

ALIA FUTURE OF THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE PROFESSION PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Introduction

In 2013, we set out to investigate the big questions about our future.

- How will libraries remain relevant for users?
- What changes will institutions and individuals in the sector experience?
- Will 'library and information professional' continue to be a necessary and desirable occupation?

We received challenging, insightful, inspiring responses to our request for feedback at events held all around Australia. As a result, we were able to identify themes and develop actions to support positive outcomes. The findings from the project were produced as seven reports, available as pdf downloads from the ALIA website www.alia.org.au. These were published in May 2014, to coincide with ALIA's Annual General Meeting.

Three years on, we have reviewed the themes, actions and what we have learned since the original investigation. This is our May 2017 update.

Themes: Did we get it right?

There were 12 themes that emerged, specific to our 1500 public libraries.

- 1. 50:50 by 2020**
Ebooks will be important, and so will print – we're not writing off the physical book.
- 2. Reading – a national pastime**
People read, borrow and buy books; demand will increase rather than decrease.
- 3. New media**
Transmedia opportunities will see highly interactive ebooks, book apps, and other exciting developments.
- 4. Support for the creative economy**
Even greater support from libraries for Australian authors, illustrators and publishers.
- 5. Community created content**
Libraries will enable people to create and share new works.
- 6. It's not all about the book**
Libraries will continue to connect people with information and ideas – and much, much more.
- 7. Maker spaces**
We will provide places for exploration and discovery through the use of shared resources.
- 8. Enterprise hubs**
Expanded services will be designed for job seekers, entrepreneurs, freelance and other home workers.
- 9. Online learning**
Public libraries will partner with tertiary education providers to support students.
- 10. Everyone a member**
Our vision is of the gift of a library membership card for every child at birth.
- 11. Local services through a national network**
Territory and state and locally funded libraries will build on the strength of collaboration to deliver national projects.
- 12. The meaning of free**
Core services will remain free to library users, but there will be pressure to charge for add-on services.

By March 2015, we had revised our 50:50 by 2020 print to ebook ratio down to 80:20 by 2020¹. We carried out surveys of public library ebook take up in 2013, 2014 and 2015 and ebooks accounted for less than 5% of loans in public libraries for all three years². In January 2017, *Publishers Weekly* reported that “Unit sales of print books rose 3.3% in 2016 over the previous year, making it the third-straight year of print growth.”³ The digital transmedia opportunities that were talked about with such enthusiasm in 2013 failed to make a significant impact and ebooks have become another format, alongside audio, large print, hard cover.

Reading remains a national pastime, supported by library-led initiatives such as The Reading Hour, National Simultaneous Storytime and the Summer Reading Club⁴, but there are signs of declining literacy levels in schools⁵ and declining interest levels among adults⁶. The ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance is working with the Australian Publishers Association, Australian Society of Authors and Australian Booksellers Association to champion Australian writing and to promote the business case to government for investment in the book industry and creative economy.

The maker space movement continues to gain traction in public libraries across Australia. We simply didn't envisage in 2013 the extent to which media, film, sound, 3D printing, coding and robotics would become part of library programming. More than ever before, public libraries are stepping up to meet the need for lifelong learning, from the every earliest baby rhyme times through to digital literacy programs for older Australians. People are turning to libraries for help with skills that will carry them through school, tertiary education and their working lives. The investment in library infrastructure to support communities and individual enterprise is to the credit of state, territory and local governments. There were outstanding examples of this investment in the 16 public library nominations for the inaugural ALIA Australian Library Design Awards 2017.⁷

The gift of a library membership card for every child at birth remains an aspiration, but was shortlisted by popular vote in the Australian Futures Project's 2016 My Big Idea⁸ initiative to inform the federal government about positive changes that could be made to advance society.

A highlight of 2016 was the launch of the *Guidelines, Standards and Outcome Measures for Australian Public Libraries* report⁹ at Parliament House in November. Politicians, Department staff, publishers, authors, technology partners, museum and archive colleagues, early literacy peak bodies and other stakeholders joined public library representatives from every state and territory to celebrate the role of libraries right across the nation.

¹ <https://www.alia.org.au/advocacy-and-campaigns/advocacy-campaigns/ebooks-and-elending#eighty-twenty> accessed 3 May 2017

² <https://www.alia.org.au/advocacy-and-campaigns/advocacy-campaigns/ebooks-and-elending> accessed 3 May

³ <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/bookselling/article/72450-print-book-sales-rose-again-in-2016.html> accessed 3 May 2017

⁴ <https://www.alia.org.au/node/184/public-libraries> accessed 3 May 2017

⁵ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-12-06/australian-school-performance-in-absolute-decline-globally/8098028> accessed 3 May 2017

⁶ <http://www.roymorgan.com/findings/6803-australias-reading-habits-good-and-bad-news-201605092335> accessed 3 May 2017

⁷ <https://www.alia.org.au/awards/library-design-awards-2017> accessed 3 May 2017

⁸ <http://www.mybigidea.org.au/ideas> accessed 3 May 2017

⁹ <https://www.alia.org.au/node/184/public-libraries> accessed 3 May 2017

Scorecard: How did we perform 2013-2017?

