



National & State Libraries Australasia

Some initial comments on ALIA's *The Future of the Profession* Discussion Paper

The following comments are the result of a lively discussion by the Members of NSLA at their meeting on 19 July 2013. The Members appreciate that the paper was intended to provoke and stimulate engagement and ideas - and hope these comments contribute to the many discussions that will follow.

1. Context for the library and information profession

There are a wide range of professionals working in library and information services – librarians and information specialists are just one stream, and the mix of professionals and skills requirements will continue to change over time.

Specialists in web development and design, in museum curatorship, in digital preservation, in Australian history, in data analysis, and in policy development are just a small sample of the professionals that are integral to our libraries. The success of libraries is inextricably linked to all these professionals. The future requires not only broadening the skills and knowledge of librarians, but also recognising that experts from many fields are necessary for library services. All professionals who work in libraries should be part of a unified approach to future planning.

2. Collecting institutions

The scenarios in the discussion paper see collecting institutions through a narrow lens, focusing on the important role of collecting, preserving and making the past accessible through digital initiatives such as Trove and new applications.

There are other key roles for NSLA Libraries and other national collecting institutions particularly around community engagement and interaction, driving literacy and learning fluencies, linking to global knowledge and ideas, actively collecting the present for the future, cultural tourism, integration in education infrastructure, and navigating the digital environment.

3. Niche individualised services vs convergence

Though recognising the validity of the Convergence scenario (Theme 1), there are also significant pressures against this, towards personalised and individualised services. Chris Anderson in his book *Makers: the new industrial revolution* (2012) discusses the revolutionary possibilities of 3D printing, do-it-yourself biotechnology and more adaptable small-scale robotics. Economies of scale are only effective in some situations and Anderson argues that the internet supports global online communities with new opportunities to connect to specialised expertise and niche services. Creating and 'making' in many forms may be increasingly dispersed and if so, this will impact on the use of libraries. Communities and their various organisations, either local or online, may become increasingly autonomous.

4. Disruptive and negative scenarios

The three scenarios explored in the discussion paper are essentially positive and affirming, also measured and conservative. For a process of future thinking, the paper should acknowledge that negative and disruptive scenarios are also just as possible. The recent threat to libraries in the austerity economics that has forced closures in the UK, US and Europe is a demonstration of this. In the UK, the decrease of 6-8% in the number of libraries over the last 3 years is seen as a good outcome with far more closures expected. With future planning looking out to 2025 we should consider more radical and disruptive scenarios.