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The Views and Practices of UK School Librarians in Handling Student Privacy

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ABSTRACT
This paper reports an online survey of the attitudes and practices of school librarians in the UK toward privacy in their workplaces, a subject that has been little studied to date. The survey examined the librarians' views of professional body ethical frameworks, their personal confidence in handling privacy issues, and how their practices are affected by the wider school environment. The survey was complemented by semi-structured interviews with six experienced school librarians. The study found high levels of personal confidence and support for CILIP's ethical framework, but also a desire for more school-specific resources about privacy.

Introduction

School libraries are shaped by the educational institutions they serve, and their aim is to support the provision of education, as well as promoting reading and lifelong learning (Sharper 2). As Sharper argues, libraries and their staff have to "align their efforts strategically with the school's objectives and work effectively with a range of colleagues." (3). However, many school librarians are the only information professionals within their institutions (Bentley et al. 23), meaning they have to build strong relations with the rest of the school community, including the pupils; indeed, many school libraries rely on pupil library assistants to support their services, and to free up time for the librarian (Armstrong 4).

Libraries are likely to collect or hold a range of personal data about their users, and this is no different in school libraries. This not only includes records of books borrowed by pupils – including those on controversial topics – but also details of students' reading levels, which may be particularly sensitive for lower ability readers (Adams, The Privacy Problem). Moreover, library privacy has often been linked to concerns about intellectual freedom, as users whose records are not confidential may not feel they have true freedom to access materials relating to "difficult questions," for example (Fletcher-Spear and

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Tyler 9). This makes privacy a significant issue for the librarians who often act as advocates for young people's rights to intellectual freedom (Fletcher-Spear and Tyler 2).

Professional bodies often provide detailed ethical principles, and this is certainly the case for the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) in the United Kingdom (UK), which updated its ethical framework in 2018 (CILIP). This asks members to "uphold, promote and defend . . . The confidentiality of information provided by clients or users and the right of all individuals to privacy." The policy is entirely general in that it is aimed at all library sectors, and does not make allowances for the particular issues faced by school librarians. Importantly, there are no references to privacy or personal data management in CILIP's guidelines for school libraries (Sharper), while the School Library Association (SLA), the other main organization for school librarians in the UK, does not have an official stance on privacy in the library setting or, indeed, any clear set of ethical guidelines. While the basic privacy principle of the American Library Association (ALA) is very similar to CILIP's, the former explores the topic in much greater depth (ALA, Professional Ethics), including some specific guidance for schools, e.g., the need to balance privacy against a school's overall policies, to develop specific privacy policies, to conduct privacy audits, and to be "advocates for protecting student privacy and intellectual freedom in the larger school environment."

The published studies of ethical issues in the school library literature have focused mainly on the issues of censorship and intellectual freedom, with discussions of privacy thus far seemingly restricted to Canada (Riehl), South Korea (Sim and Noh) and, especially, the USA (Adams, *Protecting Intellectual Freedom and Privacy in Your School Library*, Adams, Practical Ideas: Protecting Students' Privacy in your School Library; Barack; Dresang; Oltmann). This is despite a growing awareness of privacy issues across the sector: thus, Ayala(4) argues that the growth of digital services has made librarians more aware of issues relating to their patrons' privacy; Charillon et al. (7) suggest that the public are being drawn into debates about their personal data following recent political events and social media scandals. This interest is likely to grow with the recent introduction of the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (Ayala 1).

The combination of growing privacy concerns and the lack of research about this in the school library context provided the basis for the study reported here, which examined the views and practices of UK school librarians working in both primary and secondary schools in the state and private sectors. The project hence complements McNicol's survey of UK school

librarians' views on intellectual freedom (McNicol), and sought to obtain answers to the following three research questions:

- How do school librarians perceive the ethical stances of professional organizations such as CILIP, particularly in relation to privacy and confidentiality, and do they bring these to bear in their own workplaces?
- How confident are school librarians in their own handling of privacy concerns in practice?
- How does the school environment itself impact the practice of school librarians in relation to privacy?

Methods

The principal data collection method was an online questionnaire that was developed to provide answers to the research questions. The first section asked about librarians' knowledge and attitudes toward professional ethical guidelines, and how this applied to their work. The next section related to librarians' confidence around privacy, and asked them if they felt that they needed further training on privacy issues. The respondents were then asked about how working in a school environment affected librarians' practices, and about specific situations such as protecting students' records from their peers and school staff members. There was finally a set of demographic questions to provide contextual information about participants' professional and institutional backgrounds. Several of the questions provided a set of Likert-scale responses, with the others either inviting a free text response or providing a list of potential responses. None of the questions required a mandatory response: while this resulted in some participants not answering all the questions, it limited the amount of forced choice and increased the response rate by not compelling users to answer questions that they felt were irrelevant to them. Ethical approval for the research was granted by the University of Sheffield in May 2019.

After piloting the questionnaire with a school librarian colleague, the survey was administered online using Google Forms. Participants for the survey were recruited from among current school librarians in the UK via e-mail lists such as the School Librarians' Network (SLN), social media platforms such as Twitter and a school librarian Facebook group, and through relevant personal contacts. A total of 115 UK participants provided sets of responses during the three weeks that the survey was open. A further 25 responses came from users in Australia, Canada, New Zeeland and the USA: these were not included in the main study, but provided an interesting basis for comparison with some of the responses from the much larger set of UK participants.

The questionnaire provided the bulk of the data collected in this project. However, more insights into the issues raised in the survey were obtained from six semi-structured interviews that were conducted with survey respondents who had indicated an interest in taking a further part in the research. The interviews were conducted by telephone or Skype, lasted between 20 and 40 minutes, and were recorded and then transcribed for thematic analysis using the NVivo software package, version 12. The interview questions were based on both the original research questions and the initial responses to the survey, with particular attention being paid to those topics where a range of opinions had been evident.

