Australian prison libraries: minimum standard guidelines

Australian Library and Information Association
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Foreword

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), in its Statement on Freedom to Read, affirms the right of all Australians to have access to library services. Prisoners and others in detention are no exception. The Association believes that these services should be of the highest standard; the present publication is intended to offer guidance in this direction.

It is widely acknowledged that libraries play a positive role in the lives of prisoners, as they do with other people. They provide resources to support educational, recreational and welfare programs, assisting in the acquisition of new skills. They help in addressing psychological needs, attitude problems and difficulties in coping with prison life. Prison libraries are also a non-threatening link with the outside world, and in that sense are a benefit not only to prisoners themselves but to the entire correctional system.

The need for better standards in Australian prison libraries has been recognised for several years by librarians in this field. The extent of this need was indicated in a 1987 report by the National Corrective Services Librarians Group. As a result of this report, the ALIA commissioned a Working Party to prepare minimum standard guidelines. The Working Party, convened by Phil Roberts, together with Jackie Broadsmith, John Myrtle, Robert Pestell, and Ellen Quinn, produced these guidelines, and the ALIA is indebted to their efforts.

Recognising the considerable variation in the conditions which apply in Australian prisons, the Working Party has consulted as widely as possible. In a situation of such diversity, it is not easy to arrive at uniform standards. Nevertheless, the guidelines embodied here are issued in the belief that they are realistic and achievable throughout the nation. The ALIA will work with correctional authorities to ensure their implementation.

The ALIA acknowledges with gratitude the kind permission of the Library Association (London) to reproduce portions of its Prison Libraries: Library Association Guidelines. The encouragement by staff of the Australian Institute of Criminology is also acknowledged.

Averill M B Edwards
Past President 1990
1. Introduction

1.1 Minimum Standard Guidelines
The starting point for the present guidelines is the draft Australian rule for prison library services, formulated in 1978. This rule says:

All categories of prisoners shall have access to a library adequately stocked with both recreational and instructional books, and prisoners shall be encouraged to make full use of it.


In the context of current Australian conditions, the words 'instructional books' are outdated and should be replaced by 'information resources'. Thus reworded, the rule becomes:

All categories of prisoners shall have access to a library adequately stocked with both recreational and information resources, and prisoners shall be encouraged to make full use of it.

1.2 Other standards
The present guidelines draw heavily on British and North American standards, viz.:

Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions, American Correctional Association, 1981.

Because of the close link with public libraries, there is also a close relationship with the ALIA standards for public libraries: Towards a Quality Service: Goals, Objectives and Standards for Public Libraries in Australia (ALIA, 1990).

1.3 Scope
The word 'prison' or 'prisons' in these guidelines is used to mean correctional institutions in general, e.g. prisons, remand centres and detention centres.

2. Existence and purpose of prison libraries
2.1 The purpose of prison library services is to meet the recreational, educational, and other information needs of inmates during their imprisonment and to provide information which will help them subsequently to re-establish themselves in the community.

Within this general definition is implicit a wide range of functions: vocational, cultural, inspirational, legal, etc.

2.2 Every prison or similar institution with an average inmate population of 25 or more shall have its own library for the exclusive use of inmates, similar to a local public library.

2.3 In the case of smaller institutions, inmates shall be guaranteed an alternative that will equally serve their needs. Such an alternative might be access to a local public library, scheduled visits by a mobile library, or periodic rotation of a collection of books and other materials supplied by a library.

3. Management

3.1 Provision of library services to prisoners shall be in the first instance the responsibility of the prison authority. A network based on a strong central library, owned and operated by the prison authority, is a desirable model. This authority may, however, arrange for a State Library, public libraries or other type of libraries to provide services on its behalf. If so, it is recommended that this be done on a contractual basis.

3.2 To achieve consistency and make best use of the resources available, it is recommended that a professional librarian be designated as Library Services Manager, responsible for services to all, prisons, and that this librarian report directly to not less than the third level of seniority within the prison authority.

