# Commonwealth Government Agency Libraries Review

## Stage 2 Report
Consultation with senior executives and policy managers in government agencies

Dr Gillian Hallam

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**Project Leader**

Dr Gillian Hallam
Adjunct Professor, Library & Information Studies
School of Information Systems
Science and Engineering Faculty
Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane
g.hallam@qut.edu.au


**Research Assistant**

Julie Sibthorpe
julie.sibthorpe@gmail.com

# Executive summary

In 2015, the Executive of the Australian Government Libraries and Information Network (AGLIN) commissioned a study into Commonwealth Government library and research services. Following a literature review discussing the issues and challenges facing contemporary government information services (Hallam & Faraker, 2016), relevant organisational data about the individual services was collected through an online service, and library staff shared their views and insights in a series of focus groups. The research findings were presented in an Options Paper, which outlined four potential models for service delivery the government library and information services (Hallam, 2016).

One major limitation with the initial research project was noted: the timing of the study, late in the year, meant that it was not possible to involve senior members of the Australian Public Service in the study. The Stage 2 project, Consultation with Senior Executives and Policy Managers in Government Agencies, seeks to address these shortcomings. The value of the study lies in engaging the research subjects in discussions about the future of library and information services to support government staff working in research, policy and regulatory agencies.

The key objective for the study was to collect, analyse and interpret qualitative data on the views of senior executives and policy managers about the roles played by library and information professionals and about the service model in place in their agencies. After the key informants were selected, they were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview or complete an online questionnaire. A total of 13 interviews were conducted, with three additional online survey responses.

The issues and challenges facing government library and information professionals were discussed from the perspectives of the respondents. The support provided by library staff to ensure productive outcomes was highly valued, with particular emphasis placed on the strong relationships they established and the deep understanding they developed about the business of the agency. There was a good appreciation of their skills and expertise in providing access to and managing information, along with the professional networks across the library sector. On the other hand, interviewees were aware of the vulnerability of staff working in small units in terms of their professional isolation and lack of career structure.

The respondents acknowledged that there were significant barriers facing library and information services, primarily due to financial constraints within the public service and the disruptive nature of the evolving world of digital information and data. As funding cuts had resulted in the downsizing of library services, respondents were aware of lower levels of professional influence resulting from the increasingly transactional and less strategic directions taken. There were concerns about the relative invisibility of the library staff, with a perceived reticence about the marketing and promotion of their services.

Many ideas were presented about the untapped opportunities for the library and information services, with a keen focus on the need to add value to the tasks they performed, especially in the areas of data management, information management and curation of agency resources, and information and digital literacy. The respondents believed that library and information professionals, they should be ready and able to adapt and apply their highly specialised skills in the world of digital information. They wanted to see librarians demonstrate leadership in this area, especially as the territory was beginning to be claimed by newly trained data scientists and information managers who saw opportunities in the field.

There was no clear consensus about the potential options for service models: while the organisational advantages of the agency-centric model were recognised, the financial and professional benefits of a cluster model, similar to university library services, were also acknowledged.

The Stage 2 study has successfully deepened the interpretation of the discussion presented in the Options Paper. The analysis of the rich qualitative data has validated the findings of the initial research project which identified the positive and negative attributes of government library services. The digital world undoubtedly presented both challenges and opportunities for library and information professionals, specifically in ensuring strong commitment to evidence-based policy, fostering mature levels of information and digital literacy and driving the move into effective data management. There was an imperative for library and information professionals to focus on communication in order to sell their skillsets, raise their profile and advocate for higher level representation in their agencies. AGLIN has a clear role to play in achieving these goals for the future.

The research activities undertaken in Stage 2 through the consultation with senior executives and policy managers in Commonwealth government agencies reinforce the value of the recommendations presented in the Options Paper. The Executive and membership of AGLIN are encouraged to review the research findings presented in the report and to work together to consider the range of strategies which will build the capacity of and secure a strong and relevant future for the association, and by extension, for the individual member library and information services.

## Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. The AGLIN Executive establishes a Future Directions Taskforce, comprising a representative sample of the membership, charged with the responsibility to review this research report.
2. The AGLIN Executive and the Future Directions Taskforce host a workshop for members to discuss the research findings and to commit to a preferred model for library and information services across the Commonwealth Government.
3. The AGLIN Executive and the Future Directions Taskforce use the research findings presented in this report to inform the discussion and development of the future strategic directions for the organisation, with associated responsibilities and operational plans, to lead the changes required to develop a new model of service.
4. The AGLIN Executive and the Future Directions Taskforce host a sector-wide forum to identify and prioritise the areas for valuable, effective collaboration across and beyond government library and information services.
5. The AGLIN Executive and the Future Directions Taskforce develop a government-wide advocacy campaign to promote the current and potential roles of library and information professionals, the value of high quality information and research services to government stakeholders and the benefits to be achieved through a new model of service. This campaign should be supported by a media and communications plan to ensure AGLIN members commit to and participate in the advocacy activities, both individually and collectively. Champions, who will play a leading role in supporting and promoting the government-wide advocacy campaign, should be invited to be involved.

6.   The AGLIN Executive and the Future Directions Taskforce work with the Consortia Taskforce to examine the current licensing arrangements for eResources across the government agencies to identify opportunities to offer more equitable, cost-effective access to high quality information.

7.   The AGLIN Executive and the Future Directions Taskforce work with the Training & Development Taskforce to commission and/or develop and deliver a CPD program of future-focused activities designed to inspire government library and information professionals and enhance their skillsets.  Members should be encouraged to participate in the ALIA PD Scheme, with its Government Library specialisation.

# Table of Contents

# 1. Introduction

In 2015, the Executive of the Australian Government Libraries and Information Network (AGLIN)[1] commissioned a study into Commonwealth Government library and research services. The study involved the preparation of a literature review to explore the issues and challenges facing contemporary government information services (Hallam & Faraker, 2016), an extensive online survey to collect relevant organisational data about the individual services, and a series of focus groups to capture the views and insights of library staff. An Options Paper, which presented and discussed four potential service models which could help ensure the sustainable delivery of efficient, cost-effective and equitable library and information services to support the business requirements of Commonwealth Government agencies, was presented to the AGLIN Executive in April 2016 (Hallam, 2016).

The Options Paper stressed the uncertainties facing Government library and research services due to the changing technological, financial and administrative environments. It presented a series of recommendations which encouraged AGLIN Executive to establish a process to engage the managers and staff of the various government agency library and information services in determining their future directions, including identifying and prioritising areas for effective collaboration; developing a sector-wide advocacy campaign; examining the licensing arrangements for eResources across the government agencies to identify opportunities to offer more equitable, cost-effective access to high quality information; and organising a high quality continuing professional development program to build the skillsets of government library and information professionals.

To some extent, the timing of the initial study was problematic: the data collection activities took place in December 2015, immediately prior to the Christmas break and long summer holidays in Australia. This meant that, while it had been hoped to invite senior members of the Australian Public Service (APS) to contribute their opinions about government library and information services, efforts to engage with them proved too difficult. In mid 2017, the AGLIN Executive proposed that the limitations of the initial study should be addressed.

## 1.1 Background to the study

The Stage 2 study builds on the work undertaken in the earlier study, where the research data collected were primarily gathered from government library staff. It is recognised that the voices of government officers in the APS, particularly those with managerial responsibility for information services, are also very important. The Stage 2 project therefore sought to collect data from senior government officers and policy managers in order to ensure a strong evidence base to guide future decision making. The value of the study lay in engaging the research subjects in discussions relating to the future of library and research services, specifically to ensure that government staff working in research and policy areas continued to be provided with equitable access to authoritative and relevant information resources to support the effective delivery of government services in a digital world.