Results

Views on professional ethics stance

The vast majority (114) of respondents stated that they had heard of CILIP, with only one stating that they had not ($n = 115$). However, the answers to Q2 ($n = 115$), "To what extent do you agree that you feel familiar with CILIP's ethical framework?" – received a much more varied response (see Figure 1). While a majority of respondents (60) selected "Agree," many chose the neutral option. Q3-Q7 then asked for respondents' views on the privacy aspect of CILIP's ethical framework, which states that information professionals should uphold "The confidentiality of information provided by clients or users and the right of all individuals to privacy" (CILIP, 2018). Q3 ($n = 115$) found a broad agreement that this principle "is important and relevant to school libraries," with 59 stating they strongly agreed and 52 agreeing (see Figure 2). Q4 ($n = 115$) found that the majority of respondents (72) agreed that "This principle is easy to uphold in my workplace" (see

Question 2. To what extent do you agree that you feel familiar with CILIP's ethical framework?

Agree
Disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Stongly disagree
Strongly agree
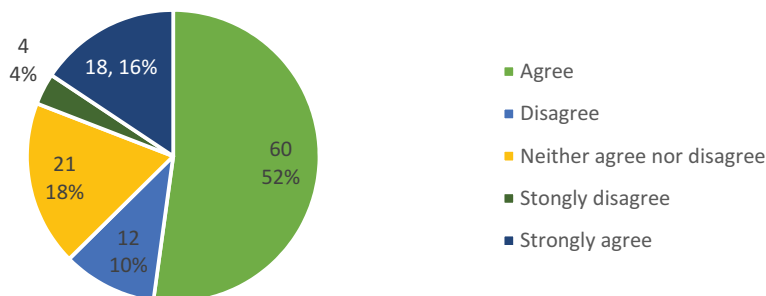
Figure 1.

Question 3. [CILIP's privacy principle] is important and relevant to school libraries
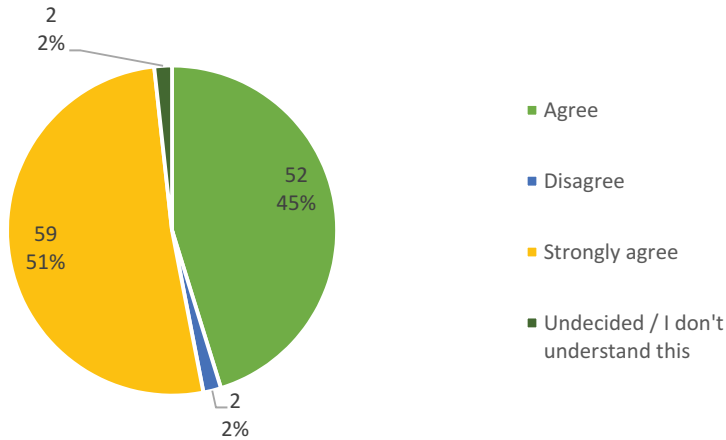
Figure 2.

Question 4. [CILIP's privacy principle] is easy to uphold in my workplace.
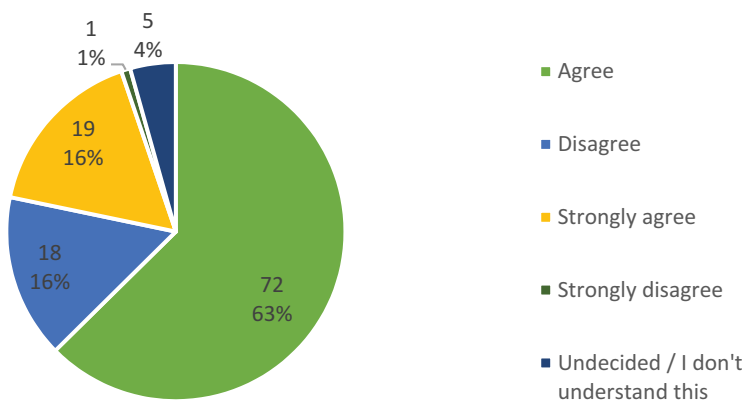
Figure 3.

Figure 3): however, there was much less agreement here than in Q3, with only 19 strongly agreeing. Q5 (*n* = 114) asked respondents how far they agreed that "School staff, parents, and other relevant adults (other than librarians) should have regular access to students' library records." The largest response was to disagree with the statement (59 responses), with only a few respondents selecting either "Strongly agree" or "Strongly disagree" (see Figure 4). In Q6 (*n* = 115), the vast majority of respondents responded positively to the statement "Students' library records should be kept private from their peers," with 57 agreeing and 49 strongly agreeing (see Figure 5). There was a similarly strong positive response to Q7 (*n* = 115),

Question 5. School staff, parents, and other relevant adults (other than librarians) should have regular access to students' library records
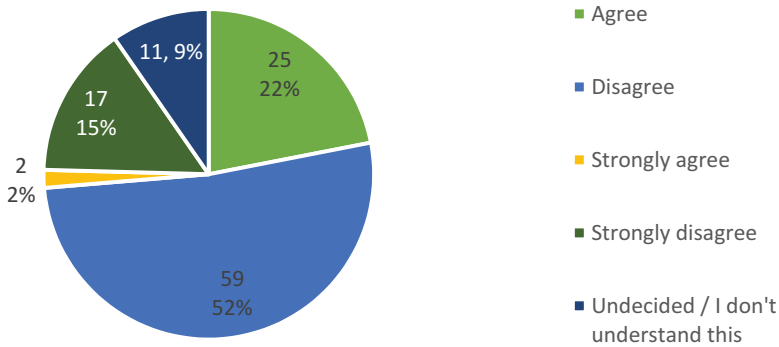
Figure 4.