3.3 Within each prison, matters of security, discipline, timetabling etc. affecting the library shall be the ultimate responsibility of the Prison Superintendent. However in anything relating to the profession of librarianship, responsibility will lie with the Library Services Manager.

3.4 Library staff shall encourage and maintain close co-operation with others involved in prisoner programmes, e.g. education officers, recreation officers or welfare officers.

4. Financial resources

4.1 Financial provision for prison libraries shall be made - or at least guaranteed - by the prison authority. Exactly how this funding is provided is a matter for each jurisdiction; for example, costs may be shared by the prison authority and one or more libraries such as the State Library.
4.2 However this is arranged, the Library Services Manager shall be assured of a regular annual budget, adequate for the purpose.

4.3 Annual funding for books and other resource materials shall amount to not less than $15.00 per capita of average inmate population. This figure shall vary each year according to the prevailing Consumer Price Index.

4.4 The extent of the total library budget spent on books etc will depend on staff costs, which will be minimised when support staffing is drawn from inmates. The standard for public libraries in Australia is 30 per cent. In prison libraries it should be higher.

4.5 The budget shall include provision for staffing and other necessary expenses such as: travel (staff training and development); stationery; equipment and maintenance; binding and photocopying. Overheads and capital expenditure are generally regarded as separate.

5. Human resources

5.1 Prison library services within each jurisdiction shall be the responsibility of an experienced graduate librarian eligible for professional membership of the ALIA.

5.2 Each library shall be supervised by a qualified librarian, full-time or part-time depending on the size of library. The role of this librarian will be - apart from supervision - to train, advise, and provide professional services such as selection, cataloguing, advanced bibliographical searching, and training in library skills.

5.3 In the absence of the qualified librarian, each library shall be supervised by a person trained in library procedures. This may be a prison officer or other member of staff (e.g. an education officer), an inmate or some other person.

5.4 Selection of staff for prison libraries shall be by the Library Services Manager in consultation with senior prison authorities. Factors taken into account will include aptitude, experience, reliability, personality and the length of time for which candidates might be available to do this work.

5.5 Training shall be for a minimum of ten days, preferably both on-site and in another larger library, subject to security considerations when the trainee is an inmate. The training curriculum shall be in essence that outlined in Prison Libraries: Library Association Guidelines, Appendix IV, (Appendix I of this document).

5.6 Officer or inmate library assistants may be expected to carry out duties such as the following:

- Issue and discharge of loans
• Request service
• Basic reference work
• Maintaining simple records and statistics
• Filing
• Shelving and keeping general order
• End-processing and repair
• Publicity

5.7 The number of hours per week spent by staff in each library will vary not only according to the size of library and opening hours but also according to the extent to which functions (such as cataloguing) are carried out elsewhere, e.g. in a Head Office library. The following are recommended:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishment population</th>
<th>Professional librarian hours</th>
<th>Officer librarian hours</th>
<th>Inmate assistant hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 – 80</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81 – 150</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151 – 350</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>351 – 550</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Staffing requirements shall be systematically reviewed to ensure that a proper level of service is maintained.

6. Physical facilities

6.1 Each library shall be separately accommodated in an area set aside for this purpose.

6.2 The library shall where possible be sited centrally in relation to the cellblocks and in such a way as to minimise the need for escort and supervision.

6.3 The library should also be sited in the vicinity of the education centre, for library resources are a natural adjunct to education. However as far as possible the link with education facilities should be attained in such a way as not to inhibit regular use by all inmates and use at times when the education centre is closed.

6.4 The library shall be designed in such a way as to make resources available to prisoners in an environment which will encourage use without prejudice to security.

6.5 The library shall be of sufficient size to allow inmates to read there, search for specific information, and undertake continuous study. Provision
shall also be made, either in the library or nearby, for small group meetings, discussion and other resource-based or related activities.

