

# **Content and Access in Victorian Public Libraries**

## ***A Strategic Blueprint 2006-2010***

Endorsed by  
Library Board of Victoria Advisory Committee on Public Libraries  
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## Executive Summary

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“The future of libraries is being shaped today by emerging technology that is transforming the way information is created and disseminated. The mantra will be: ‘Everything, everywhere, when I want it, the way I want it.’”<sup>1</sup> Content is becoming less format-dependent and consumers are not tied to traditional distribution channels for access. At the same time the brand of public libraries is generally perceived as “books,” and borrowing books remains the core and dominant activity in public libraries, which reinforces the critical importance of maintaining relevant and adequate collections. There is a substantial value in the text-based asset statewide that must be developed and maintained, particularly in growing communities. The public library network in Victoria and key stakeholders including the State Library of Victoria and the Department for Victorian Communities are working collaboratively to provide a response to these challenges to ensure access to quality local and global content. This strategic *Blueprint* for content and access in Victorian public libraries is underpinned by the collective aspiration of the public library network for *strength and excellence through collaboration*.<sup>2</sup>

This collaboration seeks leverage from the significant investment of almost \$145 million made in public libraries statewide and the collective asset of some 9 million items held in public libraries across the State.<sup>3</sup> It also recognizes the aggregate value of local points of presence and skilled staff throughout Victoria, where the public library network comprises 820 physical points of delivery. As noted in *Libraries Building Communities*, not many other services have this level of penetration.<sup>4</sup>

This *Blueprint* provides a strategic response to the current status of the state-wide collection in public libraries, facilitated through the *Strategic Asset Audit of Victorian Public Libraries*,<sup>5</sup> conducted in 2006. (Refer Appendix 1). Any asset, whether it be a building, a road or a library collection, needs to be maintained to a standard that will ensure quality, sustainability and functional use. The state-wide collection in public libraries is no exception. The *Audit* clearly demonstrates that a *collections revitalisation strategy* is urgently required and that this strategy will need to be implemented in the immediate term to avoid further degradation of collections. Strategies also need to be put in place to ensure that key stakeholders are aware of existing and emerging trends, within and outside the industry, and that they are positioning themselves accordingly. There also needs to be an enhanced

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<sup>1</sup> *Content, Not Containers* OCLC 2004 p7

<sup>2</sup> *Viclink Strategic Plan 2006-2009*.

<sup>3</sup> *Annual Survey of Public Libraries in Victoria 2004 /2005*. Local Government Victoria, Department for Victorian Communities, 2006 (\$144.93 million spent in 2004/ 2005)

<sup>4</sup> *Libraries Building Communities: the vital contribution of Victoria’s public libraries – A research report for the Libraries Board of Victoria and the Victorian Public Library Network*. State Library of Victoria 2005. (Executive Summary p22)

<sup>5</sup> Liddle, J. *Strategic Asset Audit of Victorian Public Libraries*, Melb, JLMS, 2006, (Refer Appendix 1). Hereinafter referred to as *The Audit*.

understanding about changes in the sources of production and their impact on public libraries.

The *Blueprint* also draws on consultations with public library staff and other key players to determine the challenges and the opportunities in ensuring relevant and accessible content. The development of this strategy sits within the State Government policy and planning framework and within the broader vision for public libraries articulated by the Ministerial Advisory Council on Public Libraries, *Libraries Strategic Direction*.<sup>6</sup> It also influenced by significant national and international research including Victoria's own *Libraries Building Communities*, and the OCLC reports, *Content not Containers* and *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources*.

Content needs to be relevant to the local community. There is an opportunity to further develop skills in the sector in the management of collections, including the development of meaningful analysis of community needs as well as techniques and better system capability to more efficiently analyse the performance of collections. The *Audit* highlighted the ageing of the state-wide collection, the need to ensure adequate levels of content and an appropriate mix to meet demand. Relevant guidelines and standards are required to better gauge the performance of collections and provide benchmark evidence to support advocacy for funding at the local and state level. Additionally, there will be a need for increased skills and knowledge to support the public library role as a creator or facilitator of valuable local content.

A total of \$23.937 million was spent in 2004 / 2005 acquiring some 1,056,820 items across the state.<sup>7</sup> Ensuring that we are getting the best value for the collections purchasing dollar and maximising our labour to support access to collections is critical. The identification of best practice and development of effective and efficient procurement processes presents a significant opportunity. There is certainly broad scope for collaborative purchasing through appropriate and agreed models that are best fit for purpose. The *Gulliver* consortia has certainly been an exemplary model. In particular, opportunities for collaborative purchasing and processing for LOTE collections needs to progressed as a priority. There is also an opportunity to work towards common processing standards to streamline shelf-ready supply for cost efficiencies. It would be beneficial to develop these using the *Australian Standards* framework, whereby key stakeholders, including suppliers, are at the table.

There are currently some significant projects underway that support the long-term vision for seamless and transparent access to library collections. These include the work on the *Federated Search Portal* and the *SWIFT* project, as well as regional initiatives such as *MurrayLink VDXHost*. These projects need to be progressed collaboratively and information on progress

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<sup>6</sup> Ministerial Advisory Council on Public Libraries *Libraries Strategic Direction*, Department for Victorian Communities, Victoria March 2005

<sup>7</sup> *Annual Survey of Public Libraries in Victoria 2004 /2005*. Local Government Victoria : Department for Victorian Communities, 2006

shared. Initiatives such as the State-wide card should also be further developed. It is also clear from the consultation that there is a significant amount of work to be done in creating protocols and guidelines to support a sustainable resource discovery and retrieval process in a seamless environment.

Consideration of access to content was wide-ranging in the consultations underpinning this report. Spaces need to be large enough to accommodate collections and house them attractively. Collections cannot be accessed if hours of opening are limited. Similarly, inadequate technical infrastructure and access points can limit access. Guidelines and standards, building on work that has been done elsewhere, including *People Places* are required for Victorian public libraries to support advocacy for funding and to provide useful measures of performance. Sharing innovation and models of best practice in service delivery will also be important on an ongoing basis to enhance access to collections.

In summary, this *Blueprint* seeks to provide a strategic response to meet the needs identified in the *Audit*, consultation with public libraries, and the aggregate findings of recent research and policy on Library futures. Key outcomes and strategies have been identified as well as strategies for collaborative action in the short-term to progress the outcomes identified. The *Blueprint* has been formulated from an *asset-based* approach. It recognises the social and economic value of physical and virtual library spaces, and the skills of staff in those libraries as content guides and navigators as well as producers and facilitators of content production. Most importantly, it is based on the premise that the state-wide collection in public libraries is a critically important community asset that must be managed, funded, housed and accessed effectively to provide the maximum return for all Victorians and the generations to follow.

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## ***1. Background***

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This *Blueprint* has been created out of the shared commitment to deliver enhanced library services to Victoria's communities through collaborative action, specifically through Statewide Public Library Development Projects. The *Audit* provided foundation data for the development of this strategy, providing a profile of the existing statewide collection including age profiles and sub-collection mix, and associated collection management practices and constraints, as well as recommendations for appropriate collection standards.

The development of the *Blueprint* involved considerable consultation with public libraries and with key stakeholders. Consultation was undertaken over a period of three months from March through May 2006. All public libraries were invited to provide input and most public libraries provided representation at consultations. Some library managers unable to attend consultations provided commentary by email and phone interviews. Interviews were also conducted with key stakeholders from the State Library of Victoria, the Viclink executive, the Department for Victorian Communities, the Municipal Association of Victoria, the Country Public Libraries Group and some selected learning providers.

The consultation was a staged process, beginning with the *Public Libraries 2020 Summit* on March 6<sup>th</sup>. The *Summit* provided the opportunity for public library staff and other key stakeholders to gain new perspectives on emerging trends and best practice and to workshop ideas and issues relating to the future of public libraries. A workshop held the following day provided the opportunity to refine underpinning principles and outcomes from the *Summit*, to develop a framework for further consultation and to identify some key strategies. Consultations held in metropolitan Melbourne and at key regional centres through Victoria were also well attended and highly participative. There was certainly congruence of thought in the various consultations regarding key issues and potential strategies.

