



Queensland Public Library Standards and Guidelines

Literacy Services Standard
September 2010

10.1 Literacy Services Standard

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10.1.1 Objective and scope

To provide standards and guidelines for the continuing development of library services aimed at improving the literacy skills of all members of the community.

While literacy has traditionally been described as the ability to read and write, it is now seen to have a very broad context, with UNESCO describing it as “a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential and to participate fully in their community and wider society”. Described as the ability to understand and use printed information in various daily activities, literacy is not limited to reading, but also includes functional, numerical, financial, family, cultural and digital literacies. Increasing the levels of these multiple literacies within a community builds the capabilities necessary for lifelong learning.

Public libraries, regardless of their size, play a vital role in delivering programs that build and improve all types of literacy. As community hubs, they are particularly well placed to encourage and support the development of family literacy, recognised as a critical role in Queensland today. In turn, this provides people with the ability to use lifelong learning to enhance their capacity to reach their potential and participate effectively in society.

In its statement on *Information Literacy for all Australians*, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) highlights the role played by library staff in assisting library clients to navigate the world of information and helping to develop their information literacy. While this is clearly a vital role for libraries, information literacy is out of scope for this standard which focuses on basic functional literacies. These literacies (functional, numerical, financial, family, cultural and digital) more directly affect individuals and families in their daily lives. The term “literacy” used throughout the document as well as examples of resources and services also refer to this full range of literacy types.

10.1.2 Literacy Services Standard

10.1.2.1 Standard for community profiling

Regular analysis of relevant data should be undertaken to ensure current knowledge of factors which may affect literacy levels in the local government area. These factors include but are not limited to education levels, unemployment, welfare, computer usage, levels of internet uptake and the extent to which languages other than English are spoken. This knowledge should inform the development of appropriate literacy services and programs.

10.1.2.2 Standard for staff management

Literacy services should be coordinated by staff with suitable specialist knowledge, skills and experience. Staff should undergo regular training and professional development where possible. All library staff and volunteers should have an awareness of the range of literacies and be able to assist clients who experience difficulty with literacy. Induction sessions for new staff should include an awareness of the range of literacy resources and services. Staff should also be sensitive to possible feelings of stigmatisation and inadequacy in people with literacy issues and the role of family or community members who accompany them to the library.

For larger libraries, specific responsibility should be allocated for managing literacy collections and services. In libraries serving populations over 35,000, one of the qualified librarian positions should be a specialist position to suit the demographic needs of the community. This may be a Community Services position which includes responsibility for planning and managing literacy services.

For more details, refer to the Public Library Staffing Standard, Section 2.3.5.
[http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/98785/SLQ - Staffing Standard - May 2008.pdf](http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/98785/SLQ_-_Staffing_Standard_-_May_2008.pdf)

10.1.2.3 Standard for collection development

There are extensive resources available to support all types of literacy, many of which are found online. To supplement these resources and provide alternative formats, libraries may develop specific collections for people seeking to improve literacy skills. The selection and management of the library's literacy collection should be specifically detailed in the Collection Development Policy. This section of the policy should support the role of literacy services within the library as a whole and determine level of service and guidelines for collection building. It should define the purpose, scope and format of the literacy collection.

Wherever possible, the library service and/or other relevant authorities should provide an annual budget for the purchase of relevant literacy materials in all formats.

10.1.3 Guidelines

10.1.3.1 Guidelines for collections and resources

There are many excellent literacy resources available online and these are readily available, attractive and adaptable, allowing libraries of all sizes access to them. Local literacy collections should include a wide range of materials and formats, covering a broad range of literacy types. Materials to support literacy tutors should be available as appropriate. It is important to work with local tutors where possible to ensure that materials selected are appropriate for differing levels of literacy and cater to children, teenagers and adult learners. Care must be taken to ensure that adult literacy materials retain adult interest while being presented in appropriate language.

10.1.3.2 Guidelines for community engagement and consultation

Effective community engagement and consultation on literacy issues can provide valuable input into the planning of services and programs. Partnerships should be developed with agencies that represent and serve people of all ages with literacy problems to exchange information, discuss specific strategies and projects and to obtain feedback on current services. People with literacy issues may be invited to speak at staff meetings or other forums to raise awareness. To streamline communication, many libraries prefer to designate a suitably trained staff member as the main contact for these clients.