This was the action list for ALIA.

1. We will continue to hold discussions with other book industry stakeholders to find mutually beneficial ways of working in the ebook environment.

We had an arm's length relationship with the Australian Publishers Association (APA), Australian Society of Authors (ASA) and Australian Booksellers Association (ABA) in 2013. Over the last three years, we have developed a closer relationship, based on greater mutual understanding and trust.

In 2016, we were pleased to announce a landmark agreement with the APA enabling libraries to use images of book covers for promotional purposes without fear of copyright infringement.¹⁰ In 2017, The Reading Hour will be a truly cross industry event, a partnership between the ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance, APA, ASA and ABA.

2. We will help identify advantageous ways for public libraries to collaborate.

The Australian Public Library Alliance sits within ALIA and is the peak body for public libraries. It comprises representatives from the state-based public library associations, the territory libraries and LINC Tasmania. APLA advises the ALIA Board on policy for its sector and has a highly active role in shaping our activities and campaigns.

Examples include the *Guidelines, Standards and Outcome Measures for Australian Public Libraries* [9], The Reading Hour and Summer Reading Club, eSmart Libraries (with the Alannah and Madeline and Telstra Foundations)¹¹, the SGS Economics return on investment of public libraries report¹², and media generating campaigns such as ALIA's National Simultaneous Storytime¹³, search for moodboosting books (for Mental Health Week) and list of most borrowed books (for Library and Information Week).

In 2016-17, ALIA's Leadership and Innovation Forums, held nationally, focussed on 'Innovation through collaboration and partnerships'.

3. We will help inform public library members about innovation in the sector nationally and internationally.

ALIA has an active role in lobbying for the sector at the federal government level. Topics include copyright law reform, freedom of access to information, investment in early literacy and digital literacy for seniors. In 2016, ALIA published a document entitled *10 ways that libraries power smart cities*¹⁴. This was followed in 2017 with a report on the IFLA STEAM into Sydney public libraries conference, *How public libraries contribute to the STEM agenda*.

These national conversations and supporting materials help public libraries craft their message and put forward their case locally.

¹⁰ <https://www.alia.org.au/copyright-and-book-covers> accessed 3 May 2017

¹¹ <https://www.amf.org.au/what-we-do/esmart/> accessed 3 May 2017

¹² <https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/Contribution%20of%20Australian%20Public%20Libraries%20Report.pdf> accessed 3 May 2017

¹³ <https://www.alia.org.au/nss> accessed 3 May 2017

¹⁴ <https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/Libraries%20power%20Smart%20Cities.pdf> accessed 3 May 2017

4. We will deliver PD and training opportunities to support library and information professionals and library staff who come from other disciplines.

In 2015, we launched the public library specialisation within our ALIA PD Scheme for library and information professionals seeking Certified Professional status. At the same time, we introduced the public library proficiency program on a trial basis, as a program to provide library staff from other disciplines with a foundation in library and information principles. The proficiencies have been successfully piloted with LINC Tasmania and Libraries ACT and are being rolled out to other states and territories in 2017.

In 2016 we held the National Early Literacy Summit, giving an opportunity for education professionals working in the library sector to meet and learn.

5. We will help connect public libraries with higher education and other libraries.

While relationships between public, school, TAFE and higher education libraries have developed at a local level, creating initiatives at a national level to facilitate these discussions has not been a priority for ALIA's Australian Public Library Alliance.

This was the action list for public libraries.

1. Library services will need to further develop their ebook holdings and create collection management strategies that factor in multiple formats.
2. Libraries within specific jurisdictions will need to work closely together to achieve operating efficiencies, for example providing users across municipal boundaries with one library card.
3. Library managers will need to stay on top of innovation in the sector, identifying ways to maximise community engagement and make the library experience even more interactive.
4. Enterprise support will enjoy a stronger focus and libraries will need to develop their services for entrepreneurs and small businesses.
5. Stronger partnerships between public libraries and education libraries will also be beneficial.

Conclusion: What have we learned?

It is clear from the discussions around the ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance table over the last three years that public library leaders have a strong interest in innovation in the field, both nationally and internationally, and a deep understanding of the factors at play with their communities. There is also a commitment to staff training and development to ensure that the future workforce has the professional qualities and technical skills to accommodate change.

While ebooks have not achieved the level of take up that was originally hoped for or feared, and digital technologies have become even more prevalent than anticipated in terms of community education programs, the 12 themes have held true over the past three years and stand us in good stead for the next three years.

Partnerships and collaboration have been essential to raising awareness of the changing nature of libraries and the adoption of new technologies. However, there is a constant need for ALIA to promote the role of libraries with governments and other stakeholders. Despite a growing appreciation in many quarters about the value of public libraries to their communities, their importance is still not universally understood and people need to be reminded regularly about the essential role they play.