Question 6. Students' library records should be kept private from their peers
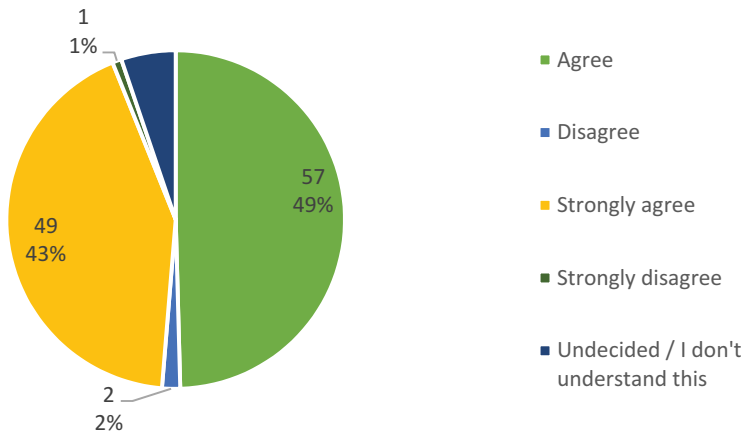
Figure 5.

with 81 strongly agreeing and no respondents (strongly) disagreeing with the idea that students should learn to manage their own privacy (see Figure 6). However, six participants in Q6 and three in Q7 selected the neutral option, indicating some ambivalence toward, or a lack of understanding of, the question or topic.

Question 7. School students should learn to manage their own information and its safety / privacy, both online and offline.

Figure 6.

Question 8. Have you ever received information / training about handling privacy in libraries?
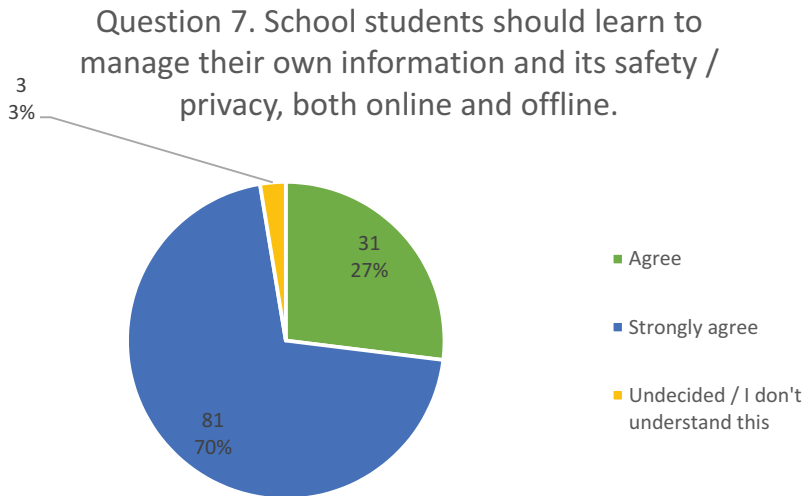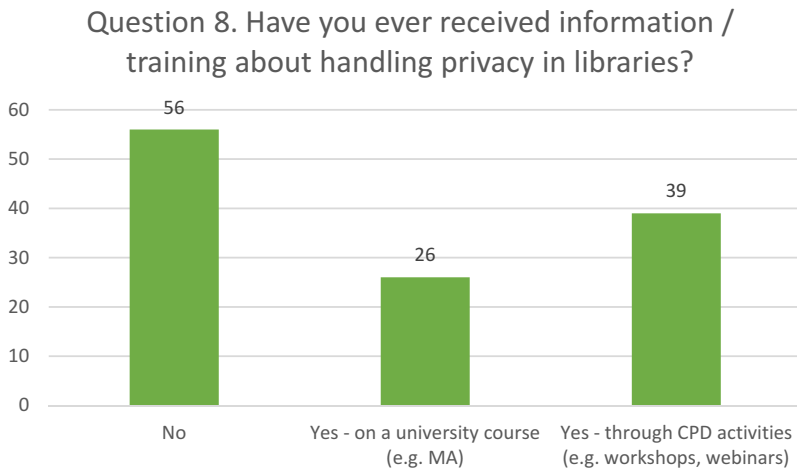
Figure 7.

Confidence in handling student privacy

Q8 (*n* = 114) asked respondents how they had learnt about privacy issues. Respondents were able to select multiple answers if relevant, so the results in Figure 7 are shown as a bar chart. 26 stated they had received information on a university course and 39 had completed continuing professional development (CPD) in this area; seven respondents indicated that they had received information from both sources, as against 56 who stated that they had received privacy training from neither. Respondents were then asked in Q9 (*n* = 114) whether they "feel confident in protecting the privacy of your student users." There was overall agreement (see Figure 8), with 73 indicating they agreed,

Question 9. To what extent do you agree that you feel confident in protecting the privacy of your student users?
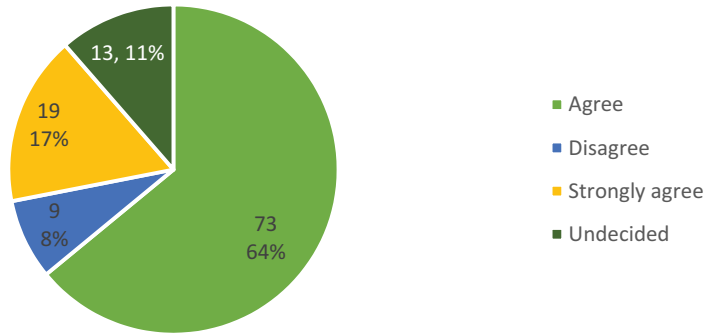
Figure 8.

Question 10. Do you feel you need any further support or training on supporting students' privacy?
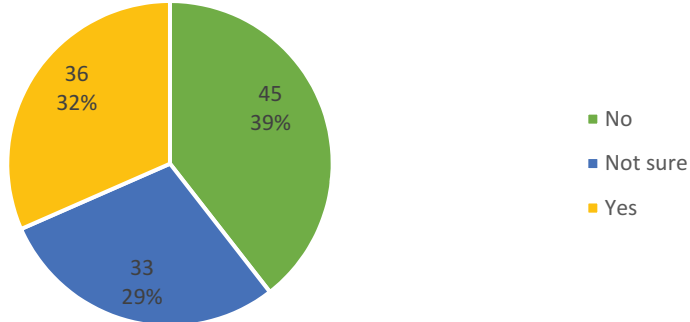
Figure 9.

a further 19 saying they strongly agreed and no participants indicating strong disagreement. Q10 (*n* = 114), asking if participants required further training on privacy issues, had a range of responses, with 36 selecting "Yes," 45 selecting "No," and the remaining 33 selecting "Not sure" (see Figure 9). The final question in this section, Q11 (*n* = 31), asked respondents to suggest what further training they would find beneficial. The answers demonstrated an interest in both formal face-to-face workshops and online training, and also suggested that written policies (or "guidelines for school libraries" as one respondent put it) would be beneficial, as would school-specific training

since "the training I received at university blanket covered all library users." Many respondents wished for training on safely handling their students' data and on GDPR legislation.

