

# A manifesto for education libraries



UNISON represents more than 20,000 library staff in a wide variety of settings. Our members work in libraries and learning resource centres in schools, colleges and universities across the UK, as well as in the more visible public library service.

UNISON knows that libraries are at the heart of learning, but this isn't widely felt or fully appreciated by decision-makers.

The best of educational settings place a high value on their library and information service. They understand it is a hallmark of their excellence. But too often, short-sighted decision-makers are closing and cutting services and skimping on stock and staff. This is usually driven by financial expediency and in ignorance of the impact of their actions.

## UNISON's pledge

UNISON will take every opportunity to keep libraries at the heart of learning.

We will:

**Promote** the role of library staff in teaching and learning, encouraging their inclusion in pedagogic teams and management structures.

**Emphasise** that information literacy is a vital skill in learning, working and life and needs to be taught under a whole school, college and university policy.

**Campaign** against closures, cuts in book stock, staff and services.

**Press** government to ensure that schools, colleges and universities have a professionally run library and information service, central to the delivery of teaching and learning.

**Lobby** for fit-for-purpose library facilities to be required in capital programmes, such as Building Schools for the Future, Building Colleges for the Future and the academy programme, and consult library staff on their design.

**Participate** in the library panel of the sector skills council, LLUK and on the professional development group



of the Training and Development Agency for Schools working towards a qualifications framework that offers career progression and appropriate professional development.

**Partner** with professional organisations to advance the interests of library staff.

**Engage** parents, students, governors, boards and other unions in promoting the library and information service.

**Co-ordinate** campaign activity across education sectors and UNISON service groups.

## **The contribution of library and information services to teaching and learning**

Reading for pleasure in early years is of direct benefit to literacy levels. Often, a love of learning begins in the library. It is an egalitarian environment that has the power to diminish disadvantage. And not everyone has access to the internet or can afford books. It is also a haven for those with nowhere to study at home.

With guidance, learners can develop the ability to find, recognise and analyse information that significantly improves their cognitive ability. Information literacy is a skill for the workplace, active citizenship and navigating life.

**“Libraries are egalitarian environments and have the power to diminish disadvantage”**



**“UNISON knows that libraries are at the heart of learning and that their staff are at the heart of the service”**



- reading for pleasure in early years benefits literacy
- libraries are for everyone, regardless of background
- developing the ability to find, recognise and analyse information improves cognitive skills
- libraries are havens for young people with nowhere to study
- libraries support the whole learning curriculum across all departments

The ability to problem-solve and learn independently is often developed in a library setting and chimes with government’s ambitions for personalisation. But the library and information service is more than a building, as important as that can be. It often reaches out into departments, tailoring resources to support the curriculum.

# “The librarian often leads on understanding and exploiting new technology applications and provides quality control”

## The contribution of library staff to teaching and learning

UNISON knows that libraries are at the heart of learning and that their staff are at the heart of the service. They select the ingredients of learning, organise them and guide users in their exploitation.

However, information retrieval skills are often grossly undervalued – as are subject knowledge and pedagogic input. Librarians in education often have a close affinity to academic staff, sometimes team-teaching or working with groups or individual learners.

Failure to acknowledge the professional contribution of library staff leads to a relegation of status and depression of salaries and may affect job evaluation outcomes.

### The dangers

- failure to acknowledge the professional contribution of library staff leads to a relegation of status and depression of salaries
- library assistants may be expected to perform the full range of duties without the appropriate training or pay
- ‘single-handed’ services bring their own particular challenges; multi-tasking, lone working, no cover for training and excessive workload

This management myopia affects all library staff in education. Where there is a limited awareness of the distinction between roles, it becomes easier to get rid of qualified staff and expect library assistants to perform the full range of professional duties. Some library assistants may rise to the occasion, but often do not have the appropriate training, are unlikely to be receiving adequate pay and will have few career development prospects.

Often, smaller education libraries are single-handed services that bring their own particular challenges; multi-tasking, lone working, no cover for training and excessive workload.

## Has the digital age made librarianship obsolete?

Absolutely not, but it may suit detractors of the service to suggest that the need for skilled intermediaries is a thing of the past. Library staff have always embraced developments in information technology and have taken ownership of its possibilities, adding to their expertise. Teaching media literacy is another string to their bow. In many services, the librarian leads on understanding and exploiting new technology applications, but may lack the status to influence the whole institution.

The modern day information explosion and proliferation of formats requires even more discernment and selective dissemination. Libraries provide quality control. And the notion that everything can be found on the internet for free simply is not true. Books or parts of books still in copyright cannot be accessed and journal material is often costly unless the user goes through their library, which may have a subscription. Library users need guidance on the possibilities of electronic information and on its limitations.

Properly trained and valued librarians are the best-placed professionals to deliver this expertise.





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£326.93–£384.61	£17,001–£20,000	£2.65	£11.50	G	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly <input type="checkbox"/> Fortnightly <input type="checkbox"/> Four Weekly <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly
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