Early Literacy in NSW Public Libraries: A survey of library staff involved in early literacy initiatives

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This report constitutes the first part of the collaborative research project *Developing a context-sensitive framework for supporting early literacy across NSW public libraries.*

Public libraries in Australia have the capacity to support and promote a stronger focus on early language and literacy development by providing free access to a range of books and other resources as well as designing and delivering effective early literacy sessions for babies, toddlers and preschool children and their families, and programs such as information events for families and childcare educators and the distribution of books for babies and children and other reading materials to families.

According to the Australian Library and Information Association's (ALIA) Early Literacy Group (2011), this capacity is significantly enhanced when libraries act as 'active connectors' – connecting people with resources and programs for supporting early literacy, with each other (e.g. parents and children through literacy experiences such as shared reading), and with other service providers as well as establishing and maintaining partnerships with the early childhood sector. Specifically, knowledge about a library's socio-economic and cultural setting provides a solid foundation on which every public library can build a strong 'active connector' profile by:

- including early literacy in every library's strategic plan
- offering professional development to other agencies
- accepting invitations to other agencies' professional development sessions
- providing resources and making them widely available (e.g. bulk loans for childcare services)
- providing outreach services for people who are vulnerable, hard-to-reach or unable to visit the library
- being actively engaged in creating early literacy programs for babies and toddlers as well as preschoolers
- being active in offering literacy-oriented parenting support
- participating in academic and other research
- collaborating with other libraries to jointly develop resources and programs locally and nationally
- being actively involved in reading and literacy debates
- including early literacy incentives (e.g. free DVDs, books, other materials) as a public library membership bonus.

(Adapted from Australian Library and Information Association's Early Literacy Group, 2011, p. 10)

In line with this vision and the leadership role of Australian, State and Territory libraries in national initiatives, State Library of New South Wales established a research partnership with the Institute of Early Childhood (now Department of Educational Studies), Macquarie University with the key aim of supporting public libraries in NSW to be (1) recognised for the early literacy services many of these libraries already offer; (2) able to evaluate existing early literacy initiatives in public libraries across the state; and (3) supported in designing and implementing effective new early literacy initiatives.

This project's overarching goal is to develop a context-sensitive framework that public libraries across NSW can employ to evaluate existing and develop new early literacy initiatives in ways that effectively respond to the specific needs of their individual socio-economic and cultural settings. To achieve this, the project involves the following processes, organised into three interrelated, and partially overlapping, stages:

Stage 1

1. conduct a voluntary, anonymous (online) survey of public library staff involved in early literacy initiatives across council-run public libraries in New South Wales in order to collect information about the early literacy initiatives these libraries offer
2. complete a comprehensive review of research on early literacy practices and development in diverse homes and communities and associated literacy outcomes; the aim of the review is to identify
   i. the prior-to-school literacy competencies and contextual factors (e.g. parental attitudes, socio-cultural and –economic background) related to success at school and beyond
   ii. specific practices that support the development of these competencies.

Stage 2

3. perform close observation and analysis of early literacy sessions (ELS) for children from birth to school age and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Toddler Time, Preschool Storytime) from NSW public library services representing a variety of ELS and library settings across the state
4. conduct interviews with the presenters of these sessions to gain insight into the decisions library staff make as they engage in preparing and conducting early literacy sessions
5. conduct a voluntary anonymous (paper-based) survey for parents/caregivers participating in these sessions to gather information about parental levels of education and attitudes and family practices related to early literacy, including attendance and attitudes about ELS

Stage 3

6. use the findings of the research literature review, the survey and the close observation and analysis of early literacy sessions in NSW public libraries to build a context-sensitive framework that includes:
   i. a set of core literacy competencies that all young children should be given opportunities to develop prior to school, which NSW public libraries can use to evaluate their early literacy initiatives
   ii. professional development materials for library staff involved in the design of early literacy initiatives
   iii. guidelines for developing effective early literacy initiatives across different public library settings in NSW that identify the key elements of such programs, supported by examples of programs designed following these guidelines.

This report presents and interprets the results of the survey of public library staff involved in early literacy initiatives, which was conducted in Stage 1 of the project.

KEY TERMS

Term	Abbreviation	Definition
Branch Librarian		A qualified librarian with responsibility for supervision and management of a branch library within a library service.
Children's Librarian		A qualified librarian with responsibility for library services, programs and collections for children and families.
Early Literacy	**EL**	The language and literacy development of children from birth to starting school.
Early Literacy Initiative(s)	**ELI**	**Initiatives developed by public libraries in order to promote early literacy in their communities.**
• Early Literacy Program(s)	• **ELP**	All ELI excluding early literacy sessions. Examples include distribution of book packs and information to families, information events for families and childcare educators, and community-based partnerships aimed at supporting early literacy.
• Early Literacy Session(s)	• **ELS**	Sessions for children from birth to starting school and their families offered by public libraries (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Toddler Time, Preschool Story Time).
Information and Computer Technologies	**ICT**	
Library and Information Services/Science	**LIS**	
Languages Other Than English	**LOTE**	
Public Library Region		The NSW Public Libraries Association (NSWPLA) divides NSW into geographic regions. The libraries cooperate within these regions but each library service operates independently.
University qualified		Staff with at least one or more undergraduate or postgraduate degrees in LIS

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1 Executive Summary

This report presents the results of a voluntary, confidential survey completed online by NSW public library staff involved in making decisions about the introduction, funding, design, implementation and evaluation of early literacy initiatives (ELI). ELI aim to support the language and literacy development of children from birth to 5 years of age and include early literacy sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Toddler Time, and (Preschool) Storytime) and early literacy programs such as information events for families or childcare educators and the distribution of picture book packs and information on early language and literacy development to families.

The survey represents the initial stage of a research project titled *Developing a context-sensitive framework for supporting early literacy across NSW public libraries* and designed to support public libraries in NSW:

(1) to be recognised for the early literacy services many of them already offer;

(2) to evaluate existing early literacy initiatives in public libraries across the state; and

(3) to design and implement effective early literacy initiatives.

The aim of the survey was to collect information about the library staff involved in early literacy initiatives, the kind of initiatives offered by NSW public libraries, the roles that library staff fulfil in these initiatives and professional competencies they require, as well as to give library staff the opportunity to share their views about key priorities, challenges and benefits of early literacy initiatives. The survey was organised into five sections: (1) Participant information; (2) Early Literacy Sessions (ELS); (3) Early Literacy Programs (ELP); (4) Professional competencies and development; and (5) Priorities, benefits and challenges of early literacy initiatives.

1.1 Key Findings

The survey had 133 respondents, with some questions receiving fewer responses than others.

Participant information

The participants' demographic information reflected the composition of the workforce of public libraries in NSW.

- There were 6 male (4.5%) and 127 female (95.5%) respondents.

- 72% (96) of all respondents held full-time and 28% (37) part-time positions as library staff.

- 19.5% (26 of 133) reported that they speak one or more languages other than English (LOTE), and only 6 of those that they use LOTE in their work at the library.

Among the respondents, many were public library staff with considerable experience in the sector and many years of involvement in early literacy initiatives. Many had university qualifications in Library and Information Services/Science (LIS) and many held leadership (manager/director, branch librarian or team leader) and/or specialised (children's librarian) positions. They were thus likely to be highly aware of the varied and multiple demands of working as a qualified librarian at a public library. Specifically:

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

- 32 had more than 10 years of service in current position, 49 more than 10 years of service in their current library, 81 more than 10 years of service in public libraries, and 62 more than 10 years of involvement in early literacy initiatives.

- Most were highly qualified, with 56% holding university qualifications and 21% other tertiary qualifications in LIS. Just over half (52.6% or 70 participants) also had qualifications in other areas. Relatively few, however, had qualifications in areas directly relevant to early literacy initiatives such as early childhood (6.8% or 9 respondents) and children's literature (8.3% or 11 respondents).

- 30% (40 of 133) were children's librarians, and 37% (56) held managerial positions (library manager/director, team leader and branch librarian).

Early literacy sessions (ELS) offered by NSW libraries

The survey data yielded the following findings about the early literacy sessions (ELS) for children and their families offered by their libraries:

- All but 5 respondents (3.86%) indicated that their library offers ELS. This reflects the status of ELS as a core type of early literacy initiative at NSW public libraries.

- Survey data suggest that ELS designed for preschool children (3-5-year-olds), are more commonly offered across NSW (92% of respondents reported that their libraries hold such sessions) followed by sessions for infants/toddlers (89%) and sessions designed for 2-3-year-olds (71%). Least common were Preschool LOTE sessions (23%). These differences are more pronounced in country NSW, with sessions for 2-3-year-olds offered by the libraries of 68% of respondents from country NSW vs. 74% from metropolitan Sydney, and Preschool LOTE by the libraries of 19% of respondents from country NSW vs. 45% from metropolitan Sydney.

- Preschool ELS are most likely to be offered across a library service (i.e. at all or most of its branches) (81% of respondents) compared to sessions for infants/toddlers (69%) and for children aged 2-3 years (57%). Only 15% of respondents indicated that Preschool LOTE sessions are offered across their library service.

- Preschool ELS are also most likely to be offered as outreach visits (76%) compared with sessions for children aged 2-3 (60%), infant/toddler sessions (49%) and Preschool LOTE sessions (2%).

Early literacy programs (ELP) offered by NSW libraries

Considering early literacy programs (ELP), or initiatives other than early literacy sessions for children and their families, such as the distribution of book packs and information to families, information events for families and childcare educators, and community-based partnerships aimed at supporting early literacy, the survey findings suggest that:

- ELP are offered less than ELS, with 20% of respondents stating that their library offers no ELP, in contrast to only 3.86% reporting that that their library offers no ELS

- NSW library services engage primarily in ELP such as distributing information to families (58% of respondents), followed by partnerships with early childcare centres

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(55%) and community-based initiatives (54%), and considerably less in distributing resources (e.g. picture book packs) to families (33%)

- Libraries in metropolitan Sydney are less likely to engage in distributing resources to families than are services in NSW country areas (19% vs. 32%), and engage more in partnerships with early childcare centres (55% vs. 47%)

- 71% of respondents indicated that their library does not offer information events for childcare staff and 44% that it does not offer information events for families, suggesting that NSW public libraries are more likely to offer information events for families than for childcare educators. Information events for families are also more likely to be offered as outreach visits than information events for childcare educators (24% vs. 19%), possibly reflecting public libraries' efforts to directly reach first-time and working parents.

Use of ICT in ELS and ELP
33% of respondents reported that their library did not use ICT for ELS, and 63% reported lack of ICT use in ELP. This was inconsistent with respondents ranking 'familiarity with and ability to use ICT' as an important professional competency for ELI.

Staff involvement in ELS vs. ELP
- A higher proportion of respondents reported that they were involved in ELS (92%) compared to ELP (69%). 58.6% reported involvement in both ELS and ELP, 26% (34) in ELS only, and only 0.05% (6) in ELP only.

- Staff involvement in ELP or ELS was not statistically related to their years of employment at their current library or in their current position. Fewer staff in positions requiring lower levels of qualification in library and information services (LIS), however, reported involvement in ELP compared to ELS.

Staff roles in ELS
- Across all three major types of ELS – infant/toddler, 2-3 years and preschool – participants reported performing multiple roles – resourcing, developing, presenting, evaluating or other. Most respondents reported performing concurrently 4 roles (44% of respondents engaged in preschool sessions, followed by 43% of those engaged infant/toddler sessions and 36% of those involved in sessions for children aged 2-3 years). The second largest group of respondents reported engagement in 3 roles (22% for preschool sessions, 19% for infant/toddler, and 19% for children aged 2-3 years).

- The role of evaluating ELS is performed by the highest number of survey respondents for all major types of ELS (77% for preschool sessions, 74% for infant/toddler, 61% for 2-3 years). By contrast, only 14% of those respondents involved in Preschool LOTE sessions reported engagement in evaluating these sessions.

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Staff roles in ELP

- Fewer respondents reported involvement in information events for childcare educators (between 25% and 28% for each major role) than information events for families (between 51% to 59%). This is consistent with the finding that fewer libraries offer information events for childcare educators than for families.

- Engagement in at least 2 roles was reported by 83% of respondents engaged in information events for families, 75% of those with engaged in information events for childcare educators, and 73% of those with involved in other types of ELP.

- The role of evaluating ELP, similarly to ELS, is performed by the highest proportion of respondents (59% for information events for families, 28% for information events for childcare educators, and 15% for other ELP), with slightly lower numbers engaged in presenting (53%, 26% and 11%) and developing (52%, 27% and 11%), followed by resourcing (51%, 25% and 15%).

Professional competencies

Given two lists of 14 professional competencies each, one about competencies for early literacy initiatives (ELI) in general and the other specifically for developing and presenting early literacy sessions for children and their families (ELS), survey participants rated each competency on a scale of 1 (not important) to 5 (very important).

- Almost all respondents rated each of the listed competencies as 'important' (3) to 'very important' (5).

- For ELI, the ability to *'ensure children's access to diverse materials that support early literacy'* was rated 'most important' by the highest number of respondents. *'Demonstrate familiarity with Australia's early childhood care and education system'*, by contrast, received the lowest rating among all competencies, with 23 participants rating it as 'not important' or 'little important' (and 97 as 'important' to 'very important'). This resonates with the lower availability of information events for childcare educators and other ELP offered by the respondents' libraries, and suggests that the childcare sector is not perceived as an important target group for public library services.

- For ELS, the competency that received the highest number of 'most important' ratings was '*communicate effectively during ELS*'.

- For both ELI and ELS, '*familiarity with appropriate reading materials for children*' emerged as the second most highly rated competency, and almost all participants rated *'high-level skills in ICT for communication and presentations'* as an important to very important competency (111 respondents for ELS and 112 for ELI, out of all 120 respondents to this question).

Additional competencies cited by the survey participants indicated both parallels and differences between the competencies important for early childhood educators, on the one hand, and for library staff involved in ELI, on the other. Respondents also listed as additional professional competencies what are more appropriately described as personal

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qualities or dispositions (e.g. *having an affinity to children; love reading children's books*), which do not describe an objectively demonstrable type of knowledge or skill.

Professional development (PD) resources and opportunities

Survey participants reported having familiarity with and access to a variety of PD resources and opportunities. They viewed different resources (e.g. for working with children in public libraries, preparing and presenting ELS and promoting early literacy) as having the potential to jointly enhance their capacity to successfully promote early literacy in their communities.

71 survey participants named various, specific PD resources related to ELS, including resources developed 'in-house'. Many mentioned the names of professional associations and networks (statewide, national and international) and titles of specific print and online resources as well as projects focused on early literacy and learning.

Asked about opportunities for learning about early literacy and how to support it in general, 43.3% respondents reported having access to at least one type of professional development opportunity – a working group (e.g. *Young People in NSW Public Libraries)*, eList (e.g. *young people)* or other; 43.3% had access to two, and 13.5% had access to all three types.

Priorities, benefits and challenges for early literacy at public libraries
Participants were also asked to share their views about priorities, benefits and challenges related to early literacy at their libraries. Managers' responses to these questions were considered as part of as well as separately from those of all survey participants.

- The most frequently reported **priorities** included: 'children's learning and development' (including 'early language and literacy'), 'engagement', 'educating carers', 'promoting the library', and 'staffing and professional development'. The same priorities dominated library managers' responses to this question, with 'engagement' being more prominent than 'children's learning and development', reflecting managers' responsibility to ensure ELI promote engagement with the library and to provide relevant PD, and less direct involvement in supporting children's learning directly, for example by developing and presenting storytime sessions.

- Key **benefits** of ELI cited in the survey data included: 'children's learning and development' (especially 'early literacy support'), 'early literacy support for families', 'promoting the library', 'community engagement' and 'fun/happiness'. Managers' responses to this question reflected similar views.

- **Challenges** for promoting early literacy at public libraries identified by survey participants included: 'resources' (e.g. 'staffing', 'meeting demand', 'funding', 'space', and 'poor use of resources'); 'recognition' by families, the organisation (library/sector/management), and the wider community; 'early literacy sessions and learning' (e.g. 'equipping staff with relevant knowledge and skills', 'developing a learning framework'); and 'hard to reach' groups. Engaging families in attending and learning from ELS was seen as a challenge, reflecting a need for library staff to consider families as a resource and a distinctive advantage of ELS at public libraries compared to, for example, childcare centres. In contrast to responses to the survey

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overall, where several library staff in non-managerial positions specifically mentioned recognition from management as a challenge, fewer managers referred to 'recognition' as a challenge. Fewer managers identified 'early literacy sessions and learning' as a challenge.

Additional views on ELI at public libraries

Respondents highlighted the achievements of their libraries, suggested tested and new strategies for overcoming key challenges, re-iterated key concerns (e.g. the place of craft in storytime sessions) and in two instances mentioned a library's efforts to develop an early literacy or learning strategy and associated tools for evaluating their efforts in promoting early literacy and learning.

Some respondents reiterated challenges and priorities that they believed are common across public libraries such as:

- developing a unified framework for assessing the diverse ways public libraries promote early literacy

- helping improve recognition of these efforts and secure funding

- considering early literacy as part of a larger effort to improve literacy levels in the larger population.

While some participants emphasised the value of state-wide and national partnerships with other early literacy providers, businesses and libraries across Australia, other responses revealed a tension between the need for collaboration with partners from the early childcare and education and school sectors and benefits of employing skilled educators or presenters from outside the library industry, on the one hand, and a perceived risk that this may devalue the unique context for promoting early literacy that public libraries offer.

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1.2   Recommendations

Based on the key findings presented above, this survey-based study offers one main recommendation related to the overall aim of the larger project to which it belongs. It also informs more detailed recommendations for further research, professional development and practices aimed at enhancing the potential of NSW public libraries to promote early literacy in diverse communities.

Main Recommendation:

Developing a framework for supporting early literacy across NSW public libraries

The survey revealed that among NSW public library staff involved in ELI, there are many with long and stable experience of employment in the public library sector and involvement in ELI, and many with high qualifications in LIS. The data also suggested that the majority of public library staff involved in ELI do not have qualifications in fields directly relevant to ELI such as child development, early language and literacy or children's literature.

The survey identified a perceived need for:

(1) professional development in early language, literacy and learning, and

(2) a framework for evaluating NSW public libraries' efforts in promoting early literacy which reflects the strengths and challenges associated with public libraries as a unique context for supporting early literacy in diverse communities.

To achieve that, the framework and associated professional development resources must be informed by current research in early language, literacy and learning as well as by the perspectives of NSW public library staff with relevant experience, and by advances that enable public libraries and their partner organisations, nationally and internationally, to make a positive impact on the literacy levels of young children and the communities they belong to.

Recommendations for further research

The findings presented in this report highlight the need for further research to pursue the following interrelated aims.

1. To develop a stronger understanding of the nature of professional development opportunities, resources and incentives that are available to support NSW public library staff in their efforts to effectively promote early literacy in diverse communities; specifically, to examine what opportunities exist for developing and enhancing professional competencies such as:

- knowledge of child development and early language and literacy

- skills for communicating effectively with and educating children and their families as well as childcare educators

- skills in developing and maintaining familiarity with reading materials for children and assessing their appropriateness for children of different ages, socio-cultural and linguistic background.

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2. To focus in detail on ELS, the main type of ELI offered by public libraries across NSW, and employ more in-depth methods of data collection (e.g. interviews with library staff, observations and analyses of ELS and the ways in which libraries advertise them) in order to extend existing knowledge about:

- the various reasons why library services do or do not offer certain types of ELS, the target audience and purpose of these ELS

- the principles library staff use for

  (i) developing and presenting ELS, and

  (ii) evaluating their potential to enhance early literacy in diverse communities.

3. As many libraries offer no information events for families and childcare educators or other ELP, to assess the potential of ELS of different types to effectively incorporate information about early language and literacy for families and childcare educators, and survey whether and how libraries complement ELS with other kinds of ELI.

4. To examine what is involved in evaluating ELS and ELP, the role performed by most library staff involved in ELI, and specifically:

- whether this varies by level and type of staff qualifications and their library position

- what resources NSW public library staff use to fulfil this role and whether these resources reflect current national and international developments in early childhood education and LIS research and practice

5. To understand why library staff do or do not use ICT in ELS and/or ELP, yet perceive skills in using ICT as an important professional competency for ELI

6. To investigate public libraries' capacity and existing initiatives for supporting the early literacy in communities with backgrounds in LOTE, in particular:

- why staff proficiency in LOTE appears to be an underutilised resource in NSW public libraries, and develop ideas of how it can be mobilised to promote early literacy

- the potential of Preschool LOTE sessions offered by NSW public libraries to promote early (bilingual) literacy.

Recommendations for professional development

The high stability of employment in the public library sector implies that professional development opportunities for promoting early literacy in the sector are likely to have higher return value than in sectors with lower stability.

The findings of the survey suggest that such professional development opportunities should equip public library staff with the competencies required to effectively perform multiple roles in ELI, such as resourcing, developing, presenting and evaluating ELS and ELP. Competencies that require particular attention include:

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- knowledge of early language and literacy development

- knowledge of child development

- the ability to develop, maintain and demonstrate familiarity with (and appreciation for) appropriate reading materials for children

- skills in communicating effectively with families and early childhood educators

- familiarity with Australia's early childhood care and education system, which could enable library staff to (i) reach children with working parents and provide these 'hard to reach' families with information about relevant services and resources offered by their public library; and (ii) more effectively articulate and promote the efforts and unique potential of public libraries to support early literacy in diverse communities

- proficiency in using ICT for the development and delivery of ELS and ELP.

Resources developed to enhance these competencies must demonstrate sensitivity to the parallels and differences between the public library sector and formal early childhood education and care settings as distinct contexts for promoting early literacy and learning. Such resources should be complemented by opportunities that enhance the capacity of library staff to work with children and families as part of providing effective community service in general. In addition to parameters for assessing whether and how public libraries' promote early literacy, frameworks for evaluating ELI need to incorporate criteria for evaluating libraries' efforts to create a sense of community and belonging. This can help public libraries to address the challenge of attracting 'hard to reach' groups and thereby to promote early literacy in diverse communities. For example, families who may be new to the experience of visiting a library or come from communities with low literacy or education levels first need to build a sense of trust in and belonging to the library as a social institution as well as a physical space. Addressing this challenge is particularly important for libraries serving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, refugees, and families experiencing intergenerational illiteracy.

Recommendations for practice

Recommendations for all early literacy initiatives

- Library staff can be encouraged to use their information retrieval skills to locate examples of best practice in the design and delivery of public library services that promote early literacy and thus to gather practice-based evidence.

- Incorporating ICT in ELI, where appropriate, would present staff with more opportunities to develop, demonstrate and apply their competency in using ICT for communication and presentations.

- For libraries to effectively promote early language, literacy and learning, they need to build strong bonds with and within the local community and actively promote their services.

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- Staff working directly with families could share practice-based ideas about how to encourage families and the wider community to recognise the value of public libraries' efforts to promote early literacy.

- Library managers could examine whether and how – for example, through allocation of appropriate resources and professional development opportunities – a library service (including management and library staff not involved in ELI) can demonstrate stronger commitment to early literacy and recognise the work of staff directly involved in ELI.

Recommendations for early literacy sessions (ELS) for children and their families

- To reach children outside formal early childcare and education settings in children's formative early years as well as children with working parents, more ELS targeting babies and toddlers can be offered as outreach visits to mothers' groups, play groups and other community events.

- Staff involved in developing and presenting ELS can be encouraged to view families/caregivers as a resource and a distinctive advantage of sessions for children at public libraries compared to, for example, childcare settings.

- Staff involved in developing and presenting ELS require time and professional development dedicated specifically for gaining and maintaining familiarity with appropriate reading materials for children, even if these staff are not involved in tasks such as building and updating the children's collection.

- Library managers could benefit from developing a stronger awareness of the prominence of children's learning as a key priority and challenge for staff involved in developing and delivering ELS. As reflective practitioners, ELS presenters in particular could offer valuable insights about observable behaviours by children and caregivers that could signal – before, during or after an early literacy session – whether learning of a particular type or related to a given area of knowledge has taken place.

