

MT DRUITT WORKSHOPS THE FUTURE



From left to right: Cherylene Fanner, Tiffany Stirling, Meagan George, Sue Masters, Nathaniel Ola-Roberts, Manjit Uppal, Julie Russell, Lynette Hodgson, Carolyn Bourke, Philippa Johnson, Maureen Breckell, Reena Narain, Donna Faulder, Bonnie Wildie, Fiona Ho, Gayatri Krishnamurthy, Allan Daniel, Robyn Hill, Marcelita Castillo, Elizabeth Khater, Myra Vandine, Cathy Hill.

On July 30, more than 20 public, school, special and TAFE library staff, together with TAFE educators, gathered at Mt Druitt TAFE in the western suburbs of Sydney to talk about the future of the profession and develop their submission to the ALIA Future of the Profession project. Here are some of the highlights of their discussion.

There are both challenges and opportunities in the political, economic, social, technological, and workforce and skills environments in our future. For individuals, it will be important to engage in continuous professional development and to show greater confidence in marketing their skills. Managers will need to work on succession planning and support for emerging leaders, while institutions will need to invest in taking the library and information services of the future to the clients, rather than expecting users to visit the physical space every time.

ALIA's role will be especially important in training and ongoing learning; providing networking opportunities, and providing an overall umbrella for marketing the profession.

The first part of the Mt Druitt workshop involved identifying the most important economic, political social technological and workforce trends and issues facing participants, their organisation and the sector over the next three years, and working through what this would mean in terms of challenges and opportunities.

Political challenges include the significant ramifications of proposed council amalgamations in New South Wales and their potential threats such as closures or, equally, opportunities, such as the chance to coordinate library system management across council boundaries and perhaps even introduce a statewide system. On the economic front, state and federal budget cuts would clearly mean more pressure to find efficiencies but also includes other, previously unforeseen issues

such as increasing power charges now that so many patrons are recharging their mobile devices while in the library.

Progress towards wider recognition of libraries, especially public libraries, as key places for social connection will bring evolving solutions to physical space requirements with flexible layouts and furnishings and probably also a need to up-skill staff in event management, while technological advances

are already resulting in increased user expectations around access and support 24/7 along with the satisfaction of being able to extend the library's reach.

Discussion around the issues of workforce and skills at the workshop produced reports of recruitment freezes, casualisation of the workforce and the need to plan for succession. There is also an increasing need for skills in licence negotiation and participants agreed strongly that continuing professional development will be essential to successful careers because already there are more applications than there are jobs in the sector.

The participants then discussed how individuals, institutions, ALIA and other stakeholders could contribute to creating a secure future, highlighting the need for individuals to be loud and proud about their skills and for institutions to ensure they are investing in improvements in accessibility and services to ensure greater equity of access to information and resources across the population.

The workshop concluded by providing ALIA with a list of ways in which the Association could support the profession, including ensuring opportunities for training and ongoing learning, networking, and marketing support for the profession as a whole.

The full submission from the Mt Druitt workshop will now be provided to the Future of the Profession project and can be viewed on the ALIA Futures wiki at aliafutures.wikispaces.com.

We're about people, not just information and resources, but people and spaces. I think the future is quite open and not as scary as people think.