One notable characteristic of Commonwealth government agencies is their distinctiveness: the lack of homogeneity relates to the diverse foci of the services they provide, e.g. as policy agencies, research organisations and/or regulatory bodies which represent the spectrum of government functions (United Nations, 2011). As noted in the initial study, the changing financial,

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[1] AGLIN: www.aglin.org. Established in 1993, AGLIN is an independent association of Australian Government public sector library and information services which aims to represent and supports the interests of its constituent members. As an association, it is not endorsed or funded by the Australian Government.

administrative, and technological government environment continues to present significant challenges for the administration of the agencies themselves, and by extension, also for management of the library and research services (Hallam, 2016). Library managers need to contend with many issues, including:

- Increasing budgetary pressures
- Reductions in the need for physical information repositories in individual agencies
- Increasing availability of electronic research information resources
- Recognition of the need to increase the level of sophistication for information management activities in the agencies
- Awareness of the lack of equitable access to relevant research information across the sector
- Recent new developments within government which seek to introduce digital transformation and e-government initiatives.

The Stage 2 study therefore seeks to examine these challenges from the perspective of senior executives and policy managers in the APS.

## 1.2   Objective for the study

The key objective of the project was to conduct interviews with key informants within the Commonwealth Government to ascertain their views about the roles played by library and information professionals and about the service model in their specific agency, to analyse and interpret the qualitative data collected and to present a report which synthesises the key findings. The study therefore continues to contribute to a clearer understanding about how Commonwealth Government agency libraries can deliver services which support their clients' needs in the most efficient, cost-effective and equitable way.

## 1.3   Research approach

A qualitative research approach was adopted for the project, with senior executives and policy managers working in a range of Commonwealth government agencies identified as potential key informants. They were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview conducted by telephone or via an online meeting platform, e.g. Zoom or Skype.  The interview questions were also made available as an online survey, to accommodate the needs of the informants who were unable to participate in a scheduled interview.

## 1.4   Structure of the report

This research report presents the details of project and its findings. The research methodology applied in the study is explained in Section 2. The research findings are presented in detail in Section 3, with the implications of these findings synthesised in Section 4.  It is important to note that the content focuses specifically on the analysis and interpretation of data collected through the interviews to determine the extent to which it reflects, supports or differs from the views of the library and information professionals in the initial study.   The report concludes with a summary and a series of recommendations (Section 5) for the AGLIN Executive and membership to consider. The interview schedule used in the data collection is provided in the Appendix.

## 2   Research methodology

At the commencement of the project, the critical first step involved identifying the possible informants in a number of different Government agencies who might accept the invitation to be interviewed. The target was to involve eight core agencies representing the diversity of government

functions such as policy, research and regulatory activities, with two interviewees from each agency. The AGLIN members' network was used to encourage library managers to provide the names and contact details for senior executives and/or policy managers who might be willing to contribute their views and opinions to the study. Although some of the agencies initially targeted declined to be involved in the study, the number of agencies increased as some of the interviewees at the selected agencies proposed colleagues in another agency as potential informants.

The nominated interviewees were contacted by email, with an introduction to the aims, scope and value of the project. A link was provided to a Doodle poll to allow the interviewees to select a convenient time for their interview. When the date and time were confirmed, the interviewees received a copy of the interview schedule so that they could consider their responses to the questions prior to the online meeting.

The semi-structured interview questions were developed collaboratively by members of the research team and the AGLIN Executive. Following the pilot testing of the interview schedule, an online survey instrument was also created using SurveyMonkey to allow for data to be collected asynchronously, as well synchronously through the interviews. The interviews, which were recorded with the permission of the interviewees, were conducted over a three week period in July 2017.

In order to ensure that the interviews did not intrude too much on the respondents' time, the number of questions was limited to nine, with the anticipation that each interview would take 20-30 minutes. A copy of the interview schedule is presented in Appendix 1. The questions focused primarily on the extent to which LIS professionals supported the individual respondent's work; the single most important contribution LIS professionals made to the agency, and the impact of this contribution; the perceived barriers to the role LIS professionals might play in supporting government strategy; and thoughts about the underlying causes relating to concerns about the current climate for government library services, with evidence of reduced representation and influence within the APS. Three questions were included about the strengths and weaknesses of an agency-centric model of service delivery and the perceived value of a cluster model of service, similar to a university library providing services to a range of faculties and schools.

