Martha Itzcovitz (ASLA); Deborah Brown (ASLA)

References

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2025). Data on government and non-government students, staff and schools. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release>

Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) (2024). Australian public library statistical report 2022-23. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-3449170849/view>

Jacqui Lucas AALIA (DCP) has been a teacher librarian, teacher, and school leader for more than 30 years, working in both government and independent schools. She currently works at ALIA as Professional Learning Teacher Librarian and is a committee member of ACSL, ALIA Schools, and the IFLA School Libraries Section.