

Report on Vision integration into State Library Reference Services

Following the discussion on Statewide Projects at the Viclink meeting last April, a review of the Vision service was commissioned and was conducted by Murray Consulting and Training in conjunction with Tell Me Now. The review was prompted by the decision taken in 1999 to integrate Vision with the State Library Reference service and to discontinue Statewide Project funding for it from July 2003.

The number of inquiries referred to Vision has been declining for several years. The consultants found that this was probably due to a number of factors:

- Use of the Internet by the public and library staff
- Use of Gulliver and Bruce databases in public libraries
- Lack of knowledge of Vision service among library staff

They found that Vision was very highly valued by library managers and other library staff. As well as the inquiry-answering service, the training component was also regarded as very useful. This has now been absorbed by the Statewide Training program and there is a continuing need for basic reference skills training for library staff at all levels.

The consultants produced five possible models for future delivery of the Vision service:

- Vision as an Australia Wide Service
- Extension of AskNow
- Integration into SLV Reference and Information Service
- Outsourcing to an independent provider
- Current model downsized

This was discussed with a focus group of library managers and reference librarians and it was agreed that Integration into the State Library Reference and Information Service would be the best option.

A meeting of the Review Working Group was held on 3 February to discuss the implementation of this.

The following steps were agreed to:

- Interim period until May 2003 to begin the process of integration and test demand for various levels of service
- Development of guidelines on how and when to use Vision to be developed by SLV and discussed with Reference Cooperative. These were discussed with the Reference Cooperative on 10th February and were approved.
- E-mail as the preferred access mode

Public library staff were concerned about possible longer turnaround times if the Reference and Information Service took over the Vision function. Vision at present provides replies within 2 days in 90% of cases as part of the service level agreement.

State Library currently answers 60% of inquiries within three days. State Library staff suggested that, rather than a blanket guarantee to complete inquiries in a set time, it would be better to guarantee completion in the time required by the patron. Some information may be needed in a day, in other cases the patron may not be able to return to the library to collect it for 2 weeks. This approach would require public library staff to screen inquiries quite rigorously and not label everything "urgent".

There has also been discussion of a special e-mail address and phone number for public libraries to use for inquiries so they could be immediately identified.

Progress and the guidelines will be reviewed again at the May meeting of the Reference Cooperative.

Elisabeth Jackson
Viclink Executive representative on Vision review

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