

**Ministerial Advisory Council on Public Libraries:**  
**The Library – The Key to Growing the**  
**Knowledge and Skills of the Victorian Community**

**An Investment in Victoria’s Human Capital**

The Ministerial Advisory Council’s vision for public library services - ‘The Library’ - seeks to provide a capability that underpins the delivery of social, cultural and economic benefits for Victoria. To achieve these benefits, the vision of The Library needs to be understood by decision makers as an important and effective investment in furthering Victoria’s competitiveness, building an innovative state and providing the means for social cohesion and inclusion and developing and enhancing human capital.

Victoria has pursued reform with the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to boost economic growth. The National Reform Agenda includes reform in human capital. The human capital agenda includes two streams:

- early childhood – with the aim of supporting families in improving childhood development outcomes in the first five years of a child’s life, up to and including school entry; and
- literacy and numeracy – with the aim of improving student outcomes on literacy and numeracy.

Libraries have three core roles that contribute to achieving positive outcomes in early childhood and student literacy and numeracy through providing:

- books and other tangible information resources;
- access to information resources through IT; and
- community meeting places.

The Ministerial Advisory Council’s vision for public library services aims to support these national reform and Victorian policy reform agendas. The vision emphasises the interconnectedness of all libraries and the benefits to be gained from resource and information sharing between libraries.

There are several critical elements to this long term plan. These are

- To create a borderless library
- To provide and deliver services via a high-speed communications network
- To be a lifelong, authoritative and trusted information broker
- To provide places for innovative and inclusive communities to be formed
- To enable resource and information sharing

To enact this, the plan aspires to achieve a borderless, integrated library system over the next five to ten years that ensures access to a seamless web of resources. Such a system has implications for communications infrastructure and the role of The Library as information broker. It will both require and promote innovation, and will necessitate the efficient sharing of resources and information.

### **To Create a Borderless Library**

Implicit in future planning is the notion of the borderless library – where anyone may access information and material from any library anywhere in the State, either in person or online. No longer will a user need to join the local public library, the school or tertiary library *and* the appropriate professional library. Instead, the library user will have one identity that will remain secure and constant from library to library. The user could search the catalogue in Melbourne, request an interlibrary loan from Bendigo, and collect it from their home library in Wonthaggi.

This easy access to collections across Victoria would build on the *LibraryLink Victoria* initiative launched in 2006, to provide the community with a single point of access to search the catalogues of public and other libraries and to request loan materials that are not available from their home library.

The borderless library will require governance and management structures to manage licensing and privacy issues, and user identification and authentication. There is also the need to consider how to deliver access to statewide collections and databases by way of sophisticated communications networks.

### **To Provide and Deliver Services Via a High-Speed Communications Network**

To operate a borderless library, there will be a need for substantial technological innovation. It will require a high-speed broadband communications network and the

progressive introduction of a common library 'smart card' for patrons. Such technology will open the doors of libraries across the State, providing access for all to the wealth of resources and information held in library collections throughout Victoria. And this increased access will itself reinforce and shape the role of The Library as an information broker.

### **To be a Lifelong, Authoritative and Trusted Information Broker**

Individuals have more access to more information than at any time in history, yet this can seem at times overwhelming and confusing. In time, the plan envisages The Library becoming library patrons' preferred source of content as well as being a trusted guide to help them discover and select relevant and authoritative content. For many users this guidance is particularly necessary when attempting to navigate the sometimes bewildering mountains of digital content available.

### **To Provide Places for Innovative and Inclusive Communities to be Formed**

One of the most striking features of The Library's seamless web of resources is the innovative relationships it can facilitate: between and across schools, town communities, business, and special interest groups. Libraries can and do provide meeting places that are safe, congenial, centrally located and well resourced. The vision builds on this central role that libraries already play in communities.

### **To Enable Resource and Information Sharing**

Resource and information sharing will also happen at the operational level, with benefits in cost-savings and the efficient use of resources.

The Advisory Council sees the opportunity to build on the SWIFT initiative, which is delivering a joint library management system for a consortium of library services, to improve business processes across libraries, identify and reduce areas of duplication and improve the capacity of libraries to grow, innovate and lead in service delivery.

The plan and development of The Library has the potential to create enormous benefits for communities across Victoria – social, cultural and economic. To reap these benefits, however, the vision of The Library must be fostered and seen by decision makers as an important and effective investment in building an innovative state with caring communities.