A significant association was noted between respondents who reported feeling confident in their ability to protect students' privacy and those who had received privacy training (Fisher's Exact Test = 12.32, *df* = 2, *p* = .002). There was also an association between respondents' confidence and their perceived need for further training (Fisher's Exact Test = 19.34, *df* = 4, *p* < .001).

The school environment

The next section of the questionnaire asked respondents about their experiences of privacy within their workplace. Q12 (*n* = 114) asked with whom participants had been asked to share students' library records. The most commonly selected answers (see bar chart in Figure 10) were teachers (29), students' parents or carers (18), and members of school senior management (16). However, the majority (67) of respondents reported that they had not been asked to share this type of information with anyone. Q13 (*n* = 115) then considered how librarians deal with such requests for information sharing (see Figure 11). Aside from the majority (63) who had not been asked to share information, the most common answers were "I have refused this at times, but on other occasions I have agreed to provide this information" (22) and "I try to supply information when asked for" (21). "I refuse to share this

Question 12. Have you ever been asked to share students' library records or personal information with others outside the library? Please select all people you have been required to share records with.
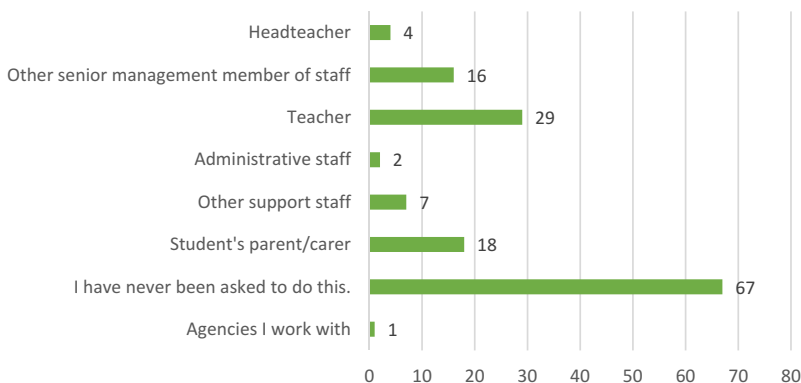
Figure 10.

Question 13. Have you ever refused, when asked,
to provide someone outside the library with a
student's personal information or library record?

- No - I have not been asked to share student information
- No - I try to supply information when asked for
- Yes - I have refused this at times, but on other occasions I have agreed to provide this information
- Yes - I refuse to share this information (except in emergency situations, for example)

9, 8%

22 19%

63 55%

21 18%
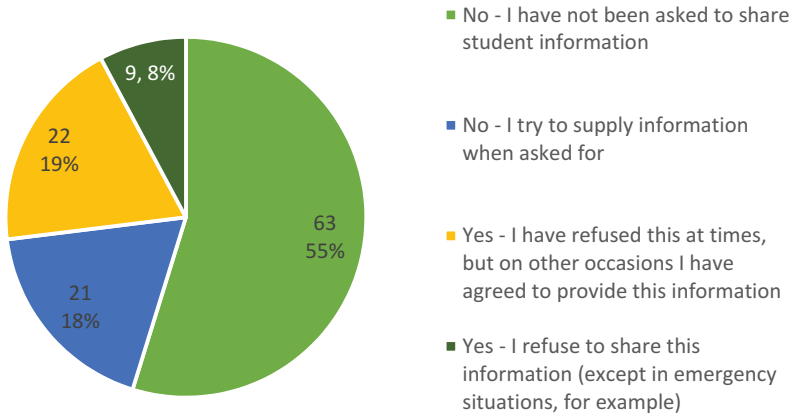
Figure 11.

Question 14. Do you train your student users to
manage their own privacy, online or offline?

- No – but this is provided elsewhere in the school
- No – we do not provide this
- Not sure
- Yes – both online and offline training
- Yes – online privacy training

3 3%

4 3%

18 16%

84 73%
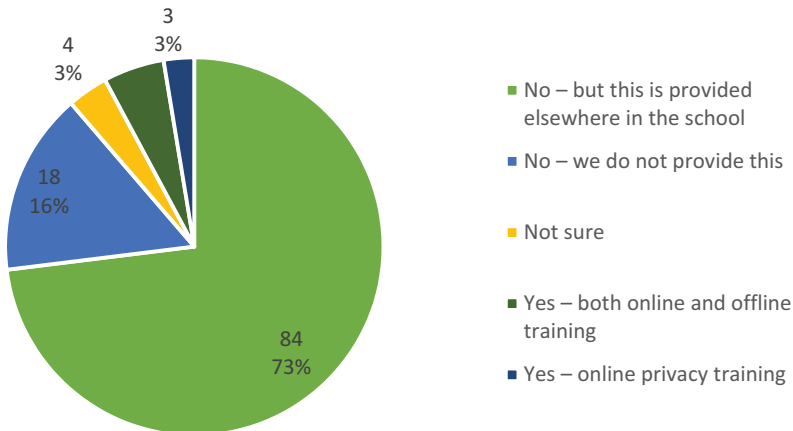
Figure 12.

information" received the fewest responses (9), indicating that where participants are asked to share pupils' library records with others, this is often complied with and may not be challenged, or regarded as a problem. In Q14 (*n* = 115), when asked if they provide training for students about online and offline privacy, the vast majority of respondents (84) indicated that they did not provide this but that it is offered elsewhere in the school, with the next most common answer being that this is not provided at all (18). Evidently,