Other major requirements are:

- service area, for loans and inquiries
- staff workspace, which in larger establishments shall include a librarian's office
- shelving for books, journals and audio-visuals.

Space allocation will also be determined by requirements for equipment, which may include: a computer terminal and printer, photocopier, microfiche reader, videocassette recorder, etc.

**6.6** Minimum standards for space allocation are as set out in *Prison Libraries: Library Association Guidelines*, Appendix V, Schedule of Accommodation. This schedule is given as Appendix II of the present document.

**6.7** A photocopier shall be situated in the library or nearby, for the use of inmates as well as library staff.

**6.8** For other requirements of library accommodation, the British standards as set out in *Prison Libraries: Library Association Guidelines*, pp. 34-39, are adopted. These are given in Appendix III.

## 7. Library resources

**7.1** As in a good public library, the prison library shall aim to anticipate, meet and encourage the whole spectrum of information needs within its inmate population. The range, type and levels of stock shall be comparable with those of a public library.

**7.2** Factors such as prison size, average length of confinement, and conditions of access affect the quantity of stock required. However the following are recommended as minimum standards:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>10 titles per inmate</td>
<td>1,500 titles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periodicals</td>
<td>0.2 titles per inmate</td>
<td>30 titles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio-Visuals</td>
<td>2 titles per inmate,</td>
<td>300 titles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each library shall also have subscriptions to at least two daily newspapers.

**7.3** Because stocks are inevitably small and usage rates high, additional provision shall be made by way of stock exchanges, made available by a central service (such as a state library or medium-sized to large public library). A minimum of 20-30% of stock shall be exchanged each year. In some cases, complete exchanges of stock might be necessary.
7.4 The physical condition of stock shall be of a quality acceptable in a good public library.

7.5 A programme of discarding shall be maintained, whereby stock that is irrelevant, out of date or physically inferior is eliminated. This programme will be the responsibility of the professional librarian.

7.6 Selection of stock, like withdrawals, shall be carried out by a professional librarian, guided by a written policy.

7.7 In general, no restrictions shall apply to the selection of stock other than those accepted in public libraries, or restrictions dictated by the demands of maintaining good order and security. In accordance with the ALIA Statement on Freedom to Read, censorship of other kinds should not be exercised.

7.8 The prison library collection shall contain not only the types of materials standard in public libraries, e.g. reference books, fiction, periodicals, newspapers and audio-visuals: it should also contain materials to cater for special needs. These include:

- Textbooks and back-up material for inmates undertaking approved courses of study (provided that such material is not already supplied satisfactorily through the education system).
- Basic education materials such as easy readers and life skills texts.
- Legal reference materials appropriate for inmates.
- Materials for Aborigines, e.g. indigenous literature and audio-visual materials.
- Material for other ethnic minorities, e.g. community language materials including newspapers, and suitable English language texts.
- Material for inmates with reading difficulties, e.g. audiocassettes or large print books.
- Material on human relationships including homosexuality and emotional and sexual problems.

It might be noted that in 1975 a survey of the information needs of prisoners in Maryland identified four types of needs. These were, in order of priority:

1. In-house information on institutional procedures, regulations, current happenings etc.
2. Information concerning families, and community resource information for family assistance.
3. Legal information concerning criminal charges, appeals, etc.
4. Job market information and other re-entry information.
Selection for the prison library should take these needs into account.

8. Inmate services

8.1 All prisoners shall be eligible to visit the library and use its services, within the limits necessary for good order and security within the prison. Provisions of the ALIA Statement on Freedom to Read shall be observed.

8.2 Prison library services shall be free in accordance with the ALIA Statement on Free Library Services to All. Under this statement, 'each Australian has an equal right to information' and members of publicly funded libraries should not have to pay 'any direct charge or fee for information services... whatever the nature or form of the information service'.

