

Public Libraries of New Zealand: A Strategic Framework 2005 to 2015

A response to the consultation document by
CONZUL (Council of New Zealand University Librarians)

1. The strategic vision

CONZUL acknowledges with appreciation the valuable work that is done by public libraries, and the tradition of service to the community that sustains them. In particular, the educative role of the public library is endorsed as one that we respect and wish to see consolidated, especially with respect to digital resources and information literacy.

CONZUL supports the vision for the future that is described in the consultation document for public libraries, "*Engaged and informed citizens, building strong communities*".

While it is recognized that there is a cost of providing public library services, we support the principle of free access to information. New Zealand strives to be a knowledge society and an information democracy, and we endorse the role that public libraries play in assisting their citizens. One key area, for instance, is the delivery of official information such as statutes.

With respect to the vision statement on p. 13, we suggest that public libraries are "repositories of recorded knowledge" rather than "*the* repositories of recorded knowledge".

We suggest also that the joy of reading may lead not just to pleasure and recreation, but also to education, discovery of information and lifelong learning. A bullet point to that effect would strengthen the statement and more accurately reflect the role as we see it.

"Develop and supply services to meet the needs of information users in the digital age" should not overlook the fact that, while all users may live in a digital age, they will not necessarily all be *of* it. Some who are accustomed to media such as print may continue to prefer it, and services will need to take this into account.

We query the last bullet point, which appears to have two aspects, one associated with social infrastructure and the other about the importance of replenishing the human spirit. The former we thought related closely to the earlier point about socially cohesive societies and might be incorporated into it; while the latter phrase struck us as just a little awkward, particularly when juxtaposed with the proximate reference to remuneration.

Although remuneration is of course important, we consider it should be a given as a consequence of the role librarians will play in achieving the vision, and that reference to it does not sit comfortably in this section.

2. The Strategic Framework's objectives

We feel that the broad objectives discussed in the consultation paper provide an excellent agenda for the public library sector. The specific objectives can be clustered under infrastructure, both digital and physical, and capability. Capability includes the key staffing objective and the key goal around lifelong learning and literacy.

We endorse the role of the National Library as a facilitator and leader in central government and applaud the successful new collaborative services including AnyQuestions, EPIC and Matapihi. These initiatives are in line with the objectives outlined in the paper and demonstrate the value of collaboration.

In a knowledge economy where the new generation has high expectations of digital content delivery the boundaries between institutions will appear less rigid. Content sharing and access to diverse resources is likely to increase. Free access to university-created web-based databases and indexes supports information sharing. Examples of resources developed in the university environment include the University of Auckland's New Zealand electronic poetry centre <http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/> and Victoria University's Electronic-text Centre, <http://www.nzetc.org/>; these extensive resources have expanded the access to rich content on New Zealand including recorded readings of poets in the former and the entire official war histories in the latter.

The tertiary sector is also committed to 'Lifelong learning and literacy' and continues to develop programmes to develop these skills in the student community. There is scope for collaboration on training programmes and courses to introduce potential new users to the tertiary environment, particularly the school age and the "New Start" students. Increased promotion and support for fast and convenient interlibrary loan allows the wider library profession to work cooperatively for the public good. The developments of portals such as Matapihi enable the end user to discover resources beyond their own institution.

Highly motivated and well-trained staff are critical to the success of the public library. There may well be increased opportunities for library staff from public and tertiary sectors to meet and where feasible job-swap or observe in order to raise awareness of relevant resources and practices, particularly where this involves resource sharing. Continuous up-skilling of library staff will ensure that initiatives such as EPIC are fully integrated and utilized by cooperation of this kind. CONZUL emphasizes the need for training to be recognized as a high priority and integrated into all collaborative and ICT projects. Consistent support and advocacy in public libraries requires a high level of training across the sector.

Regional and national projects allow participation by all public libraries. Regional repositories, for instance, provide the opportunity to maximize regional collection development, particularly for high volume collections, such as newspaper runs.

3. Future actions

CONZUL considers that the challenges and objectives are spelled out clearly in the document and that the public library sector is best placed to understand and evaluate the options. We therefore have fewer comments to make in this area than in some others.

However, we do echo the concerns that are expressed in the consultation document about unequal access to information, and the difficulties faced by small public libraries which have low budgets but whose clients have the same information needs as others.