Question 16. Does your library have any student library assistants (or similar) with access to other users' library records or issue information?
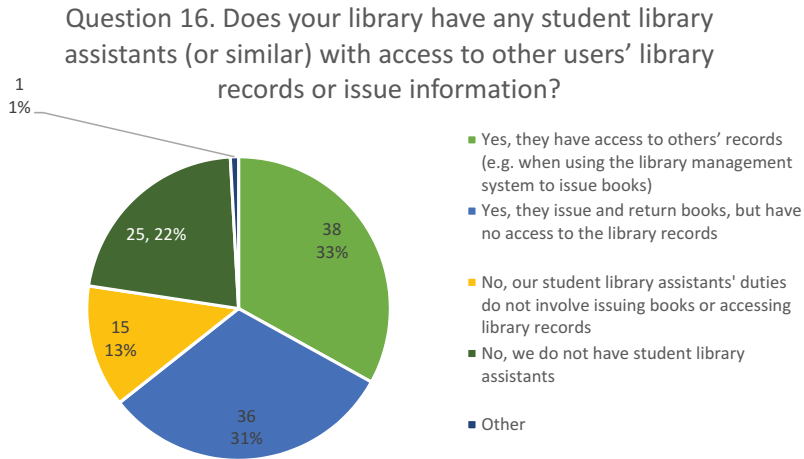
Figure 13.

for the majority of respondents, supporting pupils in learning how to manage their own data is not a significant part of their role (see Figure 12). Q15 (*n* = 8) provided an opportunity for respondents who had indicated that they did provide privacy training for students to describe what this entails. Several participants suggested that their privacy trainings are informal discussions with students, e.g., "[r]egularly talk about this with them," while others indicated that these discussions may not be primarily linked to their role as a librarian, e.g., "[a]s a form tutor, I am involved in PSHE sessions where this is regularly taught" (where PHSE denotes personal, social, and health education).

Q16 16 (*n* = 115) considered the role of pupil library assistants and their access to their peers' library records (see Figure 13). While 25 participants stated that they did not have pupil library assistants, the majority of respondents who did indicated that these students are involved in issuing and returning their peers' books, either with (38) or without (36) access to others' library records. The single "Other" response here specified that pupil assistants did issue books to other students in their workplace but had a limited view of their library records. In the following Q17 (*n* = 75), respondents who use pupil assistants were asked whether these pupils were trained in handling others' records, and what form this training took. In 21 cases, no such training was provided. However, for the others who do provide training, much of it comprised discussions with individual pupils about keeping library records confidential. This often appears to be fairly informal, e.g. "I explain that the data is personal and private and ask the students not to share it with anyone"' but a few reported asking students to sign an agreement or declaration "to

Question 18. How do you usually inform students about overdue books / resources?
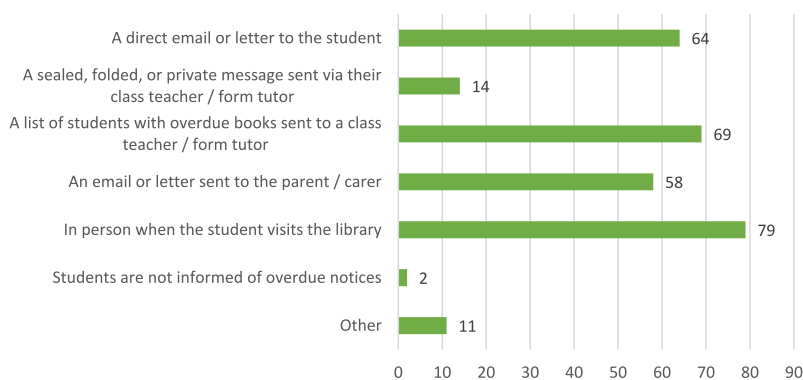
Figure 14.

show they have understood" this training, or taking other steps such as restricting students' access to the library management system or ensuring that they were supervised when using it.

Q18 (*n* = 115) asked participants how their users were informed or reminded about any overdue resources, with a range of responses provided (see Figure 14). The most frequent answers were "In person when the student visits the library" (79), and "A list of students with overdue books sent to form tutors" (69). Other methods involving contacting pupils and their parents directly were also fairly frequent, but sending a sealed or private slip via the pupils' tutors was much less common (14). Some respondents explained multiple-step approaches, often contacting students individually first and then escalating this to tutors or parents.

Q19 (*n* = 115) then asked whether privacy audits are carried out. The majority of respondents stated that they do not do this (72), with a further 29 unsure of what privacy audits are. Of the 14 respondents who do carry these out, most undertake audits irregularly (6) or less than once a year (5) (see Figure 15).

The last two questions of this section provided the opportunity for respondents to supply further information about their practices. Q20 (*n* = 79) asked about privacy precautions taken to protect students, and participants referred to the physical layout of the library, locking away paper copies of data, and screen privacy. However, there were also 26 respondents who indicated that they did not currently take any particular precautions, many citing their status as a lone worker or the layout of their library space as reasons for this (with one participant noting that their "[r]equest for private office area to allow privacy when necessary was ignored" by their school). Finally, Q21 (*n* = 68) asked what aspects of their library service they thought might compromise student privacy. The

Question 19. Do you undertake privacy audits to make sure the library is protecting its users' records?
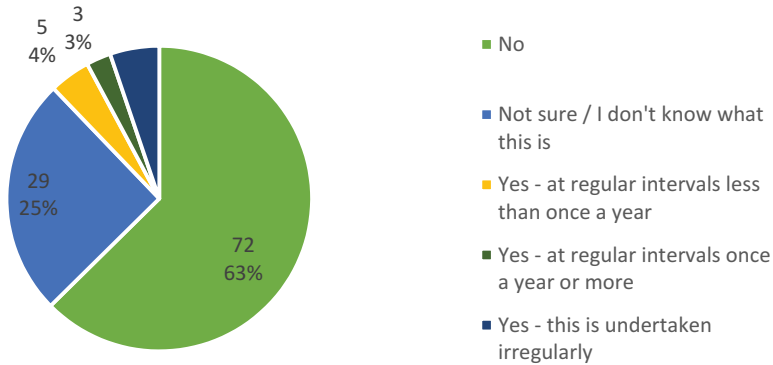