Recommendations for early literacy programs (ELP)

- Information events for families need to be engaging and accessible for everyone, including people with limited knowledge in early language and literacy, English language proficiency and low levels of education.

- Information events for childcare educators, who have opportunities to develop their knowledge of early childhood language and literacy development and pedagogy through other avenues, could draw on the unique expertise of library staff and focus on raising awareness of the value of public libraries as a unique context for promoting early literacy in the community.

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2 The NSW public library network

Public libraries in New South Wales are managed by local councils in accordance with the Library Act 1939, with assistance from the State Government though the State Library of New South Wales. In 2014 there were 102 library services, including stand-alone libraries and regional or joint libraries where local councils have entered into a written agreement to provide combined services. 62% of the library services in NSW are located in country regions. Many of these library services are regional libraries with up to 12 local government areas cooperating in an official arrangement to deliver library services through an executive council that acts as a central or headquarters library. Two of the largest regional library services, Riverina Regional Library with 12 councils in 2014 and Western Riverina Libraries with 6 councils in 2014, are both part of the Country - South West region.

A library service frequently includes a larger central or headquarters library and smaller branch libraries in surrounding suburbs or townships. Some services also use a mobile library vehicle to provide services to small communities. In 2013/14 there were 22 mobile libraries in New South Wales. Staffing is concentrated at the central or headquarters library with limited staffing in most branch library locations providing direct customer service and programs.

The NSW Public Libraries Association divides the state into eight (8) geographic zones, or regions, including five in rural and regional areas and three in the Sydney metropolitan area. A list of all public libraries in NSW that operated in 2014, when the survey data on which this report is based was collected, is presented in Appendix 1. Table 1 shows the number of library services in each region. It also includes a legend for identifying the libraries (by region and type) shown in Figure 1 for the Sydney metropolitan area and in Figure 2 for NSW overall.

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Library region [based on NSWPLA zone classification]	No of library services in region	Map legend (● =branch library; ▼ = central/HQ)
Sydney Metro - Central South East	16	●
Sydney Metro - North	10	●
Sydney Metro - West South West	13	●
Country - Central East	9	●
Country- Central West	14	●
Country - North East	16	●
Country- South East	13	●
Country - South West	11	●
TOTAL	102	

(Source: NSW Public Library Statistics 2013/2014)

Table 1. NSW Library Regions and number of library services in 2013/2014

(Source: NSW Net: http://www.nswnet.net/libraries/map)

Figure 1. Map of NSW public libraries

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Source: NSW Net http://www.nswnet.net/libraries/map
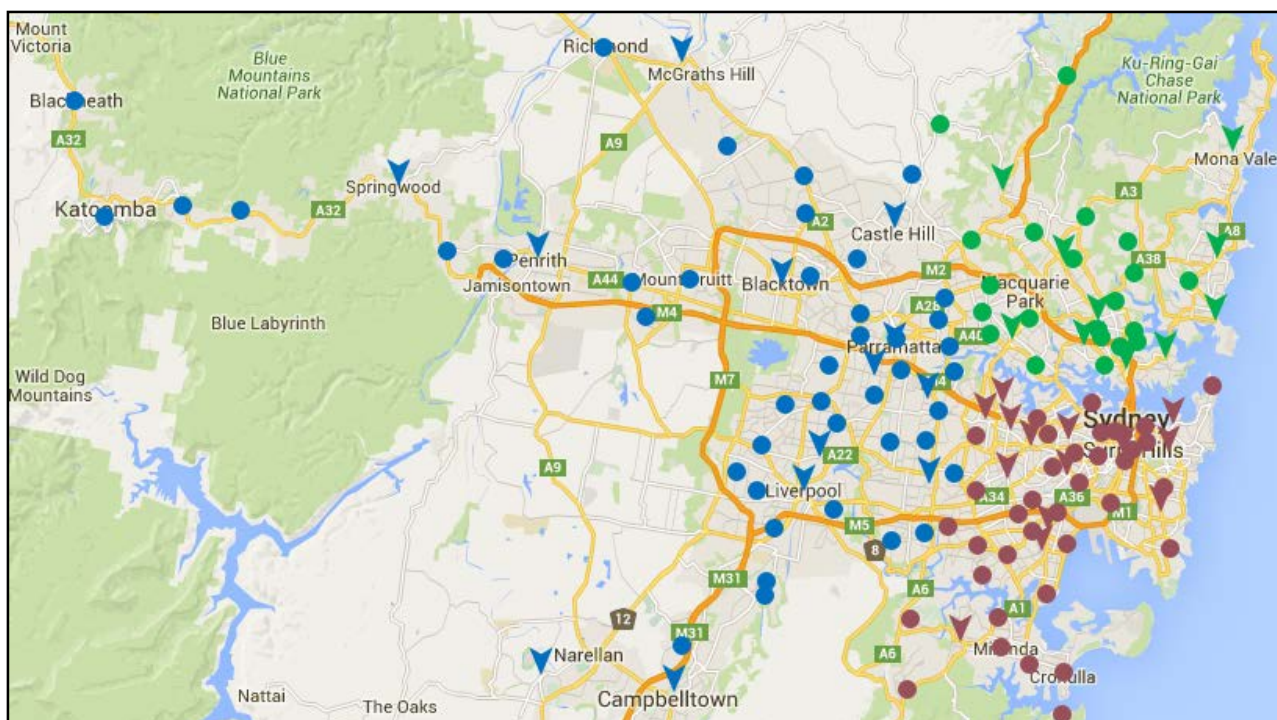
Figure 2. Map of Sydney metropolitan public libraries

Staff in NSW public libraries are employed under the Local Government (State) Award. In 2013/14 2,342.6 EFT staff worked in the NSW public library network. Each library has a library manager or director, in 2014 there were 102 people in these roles across the network.

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ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

3 Survey design and methodology

This report presents the results of a voluntary, confidential survey completed online by NSW public library staff involved in early literacy initiatives. The survey was the first stage of a study supported through a research partnership between the State Library of New South Wales and the Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University, designed to support public libraries in NSW:

(4) to be recognised for the early literacy services many of them already offer;

(5) to evaluate existing early literacy initiatives in public libraries across the state; and

(6) to design and implement effective early literacy initiatives.

The survey was developed in consultation with a reference group of children's librarians in August 2014, and distributed and completed online, through Qualtrics, in September-October 2014.

The survey was designed for library staff involved in making decisions about the introduction, funding, design, implementation and evaluation of any early literacy initiatives, i.e. initiatives aimed at supporting the language and literacy development of children from birth to 5 years of age, including early literacy sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Toddler Time, and Preschool Storytime) as well as initiatives, referred to as 'early literacy programs' in this report, such as information events for families or childcare educators and the distribution of book packs or information on early language and literacy development to families.

Aim

The aim of the survey was to collect broad and quantifiable information about the library staff involved in early literacy initiatives, the kind of initiatives offered by NSW public libraries, the roles that library staff fulfil in these initiatives and professional competencies they require, as well as to give library staff the opportunity to share their views about key priorities for and challenges and benefits of early literacy initiatives. Part of the survey collected detailed information about the frequency and number of participants in early literacy sessions for children from birth to school age and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime, etc.) offered at the respondents' libraries. This information is excluded from this report as its main function was to support the researchers in preparing for and conducting data collection in Stage 2 of the project, which included close observation, video-recording and analysis of early literacy sessions in different library services across NSW. The survey of NSW public library staff supported the recruitment of participants for Stage 2 of the larger project, too, as early literacy session presenters could express interest in their library being selected for the observation and video-recording of early literacy sessions.

Structure

The survey consisted of the following five sections.

Section 1. Participant information. This section collected general information about the respondents – age; gender; whether they speak languages other than English and whether they use them in their work at the library and, if they do, for what reasons; qualifications in library and/or information services (LIS) and other fields relevant to early literacy initiatives

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(e.g. Early Childhood Education, Children's Literature); current library position; years of service at the current library, in public libraries, and in their current library position; years of involvement in early literacy initiatives; full time or part time employment and hours of engagement in early literacy initiatives; and other relevant work experience.

Section 2. Early literacy sessions for children (ELS). This section collected information about the level and kind of engagement respondents had in any early literacy sessions for children at the time of completing the survey and about ELS offered by their library in general – their types, names, frequency, attendance rates, registration criteria, location and whether they were offered as outreach visits, and integration of technology.

Section 3. Early literacy programs other than sessions for children (ELP). This section focused on early literacy initiatives other than sessions for children[1], such as distribution of book packs and information about early language and literacy development to families, information events for families and childcare educators, and partnerships with other childcare or community services. Questions in this section asked respondents about their level and kind of engagement in ELP and about ELP offered by their library in general – their types, location across the library service and whether they were offered as outreach visits, and integration of technology.

Section 4. Professional competencies and development. This section asked respondents to rate a range of professional competencies for library staff involved in early literacy initiatives in general and early literacy sessions in particular, list additional competencies they believed to be important and share information about the types of professional development opportunities and resources relevant to early literacy that they have access to and use.

Section 5. Priorities, benefits and challenges of early literacy initiatives (ELI).[2] In this section, respondents could write open-ended answers to questions about the key priorities, benefits and challenges related to ELI and share any other information they like about ELI offered by their libraries or public libraries in general.

The survey is presented in Appendix 2.

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[1] In this report and in Section 3 of the survey, ELP refers to only to ELI other than ELS. This was made explicit in the beginning of and throughout Section 3 of the survey, as the term 'early literacy programs' is commonly used by library staff to refer to all early literacy initiatives.
[2] As common among library staff, the term 'early literacy programs' was used in this section of the survey to refer to all early literacy initiatives offered by public libraries.

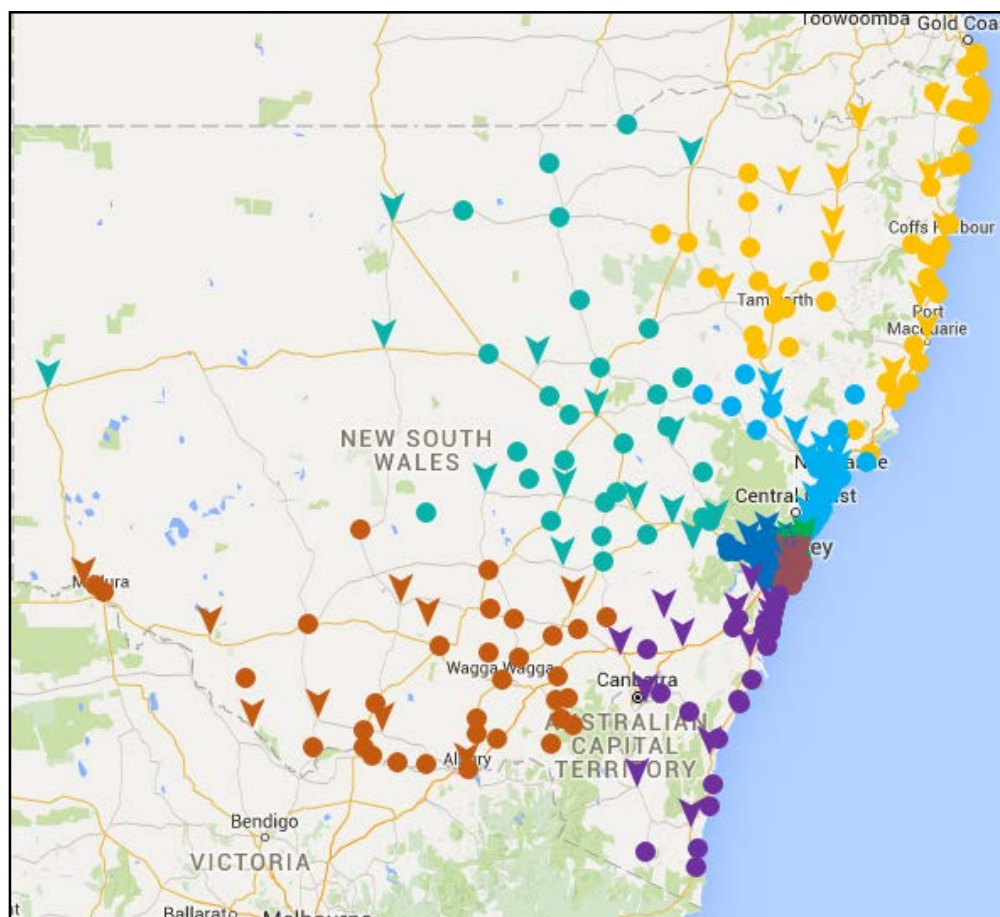**ELI Early Literacy Initiatives**
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

4   Findings

4.1   Participant information

There were 133 survey respondents (N=133). This section presents their key demographic attributes.

4.1.1   Gender

There were 6 males (4.5%) and 127 females (95.5%).

4.1.2   Languages other than English

26 respondents (19.5% of the total number of respondents) reported that they speak one or more languages other than English (LOTE). Out of those 26 respondents, only 6 (23.1%) reported using these languages in their libraries. These 6 respondents were from 5 different NSW library regions: Sydney Metro – Central South East (1), Sydney Metro – North (1), Country – Central East (1), Country – Central West (1) and Country – North East (2). This result suggests the proficiency of public library staff in LOTE is a resource that could be better mobilised in public library services in general and early literacy initiatives in particular. Reasons why 20 of the 26 respondents with such proficiency did not use their LOTE in their libraries could include: lack of demand for services and early literacy initiatives in LOTE in a given library service or region; insufficient level of the proficiency library staff have in LOTE; a mismatch between the LOTE spoken by library staff and those spoken by families with young children in the community served by the library service; and/or lack of professional development opportunities on how to employ LOTE for various purposes in the workplace (e.g. serving patrons, developing early literacy programs in LOTE). The survey results, however, cannot reveal what the reasons actually are. Additionally, exploring these reasons falls outside the scope of the Early Literacy in NSW Public Libraries project.

4.1.3   NSW Library regions and representation

The respondents worked in different NSW public library regions. The distribution of library services and survey respondents by NSW public library region is shown in Table 2.

The survey did not identify the library service or branch where respondents worked, in line with the conditions of the ethics approval for the study granted by Macquarie University's Faculty of Human Sciences Ethics Committee. This means that respondents from the same region in the survey data may also be from the same library service or even branch. A significant exception are respondents who identified themselves as library managers/directors, as this is a unique role in each library service, and those in the role of children's librarian, as there is usually only one such role per service. As explained in Section 4.1.4, library managers comprised 25% and children's librarians 30% of all survey respondents.

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Library region	No of library services in region	% of library services in NSW	No of respondents	% of total sample
Sydney Metro - Central South East	16	16	5	4
Sydney Metro - North	10	10	10	8
Sydney Metro - West South West	13	13	16	12
Country - Central East	9	9	14	11
Country- Central West	14	14	11	8
Country - North East	16	16	25	19
Country- South East	13	13	17	13
Country - South West	11	11	18	14
Don't know			17	13
Total			133	100

Table 2. Number of library services and survey respondents (N=133) by NSW library region

Respondents working at public libraries part-time were asked to indicate the number of hours they worked each week. This allowed the number of equivalent full time (EFT) staff participating in the survey to be calculated for each region (see Table 3) and compared to EFT staff numbers in NSW Public Library Statistics from 2012-2013 (State Library of New South Wales, 2013), the latest available such statistics at commencement of the survey data analysis. Figure 1 shows that in the survey sample, the Sydney Metro area as a whole (23% of survey respondents vs. 58% in NSW Public Library Statistics) and the Sydney Metro – Central South East region in particular (3% vs. 20%) were underrepresented, while the Country area as a whole (65% vs. 42%) and the Country – South West region in particular (13% compared to 3%) were overrepresented.

NSW Public Library Region	EFT staff in survey	Percentage of EFT staff in survey	EFT staff in public library data	% of EFT staff in public library data
Syd Metro - Central South East	3.32	3%	471.74	20%
Syd Metro - North Region	8.6	7%	323.24	14%
Syd Metro - West South West	15.06	13%	548.22	24%
Country - Central East	12.74	11%	286.04	12%
Country - Central West	10.6	9%	136.25	6%
Country - North East	22.37	19%	266.9	11%
Country - South East	15.83	13%	222.82	10%
Country - South West	15.04	13%	66.74	3%
Don't know	14.73	12%	0	0%

Table 3. EFT staff by library region in survey vs. NSW public library data

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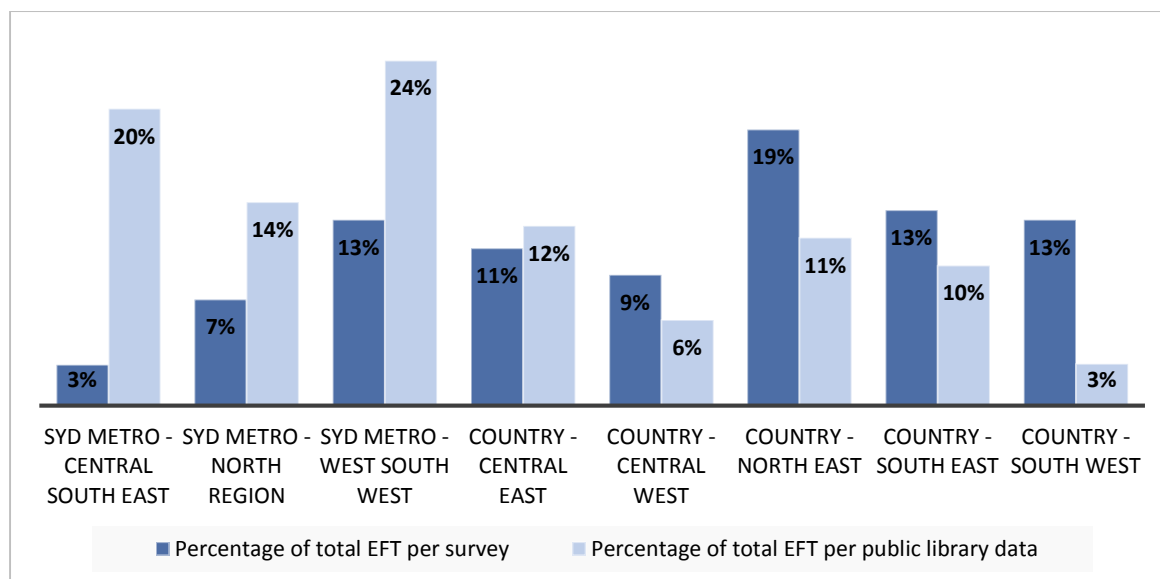
Figure 3. EFT staff by library region in survey vs. NSW public library data

For this reason, *this report offers no comparisons between specific NSW public library regions, and any comparisons between library services in Sydney Metropolitan vs. Country NSW regions drawn in this report need to be interpreted with caution.*

Comparisons between libraries in metropolitan Sydney Metropolitan vs. Country NSW areas drawn in this report are more reliable as the greater representation of regions in country NSW (65% of survey respondents) vs. metropolitan Sydney (23%) in the survey data is consistent with the larger number of library services in country NSW (63, or 62% of all NSW library services) vs. metropolitan Sydney (39 services, or 38%) (see NSW Public Library Statistics from 2012-2013, State Library of New South Wales, 2013). These comparisons, however, also need to be re-examined in relation to more in-depth, qualitative data, such as interviews with library staff involved in early literacy initiatives, like those conducted in Stage 2 of this project. These data have suggested, for example, that some library service managers completed the Stage 1 survey on behalf of their library service as a whole, rather than inviting all staff involved in early literacy initiatives to complete it as well. This could have contributed to the low representation of some NSW public library regions in the survey data.

4.1.4   Library position

Table 4 and Figure 4 show the positions held by respondents at their current libraries. As the survey was specifically designed for staff involved in early literacy initiatives, it is not surprising that 40 of the 133 survey respondents (i.e. 30%) were children's librarians.

Respondents also included a considerable number of library managers/directors, team leaders and branch librarians (altogether 56 or 37% of all respondents). This may be attributed to four factors. First, the survey respondents include library staff from country areas, and many country libraries are very small in size and do not have a dedicated 'children's librarian' position. Second, positions with similar duties may be labelled differently across library services. Third, interviews with library staff conducted in Stage 2 of this project reveal that some managers and branch librarians completed the survey on behalf of their library service or branch as a whole, which may have increased the number of

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respondents in managerial at the expense of those in other positions. Finally, the survey was distributed through specialist e-lists (e.g. youngpeople) and e-lists for library managers.

Library position	No of respondents	% of total sample
Library manager/director	33	25
Team leader	15	11
Children's librarian	40	30
Branch librarian	8	6
Library officer/assistant	24	18
Other	13	10

Table 4. Number and proportion of survey respondents by library position (N=133)
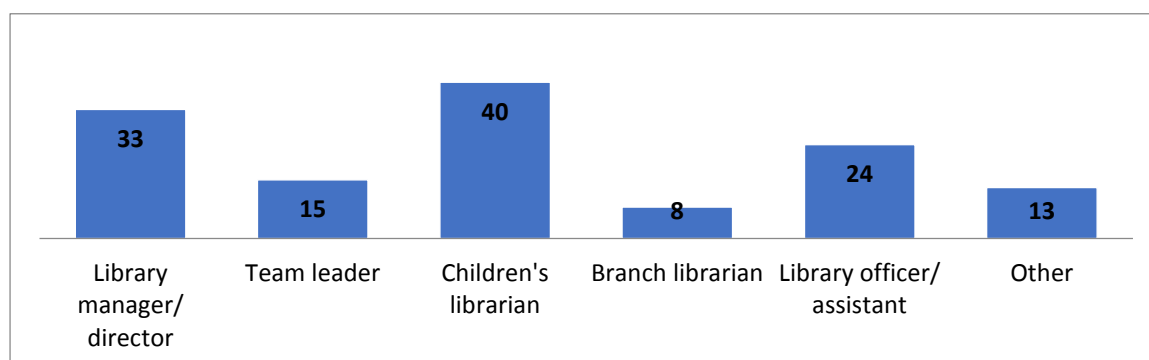
Figure 4. Number of respondents in different library positions (N=133)

It is worth noting that the perspectives of respondents in library manager/director and children's librarian roles are particularly valuable for this study. While library managers are responsible for strategy and overseeing the overall budget, children's librarians carry considerable responsibility for library services' programming and collections for children.

4.1.5   Years of service

Figure 5 shows the number of respondents by the number of years of service at the current library, in public libraries, in their current library position and in early literacy initiatives at public libraries. For example, there were 6 people with less than 1 year service in current library, 2 people with less than 1 year in public library, 17 people with less than 1 year in current position, and 5 people with less than 1 year in early literacy initiatives. At the other end, there were 49 people with more than 10 years of service in current library, 81 people with more than 10 years in public libraries, 32 people with more than 10 years in current position, and 62 people with more than 10 years in early literacy initiatives.

There were altogether 65 respondents with 5 or more years in their current positions. Figure 6 shows their distribution by library positions: 20 are children's librarians, 18 are library managers/directors, 14 are library officers/assistants, 4 are team leaders, 3 are branch librarians, and 6 have other positions.