8.3 Library services shall be available during inmate work and leisure time periods, including evenings and weekends. Each prisoner shall be entitled to at least five visits a week, or a minimum of seven hours' contact time.

8.4 At all times during inmate use, the library shall be staffed by a person trained in library procedures.

8.5 Suitable provisions shall be made for inmates in special confinement or inmates who for other reasons, e.g. physical infirmity, are unable to visit the library.

8.6 A general reference service shall be provided equivalent to that available in public libraries. This will include such things as:

- Assistance in obtaining information
- Reading lists
- Reader's advisory service

For inquiries requiring a higher level of training or more extensive resources than a prison library can normally provide, a back-up service from another library (e.g. a State or public library) shall be available.

8.7 Assistance in legal reference work shall be available, by contract if necessary, from a law library. It is not to be expected that any library can provide this kind of service beyond a level which would apply for the general public; however it is recommended, in the interests of justice, that special consideration be given for the needs of prisoners in this regard.

8.8 Prison libraries shall make their stock available for loan to inmates as in public libraries. For items not held, a request service shall operate. This will include, where possible, use of the inter-library loan system.
8.9 A service for photocopying of library materials shall be available to inmates, with minimum restriction on its use.
8.10 Training in library skills shall be given to inmate users.
8.11 Every effort shall be made to promote the library and its services to inmates and to encourage reading and related activities. The value of library services to prisoners shall also be promoted to custodial staff.

9. Technical services
9.1 Efficient procedures shall be established for the acquisition of library materials, according to accepted professional practice. The acquisition programme shall be carried out in a planned and continuous way, with due attention to the need for minimising costs, keeping within budget, and conducting affairs in a businesslike manner.
9.2 As in other libraries, materials shall be arranged logically for convenient use. A catalogue shall be available to inmates, not only of the library's own stock but also (where possible) other stock within the system. Ancillary files, e.g. shelf lists, shall be maintained as necessary.
9.3 Cataloguing of materials shall be of a sufficiently high standard to enable them to be entered in union catalogues.
9.4 Library materials shall be processed in such a way as to keep them in good repair, easily findable and attractive in appearance.
9.5 Prison library operations shall be - or aim to be - organised in such a way as to make best use of available technology, e.g. automation, electronic mail etc.

10. Performance assessment
10.1 Given that the present guidelines are of necessity brief, the point of reference for further elaboration shall be Towards a Quality Service: Goals, Objectives and Standards for Public Libraries in Australia (ALIA, 1990). This will be so for matters which, in the opinion of the Library Services Manager, are common to both kinds of libraries.

The value of the public libraries standards in this respect will apply only while they are kept up to date.
10.2 Library service needs of the inmate population shall be kept under regular review. In this respect a library advisory committee composed of individuals from all institutional components, including the inmate population, may be helpful. Statistical records should also be kept to assist in monitoring the effectiveness of library services.
10.3 An annual evaluation of library services shall be conducted with reference to the stated performance goals and objectives of the prison
library service. This evaluation shall be made by the Library Services Manager or another professional librarian of equivalent standing.

**Appendix I : Prison officer librarian training programme : checklist**

The following principles and practice should be covered in any training programme. The length of such a programme should depend on local practice and constraints, but a minimum period of 10 working days is considered to be essential.