As a minimum, contact should be made with local schools, universities, TAFE institutes and Registered Training Organisations. The Queensland Council for Adult Literacy (QCAL) directory provides contacts for other organisations working in the literacy field.
<http://www.qcal.org.au/directory/index.htm>

10.1.3.3 Guidelines for programs and services

Public libraries can be seen as a welcoming, trusted space where those who are seeking to improve literacy skills in all areas can make the connections needed to further their skills without fear of judgment or stigma. A broad range of literacy programs including family literacy and services should be offered by all libraries, regardless of size, to encourage and enhance library usage by these clients and to create opportunities for development of skills

in a safe environment. As far as possible, they should be designed to promote participation in local community life through maximising practical skills and social participation. Services should be age appropriate and reflect a wide range of interests and abilities. Most libraries use information technology to connect and build competencies to a wider audience.

Examples of services and programs include:

- conducting sessions on basic life skills such as using a mobile phone, resume writing, enrolling to vote, and obtaining drivers licenses having local tutors, TAFE teachers, organisations and volunteers run library awareness programs for classes or individuals, using library facilities and materials;
- conducting introductory computer classes that are targeted at a basic level to give new users an understanding of basic concepts and practice;
- having local tutors, TAFE teachers, organisations and volunteers run library awareness programs for classes or individuals, using library facilities and materials;
- having a page written in simple English on the library web site listing online resources relevant to all areas of literacy;
- partnering with organisations such as The Smith Family to run targeted sessions on specific skills such as financial literacy and money management, computer usage and home skills such as nutrition and cooking, utilising materials and volunteers from these organisations;
- offering baby rhyme time or story time sessions in the library for children under five to encourage word and language development.

10.1.3.4 Guidelines for promotion and marketing

Best practice in literacy services highlights the need for good promotion of services and collections. The majority of people with literacy issues are unfamiliar with libraries and they may not be aware of services available, or feel intimidated by services that are perceived to be based around the written word. It is of vital importance to promote the provision of a discrete library collection for adult literacy borrowers as well as services available. To achieve this, a variety of promotional techniques can be used, including:

- ensuring that major events like Adult Learner's Week, and National Literacy and Numeracy Week are reflected in library displays;
- promoting the use of the organisation's facilities as meeting places for those involved in literacy;
- providing a welcoming physical and virtual environment utilising signage in universal symbols and/or relevant languages;
- offering library brochures and information flyers in large print or plain English and other languages appropriate to the community;
- producing library guides in audio formats suitable for both online and portable use;
- utilising media outlets such as community radio stations and newspapers to promote the availability of literacy services, resources and programs and encouraging council to advertise services through appropriate channels;
- ensuring library participation in specific education, multicultural or disabilities based events or festivals etc;
- distributing promotional material in a wide range of locations including shopping centres, medical centres and DVD hire locations;
- offering library tours and open days for targeted groups;
- developing specific strategies to inform adult new readers and community service providers about library collections and services.

10.1.4 Performance Indicators

- Regular analysis of statistical and demographic data to inform planning and budgeting of services
- Suitably trained staff assigned responsibility for coordinating services
- Provision of regular staff awareness training
- Number of consultations with education/literacy groups
- Number of targeted programs and participation in them

10.1.5 Definitions and References

10.1.5.1 Definitions

Cultural literacy: the ability to understand and appreciate the similarities and differences in the customs, values, and beliefs of one's own culture and the cultures of others.

Family literacy: literacy programs and activities that are family centred, usually involving parents and their children, and recognising the importance of intergenerational activity in the development of literacy. Programs may include assistance for parents in becoming their child's most important teacher, interactive literacy activities for all family members and an adult literacy component.

Financial literacy: the ability to make informed and confident decisions regarding all aspects of budgeting, spending, saving and the use of financial products and services, from everyday banking through to borrowing, investing and planning for the future.

Functional literacy: the ability to engage in those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning within a specific local community.

I can sing I can read: a music based literacy program that promotes reading and self esteem through the vocal expression of karaoke. Used by the State Library of Queensland effectively in Indigenous Knowledge Centres in North Queensland.

Information literacy: Skill in finding the information one needs, including an understanding of how libraries are organized, familiarity with the resources they provide (including information formats and automated search tools), and knowledge of commonly used research techniques. The concept also includes the skills required to critically evaluate information content, and employ it effectively, as well as an understanding of the technological infrastructure on which information transmission is based, including its social, political, and cultural context and impact.

Lifelong learning: the process of acquiring knowledge or skills throughout life through education, training, work and general life experiences. The primary goal of lifelong learning is to provide people with knowledge and skills they require to adapt to and learn in a constantly changing world accelerated by globalization and new information technologies.

Literacy: the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community - to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential.

Media literacy: the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create messages in a variety of forms (print, audio, film/video, Internet, etc.) based on an informed, critical understanding of the nature of mass media, the techniques used by producers of media, and the impact of those techniques on the individual and society.

Numerical literacy: the ability to understand, analyse, critically respond to and use mathematics in different social contexts.

RTO: Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are authorised to deliver accredited training by the Australian Department of Employment and Training.

10.1.5.2 References

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