Research was also undertaken to ensure that this *Blueprint* was aligned with State policy and planning frameworks and to identify the broader strategic context, nationally and internationally.

A key outcome of the *Blueprint* is for a shared understanding and commitment to progressing the strategies identified through the *Audit*, and the consultation and research undertaken as part of the development of the *Blueprint*. This document provides an overview of Victoria's public library collection state-wide. *Appendix 1* of this report provides the full text of John Liddle's comprehensive *Audit* and that content is not repeated unnecessarily in this document unless to support strategies identified in

consultations or through research. The *Blueprint* also identifies the context for planning including State Government strategy and policy, as well as relevant research. The focus of the *Blueprint* is on how the identified outcomes can be progressed through the implementation of strategies over the next five years through collaborative action. In particular, it identifies specific projects and funding sources in the short term through *State wide Public Library Development Projects* funded by Arts Victoria through the Library Board of Victoria.

## 2. Overview of Audit Findings

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The comprehensive *Strategic Asset Audit of Victorian Public Libraries* completed by John Liddle was conducted via a survey of Victoria's 44 library services as well as in depth research and selected consultation. Overall, the *Audit* found that the statewide collection is functioning effectively. In line with population, almost half of the statewide collection resides within metropolitan standalone library services.<sup>8</sup> However, there is significant variance and inequity across the forty-four public library services with the statewide collection housed in large and small library buildings, open for different periods, holding collections of differing sizes and age and with varying performance levels.

Overall principal areas for concern identified in the *Audit* were low collection items of 1.66 per capita<sup>9</sup> (excluding periodicals) and an even lower acquisitions rate of 1.55 items per capita. Nearly 44% of the statewide collection is over 8 years old<sup>10</sup> and, with the level of discard of older materials in the collection, it is clear that the size of the statewide collection will continue to trend downwards. Liddle warns that: *"Population growth and inflation will place further pressure on the capacity of the collection to meet demand and it is virtually inevitable that at some point, the declining collection will lose its relevance and drawing power."*<sup>11</sup>

*The key findings of the Audit were:*

- Victoria currently lags South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland and New South Wales in items per capita, and it is expected that Victoria will progressively fall further behind the other states.
- Collection mix does not match customer demand, thereby creating significant collection gaps within most library services.
- The statewide collection age profile is unevenly distributed and excessively aged, with 44% of holdings older than eight years, the period nominated in the *Audit* as the average shelf-life of library materials.
- Obsolete materials (not borrowed for at least 25 months) account for 16.7% of the statewide lending collection. This

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<sup>8</sup> Audit p.40

<sup>9</sup> Audit p.19 Liddle notes that New Zealand's holdings are almost exactly double those of Victoria in per capita terms.

<sup>10</sup> "...30% of the statewide collection showing a pre-1988 publication date and a further 14% was reported as having an unknown date. It is reasonable to assume that those items with unknown dates are predominantly older collection items, which, when combined with the pre-1998 items presents the collection as decidedly aged." Audit p.53

<sup>11</sup> Audit p.16

is equivalent to holding \$29.1 million of non-performing stock

- Unless collections are diligently managed as working inventories, they will perform poorly
- It is becoming increasingly impractical and uneconomic for library services to maintain LOTE collections for minority languages and there is a need for a cooperative approach to procuring LOTE materials
- User surveys show that satisfaction levels with library collections appear to be declining
- Overall, current collection management strategies and practices are inadequate to maintain a viable statewide collection and ensure the longevity of high quality library services.
- The statewide collection is sub-optimal in terms of overall holdings, collection mix and collection age. There is also considerable variability in collection size and quality between library services, thus creating inequitable access to collection materials.
- Adoption of and adherence to proposed collection standards will restore the collection to a position of strength consistent with the importance assigned to collections by library users.

Liddle concludes that there is a need for a statewide *collection revitalisation strategy* to reach the desired standards within three years. To implement the *collection revitalisation strategy* it is estimated that one-off funding of \$77.1 million (NPV) will be required over the first three years, inclusive of centralised procurement and processing costs. Recurrent funding should also increase by approximately 26% over current levels and be annually adjusted to maintain its real investment value over time.

The revitalisation strategy is structured to achieve the following fundamental objectives:

- To ensure that library collections are acknowledged and positioned as the core asset of public library services and the primary driver of service quality.
- To ensure that library collections reflect the reading, viewing and listening preferences of their local communities in a manner consistent with the maintenance of acceptable literacy and cultural standards. This will naturally require the flexibility to accommodate changes to such preferences and standards over time.
- To ensure that adequate provision is made to safeguard against inequitable collection holdings between library services.
- To ensure that library collections are effectively and professionally managed.

To facilitate the revitalization Liddle proposes that:

- The State Government's core public library grants be changed from their current general non-specific status to that of being specifically designated to procure library materials. The grant allocations to be population driven and linked to the proposed collection standards.
- Performance based criteria be put in place to ensure that the grants are appropriately expended.
- Local government councils to retain responsibility for funding the other components of public library services and assign additional funding to collections at their discretion.

Liddle concludes that *“The Strategic Asset Audit has confirmed the critical importance of library collections as perceived by library users. If public libraries are to genuinely function as customer-driven organisations, it is, therefore, imperative that collections be afforded a status consistent with the public's perception and supported by secure funding arrangements to ensure the longevity of the library brand. These principles are accommodated within the library collection revitalisation strategy. ... Given that the statewide collection has deteriorated in terms of scale, age and relevance, an accelerated change program is recommended.”*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Audit p.141

### 3. Context for Planning

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The planning context for this strategy is one of collaborative focus on a vision for the future for the people of Victoria. The State Government has articulated a strong vision for regional Victoria, in *Growing Victoria Together*.<sup>13</sup> The 44 public libraries in the State of Victoria play a key role in working towards this vision: developing a thriving economy, growing and linking Victoria, and providing high quality and accessible community services. They also play an important role in supporting lifelong learning, and building strong, caring and participative communities. Public libraries across the State also support the government's key policy platform, "A Fairer Victoria" a social policy action plan setting out major strategies and actions to address disadvantage in Victoria.<sup>14</sup>

The State Library of Victoria, the Department for Victorian Communities, the Municipal Association of Victoria and the Victorian Public Library network have been working together to provide a collegiate response to existing and future challenges and to identify a vision for libraries that aligns with the long-term vision for the State and the policy framework underpinning it.

The Department for Victorian Communities is a key player in promoting community strength and building communities through support and advice for libraries. The Municipal Association of Victoria is the legislated peak body representing 79 Victorian councils, which are the owners, operators and majority funders of public libraries in Victoria. The State Library through *Library 21* is attempting to provide a strategic response to the challenges that new technology and changing community expectations have brought for all libraries. *Library 21* is a policy for the future to provide Victorians with access to library services appropriate for the varied cultural and information needs of the twenty-first century without compromising valued, traditional services.<sup>15</sup> The vision implicit is that all library sectors will build on their existing strengths and efficiencies and work towards a single inter-connected and co-operative framework. The policy developed also supported *Arts 21* and *Victoria 21*, other key government policies developed at that time.

Similarly, the Victorian Public Library Network, through Viclink, its peak representative body, have identified these challenges and have identified opportunities within their strategic plan<sup>16</sup> as to how

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<sup>13</sup> *Growing Victoria Together: A vision for Victoria to 2010 and Beyond*. Department of Premier and Cabinet [www.dpc.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au) Accessed May 2006.

<sup>14</sup> *A Fairer Victoria: the Victorian Government's Social Policy Action Plan* April 2005 [www.dpc.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au) accessed May 2006

<sup>15</sup> *Library 21 Victorian Libraries Policy* Library Board of Victoria 1998. p.4

<sup>16</sup> *Viclink Strategic Plan 2007-2009*

libraries may continue to be a significant player in the information age in order to respond to a rapidly changing environment and continue to add value. The plan is based on the fundamental premise of *strength and excellence through collaboration* which is the underpinning vision of the plan. The purpose of the plan is to facilitate collective strategies and initiatives enabling Victorian public libraries to deliver enhanced services to their users.