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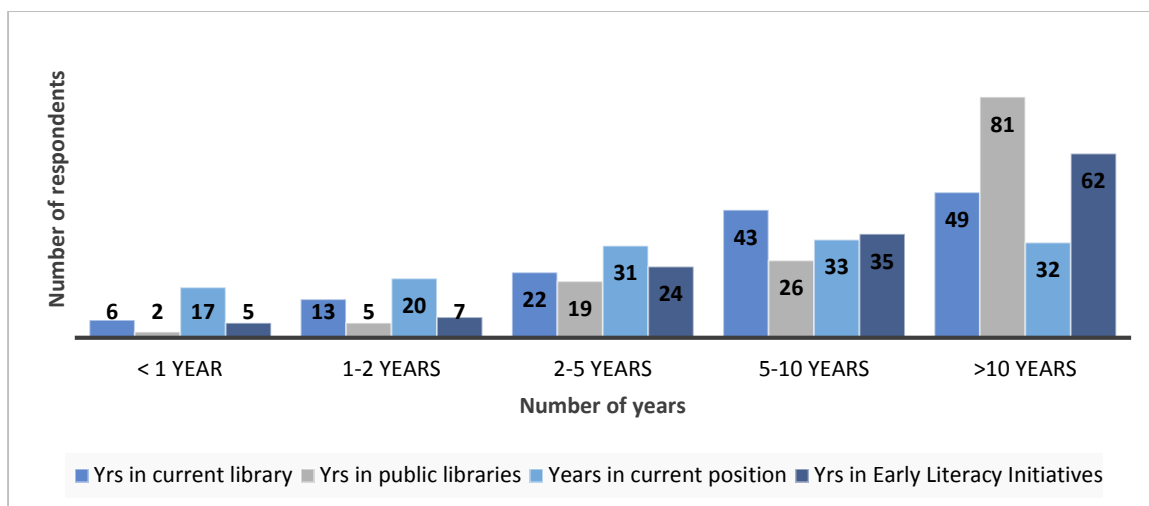
Figure 5. Number of respondents by years of service in current library, position, public libraries and early literacy initiatives (N=133)
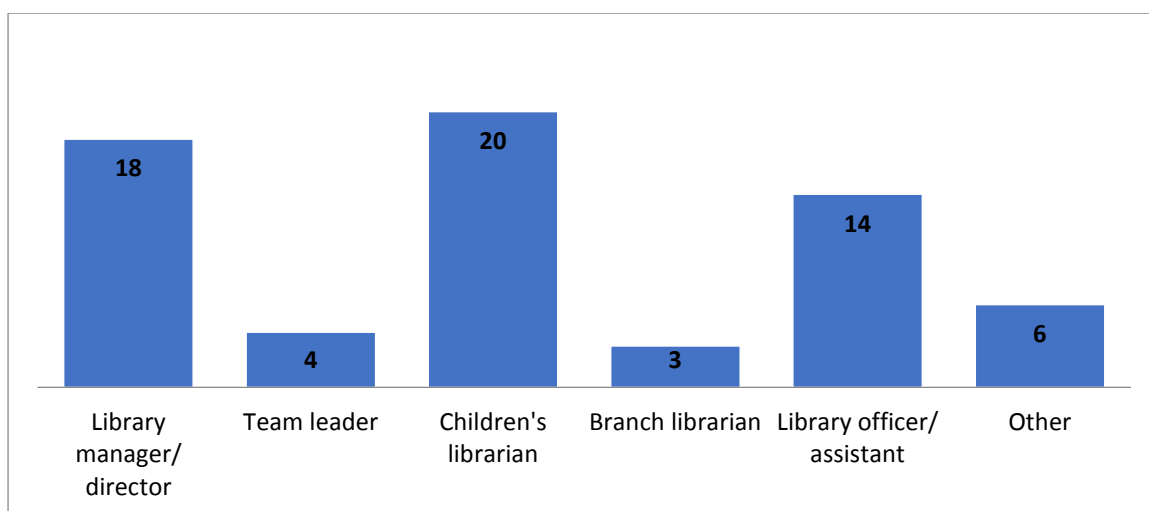
Figure 6. Number of respondents with >5 years by library position

These data reflect the stability of employment in the public library sector, and suggest that professional development opportunities for promoting early literacy will have higher return value than in sectors with high staff turnover rates. The relatively high number of respondents in library officer/assistant and other roles with more than 5 years experience in their current position raises the question of what promotion opportunities and other incentives, if any, are available to staff who make a positive contribution to early literacy initiatives. Such incentives could include support to complete additional training in early language and literacy development and early childhood education (e.g. Certificate III in Children's Services).

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4.1.6 Current workload

Figure 7 shows the percentage of respondents with full time (72%, or 96 respondents) vs. part time (28%, or 37 respondents) public library positions.
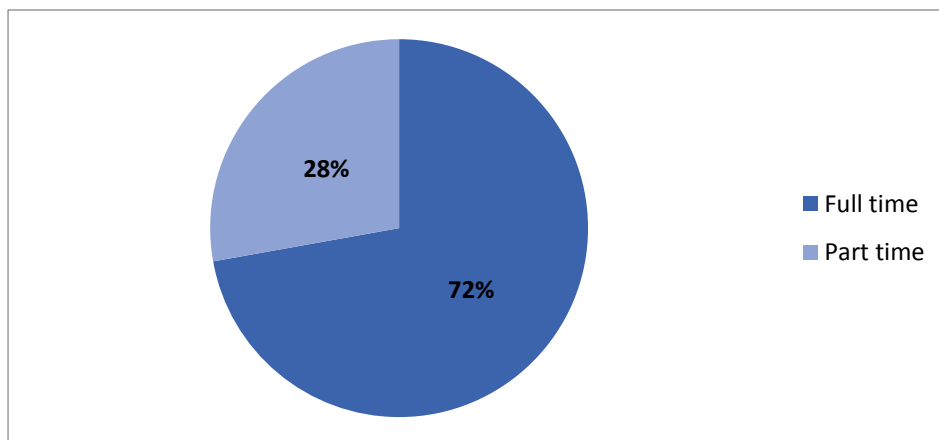
Figure 7. Percentage of survey respondents holding full time vs. part time library positions (N=133)

The survey sample, comprising 133 library staff involved in early literacy initiatives, close reflects the composition of the NSW public library workforce at the time of data collection. The *NSW Public Library Statistics 2013/2014* (State Library of NSW, 2015a) show that the total workforce included 69% full-time, 29% part-time and 2% casual staff.

4.1.7 Staff qualifications

Figure 8 below shows the types of qualifications in library and information services (LIS) held by survey respondents.
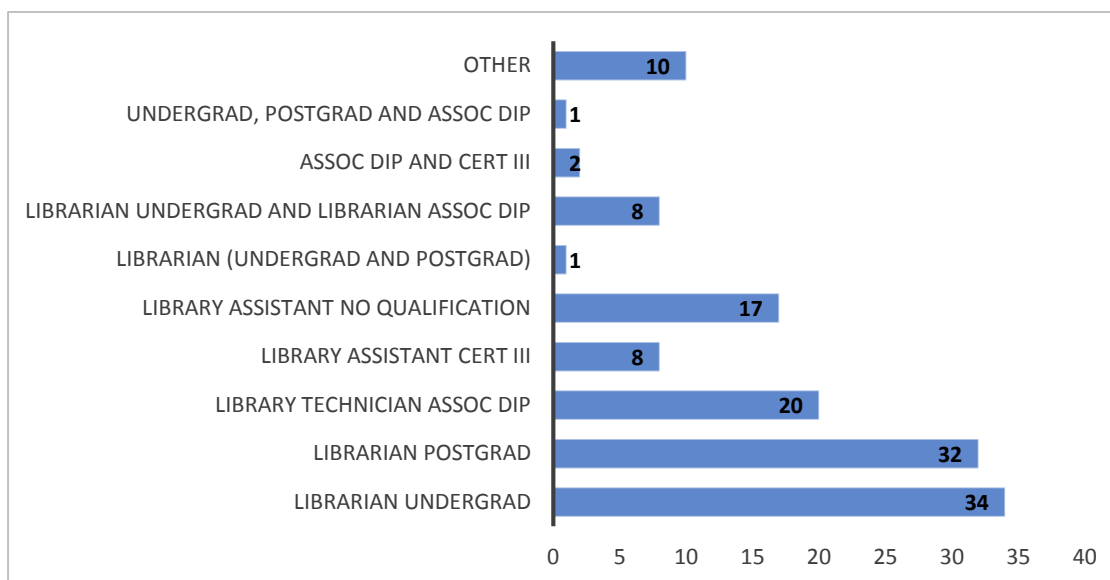
Figure 8. Number of respondents by type of qualification in library and information services (LIS) (N=133)

Most of the respondents were highly qualified library staff, with 56% holding university qualifications in library and information science (32% undergraduate and 24%

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postgraduate), and 21% holding other tertiary qualifications in library services. According to the *NSW Public Library Statistics 2013/2014*, at the time of the survey the proportion of NSW public library staff with LIS qualifications (including all levels from library assistants and technicians through to those with university qualifications) was 35%.

Just over half of the respondents (52.6%, or 70 respondents) also had qualifications in other areas: 9 respondents (only 6.8% of all respondents) had qualifications in early childhood and 11 (only 8.3%) had qualifications in children's literature. 49 respondents (46.8%) had no other qualifications.

The respondents to this survey overall were thus likely to be highly aware of the varied and multiple demands of working as a qualified librarian in public libraries. Relatively few among them, however, had qualifications in areas, such as early childhood and children's literature, that are directly relevant to their involvement in early literacy initiatives. This points to the need to examine what kinds of professional development opportunities in such areas are or should be made available to public library staff in NSW. Additionally, staff highly qualified in LIS can be encouraged to use their professional information retrieval skills to locate examples of best practice in the design and delivery of library services that promote early literacy.

4.1.8   Staff qualifications and library position

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) recognises as professional qualifications for librarians undergraduate and postgraduate degrees as well as (associate) diploma level qualifications in LIS.[3] Table 4 shows the distribution (as number and percentage) of respondents with university qualifications in library and information services (LIS) (described as 'university qualified' in this report), other qualifications in this area (Associate Diploma and Certificate III), no qualification in LIS (None), or qualifications in one or more different areas. The distribution shows that 88% of all respondents in library manager/director positions had university qualifications in LIS, as did 65% of children's librarians, and 47% of team leaders.[4]

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[3] ALIA Accredited Library and Information Science Courses https://www.alia.org.au/course-accreditation

[4] Some respondents had indicated both that they have no university qualifications in LIS and that they held positions as either library manager/director (3%) or children's librarian (8%). This finding reflects the fact that although university qualifications in LIS are usually required and preferred for these positions, in the NSW public library network there are also managers and librarians with alternatively qualifications.

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QUALIFICATION	Library manager/ director	Team leader	Children's librarian	Branch librarian	Library officer/ assistant	Other	Total
University Qualified	29	7	26	2	4	8	76
% of library position	88%	47%	65%	25%	17%	62%	57%
Assoc. Dip & Cert III	0	4	7	4	12	3	30
% of library position	0%	27%	18%	50%	50%	23%	23%
None	1	3	3	2	7	1	17
% of library position	3%	20%	8%	25%	29%	8%	13%
Other	3	1	4	0	1	1	10
% of library position	9%	7%	10%	0%	4%	8%	8%
Total	33	15	40	8	24	13	133
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 5. Number and proportion of respondents with different library qualifications by library position (N=133)

The Chi-square test of independence was used to determine if there was a significant relationship between staff qualification and library position. The result indicates statistical significance with p=0.007. However, the small sample size violated assumptions of chi square concerning minimum expected cell frequency.

As the survey asked detailed questions about early literacy initiatives and would take 30-40 minutes to complete, it is plausible that staff with long experience in the public library sector and early literacy initiatives, a leadership or specialised position and high-level qualifications in LIS were more likely to feel confident enough and be in a position to complete the survey.

In sum, in the context of this research project, it is important to note that the survey data reflect the perspectives of public library staff with considerable experience in the sector and many years of involvement in early literacy initiatives, and many among the respondents had high-level qualifications in LIS and held leadership (manager/director, branch librarian or team leader) and/or specialised (children's librarian) positions.

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**ELP** Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

4.2   Early Literacy Sessions (ELS)

A key distinction made in the survey was that between two key groups of early literacy initiatives: **early literacy sessions (ELS)** and **early literacy programs (ELP)**. ELS for children were defined as regular sessions provided by local libraries designed for children aged from birth to school age and their families (e.g. 'story time', 'baby rhyme', 'lap sit', etc.). They may take place at the library or as outreach visits (e.g. to childcare centres). This section reports on the responses to questions about ELS.

4.2.1   Types of early literacy sessions offered

The survey asked participants about the kinds of ELS offered at their libraries.

What types of early literacy sessions does your library offer? Please select all that apply:

- ☐ Sessions for infants and toddlers (e.g. Lap Sit, Baby Rhyme Time)
- ☐ Sessions for 2-3-year-olds
- ☐ Sessions for preschool children, aged 3-5 years (e.g. Preschool Storytime)
- ☐ Sessions for children in languages other than English
- ☐ Other sessions. Please specify: ……………..
- ☐ No early literacy sessions.

Figure 9 shows the number of respondents who indicated that their libraries offer different kinds of early literacy sessions and their percentage from the total sample of 133 respondents. Of this sample, only 5 respondents (or 3.86%) reported that their libraries offered no ELS.
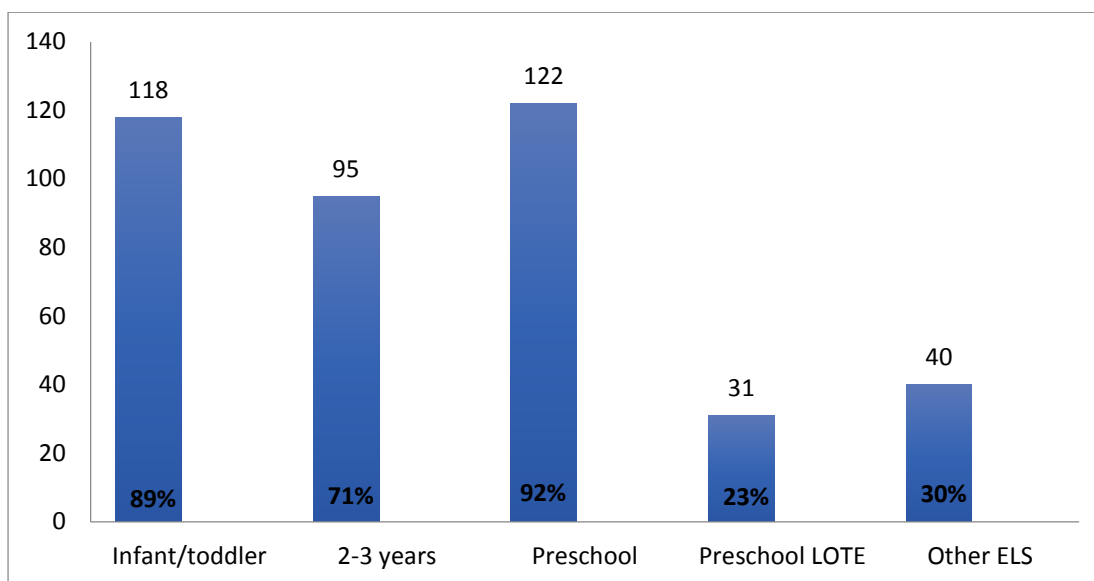
Figure 9. Number and proportion of respondents working in libraries that offer ELS by type of ELS (N=133)

Table 6 shows how these responses are distributed across regions. The overall distribution of responses suggests that ELS designed for infants & toddlers and for preschool children aged 3-5 are more commonly offered across NSW in contrast to those specifically targeting toddlers aged 2-3 and especially to those in languages other than English. (Note that, as explained above, because more than 1 respondent may come from the same library service or

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branch, the survey results presented below are not an indication of the number of ELS types offered in each region.)

Library region		Number of respondents working at libraries offering different kinds of early literacy sessions						
		Infants & toddlers	2-3 years	Preschool	LOTE	Other	None	
Sydney	Central South East	4	3	3	1	1	1	
	North	10	10	10	6	1	0	
	West South West	14	10	15	7	4	1	
Country	Central East	13	10	14	8	5	0	
	Central West	7	7	8	1	4	3	
	North East	24	17	24	2	5	0	
	South East	17	12	24	2	5	0	
	South West	15	12	15	3	7	0	
Unknown region		14	14	16	1	8	0	
Total		118	95	122	31	40	5	

Table 6. Number of respondents by NSW library region and type of ELS offered at their library (N=133)

Figure 10 shows a comparison of the percentage of respondents from metropolitan Sydney vs. the percentage of respondents from country NSW regions who indicated that their library offers any of these ELS types. This comparison suggests that sessions designed specifically for toddlers (children aged 2-3 years) are even less likely to be offered in country areas. The difference between Sydney and country areas is even greater for library preschool sessions in LOTE. A key reason for these differences may be greater funding constraints and/or more limited demand than in metropolitan regions.
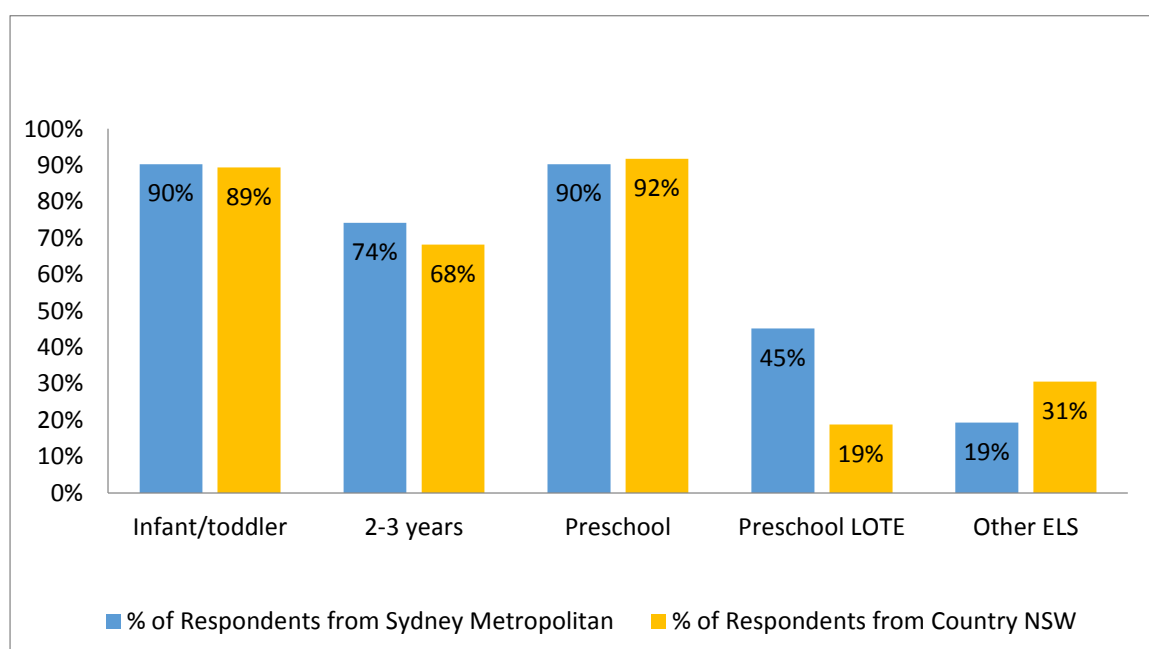
Figure 10. Percentage of respondents from libraries offering ELS by type of ELS in Sydney Metropolitan vs. Country NSW regions

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A closer look at the data, however, suggests that a small number of the responses that this comparison is based on are unreliable. Several respondents interpreted the question "What types of early literacy sessions does your library offer?" as asking them to specify which age group/s their library's ELS catered for, rather than how many separate types of ELS their library offered. To elaborate, 11 of the 26 respondents who selected 'Other ELS' specified that these sessions target mixed-age groups. Of these 11, 7 respondents were from services in country NSW, where libraries may only offer one kind of ELS, typically targeting children from birth to school age. While 2 of these 7 respondents selected only 'Other ELS', 5 selected both 'Other ELS' and two or all three of the age-based options (infant/toddler; 2-3 years old; preschool). It is unclear whether the library of each of these 5 respondents offered only 1 kind of ELS, a mixed-age storytime, or both a mixed-age storytime as well as sessions specifically designed for babies and toddlers, 2-3-year-olds and/or 3-5-year-olds.

To understand both the reasons why library services do or do not offer certain types of ELS and the target audience and purpose of ELS offered across different services, more in-depth methods of data collection are required. These may include a survey that identifies the local government area each respondent works in, so that the collected data may be correlated with socio-economic and other demographic data from the area; interviews with library staff; observations and analysis of different sessions; and collection and analysis of materials that library services use to advertise these sessions (e.g. on their websites, Facebook pages, community leaflets).

4.2.2   Location of early literacy sessions

Survey participants also reported where each of the different kinds of ELS was offered by their library: only at their branch, across the library service or not at all. This question received responses from 127 participants. Figure 11 below shows the number of participants who reported that different types of ELS were offered only at their library branch, across the library service or not at all. The results are consistent with those presented in Section 4.2.1 above. They suggest that sessions for preschoolers aged 3-5 are most common and likely to be offered across a library service (with 103, or 81% of respondents to this question indicating these sessions are offered across their library service) than sessions for infants and toddlers (87 or 69%), children aged 2-3 years (72 or 57%), and preschool sessions in LOTE (19 or 15%).

In addition, respondents were asked to identify whether their library offered any of these sessions as outreach visits (e.g. to childcare centres, shopping centres, hospitals, etc.). Figure 12 shows the number of participants who reported that their libraries offer these session as outreach visits. These responses suggest that sessions for 2-3- and 3-5-year-olds are more commonly offered as outreach visits than sessions for babies and toddlers. A possible explanation is that outreach ELS are typically visits to preschools and to long day care centres that cater for children aged from 2 years to school age, and across NSW there are more children from 2 years to school age in formal child care and education settings (ABS, 2016).

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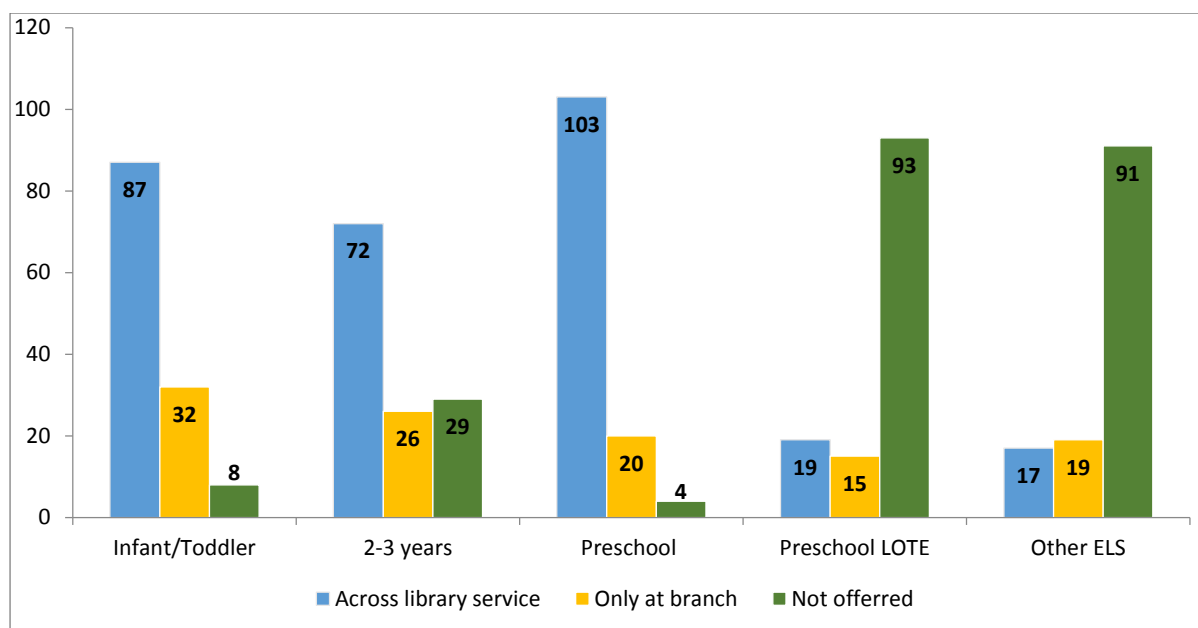
Figure 11. Number of respondents by type and location of ELS offered by their library (N=127)
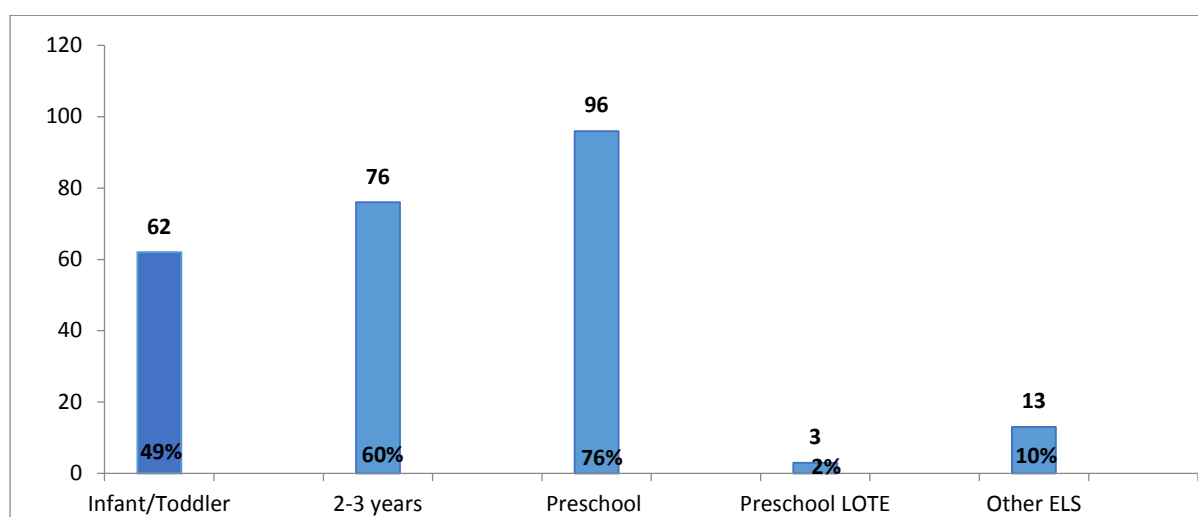
Figure 12. Number and proportion of respondents from libraries that offer ELS as outreach visits by type of ELS (N=127)

Public libraries could, however, be encouraged to offer ELS targeting babies and toddlers as outreach visits to mothers' groups, play groups and community events or settings that babies and their families attend, as well as attempt to reach children outside formal childcare and education settings. The value of such opportunities cannot be overestimated, especially for babies and toddlers, as international research continues to mount evidence of the long-term, critical impact that experiences in the first three years of life have on children's later literacy and learning development (Bartl-Pokorny et al., 2013; Dickinson, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2010; Durand, Loe, Yeatman, & Feldman, 2013; Kim, Im, & Kwon, 2015; Mistry, Benner, Biesanz, Clark, & Howes, 2010), and there are fewer childcare centres that cater for children younger than 2 years old in Australia (ABS, 2016).

