



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

Submission Number: 031

Date Authorised for Publication: 26 September 2018

Committee Secretary,

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Inquiry into ACT Libraries

Thank you for the opportunity to present a submission to the inquiry into ACT Libraries.

I am an avid reader (and local author) who has used the ACT Library Service for the 52 years I have lived in Canberra and would make a general observation before addressing specific matters.

“There is nothing fundamentally wrong with our ACT (public) Libraries so please do not fiddle with them!”

Granted I might not be a good example of a typical user because I know my way around all of our existing libraries in my quest for books I wish to read. I am not a random reader: I generally know what I want to read from media critiques or news stories and usually make a notebook note.

Thanks to the excellent computerised catalogue these books are easily tracked down and nowadays in retirement instead of calling into various branches I prefer to order the book and place it on a waitlist for delivery to my local Woden branch. Again this service is excellent.

Because I am not a random reader I cannot accurately comment upon the quality of the books in our libraries, although the popular fiction authors are well catered for and the number of copies of bestsellers is adequately scattered around the various branches.

My own success in obtaining books from the service is very satisfactory. As a rough guide a check of my To Read notebook shows 20 books listed recently of which I have obtained and read 17. This is an unsuccessful rate of 15 percent and all three are non-

fiction probably of greater overseas interest (they are: The Templars, Rome in Africa and In Search of Lost Books).

No doubt they explain my catholic taste and I have no complaint about their absence from our shelves. If I want to read them I can purchase on-line and do not expect a public library service to indulge all my quirky interests.

I welcome the reduced borrowing time limits of in-demand publications – it shows an awareness of need not always apparent in other government agencies.

I am unfamiliar with eBook services because I do not use them and do not know how to do so, despite advice 25 percent of readers use it. Perhaps a simple explanation sheet could be made available to encourage more readers?

Again because I do not use them, the magazine and newspaper services cannot be commented upon save to say the range of magazines is very enticing – I wish I had more time – and the various newspapers are popular. This service is possibly underrated because it is obviously of great value to many people who I see regularly absorbed reading them at the Woden branch.

Although so much research is carried out with computers now, the facilities for such at the libraries still fulfil an important role both for those who do not have a computer and those even in this technological age who still automatically think ‘library’ if they wish to find out something.

Other welcome services are the computer training, the sedentary popular children’s activities (which I don’t find noisy), the ever-popular Internet and the comfortable safe haven a library provides. The ACT Library listing on the computer is very comprehensive although I doubt many people use it.

The staff are universally helpful, particularly to those visiting for the first time or, often with ethnics, seeking information about the services available. Staff also will search for a returned book not yet on the shelf.

Sometimes there is a build-up of books to be shelved, post-Christmas perhaps, and while no problem to regulars who just check the cart, more volunteers might speed things up.

The generous number of books which can be borrowed at one time worries me if they are not returned as read, thus perhaps delaying someone else the chance of earlier enjoying the book. An exception could be made with the number of children's books borrowed as many are picture books with a high turnover.

I welcome the charge for overdue books while accepting it isn't financially viable but hopefully makes borrowers more responsible. I fret at those lost, damaged or not returned without having any simple cheap solution to the problems.

The operating of the libraries raises the question of cost and whether or not a charge should be made for borrowing books. Many other government services are provided as part of our rates and taxes so it is difficult to justify such an impost upon libraries. Further, the charge may well fall upon those least able to afford it but who benefit most for what is provided. Any levy on ratepayers would be discriminatory, while a borrowing charge per book would be expensive to administer and may prove a deterrent to some borrowers.

The distribution of libraries across the ACT has lacked an outlet in Weston Creek, however one trusts an outlet in the new region of Molonglo will correct this deficiency and opening hours and disability access in this new library will be as satisfactory as in the other outlets.

Again only from observation but the use of libraries appears to be by the very young, children with mothers, and the very old or retired and probably of the middle-class. Those working perhaps do not have time for reading in otherwise busy lives or lack the interest to do so and it would be a challenge to try to overcome these limitations because unless the individual wished to do so – and there is nothing stopping them using a library – efforts would be wasted.

As explained my use of our libraries is limited to borrowing books. It certainly is not comprehensive.

Nevertheless I believe we have a good, efficient educational service and trust the committee will recognise these considerable benefits and not recommend major changes to library operations in justification for the inquiry's existence.

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