

Case Study: Emily Stannard, Head Librarian, Bradfield College, Berkshire

Library use and impact on public examination grades

Abstract: This case study examines library use by secondary school pupils in the Summer Term 2016 and compares this use with the overall outcome of public examinations to investigate whether there is a link between library use and achievement of higher grades at GCSE and A level (without the Extended Project Qualification).

Bradfield College is an independent secondary co-educational boarding school with approximately 780 pupils, comprising 310 girls and 470 boys from 13 to 18 years of age. Roughly 90% of pupils are boarders with the other 10% day pupils. The library is open and staffed from 8.15am – 9.00pm every day and is also open at the weekends (Saturday 8.15am – 1.15pm and Sundays 11.00am-4.00pm). Staffing consists of one full-time chartered librarian and two part-time library assistants.

In a world increasingly driven by data, one of the most problematic issues for school libraries is how to continuously evidence their impact, especially when it comes to asking senior management for budget or resources. Historically, this evidence base has always been drawn from statistics such as issues of items or head counts during exceptionally busy periods. However, these statistics are no longer enough to prove the true worth of the secondary school library. Senior management are looking for stronger links between the use of the library and the impact that this has on examination results. Just as teachers are increasingly required to analyse outcomes on quantifiable data to demonstrate where they add value, librarians must now start to do the same. The difficulty with statistics is that it is easy to miss the bigger picture; a pupil's use of the library alone will not necessarily lead to an improvement in his or her overall grade. Rather, statistics must be viewed in the context of other circumstances; for example, the pupil's use of revision sessions with

his/her teacher, the effectiveness of revision techniques, his/her inclination to work hard, and so on. With this caveat, then, this case study is simply a snapshot solely from the library's perspective; it is based on data gathered over the course of the Summer Term 2016 and looks at library use by pupils in Years 11 and 13, comparing this use with grades achieved at GCSE and A-level.

Bradfield College Library requires pupils entering the library to sign in via a physical register over the course of the summer term. This is predominantly to ensure an element of control of the physical space by the librarians, especially as the library consists of approximately 45 study spaces which is below the School Library Association's (SLA) recommendation that the library be able to seat 10% of the school's pupils. As Head of Department, I receive the breakdown of GCSE and A-level results by pupil in August and in 2016 I decided to analyse them in the context of the data pulled from the library register. On an Excel spreadsheet, alongside each pupil's name and grades achieved, I added a column for the number of days they had used the library in the summer term. Where a pupil had never signed in to the library over the course of the term, this field was left blank. On a separate tab, I then created a table for number of days the library was used and grades achieved from A*-U. I had to physically count the number of grades for each pupil who had used the library and add them to the relevant box. I also created another table for the total number of grades achieved by those pupils who had not used the library that term. Finally, I added a comparison table showing actual figures of A*-U grades achieved by pupils who used the library and pupils who did not.

This was a very 'quick and dirty' analysis as it did not take into account how long pupils had stayed in the library for but simply acknowledged that they had been in and stayed for one lesson period or more. Some pupils came and went from the library several times per day. However, it was interesting to note the results: for Year 13 pupils, those who used the library at least once in the summer term achieved higher numbers of

grades A*-D than pupils who did not use the library. Sadly, of the three U's that were achieved, two were achieved by pupils who used the library but who only used the library over the course of one to three days in the Summer Term. However, those using the library at least once in the summer term achieved more A and B grades than those who did not. The most interesting statistic was that only grades C and above were achieved by those who used the library between 15 and 25 days over the course of the term. This would seem to indicate that consistent longevity of library use (generally by the same pupils) led to higher grades in A-level examinations.

Analysis of GCSE grades and use of the library took longer to process given the sheer number of subjects and grades. Initial findings showed that library use did not have a significant impact on pupil achievement at GCSE but this may also be because fewer numbers of Year 11 pupils used the library in the summer term. Looking at longevity of library use, grades of pupils who worked in the library more than 10 days were no more exceptional than those who used the library for at least one day; however, the data suggests that use of the library for more than 10 days did have a positive impact on grades D and below as these pupils achieved no lower than a C grade.

I am not a data analyst but was simply curious to see whether the library may have played a part in the achievement of good to excellent public examination grades. I certainly found the data interesting and although it is not perfect it was a useful exercise which gave me statistical evidence to pass on to the Deputy Head Academic for information. I am the first to acknowledge that teachers are crucial in helping pupils achieve good grades at both GCSE and A-level, and some pupils really put in the work that they needed to in order to achieve their desired result. However, if there is even a small way that we as librarians can show that the library adds value to results achieved in examinations, we should seize it, and this may be one way of doing so.