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

4.3   Early Literacy Programs (ELP)

This section reports on early literacy programs that encompass all early literacy initiatives except early literacy sessions for children (e.g. baby rhyme time, story time, craft sessions), which were the focus of Section 4.2. Examples of early literacy programs include distribution of book packs to families; outreach information events or workshops for parents or childcare staff; professional development initiatives for early childcare and education services. In the library industry, such programs fall within the broad definition of 'outreach programs'. Their main aim is to attract people who do not use the library, and to achieve it, many ELP are conducted off-site, as visits to maternity wards, shopping centres, childcare settings, and so on. This differentiates them from regular ELS conducted on-site, which are considered 'core programs'.

4.3.1   Types of early literacy programs

The survey asked participants about the kinds of ELP offered at their libraries.

> **What kinds of early literacy programs other than sessions for children does your library offer? Please select all that apply.**
> ❑ Distributing information to families about early language and literacy development
> ❑ Distributing early literacy resources to families (e.g. free book packs for babies)
> ❑ Partnerships with local child care and education settings for children aged birth to 5 (e.g. outreach visits)
> ❑ Participation in community based and other early literacy programs that include other organisations (e.g. Let's Read; Ten Minutes a Day)
> ❑ Other. Please specify: _____
> ❑ Library service does not offer early literacy programs (other than sessions for children).

This question received 120 responses. Figure 13 shows the number and percentage of respondents to this question by key types of ELP. Compared with the results presented in Section 4.2, these results suggest that public libraries in NSW offer early literacy programs less than they do early literacy sessions for children. This may be attributed to the view that presenting ELP, particularly information events for families and childcare educators, requires a greater level of expertise in early literacy than presenting ELS (see further Section 4.6). It could also reflect an understanding that ELS can achieve the outcomes associated with other types of early literacy initiatives as well. As not every library service in NSW offers ELP, there is a need to understand the potential of ELS to support early literacy in diverse communities, and whether and how ELS are or could be complemented by other kinds of early literacy initiatives in different communities. These responses suggest that library services are considerably more likely to engage in distributing information about early literacy to families followed by working in partnership with early childcare centres and participating in community-based initiatives than in distributing resources (e.g. picture book packs) to families. A likely reason is that distributing resources to families places even heavier demands on libraries to secure funding from government and industry sources, as has been the case for large-scale projects such as *The Little Big Book Club* in South Australia (http://www.thelittlebigbookclub.com.au/) and *Better Beginnings* in Western Australia (http://www.better-beginnings.com.au/).

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS
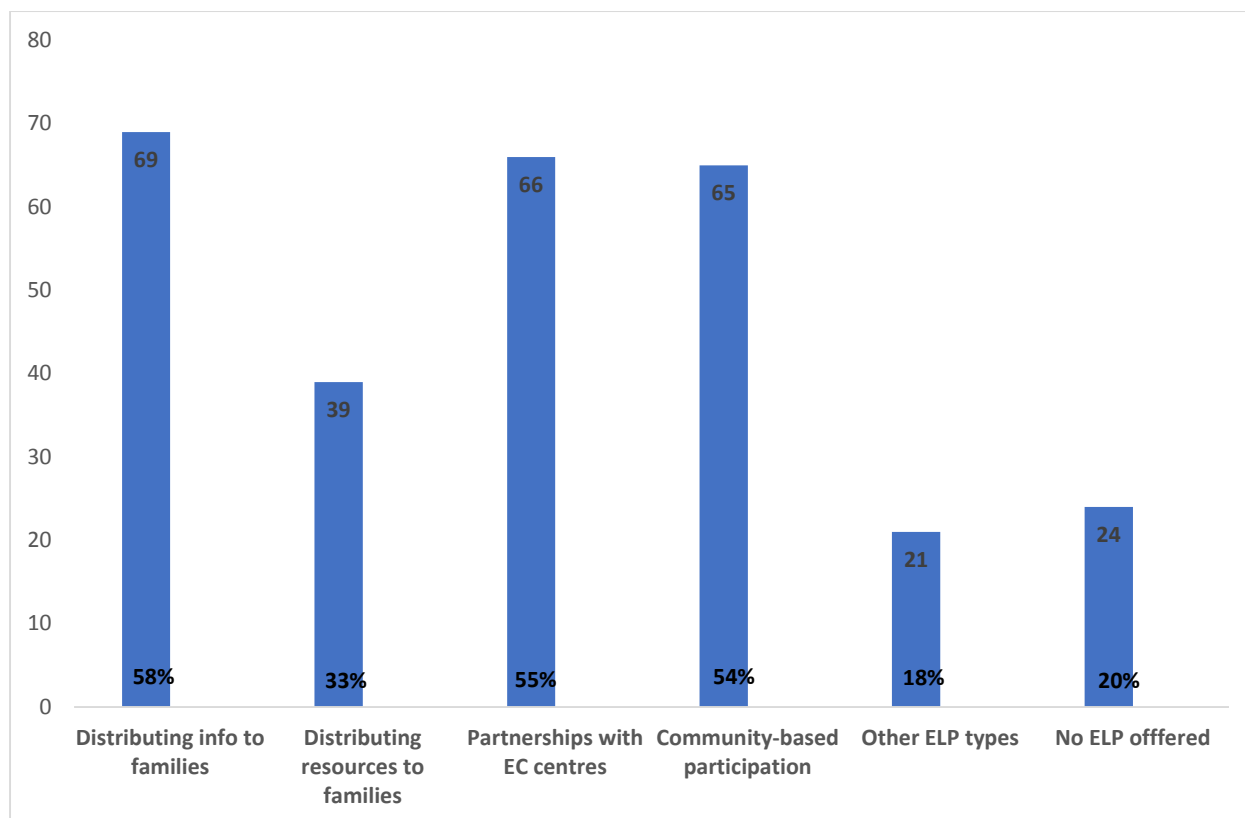
Figure 13. Number and proportion of respondents by type of ELP offered at their libraries (N=120)

Table 7 shows the NSW public library regions these responses originate from, and supports the finding that fewer respondents come from libraries that distribute early literacy resources to families.

	Library region	Distributing information to families	Distributin g resources to families	Partnership s with EC centres	Community-based participation	Other ELP	
Sydney	Central South East	2	1	1	0	1	
	North	6	2	7	4	1	
	West South West	7	3	9	10	2	
Country	Central East	8	2	6	4	3	
	Central West	7	6	7	7	1	
	North East	9	7	12	13	5	
	South East	8	5	9	10	3	
	South West	11	7	6	7	4	
Unknown region		11	6	9	10	4	
Total		**69**	**39**	**66**	**65**	**24**	

The header "# of respondents working at libraries offering different kinds of ELP" spans the columns.

Table 7. Number of respondents by NSW library region and type of ELP offered by their library (N=120)

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS
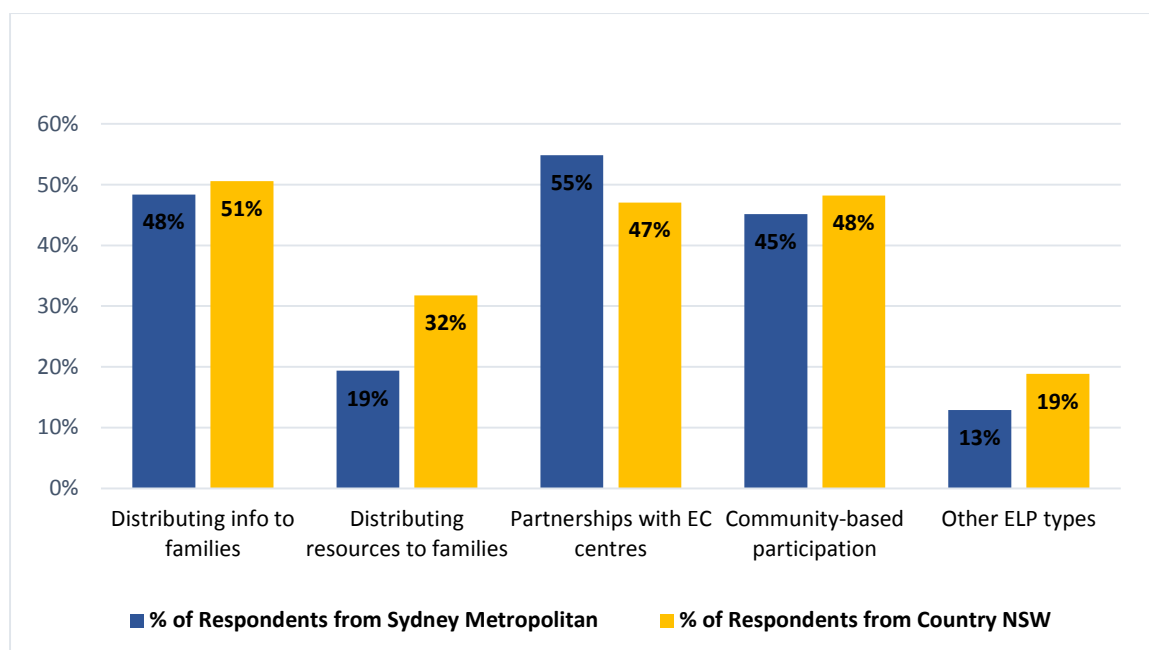
Figure 14. Percentage of respondents from libraries offering ELP by type of ELP in Sydney Metropolitan vs. Country NSW regions (N=120)

Figure 14 shows a comparison of the percentage of respondents from metropolitan Sydney with the percentage of respondents from country NSW areas who indicated whether and what kinds of ELP their library offered. If survey responses reflect the different ELP initiatives in metropolitan vs. country library services in NSW, it appears that metropolitan libraries are even less likely to engage in distributing resources (e.g. picture book packs) to families than are country area services (19% vs. 32%), and more likely than country services to engage in partnerships with early childcare centres (55% vs. 47%). A likely reason why libraries in metropolitan Sydney are less likely to distribute resources to families is the prohibitively high cost such initiatives would have in areas with large populations. There may also be an understanding that families in metropolitan Sydney are able to access and borrow materials from their local library more easily than those in regional and remote country areas. The higher engagement of libraries in metropolitan areas with childcare centres, on the other hand, may be attributed to the higher number of children in formal child care and families with working parents in major cities (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014, 2016). These families were identified by respondents to this survey as one of the 'hard-to-reach' groups for their libraries (see further Section 4.6).

4.3.2   Availability and location of early literacy programs

Survey participants also reported where information events for parents, information events for childcare staff and other ELP took place at their library service: only at their branch, across the library service, or not at all. This question was answered by 123 participants. Figure 15 summarises their responses. The high number of respondents who indicated that their libraries did not offer these types of information sessions at all is consistent with responses to the question about different types of ELP overall.

If a library does offer early literacy information sessions, however, there seems to be a preference for information events for families over those for childcare staff, regardless of

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ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
**ELP** Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

where these are offered. Out of the 123 respondents to this question, 87 indicated that their library does not offer information events for childcare educators, and 54 that it does not offer such events for families. This reflects the fact that childcare educators are not a specific target group for public library services. This may also be due to a perception that childcare staff already have qualifications in and knowledge of early language and literacy and of child development, unlike most caregivers and even most library staff, and that presenting information events for childcare educators would require considerable expertise in these areas. Childcare educators are also likely to have tailored expert avenues for further improving their knowledge of early language and literacy development. Yet, childcare educators may not be aware of the ways in which public libraries aim to and can support early literacy in the community (e.g. providing access to picture books and other reading material for children, parenting literature and other resources; early literacy sessions that children can attend with caregivers on days when they do not attend formal childcare; community-based initiatives such as 'Paint the Town Re(a)d', a community-based reading challenge encouraging the joint reading of picture books by adults and young children in both families and childcare centres). Raising their awareness of public libraries as a valuable resource for promoting early literacy can then be a key focus of information events for childcare centre directors and educators.

The high number of 'not offered' responses for 'Other ELP' (101 out of 123) may be reflective of confusion about what could be considered examples of early literacy programs, even though some examples were included in the introduction to and questions in this section of the survey.

Respondents also identified whether their library offered different types of ELP as outreach visits. Responses to this question (123 respondents) are summarised in Figure 16. Overall, less than a quarter of respondents reported that their libraries offer ELP as outreach visits (24% for information events for families, 19% for information events for childcare educators and 10% for other ELP). This can be attributed to budgetary constraints limiting the number of outreach events that a library can run.

Furthermore, if these responses reflect overall trends, then they suggest that public libraries in NSW, again, are more likely to offer information events for families rather than for childcare educators (24% vs. 19%) as outreach visits. This could be reflective of public libraries' efforts to reach first-time parents who may not be library users and families with working parents.

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS
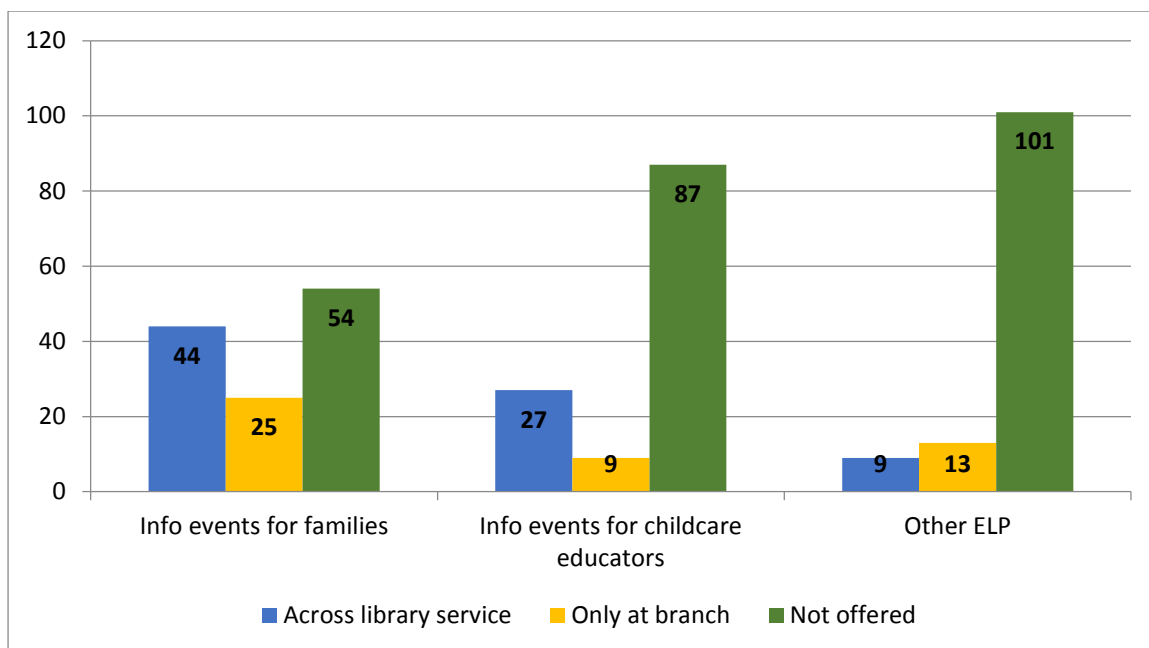
Figure 15. Number of respondents by type and location of ELP offered by their libraries (N=123)
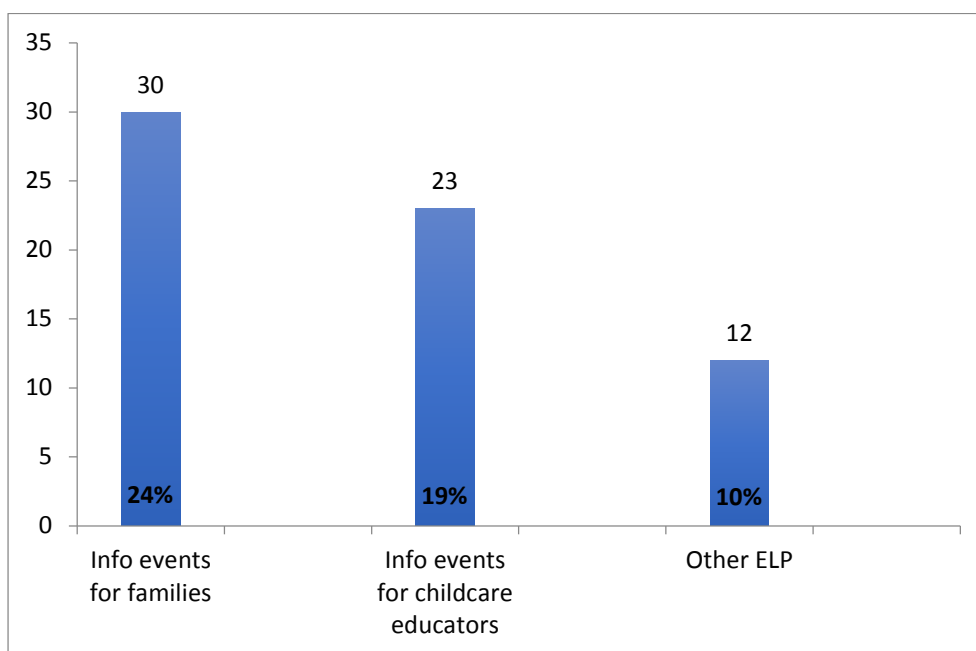
Figure 16. Number and percentage of respondents from libraries that offer ELP as outreach visits by type of ELP (N=123)

Figure 17 shows a comparison of the percentage of respondents from Sydney metropolitan vs. the percentage of respondents from country regions who indicated that their libraries offer ELP as outreach visits by ELP type. These results suggest that libraries in country regions are slightly more likely to offer as outreach visits information events for families (24%) than information events for childcare educators (19%). Information events for families (22%) are by contrast less commonly offered as outreach visits than information events for childcare educators (26%) by libraries in Sydney. This may reflect difficulties in organising

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ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

information events for parents in major cities in Australia, including Sydney, where the number of families with working parents is higher, as are the number and use of formal childcare and education settings (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014, 2016).
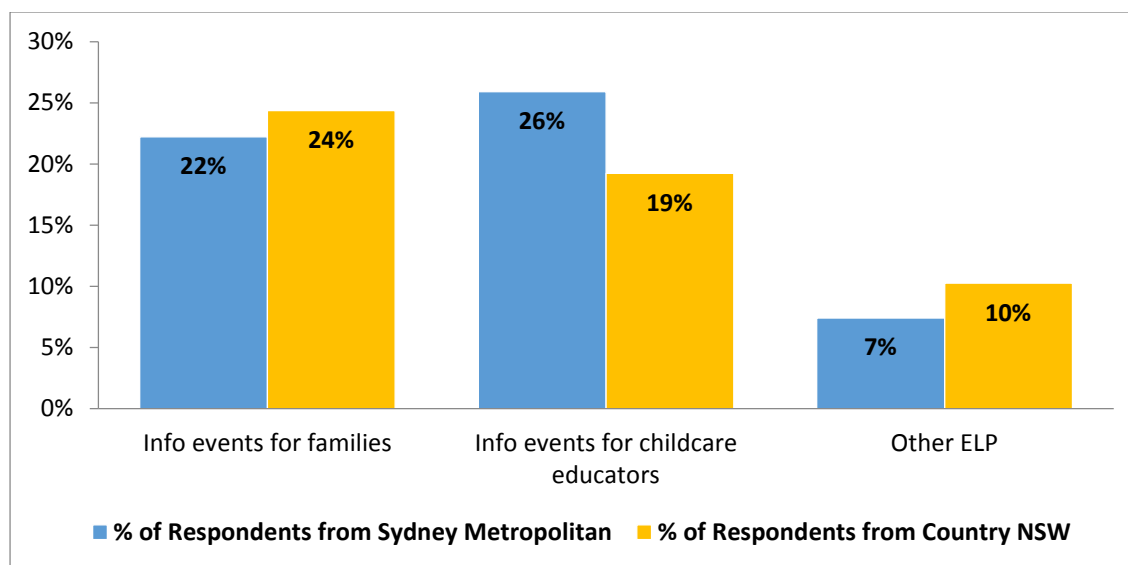
Figure 17. Percentage of respondents from libraries that offer ELP as outreach visits in Sydney Metropolitan vs. Country NSW regions by type of ELP

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
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4.4 Use of information and communication technologies

Two survey questions asked participants to indicate whether they used information and communication technologies (ICT) in their early literacy sessions for children and their families (e.g. Storytime, Baby Rhyme Time) or early literacy programs (e.g. information events for families or childcare educators). Of the 119 respondents to the first question, 33% (39 respondents) reported not using ICT in ELS. Out of the 120 respondents to the second question, 63% (75 respondents) reported not using ICT in ELP. Figure 16 shows these results alongside the percentage of respondents who indicated that they used a particular type of ICT in their ELS and/or ELP.
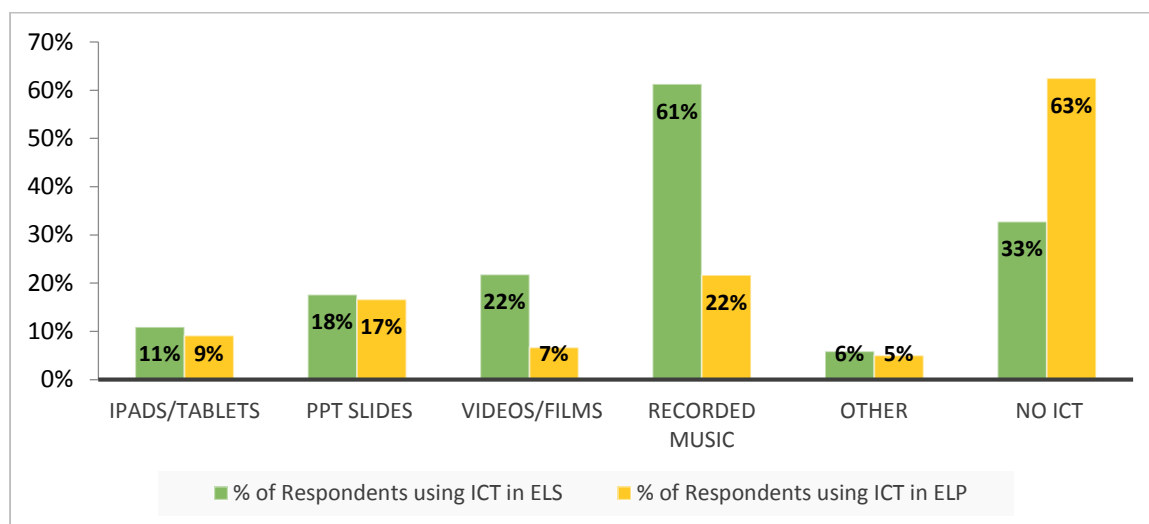
Figure 18. Percentage of respondents who indicated that they used ICT in ELS (N=119) vs. ELP (N=120)

These results reveal that only a small proportion of survey participants worked at libraries that incorporate ICT in their ELI, with more ICT use in ELS compared to ELP. Recorded music is the most frequently used type of ICT in both ELP and ELS, but is used significantly more in ELS than in ELP (61% vs. 22%). Videos and films are also more popular in ELS than ELP (22% vs. 7%). Some respondents listed other technologies that they use. For ELS, participants mentioned using 'e-resources', data projector, stories streamed from the Web, musical instruments and PowerPoint for lapsit programs for babies from birth to 1-year-old. For ELP, these included material downloaded from the Web, online chats and interactive whiteboards. The relatively high percentage of respondents who indicated that they use recorded music in ELP may suggest that at least some of them were using ELP in its broad sense, which includes ELS, as recorded music is very common in ELS and much less so in other ELI.

