



**SUBMISSION TO  
ALIA Education and Workforce Summit 2008**

**Prepared by  
Public Libraries New South Wales – Metropolitan Association (PLM)  
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## **1. Introduction**

Public Libraries New South Wales – Metropolitan Association (PLM) is very pleased to make this submission to the *ALIA Education and Workforce Summit 2008*. PLM's submission is focused on the Public Library system.

The Summit will be attended by library employers, educators, researchers and ALIA members. It will be informed by critical topics and issues in both library and information education, and in the library workforce. ALIA, in leading this process, expects the following outcomes:

- Consideration of a small number of identified major themes and issues
- Agreement from the participants on an action plan.

The Summit will provide recommendations to the ALIA Education and Professional Development Standing Committee.

## **2. The Current Environment**

In 2007 Australia's population reached 21 million. Eighty five percent (85%) of Australia's population is located around its coastline, and one third (33%) resides in New South Wales. Twenty percent (20%) of the Australian population resides in Sydney.

The median age of Australia's population is 37 years. Nearly 25% of the Australian population is aged 55 years or older, and around 20% is under the age of 15. Australia's population is expected to reach 23 million during the next 10 years. Immigration contributes to Australia's population growth with over 100,000 immigrants per annum.

Australia' economic standing globally is relatively strong. With only 0.3% of the world's population of 6.6 billion, Australia contributes 1.6% of world gross domestic product (GDP). Australia's GDP is A\$1 trillion. Of this, conservatively A\$2.5 billion<sup>1</sup> (0.25% of GDP) is invested annually into Australia' library and information services sector which encompasses:

1. The Public Library System of Australia
2. The Education Sector's libraries: Universities, TAFE and Schools
3. The National, State and Territory libraries
4. Libraries, and information and research services in State, Territory and Australian Government departments and agencies
5. Libraries, and information and research services in the private and not-for-profit sectors.

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<sup>1</sup> Compiled from NSLA and CAVAL statistics, National, State and Territory Library Annual Reports, and estimates

Australia's public libraries play a key *multifunctional* role in their communities, by providing *educational, information, recreational and cultural services* and associated outcomes to 60% of the total Australian population, that make over 100 million visits to the libraries per annum. One-third of public library users are children, school and other students. The public library services are provided by over 8,000 FTE staff.

In 2006, total Australian public library operating expenditure was \$743 million: \$36 per capita, 9.8c per Australian per day or 0.07% of Australia's GDP. Eighty six percent (86%) percent, or just over \$600 million of Australia's public library funding, came from local government, which represented 3% of total Local Government expenditure.

New South Wales' public libraries' total operating expenditure was one third (33%) of the Australian total, and that of the Sydney metropolitan area's public libraries was 20% of the national total.

Australia's local government financial sustainability has been identified as a major concern. In a 2006 report<sup>2</sup> on local government financial sustainability, it was estimated that anywhere between 10%-30% of Australia's councils have significant financial sustainability issues.

Public libraries are integral to the COAG (Coalition of Australian Governments) agenda, including the Australian Government's *Education Revolution*. Public library performance impacts on at least seven of the Australian Government's Ministerial portfolios<sup>3</sup>.

The 2005 Canadian study<sup>4</sup>, "*The Future of Human Resources in Canadian Libraries*", also known as the 8Rs study (*recruitment, retirement, retention, rejuvenation, repatriation, re-accreditation, remuneration and restructuring*), revealed three key skills need to be pursued in library professionals' education: *Management, Leadership and Business Skills*.

### 3. The Future Australian Public Library Workforce

#### 3.1. The environment in which the Australian public library system will be operating

There are around 670 local government areas (Councils) in Australia at present, although this number will reduce following the 15 March 2008 Queensland local government elections.

It will be important for the Australian library and information services sector, and particularly the public library system, to consider different *scenarios* under which it will exist and operate over the next 10 and more years. This will set a context in which workforce planning, skills and education requirements, and other critical factors, can be considered for those who will work in the system.

Possible assumptions about the environment in which Australia's public library system will operate in 10 years time include:

1. Australia's population will be around 23 million and primarily coastal based
2. A flexible multi-generational workforce with some "short stays" in organisations
3. Local government restructuring will have occurred - there will be fewer Councils
4. The funding model for Australia's public libraries will be different to that in 2008

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<sup>2</sup> PriceWaterhouse Coopers 2006. *National financial sustainability study of local government*. A report commissioned by the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) <http://www.alga.asn.au/policy/finance/pwcreport/>

<sup>3</sup> FOLA 2008. *Investing in Australia's Future through its Public Library System*. [www.fola.org.au](http://www.fola.org.au)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.js.ualberta.ca/8rs/8rsFutureofHRLibraries.pdf>

5. Public libraries in medium to larger councils will be part of centralised multifunctional community services facilities – the manager of a future library service may be a Community Services Manager or Business Manager
6. Public libraries will operate in strategic partnerships and collaboration with all three levels of government, with the education sector eg schools and universities, with vendors, community groups, cultural organisations, the corporate sector and with other areas of local government
7. The public library system will be a key stakeholder in delivering and supporting “whole-of-government” programs and initiatives: *educational, information, recreational and cultural services*
8. Those working in multifunctional local government community services/public libraries will possess a range of ages, languages, skills, expertise, experiences and qualifications.