A *Framework for Collaborative Action*<sup>17</sup> acknowledges the commitment of the Library Board of Victoria through the State Library of Victoria and the public library network to work together and to collaborate in building a shared future. It confirmed the strategic importance of Victorian libraries collaborating to achieve sustainable beneficial outcomes for all Victorians through working to achieve:

- Enhanced library collections
- Improved access options
- “seamless” service /access for users
- better skilled staff
- increased community and government understanding of and engagement with libraries
- greater efficiency and effectiveness of library services through collaboration and sharing

Collaborative action has been a key strategic thrust over the past two years. The *Partnering Agreement*,<sup>18</sup> of September 2005 was entered into by the Municipal Association of Victoria, VicLink, the Department for Victorian Communities and the State Library of Victoria, representing the Library Board of Victoria to facilitate collaboration that would support:

- life long learning, research, recreation and entertainment needs
- equitable and ubiquitous access to world class content and knowledge networks,
- access to broadband communication networks,
- development of social capital and community building.

This partnership agreement grew out of a process initiated by the Ministerial Advisory Council on Public Libraries to define a vision and strategic direction for libraries. This process delivered a shared

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<sup>17</sup> Library Board of Victoria and Victorian Public Library Network *Framework for Collaborative Action* June 2004 p2

<sup>18</sup> *The Library Partnering Agreement Between Parties with a Role in The Development and Implementation of a Shared Vision for Victorian Libraries Ministerial Advisory Council on Public Libraries.* September 2005

vision for the future of libraries, which is ambitious, far-reaching and stretching well beyond the boundaries of public libraries.<sup>19</sup>

This *Blueprint* sits within that longer-term vision, known colloquially as the *MAC Vision*:

- Our vision is that **The Library** will be your consistent partner throughout your journey of life long learning acting as a broker and trusted guide to a wealth of valuable content.
- Our vision is that **The Library** is seen by decision makers as one of the most important and effective investments in building an innovative state with caring communities.

The *Vision* for a borderless integrated web of resources is closely aligned with *Growing Victoria Together* supporting lifelong learning and developing a fairer society as well as better linking Victoria and building communities. The specific goals of the *MAC Vision* are

- Borderless Library
- Seamless Web of Resources
- Broker of Authoritative Relevant Content
- Trusted Guide in Information Discovery
- Personalised Service
- Interacting Innovative Communities
- Smart Deployment and Resource Utilisation
- Service Interoperability and System Interoperability
- Dynamic Innovative Diverse Network
- Priority Area of Sustained Investment
- The Custodian of Victorian Content
- Best Practice People, Facility and Resource Management

The context for planning for this *Blueprint* is also predicated on enhanced understandings through research and information about emerging trends. A foundation document is the UNESCO *Manifesto for the public library*, prepared by the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA).<sup>20</sup> The manifesto affirms the public library, the local gateway to knowledge, as a basic condition for lifelong learning. It states that collections and services have to include all types of appropriate media and modern technologies as well as traditional materials, and that high quality content and relevance to local needs and conditions are fundamental.

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<sup>19</sup> Ministerial Advisory Council on Public Libraries *Libraries Strategic Direction* Department for Victorian Communities Victoria March 2005

<sup>20</sup> UNESCO *Manifesto for the public library*, prepared by the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA)

The major body of research and culminating publication, *Libraries Building Communities*, an initiative of the Library Board of Victoria and the Victorian public library network, has become a seminal document in library literature in relation to the community-building role of public libraries. This study demonstrates that libraries and librarians make a fundamental contribution to communities in four key areas: free public access to computers and information technology resources; the creation of better informed communities and the promotion of lifelong learning and literacy; and the building of connections between individuals, groups and governments.<sup>21</sup> We know that public libraries are invaluable contributors to our economic, social and cultural well-being and that they help build communities.

Alan Bundy's report, *Community Critical: Australian Public Libraries serving Seniors*<sup>22</sup> highlights the need for strategies to respond to the informational, learning and quality of life needs of an ageing population. Nationally, strategy across sectors will need to be aligned to address the impact of baby boomers, who will be "large in numbers and unique in their demands."<sup>23</sup> Similarly, research and thinking into the ways that public libraries can respond to the Y generation and those that will follow must influence our strategy.

The OCLC report, *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources* also provides critical perspectives on the place of the library in the online environment. It is against this backdrop of emerging trends and the behaviours of participants in a rapidly changing information environment, that we must position ourselves, while at the same time ensuring that we maintain and develop our core assets.

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<sup>21</sup> *Libraries Building Communities: the vital contribution of Victoria's public libraries – A research report for the Libraries Board of Victoria and the Victorian Public Library Network*. State Library of Victoria 2005. (Executive Summary p5).

<sup>22</sup> A. Bundy *Community Critical: Australian Public Libraries serving Seniors*: Melb; FOLA, 2005. This was specifically noted in the *Interview with Lynn Makin*, PLA, March 2006

<sup>23</sup> Kahlert, M The impact of baby boomers on public libraries: myth and reality. *Australasian public libraries and information services* 13 (1) march 2000 pp25-40

## 4. Vision and Strategic Outcomes

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### 4.1 Vision

A vision is a *word picture* of the future: it paints a picture of where we would like to be in the longer term. A good vision is bold, aspirational and inspiring. The *Vision* articulated in *Strategic Directions for Public Libraries* (which was developed under the policy statement “*A Fairer Victoria*”) was identified as the overarching vision for the development of the strategic *Blueprint*. Consultation clearly re-inforced the intent of this *Vision* for seamless access and service delivery and the sharing of resources. Concerns focused more on developing clarity as to how this might be achieved. It was seen that the *Blueprint* could provide strategies that will start to develop the framework, infrastructure and protocols to progress the *Vision*

### 4.2 Underpinning principles

There was a strong congruence in the consultations regarding the principles underpinning the *Vision*. Common principles identified were:

- Equity of access
- Empowering and building communities through collaboration, inclusion, engagement and participation
- Flexible, pro-active and responsiveness to change
- Innovation and openness to risk
- Inspirational, focused on excellence and demonstrating financial value
- Visible and well-used
- A public good - *Making a difference*

### 4.3 Broad outcomes and enablers for public libraries

The *Public Libraries 2020 Summit*, held in Melbourne on March 6<sup>th</sup> 2006, provided the opportunity for public library staff and other key stakeholders to engage in new ideas and discussion about public library futures. The context was broad, however it was clear that there were some key areas emerging from brainstorming sessions and discussion, which could broadly be categorized as *key outcomes* and *key enablers*.

***Key outcomes were identified as:***

- Connected and engaged communities
- Learning communities
- Relevant and accessible content

**Key enablers were identified as:**

- Skilled flexible and representative workforce
- Effective efficient use of resources and technology
- Meaningful measures of our success
- Vibrant active and accessible spaces – physical and virtual
- Libraries highly valued and well used
- Effective leadership and advocacy at all levels

This *Blueprint* for strategic action focuses on *Relevant and Accessible Content*, as a foundation for *Learning Communities* and *Connected and Engaged communities*. This key outcome is also delivered through the above enablers.

## 4.4 Outcomes for the *Blueprint*

Consultation with the Steering Committee for this project and other key players identified the following outcome areas for the development of a strategic *Blueprint* for Content and Access.

- **Positioning**
  - Positioning of public libraries through pro-active intelligence gathering and strategic advocacy
- **Production**
  - Engagement with the sources of production and publishers as well as the facilitation of production at the local level
- **Procurement**
  - Cost-efficient procurement of content through collaborative activity, and the development of common standards for shelf ready processing
- **Relevance and capacity**
  - Content relevance and capacity through a revitalisation strategy and the development of tools and skills to support “*whole of life*” asset management of collections
- **Discovery and retrieval**
  - Resource discovery and retrieval through collaborative projects facilitating seamless access to state-wide collection, including the development of resource sharing protocols and guidelines
- **Access and availability**
  - Access and availability of content through the provision of appropriate built and technical infrastructure and opening hours and the development of innovative service delivery enhancing access

## 5. Challenges and Opportunities

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### 5.1 Positioning:

***Outcome 1: Public libraries well-informed of trends and futures and positioned strategically***

#### 5.1.1 Awareness of Futures and Trends

The pace of technological change has been exponential and we can only assume that communication systems and technologies will further evolve and demand for global information will continue to grow. Our client base is also changing with the emergence of the *Baby Boomers*, and the predominance of *Generation Y* as confident players in an online world. Both groups will bring new expectations for service delivery from public libraries.