Overall, there is a discrepancy between the low use of ICT in ELS and ELP in public libraries across NSW that these responses reveal and the view that familiarity with and ability to use ICT is important for developing and delivering effective early literacy programs and sessions, which most survey participants shared (see Section 4.6 below). It is important therefore to explore reasons for this discrepancy through more in-depth methods of data collection and analysis such as thematic analysis of the interviews with library staff involved in early literacy initiatives conducted in Stage 2 of the larger project that this survey belongs to.

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

4.5   Staff involvement in early literacy sessions and programs

This session compares staff involvement in early literacy sessions for children and their families (ELS) and early literacy programs (ELP), and considers the number and kinds of roles (e.g. resourcing, developing, presenting, evaluating, other) that staff fulfil in ELS and ELP in relation to their qualifications in LIS and library position.

Figure 19 and Figure 20 below show the proportion of respondents who were involved in ELS and ELP in their libraries. Out of 132 respondents to the question on whether survey participants were involved in ELS, 121 (92%) reported that they were. A significantly lower proportion, 85 out of 123 respondents (69%), reported that they were involved in ELP.
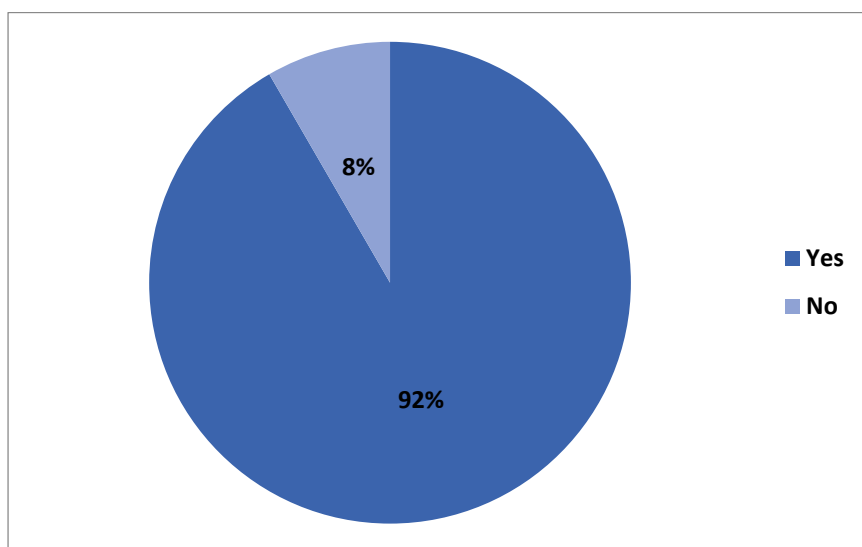
Figure 19. Proportion of respondents involved in early literacy sessions (ELS) (N=132)
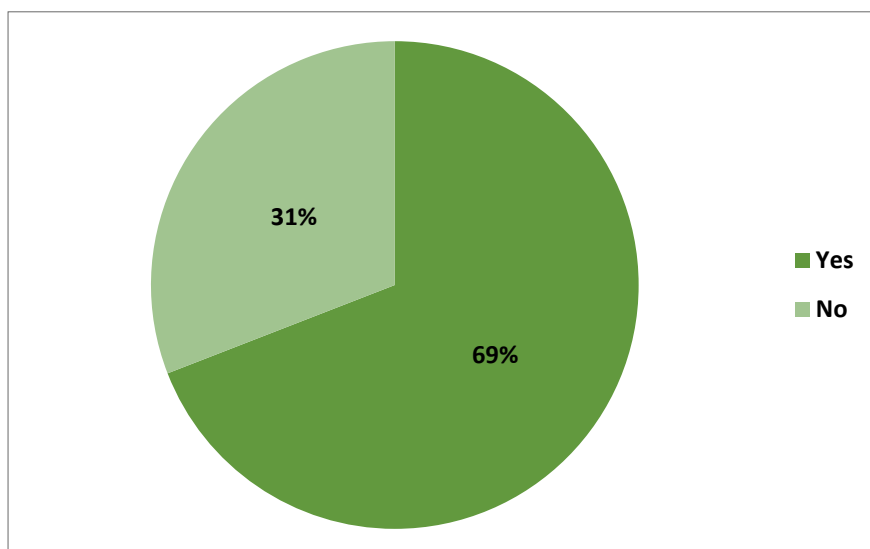
Figure 20. Proportion of respondents involved in early literacy programs (ELP) (N=123)

There were 78 respondents (58.6% of all 133 respondents) who were involved in both ELS and ELP, 34 (26%) in ELS only, 6 (0.05%) in ELP only, and 4 (0.03%) who identified

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
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themselves as not involved in either ELS or ELP. These 4 respondents included 2 library managers/directors, 1 branch librarian and 1 library officer/assistant, and answered most of the survey's questions of the survey. This is why their responses were not excluded from the analysis. It is possible that they completed the survey for their library as a whole, even though the survey was explicitly defined as being only for staff involved in early literacy initiatives.

The finding that a lower proportion of staff are involved in ELP is consistent with ELP being less likely to be offered by NSW public libraries. The rest of this section examines factors that may play a role in whether and how staff are involved in ELS, ELP or both.

4.5.1   Involvement in ELS vs. ELP and number of years of service at current library

Table 8 and Table 9 show the distribution of respondents with different number of years of service at the current library who are involved in ELS vs. ELP respectively. No statistical association was found between staff involvement in ELP vs. ELS and the number of years they had been employed at their current library.

	Years of service at current library				
	< 1 year	1-2 years	2-5 years	5-10 years	>10 years
No of respondents involved in ELS	6	11	21	39	44
% within years of service	100%	85%	96%	91%	92%
% of staff involved in ELS	5%	9.1%	17.4%	32.2%	36.4%

Table 8. Number and proportion of respondents involved in ELS (N=121) by years of service at current library

	Years of service at current library				
	< 1 year	1-2 years	2-5 years	5-10 years	>10 years
No of respondents involved in ELP	3	7	15	26	34
% within years of service	50%	64%	79%	65%	72%
% of staff involved in ELP	3.5%	8.2%	17.7%	30.6%	36.4%

Table 9. Number and proportion of respondents involved in ELP (N=85) by years of service at current library

This finding is consistent with the tendency of libraries to mobilise all the human and other resources available to them in order to meet the needs of their communities, including the strong demand for ELI. Libraries must therefore acknowledge that although staff who deliver ELI and at the same time participate in professional development and actively reflect on their practice could have developed the necessary additional knowledge and skills over time, this requires both initiative and opportunity.

4.5.2   Involvement in ELS vs. ELP and library position

There was also no statistically significant relationship between staff involvement in ELS and ELP and their library positions. Figure 21 and Figure 22 show the library positions of the 121 people involved in ELS and of the 85 people involved in ELP respectively. As 23 of the 24 survey respondents holding officer/library assistant positions were involved in ELS and only 12 respondents in this position were involved in ELP, however, it seems reasonable to

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ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
**ELP** Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

assume that staff in positions that require less advanced qualifications in library and information services (LIS) are much less likely to be involved in ELP than in ELS. This is most likely a reflection of the much higher availability of ELS, in contrast to ELP, offered by public libraries in NSW, and the need this creates for more staff to be involved in ELS. The lower involvement of library offers/assistants in ELP may also be indicative of a view that ELP require higher qualifications in LIS than do ELS.
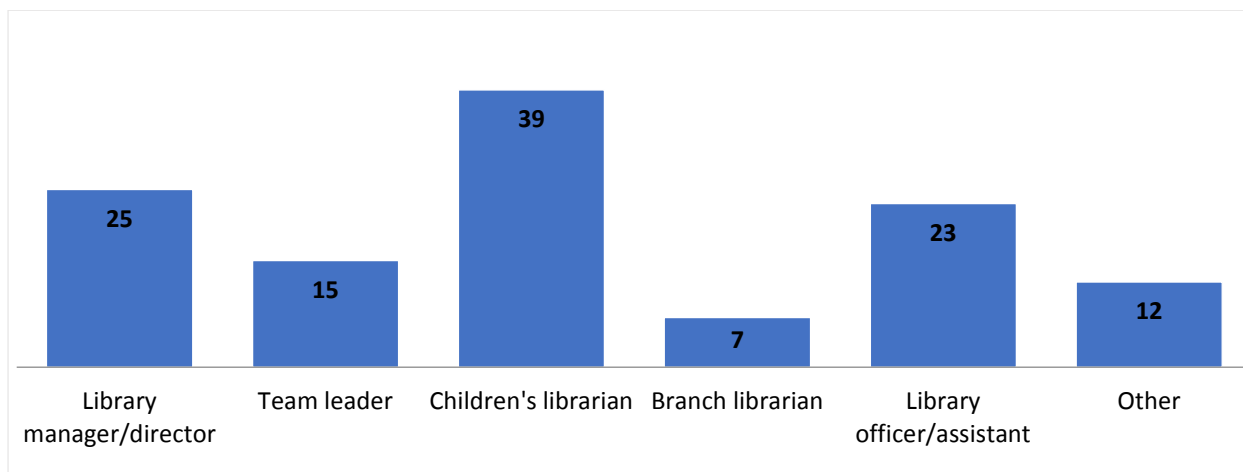
Figure 21. Library positions of staff in ELS
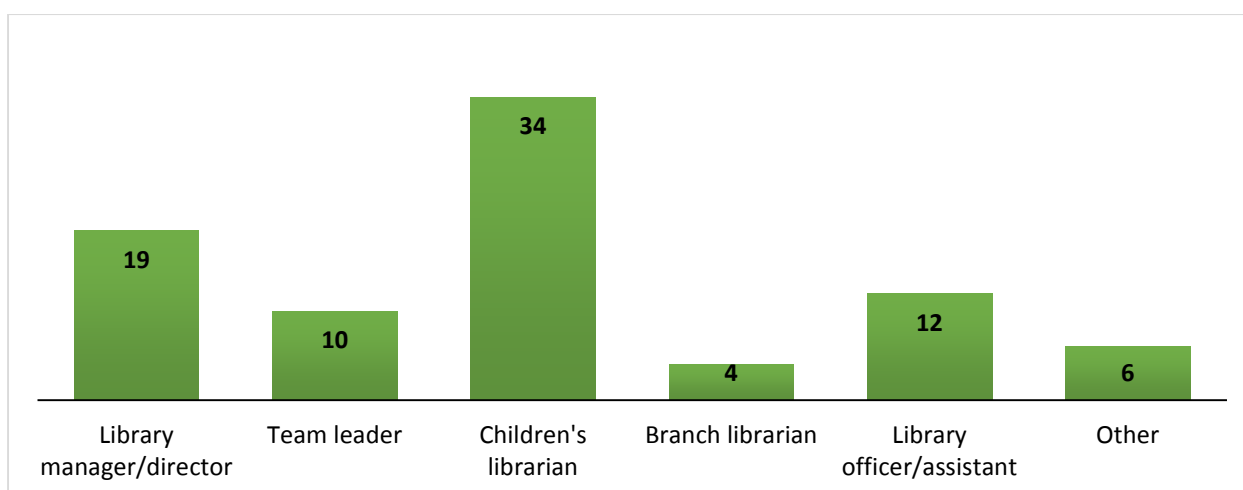
Figure 22. Library positions of staff in ELP

Reflecting the responsibilities of their position in the public library sector, children's librarians took the lead among survey respondents with involvement in ELP.

It is important to note, however, that due to the higher number of staff in managerial and children's librarian positions and staff with university qualifications in LIS in the survey data, these data cannot be used to compare staff with different library positions or different qualification levels in terms of their involvement in either ELS or ELP; rather, they can only indicate degree of involvement within a particular group (e.g. where more staff holding library officer/assistant positions have reported involvement in ELS vs. ELP).

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
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ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

4.5.3 Roles of staff in early literacy initiatives

Respondents involved in early literacy initiatives were asked to indicate their roles in ELS and/or ELP, or the kinds of activities in which they participated, for each key type of ELS or ELP offered by their library.

Roles of staff in early literacy sessions

Table 10 shows the number of staff who indicated they performed resourcing, developing, presenting and evaluating or some other role for each type of role in key types of ELS, as well as their proportion of the 121 respondents involved in ELS. Figure 23 illustrates the number of respondents performing each of these roles by key types of ELS. These data show that staff involved in ELS tend to perform multiple roles across all types of ELS.

The role of evaluating ELS is performed by the highest number of survey respondents for all key types of ELS except for Preschool LOTE. This points to the need to explore, for instance through focus group interviews, what evaluating ELS consists in for staff with different library positions and/or different levels and types of qualifications. To illustrate, library managers may assess ELS based on key library performance indicators such as audience, reach, return on investment, outlay, and the sessions' impact on visitor numbers and circulation. Children's librarians, on the other hand, may focus on assessing the effectiveness of particular reading materials and other resources (e.g. songs, props, craft, technology, etc.) used in ELS, the number of people attending these sessions and their level of satisfaction. There is also a need to consider what professional development opportunities and resources exist to support NSW public library staff in evaluating ELS, and whether they reflect current national and international developments in early childhood education and LIS practices and research.

The role of resourcing engaged the second highest number of survey respondents in all key types of ELS, and the highest in Preschool LOTE sessions. This may be reflective of the high proportion of survey participants in managerial and children's librarian positions, who are more likely to be responsible for resourcing compared to other positions.

Type of role	Infant/toddler Number	% of total	2-3 years Number	% of total	Preschool Number	% of total	Preschool LOTE Number	% of total	Other ELS Number	% of total
Resourcing	85	70%	67	55%	85	70%	24	20%	25	21%
Developing	79	65%	63	52%	87	72%	14	12%	20	17%
Presenting	83	69%	67	55%	88	73%	11	9%	21	17%
Evaluating	89	74%	74	61%	93	77%	17	14%	24	20%
Other	11	9%	12	10%	11	9%	4	3%	7	6%

Table 10. Number and proportion of respondents with different types of roles in key types of ELS (N=121)

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

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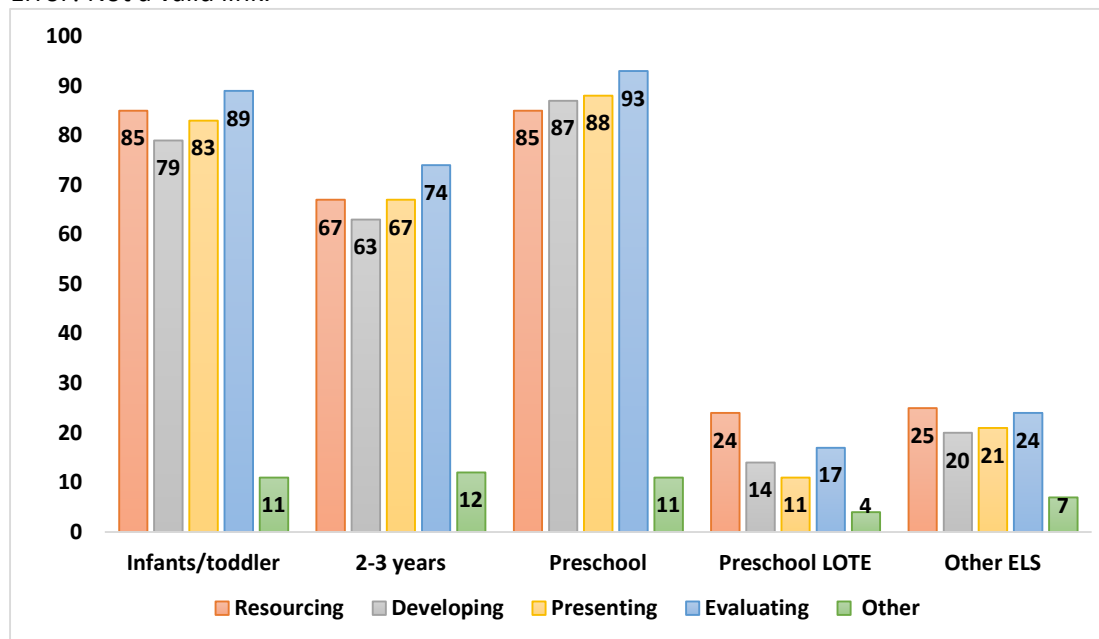
Figure 23. Number of respondents performing different roles by key types of ELS (N=121)

The lower number of respondents involved in evaluating and presenting (compared to resourcing) Preschool LOTE sessions could be attributed to the low number of respondents with proficiency in LOTE. This again points to a need for further research into Preschool LOTE sessions in public libraries, as they could be a valuable resource for promoting early language and literacy development in NSW. The need for such research is highlighted by figures showing that over a fifth of NSW population (22.5%) speak languages other than English at home according to 2011 Australian census data (ABS, 2011), and there are 15% of children with English as a second language and 21.5% from language backgrounds other than English according to the *Australian Early Development Census National Report 2015* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2016).[5]

Table 11 shows the number and proportion of respondents performing each role in key types of ELS by library staff position. The data suggest that respondents in managerial positions such as manager/director and team leader are much more likely to be involved in resourcing and evaluating ELS than in the other roles. This observation is valid across different types of ELS, with the exception of Preschool LOTE where, as mentioned, only a very low proportion of staff overall are involved in evaluating.

Children's librarians, according to the survey, tend to be involved in each major role (resourcing, developing, presenting and evaluating) across all types of ELS, including Preschool LOTE, with a higher number of children's librarians reporting involvement in

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[5] Research into LOTE sessions in public libraries will need to take into account the volatility in the need for such sessions across local communities. For example, a new migrant community or refugee settlement program may bring into an area people from a specific language and cultural background, and associated experiences with and attitudes towards language, literacy and libraries, and with specific language and literacy needs. Library staff in the same area may not include people with the required LOTE skills. To address this skills gap, a library may employ volunteers and casual staff to assist with the preparation and presentation of LOTE sessions.

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives

ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)

ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

developing ELS compared to the other three roles. This is likely to reflect the expectations and recruitment criteria of the children's librarian position.

A higher number of survey respondents holding branch librarian positions reported being involved in developing and presenting than in resourcing and evaluating ELS. No survey respondent in that position reported involvement in Preschool LOTE.

Developing effective ELS requires knowledge of child and early language and literacy development as well as of children's literature and other material that can be incorporated in ELS. It is therefore important to explore whether and what professional development resources exist to support public library staff who develop ELS in building and enhancing their knowledge in these areas (see further Section 4.6).

Table 12 shows the number and proportion of respondents performing each role in key types of ELS by library staff qualification. Across all ELS types, a greater number of staff with university qualifications in LIS are involved in resourcing followed by evaluating ELS, and fewer in developing and presenting ELS. By contrast, from staff with other qualifications in LIS (Associate Diploma and Certificate III), are more involved in developing, presenting and evaluating than in resourcing ELS. The results also suggest that among respondents who reported having no qualifications in LIS or having qualifications in other fields, more are involved in developing and presenting than in resourcing and evaluating ELS, with the exception of Preschool LOTE where more of this group of respondents participated in resourcing.

This distribution in the survey data suggests that staff with higher qualifications in LIS tend to have greater responsibility for resourcing ELS. The data may also be indicative of an understanding that higher qualifications in LIS are either not required or not necessarily very useful for developing and presenting ELS.