The National Library of New Zealand (Te Puna Matauranga o Aotearoa) Act 2003 specifies a purpose of the National Library as “supplementing and furthering the work of other libraries in New Zealand” (7(b)).

We recognise the part that National Library has played in initiatives such as EPIC, which has extended services significantly, particularly for public and school libraries.

It is noted that, in some Australian states, the State Library has a responsibility to work with libraries in smaller communities, e.g. we understand that the State Library of Queensland has responsibilities towards libraries in communities of 25,000 and less. We suggest that National Library might have a similar role in supporting the small rural libraries in New Zealand. Some suggested examples of such support are the provision of advice or expertise to establish new services; or through assistance in forming regional groups or consortia for the provision of library services; or through the purchasing and rotation of selected collections which could be modeled on the State Library of Queensland operations. In terms of advisory services, the model of advisers in School Library Service comes to mind and the work of the National Preservation Office is to be commended; an equivalent service for digitizing locally held material is suggested. Consolidation of technical services and/or systems operations are other examples of potential areas where cooperation could lead to strength.

4. Collaboration

The initiatives set out in Future Actions (Consultation question no. 3) will inform the priorities leading up to 2015. The most important collaborative initiatives from the university library perspective are those which support learning and research. CONZUL is interested in participating in collaborative projects where these align with our institutional needs and capability. Image sources including maps and photographs¹ are in high demand and public libraries hold rich and unique documentary resources in these formats.

Matapihi provides a useful model of collaboration where diverse institutions can be searched through the Matapihi portal with a pathway to the holding collection for further

¹ Dorner, Dr Dan et al, ‘A textured sculpture: the information needs of end-users of digitized collections of New Zealand cultural heritage resources’, School of Information Management, VUW, Wellington, 2005.

requests. Collaborative initiatives support the diversification of the research environment and provide efficiencies as long as there is leadership and a coordinated response across the library sector. This leadership, including administrative support, is critical to successful collaboration, particularly when small libraries with limited staffing resources are involved.

We would support further work to digitize New Zealand content to make it widely accessible. Many public libraries have rich collections of research and heritage materials to contribute. The digitization of key resources including newspapers, official publications, and finding aids and inventories for unpublished material would assist in providing more equitable access to resources as would the development of electronic text options for out of print New Zealand works. A central registry of projects is necessary to prevent high demand works being copied unnecessarily. The National Library has established this already through the National Digital Forum but the registry's profile is currently low on the National Library website.

The costs involved in preservation copying are high and it may not be realistic for public libraries to commit to digitization projects without national funding. Digitisation projects require a level of authority control and best practice to ensure that fragile material is copied at the appropriate levels and that compliance issues are met. Collaborative indexing projects delivered via federated searching would allow for a greater number of resources being available across the country as well as potentially reducing the amount of "repeat" indexing. There are significant administrative costs involved with collaboration, which should be budgeted for and assigned early in the process. Partnerships with local community may be practical but the costs should be assessed conservatively.

A commitment to a high level of cataloguing, shared reporting on Te Puna and NRAM, and public access to designated research collections will ensure that special collections remain available to the wider research community. The presence of digital collections tends to increase the use of the original material, rather than diminish this use. This increases the need for appropriate storage and environmental controls as well as well defined collection development policies. There are considerable benefits in collaborating to achieve adequate storage and sustainable regional collections.

5. New Zealand People's Network

We consider it important that all public libraries provide access to the Internet. This would be an excellent nation-wide service and it would be helpful for New Zealanders to know that they could depend upon it.

However, we would not wish public libraries to jettison other services in order to provide Internet access. Of course, a People's Network should be based on the needs of the local community rather than be determined by a blanket prescription, but we consider that New Zealand's public libraries should be given responsibility for providing public access to the Internet, with appropriate funding for hardware, telecommunication costs and staffing

resources to enable them to do this. This additional funding must be on-going so that the service is sustainable - the UK initiative began with substantial central funding but we understand that some public libraries are now struggling to maintain the service.

The educative role associated with a People's Network is one that is not being met by others and public library staff have a good reputation for providing helpful support. The provision of training and access would be an especially valuable service. We have raised the importance of training earlier in this submission and reiterate it.