1. The role of libraries - their aims and objectives.
2. Library services in the Australia - the national scene.
3. The local library system, including school and welfare library services.
4. Prison libraries - their characteristics.
5. Prisoners' library needs.
7. Ordering and receipt of books.
8. Cataloguing practice, including use of catalogues.
9. Classification schemes.
10. Request service.
11. Inter-library loans.
12. Bibliographical work.
13. Reference and information work.
14. Other branch and mobile library routines:
   A. general administration - statistics, stationery supplies
   B. reader's registration
   C. shelving and guiding
   D. issuing system
   E. binding and withdrawals
   F. displays and publicity
Appendix II : Schedule of accommodation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Example: Requirements for a 351-550 population institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shelving</td>
<td>Tables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service area</td>
<td>Minimum 9m²</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workroom/office</td>
<td>Allow 9m² for each member of staff present at any one time</td>
<td>As much as possible. Outsize type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lending Library</td>
<td>Allow 1m² per 100 books to be shelved</td>
<td>120m run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading area</td>
<td>Allow 2.5m² for each seat</td>
<td>15m run of periodical slopes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference or Study area</td>
<td>Allow 3m² for each seat</td>
<td>5m run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Store</td>
<td>Minimum 2m²</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>93m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allow 10% balance area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix III : Other accommodation requirements

It is desirable that the approach to the library should be made as pleasant as possible. Some of the features which might be considered include: glazed area which allows the activities inside the library to be seen, and/or an exterior display case. Signposting should be adequate.

Provision for the delivery of books by van is desirable. Where this is not possible, due to the layout of the establishment, then it should be remembered that heavy boxes and packages of books will have to be trucked to the library. For this reason steps should be avoided.

The spaces and their relationships

General

- The number of separate rooms should be kept to a minimum. In general only the staff workroom and the librarian's office need to be separately enclosed. To permit changes in provision and use, to allow for expansion and to improve supervision a single area subdivided by furniture and soundproof partitions is
preferable to separate rooms. Arrangements for lighting, heating, air conditioning and the provision of power points should take account of the need for flexibility.

- A progression should be provided from the noisiest area (ie the counter and service desk) through the periodical browsing area where talking should be allowed, followed by the shelving area where there is movement and a certain amount of disturbance, to the study area where quiet should be enforced.
- Traffic should be cut to the minimum. This can often be achieved by locating the entrance to the library in a central position.
- The entrance should preferably have glazed and lockable doors, and should be effectively supervised.

**Service area**

The main requirements of this area are as follows:

1. It must extend the welcome of the entrance and allows users interesting views of the main areas of the library.
2. It must be sufficiently large to accommodate groups of prisoners waiting for attention.
3. There must be provision for:
   - Notice board
   - Hours of opening board - visible from outside the library.
4. It must accommodate a service desk with space for two to three assistants, according to the size of the establishment, who will supervise all parts of the library. A table and chair for a supervising prison officer may be associated with this desk.
5. There must be good visual supervision of all parts of the library from the desk.
6. The desk must have easy access to other areas of the library.
7. It is desirable that it should be adjacent to the staff workroom.

**Staff workspace**

A considerable part of staff time will be spent in the library supervising the service area and working with the readers. Nevertheless, there is a certain amount of indispensable office work, preparation of displays, packing and unpacking books, sorting private reading material sent in for prisoners, etc for which provision is necessary. Books and periodicals also have to be stored and essential stationery supplies housed, and there must be sufficient space to store any trolleys used in providing direct services to cells or, possibly, to the wards of the prison hospital. A defined workspace is therefore required. Access to this should take account of the movement of the trolleys. As already mentioned the workspace should preferably be
placed in close proximity to the service area and in visual contact with the service desk.

Requirements include:

1. Workbench, with stationery cupboards under.
2. Filing cabinet.
3. Desk(s), chair(s), and stool(s).
4. Visitor's chair.
5. Storage shelving - outsize type.
6. Cupboards.
7. Typewriter with appropriate working surface.
8. Telephone (internal and external).
9. Sink and water supply.

Store

A small store is desirable to accommodate such items as stacking chairs, display equipment and book boxes. It may also be convenient to house the book trolleys in this space.

Librarian’s office

Accommodation should be provided for the librarian separate from the workspace so as to cater for confidential or individual work with library users and undisturbed telephone conversations.

Areas open to readers

As readers enter they should be able to see all areas of the library and identify those which they require.