All research activities were conducted in accordance with the principles of research ethics, with the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents ensured. While the government agencies are identified in this report, the details of the identity and role of the respondents remain confidential; cited responses are not attributed to any individual respondents. The digital files of the recorded interviews remained with the research team, to be deleted once the research report had been accepted by the AGLIN Executive.

## 3  Research findings

A total of 13 interviews were conducted with senior executives and policy managers employed in eight government agencies, with three additional online survey responses received. The AGLIN Executive was satisfied that this level of response met the target they had set for the research study. The agencies included in the study were:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Department of Employment
- Australian National Botanical Gardens
- Bureau of Meteorology
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
- Department of Health

- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
- IP Australia.

It was agreed that these agencies provided broad representation across the typical functional areas of government (United Nations, 2011). The roles of the interviewees varied, with typical job titles including:

- Divisional Director
- General Manager
- First Assistant Secretary
- Assistant Secretary
- Head of Research
- Senior Speech Writer.

The duration of the interviews varied, with the shortest being 12 minutes and the longest 47 minutes. The average time for the interviews was 29 minutes.

The interviewees were asked to provide their responses to the nine open-ended questions (see Appendix 1). As the research approach involved semi-structured interviews, it was not necessary to follow the order of questions sequentially, as long as the topics of all questions were covered in the individual interviews. The data gathered through these responses have been analysed from the perspectives of the nine questions in the interview schedule.

## 3.1 Support for work in government

To what extent do you believe that library and information professionals support your own work in government policy development/research/service delivery?

All respondents had very clear views about the range of activities undertaken by library and information professionals in the context of their own work responsibilities. One respondent provided a succinct summary:

> The library provides access to a range of library services networks. They manage the information resources. They have a range of skills to assist people and provide training to search and find things to become self-sufficient. They advise on information, metadata, electronic holdings, and manage them for the organisation. They help turn information into knowledge.

The indispensable collaboration with the librarians was underscored by a number of the interviewees, where they worked closely, indeed "in partnership", with the library staff on a daily basis, with particular acknowledgement of their "excellent research skills" and their ability to provide advice about effective search strategies.

Some respondents stressed that their information retrieval activities were highly specialised, so it was really important to have sound and effective independent search skills, thus limiting the need to draw on the library staff. This was viewed as a trend that had increased in recent times, with technical staff numbers in one agency growing to over 600. The value of the library professionals was, however, recognised through the ability to source and provide access to the "hard-to-get" documents the searchers had identified.

The theme of access to documents was echoed by other respondents who underscored the importance of needing to go back to primary sources which were not available online. One of the key strengths of the librarians was the ability to provide speedy access to published articles, directly

or through interlibrary loans.  Where an agency's library services had been scaled back or disbanded, interviewees articulated their frustration about the negative impact this had on their work:

> *We used to have the ability to source items quickly through the interlibrary loans system, but now we spend a lot of time trying to get to the authors and [obtain] free press copies etc.*

Some respondents relied on the proactive approach taken by library staff who "use their initiative in providing material across the agency", with genuine appreciation for the value-add achieved through "the substantial weekly newsletter which includes matters of high political interest, with a précis about each item".  The conversations led quite naturally from the direct support for individual staff to the more general contribution made to the agency as a whole.

## 3.2   Contribution to the agency

### What do you believe is the single most important contribution that the library and information professionals make to your agency? What is the impact of this contribution?

The respondents had a good understanding of the contribution made by the library and information professionals in their agency, specifically highlighting:

- Skills and expertise
- Discovery and access to quality information
- Understanding the business of the agency
- Professional networks
- Curation of agency information resources.