### **3.2. People Capabilities: Knowledge, Skills, Experience, Attributes and Qualifications for those working in the future Australian public library system**

Recent comments from Sydney metropolitan public library managers regarding current and future people capabilities in the public library system include:

- *“The system will require all-rounders: those who like children, older people and everyone in between, who can relate to all sections of the community, who have an interest in current affairs, local affairs, literature, technology, and have investigative (inquisitive) skills.”*
- *“It has been my experience that some of the best public librarians have come to the career by accident. We are recruiting from local high schools to catch those looking for casual work and offering it instead of McDonald's, Coles and KFC. They are bright, extraverted, show initiative, have great interpersonal skills. Some see the public library then as a career. Generally, those coming out of Universities and TAFE are not what we are looking for.”*
- *“In my experience, those who make the best professional librarians have often been library assistants or technicians prior to undertaking professional qualifications. They are also usually the ones who have not stayed in the one workplace for too many years, and bring with them a breadth of experience. If they've had experience in another industry or profession, then this can be even better.”*
- *“We have broadened our scope for the appointment of library technicians in recent years, and will accept people with suitable relevant tertiary qualifications (with preference given if they have library experience) eg IT qualifications in a Library IT technician role, childcare or teaching qualifications in a children's and youth role. Equally appropriate in particular positions could be community workers or those used to working in a particular community sector eg aged, multicultural and social workers.”*
- *“For professional librarians, an undergraduate degree with a graduate diploma in librarianship or another relevant area should be a minimum requirement, however if the degree or post graduate qualification is not library based, then there would really need to be prior library experience - there is still a basic skill set required for such an appointment.”*

- *“Paraprofessional library qualifications provided at TAFE need to be practically based, but still provide team leadership skills and basic management training, as technicians can be required to manage a small branch.”*
- *“I am not sure that a degree undertaken at the beginning of a career can hope to meet the total needs of an individual as their career progresses. Many librarians, who become library managers, have worked their way up through the system. Management training or education acquired early in their careers may well be dated by the time they are working at, or progressing to a more senior level. This is where the need for ongoing professional development, learning and upskilling is important.”*

A key characteristic of the Australian public library system, particularly in large cities such as Sydney, is the diversity of people ie ages and cultures that utilise public library services.

A major consideration for those managing and operating future public libraries is their multifunctional role and hence, the capabilities required in providing *educational, information, recreational and cultural services*.

The future public library professional and public library manager needs redefining. The differentiation between “librarians” and “library technicians” is increasingly blurred. They are both library professionals with defined roles and responsibilities in the public library system. Over the next 10 years, these roles and responsibilities may change.

A set of essential and desirable future capabilities are suggested for future public library professionals and essential future capabilities for future Library Managers. Some of these capabilities relate to both knowledge and skills, and others relate to personal experiences and attributes.

#### **Essential for future Public Library Professionals**

- IT literacy: eg Microsoft Office products; Web 2.0; Social Networking
- Information retrieval/Information Management (successfully undertake online searching, use a library management system, and organise information for retrieval)
- Human behavior knowledge, customer service and people skills including customer demographic expertise eg community languages; working with youth, children aging and CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) populations
- Community development
- Project Management
- Decision making
- Interest in information and literature
- Verbal and written communication skills
- Innovation, energy, an open mind and flexibility.

#### **Desirable for future Public Library Professionals**

- Marketing skills
- Event Management
- Train the Trainer
- Graphic Design
- Training for youth and children's librarians available as a specialty.

**Essential for future Public Library Managers, Team Leaders and Coordinators**

- Political and government knowledge and awareness: Australian, State and Local Government
- Community Development
- Strategic Planning
- Leadership and Change Management
- Business Management
- Financial Management
- Human behavior knowledge
- People skills: relationship management, people and talent management including mentoring, and team management
- Project Management
- Marketing and entrepreneurship
- Interest in information and literature
- Verbal and written communication skills
- Public speaking and presentation skills
- Innovation, energy and an open mind.

Formal qualifications acquired through a University, TAFE or other accredited providers including Business, Industry and Professional Associations, should encompass:

1. Business management
2. Community services management
3. Information management
4. Languages
5. Literature
6. Politics, government and legislation
7. Technology management.

There could be a range of program and formal qualification course options including:

- Information Management, with a combination of themes as in 1-7 above
- Community Services Management, with a combination of themes as in 1-7 above
- Local Government Management, with a combination of themes as in 1-7 above
- Business Management, with a combination of themes as in 1-7 above
- Education, with a combination of themes as in 1-7 above.

Ongoing professional development, including short course programs, will be dependent upon the roles and responsibilities of those working in a public library, or in a multifunctional community services facility.

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