6. Public Library Act

CONZUL believes that it is desirable to have a consistent level of access to public libraries nationally and existing legislation could be enhanced to ensure this. At present the Local Government Act 2002² "... provides for local authorities to play a broad role in promoting the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of their communities taking a sustainable development approach". There is scope to amend the Act and include reference to the "public good" that is inherent in public libraries, and to require all Councils to provide public library service. Any changes in legislation could also spell out the Central Government responsibilities in this area, including the National Library's role. This would support the Strategic Framework's vision for public libraries, 2005 to 2015.

The 'National Library of New Zealand Act 2003' requires a significant leadership role for the National Library of New Zealand with specific reference to "supplementing and furthering the work of other libraries in New Zealand"³. We interpret this as an important mandate which has been reinforced through the memorandum of understanding between public libraries and the National Library signed in 2004. This support is particularly necessary in smaller, more isolated communities. LIAC, the Library and Information Advisory Commission was instructed under the National Library of New Zealand (2003) Act to "provide advice to the Minister on library and information issues"⁴. LIAC is well placed to work with the National Library to provide leadership in this sector. The e-government strategy⁵ delivered through the State Services Commission will further support the objectives for the viable future of public libraries in the community. The reduction in broadband charges should assist with connectivity for equitable digital delivery and the commitment to providing government information will provide consistent levels of access. We are aware of useful models in Australian states where proactive support has been provided at a government level to support equitable public library service.

The provision of library services and buildings should not be left to individual councils who may not share the strategic commitment to libraries in the knowledge economy.

² Local Government Act, (2002) Section 3, d.)

³ National Library of New Zealand Act, (2003) Section 7, b).

⁴ National Library of New Zealand Act, (2003) Part 3, 23.

⁵ <http://www.e-government.govt.nz>

Smaller and geographically isolated libraries may need to form strategic partnerships for purchase and service delivery. Geographically based collaboration such as eLGAR's Smarter Systems project can work together to achieve enhanced services for their communities. The National Library, in the interest of a consistent approach to public library access, should support specific partnerships and consortia options with administrative and financial assistance where required for equity of access.

7. Culturally appropriate information

CONZUL considers that New Zealand libraries as a whole have made good efforts in understanding and addressing the bicultural aspects of library service. The partnership between LIANZA and Te Ropu Whakahaui is an example of this. Complacency would not be justified, as there is always more to be done, but public libraries can be pleased with the services that many of them provide.

All New Zealand libraries struggle to find and retain Maori staff. As the demographics of the population change, this may no longer be the case.

CONZUL appreciates the challenge that public libraries face in meeting the needs of an increasingly ethnically varied community. Consultation with those communities should ensure that local libraries meet local needs.

8. Building strong communities

We agree that the sense of place is important and that public libraries can play an important role in establishing and maintaining community identity. The strategic framework, 2005 to 2015, should develop an infrastructure, which recognizes the significance of both the place and the technology. In addition to physical space, there is a need for public libraries, or regional consortiums of public libraries, to build their own virtual community as well as their public place, e.g. through EPIC, their own web pages, and the development of digital services.

The siting of libraries in community centres and shopping precincts provides an immediate linkage to the local community. The digital landscape will support library use, both virtual and physical. The public library needs to build on its role as the "third place" in the community where people can relax and work successfully. New Zealand architects have an excellent record of working in partnership with librarians and the wider community to deliver flexible services and attractive buildings. Librarians need to continue to respond to the changing demographics and work closely with local communities. We consider the following elements to be formative in building strong communities:

- Bi-lingual signage / branding
- Confident, well informed and friendly staff

- Local events programmes including exhibitions and meeting rooms
- Connected to local museums, art galleries and related council services
- Connection to schools including preschools with visits in both directions
- Outreach services including mobile and targeted services for the elderly and the housebound
- Disabled access in place; parking options including public transport networks; specific services for the deaf and the sight impaired
- Unmediated access to collections e.g. self issue machines, hard copy reference works as well as digital options
- Mediated access options to collections including training options for new users, promotion of the information services beyond the hard copy local resources, particularly through interlibrary loan, and approachable staff at Information desks
- Well maintained and purpose-built spaces with ergonomic and attractive furniture and fittings

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