The significance of discovery and access was mentioned by several interviewees. There was a clear sense that while Google had made things easier to find materials from the last ten years, it didn't cover all their business needs. Accordingly, there was frequently the need to "find stuff that is not online". This meant that the librarians' sophisticated skills in information searching were held in high regard:

> *Expertise: the ability to direct staff to finding information, or finding it for us… Could be in book form, electronic, ILL – they obtain documents for us 'instantly'. The quality of the work is important, but so is the pace at which staff have to work. Many questions need to be answered in 30 minutes. Pace is generally increasing in government departments.*

> *An example: we thought we heard the minister say something and we needed to check. The library can provide an added degree of comfort – the library will always find it… the library takes half the time…*

However, as it was common in some agencies for staff to undertake their own information searching, changes were inevitable: "No one used to have access to searching and the librarian's role as a searcher is being watered down".  As a result, it was found that the specialised skills of the librarians were being translated into the training environment:

> *Technology has made information so much more accessible and available and staff can sort out their own information needs themselves. The help they want now is to improve searching: how to do it well and efficiently.*

It was regrettable that the reduction in library staff, as had occurred in some agencies, meant that the training and development the agency staff would like was not available.

The librarians' understanding the business of the agency had distinct advantages through the targeted scanning of the information environment to "provide alerts and first notifications of publications". One respondent reported that "the library leads in identifying the best databases and new products and resources", while another highlighted the useful way "they keep us abreast of journals in a relatively narrow subset". Respondents in research-intensive agencies were aware of the role the library staff were playing in terms of the evolving need to monitor and promote the research impact of the agency's publications: "they also get bibliometrics, citations, journal impacts etc".

The librarians' networks represented a very special dimension of professional practice, with the true appreciation for their work felt only when they were lost, after the closure of the library services: through their "personal networks" connecting with other special libraries, "the librarians were phenomenal".

A number of interviewees recognised that there was an unsophisticated understanding of online access to departmental resources; the information management expertise of library and information professionals in curating the agency's own published documents was often overlooked:

> There is a lack of awareness that someone needs to curate and organise literature, grey literature, databases and manage information etc. This is currently lost.

Several interviewees mentioned the importance of having access to older materials, whether in the areas of politics, government, or science. It was acknowledged that library staff had a better grasp of the historical importance of documents and the associated archival functions, but the cutting of library staff meant that there were no longer any staff who had the training to manage this area effectively.  In one research-intensive agency, an open access repository had been developed with professional guidance – "but we lost the trained librarian who understood the procedures and practices to link the information together".

The tone of the discussions inferred that some factors were beyond the immediate control of the library and information professionals themselves, which anticipated the following question about the challenges and barriers they faced.

## 3.3   Barriers for library and information services

Do you feel that there are any specific barriers to the role that library and information services might play in supporting the achievement of the government's strategic objectives?

The interviewees openly shared their thoughts about the barriers facing government library services, with the main, arguably intertwined, themes covering:

- Disruption resulting from the fast-moving world of information
- Organisational change
- Funding and space
- Lack of visibility and leadership within the agency
- Lack of knowledge about the specialised skills of librarians.

A number of interviewees indicated that there was "a real lack of understanding of the role of libraries, they are sometimes seen as an indulgence."  In an information environment which was constantly changing, ubiquitous mobile devices and search engines meant that information skills were frequently regarded as generic.

> They are downsizing because information is available electronically, staff use Google and get articles online, there is no need for the support and it has dwindled.

However, it was acknowledged that this was short-sighted, as "information is not knowledge".

One respondent pointed the finger squarely at inferior information practices across government departments:

> *The public service has been dumbed down in the past 15 years, it just focuses on delivering what the government of the day wants. Policy is hastily put together (research skills have diminished) and it is not evidence/research based. MBAs flit between departments, without any in-depth knowledge of the work of the department and what they are doing… The line between reality and unreality is blurring and there is a complete lack of critical analysis."*

Another interviewee was also circumspect, believing that it was not an easy fit for these "MBAs and economists" to manage the information requirements of research-intensive agencies:

> *Economics tends to be taught at a more theoretical level, so I am not sure that their background included as much library training in library services (as the researchers), so they may be predisposed to think in that way.*

However, there was a sense that change was on the horizon:

> *There is a lack of self-reflection in public administration, which is getting noticed by [some leaders] who are trying to improve and get better skills and better performance… Leadership now puts a value on good advice.*

Financial factors undoubtedly represented immense challenges for government library services, as "whenever cuts to funding are threatened, they try to trim the library."