Figure 15.

responses referred to a range of issues, including pupil library assistants accessing others' records, the difficulty of chasing overdue books without infringing on privacy, and other members of school staff having access to the LMS and borrowing records. These issues were often described as being a difficult balance between protecting pupils' privacy and running the library efficiently, e.g., "Though I do try to respect privacy we still work on a system whereby the most effective way of communicating overdue books is a list of borrowers and their books sent to the form tutors." Another respondent felt similarly about using pupil library assistants to handle their peers' information: despite the possibility for problems, "I am a solo librarian in a busy library, and simply could not operate without the help of this group of students."

Demographic factors

The final section asked a series of demographic questions, the responses to which showed that the survey had attracted people from across the sector, including librarians with a variety of levels of experience, and a good mix from state, academy, and independent schools. There were also a small number of responses from grammar schools, and two from sixth form colleges, which, while not a focus of this study, were included in the final results as the Key Stage 5 age group (16–18) is also often served by secondary schools. Overall, most respondents served Key Stages 3 and 4 (11–14 and 14–16 years, respectively), the typical ages for secondary schools in the UK; there were some who provided services for the primary school age groups, but this was less

common, and often from librarians in private, all-through schools. The demographic data were used to test associations between respondents' experiences and their views on the ethical stance questions in the first section of the survey.

There was a clear association between being a member of CILIP and reporting familiarity with its ethical principles; 50% (8) of those who disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were familiar with the framework were members of CILIP, but this group made up 84.4% (65) of those who agreed or strongly agreed (χ^2 = 27.44; df = 2; p < .001). However, there was no significant association between membership of CILIP and agreeing with Q3's statement, "This principle is important and relevant to school libraries," or Q4's "This principle is easy to uphold in my workplace." Being a CILIP member was also associated with disagreement toward the statement in Q5, "School staff, parents, and other relevant adults (other than librarians) should have regular access to students' library records." CILIP members made up 72.4% (55) of those who disagreed with the statement, but only 50% (13) of those who agreed with it (χ^2 = 7.26; df = 2; p = .026). Memberships of other professional bodies, or having no memberships at all, showed no significant link with this view.

However, views on whether adults outside the library should have access to pupils' records were also associated with the age groups served by the library. For instance, participants who served Foundation children (ages 2–5) made up 3.9% (3) of those who disagreed with the statement, but 18.5% (5) of those who agreed (Fisher's Exact Test = 6.856, df = 2, p = .021). While the number of participants who served younger patrons was very small, there does appear – perhaps unsurprisingly – to be a link between having younger pupils and agreeing that other adults should be able to access their information. Conversely, respondents whose libraries serve Key Stage 4 pupils (ages 14–16) made up 93.4% (71) of those who disagreed with the statement, and 70.4% (19) of those who agreed, despite representing 86.8% (99) of respondents overall (Fisher's Exact Test = 9.032, df = 2, p = .008). No such associations were observed when taking account of either the respondents' lengths of experiuence or their LIS qualifications.

The participants were finally asked for any additional thoughts about privacy issues. Responses (n = 44) mostly reiterated earlier comments about the difficulty of navigating overdue notices, and referred to the introduction of GDPR, which "has added another layer of awareness with regards to privacy" across the library and the school. Some respondents also discussed the role of the librarian in relation to other members of staff; many felt uncomfortable sharing student data with other adults, e.g., "I think there is a perception among school staff that students are not entitled to privacy (. . .) and I feel like I'm constantly having to remind them that I can't share data with them." Others, however, felt it was their place to do so, e.g.,

> The CILIP ethical guidelines in this respect are completely overridden, in my opinion, by my commitment to my employer (...) I am an employee at work not a private individual. I will always respect a child's loan history as private information that I would not divulge to their peers but would assume that loan data is school property and can legitimately be shared with other members of staff if necessary.

The wide range of responses to this question, and the varying perspectives on different issues, demonstrate that there is no one clear view on how libraries should be run, and also that librarians themselves have to balance a number of concerns.

Interview responses

McNicol's study suggested that membership of a professional organization may help school librarians in implementing ethical principles (McNicol 339), and certainly some interviewees reported using CILIP's ethical principles to support their work, either in school or for CPD purposes. However, because the schools themselves do not necessarily recognize CILIP, this is not always an effective tool for practitioners. While professional bodies may be important to school librarians for the sense of professional identity they provide, and for the guidance they can offer, they currently have little significance for the organizations in which these professionals operate.

Furthermore, participants also suggested that tools designed specifically for school libraries – such as guidance on how to implement privacy principles in schools, and more discussion about the sector at CPD events and on master's courses – would benefit them. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that one participant had turned to the guidance for school libraries offered by the ALA since this body provides more specific policies and advice. Reaching out to further sources for information about privacy also arose during discussions about their confidence, with mention of professional magazines, books and discussions with other librarians. Such sources had also proved useful for interviewees wishing to understand more about the introduction of the GDPR legislation so as to ensure that their libraries were complying with the new laws. Many felt that the training offered in their schools did not cover how privacy should be handled in the library, i.e. that formal training and guidance was not sufficiently specific, despite Bailey's finding that the introduction of GDPR had brought privacy concerns to the attention of librarians (Bailey 33).

Interviewees noted a dichotomy between their profession and that of the other staff members in their workplaces, particularly in the case of pupils' library records; they felt that teachers assumed that they should have access to pupils' information in their role as carers for the children, and that these records did not have the same import as other data collected by the school, such as exam results. Furthermore, the confusion about whether library records should remain confidential may stem from the lack of clarity in law,

where the parents of pupils in maintained schools have the right to access their "educational record" but where it is unclear whether this includes their library record. Some interviewees referred to a distinction between the different age groups served by schools, suggesting that practices may depend on the age of their students (as noted previously when discussing the survey responses).

