Workplace Research Centre

(formerly acirrt) university of sydney

Workforce Sustainability and Leadership

Scoping Research

April 2006
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contents

Executive Summary

The State Library of Victoria, in partnership with the Victorian public library network, contracted the Workplace Research Centre (formerly acirrt) to conduct a scoping exercise regarding the sustainability of the public library workforce. The purpose of the research is to identify the key issues surrounding the recruitment and retention of qualified public library staff, and the development for leadership positions. The planned research phase following the scoping exercise is a survey and analysis of current training and staffing and the identification of future needs. The scoping exercise is a necessary first step in establishing the context of the quantitative research and systematically identifying all the issues to be quantified.

The key issues identified by the research are as follows:

- A need to define and articulate the role of public libraries and librarians— The first step in planning for the future and assessing what will be required from the future workforce, is to determine the model of public libraries. That is, what will be their function, what services will they deliver and how will they do it. Part of this will be determining the function of librarians. In the absence of a clear model librarians have developed into a complex hybrid of information manager and social capital service deliverer. The research highlights a need to explore and understand the balance between the two roles in order to determine training and educations needs for public librarians.

- There is scope for building better networks—there is potential for Victorian public librarians to build stronger networks with each other as well as external organisations. Stronger networks between public libraries will enable more efficient approaches to training and development, and holistic succession planning. Practical implementation of this would be: formal statewide secondment and mentoring programs, and establishing a central body to co-ordinate relationships and opportunities such as statewide training.

- Developing managers who can instigate workplace change—the success of future workforce planning will rely on managers to lead and execute this change. Managers are also responsible for the future direction of public libraries, the role they play within the community and communicating this vision to the Local Council or Library Board. Managers could benefit from more information about, and support in, fulfilling this role.

- Attracting and developing the right people—research participants reported difficulties in attracting 'quality' people to work in public libraries, as well as limited opportunities for development of current library staff. A clear vision will assist in determining the type of people that need to be recruited to public libraries, and subsequently, how this can be done. The research also identified development opportunities that could be implemented in the immediate future as well as changes that will require more consideration, consultation and planning. Immediate opportunities include: developing guidelines and procedures for secondment opportunities, and creating centralised database for mentoring and secondment

opportunities. A longer-term opportunity is the possible development of a public library graduate or cadetship program.

• Developing funding models for workplace change—there were varying views as to how important funding levels were in being able to conduct succession planning. Library managers felt that faced many operational restrictions due to limited funding. Some stakeholders argued that good managers and strong leadership was essential for effective succession planning, rather than funding.

The scoping research has identified some key areas for future research. At a minimum, quantitative research is required to quantify current skills and training levels and needs, as well as to identify future needs and gaps. It will be particularly important to identify recruitment and retention issues that may be present for particular libraries, for example, those in particular locations. Further research could also assist in identifying potential development opportunities for staff, the potential for a state-wide approach, and the acceptance of different training models for library staff.

There are two main options for developing a model for public library service delivery. One option is for policy-makers and stakeholders to develop a model and clearly articulate this model to the workforce. The other option is a more consultative approach. A survey of the workforce could elicit possible models of service delivery, as well as what the workforce believe the community wants from public libraries.

The report discusses the issues relating to creating a sustainable workforce for Victorian public libraries and concludes with some more detailed recommendations for further research.

Background and Methodology

As Australia's population ages the labour market will be faced with a decreasing supply of skilled workers. The challenge faced by employers and policy-makers will be to find ways to encourage greater participation in the labour market as well as provide incentives and opportunities for labour to increase their training and development. Libraries are more likely to feel the weight of this challenge due to their older workforce and the continuing technological evolution confronting libraries and the services they provide.

The Victorian public library network in partnership with the State Library of Victoria has begun to address the issue by commencing a series of research projects that will explore and quantify the issues related to the sustainability of the Victorian public library workforce.

There are 44 public library services in Victoria serving a population of 5.187 million. Library services comprise single Council public library services and public library corporations. The corporation libraries service multiple Councils and are overseen by a library board. The State Government's Department for Victorian Communities provides approximately 25 per cent of recurrent funding to Victorian public libraries, with the majority of funding provided by Local Government. There are 2,644 people working in public libraries in Victoria. This amounts to 1,504.7 equivalent full-time staff, 526.4 of these staff are qualified librarians. The library qualification can be obtained by completing graduate or post-graduate studies. Qualified librarians are generally employed from the Band 5 level. Library Technicians require a Diploma qualification and are employed at the Band 4 level. The positions above a librarian are generally Branch Manager and Library Manager, though there may be other specialist librarian positions. The banding for these positions can vary across libraries. The following table provides a brief description of the responsibilities at each of the library staff levels from the Victorian *Local Authorities Award 2001*.

Position	Accountability and extent of authority	Qualifications and Experience
Band 4	Essentially doing jobs and are often the providers of information to clients and/or information and support to more senior employees.	Completed a TAFE certicate course or equivalent.
Band 5	May supervise resources, other employees or groups of employees and/or provide advice to or regulate clients and/or give support to more senior employees.	Completion of a degree or diploma course with little or no relevant work experience.
Band 6	The prime responsibility is for resource management, the freedom to act is governed by clear objectives and/or budgets with a regular reporting mechanism to ensure adherence to goals and objectives. The effect of decisions and actions taken at this level is usually limited to the quality or cost of the programs and projects being managed.	The skills and knowledge needed for entry to this Band are beyond those normally acquired through tertiary education alone.
Band 7	The prime responsibility is for resource management, the freedom to act is governed by	The skills and knowledge needed for entry to this Band are beyond

	clear objectives and/or budgets with a regular reporting mechanism to ensure adherence to goals and objectives. Decisions and actions taken at this level may have a significant effect on the programs or projects being managed or on the public perception of the wider organisation.	those normally acquired through tertiary education alone. These positions require the ability to gain co-operation and assistance from clients, members of the public and other employees.
Band 8	(As Above). Decisions and actions taken in this Band may have a substantial effect on the operational unit being managed or on the public perception of the wider organisation.	Typically, the necessary skills and knowledge would be gained through further formal qualifications in the field of expertise or in management, or through at least four years of experience in another specialised field.

The issues that are considered to require attention in particular are leadership succession issues, ongoing opportunities for professional development, the difficulty in attracting appropriate candidates to training and to public libraries, and the provision of the relevant training in tertiary courses aimed at producing qualified staff for public libraries.

The Workplace Research Centre (formerly acirrt) at The University of Sydney was contracted by the State Library of Victoria to undertake the Stage 1 *Scoping Exercise* on the *Workforce Sustainability and Leadership* project. The purpose of this stage of the research is to identify key issues surrounding the recruitment and retention of qualified public library staff, and the development for leadership positions. The outcomes of this stage will inform the methodology to be utilised in Stage 2 of the project: *Survey and Analysis*.

The research methodology consisted of eight in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, one focus group with public library managers, one focus group with public library employees of the Band 5 to Band 6 level, and a brief overview of relevant literature that was identified in the interviews and meetings with the Workforce Survey Analysis and Planning Workgroup.

The in-depth interviews were conducted with stakeholders from a range of educational institutions, various positions within the public library system, and key interest groups from Victoria and other states in Australia. Several interviews were conducted prior and subsequent to the focus groups being held with public library staff. This enabled the researcher to gain an understanding of the public library context from stakeholders prior to speaking to staff and enabled the researcher to validate the information that was collected in the focus groups.

The two focus groups were held in Melbourne at the State Library of Victoria. Focus groups were recruited by the State Library project manager, in consultation with the project workgroup. Participants recruited to the focus groups came from both country and metropolitan locations. Recruitment was also based on achieving participants who were from libraries with both high and low levels of staff turnover. The purpose of this

was to learn about libraries that have a range of experiences in recruitment and retention of staff. A total of 10 staff attended the library managers' focus group and 5 staff attended the library employees' focus group.

In scoping exercises such as this one, a qualitative research design is the most appropriate. Qualitative methods enable the researchers to identify and explore all the issues relating to the issue or research questions at hand. Qualitative research, such as that used for this project, does not allow the reporting of statistics or representative data. However, such a phase in the research is important in understanding the scope of issues to be measured in the intended quantitative phase of the research to be completed subsequently.

Review of the Relevant Literature

The ageing workforce and possible responses to this challenge in the form of succession planning has captured the attention of researchers and human resources practitioners in Australia and overseas. However, many human resource practitioners and researchers are attempting to come to grips with the situation and many responses are still in the early stages of development. This section details some research that has been undertaken on the issue both in Australia and overseas.