Public libraries will need to have good scanning mechanisms to continually redefine their offer in the information society. They will need good intelligence to better understand the emerging environment of changing expectations and to position themselves through embracing new technologies, tapping into the content of their communities and developing creative physical and virtual spaces that become an experience and a destination. Libraries must have the capacity to respond flexibly to existing and emerging trends. To do this we must better understand what our potential futures are, looking both within and outside our own industry.

Certainly the OCLC Report<sup>24</sup> has confirmed the way that *Google* has changed the way information consumers interact with content. The stated intent by Google to digitise the world's literature is worthy of some discussion in relation to impacts on the public library. A common thread in the consultations was the recognition that a better understanding of new technologies and innovation is required, and in particular, how they can be harnessed to facilitate access to content. The need to understand our changing role as enablers and facilitators of content in participatory environments was also highlighted.

Keeping abreast of the trends and maintaining as awareness of what is happening internationally in areas that may impact on libraries, and particularly on library collections and access to content, was seen as fundamental to the way that issues in relation to access and

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<sup>24</sup> Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources. A Report to the OCLC membership. [www.oclc.org/reports/](http://www.oclc.org/reports/) (accessed 20/4/06)

storage of new formats are resolved. The need for virtual and physical forums for exploring issues, trends and new technologies in different industries was identified as well as the facilitation and development of centres of excellence that could showcase innovation widely.

### 5.1.2 Collaborative action

*The Framework for Collaborative Action* is a public commitment by the Library Board of Victoria (through the State Library of Victoria) and the Victorian Public Library Network to work together to deliver enhanced library services to Victoria's communities over the next five years. *The Partnering Agreement* signed by the key players including the Department for Victorian Communities and the Municipal Association of Victoria, the Library Board of Victoria, and the Victorian Public Library Network provides a strong platform to move forward towards the common *Vision* for libraries, articulated through the Ministerial Advisory Committee. This *Blueprint* should now underpin the development of strategy and the rollout of projects. It is critical that resources are not diluted and that there is maximum return on investment in collaborative action including advocacy.

This call to collaborate goes beyond state boundaries and opportunities through CASL, and state public library networks for collaborative action on a state-to-state level, a national level and internationally, (and in particular with New Zealand) need to be progressed. Similarly, opportunities for collaboration at the local level particularly with local communities to develop, enhance, produce or facilitate access to content need to be further explored.

### 5.1.3 Joint Advocacy

Alan Bundy notes that “*public libraries need to be better funded to meet their widening roles at the heart of their communities and the increasing demand on them as unique multidimensional “cradle to grave” services available to all*”<sup>25</sup> Collections, and the infrastructure that provides access to content, are assets that need to be maintained and developed, and there is a need for ongoing advocacy in relation to funding the state-wide asset. Understanding needs to be enhanced about the impacts of population growth on existing assets and the need for an investment to support that population growth. Similarly, there needs to be a greater ongoing appreciation of the gaps across the State, particularly in the size and age of collections as well as the adequacy of the infrastructure, built and technical, to support access to collections. Most particularly, there is a need to ensure that country areas are not disadvantaged in the online environment. Sustainable and appropriate funding is

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<sup>25</sup> Bundy, A *Community critical: Australian public Libraries Serving Seniors*. Melb, FOLA, 2005 [www.foia.org.au](http://www.foia.org.au) p1

required and advocacy should be strategic and well co-ordinated at all levels of government based on sound data and standards, and collaborative action.

Consultation clearly identified a need for a new language when talking about collections with decision makers. *“We need to grow the understanding in Local and State Government about collections as assets and need to be talking about asset renewal as a key strategy ...– we need to make the assets of the state at triple AAA rating through a collections upgrade program specifically targeted towards core collections.”*<sup>26</sup>

#### 5.1.4 Strategic response

- Identify and implement mechanisms to ensure public library managers and key staff are well informed and are engaged in discussion around emerging trends that may impact on collections and access within and outside the industry
- Develop virtual and physical forums to share information, trends and futures that may impact on collections and access to content
- Further develop information sharing mechanisms and means of distilling the relevant trends and implications, maximizing existing vehicles such as the VicLink list
- Facilitate industry leaders feedback sessions from relevant areas
- Ensure we have good demographic projections and can interpret what this means
- Build relationships with early adopters within and outside the industry nationally and internationally
- Maintain a watching brief on new developments in public libraries that may impact on collections and access (nationally and internationally) and maximise opportunities to showcase innovative models
- Work together to provide a filtering / scanning service for new and emerging trends providing information to the industry on potential impacts and possible strategies using our existing staff as well as identifying external resources that may assist in such scanning
- Tap into the innovation and thinking of the partners that we are dealing closely with (e.g. suppliers such as Borders, Library Management System providers, marketing agencies etc)
- Showcase relevant innovative responses to emerging trends and developments
- Develop better means of advocating with key decision makers and funders the implications of changing trends

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<sup>26</sup> Interview John Murrell Country Public Libraries Group. April 2006

- Develop a collaborative advocacy strategy to inform decision makers and funders about the state of public library collections in Victoria and the need to fund the *collections revitalisation strategy*

## 5.2 Publishing and Production

### *Outcome 2: Content produced and packaged to meet changing needs*

The need to fully appreciate the impacts of a fluid environment with publishing trends and content storage is clear. Shorter print runs, price increases for text based materials, increasing product born digital, just in time printing and the trend towards the downloading of data will all impact on public libraries. We have also seen significant changes in the publishing industry, including decreasing margins for publishers and suppliers, and rapid changes in the format and in the ways that information is becoming available to the public. Not only does the library sector need to be aware of these impacts but funders and constituents need a greater understanding of these trends and their potential impacts, particularly in relation to changing formats and mechanisms for content delivery and the implications for access.

Equity of access is an underpinning principle for public libraries. Currently, access to quality affordable content for culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD) is an issue that must be addressed. The cost and access to material in languages other than English (LOTE) is a significant issue for many public libraries, and there is a need for greater collaboration in sourcing quality content and in influencing the production of that content so that it is available in the required medium and coverage required. There is also the potential to explore more innovative solutions for some LOTE content, such as the production of multilingual content on the web, the download of content and print on demand. There are opportunities to build on the success of *Open Road* in facilitating the production of LOTE content.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, there is a need to ensure that material for persons with a print or vision disability have adequate access to quality content. Partnerships in place with producers and sector advocates need to be strengthened through two way feedback in relation to client needs for content and the channeling of content as well as potential for new ways of packaging and delivering content. *Vision Australia*, in particular is a key partner.

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<sup>27</sup> The State Library of Victoria, through its “Open Road” project managed by Vicnet, offers libraries and their communities Internet access to information in community languages including some non-Roman scripts. “Open Road” is building a directory of resources relevant to the delivery of multicultural services, including links to organisations.

Although it is acknowledged that public libraries are not significant players in terms of influencing publishers, some aggregate advocacy, particularly with specialist producers of content should be initiated to ensure that publishers and producers are aware of the needs of public libraries in relation to content and format and usage trends of various media.

As OCLC research confirms, we are seeing increasing quality content finding its way to the open web, facilitated by self-publishing tools.<sup>28</sup> There has also been considerable growth in publishing on personal web sites and blogs and as noted by OCLC in its analysis of information formats, “*there’s a transformation underway in the world of content and its deployment*”.<sup>29</sup> The transformation within the music industry alone is a salutary lesson. There is an increasing trend for MP3s, and the AppleiPods and similar devices are increasingly being used for more than just music. Digital audio books are on the increase as well as methods of streaming content as required. There is also a new arena of information technology opening up for libraries in the transition of the web into Web 2.0. Ultimately, the format of the content becomes less important than its ability to be delivered via a low-cost, convenient channel.<sup>30</sup> This provides both a challenge and an opportunity for content producers and their clients, including libraries, and raises some critical questions for public libraries in terms of how they position themselves in relation to their product mix and offer.

