



Submission to the ALIA Education and Workforce Summit 2008 Prepared by Public Libraries NSW – Country (PLC)

Introduction

The interrelated themes of recruitment and professional development, and how they impact on library services in regional and rural NSW, have been identified by our members as key areas within PLC's *Strategic Plan 2006-2009* http://www.cpla.asn.au/cpla/bus_plan.html. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to ALIA's Education and Workforce Summit 2008 and work in partnership with other peak bodies to address these issues.

Public Libraries NSW – Country (PLC)

PLC represents the interests of public libraries and their users in regional and rural New South Wales. It has 129 members comprising 117 local government authorities and 12 regional library services from across country NSW. The Association has a vital interest in improving library services and access to information resources for all people living in regional areas through a range of initiatives, joint ventures and partnerships.

Recruitment

In common with many professional areas public libraries are increasingly being confronted with the difficulty of attracting suitably qualified and experienced staff to country areas. It is becoming commonplace to advertise several times before filling a position and even then the appointment is often a compromise situation. PLC members identified these as contributing to this challenge:

- The recognised issues associated with relocation from city to country – lifestyle, family connections, social networks, and distance from major centres. As Librarianship is often chosen as a second career these can be exacerbated due to the involvement of the applicant and their family in their home community.
- Capacity of country councils to pay attractive salaries
- Comparative position of library services within rural (rather than regional/provincial) councils
- Lack of education and professional development opportunities
- No perceived or identified career path

Already the ageing of the library profession is beginning to have an impact with difficulties in recruiting for positions vacated by baby boomers being recorded across regional NSW. The impending retirement of larger numbers of older staff combined with the reluctance of new graduates to relocate to country areas will ensure that alternatives will need to be explored. Problems such as this are not restricted only to more remote locations but also occur in more “desirable” coastal communities.

Many PLC members comment on the difficulty of attracting young people to country areas. In an attempt to address this some libraries have introduced trainee schemes directed at local school leavers. Currently such initiatives are ad hoc but could be supported and expanded to address this issue. Members also suggested that an ongoing campaign focussing on the benefits of working in country regions be developed.

By necessity country libraries are also being more imaginative and adaptable in their recruitment and are looking to engage with allied professions to deliver quality services eg childcare, education and communication. However this raises the question of what is a suitable "ratio" of library/non library positions.

Professional issues

As many library professionals who accept a position in country NSW will be working in isolation, or with limited support, there is an expectation by employers that they be "workplace ready". This is envisaged as working towards an agreed upon skill set that prepares graduates for the public library environment. Subject areas where it was felt that greater emphasis should be placed were:

- customer service
- marketing
- business planning
- political awareness, lobbying and advocacy
- financial management
- oral and written communication
- understanding of the legal environment

Ongoing professional development was also viewed as a key area for examination by PLC members. Comments included:

- summer schools be offered similar to those available for teachers
- advantage should be taken of flexible education methods to ensure that those living outside of metropolitan areas aren't disadvantaged in the area of ongoing professional development
- Ongoing CPD should be mandatory, and should be directed by ALIA. CPD should embrace a wide range of skills in keeping with what is required in the workplace.

By virtue of their circumstances many PLC members undertake tertiary study in librarianship by distance education. Most are already employed in the industry and are studying to address the identified need for qualified staff. For many of these students the requirements for practicums creates great hardship, both at a personal and institutional level – the need for replacement staff, travel and accommodation costs and family commitments. Members believe that in order to make education a more attractive option this area needs to be closely examined.

Contact Details:

Jan Richards
Secretary
Public Libraries NSW – Country
PO Box 194
Orange NSW 2800
jrichards@orange.nsw.gov.au
www.cpla.asn.au