A comprehensive study was undertaken by the '8Rs research team' from Canadian Library Human Resources to examine the issues surrounding the ageing and retirement of library staff (Ingles et. al., 2005). They identified the issues of recruitment, retention, education and training, and quality of work as interrelated to the ageing and retirement of the workforce. The primary research method was two web surveys across all types of libraries: one of the individual staff (both librarians and library technicians) and an institutional survey of individual libraries. The study highlights the benefits of conducting a large quantitative survey to be able to understand the issues in implementing effective succession planning. Canadian libraries are facing similar issues to those of the Victorian public library workforce. One issue in particular has been the relatively stagnant careers of middle-level librarians due to older librarians remaining in their management positions until retirement:

> "A parallel concern with that regarding a potential human resource shortage is the perceived need to rejuvenate mid-level staff who, because of downsizing and hierarchical flattening, have not been provided with the opportunity to prepare themselves to fill the roles that will arise from retirements" (Ingles, 2005:1).

Like Victorian public libraries, staff turnover is not a problem for most libraries. Consequently, recruitment strategies should be aimed at people who have the ability to change and grow with the organisation and opportunities for change and development need to be available to current staff. Some Canadian libraries have implemented job enrichment schemes such as job enlargement, quality circles and participative management which were found to have beneficial impacts on job satisfaction and productivity. However, problem-solving teams were more common

with much less incidence of job sharing and job rotation programs. The survey revealed an interest among staff to participate in decision-making (Ingles, 2005:7). Mentorship programs are not only good for the mentored person's career development, but also for skills transfer from more experienced staff.

> "Grooming efforts for leadership management should be taking place at all levels of the library organisation, including new entrants (both professionals and paraprofessionals)" (Ingles, 2005:97).

Canadian libraries reported insufficient resources for training librarians and paraprofessional staff, particularly in the area of management and leadership. Management and leadership training is particularly needed when considering imminent organisational needs for staff with these skills. A consistent finding from the research was that Canadian librarians are increasingly required to take on managerial, business and leadership roles. "The possession of managerial skills and leadership potential are two of the most important and difficult to fulfil competencies" (Ingles, 2005:9). And it is the replacement of leadership skills that is more of a problem than replacing general skills and knowledge. The survey found a promising level of interest in these types of positions among all levels of staff. Worryingly, 42 per cent of librarians did not consider their capacity to manage a service or department to be important, even though 60 per cent were performing managerial functions; even fewer considering supervisory ability important. There was an interest in gaining these abilities among the more recent librarian entrants (Ingles, 2005:185). In Canada, new librarians have the opportunity to move into management positions early in their careers. Further research needs to identify whether this is the case for the Victorian public library workforce and what is the level of take-up of these opportunities and reasons for this.

The research found that satisfaction with the librarian education varied depending on library sector, with dissatisfaction relatively high among Canadian public libraries, indicating a gap between what the education provides and public libraries' needs. This is similar to the findings from the Scoping Exercise that librarianship degrees did not include a core component on public libraries and it was felt this was necessary due to the differentiation in public library service and the social capital ideology that belies the service. Even though libraries do not feel they have input into the library university education it was recommended that educators and library managers work together to build opportunities that can provide practical experience for students.

> "A coalition of libraries, library associations and library schools must act to promote both a current view and a vision for the profession – one that expresses the potential of librarianship as a career of choice and is attractive enough to capture students of high quality and commitment to the practice of a dynamic and changing profession" (Ingles, 2005:174).

This research examined paraprofessionals (i.e. library technicians) and professionals (i.e. qualified librarians). This proved to be beneficial as it identified some interest among paraprofessionals in gaining their librarianship qualifications but also barriers

in doing so. Recruiting staff at the technician level and allowing them to gain qualifications and move upwards is another source of librarian recruitment.

Like Victorian public libraries, reports of budget and size constraints were common among Canadian libraries. The recommended response to this issue was greater sharing or resources among libraries:

> "Constraints of budget and size will always exist. Therefore, libraries should also look to sharing of staffing resources through consortia and other local arrangements where two or more libraries might realise benefits and share costs. Sharing of resources has been the hallmark of the library profession for many years; the thinking needs to extend to the sharing of human resources – whether one webmaster for a college/university library partnership, one children's literature specialist for two regional library systems, or one training officer for a consortium of libraries" (Ingles, 2005:175).

Studies that have been conducted locally, albeit smaller in scale, include research by the workforce planning team in the Northern Territory (Chmielewski, 2002:166). It seems the issues are not that dissimilar to those being faced by Victorian public libraries. However, Northern Territory public libraries face greater issues in terms of a small pool of local personnel and isolation from other librarian labour markets. But the solutions to the recruitment issues are similar such as 'growing our own' approach to staff development, targeted professional development and providing more incentives to school leavers to choose librarianship as a career. It was felt that Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) could be used more to organise and promote training opportunities (Chmielewski, 2002:167). It was also suggested that the occupational boundaries between library technicians and librarians could be loosened to enable job progression. However, the Canadian study revealed that this can cause tensions when library technicians are expected to do more but for the same pay (Ingles, 2005:195). There needs to be some scope for on-the-job training to be recognised in occupational and pay structures, in addition to formal qualifications. One way of doing this is to have competency-based job definitions rather than qualification based definitions, as is discussed in the following section. It was also suggested that recruitment be extended to people with other types of degrees such as marketing, business and IT.

Influencing the skills, performance and development of current staff is an important component of workforce planning. One approach to this is to focus on a competency-based management system that "provides a process whereby competencies needed to achieve organisational success are clearly defined. The system is behaviourally anchored so that both managers and employees can see what is expected of them" (Bryant & Poustie, 2001:3). This could be one way of initiating cultural change at the workplace and sending a message to staff that managerial functions and adaptation to change are an employment requirement. It can also act as a blueprint for the needs of the library workforce as it moves forward. As demonstrated in the previous section, the current Victorian Local Authorities Award uses broad descriptions of accountability and authority, and qualifications and experience, and does not detail

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competencies and is not public library-specific. Once the skills and behaviours needed from the future library workforce have been quantified in Stage 2 of the Workforce Sustainability project, it may be useful to translate this into structured competencies for each band. Some of the competencies identified by Bryan & Poustie (2003:12) were also identified as required librarian behaviours in this stage of the research—such as, customer service excellence, innovation, flexibility and leadership. Identifying competencies was also an important recommendation from the '8Rs' research:

> "Institutions need to carefully plan how they will restructure their staffing complements as retirements occur. The first step is to define needed competencies and determine what mix of staff will meet the present and (insofar as possible) future needs of the organisation. However, we can say overall that the ability for staff to adapt flexibly to change will clearly be a necessary competency throughout Canadian libraries" (Ingles, 2005:193).

Vicki Whitmell (2002) considers succession planning as the prime strategy for being able to replace the large numbers of librarians who are expected to leave the workforce in the near future. Effective succession planning needs to extend beyond the organisational level and be approached on a broader basis. Whitnell (2005:148-9) lists a number of broad strategies for succession planning such as management training, job rotation and secondments, the development of a database of individuals seeking advancement, mentoring programs, increased communication and leadership from management. The challenges in implementing such strategies include relatively low salary levels, insufficient funding and a lack of middle managers. In 2004, Whitmell & Associates (2004) produced a paper for the Australian Technology Network that clarified some broad guidelines for succession planning such as recognising abilities and not only qualifications, encouraging professional development and changing recruitment practices. They do not provide pragmatic details in how to go about implementing such changes. Specifically, they do not acknowledge the significant organisational and cultural change, the substantial levels of management support and leadership, and the funding required in implementing such changes. The paper was written for a broad audience that incorporates all Australian libraries in a variety of environments. Thus it does not address some of the issues that are especially acute for public libraries. Nevertheless, the ideas can feed into general directions forward. The challenge remains however, for Victorian public libraries to turn the 'good idea' of succession planning into good practice.

The review of literature confirmed the need to be able to quantitatively understand the recruitment, retention and in particular supply and demand issues that are being faced by Victorian State Libraries. Once the specific issues are clearly understood we can then return to the literature to examine strategic directions that have been assisted by libraries overseas and assess the extent to which these strategies may be adopted and applied to Victorian public libraries.

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The Public Library Context

The public library workforce is employed under a complex set of circumstances that impact on the ability to recruit, retain and develop workers as well as plan for the future. The complex circumstances include the impact of growing technologies; evolving purpose and functions; funding arrangements and relationships with Local Councils and Boards; and a diverse and changing customer base. It is important to first establish the context under which public libraries are operating so that we can clearly identify and understand the opportunities and challenges in planning for the future workforce.

The librarian workforce is particularly susceptible to the challenge of the ageing population with over half of employed librarians in Australia over the age of 45 years.[1] Stakeholders from education institutions reported that students in librarianship courses also tend to be older. The workforce is also predominately female—84 per cent of librarians in Australia are women.[2] Therefore employees are more likely to carry the bulk of childcare responsibilities within the household. This creates a demand for more flexible working arrangements.