OCLC also note, however, that the major trends are not just technological: they are social, and are profoundly changing how content is created, collected, used, shared and preserved. It is also significant that the most critical changes are taking place outside the arena of traditional information management. Social publishing, or open content, such as wikis and blogs are arenas of content production that public libraries have not engaged in extensively to date. Once again this presents some opportunities.

As noted in consultations with public libraries, the greatest opportunity exists in the domain of harvesting local content. Public libraries do have a vital role in collecting, preserving, digitizing, and sharing local history, and once again this can be productive community collaboration. The phenomena of individuals and communities creating content is increasing and libraries can play a guiding role in supporting the creation of local content and

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<sup>28</sup> 2004 *Information Format Trends: Content, not Containers*. OCLC 2004. The OCLC report noted in the U.S. 23 million fewer new print books were sold in 2003 than in 2002 and that according to a Book Industry Study Group report there is continued trend of increasing production and declining demand

<sup>29</sup> 2004 *Information Format Trends: Content, not Containers*. OCLC 2004. OCLC estimated in 2004 that there would be an increase in daily activity on Blogs from 2.7 million to 86 million over a five year period. p.2 and 9 .

<sup>30</sup> 2004 *Information Format Trends: Content, not Containers*. OCLC 2004. p3

facilitating its access. The library then further develops its status as the focal point and source of local information and facilitator of global access to that content. Public libraries have an opportunity to strengthen community and community identity through tapping into local and social history. They will, however, need to have the tools and training to facilitate and harvest some of this content, as well as enable local communities to create content and make it accessible. There is also an opportunity to harness collective energies and to engage with the *Victorian Cultural Broadband Network* who have been working with the main cultural organisations and are now starting to work with communities at a more local level.<sup>31</sup>

Certainly, consultation identified a concern that at the same time that local content is being developed, there is a significant amount disappearing. It was seen that public libraries have a responsibility to local communities that should now be facilitated by an investment in knowledge, skills and enabling tools. In particular the preference of Generation Y to be *creators* rather than *receivers* was noted. *Picture Victoria* was identified as an excellent model in discussions. Overall, there is a need for a greater understanding and capacity in relation to the role of public libraries as content creators and facilitators. “*We need to state that we are in the business of content development.*”<sup>32</sup>

### 5.2.1 Strategic response

- Develop stronger partnerships with producers of text based and digital content to better inform and potentially influence production and access to produced content
- Maximise representation and inputs where possible to publishing industry bodies and forums re changing needs and medias
- Work collaboratively with producers of content for the visually and hearing impaired, and in particular with *Vision Australia* to ensure two way feedback
- Develop partnerships with selected producers of content to test formats and maximise information sharing and joint strategy development
- Ensure effective information flow to and from public libraries and the publishing industry in relation to existing and emerging media
- Identify opportunities to apply print on demand for specific content
- Develop advocacy strategy with publishers as an aggregate body (Viclink) to ensure issues and needs are understood

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<sup>31</sup> *Commentary from Wendy Quihampton, SLV. Steering Committee Meeting, May 2006*

<sup>32</sup> *John Murrell Consultation with Library Managers at Traralgon, 12<sup>th</sup> April 2006*

- Advocate with LOTE producers to facilitate content production that meets changing needs (e.g. format, availability, content)
- Identify advocacy opportunities to better inform funders and decision makers about the transition to new technologies and containers of content
- Encourage CALD groups to develop content, building on the success of *Open Road*
- Create / facilitate infrastructure for local communities to create content and provide a platform of tools and knowledge to engage and harness the knowledge of our communities
  - Develop tools to assist libraries and communities to develop or facilitate the development of local content, including training, templates, and access to equipment and software
  - Leverage from existing toolkits for community engagement
  - Provide Train the Trainer for content production or the facilitation of content production at the local level
  - Provide examples of Best Practice
- Link with the “*Creating Community Content*” strategy
- Confirm that we are in the business of content production and resource the commitment
- Develop and showcase successful models of community engagement for local content production and access

## 5.3 Procurement

### ***Outcome 3: Effective and cost efficient procurement***

Discussion with Public Libraries Services staff and other key staff from the Department for Victorian Communities<sup>33</sup> as well as public librarians highlighted the need to progress collaborative action on procurement for collections. A total of \$23.937 million was spent on Victorian public library collections in 2004 / 2005 acquiring some 1,056,820 items across the state.<sup>34</sup> Ensuring that we are getting the best value for the collections purchasing dollar and maximising our labour to support access to collections is critical. Consultation with public libraries and other key stakeholders highlighted this area as a priority and a focus for collaborative action over the next few years.

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Graham Dudley and Colin Morrison, Department for Victorian Communities, March 2006

<sup>34</sup> *Annual Survey of Public Libraries in Victoria 2004 /2005*. Local Government Victoria : Department for Victorian Communities, 2006

Procurement covers all processes from the selection of an item for ordering to making the item available for use, either virtually or physically. The success of *Gulliver* as an exemplary model was highlighted in all discussions, and it was noted by the President of Viclink that libraries are now realising up to 75% savings on their investment.<sup>35</sup> State-wide license for Kinetica was also identified as another sustainable model. There has been some work done by a handful of libraries such as shared multi-cultural collections and some regional initiatives, but, apart from *Gulliver*, there has not been significant development in this area. It is clear that libraries will need to demonstrate that are getting the best value for money.

In the *Audit*, Liddle noted that concerns had been expressed in other quarters: “*the common concern expressed when discussing libraries with non-librarian stakeholders is that resources appear to be wasted through duplicated effort in ordering and processing library materials.*”<sup>36</sup> He also noted “*Further improvement will be achieved through more effective procurement... practices.*”<sup>37</sup> There is certainly a willingness to explore a more effective procurement and processing model through collaboration, particularly for LOTE materials.

Despite anecdotal evidence, the *Audit* found that 81.9% of new items are catalogued in-house and there is a surprisingly high level of internal processing, which suggests a significant opportunity for process re-design to minimize duplication. The sub-collections with the highest use of outsourced cataloguing were the LOTE and audio-visual collections.

Liddle estimates that the technical services functions adds a further 56% to the cost of making an item available on library shelves. He also noted that supplier aided selection provided significantly lower costs, and that cost savings on this model could be in the vicinity of \$300,000 per annum based on the Yarra Plenty model.

Certainly, this has been supported by research completed in the UK, where PKF Consultants have completed their in-depth national stock procurement and funding review to find the best and most cost-effective way to operate the book supply chain, and to look at budget issues and efficiency in public library services.<sup>38</sup> Recommendations from the report included:

- Supplier selection
- Standardised processing

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Julie Rae, President of VicLink May 2006

<sup>36</sup> Audit p.61

<sup>37</sup> Audit p.61

<sup>38</sup> MLA (Museums Libraries and Archives Council) and DCMS (Department for Culture, Media and Sport) commissioned this report i effectively library services are spending, and the relationship between the funding available and successful delivery [http://www.mla.gov.uk/action/framework/framework\\_04b.asp](http://www.mla.gov.uk/action/framework/framework_04b.asp)

- Libraries purchasing books together

The *Procurement Audit* recently undertaken by A.T. Kearney at Brisbane City Council has also supported these findings.<sup>39</sup>

Regardless of the preferred model, the Audit “*clearly demonstrates that evaluation of alternate approaches could be beneficial*” and “*the clear finding is that there is considerable duplication across the sector and further effort should be expended to ascertain how such duplication can be reduced and funds freed for investment in other areas*”.<sup>40</sup>

Given the significant duplication of activity across Victoria in the procurement process, new and emerging formats and a wider variety of formats, as well as the increasing cost of content, the need for more efficient means of acquiring collections through collaborative purchasing models is a priority.

There is also a need for more efficient means of accessing multi-media, using profile ordering and ensuring it can be provided shelf ready. The opportunity to develop selection profiles for a range of collections from specialized collections to generic collections should be progressed. The need to develop a more effective model for the procurement of LOTE is clear and opportunities to work with the NSW State Library in identifying an appropriate model should be explored.

It is recognised that decreasing profit margins for text based material limit the potential for significant increases in discounts, however, there are cost-savings to be made in the minimising the duplication of labour in the procurement process and some savings will be made through aggregated purchasing. Clearly, the focus in any collaborative activity would be the cost-benefit for participants. .