Having children as the main users of the library was clearly significant for the participants and this affected their practice significantly. However, this did not produce consensus in all cases; for instance, while some participants were concerned at their pupil library assistants having access to other students' information, and provided training to ensure this was under control, other interviewees did not consider this to be a problem. Perhaps the lack of clarity from professional bodies about how much privacy records in school libraries should be subject to is a reason for these very different attitudes. Moreover, being a solo worker was likely to impact librarians' practices; some interviewees were concerned about using pupil assistants but did so anyway because they needed the support offered by these students to run the library efficiently.

Discussion

The first research question aimed to explore participants' views of CILIP's ethical stance on privacy. There was a strong sense overall that participants were aware of CILIP as an organization and of its ethical framework, with many feeling that its privacy principle held significance for school libraries. Respondents also agreed that pupils' records should be kept private from other pupils, and that users should learn about managing their own information. However, not all the responses necessarily correlated with CILIP's standards, since, e.g., many felt that it was not inappropriate for figures outside the library to access students' library records. Significantly, despite a broad overall agreement with CILIP's privacy principle, there was a significant number of respondents who did not agree that it was easy to apply where they worked, suggesting that it is harder to implement this standard in practice than it is to agree with it in theory. This certainly reflects the findings of previous studies into ethical principles in UK school libraries (McNicol 333), and there were similar comments from the non-UK respondents regarding these theoretical stances, despite their answers to the questions about their practice being quite different. However, McNicol's study also found that belonging to a professional organization was likely to boost a librarian's practical support for intellectual freedom (McNicol 339), something that is not entirely supported here since whilst being a member of CILIP was linked to familiarity with its ethical stances, there was no suggested connection between membership and feeling able to apply the framework to one's workplace. McNichol did report that there was a significant association between pupils' ages and the actions of their librarians in the

context of intellectual freedom, as "[t]hose who worked with very young children were, perhaps unsurprisingly, most likely to censor" their reading material (McNicol 336). A similar finding is evident from the present study, where the students' ages were linked to the participants' attitudes toward the privacy of their library records.

Regarding the second research question, respondents felt confident in handling privacy issues. However, this comes despite a large number indicating that they had not received training on this topic either during their academic studies or in CPD activities. There was no consensus on whether respondents required further training on privacy; while the most frequently selected answer was "No," many indicated an interest in receiving more support, while others were uncertain. Given the significant number who had not received training in the past, this may indicate a lack of knowledge about what types of training might be available to them. However, responses to the free-form question asking what types of training respondents would consider useful did elicit a range of themes, including the desire for both online and face-to-face training, as well as an interest in examples of policies or guidance for the school sector. This is perhaps unsurprising given the lack of current provision in this area. Mention of training in data handling and GDPR indicated that respondents wished to refresh and to update their knowledge in relation to current issues and changes.

The third research question aimed to find out about the impact of the school environment on participants' practices, and here a range of issues and contradictions were revealed. For example, while many agreed that students should learn how to manage their own online and offline privacy, the majority of respondents were not involved in training students to do this. Indeed, those 8% of the respondents who did provide training referred mostly to informal discussions and teaching linked to the school's PSHE sessions; this was rarely seen as a core aspect of the librarian's day-to-day role in the UK, whereas 28% of the 25 non-UK respondents offered some kind of training in the library.

Most respondents agreed that students' records should be kept private from their peers, but there was a mixture of views as to whether it was appropriate for student assistants to have access to their peers' records or loan information. The frequent use of assistants to issue books and to access others' records suggests this principle is not always easy to implement in schools. While many of these assistants received training in doing this appropriately, some respondents commented that they were concerned that this may be breaching their users' privacy; however, for several this was necessary in order to complete their tasks, particularly for those who have no other help in running the library. The issue of overdue notices also appeared to be significant for many respondents, with many referring to this in free-form answers as a potential breach of students' privacy. It is interesting to note that it was fairly common

for participants to involve other adults – such as form tutors or parents – to ensure books were returned. More private methods of reminding students, such as sealed slips, are less used, despite these having been suggested as a way for librarians to avoid sharing pupils' loan information with other staff and students (Adams, The Privacy Problem, 4). As with the use of pupil library assistants, it appears that the convenience or practicality of involving adults in this process outweighs an acknowledged concern about pupil privacy. However, in both these areas the answers from non-UK participants were rather different: pupil library assistants were less commonly used and less likely to be given access to other pupils' records outside of the UK, and none of these respondents indicated that they contact pupils' parents regarding overdue items. However, the non-UK participants appeared to be more likely to share their students' records with other staff members; while the majority of UK participants had not been asked to share records with others, this was only the case for 40% of non-UK respondents, who were also more likely to provide this information when asked for (28%). Other differences included more of the non-UK respondents having received some privacy training, a greater involvement in providing privacy training for students, and no involvement of parents and less involvement of teachers when handling overdues.

Finally, the majority of respondents to the questionnaire noted that they did not carry out privacy audits, something recommended by the ALA (ALA, Library Privacy Guidelines for Students in K-12 Schools) and by non-UK practitioners (Barack; Riehl 36) to ensure that the library stays up to date with its privacy measures. However, many of the respondents here reported not knowing what a privacy audit was, suggesting that this is an area of practice of which librarians in the UK are markedly less aware than their overseas colleagues.

Conclusions

This study examined the views and practices of UK school librarians regarding the handling of student privacy, focusing in particular on three areas of concern. Overall, the participants agreed with CILIP's ethical stances; indeed, for some people these were seen as "common sense" and evidently appropriate for their work. However, some participants found that CILIP's ethical principle relating to privacy in particular was not necessarily easy to apply in a school library environment, particularly as the school itself may not recognize professional LIS organizations. This is analogous to the finding by McNicol that librarians are "more likely to express support for intellectual freedom in theory than in practice" (McNicol 333). Many respondents expressed a desire for more school-specific privacy guidance, which would support them in bringing CILIP's ethical principles into the workplace. In general, participants reported feeling confident in handling privacy concerns in the workplace, based in large part on training they had received at university, or on information they had

sought out for themselves (since there appears to be relatively few training and learning opportunities offered in the workplace itself). It was clear that the school environment can impact the practice of school librarians in relation to privacy, with little overall consensus on certain aspects of library practice, such as who could be given access to pupil information and whether policies should take account of the age of pupils.