Libraries exist within the local government structure. As mentioned in the background, they are either managed by single councils or by corporations acting on behalf of multiple councils. The majority of recurrent funding is received by Local Government Associations. Therefore, funding and budget capacity is primarily determined by councils. Library managers reported varying relationships with their councils and corporation boards and felt that this relationship as well as councillors' and CEOs' perceptions of what libraries do and their contribution to the community also influenced the amount of funding they received. Managers commented that this environment is often changing which requires them to continually adapt to the perceptions and demands of the board and council. Most research participants reported that funding was often a constraint on libraries' operations. Some library managers felt that their council(s) did not value the library service.

> "Our hardest challenge at the moment is our councils and trying to say this is what really needs to happen in libraries and the Board … not listening to the advice of the senior managers and specialists" (Library Manager).

In the case of Council libraries, staff are included in the council's industrial arrangements. This is usually an enterprise agreement which is based on an Award. Corporation libraries tend to have an enterprise agreement at the corporation level, outside any contributing Council agreements or are employed under the Award. Participants in the research generally felt that public librarians are underpaid. There were reports of discrepancies between other local government staff and library staff. For example, customer service staff in some local government positions are paid at one or two bands higher than library customer service staff. It was also felt that librarians, who require a tertiary education are

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[1] Teece, P. (2005) "Genuine choice can boost participation rates", *Workwatch* from the ALIA website http://www.alia.org.au/publishing/incite/2005/07/workwatch.html, accessed 16 February 2006.
[2] ibid.

undervalued and underpaid, particularly when compared to other professions, such as engineers, who are also employed by local government.

There was no evidence of strong union representation for employees, apart from the general union representation for local government employees. The Australian Library and Information Association is a professional organisation that represents all library employees, not specifically public library employees, and membership to the organisation among public library employees was reported to be low due to costly membership fees.

There are basically four types of libraries that a person can work for if they choose to work as a librarian:

- Special
- Academic
- Public
- Schools

Public libraries differ from other types of libraries in that they service the general public, i.e. all ages, backgrounds, and language and learning abilities. In other libraries the client base is likely to be more narrow, for example, children in school libraries or academics and students in academic libraries. This has the advantage of making the job varied but possibly more challenging. Public librarians who participated in the research reported sometimes having to serve challenging or aggressive customers, and public libraries in certain locations were renowned to be more demanding to work in due to the customer base. One stakeholder observed an increase in aggressive behaviour and commented that public libraries are 'safe havens' for people with low grade mental disabilities due to a decrease in support services.

Qualified librarians not only have the choice to work in different type of libraries but they can also work in organisations that require their information management skills, such as law firms and financial institutions. This means that skilled librarians have a range of employment (and remuneration) possibilities and have scope to be selective when choosing their workplace. The labour market for librarians is more diverse compared to other public service occupations such as teachers, nurses, and doctors. In these occupations the public service is the biggest labour market and with limited employment choices there is an acceptance among most graduates that they have to "do time" in the less desirable areas before they achieve a placement somewhere they prefer. Qualified librarians, however, can opt out of the less desirable public library positions and have a range of other employment opportunities to choose from. This makes recruitment in, for example, low socio-economic areas more difficult for public library managers.

Another aspect that makes recruitment to public libraries more challenging is the image that libraries and librarians have in the broader community. The image can be stereotypical and can present a limited view of what libraries are and what librarians do. It was commented by some research participants that librarians have a quiet, reserved and almost reclusive image, and it is generally not perceived to be a customer service occupation. However, the nature of the job is often constant contact with the public. The other perception that appears to characterise the library's image is the physical building and the physical objects within it. However, with the rise of technology and the internet, libraries are becoming more 'virtual'. More and more reliance is being placed on librarian's

IT skills and there is a growing need for IT experts in public libraries. Nevertheless, stakeholders observed that people with these skills are not being attracted to the profession, partly because libraries are not considered to be hi-tech institutions. Several participants made the comment that libraries are not good at promoting themselves and letting the community know what libraries and librarians do. This is a particularly important challenge as libraries face a significant opportunity for their function to evolve along with the technical revolution. The technological and image issues are intertwined; as one stakeholder put it, the challenge for public libraries is to move beyond the public perception that they are more than a place where books are checked out and communicate their varied functions to the wider community.

The internet is having a significant impact on what services libraries provide and how they provide them. Due to the internet the library will have more services to provide and more people who are going to use them. Additionally, community has access to much larger quantities of information through the internet, which means the library's task of validating and managing this information is also rapidly growing. However, many aspects are yet to be comprehended. One stakeholder summed up the challenge facing libraries as:

> "Society and information technology and the combination of all those type of things are impacting service development and service delivery. And do the current staff have the skill set that is required to take libraries into the future?" (Stakeholder)

Although most library managers were mindful of the workforce issues these weren't the only challenges they were facing. Some library managers reported significant issues with the condition of their buildings as well as the amount of building space.

> "Keeping abreast of technology also comes back to a funding issue and adequacy of buildings and training staff" (Library Manager).

Other managers reported difficulties in dealing with their council and getting adequate recognition of the contribution they are making to the community. Thus public libraries have a range of changing conditions and challenges that require a response in order to plan for the future and develop the workforce. The following sections discuss some of the specific issues relating to recruitment, retention and development of public library employees.

Education

Supply and demand

The research gained the perspectives of educational institutions and those people responsible for attracting and employing library staff. These perspectives differed on the level of supply and demand for qualified librarians in public libraries. Library managers reported being unable to recruit suitably qualified people. However, educators reported limited availability of entry-level librarian positions for graduates.

The education stakeholders perceived opportunities in Victorian public libraries for graduates to be limited. There appears to be sufficient employment opportunities for information management graduates and public libraries do not play a main role. A program convenor of an undergraduate course had recently obtained feedback from a number of industry people. The feedback she received from public libraries is that they don't have entry level vacancies, that is, Band 5 positions. Instead they need managers or library assistants. A stakeholder reported an increase in library technician students and there appears to be a healthy demand for them. He felt that employers were realising that technicians have the essential library skills with the bonus of being cheaper to employ.

All program convenors reported work placements as a component of their librarianship or information management courses. Public libraries are involved but there are also many other organisations where students can gain work experience. Work placements are a good opportunity for students to be exposed to public libraries.

Student awareness and interest in public libraries appears to be relatively low, especially as other organisations' need for information managers increases. Also, program convenors reported students entering into information management degrees due to the focus on IT, with little awareness of the opportunities in libraries. A course convenor believes that students have mixed perceptions of what a librarian is and what their job involves:

> "Some people are quite realistic, they understand what a librarian's job is about and they want to meet people and are interested in books. There are other people who have an unrealistic expectation. There are quite a number who come with issues and think they'll have a quiet job to the back of a cupboard somewhere filing books. … This is a customer service job [where they are] working in teams [and] communicating".

Managers reported receiving no interest from advertisements that specifically requested that graduates apply. However there were few accounts of being unable to fill Band 5 positions. A manager of a country library commented that they have not had many opportunities to employ graduates; she does not know whether this is due to lack of interest, awareness or opportunity. The managers believe that graduates tend to be very selective about which public libraries they wish to work at. One manager reported receiving an overwhelming number of applications for a position while others are lucky to get a few. This demonstrates that labour supply varies significantly across libraries and, in response, different recruiting models may be required

Library managers and staff were generally positive about the contribution graduates can make to the workplace. Getting 'new blood' into the workplace is a positive aspect and graduates were often considered to be enthusiastic and willing to take on or develop new ideas. However, a library manager reported that she often had to push the branch librarians to be receptive to their graduate's new ideas and enthusiasm: "I think they are a bit threatened, especially you know when it's 50-something year old women". One manager had recognised the potential in a graduate so she advocated on his behalf so that he could take on special projects.

> "I think with the young graduates if we are going to attract them we also need to be training them and need to be developing them and we need to be encouraging them" (Library Manager).

Taking students on through work placements and part-time work was considered very effective in gaining the interest of potential graduates who could be employed on a full-time basis once qualified. A library manager believes that one way of overcoming the lack of awareness of public libraries among students may be to employ them on the weekends:

> "It would mean we have to spend a long time training them up so they can work on the desk. But it would also give them that exposure. And it's quite good money for a student to come out and work on the weekends" (Library Manager).

Another manager has a similar program already in place with another university. She employs students at a Band 4D level with the agreement that they move to a Band 5A once they graduate. Sometimes she has been unable to place them into full-time permanent employment but their next employers are very grateful for the training they have received. The advantage of taking on students part-time is that it is an opportunity to educate and train them in public libraries which supplements, but does not overlap with, what they are learning at university.

Library education

The education stakeholders in the research came from both universities and technical colleges. There are a variety of qualifications that a student can obtain to work in libraries. A diploma in library education qualifies a person for a library technician position. There are a variety of options for those wishing to be a qualified librarian. Historically, undergraduate students could enter into degrees in librarianship. However, undergraduate courses for qualified librarians now tend to be in information management more broadly and are accredited by ALIA (the following discussion provides an example). Post-graduates have the choice of a graduate diploma or masters degree in librarianship or information management.

