



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES

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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into ACT Libraries

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ACT Legislative Assembly
Standing Committee on the Environment and Transport and City Services
Inquiry into ACT Libraries

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By email: LACommitteeETCS@parliament.act.gov.au

Dear Committee

Thank you for agreeing to accept this late submission. I really appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. I write as an enthusiastic library user who also tried to instil a love of books and libraries in general in my two young children.

I have tried to identify which of the terms of reference my comments apply to below. I have only responded to those criteria where I have views.

Criteria (1) and (6) - role of libraries in the community and cost effectiveness of existing branches

Libraries remain a key place for people of all ages and all backgrounds to meet. They are one of the few places that fulfil this function outside of retail spaces. In a world where it feels like social cohesion is declining, I think we need to do as much as we can to encourage this to continue. In this respect, I consider libraries are a social good and any attempt to conduct a cost/benefit analysis (as perhaps implied by criterion 6) needs to take into account the significant benefits non-monetary benefits they provide.

I would suggest continuing to offer a wide variety of community events to cater for all tastes and ages, and to advertise these as much as possible using both traditional and new means. It could also be worth making it easier for community groups to hire library venues for their meetings, including by expanding after hours access where possible.

One issue I have noticed in libraries is potential conflict between different users. I have young children and have had three experiences of other people (all older men) complaining about the presence of children in the library (in one case a man complaining to me about the behaviour of children that were not my own, but that he assumed were mine). I do not consider that in any of these situations the children were behaving inappropriately: in all they were talking at a usual conversational volume and not misbehaving (they were not shouting, running around or being disruptive), but they were clearly not being quiet enough for these other library users. I wonder if it would be worth setting up designated quiet areas for library users who prefer this.

Related to this, I see libraries as being a major place where high school/college students can meet and spend time after school. There is a real lack of places for people of this age to meet and socialise and I wonder if libraries could more formally fill this gap. In this respect it may be worth considering spaces where students can meet--not necessarily just study--but perhaps again in separate areas so they do not disrupt other library users unnecessarily.

Co-locating other government services (e.g. Access Canberra) with libraries also makes sense.

Criteria (3) - The nature and extent of current and future community demand for different library services

I think ACT Libraries are doing a good job at expanding its digital and non-digital offerings. As other submissions have noted, I really appreciate the Library's willingness to purchase new releases quickly, and to respond to suggestions for purchase as well.

I have found myself using the two ebook apps (Libby and BorrowBox) more and more, not least because of their convenience in not having to physically get to a library to either borrow or return items. I would suggest the library explore whether there are other ebook/eaudiobook platforms they could subscribe to, and also that these are properly cross-referenced in the library catalogue as at the moment they are often either not listed, or items are listed as being available online when they are not.

I am also impressed by the Library's other digital offerings. My main suggestion for improvement is to make it easier to browse these and find out what is there. At the moment it is not really that obvious unless you go digging down through a few layers of pages on the website.

One of the reasons I have increasingly moved to borrowing items digitally is that I find it difficult to get to any branch within opening hours to collect items, or to return them (even after hours). I think the Library should seriously consider offering additional pick up/return points outside of libraries themselves, much as Australia Post has done with its parcel lockers. Even having the option to pick up items after hours would be incredibly useful, but if you could pick up/return items at selected local shops and/or other ACT Government facilities. I expect this would make people even more likely to use the library. While I do consider libraries a public good, I wonder if these could be introduced using a cost recovery system as I expect many people who are time-poor would be prepared to pay for this convenience (I know I would!)

Of course in an ideal world library branches would also be open longer hours, including more evening openings, as this would improve accessibility and improve the Library's role in the community by providing a meeting place for more of the day. I appreciate you need to balance this against the need to staff libraries when they are open. However, I think increased opening hours for at least some branches would be a benefit to the ACT community.

Finally I have appreciated the various user surveys ACT Libraries has run. I think it would help the community better understand the Library's priorities if the results of these surveys were published and the Library responded publicly to the survey's results.

Kind regards

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