The opportunity to work towards common processing standards to streamline shelf-ready supply should also be progressed. Common specifications for processing will certainly drive further savings in the procurement process. It would certainly be beneficial to develop these specifications using the *Australian Standards* framework, whereby key stakeholders including suppliers are at the table.

Overall, leveraging through critical mass and developing common specifications for shelf ready are key strategies that should be progressed as a matter of priority. Additionally, there are significant opportunities to work together more strategically in the procurement process for supporting infrastructure such as technology and software.

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<sup>39</sup> Interview Sharan Hervey, Brisbane City Council, March 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Audit p.71

### 5.3.1 Strategic response

- Identify costs and benefits of a range of collaborative models of procurement, including statewide, and regional models and models of collaboration between willing partners
- Identify and implement strategies and demonstration projects to maximise aggregate purchasing power and best value for dollar for the procurement of collections
- Research and develop state-wide co-operative purchasing for LOTE, using the expertise of staff in the State Library of NSW and other organisations
- Develop specifications for supply of material to a standard (cataloguing and physical processing as well as invoicing) using the *Standards Australia* framework
- Develop source guides to assist libraries in procurement, particularly LOTE and multi-media
- Continue to support and further develop *Gulliver*
- Showcase innovative models of procurement and cost/benefits and share information to assist procurement
- Develop partnerships with suppliers to maximise efficiencies and quality of supply
- Identify collaborative opportunities to acquire enabling technologies to enhance access to content
  - Investigate opportunity to buy (technical) storage collaboratively

## 5.4 Content relevance

***Outcome 4: Content that is relevant to the changing needs of our diverse communities***

### 5.4.1 Needs Analysis and collection development

Public libraries have witnessed an increasing demand for broader collections to meet the needs of various groups, including collections for persons with a visual or other disability, materials in

languages other than English; and resources to support the development of literacy in communities. In seeking to remain relevant to local communities public libraries have also integrated physical collections with some digital content and have expanded into new popular mediums such as DVDs. Collection development has certainly been impacted by changing demography and expectations, and changes in media.

Consultation with public libraries highlighted the need for more effective mechanisms, and system capability to assess community needs. This was certainly supported by the findings from the *Audit* where it was found that only 9 of the 44 library services have adequately incorporated turnover analysis within their collection management programs and that 11 services do not monitor turnover at all. *“It is acknowledged that library services place considerable emphasis on anecdotal evidence and believe that informal day-to-day monitoring of their collections through branch staff facilitates good collection management.”*<sup>41</sup> Generally, turnover is under-utilised as a collection management and development tool. Additionally, there is a need to better monitor the performance of selection processes overall given the \$22 million investment across the State. There is clearly a need to develop skills and tools to effectively assess and project community needs and manage collections. This includes developing and interpreting community profiles as well as using system information.

The need to ensure relevant collections for CALD communities is critical. Understanding content and format needs of diverse communities and age groups within these groups is a challenge. Similarly, an understanding of appropriate content and media for persons with special needs is important if access is to be equitable. *“Whatever solution you build has to be inclusive. Estimated 1.7 million who have print disabilities – significant proportion of population and will increase with an ageing population.”*<sup>42</sup> There are also opportunities to investigate the use of new mediums in delivery of services to some of these groups. Peak bodies, suppliers and agencies such as the *Centre for Print Disability* are keen to work with public libraries using new processes such as the downloading of data.

The *Audit* also reported that a high percentage of the statewide lending collection (83.3%) was borrowed in the 25 months from January 2004 to January 2006 inclusive. However, 16.7% of items have not been borrowed for at least 25 months, including 6.9% that have never been borrowed. This equates to \$1.44 million obsolete items as at January 2006, and suggests that more effective stock maintenance processes were required: *“Obsolete materials are*

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<sup>41</sup> *Audit* p.44; p55

<sup>42</sup> *Vision Australia*. Commentary during *Summit*, April 2006.

*higher than is desirable and it is critical that collections be viewed as working inventories.*<sup>43</sup> The *Audit* confirms the expectation that demand for collection items diminishes as items age and obsolescence progressively increases as items age.<sup>44</sup> It should be noted in particular that several of the LOTE collections show high “*never borrowed*” rates, suggesting that some better selection processes and collaborative purchasing for LOTE may improve the quality and effectiveness of LOTE collections.<sup>45</sup>

The *Audit* found that only 24.3% of the statewide lending collection, based on returns from 34 services, was currently on loan which is somewhat below the generally accepted benchmark that library collections are 35% on loan.<sup>46</sup> The only major category to surpass the 35% benchmark was audio-visual, where four sub collections each had high percentages of the collection currently on loan. These were music CDs (40.2%), other CDs (39.7%), videos (36.4%) and DVDs (67.8%). The only other individual sub collections over 35% were picture books (38.7%) and early readers (37.2%).<sup>47</sup>

Certainly, the learning for many participants of the recent *Audit* was what they *didn't* know about their collections, how difficult it was to extract critical collection management information, and the complete lack of access to some data for some. For example, the data collection for the *Audit* has started to pose some significant questions for some libraries as to the level of non-fiction held in relation to usage, and in particular junior non-fiction. Additionally, the *Audit* poses some questions in relation to disposal practices. “*Further improvement will be achieved through more effective ... weeding practices*”.<sup>48</sup>

There is certainly an opportunity to work together to model better collection development practices and to provide a better understanding of collection performance.

## 5.4.2 Collection mix

Getting the product mix right, particularly in a changing environment is also a challenge, which is very much predicated on the perceived role of the public library. The *Audit* found that the dominant category in the statewide collection is adult print, which comprises 58.8% of the total collection, followed by junior print (26.7%), audio-visual (8.8%) and reference (5.7%).<sup>49</sup> Liddle notes that the most obvious and serious gap occurs in relation to the adult

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<sup>43</sup> Audit p.56

<sup>44</sup> Audit p.57-58

<sup>45</sup> Audit p.45

<sup>46</sup> A benchmark recognised in the State Library of New South Wales design guideline publication *People Places*.

<sup>47</sup> Audit p.59

<sup>48</sup> Audit p.65

<sup>49</sup> Audit p.39

fiction and non-fiction collections, where he sees that the industry has failed to respond to community demand. Non-fiction holdings are 73% higher than fiction holdings, yet fiction generates higher circulation and returns a considerably better turnover rate of 5.6 compared to 3.0 for non-fiction. Similarly, the high turnover for pre-school early readers indicates that this sub-collection could be expanded: “*This is a critical early development collection which, by holdings, is only 17% of pre-school picturebooks, yet achieves equivalent turnover levels.*”<sup>50</sup>

It is clear from the *Audit* that audio-visual materials are showing an upward trend and that reference collections are trending downwards with the move to using search engines as the first point of call. The *Audit* found the most significant recent trend in relation to statewide collections is the growth of audio-visual collections and the decline in print material collections.<sup>51</sup> This is congruent with the findings from the OCLC report: *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources*. It is significant to note that the growing popularity of audio-visual has been met in most public libraries at the expense of print collections.

Consortia purchasing through *BRUCE* and *Gulliver* as well as independent arrangements have acquired subscriptions to a total of 465 electronic resources in 38 libraries.<sup>52</sup> Databases may be accessed within public libraries or remotely. In-house access is available to members and non-members, whereas remote access requires log-in with a valid library membership ID. The *Audit* found that 70% of access was through remote usage and that the main usage period for remote access was between 7.00pm to 3.00am, which suggests that *Gulliver* is filling a niche for information during periods when library branches are closed.<sup>53</sup>

However, existing electronic resources are underutilized and need to be better promoted. OCLC highlight the slow uptake by libraries of online resources and the fact that global awareness and usage of library accessed on-line databases has been low. There is certainly need for some re-evaluation of the text and digital product mix and how it is made accessible. Liddle, in the *Audit* suggests, “*Diverting funding...from print to on-line is an appropriate medium-term strategy*”<sup>54</sup>

A significant finding from the *Audit* is the apparent over – representation of non-fiction holdings state-wide in relation to usage, where holdings are 73% higher than fiction holdings, yet fiction generates higher circulation and returns a considerably better

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<sup>50</sup> Audit p.52

<sup>51</sup> Audit p. 6

<sup>52</sup> Audit p.39

<sup>53</sup> Audit p.107-8

<sup>54</sup> Audit p.39

turnover rate of 5.6 compared to 3.0 for non-fiction. Some reconsideration of the level of investment in non-fiction or the level of holdings for non-fiction through de-acquisition based on usage was suggested. This is particularly apparent for the junior non-fiction collection with a turnover rate of only 1.9. (This decline in usage was also noted in the consultations with library staff.) Similarly, Liddle notes the high turnover for pre-school early readers and the opportunity to expand this collection given its critical function in early childhood development.