Managers criticised current university courses for taking the focus away from libraries, and in particular public libraries. A program convenor described the transformation of a traditional librarianship degree into an information management and business degree. There was pressure from the University for the librarianship program to close and the places to be moved to another area. In the end it was agreed that the program would undergo 'renewal'. The convenor feels that the course was targeted because it was a small program:

"Institutions are big places and small programs become prey to the politics and it's really hard to sustain small programs and small industries, I think, in the kind of dog-eat-dog conditions we have in education".

The program was transformed to a Bachelor of Information Knowledge management in an attempt to make it broader in its appeal, "we stopped talking about libraries to some extent". The change was in response to the recent trend of employment opportunities for librarians or 'information managers' growing and diversifying. The change is thought to have impacted on students' knowledge and awareness of public libraries. The convenor reported that there a few students who clearly want to work in public libraries and have taken up part-time positions in libraries. However, among a large majority of students there doesn't seem to be a high level of awareness of or interest in public libraries as an employment prospect. The convenor reported a successful strategy for engaging students has been for enthusiastic spokespeople from public libraries to talk to the students about employment opportunities.

One stakeholder thought it was very important to ensure that library courses around Australia remain diverse and based in different disciplines. She believes that information management is and should be approached as a multi-disciplinary area.

Although some library courses have been cancelled at other universities, the education stakeholders were positive about the future of their programs and either reported stable or increasing attendance. The Planning Workgroup raised the declining number of librarianship courses over the years as a potential issue. However, educational stakeholders did not mention an inability to meet demand for courses. The profile of students in information management and library courses are relatively older, i.e. a significant number are 45 and over; and they are mainly women. Among the students, particularly those in library technician courses, are mothers who are returning to the workforce. The job appeals to them because they have exposure to libraries through their children and consider the working conditions appropriate. A course convenor noted that the mean age of their students is 35 years, but the undergraduate courses tend to attract younger students. The fact that many of the librarianship courses are available through distance education appears to have prevented access issues. Distance education is popular among older, employed and regional students.

There was concern among library managers that university courses were not training students in line with what public libraries need. Most library managers who were involved in the research believed that the courses taught at university no longer mentioned public libraries which led to a lack of awareness of public libraries as a potential career among students. One manager said she found the state-wide training program (as detailed on p.19) useful in supplementing graduate's university education.

"Because they're not doing anything about public libraries they don't understand the whole social construct around public libraries, and what our role is, and the community, and it's not just the information stuff it's the social capital side of it as well. So they don't learn any of it" (Library Manager).

The education stakeholders commented on the weak links they have with public libraries and, in particular, the lack of a clear message of what they want from their graduates, in terms of skills and qualities to develop. They were eager to build stronger links with libraries.

Recruiting and Attracting Staff

There were mixed experiences in recruiting and attracting public library staff among research participants. Some managers reported an abundance of applications for positions while others reported receiving very few applications, often of poor quality. There appeared to be an accepted view that attracting staff was more of an issue for libraries in particular areas, such as areas with a low socio-economic status. One library manager said that attracting staff was problematic because of the location of the library combined with the award wages that were being paid to staff. There were also more reports of difficulties filling vacancies at the higher levels (e.g. Bands 6 and 7). Managers reported that the quality of job applications were low, with many applications not addressing the selection criteria.

The inability to recruit in particular areas is demonstrated in the following exchange that occurred in the employee focus group; an employee who is currently acting in a branch manager position recounted the recent experience of her library trying to hire someone:

> "We have a management position at one of our branches that we are hiring at the moment. That's our largest branch and probably a very difficult branch to run. We actually had problems with not many people applying the first time. We had to reapply for another set period. I think the first time we had 5 applications" (Library employee #1).

> "Which Library was that?" (Library employee #2).

> "<Library name>" (Library employee #1).

> "Oh that's why I didn't apply for it! I was wondering why I didn't apply for it! That's why, <library name> yeah" (Library employee #2).

> "I worked at <library name> for a couple of years and now when I go back to it and do shifts there I'm thinking how did I deal with this? You sort of forget. Well <Council name> are the most multicultural council in Victoria and it is very difficult patronage wise" (Library employee #1).

Both staff and managers considered remuneration to be a significant barrier in being able to attract quality staff. Some staff felt that the remuneration did not adequately reflect the skills and tertiary qualifications required to be a librarian.

The nature of the job

In looking at how to attract future staff it is useful to examine what has attracted current librarians to the public libraries. Overall, the library employees that participated in the research were positive about the type of work they do. They enjoy the variety and helping people. However, some employees commented that the constant dealings with the public could sometimes become "too much". One employee specifically requested to job share her position because she knew that the customer demands on a full-time basis would be

overwhelming. There was a level of dissatisfaction with the working conditions—the pay levels and the opportunities to gain more responsibility and earn more.

> "I like the variety and the fact that in my job there is so much outreach into the community. Libraries just aren't a building anymore. There's so many other services that you are taking out to people who never came in before" (Library employee).

There were a range of experiences in terms of why the employees became librarians in the first place. One person wanted to leave another occupation and chose librarianship because she could study by distance, the working conditions are flexible, and the education could be covered by HECS. Employees were very positive about the flexible working conditions and this seemed to play an important role in some of their decisions to work or stay in public libraries.

Skill shortages

Library managers agreed that children's and youth services librarians are the most critical skill need. In looking toward the future, one stakeholder noted that, particularly in larger organisations, librarians will need diverse skills and that they shouldn't be expected to have the same skill sets. But it was felt that IT skills will probably need to underpin any librarian's skill set.

Customer service was considered to be an increasingly important skill for library staff. It was agreed that customer service is an essential aspect of being a librarian but particularly necessary for public librarians as they are dealing with the whole 'gamut' of society, and thus there needs to be a particular focus on this skill. One library manager was contracting a consultant to provide conflict resolution training due to the issues they were having with their customers.

One stakeholder argued that the focus in libraries was not on customer service, where it should be, and that there are many librarians who do not like working with people all the time. To address this she felt that:

> "We need to promote people from in customer service instead of people from administration, which is behind the scenes. We should be promoting people who are out the front. So our most expensive people should be out the front not our cheapest. So that's a huge change".

A stakeholder from an education institution believes that all library managers (not just public libraries) are not fully aware of the potential skills shortages in the next 10 years. She predicts that there will be high competition among employers for skilled labour, and they will be competing in terms of remuneration, image and career prospects. It was also raised that the people teaching students librarianship are also suffering from critical shortages. One stakeholder said that the number of tertiary educators in information management had dropped 50 per cent in the last ten years and there is no evidence of people entering the profession. It was argued that there is little incentive to become a lecturer in the area, particularly when often a PhD qualification is required. Several education stakeholders noted how Government policy is impacting on niche courses such

as information management, "all the higher education reforms are impacting dramatically on niche areas of education. … Libraries are a minority area still".

Stakeholders considered that recruiting staff with qualifications and experience may have to be rethought in the future. For example, one manager considered that in response to the shortage of children's and youth services librarians they may have to consider hiring a person with "some sort of degree in children's services or youth services and then skill them up in terms of librarianship skills. It's really heading that way". However, library managers generally believed that recruitment based on personality and not skills can only occur for staff at lower levels such as front line staff. "Then the next level up it's personality as well but you need the qualification".

Recruiting library staff based on personal attributes and not on qualifications may also be a way of addressing the lack of diversity in the Victorian public library workforce. The fact that the workforce consists primarily of middle-aged, female and middle-class women was considered to be an issue in servicing the broader community.

> "Maybe we choose the right person and then try to entice them into getting a qualification. Maybe we need to look at having apprenticeship style arrangements with staff. They're all the issues I think we are faced with".

The suggestion of apprenticeships was raised on several occasions throughout the research. Librarianship is considered to be like a trade in that a lot of on-the-job training is essential. There were reports of many students undertaking their librarianship studies while working part-time at the library—similar to a formal apprenticeship program.

The attributes managers and stakeholders said they wanted in library staff included:
- intelligent and energetic;
- good customer service and communication skills;
- the ability to think laterally and strategically;
- respect the role of the library in the community and to maintain relationships in the community, i.e. community involvement; and
- ability to swiftly adapt to new technologies and to translate these to the community.

Image

Most research participants believed that public libraries suffer from an image problem which, in part, was contributing to an inability to recruit quality people to public libraries. Managers and stakeholders felt that the need for dynamic and energetic staff who are willing to take on leadership roles is not being met due to the perception that librarians take on a more reclusive role.

> "It's not very prestigious to work in public libraries. And it wasn't when I went through [uni] and that was nearly 30 years ago" (Library Manager).

One library manager felt that salaries weren't the problem but rather the image of public libraries, as academic libraries have similar salaries and she understood them to have fewer problems recruiting. Upon further exploration it was discovered that there is a more expansive career path for academic librarians with the opportunity to earn higher salaries.