Periodicals and newspapers

1. This area might be sited close to the entrance.
2. An informal atmosphere should be created in this area by, for example, the provision of comfortable chairs, low tables, small display stands, etc. Requirements also include a rack or stand for the storage and display of newspapers and display slopes for current periodicals.

Literacy material

Associated with the informal periodical and newspaper area should be a display of material suitable for illiterates and new literates. This will require outsize shelving and display slopes for picture books and display boxes for simple readers which are often slim and in paperback form.
**Reference area**

A well-supervised and reasonably quiet area should be set aside for readers wishing to consult encyclopaedias, dictionaries, etc or to study in the library. This calls for a small amount of outsize shelving, and tables and chairs. Additional shelving for more general reference books will also be required in establishments with an extensive education programme. Where prisoners are allowed to follow protracted courses of study individual carrels might be provided.

**Lending library**

This area should be readily accessible from the outside area. The layout of the lending library requires careful attention so as to ensure that tall bookstacks do not dominate the library and to allow the greatest possible supervision. Shelving arranged around the walls and/or in island cases is to be preferred to alcoves which inhibit rearrangement and the cases should be arranged to facilitate the ordering of the books. Approximately 5% of the shelving should be for oversize books.

All shelving should be kept clear of door openings and readers consulting books on the shelves should not obstruct traffic lanes. As a general guide, at least 900mm clearance should be allowed in front of each bookcase, ie where bookcases are facing one another they should be placed 1850mm apart. Wall bookcases should be kept clear of glazed areas, eg a window placed immediately above a bookcase makes it impossible to read titles of books on the top shelf. Island bookcases should run at right angles to the main source of natural lighting.

The primary use of this area will be by readers selecting books for reading outside the library, but browsing should be encouraged as far as possible and for this purpose some casual seating should be provided.

**Display and activities**

In smaller libraries it should be possible to rearrange the furniture to accommodate small exhibitions of books, or group meetings. In larger libraries a separate area opening out from the main library, but capable of being closed off from it, should be provided. This space could be equipped for record listening and film shows, for example, in addition to special display fittings. This accommodation might be provided as part of the education centre but is particularly important when the library is divorced from the centre.
Technical Requirements

Furniture
The library will require a variety of furniture and equipment. In addition to tables, chairs and shelving for the storage and display of books, periodicals and audio-visual material, this includes:

1. Special display fittings, eg for picture books and paperbacks
2. Catalogue cabinets
3. Audio-visual carrels
4. Service desk

Equipment and furniture of this kind is obtainable from specialist suppliers, but since the requirements of each library differ it is essential that a librarian should be consulted in drawing up a schedule of requirements. Similarly, if it is planned to design furniture specifically for the library it is essential to obtain detailed guidance on its features and dimensions if expensive mistakes are to be avoided.

Lighting
A high level of lighting is essential, particularly in areas where protracted reading and close work is likely, eg the reference and study areas and the service area. Care must be taken however to avoid glare, eg as far as possible readers should not be seated facing glazed areas. Direct sunlight is harmful to books and should be excluded.

Individual lights over fittings or on reading tables inhibit rearrangement of furniture, and should be avoided in favour of a high level of general illumination from the ceiling.

The lighting of bookshelves requires special consideration due to the problem of evenly illuminating all shelves down to the bottom shelf of the case, without glare or shadow.

Lights in the darkest areas of the building should be switched separately, as should the lights over the service desk. It would be advantageous if all light switches could be placed in the desk or service area.

Acoustics
Sound absorbent floor and ceiling finishes should be considered since the constant movement of readers in and out of the building and around the shelves, the work of the staff, the use of audio-visual equipment and necessary conversation are at constant conflict with one of the main purposes of the library which is to provide a place for relaxed reading and quiet study.
Select bibliography


- Canadian Association for Adult Education. *Suggested Educational and Library Standards for Prisons*. Canadian Association for Adult Education, Toronto, 1985, pp. 4-5.