Opportunities identified in the *Audit* and in consultations focus on providing collections that better reflect user demand, developing a stronger emphasis on local history content and facilitating the transition from text to digital for reference collections. The key finding is that there needs to be some re-evaluation of the structuring of collections overall in response to user needs and format trends. This needs to be done in the context of clarification of the existing and future role of the public library in the information society and in the development of learning and connected communities.

### 5.4.3 Maintaining the asset

Consultation with public libraries highlighted concerns in relation to the age of collections, participants reinforcing the need to maintain the collective asset at appropriate levels. Although there has been an investment by the State Government and local government, the *Audit* clearly demonstrated that action is required to ensure an appropriate investment in the asset to keep pace with population growth.

The *Audit* identified relevant collection and usage trends over the past five years<sup>55</sup> where:

- Victoria's population grew by 8.3% over the subject period, yet the number of collection items rose by only 2.4% and *collection items per capita fell by 5.8%*
- Members as a percentage of the population declined by 5.1% and loans per capita declined marginally by 1.7% but visits per capita grew significantly by 9.9%;
- Annual discard rate increased from 9.9% to 12.5% of collection materials
- Material expenditure increased by 20.5% overall and by 11.2% on a per capita basis.
- However, the CPI (Consumer Price Increase) index for books rose by 18.3% over the trend period, resulting in a 2.2% increase in total materials expenditure in real terms and *a fall of 7.1% in real per capita expenditure.*

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<sup>55</sup> Audit p.15

The trend analysis clearly demonstrates the erosion of the statewide collection over the period, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Liddle suggests that without a significant investment the long-term sustainability of the statewide collection is in doubt noting that an investment of \$5.00 per capita is required to maintain collections at two items per capita over an average shelf-life of eight years and average unit cost of \$20.00. *“At only \$3.92, Victoria would need to increase its per capita investment by approximately 28% to reach this position.”*<sup>56</sup>

Average per capita expenditure on new materials is \$4.28, with standalone and metropolitan services enjoying a considerable advantage over their regional and country service peers. In fact, the advantages approximate 20% and 18% respectively.<sup>57</sup>

This is also re-inforced by analysis of the acquisitions rates: at an acquisitions rate of 1,938 per 10,000 residents, Victoria is considerably behind the 2,500 per 10,000 required to maintain collections at two items per capita with an average shelf-life of eight years. Using the two items per capita and eight year shelf-life as a base, maintaining the current acquisitions rate would involve a choice between 1.55 items per capita held for eight years or two items per capita held for 10.3 years. The position as at 2003-2004 was 1.66 items for capita.

Liddle points out that an additional 50,000 population in Victoria would require an additional \$2.07 million for the purchase of collections and \$1.13 million to process acquisitions based on the existing model. Such an increase in population would also require an additional \$20 million in provision of space for collections.<sup>58</sup>

Action is also required to address the ageing of state-wide library collections, given that nearly 44% of the collection is over 8 years old and only 15.8% is less than three years old.<sup>59</sup> It is also important to note that the most significant differential was found between country and metropolitan standalone services, where the youngest and oldest ageing profiles were found in metropolitan regional and country standalone services respectively.

Library collections are capital assets and must be depreciated over the useful life of the asset. Library collections age differently in

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<sup>56</sup> Audit p.10

<sup>57</sup> Audit p.67

<sup>58</sup> Audit p36

<sup>59</sup> *“...30% of the statewide collection showing a pre-1988 publication date and a further 14% was reported as having an unknown date. It is reasonable to assume that those items with unknown dates are predominantly older collection items, which, when combined with the pre-1998 items presents the collection as decidedly aged.”* Audit p.53

response to factors such as collection mix and usage patterns, thus creating a range of depreciation scenarios. There is a need to impose parameters within which collections should be depreciated and there would also be value in undertaking an industry-wide review of depreciation practices.<sup>60</sup>

The findings from the *Audit* confirm the need for a significant investment through a statewide *Collection Revitalisation Strategy*. Drawing on these findings the process and methodology will need to be further investigated and agreed upon to achieve the stated outcome. An appropriate funding model will need to be put in place to address identified collection deficiencies.

#### 5.4.4 Standards and guidelines

Guidelines and standards and relevant indicators for collection performance are required. These will provide useful benchmarks and support advocacy to work towards quality collections. These could include indicators such as items per capita, recommended turnover rates, expenditure per capita and the average age of the collections and recommended collection mix. Liddle also notes that the long-term target of two items per capita and acquisitions and discards of 0.25 items per capita would appear to represent an appropriate standard with some modification to address the differential between country and municipal based services. The audit found Victoria's per capita holdings to fall below this standard at 1.82 items per capita.

In summary, standards as follows were recommended although it was noted that further work would need to be undertaken:

- Base level items of two items per capita
- Base level acquisition and discard rates of 0.25 items per capita, equivalent to refreshing the collection on an eight year cycle
- Collection mix at the sub collection level to reflect the demand for library materials as indicated by circulation statistics
- Collection weeding should be non-discretionary and based on picking lists of items not borrowed within a designated period.
- Minimum collection size to ensure branch viability: 12,000 items

#### 5.4.5 Strategic response

- Facilitate *whole of life* asset management approach to collection development and management

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<sup>60</sup> Audit p.65-66

- Facilitate better needs analysis for collections for public libraries
  - Develop guidelines and processes for skills development to facilitate better needs analysis in public libraries including analyzing demographic data, library management system data and tools for market research and community engagement in identifying needs
- Develop tools, guidelines and training to facilitate better collection management in public libraries including analyzing library management system data more effectively
- Identify collaborative opportunities for developing management strategies for emerging content
- Develop base specifications for functionality of Library Management systems and advocate the need for easy access to collection management data with suppliers of library management systems
- Provide opportunities to share information about collection management
- Develop and showcase model collection development plans using *whole of life* asset management principles
- Identify standards and guidelines for collections relevant to both metropolitan and country libraries indicating recommended items per capita and % make-up of collections, turnover rates, expenditure per capita and average age of the collection
- Progress opportunities for collaborative content development for LOTE collections
- Define relative strengths and roles of State and public collections
- Develop a plan and process for collection development for the state-wide collection with a focus on the development of local and unique content
- Develop a 3 year statewide *Collection Revitalisation Strategy* and a funding model to address identified collection deficiencies and advocate for funding from State and local Government using the findings from the *Audit*
- Develop a strategy for the provision of ongoing asset renewal through adequate state and local government funding.
- Implement an industry-wide review of depreciation practices and develop broad guidelines

## 5.5 Resource Discovery and Retrieval

### ***Outcome 5: State-wide content of public libraries easily accessed and retrieved***

The goals articulated in *Strategic Directions for Public Libraries* include:

- The Borderless Library
- Seamless Web of Resources
- Broker of Authoritative Relevant Content
- Trusted Guide in Information Discovery
- Service Interoperability and System Interoperability<sup>61</sup>

Generally, consultation with public libraries endorsed these goals and the principles underpinning the Ministerial Advisory Committee's *Vision*, although it was clear that the *Vision* needs to be better understood and integrated within the development of strategy at the State and the local level. It was noted that this has been acknowledged and has been incorporated in the Viclink strategy.

It is clear that in order to realize the *Vision* for public libraries in Victoria there will need to be a significant investment in the development of an effective search portal to provide access to library collections state-wide. Funding and energies should now be concentrated to achieve the desired outcome. This is fundamental to the discovery of the collective asset. The search portal will completely change the dynamic, and some concern was expressed in relation to the impacts of enhanced access to local collections. Clearly, agreed protocols, guidelines and policies will need to be developed from the outset.