On the other hand, a library employee argued that the issues of image and salaries were related:

> "I don't think we get paid enough. In comparison to some other professions I don't think our profession is regarded as a profession that much really. … I know that ALIA has been trying to lift the image of the profession but I think you're up against so many years of the stereotype that even now with the internet and everything we do in libraries – we're still books and magazines and telling children stories" (Library employee).

There appears to be a lack of awareness in the general community that qualifications are needed to become a librarian. Managers reported members of the public wanting to apply for a librarian position because they like reading books. A stakeholder argued this is because libraries present a 'seamless' service that is fronted by the library assistant at the front desk, so very few people understand what librarians do behind the scenes.

> "That's one of our issues though, that the whole profession of librarianship somehow lacks some credibility" (Library manager).

Retaining and Developing Staff

Retention was generally not considered an issue for public libraries. Attracting staff was considered to be difficult, but once staff have been successfully recruited it is usually for a long period. In fact, managers were more likely to report retaining staff in the same position for too long as an issue. If a person stays in the same job for 10 or 15 years it is likely that they have been performing the job in the same way for all that time. This is also a consequence of the ageing population in that ageing managers and co-ordinators are staying in their jobs for long periods until they retire. Retaining staff for too long in the same position may create a stagnate workplace and if they leave when they retire there will be significant gaps to fill.

> "They've got the skills and knowledge but quite often they are still stuck in the 80s pre-amalgamation or they like things the way they were. They can see what's going on around them but they're in their own comfort zone and it scares the hell out of them to step outside that" (Library Manager).

Whilst it was acknowledged that problems with stagnation could be overcome with adequate training opportunities, not all staff are amenable to ongoing skill development.

> "That's definitely true for some but there are also on the other hand, some staff that as long as you've got say, a good training program and things like that to motivate and enthuse staff, that you can actually bring them along. But yeah I agree we've got some who will never be brought along but there's also those who have been there for over 20 years who are fantastic" (Library Manager).

It was agreed that a certain amount of turnover is good for the workplace. Managers discussed strategies they use in dealing with long term staff who remain in the same positions. They considered staff stagnancy to be an issue because it can breed complacency, prevent new ideas and better work practices being developed, and block opportunities for other staff who wish to rotate to different positions within the library.

It was commented by a library manager that the culture within public libraries had changed significantly in the last 10 years or so, and in response she was in the process of producing a staff development program. She felt that previously staff were not allowed to make decisions but now there is much greater autonomy and staff are expected to make such decisions confidently. Not only has the work environment changed but the types of work public librarians do have also changed. Some employees said they enjoyed the research aspect of the job, while the managers observed that research isn't required as much anymore. Generally, customers either have good information literacy skills and know how to conduct internet searches, or they have poor literacy skills and require language teaching. One manager noted:

> "The librarians say to me 'I just feel like a retailer'. I say well actually that's what you are now, you are now essentially a marketer because we've got one of the lowest index and deferred reference enquiry rate across the states" (Library Manager).

A library manager of several western suburbs branches reported high turnover in one particular branch. She did not understand what was leading to the high turnover as a branch in a similar area had low turnover. She reported some staffing issues and staff leaving for positions both inside and outside the library network. The exit interviews revealed the two main reasons of personality clashes among staff and the problems with the community. This example appears to illustrate the importance of staff support and coherence in being able to deal with issues relating to the 'tough' customer base.

Training

The Library Board of Victoria has $1.3m for special Development Projects. From 1997 to 2005 the State-wide Training Project was in place. This program allocated $300,000 per year to provide subsidised training to public library staff across Victoria. The training focussed on leadership and development of the network. The training was not intended to be on-going but rather act as an impetus for public libraries to develop and sustain their own training program. Public libraries have been given a small amount of further funding to cover administration costs of the current program for this financial year only. Therefore, state-wide training is now offered on a user pay basis. Many courses that have been offered have been cancelled due to lack of interest which is thought to be due to cost.

Library managers and staff spoke very positively about the State-wide Training Program. The aspects that were seen very beneficial were:
- the ability to meet and network with people from other libraries – it is valuable to hear of other experiences as well as of opportunities in other libraries;
- the training topics which were tailored to public library staff specifically; and
- the cost – subsidised training enabled them to participate in training that is otherwise considered to be unaffordable.

Some Council libraries are able to take advantage of training provided by their council which covers topics such as OH&S, customer service and leadership. Computer based training is also provided at some libraries. But employees said it was expected that this training be completed in their own time.

The cost and availability of training is more of an issue for country libraries where they normally have to travel to the city to receive training and therefore face more costs for accommodation and travel. It is also not economically efficient to hold tailored training in country areas as staff numbers do no warrant it. Country libraries often work as part of corporation libraries and therefore do not have access to council training. Larger libraries are able to keep training costs down by sending a few staff members on a training course and then requiring them to come back and train the remaining staff members. This also provides an excellent development opportunity for those who are sent on the training. One manager was looking into the prospect of sending these same staff members to country libraries to also conduct the training there. She commented that they need to support one another because the infrastructure is not sufficient.

> "Technology is a big thing – it's keeping up to date. We're fortunate we've got a training room so we can send a couple of information staff to a training session and then they come and train the other staff" (Library Manager).

Library managers predicted that training will become more of an issue in the future as skill needs are unlikely to be met. In terms of the specific training needs, technology is thought to be the most critical; customer service is an ongoing training need; and management and supervision training is needed for the higher levels of Band 5 and above. The middle managers course which was originally part of State-wide training program was considered very useful and something that should be available on a more on-going basis.

Continuous training was considered important and managers were unsure how they could support continuous library-specific training for their staff from their budgets. Managers said they now tend to look for more informal training opportunities. For example, if there is a vacancy (due to sick leave or maternity leave) managers will use this to move someone who has potential into the position. These types of opportunities are sometimes identified in performance reviews.

Although budgets were tight, employees felt fairly comfortable that if there was training that they wanted to go to that was relevant to their role and reasonably priced then they would be able to attend. One library employee wanted training in cataloguing but there were no courses available through the Statewide Training project:

> "There seems to be a lot of training on presentation and marketing and all that sort of stuff. Some of us aren't interested in that. … I'd like to see more encouragement of people going back to uni doing masters and actually being helped to do that. I don't think that's encouraged enough. Particularly in business, like before I said I wasn't really interested in budgets but it's because I haven't really thought of going off and doing accounting. But it's sort of geared to what you are already doing or in management or something like that. I think if you want to get to management level it would be nice to do some study before you actually got there instead of falling upwards and kind of hoping you can do it" (Library employee).

Other employees employed in Council libraries reported good study leave policies in their workplaces. It is unclear whether such policies improve the recruitment or retention of staff, but it could be explored by further quantitative research.

Developing staff

Managers reported that staff are generally open to being developed and employees reported a willingness to learn new things. However, there were perceived to be very limited opportunities for development due to the lack of staff movement between positions. The lack of development opportunities is a particular issue in an environment where there is also pressure to gain new skills and experience, especially in the changing IT environment.

It was generally believed that there are opportunities for staff development and reward that could be exploited further such as increasing autonomy, providing grants, new projects, committee work, cross-departmental initiatives and opportunities for innovation. Staff development opportunities tended to be within the library rather than across libraries state-wide. One library has a compulsory Band 6 rotation program where every 2 or 3

years the Band 6 staff member has to move into a different position. Another library has a policy where Band 5 staff have to move to a different branch on a yearly basis.

Formal secondment or mentoring policies currently do not exist for Victorian public libraries. There were a few reports of secondments occurring between libraries. Secondments were usually one-off opportunities used to fill a vacancy that did not need, or was unable, to be filled on a permanent basis. One library manager had a problem with the union in that they were telling staff that if they go on a secondment they should be getting extra money for petrol.

A stakeholder gave the example of a secondment program that occurs in another Australian city between university libraries, the State Library and the city council library. The secondments of 6 or 12 months were reported to be very beneficial because, "it kicks people out of their general comfort zone and they see how these other organisations work. … [It has] very positive outcomes down the line because they are learning to work in different ways".

Employees were positive about more secondment and mentoring opportunities being available. The employees said they would like the opportunity to work at the State Library for several months. However, one employee recounted weighing up the possibility of moving to another library to gain more experience but he already feels that he is not paid enough and therefore did not think the extra travel time and petrol costs would be worth it. One stakeholder questioned the motivation for staff to take on development opportunities when there are a lack of direct rewards in doing so:

> "Where we talk about skills – there is a pretty widespread feeling that what's the point of doing continuing professional development because they don't get recognised. There's no differentiation between the proactive people who go out and gain new skills and those who just plod do what they've done for the last 30 years. They are paid the same basically" (Stakeholder).