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
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ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

ELS types	Role	Library position												Total staff in role
		Manager/ director	% of staff in role	Team leader	% of staff in role	Children's librarian	% of staff in role	Branch librarian	% of staff in role	Officer/ assistant	% of staff in role	Other	% of staff in role	
Infant/ Toddler	Resourcing	24	28%	14	16%	31	36%	3	4%	4	5%	9	11%	85
	Developing	8	10%	6	8%	36	46%	5	6%	17	22%	7	9%	79
	Presenting	8	10%	7	8%	35	42%	5	6%	19	23%	9	11%	83
	Evaluating	15	17%	10	11%	36	40%	4	4%	14	16%	10	11%	89
	Other	1	9%	0	0%	5	45%	1	9%	2	18%	2	18%	11
2-3 years	Resourcing	20	30%	11	16%	25	37%	3	4%	3	4%	5	7%	67
	Developing	5	8%	5	8%	30	48%	6	10%	14	22%	3	5%	63
	Presenting	6	9%	5	7%	29	43%	6	9%	17	25%	4	6%	67
	Evaluating	12	16%	9	12%	29	39%	6	8%	12	16%	6	8%	74
	Other	1	8%	1	8%	4	33%	2	17%	2	17%	2	17%	12
Preschool	Resourcing	24	28%	14	16%	32	38%	3	4%	3	4%	9	11%	85
	Developing	9	10%	7	8%	38	44%	7	8%	17	20%	9	10%	87
	Presenting	8	9%	8	9%	36	41%	7	8%	20	23%	9	10%	88
	Evaluating	15	16%	12	13%	37	40%	6	6%	13	14%	10	11%	93
	Other	1	9%	1	9%	5	45%	2	18%	1	9%	1	9%	11
Preschool LOTE	Resourcing	4	17%	4	17%	14	58%	0	0%	0	0%	2	8%	24
	Developing	0	0%	0	0%	13	93%	0	0%	1	7%	0	0%	14
	Presenting	0	0%	0	0%	10	91%	0	0%	1	9%	0	0%	11
	Evaluating	1	6%	0	0%	14	82%	0	0%	0	0%	2	12%	17
	Other	1	25%	0	0%	3	75%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4
Other type of ELS	Resourcing	8	32%	6	24%	3	12%	3	12%	3	12%	2	8%	25
	Developing	2	10%	4	20%	3	15%	4	20%	5	25%	2	10%	20
	Presenting	2	10%	4	19%	3	14%	4	19%	6	29%	2	10%	21
	Evaluating	5	21%	5	21%	3	13%	3	13%	6	25%	2	8%	24
	Other	1	14%	1	14%	0	0%	2	29%	2	29%	1	14%	7

Table 11. Number and proportion of staff in different roles by key type of ELS and staff library position (N=121)

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives

ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)

ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

ELS types	Role	Library qualification								Total staff in role
		University Qualified	% of staff in role	Assoc. Dip & Cert III	% of staff in role	None	% of staff in role	Other	% of staff in role	
Infant/ Toddler	Resourcing	57	67%	15	18%	7	8%	6	7%	85
	Developing	39	49%	24	30%	9	11%	7	9%	79
	Presenting	42	51%	23	28%	11	13%	7	8%	83
	Evaluating	53	60%	21	24%	8	9%	7	8%	89
	Other	9	82%	1	9%	1	9%	0	0%	11
2-3 years	Resourcing	46	69%	10	15%	6	9%	5	7%	67
	Developing	30	49%	17	28%	17	27%	6	10%	61
	Presenting	29	46%	17	27%	10	16%	7	11%	63
	Evaluating	43	58%	17	23%	7	9%	7	9%	74
	Other	8	67%	2	17%	1	8%	1	8%	12
Preschool	Resourcing	57	67%	16	19%	5	6%	7	8%	85
	Developing	43	49%	26	30%	9	10%	9	10%	87
	Presenting	46	50%	26	28%	11	12%	9	10%	92
	Evaluating	53	57%	24	26%	7	8%	9	10%	93
	Other	8	73%	2	18%	0	0%	1	9%	11
Preschool LOTE	Resourcing	16	67%	2	8%	3	13%	3	13%	24
	Developing	10	71%	2	14%	1	7%	1	7%	14
	Presenting	8	73%	0	0%	2	18%	1	9%	11
	Evaluating	13	76%	1	6%	1	6%	2	12%	17
	Other	4	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4
Other type of ELS	Resourcing	15	60%	6	24%	3	12%	1	4%	25
	Developing	9	45%	5	25%	4	20%	2	10%	20
	Presenting	8	38%	5	24%	5	24%	3	14%	21
	Evaluating	12	50%	6	25%	4	17%	2	8%	24
	Other	3	43%	2	29%	1	14%	1	14%	7

Table 12. Number and proportion of staff in different roles by key type of ELS and library qualification (N=121)

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

Figure 24 and Table 13 show the number of respondents and the number of roles they perform for each key type of ELS. In alignment with the pattern in Table 12 and Figure 23, Figure 24 shows that most respondents engaged in ELS perform concurrently 4 roles, followed by 3 roles, 2 roles, 1 role, no role, and 5 roles. This holds across the different types of sessions, and suggests that professional development targeting early literacy sessions needs to support staff in enhancing the competencies and skills required to effectively perform all of these roles – resourcing, developing, presenting and evaluating ELS.
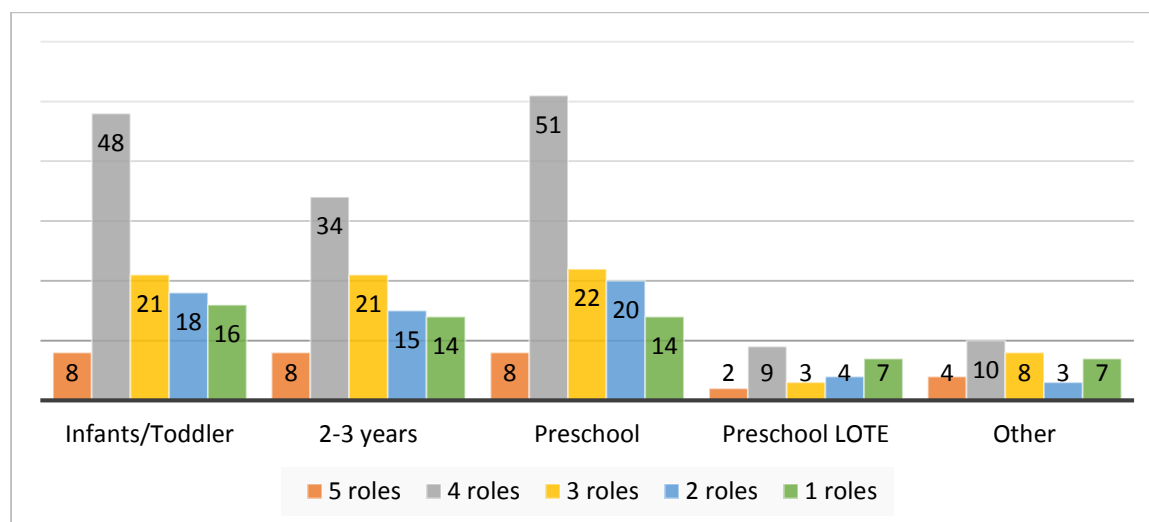
Figure 24. Number of respondents by number of concurrent roles in key types of ELS (N=121)

Type of ELS	Number of respondents with a role	Number of concurrent roles	5	4	3	2	1	no role
Infant/Toddler	*111*	No of staff	8	48	21	18	16	10
		% of respondents	7%	40%	17%	15%	13%	8%
		% of respondents with a role	7%	43%	19%	16%	14%	
2-3 years	*94*	No respondents	8	34	21	15	14	27
		% of respondents	7%	28%	17%	12%	12%	22%
		% of respondents with a role	9%	36%	22%	16%	15%	
Preschool	*115*	No of respondents	8	51	22	20	14	6
		% of respondents	7%	42%	18%	17%	12%	5%
		% of respondents with a role	7%	44%	19%	17%	12%	
Preschool LOTE	*30*	No of respondents	2	9	3	4	7	91
		% of respondents	2%	7%	3%	3%	6%	75%
		% of respondents with a role	7%	30%	10%	13%	23%	
Other	*40*	No of respondents	4	10	8	3	7	81
		% of respondents	3%	8%	7%	3%	6%	67%
		% of respondents with a role	10%	25%	20%	8%	18%	

Table 13. Number and proportion of respondents by number of roles in key types of ELS (N=121)

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

Roles of staff in early literacy programs

Table 14 shows the number of staff who indicated they performed resourcing, developing, presenting and evaluating or some other role for each type of role in key types of ELP, as well as their proportion of the 85 respondents involved in ELP. Figure 25 illustrates the number of respondents performing each of these roles by key types of ELP. The lower proportion of staff involved in information events for childcare educators, between 25% and 28% for each of the specified roles (i.e. resourcing, developing, presenting and evaluating), is consistent with the finding that such events are less likely to be offered by NSW public libraries (see Section 4.3.2 and Figure 15), and contrasts with the proportion of 51% to 59% in each of these roles for information events for families. Respondents' involvement in both types of information events can be contrasted with the most common types of ELS – for babies and toddlers and for preschool children – where 65% to 77% of the 121 respondents involved in ELS reported performing each of these specified roles.

As with ELS, the role of evaluating ELP is performed by the highest number of respondents, with slightly lower numbers involved in presenting and developing, followed by resourcing ELP. The relatively minor differences in the numbers of respondents involved in resourcing vs. developing and presenting ELP can be attributed to the high number of survey participants in managerial and specialised library positions as well as with high levels of LIS qualifications, as such staff are more likely to be involved in ELP in general than staff in other positions and/or with lower qualifications in LIS.

As for ELS, the higher involvement of library staff in evaluating compared to other roles in ELP points to the need to understand what this role entails and what tools and professional development opportunities exist to support NSW public library staff engaged in it. It would also be important to consider whether existing evaluation tools and professional development opportunities reflect current national and international developments in early childhood education, library and information services and research in these areas.

Type of role	Information events for families		Information events for childcare educators		Other ELP	
	Number	% of total	Number	% of total	Number	% of total
Resourcing	43	51%	21	25%	13	15%
Developing	44	52%	23	27%	9	11%
Presenting	45	53%	22	26%	9	11%
Evaluating	50	59%	24	28%	13	15%
Other role	5	6%	2	2%	0	0%

Table 14. Number and proportion of respondents with different types of roles in key types of ELP (N=85)

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS
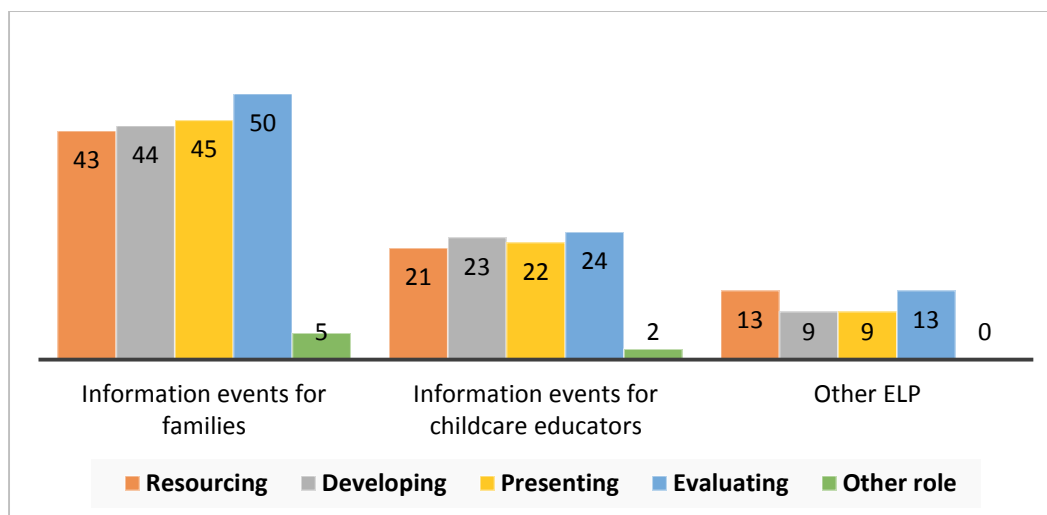
Figure 25. Number of respondents performing different roles by key types of ELP

Table 15 shows the number and proportion of respondents performing each role in key types of ELP by library staff position. The data show that a greater number of respondents in managerial positions such as manager/director and team leader are involved in resourcing than in the other roles, and that staff in these positions are more likely to be involved in evaluating than in developing and presenting ELP. This observation holds for both information events for families and information events for childcare educators.

Fewer children's librarians reported being involved in resourcing ELP, especially information events for educators, compared to developing, presenting and evaluating such programs. The numbers of children's librarians engaged in developing, presenting and evaluating ELP are very similar across these three roles. In addition to knowledge of child and early language and literacy development, the roles of developing, presenting and evaluating ELP require high levels of skills in communicating effectively with adults such as parents and early childhood educators, and being able to convey information about each language and literacy development in different ways. Information events for families would benefit from presentations that are engaging for everyone yet accessible for people with limited knowledge in these areas and/or low levels of education. Information events for childcare educators, on the other, will need to build on the knowledge these professionals already have. It is important to explore whether and what professional development resources exist to support public library staff who develop and present such information events (see further Section 4.6).

Table 16 shows the number and proportion of respondents performing each role in key types of ELP by library staff qualification. The data suggest that university qualified staff (i.e. those with one or more undergraduate or postgraduate university degrees in LIS) are equally likely to be involved in resourcing, developing, presenting and evaluating ELP. This contrasts with the pattern for ELS, where fewer qualified staff were involved in developing and presenting, in contrast to resourcing and evaluating, ELS. The difference could be indicative of an understanding that all ELP roles, including developing and presenting, require higher levels of knowledge in a range of areas, including LIS, compared to the equivalent roles in ELS. This may also explain why respondents with lower qualifications in LIS (Associate Diploma

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ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
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and Certificate III) are less likely to be involved in resourcing, developing and presenting ELP.

The low number of respondents involved in ELP who reported having no qualifications in LIS or qualifications in other fields does not allow a comparison of the level of their engagement in different ELP roles. It is worth noting, however, that among these respondents were respondents with university qualifications in early childhood and school education as well as in human movement and in performing and visual arts.

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ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

Type of ELP	Role	Manager/director	% of staff in role	Team leader	% of staff in role	Children's librarian	% of staff in role	Branch librarian	% of staff in role	Officer/assistant	% of staff in role	Other	% of staff in role	Total staff in role
Information events for families	Resourcing	9	21%	7	16%	21	49%	1	2%	2	5%	3	7%	43
	Developing	2	5%	4	9%	25	57%	1	2%	8	18%	4	9%	44
	Presenting	3	7%	3	7%	25	56%	2	4%	8	18%	4	9%	45
	Evaluating	5	10%	6	12%	27	54%	1	2%	7	14%	4	8%	50
	Other	0	0%	2	40%	3	60%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	5
Information events for childcare educators	Resourcing	4	18%	5	23%	11	50%	1	5%	0	0%	0	0%	22
	Developing	0	0%	1	4%	16	70%	1	4%	4	17%	1	4%	23
	Presenting	1	5%	0	0%	15	68%	1	5%	4	18%	0	0%	22
	Evaluating	0	0%	4	17%	16	67%	1	4%	2	8%	1	4%	24
	Other	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2
Other ELP	Resourcing	7	54%	1	8%	1	8%	0	0%	1	8%	3	23%	13
	Developing	2	22%	2	22%	3	33%	0	0%	1	11%	1	11%	9
	Presenting	3	33%	2	22%	1	11%	1	11%	1	11%	1	11%	9
	Evaluating	5	38%	2	15%	2	15%	1	8%	1	8%	2	15%	13
	Other	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0

Table 15. Number and proportion of staff in different roles by key type of ELP and staff library position (N=85)

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

| Type of ELP | Role | Library qualification | | | | | | | | Total staff in role |
		University Qualified	% of staff in role	Assoc. Dip & Cert III	% of staff in role	None	% of staff in role	Other	% of staff in role	
Information events for families	Resourcing	30	70%	6	14%	4	9%	3	7%	43
	Developing	27	61%	8	18%	5	11%	4	9%	44
	Presenting	29	64%	7	16%	5	11%	4	9%	45
	Evaluating	31	62%	10	20%	5	10%	4	8%	50
	Other	2	40%	1	20%	1	20%	1	20%	5
Information events for childcare educators	Resourcing	15	71%	2	10%	2	10%	2	10%	21
	Developing	15	65%	4	17%	1	4%	3	13%	23
	Presenting	15	68%	3	14%	1	5%	3	14%	22
	Evaluating	14	58%	5	21%	2	8%	0	0%	24
	Other	1	50%	0	0%	0	0%	1	50%	2
Other ELP	Resourcing	10	77%	2	15%	0	0%	1	8%	13
	Developing	4	44%	3	33%	1	11%	1	11%	9
	Presenting	3	33%	7	54%	1	11%	1	11%	9
	Evaluating	7	54%	0	0%	1	8%	1	8%	13

Table 16. Number and proportion of staff in different roles by key type of ELP and staff library qualification (N=85)

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives

ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)

**ELP** Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

Figure 26 and Table 17 show the number of respondents and the number of concurrent roles they perform for each key type of ELP. The data shows that among respondents with a role in information events for families, the greatest number (23) have 4 concurrent roles, followed by 3 roles (20 respondents), 2 roles and 1 role (10 each), and 5 roles (1 respondent). Information events for childcare educators have a greater number of survey respondents engaged in 4 or 3 concurrent roles (10 each), followed by 1 role (7), 2 (5) and finally 5 (1) concurrent roles.
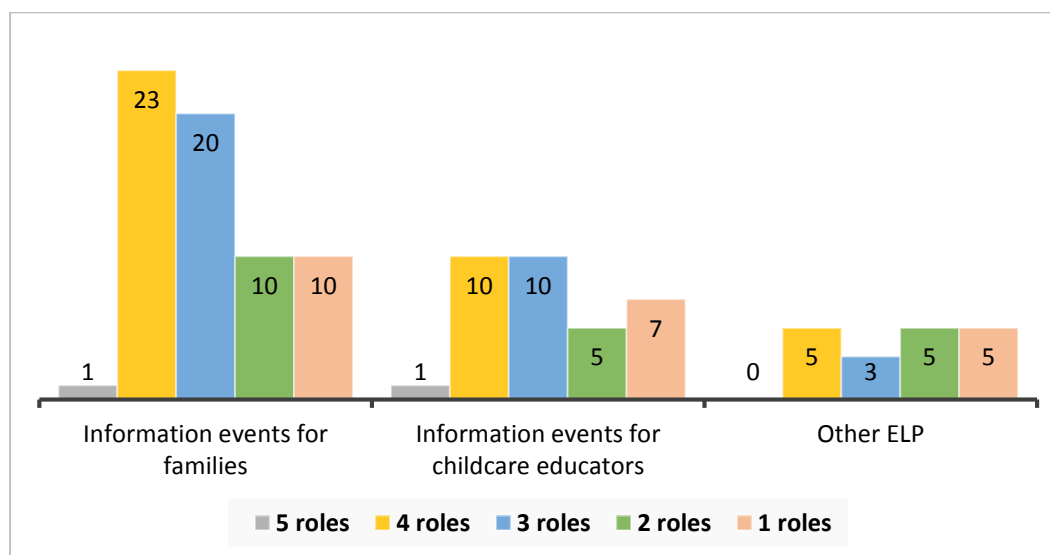
Figure 26. Number of respondents by number of concurrent roles in key types of ELP

Type of ELP	*No of staff with a role*	Number of concurrent roles	5 roles	4 roles	3 roles	2 roles	1 roles	no role	Total
Information events for families	*64*	Number of respondents	1	23	20	10	10	21	85
		% of respondents	1%	27%	24%	12%	12%	24.7%	100.0%
		% of respondents with a role	3%	36%	31%	16%	16%		100.0%
Information events for childcare educators	*33*	Number of respondents	1	10	10	5	7	49	82
		% of respondents	1%	12%	12%	6%	9%	60%	100.0%
		% of respondents with a role	3.0%	30%	30%	15%	21%		100.0%
Other ELP	*18*	Number of respondents	0	5	3	5	5	58	76
		% of respondents	0%	7%	4%	7%	7%	76%	100.0%
		% of respondents with a role	0%	28%	17%	28%	29%		100.0%

Table 17. Number and proportion of respondents by number of roles in key types of ELP

Overall, 83% of respondents engaged in information events for families, 75% of those with a role in information events for childcare educators, and 73% of those with a role in other types of ELP reported performing 2 or more concurrent roles. Although among staff with a

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ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

role in any ELP those who perform 4 concurrent roles constitute a lower proportion than is the case for ELS, these results suggest that professional development focusing on ELP should support staff in building the competencies and skills required for effectively performing all of the roles involved in ELP. In other words, a holistic approach is needed, rather than one where a given role – for example resourcing – is emphasised at the expense of other aspects of ELP.

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

4.6 Professional Competencies and Development

A section of the survey explored the views of NSW public library staff about key competencies involved in early literacy initiatives and their familiarity with relevant professional development opportunities and resources.

4.6.1 Rating competencies for ELI and ELS

Two questions asked respondents to consider competencies that library staff need to develop effective ELI in general (Question 42) and prepare and present ELS in particular (Question 44) and rate each competency on a scale from not important (1) to very important (5).

Each question presented 14 competencies. The use of two lists of competencies reflects an understanding some competencies are specific to developing and presenting ELS (e.g. effective performance and presentation skills), while others concern different roles staff may fulfil related to ELI in general (e.g. identifying sources of funding and preparing grant applications, developing strategic plans and priorities). Items in each set were selected from the extensive list of 'Competencies for Librarians Serving Children in Public Libraries' developed by The Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC): A Subdivision of the American Library Association (2015), using the latest available versoin of this list (from 2009) availble the time the survey was designed, in August 2014. The competencies in the survey are primarily ones specifically oriented to children's services. They exclude predispositions or affective factors (e.g. 'loves children', 'enjoys reading children's literature'), and instead emphasise the ability of library staff to demonstrate relevant knowledge/understanding/ familiarity and skills. For practical reasons, the list excludes many ALSC competencies that, although important, are not specific to children's services (e.g. "Preserves patron confidentiality"), and any that are developed for members of the American Library Association (e.g. "Knows and practices the ALA's Code of Ethics"). Each set had a high reliability indicator with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.898, that is, a high internal consistency showing that the competencies in each set measure a single construct.

Figure 27 shows how respondents rated professional competencies for developing effective ELI according to the number of respondents who had rated each competency at a particular level of importance from not or little important (1 or 2) through to important, quite or very important (3, 4 or 5), with the competencies arranged from those more respondents rated as being very important down to those that received fewer such ratings. For example, the data show that 117 out of 120 respondents who answered this question indicated that "*pursuing professional development and learning opportunities for promoting early literacy (EL) in public libraries (PL)*" is important to very important for developing effective ELI. Figure 28 shows the rating of competencies for preparing and presenting ELS. Overall, the data show that the majority of the 120 respondents who answered both these two questions felt that the competencies noted in the survey were important or very important for developing effective ELI and preparing and presenting effective ELS.

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

	Not or little important	Important	Quite important	Very Important
Ensure children's access to diverse materials that support EL	0	7	34	79
Demonstrate and maintain familiarity with appropriate RMC	1	6	35	78
Assess needs and preferences of local community regularly	1	16	44	59
Pursue professional development and learning for promoting EL in PL	3	19	42	56
Demonstrate understanding of difference and disability	0	20	49	51
Demonstrate understanding of cultural and ethnic diversity	4	15	51	50
Understand implications of child development theories for PL	7	18	45	50
Understand implications of language and literacy development theories for PL	4	17	54	45
Maintain connections with services for children in the community	3	28	52	37
Demonstrate familiarity with & appreciation for emerging tech that support EL	4	36	48	32
Maintain high-level skills in ICT for communication and presentations	6	36	48	30
Promote children's access to emerging technologies that support EL	11	34	47	28
Demonstrate high-level administrative and management skills relevant to ELI	10	37	46	27
Identify sources of funding and develop strong grant applications for ELI	10	47	39	24
Demonstrate familiarity with Australia's early childhood care and education system	23	39	42	16

Key: EL = Early literacy; RMC= reading materials for children; PL = public library/libraries; ELI = early literacy initiatives; ICT = information and communication technologies

Figure 27. Professional competencies for developing effective early literacy initiatives (N=120)

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS
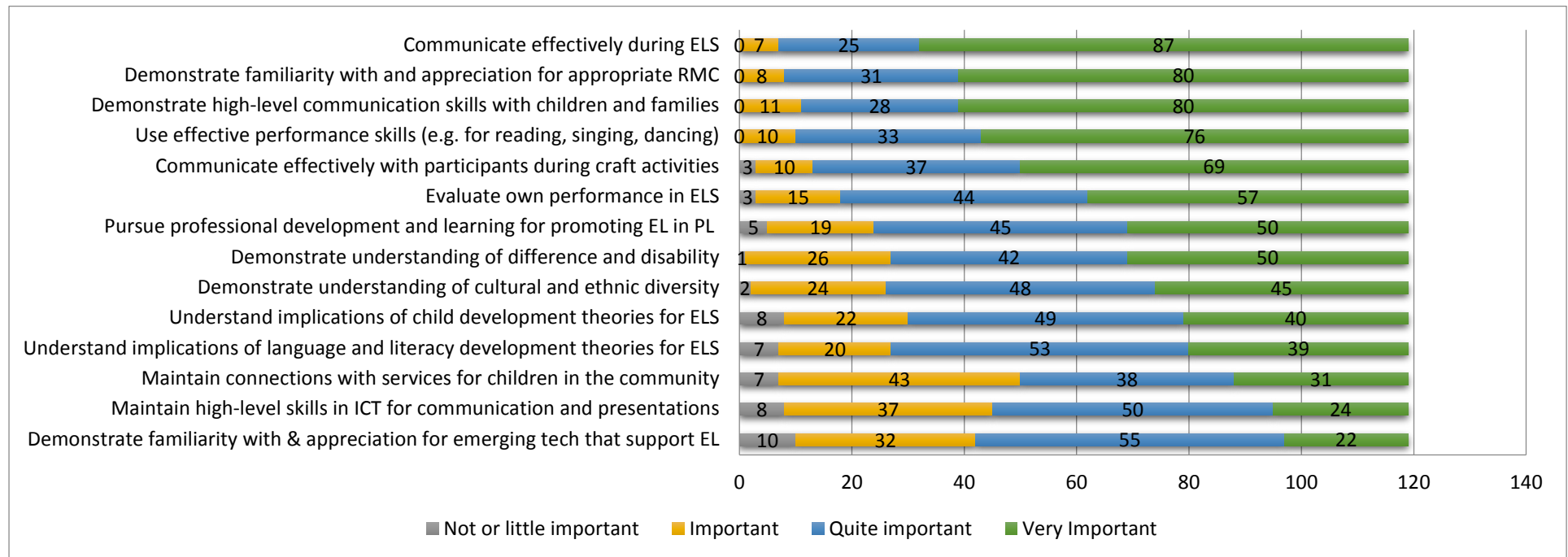
Key: EL = Early literacy; ELS = Early Literacy Sessions; RMC= reading materials for children; PL = public library/libraries; ELI = early literacy initiatives; ICT = information and communication technologies

Figure 28. Professional competencies for preparing and presenting effective early literacy sessions (N=120)

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
ELP Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

Responses met the expectation that competencies specific to ELS (e.g. *communicate effectively during ELS, demonstrate high-level skills in communicating with children and families, using effective performance skills and communicating effectively during craft activities*) would be rated as most important for preparing and presenting effective ELS, and those relevant to both ELS and other ELI would receive very similar ratings in response to both questions.