There have been some pro-active collaborative initiatives undertaken across the State that provide good learnings which need to be shared more widely with other public libraries. For example the *MurrayLink Libraries* a consortium of Victorian Public Libraries have been piloting VDXHost which is a standards based system that seamlessly links all the existing public library management systems and provides a single interface for locating and managing ILL and document delivery. The system can automatically determine holdings and availability and the status of requests is automatically updated as they progress through the various stages of the life cycle of a request.<sup>62</sup> This has been identified as a good model of collaboration and load sharing.

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<sup>61</sup> Ministerial Advisory Council on Public Libraries *Libraries Strategic Direction*, Department for Victorian Communities Victoria March 2005

<sup>62</sup> [www.murraylink.vic.gov.au](http://www.murraylink.vic.gov.au) VDXhost trial. Accessed May 2006

The SWIFT project is another collaborative initiative to share the operation of one library management system to achieve improved service outcomes for library users plus operational and cost benefits for the participating libraries. This project is based on the premise that, for the users, ease of access and comprehensive content are of paramount importance. How it is done and the source is of little or no relevance to the library user. The ultimate intent is to enable the participating libraries to have a user-friendly and sophisticated system front end that retrieves and delivers reliable authoritative information from all sources better than Google. With the inclusion of federated searching capabilities in the project, there is the potential to retrieve, from a single search, catalogue records, information from bibliographic and full text databases, web site addresses and other sources.”<sup>63</sup>

Changing user expectations are driving a predilection for self-service for many users, particularly in the online environment, which needs to be supported through appropriate and easy access paths. Working towards a statewide library card will also be another key strategy in facilitating access.

Public libraries need to better equip their staff and communities with the tools and the attitudes for the digital age. “*By and large we have a workforce who do not fully embrace the new environment – we need to re-orient the workforce.*”<sup>64</sup> Public libraries still play an important role in the discovery of resources, whether they be text or online. This process needs to be supported and facilitated by relevant tools, skills and distribution channels. The confidence of the navigator in the infosphere is a critical factor in accessing content, particularly in the online environment. Skills need to be broadened, developed and maintained by library staff in information and digital literacy. These skills as well as building confidence using technology can be passed on to users to enhance their access to content.

Effective models of public library practice, where the new world of blogs, locally produced content, streamed data and the plethora of online content is understood and harvested, need to be showcased. Libraries need to look and be part of the information age. There is certainly an opportunity for broader collaboration nationally and with New Zealand

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<sup>63</sup> J. Binnion and D. Cochrane *SWIFT – the future Library System for Victoria’s communities*. P4

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Geoff Carson, Mornington Peninsula Library, April 2006

### 5.5.1 Strategic response

- Progress the state wide portal through State Library, DVC and public library collaboration *as a matter of priority*
- Identify and promote innovation in resource discovery and retrieval
- Develop tools and generic training packages for information retrieval for diverse communities including self-help tools
- Develop migration strategies to self-help
  - Templates
  - Training program
- Provide input into professional bodies, educational bodies regarding training and professional development needs in the changing resource discovery environment
- Develop appropriate framework for document delivery and protocols and guidelines for document delivery.
- Investigate extended on-line reference services – 24x7
- Ensure that equity of access standards are applied (e.g. for CALD and persons with a disability) and investigate tailored solutions for online reference services for CALD and persons with a disability
- Develop tools and guidance for the development of quality library websites
- Identify opportunities to improve the integrity of *Libraries Australia* databases
- Maximise *Memory Victoria* and *Picture Victoria* and local models (e.g. *Made in Moreland / Maribyrnong*) and facilitate ways in which material directly relevant to Victoria is made globally accessible

## 5.6 Availability

### ***Outcome 6: Accessible and available content through appropriate infrastructure***

Access to content is influenced by a range of factors. The level of access is often predicated by space available, the ability to house content, adequate collections, the quality of built and technical infrastructure, the level of response to diversity and disability, staff available and the suitability of opening hours.

For example, the size, location and quality of library buildings impacts on the ability to house and access content. There has been a resurgence in new and replacement library buildings, particularly under the State Government *Living Libraries* program which has been the key driver in improving physical library facilities in Victoria since its introduction in 2000. Many of these developments have been influenced by an understanding of the role of libraries as community anchors and places for lifelong learning as well as places to access and create content. Experience generally is that an investment in well-designed libraries provides a return in increased usage and community pride.

The size and location of libraries as well as the spread of opening hours, (particularly for country libraries) is an access issue for public libraries. The distance factor provides particular challenges for some Councils in the provision of facilities. The *Libraries Building Communities* research noted the high variation in the quality of buildings statewide. It was recognized that *Living Libraries* had done much to improve facilities but it was emphasised that much remains to be done. Lack of space impacts on the ability to house content, and the level and quality of technical infrastructure impacts significantly on the ability to access online content.<sup>65</sup>

Similarly, limited opening hours can be a barrier and as Liddle notes, economically questionable: “*One must question the wisdom of holding collection items with a replacement value of \$7.9 million in branches open for up to twenty hours per week and items with a replacement value of \$12.5 million in branches open between twenty to thirty hours per week*”.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Libraries Building Communities: the vital contribution of Victoria’s public libraries – A research report for the Libraries Board of Victoria and the Victorian Public Library Network*. State Library of Victoria 2005. (Executive Summary p23)

<sup>66</sup> Audit p41

Public libraries play a fundamental role in ensuring equity of access to digital and online content. Clearly, content must be supported by adequate access. Improving access to broadband across Victoria is a Government priority, particularly for regional Victoria. However, limited communications in some areas still precludes the operation of this underpinning principle. Issues around isolation and lack of capacity to provide a broad range of content in some country areas can be addressed to a degree through access to broadband.

Providing the infrastructure and mechanisms to support equitable access for persons with a disability is also important. For all libraries the cost of adaptive technology or lack of training in adaptive technology can also be a barrier to access for some.

The *Audit* shows that Victoria's public libraries are operating quite efficiently and process more loans per hour than their national counterparts.<sup>67</sup> Liddle notes that whilst this is encouraging from a productivity perspective, it contributes further to a picture of relative leanness when viewed in conjunction with Victoria's comparative positions nationally regarding floorspace and staffing.

Many innovative models of service delivery are also emerging and public libraries need to be continually creative in identifying ways that they can better engage with their communities and potential partners to provide better access. Some excellent examples of innovative service delivery to enhance access were identified in the consultations including hybrid models of service delivery, 24x7 reference services, home delivery options, integration and co-location with other providers, and delivery of services on foreign turf such as railway stations. The ongoing showcasing of national and international models was seen as important. Opportunities to better inform decision makers of trends, relevant standards and recent research to encourage additional investment in libraries or innovative service delivery should also be maximized.

Standards and guidelines relevant to both metropolitan and country libraries should be developed to assist libraries in benchmarking and advocacy in relation to buildings, opening hours and technical infrastructure. The public library network also needs to have a clearer understanding of performance against these standards and guidelines.

#### 5.6.1.1 Strategic response

- Audit level of access to online content from public libraries and develop guidelines for appropriate access (e.g. access to broadband and provision of access points)

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<sup>67</sup> Audit p15

- Develop guidelines for appropriate access through technical infrastructure including access to broadband and number and location of access points
- Identify level of disadvantage for specific communities / areas in relation to online content and develop advocacy strategies for all levels of government
- Develop appropriate standards and guidelines for public libraries including opening hours, building and collection size, access to technology, etc in the Victorian metropolitan and country contexts through adaptation and evaluation of existing standards including *People Places*
- Audit public library buildings and opening hours in Victoria against the standards and guidelines identified
- Identify areas of disadvantage in relation to public library buildings and opening hours and develop advocacy strategies for State and local government
- Advocate for continued *Living Libraries* funding and for ongoing and increased funding to address areas of identified disadvantage
- Develop and showcase models of alternate delivery mechanisms (e.g. hybrid mobiles, delivery by Post, Online delivery to pick up points, Railway Express services, Housebound links with other agencies and other partnerships etc)

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