Career Paths

There was agreement among managers and staff that there was a career path in the public library system, albeit some considered it a relatively short path. However, managers had mixed opinions about whether staff could move along this path at an acceptable pace. Among the small group of staff there was agreement that a bottleneck existed above Band 5. One employee commented that the branch managers seemed to "have been cemented in for the past 10 years". It was argued that this bottleneck is partly the result of women no longer leaving the workforce completely to have children. The following quotes illustrate the perspectives of library employees and stakeholders:

> "It's not a particularly huge industry. If you come in as a Band 5 there's some 6s, a few 7s and then you are a manager. Well in a very small industry that's not a huge career path in my mind" (Library Manager).

> "I am a team leader. There's three co-ordinator positions above me and then the manager. So there's only four people above me and they're in it for their career – where do I move to? … I am keen to move up and I'd be happy to stay [in the

library]. I like where I am but it may come down to if I want to progress either work-wise or financially, where can I go? It might not be that I can keep going up and I might have to move out of libraries" (Library employee).

"There's many people out there who are qualified or want to get into it or want to move from somewhere else but everyone is just pushing against each other for position" (Library employee).

"We're a hierarchical organisation. So I think it's difficult for people to move within the organisation. The baby boomers are staying there or you know it's clogged up with people who won't leave. I think that for individuals within the organisation they might find it frustrating. … I think that there's not enough communication – as an individual you don't know what is happening in the big wide world of the public library network. I think managers are not communicating well to their staff" (Stakeholder).

An employee gave the example of two young colleagues she works with who have been working for libraries since they were students, who are at Band 5 and are unlikely to progress until someone "leaves, dies, or retires":

"There needs to be some sort of training or variety to keep them interested and where they are otherwise, they are young and dynamic, they are just going to go off and do something else because they want more money for what they are doing".

Due to the scarcity of higher level positions in some libraries, librarians have to be prepared to relocate to attain career opportunities. It appears that most librarians live in the same area as their work, and are unwilling to move for their career. This limits the number of opportunities open to country staff, in particular, if they are unable to relocate. It was argued by a few managers that employees had to broaden their scope beyond public libraries if they wanted to progress their career.

The way libraries are structured organisationally appears to promote stagnancy. Within the organisation this occurs due to the limited number of positions on the career ladder and the number of increments to progress along within the Bands. There is also stagnancy across libraries, as some libraries service large geographical areas so that if a librarian wants to take up an opportunity at another public library they have to travel long distances.

It was generally agreed that it would be more rewarding for staff and would enhance development opportunities if new middle management positions were created to bridge the gap between managers and librarians. In larger libraries there are slightly more opportunities such as team coordinators, branch managers or development coordinators. An employee described the situation and the need for a response in the following way:

"You've got librarians who all get to a certain banding and then it stops. And then you've got to wait ten to fifteen years before you can move up again. There has to be something done in the middle there. Now whether that is a change in variety or the ability to take some sort of management or whether it's looking at the sort of

roles that we have in libraries and changing them, splitting them up, doing something because that's where people are getting frustrated. And because of the way the world works we can leave and we can take a new career. That's not an unusual thing and as librarians we certainly have lots of skills that can be applied to any other sort of job. So if they don't want to lose people at that point then there needs to be something done".

One employee said that library management were considering a 'plus' level to be added to each band that would be for staff members who took on a project in addition to their other responsibilities. However, he did not think this would be implemented due to budget concerns.

Developing managers and leaders

According to one stakeholder, inspirational leaders are "people at the top who are wanting to take their organisation to places they haven't yet been and inspire their workforce to want to travel that journey with them".

Many managers discussed strategies they have for identifying and developing potential leaders among their staff. They described potential leaders as someone who has energy and enthusiasm. Exposing potential leaders to new opportunities and experiences at work was considered the best way of informally developing them, such as taking them to specialty meetings so they can network, and giving them special projects and temporary positions when staff members are on leave. It was generally felt that there are untapped opportunities within public libraries to create leadership positions at the Band 5 to Band 7 level.

Some library managers commented that although staff were interested in being developed, many did not want to progress to the managerial ranks, "I think they see a lot of the hassles". They admitted that their role as managers is very different to being a librarian, "we are not librarians as such anymore. [The staff] see that and think 'oh I don't want to be fighting with the board'. That's not what they want to do". A library manager recounted a staff member who had acted in a managerial position and afterwards said,

> " 'I don't want to do it. I don't want to do those reports. I don't want to do the budget. I just want to do what I want to do'. And she's absolutely fantastic and she has been in that role for 20 odd years. She's always evolving and developing so I don't have any issues but she's not at all interested. They went into libraries because of that and don't want to do the rest".

This view was verified by library employees. They felt that being a librarian and being a library manager were two very different jobs that required different skills. The participants believed they were skilled librarians but did not feel they had the right experience or qualifications to manage a library, in particular, to manage budgets, write reports, and liaise and negotiate with councils or boards. There was a perception that it was a large leap between being a librarian and being a manager, and no stepping stones between the positions were provided. One library employee described some of the unappealing aspects of being a library manager:

"Dealing with staff. Dealing with the rosters. And budgets – that's a side of it. I didn't go through business I did an Arts degree. I'm not that way inclined I suppose".

Further, some sections of the workforce are librarians because of the nature of work and the flexibility, something that is not perceived to be present at the manager level. As one stakeholder put it:

"We employ a lot of middle aged women – I'm one of those. But they are, you know, they've got families and they like the hours and it is not a hugely stressful job. You know it suits certain types of personalities who are quite happy to come to work and go home and not pursue the career path".

Therefore, the librarians felt it was a significant decision to go into management ranks and some did not feel inclined to take these steps but felt that further professional development and experience should be rewarded somehow. The employees felt that there needed to be ways of recognising and rewarding librarians especially as there are not many opportunities to progress within their library and because the classification structure is relatively limited. As one librarian pointed out "I'm at the top of my band now and I've been a librarian for 5 years".

Leadership opportunities really depend on whether the manager works to provide them and makes them available to staff. Developing and nurturing leaders is a responsibility that rests primarily with managers because leadership and management are not taught in the usual library university courses:

"It is a matter of gaining the confidence that you do have those abilities. If you do a beginning qualification in librarianship, it's not going to give you leadership. … You're not getting that hands-on skill development. So I guess it comes back on to the employer – how do they nurture leaders?" (Stakeholder).

One public library stakeholder is concerned that there aren't good management skills among the current managers. She hears managers complain about staff and what they are or aren't doing but she believes the problem is that the managers keep allowing staff to continue with the behaviour:

"They're not managing that person in a proactive way to stop them behaving in this manner. So they just complain about. It worries me that they aren't using their management skills to deal with that. … I just don't think my colleagues know how to deal with it".

She argues that part of the problem is that managers are promoted to their position because they are good librarians or have been there for a long time, not because of their people management skills.

Succession Planning

Policy-makers and higher level stakeholders within the Victorian public library system are attuned to the concept of succession planning and believe there is a need for it. There is general awareness of what succession planning is among library managers and some reported implementing it on a very informal or ad hoc basis. Awareness of succession planning among employees is limited. They had heard about it through their managers or other channels but not in any great detail. The following are some quotes that illustrate the research participants' understanding of succession planning:

> "[Succession planning is] having a vision for the future and knowing where the board and your supervisors see the future of your organisation, where you would like your staff to be and that they are customer focussed, and that we do work together and work towards the overall plan to build and grow" (Library Manager).

> "It's planning for the future so there is someone to replace us" (Library Manager).

> "As a manager, you have to make sure your business won't fall to bits as people retire" (Stakeholder).

> "I understand that we need to look at who is coming up and give them the skills to ensure that they'll be able to take up the positions of those who leave" (Stakeholder).

> "[It's about] corporate knowledge and loss of corporate knowledge" (Library employee).

Succession planning involves assessing future requirements and demands of the public library service and workforce; understanding what skills will be required; knowing what current resources are available and the current gaps in needs; and projecting future skill and resource gaps and how they can be filled. Due to the challenges discussed previously such as attracting young staff and the tendency for older and long-term staff to remain in the same positions, library managers saw the need for succession planning.

Research participants were asked to comment on what they considered to be the important elements of succession planning. Documentation was considered key in retaining corporate knowledge, that is, documenting processes, procedures, plans and strategic directions. It was noted by a stakeholder that succession planning needs to be consultative as one objective of succession planning is to create an engaging workplace. He argued that succession planning needs to establish "what people need, what they can contribute and what you're doing flexibly to accommodate that. It's got to work for the organisation but it also has to work for the workforce".

Stakeholders and managers had differing opinions about how to approach the development of staff. Some believed that 'talent' should be identified and targeted for special development initiatives, while others argued that it should not be a process of singling out staff members. The disadvantages of singling out certain people for

development are that it can lead to low motivation of the remaining workers and be a risky investment if the singled out staff decide to leave the organisation. Some people suggested a more inclusive approach of creating talent pools of interested and involved staff using shadowing, rotation and project work:

> "So it's about how do you nurture the right people without injuring those who are not going to go that route" (Stakeholder).