'*Demonstrate familiarity with (and appreciation for) appropriate reading materials for children*' emerged as the second most important competency for both ELS and ELI. This suggests that staff involved in preparing and presenting ELS require time and professional development dedicated specifically to developing this competency, even when they are not involved in ELI tasks such as building and updating the children's book collection. There is also a need to explore what criteria library staff use in defining reading materials for children as 'appropriate' (e.g. reader characteristics such as age, gender or cultural and linguistic backgrounds and/or book features such as theme/field, genre, format), and whether these criteria are informed by relevant research.

Notably, although most participants rated '*high-level skills in ICT for communication and presentations*' as an important to very important competency for both ELS and ELI, with more respondents considering it 'quite or very important' for ELI, than for ELS, as noted in Section 4.4, 33% and 63% of respondents reported not using ICT in respectively ELS and ELP offered by their libraries. This discrepancy suggests that these library staff require more opportunities to develop and/or demonstrate this competency.

The competencies of *understanding the implications of child development theories and early language and literacy development theories* were rated as more important for developing effective ELI than for preparing and presenting effective ELS. In either group of competences, they were not among those considered most important, and are, for example, positioned below '*Demonstrate familiarity with (and appreciation for) appropriate reading materials for children*' in Figure 27 and Figure 28 above. This may reflect the strong emphasis on reading materials and library collections in the LIS field, rather than, for instance, on working with and educating children and families, which is emphasised in courses in early childhood education and care. It also suggests that library staff may need to become (more) familiar with theories of early child and early language and literacy development before they can appreciate how knowledge of such theories can inform ELI in general and ELS in particular.

Additionally, from the list of ELI competencies, '*Demonstrate familiarity with Australia's early childhood care and education system*' received the fewest responses (97) in the important to very important range, with 23 respondents rating it as 'not or little important'.

Considered together, the ratings of these two competencies may relate to the lower availability of ELP offered by public libraries (see Section 4.3); if libraries offer few information events focused on early literacy (especially for childcare educators), for example, knowledge about early language and literacy or child development theories or familiarity with Australia's childcare education system would not be viewed as important for library staff. Yet, understanding the childcare system, for example, could support libraries in developing more effective partnerships with childcare settings and reaching families with working parents, which this survey revealed as a priority and challenge for NSW public libraries' efforts to promote early literacy (see Section 4.7).

ELI Early Literacy Initiatives
ELS Early Literacy Sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Preschool Storytime)
**ELP** Early Literacy Programs - all early literacy initiatives excluding ELS

4.6.2   Other relevant competencies

Respondents were also invited to identify other competencies (i.e. not included in Question 42 or 44) they viewed as important for ELI (Question 43) or ELS (Question 45). Responses to these and all other open-ended questions analysed for this report were subject to content analysis. This involved categorising the answers according to concepts/themes that were identified in them, and counting the number of respondents who had mentioned each theme. The themes were identified on the basis of tokens (words, phrases or statements) in the responses by interpreting these tokens in the context of the question and the survey as a whole, and then grouped into categories.

For ELI, 79 out of the 120 respondents who had rated ELS competencies could or did not identify any additional competencies, with 10 among them explicitly stating this (e.g. 'none', 'x', 'all covered from above'). Additionally, two responses mentioned that the previous question identified relevant competencies, yet there were limited resources/funding for professional development.

> *The above competencies are excellent, however, the reality is that public libraries are chronically underfunded. While this situation exists it is unlikely that the resourcing would be available to deliver these programs or for staff to develop these competencies to a significant level.*

> *Allocation of longer working hours to be able to facilitate the requirements needed to develop an effective early literacy program. We have limited funding, time and resources.*

In the remaining 39 responses, the analysis revealed 70 tokens that specified competencies other than those listed for ELI. Of those, 43 tokens referred to **personal attributes**, not all of which were explicitly related to ELI by the respondents. These included: affinity for working with children and families (14); being engaging (9); enthusiasm (6); love of/passion for reading and learning (4); communication skills (3); creativity (3); friendliness (1); openness to new ideas and technologies (1) common sense (1); and confidence (1). The analysis revealed 27 tokens identifying **professional knowledge and skills**, some of which (identified with an asterisk below) were more specific than the competencies the participants were asked to rate, while others were general professional competencies. These included: presentation skills (6); advocating and passion for early literacy* (4); ability to educate and empower parents* (3); crowd control/group management skills (3); finding and implementing resources (1); regular participation in relevant professional development* (3); planning and leading early literacy programs* (1); teamwork (1); time management (1); knowledge of rhymes and songs* (1), early literacy and numeracy* (1), and children's literature* (1), as well as *"a strong understanding of how early literacy programs run by public libraries differ from those run in early childhood centres eg programs run to educate parents on the importance of reading, singing, talking to babies and modelling how this is done"* (1).

For ELS, answers to the question about other competencies closely overlapped with those about other competencies for ELI. This is expected because ELI include ELS. In fact, some answers to Question 45 simply referred back to the response the survey participant had provided for Question 43. A small number of competencies mentioned in responses to this question, however, were specific to ELS and included: "*pass on to children the world of stories and the power of play*"; "*willingness to try various methods of presentation",* and

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"c*ompetencies in how to be inclusive of families with a disability and behavioural difficulties to develop strategies to enable inclusion in mainstream programs".*

Many of the 'other' competencies for ELI and ELS mentioned by respondents were already included in the list of competencies they had rated or intentionally excluded from the list of competencies as explained above. Responses that refer to the power of play, different ways of presenting ELS, and understanding the difference between ELS and literacy activities in formal early childhood education settings are worth noting, however, as they indicate both parallels between the public library sector and early childhood education (e.g. valuing play-based learning and the ability to adapt one's teaching strategies to the strengths and interests that children bring with them) and differences in the ways these two sectors can promote early language and literacy development (e.g. the libraries placing high significance of modelling how parents/families can support early literacy in the home environment, due to limited duration and frequency of ELS).

4.6.3 Professional development resources

Resources for developing and presenting ELS

Survey participants were also asked to indicate whether they used any resources to help them with development or conducting early literacy sessions (e.g. guidelines for reading books to children, workshops on preparing early literacy sessions at public libraries, etc.). This question received 86 responses. Of these, 15 were negative ('nil', 'no', 'none recently', n/a, 'not applicable to my role'). Content analysis of the remaining 71 responses produced 299 tokens.

Among these responses, there were 37 general statements; they varied from indicating the focus (e.g. 'child development') or types (e.g. craft activities, puppets, nursery rhyme books, policies, educational guidelines) of the resources that respondents used (e.g. "Guidelines to understanding the various stages of child development. Preparation of craft and activities appropriate to different ages.") to simple positive statements such as 'Yes' or ones that mentioned the channel through which respondents accessed resources for developing and presenting ELS (e.g. 'internet and email').

In more specific responses, the largest number of tokens (39) fell in the category 'books and other print materials', and included mention of publishers (e.g. American Library Association) as well as many book and magazine titles (e.g. 'Magpies', 'Playschool Useful Book', 'The Reading Bug by Paul Jennings', 'Enjoying Library Storytime by Jo Potter').

Thirty-two tokens (32) referred to particular professional or library-oriented/friendly projects, most with a focus on early literacy and offering online materials. The projects/resources included: 10 Minutes a Day; Australian Breastfeeding Association; Better Beginnings; Blackrose International Storytelling; Blacktown City Libraries YouTube Project; Children's Book Council of Australia; Early Words (pamphlets); 'Flannel Friday and other librarian blogs'; Good Reading; Let's Read; Little Big Book Club; Mem Fox's website; Paint the Town REaD; PBWorks; raisingchildren.net.au; Storybox; WordsforLife; Zero to Three.

Professional networks – local, statewide and international - emerged as another dominant resource, with 26 tokens, as did workshops, particularly workshops organised by State Library of NSW, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), and the

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Australian Storytellers' Guild (NSW), and the respondents' library zone (regional) meetings (20 tokens).

Several respondents mentioned using 'in-house' resources (e.g. existing programs, props, locally produced training DVD, 'on the job training')(7 tokens) and drawing on one's personal experience (4), while one mentioned relying on parents to learn about what their children like.

Access to relevant professional development opportunities

Survey participants were also asked a more general question: "Do you have access to professional development opportunities for learning about early literacy and ways to support it?". The question allowed them to select one or more of the following options:

(1) Working Group (Young People in NSW Public Libraries),

(2) eList (young people)

(3) Other. Please Specify:… .

This question received 104 responses. Of these respondents, 43.3% had access to one type of professional development opportunity, 43.3% to two, and 13.5% to all three. Examples of 'other' opportunities were provided by 34 respondents and repeated most of the resources they had cited for learning about preparing and conducting ELS. Additional resources included: 'IBBY, IFLA, CBCA and ALIA membership', 'REaDtember consultant is tasked to train staff while one the job', 'Intereach, local preschool', 'Undertook MOOC – via Open2Study & Gowrie Victoria', 'local Early Childhood Australia events', 'State Library of NSW Consultants are always really helpful'.

Of the 29 survey participants who did not respond to this question, 7 were library managers, 12 were children's librarians, 1 was a branch librarian, 7 were library officers, and 2 had other positions. Given the large proportion of children's librarians in this group, it is possible that this question was interpreted as a repetition of the previous one, which focused only on ELS. This interpretation in turn reflects a view of ELS as public libraries' core contribution to promoting early literacy (e.g. no respondent mentioned resources on resourcing such as support for preparing funding applications). It is also possible that staff who do not have such opportunities did not answer the question. Library staff working in regional and remote communities have fewer professional development opportunities available locally and limited budgets for attending training and professional development activities.

Overall, participants' responses about professional development resources and opportunities suggest that public library staff involved in ELI have access to and are aware of a rich variety of such resources and opportunities, with many going beyond those they are required to access or participate in as part of their job. These responses also suggest that library staff have a holistic orientation to professional development, where resources for 'working with children in public libraries', 'preparing and presenting early literacy sessions' and 'early literacy' are seen to all have the potential to enhance the knowledge and skills library staff require to successfully promote early literacy in their communities.

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4.7   Priorities, benefits and challenges of early literacy initiatives

In the survey's final section, respondents were given an opportunity share their views about the key priorities, benefits and challenges of ELI at their library, as well as any other views about ELI offered by their library or public libraries in general.

4.7.1   Priorities

Asked to share their views about what aspects of early literacy were key priorities at their library, 99 respondents identified a number of priorities that extended beyond the question's explicit focus on early literacy. Figure 29 visualises the most frequent words in their responses.

Figure 29. Early literacy priorities at your library: a word cloud visualising respondents' views

Coding revealed three top priorities related to early literacy: 'children's learning and development' (comprising 78 tokens out of all 292 tokens coded for this question), 'educating carers' (37), and 'engagement' (80).

Just over half of all **'children's learning and development'** tokens fell into the subcategory 'early language and literacy' (41), and the rest did not explicitly refer to literacy or language and were therefore subcategorised into 'early learning' (23), 'music and nursery rhymes' (8) and 'learning about the library' (6). 'Early language and literacy' tokens included ones that mentioned 'language and communication' (12), 'reading/reading readiness' (8) and a smaller number that referred to specific aspects of emergent literacy such as 'vocabulary' (5), 'phonological awareness' (4), 'print and alphabet knowledge' (4) and 'writing' (1). 'Early

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learning' included references to learning, memory and cognitive processes in general (7) and to 'social skills' (9), 'play-based learning' (2), 'fine motor skills' (2), 'numeracy' (1), and 'routine' (1).

Considered together, responses coded under 'children's learning and development' indicate that the focus of the library services explored under the umbrella term 'early literacy initiatives' in this study (which can also be referred to as 'children's library services') extends beyond early literacy to include other domains of development, and that library staff view language and literacy development from a holistic perspective, as part of children's learning and development more generally. This includes learning about the library and becoming a library user, as suggested in responses such as:

> *having the children come into the library, be familiar in the library space, enjoy the sessions, know the staff, and enjoy the books and programs*

> *children learn the library is a good place, borrowing books becomes a habit*

> *awareness of library services and resources.*

Importantly, many of the responses to this question emphasised the priority of **'educating carers'** (37). This included educating families 'about parenting and children's learning' in general (10), as illustrated by these responses:

> *helping parents to interact with their child's learning*

> *empowering parents to become involved in child's development*

> *resources for professionals and parents — collections of board books, picture books, CDs, DVDs, databases, parenting books and magazines.*

Reflecting the survey's focus on early literacy, 73% of tokens in this category emphasised the need to educate carers 'about language and literacy development' and how they can support it (27). Examples include:

> *Encouraging parents to read to their children everyday. / Offering support and guidance to parents/carers on ways to encourage children to read and to be part of the library service*

> *educating parents and caregivers the value of reading and singing to their children, promoting early literacy to families through offering session and encouraging book borrowing for example where families can promote literacy at home*

> *modelling good reading skills for parents to engage with their children.*

These responses suggest that many library staff have "*a strong understanding of how early literacy programs run by pubic libraries differ from those run in early childhood centres eg programs run to educate parents on the importance of reading, singing, talking to babies and modelling how this is done*", a competency highlighted as important by a respondent to this survey.

Many tokens in the category of **'engagement'** (80), which typically included words such as 'fun', 'love', 'passion' and 'enjoy/enjoyable/enjoyment', could be seen as related to early literacy. Among them, however, only 7 made an explicit connection to one or more aspects of 'children's learning' and were coded both under 'engagement' and under the appropriate subcategory of 'children's learning' (e.g. *"making learning through reading fun", "making*

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literacy fun"). Many more did not make that connection explicit (e.g. *"ensuring that sessions are enjoyable", "encouraging enjoyment, discovery and imagination"*). This may be indicative of a need for library staff to develop a better understanding of the importance of engagement for promoting early literacy and/or a better ability to articulate their understanding of this connection. Strong engagement during storytime, for example, could increase young children's eagerness to tell people other than the caregivers who took them to the library about that experience, thus stimulating interactions with the potential to promote language development, to borrow books after storytime and read them with their parents or older siblings at home, and visit the library again.

Tokens coded under 'engagement' were further subcategorised into: 'engaging library sessions' (34), 'engagement with books' (28), 'welcoming/fun/safe environment' (9), 'engagement with language' (5), 'engaging stories and storytelling' (4), and 'effective communication with parents and children' (4). The explicit reference to sessions for children, rather than other ELI, in many of the responses highlights the view that ELS are seen as public libraries' main priority in supporting early literacy. Many respondents also appeared to view books (rather than DVDs, apps, audio-books, etc.) as the main type of resource for supporting early literacy.

Finally, it is worth noting that among the nine responses identifying the library environment as a priority, 2 focused on the priority of providing a rich literacy environment, while 7 emphasised that the environment needs to be safe, welcoming, fun and comfortable. Examples include:

> *Babies and infants are given the opportunity to listen to, hear and enjoy a wide range of language, songs and rhymes in a safe environment.*

> *priority is that people are comfortable coming to the library and enjoying the sessions, children learn the library is a good place*

> *fostering a sense of safety in library and library staff*

> *Creating a children's area - a fun place where they feel safe and comfortable.*

> *Providing a warm welcoming environment for parents, carers and children to facilitate growth and learning*

These responses demonstrate library's staff awareness of the need to appeal to families who may be new to the experience of visiting a library and to communities with low literacy levels, who may need to build a sense of trust in and belonging to the library as a social institution as well as a physical space. Addressing this challenge is particularly important for libraries serving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (State Library New South Wales, 2015b), refugees, and families experiencing intergenerational illiteracy.

Other early literacy priorities that the survey respondents identified included: 'promoting the library' (19), 'staffing and professional development' (14), 'developing age-appropriate programs' (12), 'hard-to-reach groups' (10), 'community service' (9), 'quality of collection' (8), 'funding' (7), 'accessibility' (5), 'partnerships' (2) and 'inclusivity' (1). Among these responses, several suggest that public libraries strive to support early literacy as best as possible despite limited resources, and do that within the context of their community-building efforts:

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> *Being realistic about what is possible in a single-staffed institution (which isn't an aspect of early literacy development but shapes potential programmes ...)*

> *Communicating the benefits of early childhood literacy to the entire community.*

> *The literacy level of our community in the various centres is just below the national average. We endeavour to elevate this trend in all the activities we prepare and present. This is the underlying principle in all that we do in children's work.*

Responses that refer to staffing and professional development include four that explicitly mention staff having an understanding of and reflecting on language and literacy learning as a priority.

Managers' perspectives on priorities

Among the 25 responses from library managers, the most commonly cited priority was 'engagement' (21), especially 'engagement with books' (9) and 'engaging library sessions' (9), followed by 'effective communication with children and parents' (3) and 'engagement with stories and storytelling' (2). The second highest priority cited by managers was 'children's learning and development' (12 tokens), with references to 'early language and literacy' (7 tokens, among which 3 referring to 'reading readiness', 3 to 'early language and literacy', 2 to 'vocabulary' and 1 to 'print and alphabet knowledge') and early learning (3 tokens, including 'social skills' (2) and 'music and nursery rhymes' (1), with no reference made to 'play', 'numeracy', 'routine' or 'fine motor skills').

Other priorities mentioned by managers included 'educating carers' (9 tokens, 'about language and literacy development' (5) and 'about parenting and children's learning' (4)), 'staffing and professional development' (7), 'promoting the library' (5), 'community service' (5), 'funding' (4), the 'collection' (4), and 'hard-to-reach groups' (4). The frequency of references to these priorities in the managers' responses reflects their responsibility to ensure that any initiaves promote engagement with the library as a place for learning in the community and that staff have opportunities for professional development, and their lower involvement in developing and presenting early literacy sessions, which are more concerned with directly supporting children's learning and educating carers.

4.7.2 Benefits

Respondents were also asked what they saw as the key benefits of early literacy initiatives. This question received 104 responses, in which the words 'children', 'reading', 'literacy', 'development' and 'books' as well as 'staff' and 'resources' were amongst the most frequent as shown in Figure 30. The coding of these responses led to categorising a total of 295 tokens into five main categories: 'children's learning and development' (165 tokens), 'early literacy support for families' (41), 'promoting the library' (41), 'community engagement' (37) and 'fun/happiness' (11). These matched closely the dominant views associated with the key aspects of early literacy priorities, suggesting a close relationship between the priorities and benefits of ELI.

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Figure 30. Benefits of early literacy initiatives: a word cloud visualising respondents' views

Within **'children's learning and development'**, the largest group of tokens identified **'early literacy support' (101)** as a key benefit. This is not surprising given the study's focus on early literacy. While many of these tokens referred to early literacy in general, further subgroups were defined for those referring to specific aspects of 'early literacy support': 'language development' (20), promoting 'love of reading' (20), 'engagement with books and stories' (14) and 'songs and rhymes' (7), and helping children 'learn to read' (5). These results suggest that most respondents viewed libraries as supporting early literacy by promoting language development and love of reading and books/stories in children, rather than by focusing on narrower skills such as '*print recognition*' (1). Other benefits classified under 'children's learning and development' included 'social skills' (19), 'school readiness' (11) and 'quality learning environment' (3). These responses suggest that public libraries support early literacy as part of supporting children's learning in general.

Responses that mentioned **'early literacy support for families'** (41) included:

> *Providing parents with the advice and encouragement required to foster the emerging early literacy skills of their child regardless of the parents literacy levels./ Presenting an experience that can be carried over into the home setting*

> *Some of my parents have never read a Dr Seuss book before they came to my story times. If we can excite the parents about reading the children will benefit. I have had Au Pair's record my sessions on their phones and the children use them as their bedtime stories for the next week until my next session with them.*

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Informing parents that the library has a lot to offer their family from birth onwards and assisting them with selection of material / information.

Distribution of the gift packs ensures every child has at least one book to hand and reminds all new parenting couples of the existence of the library. There is valuable information included but whether they ever read it ….

As some of these responses evidence, there is a close overlap between this group and the equally large group of tokens presenting **'promoting the library'** (41) as a key benefit. Examples include:

Positive library experience that promotes love of reading and awareness of library resources

Offering programmes to all children and their carers so that they become familiar with books and reading and become comfortable in the library so that reading and literacy becomes an important part of every young child's home environment

We are helping families and their children to develop the foundations of early literacy and language development by providing rhymetime and story time sessions and encouraging borrowing of our resources so that they can promote this at home.

The same observation can be made about responses referring to **'community engagement'** (37) as a benefit, as illustrated by these tokens:

community engagement, children, parents and grandparents learning and bonding together including our ESL community. Providing a healthy and happy environment that will bring the community into the library.

Building bonds with our community, and creating a space for new (and not so new) parents and carers to socialise and meet in an educational and fun environment. / The other key benefit to early literacy programs is that if you capture your target group young, you grow up a whole generation of children who love the library, and what it can offer.

Those sessions that our small team can deliver are of immense benefit to our small rural community. / we have a large indigenous population and on a recent visit to a primary school with a large number of Aboriginal students I was encouraged by the enthusiasm of the children to what I was offering.

selling the library service to the whole community / Community engagement; we often ask other service providers to sell their services at our sessions to increase the knowledge of the service like Relationships Australia or Playgroups NSW.

Managers' perspectives on benefits

Managers responses to this question (n=26) reflected similar views, citing 'children's learning' (29 tokens), 'early literacy support' (20), 'community service' (13), 'early literacy support for families' (10) 'promoting the library' (10) as the main benefits.

In sum, responses to this question imply that for public libraries to effectively promote early language and literacy, and learning more generally, they need to build strong bonds with and within the local community and actively promote their services.

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4.7.3   Challenges

Responses to the survey provided some insight into the key challenges for ELI. This question received 78 responses, in which the words 'children', 'programs', 'staff', 'sessions', as well as 'time', 'resourcing' and funding' followed by 'crowd', 'space' and 'demand' were amongst the most frequent as shown in Figure 31.

Figure 31. Challenges for early literacy initiatives: a word cloud visualising respondents' views

The coding of the 78 responses to the question about challenges for ELI produced 226 tokens organised into four main categories: **'resources' (125 tokens), 'recognition' (37), 'early literacy sessions and learning' (32)** and **'hard-to-reach families' (31)**.

In the **'resources'** category, the main challenges mentioned were 'staffing' (55), 'meeting demand' (24) and 'funding' (22), followed by 'space' (13), 'providing interesting and current materials' (3), 'technology' (2) and 'poor use of resources' (1), with specific mention of 'craft', which is a staple component of mixed-age and preschool storytime sessions: '*more emphasis on craft materials than on actual reading'.* Many of the responses citing staffing as a challenge explained that in relation to 'meeting demand' and 'funding' as well as to broader challenges such as 'recognition' and 'early literacy sessions and learning':

> *Huge demand for these sessions, with limited staff available to present, which*
> *results in very crowded sessions and creates challenges for crowd-control.*

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> *Staffing and time to prepare and present a variety of entertaining programs to encourage children (of varying needs and abilities) and their carers into the library and to use resources available.*

> *Inadequate training and professional opportunities*

> *Support from other staff to present programs and adequate time to develop and prepare programs.*

> *Not enough staff to cover sessions and participate in outreach eg childcare visits offering separate sessions to 2-3 year olds not able to currently do this, not enough staff interested in being involved in early literacy programs.*

> *For us it is all about professional staffing, we are limited in what we can do due to staffing. / It is only staff enthusiasm and commitment that delivers programs at present. / The Baby Bounce sessions are delivered on a voluntary basis by a local teacher. / So staff, funding and council support are our key challenges.*

> *It is very important for staff used for these programs to have certain skills and knowledge otherwise the programs are not relevant to the children and parents attending.*

> *Finding staff with the appropriate skills and qualifications.*

> *Holistic understanding of literacy and literacy development by library staff preparing and delivering the sessions / Knowledge acquisition and professional development /*

One response also suggested that there is a need to acknowledge library staff involved in ELI and the context in which they work as being different from early childhood educators and formal early childhood education and care contexts:

> *We are also not early childhood educators with all the expertise but are parents and literacy advocates who love providing the public with fun, free programs that hopefully develop early literacy skills.*

Considered together, these responses suggest that library staff perceive a strong need for professional development that would support them in developing and delivering effective ELI (with several responses mentioning explicitly the areas of early childhood and language and literacy development and/or performance skills), and that any such professional development opportunities and frameworks need to be sensitive to the unique strengths and challenges of the public library context.