There are obvious limitations to the work reported here. Most obviously, the respondents were self-selected, meaning that their views and experiences may not be representative of the population of UK school librarians. Moreover, the study took place during the summer, which may have limited the numbers of potential participants choosing to take part. However, the fact that 115 completed responses were obtained during just three weeks in the summer suggests that student privacy is not just a niche or specialist interest, but is one that is likely to be a concern for many UK school librarians. Some of the responses from overseas suggested that policies and practices may differ from those currently in the UK, and this could be an area worth investigating in future comparative research, most obviously with the USA where student privacy has already been a focus of interest for some years now.

Disclosure statement

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Appendix A

Views on ethical stances

(1) Have you heard of CILIP (the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals)?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Not sure
(2) To what extent do you agree that you feel familiar with CILIP's ethical framework?
  - Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree

CILIP's ethical framework says information professionals should uphold "The confidentiality of information provided by clients or users and the right of all individuals to privacy." Rate the following statements on the extent to which you agree with them.

(3) This principle is important and relevant to school libraries.
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided/I don't understand this
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

(4) This principle is easy to uphold in my workplace.
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided/I don't understand this
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

(5) School staff, parents, and other relevant adults (other than librarians) should have regular access to students' library records.
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided/I don't understand this
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

(6) Students' library records should be kept private from their peers.
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided/I don't understand this
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

(7) School students should learn to manage their own information and its safety/privacy, both online and offline.
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Undecided/I don't understand this
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Your handling of student privacy

(8) Have you ever received information/training about handling privacy in libraries?
- Yes – on a university course (e.g. MA)
- Yes – in CPD activities (e.g. workshops, webinars)
- No

(9) To what extent do you agree that you feel confident in protecting the privacy of your student users?
- Very confident
- Confident
- Slightly confident
- Not at all confident

(10) Do you feel you need any further support or training on supporting students' privacy?

- Yes
- Not sure
- No

(11) If you answered yes to the above, what sort of support or training do you feel you would benefit from?

Your school environment

(12) Have you ever been asked to share students' library records or personal information with others outside the library? Please select all people you have been asked to share records with. (Note: this does not include times where this has been required by law or because of a suspected threat to student safety, for example.)
- Headteacher
- Other senior management staff member
- Teacher
- Administrative staff
- Other support staff
- Student's parent/carer
- I have never been asked to do this
- Other (please specify)

(13) Have you ever refused, when asked, to provide someone outside the library with a student's personal information or library record?
- Yes – I refuse to share this information (except in emergency situations, for example)
- Yes – I have refused this at times, but on other occasions I have agreed to provide this information
- No – I try to supply information when asked for
- No – I have not been asked to share student information

(14) Do you train your student users to manage their own privacy, or respect that of others, online or offline?
- Yes – online privacy training
- Yes – offline privacy training
- Yes – both online and offline training
- No – but this is provided elsewhere in the school
- No – we do not provide this
- Not sure

(15) If you answered yes to the above, please provide details of what training you provide to your students.

(16) Does your library have student library assistants (or similar) with access to other users' library records or issue information?
- Yes, they have access to others' records (e.g. when logged on to the library management system)
- Yes, they issue and return books, but have no access to the library records
- No, our student library assistants' duties do not involve issuing books or accessing library records
- No, we do not have student library assistants
- Other

(17) Do your student library assistants receive any training for handling other users' records or privacy? Please give details of any training given.

(18) How do you inform students about overdue books/materials?
- A direct e-mail or letter to the student

- A sealed, folded, or private message sent via their class teacher/form tutor
- A list of students with overdue books sent to a class teacher/form tutor
- An e-mail or letter sent to the parent/carer
- In person when the student visits the library
- Students are not informed of overdue notices
- Other

(19) Do you undertake privacy audits to make sure the library is protecting its users' records?
- Yes – at regular intervals once a year or more
- Yes – at regular intervals less than once a year
- Yes – this is undertaken irregularly
- No
- Not sure/I don't know what this is

(20) Do you take any particular precautions to ensure students' privacy or information safety is maintained in your library (e.g. using the library layout to give students privacy)? Please give details.

(21) Are there any processes or aspects of the library service that you feel may compromise your students' privacy, either from their peers or adults? Please give details.

About you

(22) What type of organization do you currently work in?
- State/comprehensive school
- Grammar school
- Academy
- Independent/private school
- Special school
- Other

(23) What student age group(s) does your library serve? Tick all that apply.
- Foundation (ages 2–5)
- Key Stage 1 (5–7)
- Key Stage 2 (7–11)
- Key Stage 3 (11–14)
- Key Stage 4 (14–16)
- Key Stage 5 (16–18)

(24) How long have you worked in school library settings?
- Less than 1 year
- 1–5 years
- 5–10 years
- 10–15 years
- 15–20 years
- 20 years or more

(25) What, if any, library or information related qualifications do you hold? Tick all that apply.
- NVQ or equivalent
- Undergraduate degree
- Master's degree
- PhD
- CILIP Accreditation
- CILIP Chartership
- CILIP Fellowship
- Other

- None

(26) Are you a member of any professional organizations for librarians and information professionals? Tick all that apply.
- CILIP
- Regional CILIP group
- CILIP School Libraries Group (SLG)
- CILIP Youth Libraries Group (YLG)
- Any other CILIP special interest groups
- School Library Association
- Professional body from another country (please specify)
- Other (please specify)
- None

Finally . . .

(27) Do you have any further comments about privacy in your experiences of library work?