Managers have generally not undertaken succession planning in a formalised way but they could nominate several informal activities that they are undertaking that contribute to the development of their workforce for the future such as employing and developing graduates; giving staff opportunities to act in positions; encouraging staff to attain the appropriate qualifications; and low-key staff mentoring. One stakeholder argued that succession planning was happening in a very ad-hoc way, that is, when a manager saw an opportunity or when they felt they had time to do it. One manager commented that she now saw the need as staff members had been taking extended periods of leave. In response she has been building up small teams of staff that could cover for each other.

Smaller libraries have the advantage in that they have to be multi-skilled to fulfil most roles in the library. It was acknowledged different approaches will be required for small and large libraries, and that smaller libraries may face more challenges due to limited staff and resources. Larger libraries have more scope to plan and further develop the workforce and smaller libraries would benefit from building partnerships with these libraries.

There was support among employees and managers for mentoring across library organisations, with the aim of developing staff as well as information-sharing. They felt this would be useful,

> "…particularly in sharing ideas and keeping the communication between rural and metropolitan libraries as well. I think we have a lot to offer each other so you could possibly set up mentoring programs within organisations as well particularly for someone looking in to going into management" (Library employee).

An employee suggested that new staff be given a 'training buddy' whom they could go to for help whenever an issue arises. Another employee felt that there needed to a more flexible approach to librarian's work with opportunities to move around the organisation, do different things, learn and train more.

> "It's kind of encouraged that we all have at least one other person that knows how to do your job. It does enable people to swap and change a bit and that is encouraged and I think it stops us from getting too set in our ways" (Library employee).

A more formal way of implementing succession planning is to incorporate it into performance appraisals that occur every six months. A few managers reported doing this.

Managers and some stakeholders argued that there needs to be recognition that there is both financial cost and effort that goes into workforce planning and management. One

manager commented that they are too busy addressing current issues such as decreases in circulation and attendance, to be able to plan for the future. It is only once issues like this have been dealt with that they can start implementing a vision for the future. The barriers to succession planning that managers spoke of were generally the day-to-day operations they were facing in running their libraries, rather than anything specific. Barriers to succession planning that were mentioned included funding, the lack of a clearly communicated organisational direction, internal relationships, a stagnant workforce and a lack of time. A stakeholder considered a barrier in succession planning to be a lack of awareness of what it is and how to carry it out:

> "I think we need training in how to do it more effectively to benefit the organisation and the individual" (Stakeholder).

A vision for public libraries

To be able to effectively plan for a future Victorian public library workforce requires a strategic plan of the services that Victorian public libraries will be delivering and how this will be done. This is an important and evolving aspect due to the continual advances of technology and information provision on the internet. Thus from a higher policy level, succession planning for libraries will be very complex. As one stakeholder noted, a significant hurdle is "the need to plan and think through all the issues because there are just so many variables in it". Stakeholders noted that the barriers to successful succession planning are the ability to think strategically, a lack of time, recognition of the need for planning among all stakeholders, a dearth of proactive responses, and limited Human Resources planning. Stakeholders agreed that a 'vision' was an important element of effective succession planning. The following outlines some of these visions.

> "[Libraries] are going to go more electronic. It's going to have more special databases. People are going to access them from more wireless remote and mobile work stations. ... So there's going to be another layer or different layers of technology than what they actually do. That's fairly clear that's going to happen. There's another strand where I don't know what's going to happen here. Libraries collate, systematise and validate knowledge. That is still very necessary in the academic process. But it's not really clear how the internet and the publicly available search databases – how they are going to interact with libraries" (Stakeholder).

One stakeholder conceded that the vision she has for public library staff is quite demanding. It involves:
- excellent customer service;
- high level of professional data communication skills that are appropriate for the local community;
- staff who are enthusiastic about the role of libraries in the community;
- energy;
- openness to new ideas;
- a capacity to be multi-skilled;
- team work; and
- good social justice principals – access and equity; empathy with people from a range of backgrounds.

It was argued that the key facilitator of this vision is library management:

> "I think we should have vibrant, active, excited people who are enthusiastic about the opportunity of what we can be doing with our customers, with our councils, with our stakeholders, with our community organisations. You know, constantly looking at what we are doing and how we can do it better. Constantly wanting to improve the services we offer instead of being introspective, reflective, being out there and even wild ideas and different ways of doing things and experimenting with those. That's what I would like to see. Passion" (Stakeholder).

In considering the future of public libraries, stakeholders mentioned the positive aspects of undertaking succession plans. For example, it presents an opportunity to rethink libraries and the way things have been done in the past. Several stakeholders mentioned that libraries have an advantage when it comes to succession planning as managing and sharing information, technology, and strong communication networks are already a part of their job. The challenges that libraries face were also seen as opportunities for libraries to become more proactive and more relevant to society's increasing technological needs. It is also an opportunity to begin building sustainable partnerships with other organisations and with the broader community.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The aim of the research was to identify the scope of the issues that need to be addressed if a more sustainable Victorian public library workforce is to be developed. The research has identified the key issues and the following discusses some recommendations for steps forward as well as areas for further research.

Building better networks

A key facilitator in meeting the future challenges of providing public library services in Victoria will be the development of strong and strategic partnerships both within and beyond the Victorian public library system. Partnerships are vital for information-sharing and working together to do things more efficiently. There is potential for Victorian public libraries to build stronger partnerships with:

- each other;
- education institutions and the education department;
- other industries facing similar issues such as teachers and community services; and
- interest groups – a stakeholder gave the example of libraries developing a history portal in collaboration with the genealogy society.

Stronger networks between public libraries across the state could facilitate more formal mentoring programs, secondments, training programs, upgrading of IT and other library systems, and general knowledge sharing. Succession planning will be more effective if it is approached on a state-wide level rather than each library individually. Approaching issues cooperatively rather than on an individual basis will enable the pooling of knowledge and resources. Partnerships across public libraries may be assisted by having a central body to facilitate networks and linkages. Such a body could achieve this by administering mentoring, secondment and training programs, as well as developing and overseeing succession planning strategies.

Defining the role of public libraries

There is a need for a clear future direction for Victorian public libraries to be communicated effectively to the entire workforce. Groups of higher level stakeholders have begun to examine the future direction of public libraries in Victoria. Public libraries will need to clearly define the size, shape and model of service delivery. A clear direction can form the basis of succession planning so that library managers and the workforce can start working towards it.

Managers' and employees' understanding of succession planning was limited in that it was perceived to be about the ability to replace current staff and skills. In fact, a key to succession planning is to anticipate future skill needs, especially in an evolving environment such as public libraries.

The role of managers in workplace change

Library managers are directly responsible for the future planning of their libraries, in terms of the services they deliver, the funding that is obtained from local government and the development of their workforce. Many of the changes that need to occur to ensure

workforce sustainability as well as sustainability of public libraries more generally will need to be instigated by library managers with direction from higher level policy-makers and stakeholders. One public library stakeholder argued that the workforce is reactive rather than proactive, and that library managers are primarily responsible for this approach.

> "We tend to react to the situation around us and [we are] not trying to think about or anticipate the wants and needs of our community. We tend to wait for them to tell us. And then they tell us out of frustration" (Stakeholder).

To change this approach to servicing the community, a cultural shift will need to occur. There was also a sense that a key in the future direction of libraries will greatly depend on current library leaders to advocate the importance of libraries in communities as well as enact a vision that takes account of our increasingly technological society.

Attracting and developing the right people

Victorian public libraries face a variety of challenges in recruiting and developing a workforce that is suitable for its needs. There are steps that can be taken in the immediate future, while other needed changes will require more consideration, consultation and planning.

Developing and promoting formal mentoring and secondment policies is a strategy that could be implemented in the immediate future. Such policies would assist with staff development, which is limited due to immobile staff. In addition, it would assist with establishing stronger networks and partnerships among public libraries within Victoria—an issue previously mentioned. Employees and managers responded positively toward the suggestion of mentoring and secondment systems. Secondments are currently occurring on an informal basis but if guidelines and procedures were developed that clarified issues such as remuneration and returning to previous employment, it is likely that more opportunities would occur. It would also be beneficial to have a centralised mentoring and secondment database where opportunities could be identified and sought.

Similarly, the practice of employing students part-time with the possibility they are hired on a full-time basis once qualified is a successful strategy that is not currently used by all libraries. Information about effective strategies such as this one need to be shared more widely among all public library managers in Victoria.

There appeared to be some hesitation among several managers in recruiting information management graduates into Band 5 positions, particularly when they had no experience in public libraries. Some managers reported doing so with positive results. There was also concern among current librarians that they lack the business skills to be managers. However, the Bachelor of Business and Information Technology at RMIT seems appropriate to library manager positions as it combines business with information management. There may be opportunities here to take these graduates and carefully accelerate them through the public library system.