Among the responses that mentioned **recognition (37)** as a challenge, many referred specifically to the need for appreciation of the importance of ELIs by **families (20), the public library/organisation itself (9)**, and **the wider community (5)**.

Examples referring to **families** include:

> *Parents not understanding their role in the program (they cannot just sit and talk).*

> *Parents/carers viewing sessions as free babysitting rather than opportunities for engagement and learning. / Parents/carers who disrupt/disengage throughout the session.*

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> *Encouraging parents to be more involved not just relying on the library staff member who is presenting the program to entertain their children. Instilling the benefits for children to attend regularly.*

> *Parents who come often do not borrow books as they say they have stacks at home so we do not have an indication of the range of material accessed by the child.*

Responses also mentioned the challenge of receiving recognition from within the **organisation** itself, from other library staff, managers and councils, and alluded to the changes in the public library context in NSW anticipated at the time the survey was conducted, late 2014 (e.g. council amalgamations in 2016 led to a reduction in the number of public library services and changes in library management).

> *Most library staff do not want to get involved in children's programs. These programs are not usually counted as desk shifts so staff in the Children's Team have programs plus desk shifts resulting in heavy workloads.*

> *Currently programs are well supported, but not every manager/director recognises the value to the community. Policy changes and a perception that libraries are irrelevant in the digital age are the biggest challenges.*

> *Restructures and Change of Management that are not familiar with Children's Early Literacy Programs and staffing them appropriately.*

> *Many Councils (and sometimes Libraries) don't see Early Literacy as an essential part of Library Service so consequently funding and allocation of staff are a low priority.*

Responses that referred to views of the **wider community** included "Our sessions are free – seen as lesser compared to paid sessions by businesses", and mentioned "conveying the importance of such programs to the wider community" as a challenge.

Tokens in the broader category of **'early literacy sessions and learning' (32)** described challenges, including current as well as some that had been successfully addressed, related to 'staff knowledge and learning framework' (10), 'ELS entertain and inform' (7), 'caregivers' (5), 'inclusivity' (4), 'limited English' (4) and 'craft' (2). The first of these groups featured responses (some of which were also included in the broader category of 'resources', specifically 'staffing') such as:

> *The sessions we offer are relaxed, friendly, based on a critically assessed, on the job, formula. We have taken scientific based theory and created programs that engage and pass on skills and habits to children and adults.*

> *Recruitment for children program staff can benefit from looking outside library trained staff. It can be easier to provide "library" training rather than the skills to develop and deliver children's programs.*

> *Incorporating a learning framework into program development and delivery*

Such responses convey the understanding that the focus of services for children offered by public libraries in NSW is not solely language and literacy but early learning in general, and that collaboration with experts in children's learning and curriculum development could help enhance the educational benefits of programs for children offered at public libraries.

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Responses that identified keeping sessions entertaining and informative as a challenge also mentioned school readiness and early learning. At the same time, two respondents argued that reading and literacy, rather than craft, must be the core focus of ELS, with one stating: "*The importance placed on craft as part of an early literacy program causes me concern. Craft for a preschool program can be included, but it should not be the focus of the program.*" These responses reflect a view of craft as an activity that competes with activities viewed as more obviously related to literacy such as reading and writing, and a need for library staff to understand whether and if so how craft can support specific aspects of early language and literacy development.

References to **'hard to reach'** groups as a challenge identified particular experiences such as *"Parents "owning" a program (can cause problems when new families come in)."* and difficulties in resourcing outreach programs at the same time as meeting demands for on-site sessions or in simply creating interest in families and communities who stand to benefit the most from ELI:

> *...next year we are starting Toddler Time (which I know will be very popular) and as a consequence our outreach visits will be reduced to one visit per centre per year. We simply can't stretch ourselves far enough.*

> *Not reaching those families who need the literacy programs most in our community. When approached parents have made comments such as 'no he/she doesn't do that' or 'it's not for us'. We have tried to take the programs to shopping centres etc. but there still has been little involvement by people who seem to be less educated.*

> *Parents of less advantaged status are less likely to engage in early literacy programs than are more advantaged parents, and their children are less likely to have access to early literacy resources as they may place less value on such resources, have less time and money.*

> *Small children are not always good currency / / community apathy – if local area does not have a great opinion of value of reading or language or avoid the library for any reason, then we struggle to reach the people who need it most*

In this group, five tokens identified as a challenge the need to move beyond "preaching to the converted", for instance:

> *We "preach to the converted". It is a challenge getting some of the people from lower socio-economic backgrounds who would benefit greatly from such programmes to attend - even if they are already in the library when a session is on.*

> *Levels of education of our parents. / Targeting effectively.*

> *Much of our programme delivery is to the regular lovers of our sessions, but there are so many parents, carers and young children in our community that would benefit from the programmes.*

Other tokens identified different types of 'hard-to-reach' groups: 'Indigenous communities' (1), 'non-library users' (6), 'non-readers' (2), 'fathers' (1) and 'working parents' (3).

Responses that mentioned 'working parents' reflect the view of parents as a child's first teacher, which dominates early childhood education and is promoted through Australia's

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Early Years Learning Framework, and the significance of the parents attending and learning from ELS:

> *Connecting with parents. Most parents of young children are in the workforce. Library opening hours are the same as office hours. Whilst children may still be accessing the library with a carer, their parents are not gaining the benefits of our programs as the child's first teacher.*

> *Parents working round the clock are not able to attend sessions at regular times. If they can't attend they can't learn and therefore won't be able to follow up at home.*

> *With many more mothers now in workforce, not so much time to attend daytime sessions (however we have recently organised to run 3 monthly sessions to the end of the year for a local pre-school / daycare provider - this means we are now reaching some of the children who would previously have been brought along by a parent)*

At the same time, they do not seem to reflect an understanding of parents/carers as a valuable resource which presenters could mobilise during the delivery of ELS, and which is a distinctive advantage of ELS at public libraries compared to shared reading or other literacy experiences conducted at childcare centres.

Managers' perspectives on challenges

Among the 24 managers' responses to the question about challenges to ELI, 'resources' (28 tokens) was the most frequently mentioned challenge, with 'staffing' (17) not surprisingly emerging as a key concern for managers, followed by 'funding' (6) and 'meeting demand' (5).

Managers also perceived 'hard-to-reach' groups as a challenge (11 tokens), yet only mentioned 'non-library users' (2) and 'non-readers' (1) as subcategories.

Only 7 tokens in the 24 managers' responses cited 'early literacy sessions and learning' as a challenge for ELI. Compared with the 32 tokens in that category found in all 78 responses to the question, may be indicative of a difference in the challenges perceived by managers vs. respondents more directly involved in the design and delivery of ELS. This type of difference suggests that managers could benefit from developing a stronger awareness of the views of library staff involved in ELS, especially presenters, who are likely to have insights into observable behaviours – before, during or after ELS – that signal whether learning of particular kind or related to a given area of knowledge is taking place. Learning more about such observations, through more in-depth methods of data collection such as interviews with presenters, can also prove to be a useful strategy for building a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of ELI, especially ELS, that incorporates the perspectives of library staff.

Another difference is also worth examining: while 37 tokens in the 78 responses to this question cited 'recognition' as a challenge, only 5 such tokens were identified in the 24 managers' responses. This could be explained, at least partially, by the presence in the overall responses of 9 tokens that referred to recognition by the organisation (which includes 'management') and 20 to recognition by families, and the fact that these two subcategories were mentioned respectively only 1 and 3 times in the narrower group of managers' responses. This points to the need to examine the insights that library staff working directly with families may have on how they could improve the level of recognition for the importance of ELI among families. It also suggests that library service managers should

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examine whether and how – for example, through allocation of appropriate amount of time and other resources and professional development opportunities that focus on early literacy – the library service itself (including management and library staff not involved in ELI) demonstrates its commitment to early literacy and recognises the significance of ELI and the work and expertise of library staff directly involved in such initiatives.

4.8   Other issues related to early literacy initiatives

The final two questions of the survey asked respondents to share any other issues related to ELI at their libraries or in public libraries in general.

4.8.1   At your library

Responses to the first question (n=75) comprised 29 that did not identify any other issues (e.g. 'N/A', 'no', '-') – and could therefore be interpreted as evidence that these participants' responses to previous questions in the survey had covered most issues comprehensively – and 46 that did. The latter tended to highlight achievements at the libraries of the respondents, including strategies for overcoming some of the key challenges identified in the previous question (e.g. attracting 'hard-to-reach' groups such as working parents, first-time parents, or Indigenous communities; improving 'recognition' in the wider community; increasing borrowing and membership levels; implementing technology with care; educating parents about early literacy). Examples include:

They are very popular (the bulk of our programs and events attendance), could be considered as a flagship activity of the library due to the high visibility and customer feedback we receive. Our team approach using a variety of staff allows us to effectively deliver the frequency of sessions we currently offer.

1,000 Books Before School is a very successful programmes that encourages participation by giving milestone certificates. We always get the Mayor or a councillor to present the certificates at a presentation event which we hold every few weeks for those children who have reached the miles number of books enjoyed. We send out invitations to everyone, morning tea is available and it's a great networking opportunity for parents also. / Preschool children can also participate through their school.

We offer a very interactive program. We rarely use any technology (very occasionally a CD). It allows for engagement and interaction and the ability to respond to a situation. It makes it less a show and more a group. I originally attended storytimes as a parent and enjoyed the spontaneity of the staff and their ability to engage both the children and parents.

We have developed a PJ storytime program to help address the needs of children and parents that are working or not available during day hours. This has been hugely successful and we now offer them irregularly at all of our branches to maintain interest and demand. A lot of parent education has sprung from these sessions with many parents telling us how they develop new skills and confidence by watching us and our varying presentation skills.

Our children going off to school receive a certificate and bag as they graduate from Storytime. // I have 3 regular staff who share the delivery and preparation of early

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childhood programs (1 male and 2 females). They are all fabulous and both parents and children love them. I think they give the community's 'youngest readers and future rate payers' an excellent introduction to reading, books and libraries! / Last week was Talk Like a Pirate Day for Storytime so they dressed up and even made the front page of the Saturday edition of the local paper. // Our programs also bring young parents back into the library so they rediscover the things they loved but also all the e-resources - films, books, mags and music. // Recently a member told me that her 40 year old son's very first baby outing was a trip to the library to get a membership card. He is still borrowing today. Another lady said that she brought her children and now her grandchildren to Storytime and that the library is like a second home to their family. // Motto: Get them early and you will have them for life :) // We have an Indigenous Storytime group (lead by Aboriginal Health) who meet at the library independently in a separate room. We had hoped they would eventually join the main sessions but this has not happened after nearly 2 years. It is disappointing because their children miss out on the high quality activities that we offer mainstream and they rarely borrow anything. However they are still in the library each week.

The quality of the presenter is critical. Our sessions for very young children (0 to 3 years) are becoming increasingly popular, as our presenter is highly skilled at engaging the group and providing a quality experience. She is able to work with all sizes of group with ease. Incidentally this person is a volunteer, who works the rest of the time as an assistant Principal at local primary school. // I would like to run sessions for all ages more frequently, however lack of staff prevents this. //

Numbers are controlled by the number of tickets available - from 15 for toddlers at the branch to 30 for sessions in the main library (space being the deciding factor). Each ticket is for a family not a child. This allows for visiting grandparents etc. to attend as well. All our sessions encourage grandparents and fathers.

Sing, Read and Rhyme has been successfully operating as a lap sit program for many years with presenters signing and rhyming using their own voices. Our groups have grown continually. We provide a free booklet to those interested and also off the same booklet online. The program was listed as Best practice with IFLA several years ago and has never been advertised outside of the library newsletter. Parents requested that 2 year olds needed another step between this program and storytime so after much research we commenced 2-3 What about me? This program offered over 8 week cycle still relies on lo0ts of songs and rhymes in a very interactive session but includes a story and simple parent lead activity.

Two responses indicated that a library service had recognised and taken steps towards addressing the need for a literacy strategy and framework, one focusing on early literacy and the other on lifelong learning/literacy:

We are currently drafting an early literacy strategy because literacy is at the heart of what we do. It is the fundamental foundation underpinning the delivery of public library services.

Our new 4 year Strategic Plan for libraries and lifelong learning will build on early and adult literacy connections in our Shire as part of our vision for a framework of

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a Learning Alliance for the Eurobodalla. / On this basis I would be interested in being kept informed of this project and how we might contribute along the way

These responses, alongside several provided for previous questions, point to the importance of developing a framework for developing and evaluating ELI that builds on the existing efforts and strengths of public libraries in NSW and demonstrates sensitivity to the uniqueness of public libraries as a context for promoting (early) literacy within diverse communities.

A small number of responses reiterated key concerns such as "reduction in delivery of sessions next year by 1/3" and "not enough staff willing/interested in presenting programs", or raised additional ones:

Storytime type sessions are being offered at Art Galleries, Museums, Churches etc. Great that reading is being valued but there must be a stronger connection with Libraries as this is our core business. Either we compete with these other venues, or work with them so our Library staff are the ones delivering the reading experience at their venue.

While two offered ideas that could help promote early literacy as well as ELI at public libraries in general:

I would love to see programs such as Booktrust (UK) and Little Big Book Club (SA) implemented in NSW. To be able to reach families who would not normally attend a library or read a book to their children is so important.

More television campaigns about the importance of early childhood literacy would be of great value in any community.

4.8.2   At public libraries

Of the 64 participants who responded to the question asking them to share anything else they'd like about early literacy and public libraries, there were 26 who did not identify any further issues. The remaining 38 responses tended to reiterate concerns and achievements, as well as (and much more than answers to the previous question) also suggest ideas for improving public libraries' efforts to promote (early) literacy in diverse communities.

One response acknowledged the challenge of developing a unified framework for assessing the efforts of public libraries to promote early literacy while acknowledging their diversity:

There is such a wide variety of styles, programs and presentations on offer - it is very difficult to assess how each Library performs. Our community loves that we are free, are child friendly and offer their children fun, educational programs, with many commenting on how this is one of the few programs available for babies and toddlers anywhere (free or otherwise).

Another expressed hope that the current research project will help NSW public libraries overcome funding as a key challenge they currently face in promoting early literacy:

It would be highly encouraging to have more funding directed at this particular age group, particularly in light of recent baby boom trends. Hopefully this research would impact the Local Government to providing more resources and services to Children's Services in Libraries.

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Several responses stressed the importance of considering early literacy as part of a larger effort to improve literacy levels in the larger population, including adults experiencing disability:

> *These activities are central to the value of libraries in our community as important resources for supporting a literate and educated population.*

> *We should not stop at pre-school level. There are a large number of primary school children who are disadvantaged and are behind the literacy / numeracy levels for their class / age group. This group also needs assistance and sometimes the parents are not able to help them due to their poor literacy levels.*

> *We were involved in a 'free book for newborns' program, in partnership with Community Health a few years ago, and am trying to get that going again. Funding issues are the problem. This would be good to run statewide with a major sponsor. / / Early literacy for refugee background families is a growing cohort. We have purchased thousands of dollars of early literacy readers for all ages but the adults are really focused on the IELTS (international language test) workbooks. So the other resources are not really used to assist with early literacy. / / The State Library's Multicultural Service is well utilised by our service to provide a wide range of children's and adults books in other languages. / / I think libraries cover early literacy very well. My concern is adult literacy which is much harder to address apart from providing resources.*

> *We also deliver "storytime" sessions to adults with intellectual disabilities – and this is also an area that staff feel uncertain about.*

Three responses emphasised the value of state-wide and national partnerships with other early literacy providers, businesses and libraries across Australia:

> *Linking in with other service providers through Paint Blacktown REaD has been very fruitful and helped us increase our services even in an associated way as these organisation run baby Rhyme Time at their events*

> *There is a real potential for a state-wide early literacy partnership. Rio Tinto has a partnership with the State Library of WA - it would be good to see a similar partnership developed in NSW. Key players would include the State Library of NSW and big businesses with underlying support from a major educational institution. Local government does not have the resources to do this alone (nor, if asked, would key players consider it to be core business of local government)*

> *It would be nice that there was a national approach like the States, but I am not sure that cooperation would be likely as people are reluctant to forego what they have been doing for a long time*

Considered together, three other responses identified a tension between the need of collaboration with the early childhood care and education and school sectors and benefits of employing skilled educators or presenters outside the library industry, on the one hand, and a perceived risk that this may devalue the unique context for promoting early literacy that public libraries offer:

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> *That sometimes recruiting from outside the library industry has enormous benefits. That sometimes bending the library rules is okay. But always recruit and use staff that possess a genuine love for presenting children's programs.*

> *Need for some co-operation with pre-schools and schools*

> *There seems to be a growing trend to replace Children's library staff with early childhood trained staff or primary school teachers. Programs offered in libraries have a very different focus to those offered in school or early childhood centres. / There needs to be more focus on children's services and programs in all library courses fr0m TAFE to University.*

Overall, the additional issues that respondents identified as relevant to promoting early literacy in public libraries support the view that NSW public libraries need a strategy and framework for evaluating their efforts in promoting early literacy. To be successful, such a framework must be sensitive to the unique strengths of public libraries as a context for supporting early literacy in diverse communities (and its differences from formal early childhood education). It must also be informed by other national and international efforts to position public libraries and their partnerships with other organisations as key players in providing opportunities to increase the literacy levels of young children and the communities they belong to.

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5   Conclusion

This report presented the findings of a survey completed in September and October 2014 by 133 NSW public library staff involved in initiatives for supporting the language and literacy development of children from birth to 5 years of age. These early literacy initiatives include early literacy sessions for children and their families (e.g. Baby Rhyme Time, Toddler Time, and Preschool Storytime) and early literacy programs (e.g. information events for families or childcare educators; distribution of book packs or information on early literacy). The survey collected broad, quantifiable information about the respondents, the types of early literacy initiatives offered by their libraries, and their own engagement in these initiatives. It also asked respondents to share their views on the professional competencies and the key priorities, benefits and challenges related to early literacy initiatives.

The key priorities for early literacy initiatives at public libraries include supporting children's learning and development, increasing engagement, educating families, and promoting the library. They overlap closely with what survey respondents reported as key benefits of these initiatives, namely, enhancing children's learning and development (especially literacy), providing early literacy support for families, promoting the library, increasing community engagement, and offering fun and happiness. To deliver such benefits, however, libraries must overcome a range of challenges. Most significant among these are the limited resources available for early literacy initiatives, the difficulty of attracting children from 'hard to reach' groups, and the need for families, public library organisations and the wider community to recognise the value of such initiatives and the amount of work and dedication they require.

Most importantly, the survey data revealed a need for:

(1) resources that can help library staff improve their knowledge of early language, literacy and learning, and

(2) a framework for evaluating and designing early literacy initiatives that reflects the uniqueness of public libraries as a context for promoting early literacy in diverse communities, a context that differs from early childcare and education settings.

To achieve that, the framework and associated professional development resources must be informed by current research in early language, literacy and learning, by the perspectives of NSW public library staff with relevant experience, and by national and international advances that have enabled public libraries and their partner organisations to make a positive impact on young children's literacy.

Unlike other early literacy initiatives, early literacy sessions for young children and their families such as Baby Rhyme Time and Preschool Storytime are regularly offered at almost all public libraries across NSW. These sessions thus require further, more in-depth research and must be a key focus in developing an early literacy framework for NSW public libraries.

This framework and any professional development based on it must address the diverse roles (e.g. resourcing, developing, presenting and evaluating) that library staff fulfil in early literacy initiatives. They must also be complemented by resources for evaluating and improving public libraries' efforts to promote children's learning more generally and address the broader literacy and learning needs of their communities.

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Appendix 1: List of NSW public libraries in 2014

In 2014, 101 Library services operated by 151 local government authorities across NSW. The library services include 16 regional or joint library services operated collaboratively.

1. Albury City Libraries
2. Armidale-Dumaresq Library Service
3. Ashfield Library Service
4. Auburn Library Service
5. Balranald Library Service
6. Bankstown Library Service
7. Bathurst Library Service
8. Bega Valley Library Service
9. Berrigan Library Service
10. Big Sky Libraries
11. Blacktown Library Service
12. Blue Mountains City Library
13. Botany Bay Library Service
14. Bourke Library Service
15. Broken Hill Library Service
16. Burwood Library Service
17. Camden Library Service
18. Campbelltown Library Service
19. Canada Bay Library Service
20. Canterbury Library Service
21. Central Murray Library Service
22. Central Northern Library Service
23. Central West Library Service
24. Cessnock Library Service
25. Clarence Library Service
26. Cobar Library Service
27. Coffs Harbour Library Service
28. Eurobodalla Library Service
29. Fairfield Library Service
30. Glen Innes Severn Library Service
31. Gosford Library Service
32. Goulburn Mulwaree Library Service
33. Great Lakes Library Service
34. Grenfell Library Service
35. Gunnedah Library Service
36. Guyra Library Service
37. Hawkesbury Library Service
38. Hills, The Library Service
39. Holroyd Library Service
40. Hornsby Library Service
41. Hurstville Library Service
42. Inverell Library Service
43. Kempsey Library Service
44. Kiama Library Service
45. Kogarah Library Service
46. Ku-Ring-Gai Library Service
47. Lachlan Library Service
48. Lake Macquarie Library Service
49. Lane Cove Library Service

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50. Leeton Library Service
51. Leichhardt Library Service
52. Lithgow Library Service
53. Liverpool Library Service
54. Macquarie Library Service
55. Maitland Library Service
56. Manly Library Service
57. Manning Valley Libraries
58. Marrickville Library Service
59. Mid-Western Regional Council Library Service
60. Monaro Library Service
61. Mosman Library Service
62. Nambucca Library Service
63. Newcastle Region Library
64. North Sydney Library Service
65. North Western Library Service
66. Oberon Library Service
67. Parkes Library Service
68. Parramatta Library Service
69. Penrith Library Service
70. Pittwater Library Service
71. Port Macquarie-Hastings Library Service
72. Queanbeyan Library Service
73. Randwick Library Service
74. Richmond-Tweed Library Service
75. Richmond-Upper Clarence Library Service
76. Riverina Library Service
77. Rockdale City Library Service
78. Ryde Library Service
79. Shellharbour City Libraries
80. Shoalhaven Library Service
81. Singleton Library Service
82. South West Library Service
83. Strathfield Library Service
84. Sutherland Library Service
85. Sydney Library Service
86. Tenterfield Public Library
87. Upper Hunter - Muswellbrook Library Service
88. Upper Hunter Shire Library Service
89. Upper Lachlan Library Service
90. Wakool Library Service
91. Warringah Library Service
92. Waverley Library Service
93. Wentworth Library Service
94. Western Riverina Library Service
95. Willoughby Library Service
96. Wingecarribee Library Service
97. Wollondilly Library Service
98. Wollongong Library Service
99. Woollahra Library Service
100. Wyong Library Service
101. Yass Valley Library Service

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Appendix 2: Survey of NSW Public Library Staff Involved in Early Literacy Initiatives

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