Recruiting unqualified people with the right attributes and then training them is a strategy that needs more consideration and discussion among public library managers and

stakeholders. Managers appeared to be somewhat closed to this idea thus guidelines on how to go about such a practice, as well as the potential benefits, may be required. The approach to recruitment and the focus on particular skills and experience may also need to be reconsidered. At the lower levels there is an increasing focus on customer service and dealing with people from a variety of backgrounds. Selection criteria could be more oriented towards these skills, with applicants required to have customer service experience such as in retail or hospitality.

It appears that some librarians have been promoted to management positions without the adequate training. A few library managers seemed beleaguered by the demands of managing libraries, but more specifically dealing with Councils or Library Boards. Libraries would benefit from managers receiving more assistance or training with management responsibilities such as advocating for their library, presenting a business case and arguing for the community need and benefit, as well as negotiation skills.

There is a clear need for a state-wide co-ordinated and subsidised training program that provides training specific to public libraries. In current budgetary conditions, managers involved in the research felt that they would not be able to provide for all future research needs.

Another strategy that would require more planning and funding is a graduate program. Such programs are popular in other State and Government Departments. Library managers reported that there is a Victorian Local Government Graduate Program called GOGRAD that is not used by public libraries due to the restrictive cost. A public library graduate program could involve rotations to different libraries ending in a permanent placement in a library (this could be in a library that is having trouble recruiting), providing both on-the-job and supplementary training. A graduate program could be an effective way of recruiting graduates with non-library qualifications and selecting individuals to be accelerated into leadership positions. However, a graduate program would require funding and resources for general administration, processing applications and selecting graduates, and providing supplementary training for graduates.

The structure of library staff has not altered in many years despite the fact that the public library service has changed and continues to change significantly. Services need to be provided for those with poor literacy but those who have literacy skills are likely to also have high levels of information and computer literacy. Additionally, stakeholders and managers argued that there was less of need for traditional librarian tasks such as cataloguing. It appears that the library service has become more focussed on customer service. To reflect this change of focus and enable the delivery of a more appropriate service, workplace structures and classifications could be reconsidered. Strategies to consider could be a reduction in the focus on qualifications and increase in the focus on customer service skills, higher remuneration for customer service positions, more customer service training, focussing on customer service skills when recruiting new staff, and broad-banding and extending current classifications. There was a strong perception that the development of more middle management positions would provide a better career path and therefore limit the extent to which experienced librarians are leaving public libraries for different careers. Again, an essential aspect of this process would be to define

what libraries will look like in the future and what the subsequent staff needs will be; rather than trying to fit the future vision in with the current structures.

Flexible work arrangements are a practice that currently exists in the Victorian public library system that appears to be attracting staff. However, no-one within the Victorian public library system mentioned this as a succession planning strategy. Some employees said that the option of flexible working arrangements is an aspect that attracted them to public libraries. While one library manager said she was burdened by the number of her staff that were taking maternity leave, flexible work arrangements can create needed opportunities for staff to rotate or for secondments for staff from other libraries. Continuing to provide flexible work arrangements and conditions such as maternity leave will ensure that libraries will continue to attract people to the profession and to public libraries. Part-time work is popular among retirees and it is a way of maintaining corporate memory. One employee said that job-sharing was not encouraged at his workplace because it was seen to be too difficult to manage. However, addressing work arrangements flexibly and creatively can also provide further development opportunities for staff.

The role of funding

It was argued by library managers that they are limited in what they can do in developing the workforce and leadership positions, and planning for the future due to budget constraints and restrictions imposed by their councils and boards. It was the view of a few stakeholders that the role of library management is to continually advocate the worth of libraries and prove to councils and boards the contribution they make by using performance indicators and other documentation. There appears to be a lack of understanding among some parts of library management about how to argue for more funding and a higher priority, and what strategies work. One stakeholder interviewed revealed several successful strategies that have led to a 60 per cent increase in funding in 3 years. Thus, more information sharing among managers about effective strategies and what is required in the management role is needed. This could assist managers to secure additional funds that could be put towards staff training and development. One stakeholder described the current situation in the following way:

> "Money is changeable and depending on how good you are and how you communicate with the funders [sic] you can change that. And this highlights the passiveness of the library community. That they are saying 'I can't do that because my funders [sic] won't let me or I won't be able to get funding for that'. How have they tried? … You talk to the board and you tell them what's going on and you involve them in what's happening and you don't hide anything from them and you instil confidence and you show them change and you show them that when you do make a change what the benefit is. I did a major change program in the first 12 months and the loans increased by 70,000. You know, there's an immediate response to that. So they can see some value out of that. You've got to constantly keep giving them the message. … You remind them the intention of what you are trying to achieve" (Stakeholder).

One stakeholder also argued that funding was not the key to effective workforce planning:

"Yeah funding is an issue to us, give us a bigger piece of the pie but are we going to solve all the problems we talked about? No. We are still going to have passive people, managers who can't manage effectively, people employing the wrong people and people saying we still don't have enough money. I don't see funding as the issue. I see people as the issue. I see us as managers we are at fault and we need to change" (Stakeholder).

Further research and next steps

To be able to plan for the future workforce, expectations of the workforce and the type of services they will be delivering needs to be established. Public libraries are facing a great deal of change both technologically and in terms of their role in an increasingly diverse community. In developing effective succession plans, these aspects need to be clearly defined:

- Future role of public libraries – in terms of the services they aim to deliver and how these will be delivered.
- Future needs of local community – in terms of the services expected to be demanded in the future and what is currently being demanded.
- Current skill profile of the workforce, projected skill profile of the workforce and future skill needs – this will enable an assessment of likely skill gaps in the future. To be able to determine future skill needs the previous two points need to be established

For the first two aspects, research could assist to understand what the workforce believes the future of libraries will be and also to gather their understanding of what their clients will demand in the future, but it will also require a strong vision from public library leaders and policy-makers.

Thorough quantitative research could establish the last point. Also, understanding current skill needs would be a useful tool in succession planning. Future skill needs could be determined by asking managers their predictions, or more accurately, model future gaps by examining the current workforce in terms of age, predicted retirement/workforce exit age, current skills, mobility, etc. This would involve a skill profile of the workforce that outlines skills and specialities, and training that is currently occurring. Skill shortages have arisen in education institutions and the public library system because, to date, workforce planning does not occur and there are no processes for identifying skill shortages. Workforce planning would benefit from a systematic way of tracking on-going vacancies and skill shortages, or conducting a one-off audit of on-going vacancies and advertised jobs more generally.

A survey of the public library workforce could examine in greater detail the recruitment and development issues raised by this research, as well as responses to possible succession planning strategies. For example, a survey could provide representative data on:

- Employees who want training and development:
    - Who they are – demographics, classification, and location.
    - Training and development opportunities sought.
    - Reasons for seeking training and development (i.e. not feeling challenged, want to progress further within public libraries, want to progress further outside of public libraries).

- Staff's perceptions of and attitudes toward a career path and leadership positions in public libraries:
  - Who wants to progress and who doesn't – demographics, classification, and location.
  - The type of opportunities wanted and perceived constraints.
  - Likely impacts of not having a career path or leadership opportunities.
- Managers' perceptions of using the apprenticeship model for libraries, recruiting staff with no qualifications, recruiting staff with non-library qualifications, establishing a cadetship program with universities and TAFEs, and establishing a graduate program.
- Staff working conditions and whether these impact on turnover and job satisfaction. For example, are council study leave provisions in particular libraries associated with greater satisfaction or higher retention levels?
- Opportunities for secondments and mentoring, exploring:
  - Managers' and employees' willingness to be involved in such opportunities.
  - Predicted opportunities created by maternity and other leave being taken.
- Managers' perceptions of what will enable them to implement succession planning.

This information could also be examined in relation to the occupational structures and working conditions that exist within each library. It was clear from the focus groups that the various levels of library staff were classified differently and also had varying salaries. The survey could examine how working conditions differ between libraries and whether this is related to particular recruitment or retention issues.

The research has identified three areas where attracting staff is difficult:
- new graduates;
- libraries in particular areas (thought to be low socio-economic status); and
- senior managers.

A survey could examine whether libraries have issues in recruiting particular groups and whether this can be associated with factors such as location or working conditions.

The employee focus group unintentionally had participants from the Band 5 and Band 6 level[3]. Therefore, the views of Band 4 Library Technicians were not examined in this research. Customer service staff were out of scope of the research brief. It may be useful to consider the perspectives of customer service staff in future research particularly if in the future customer service is to become more of a focus of library services. And in doing so, one possibility is to focus on the development and advancement of these staff.

Now that the key issues related to recruitment, retention and development of the Victorian Library Workforce have been highlighted, a more extensive literature review focussed on these specific issues would be beneficial. A more extensive literature review could explore other industries' approaches to recruitment and retention issues. For example, nurses and teachers are faced with similar issues and would make useful comparisons as they are

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[3] Half of the employee participants who agreed to participate were unable to attend on the day. Recruitment targeted employees from Band 4 to Band 6.

female-dominated public service professions. A review could also explore experiences in restructuring, reclassification, and pay equity in the same or comparative industries.