> *The people who are making the difficult decisions to cut are not the ones who use the services, they are not seeing the process. There is a disconnect between people using the services and the people making decisions about budgets and priorities.*

As budget-driven organisational changes have seen the more senior library managers removed, "there are no leaders there to map out their contributions". One respondent noted that while he used to see the skills of librarians in coaching search strategies and introducing new programs and services, today they are not doing so much "to lead and coach". The position of the library and information service within the organisational structure was viewed as critical.

> *Efficiency is diminishing and the library was moved into IT services, who have less interest in using it. If it was in the economics and statistics area – they are big users. Where they are located now, the value is not seen.*

> *The organisation is always looking at the value contribution. The library has become transactional, no strategy, no direction, no senior people. I think eventually it will be replaced by robots!*

Some respondents felt that some of the responsibility sat with the library and information professionals themselves, due to a lack of marketing and promotion:

> *The library is not 'out there' – I could not find them on the intranet. They are not in the front of the staff minds. People have to find the library.*

> *Librarians are seen as 'nice, helpful people'… [but they] do not have a high profile or blow their own trumpet.*

While the danger of being invisible was acknowledged, there was an appreciation in some agencies that the librarians had good strategies to reach out to staff. Some library and information services, for example, hosted morning tea presentations to showcase the significant role they played in

coordinating the electronic resources to provide agency staff with the magical seamless access to information – which ironically contributed to their own lack of visibility. The increasingly digital environment was regarded as a key factor in the changing roles of library and information professionals.

## 3.4 Concerns about the current climate for library and information services

Concerns have been expressed about the current climate for government library and information services, with evidence that these services have lost traction, influence or representation in many government departments. What do you believe are the underlying causes for this situation?

The issues explored in the previous question about the barriers facing the library and information services were considered symptomatic of the current environment in Canberra where "budget issues and downsizing are affecting everyone" and "everything is contestable at the moment". Beyond government resourcing, "the technology trend is one of the drivers" for downsizing and closing library services.

The theme of the rapidly changing world of information and communication technologies (ICTs) was central to the discussions.

> *Technology has made information so much more accessible and available and people can sort out their own information needs themselves… The need for professionals has become less and, as a result, we cannot justify the library staff.*

Nevertheless, concerns and frustration were expressed about the attitudes of agency staff towards information. The fact that "Google searching is not effective or efficient" was compounded by "the lack of understanding where and how the library can add value". Several respondents reflected on the pre-digital environment and concluded that "there was now so much information".

> *For us it meant we could have a traditional catalogue integrated into the intranet and accessible from anywhere. We could answer simple questions like 'have we published anything on this before?' For me it was a strong and structured way to knowledge, especially what had been published. We had librarians do the searches… could get into new topics (when they searched for you). Now all replaced with Google Scholar, searches without sophistication.*

Interviewees believed that it was incumbent on library and information professionals to play a more decisive role:

> *Librarians could do more with culling and helping people with the changes in information.*

> *Librarians should play a role in sorting out the dross.*

> *Librarians could make a good contribution to quality information by educating.*

Some researchers were tracking the developments in online information with new initiatives in the area of textual analysis.

> *Major publishers are buying into the technology, text analysis tools are embedded into databases… but the bit we are losing is getting the perspective and rigour of the way librarians are trained and how information professionals and librarians look at these problems.*

In some agencies there was a clear sense that librarians were meeting the challenges of the information environment head on:

*In our department they are urged to be innovative and the library was very early in adapting to new technologies and keeping ahead of the game with iPads, blogs etc. The library is very responsive – the focus is changing to a stronger customer service, keeping ahead of needs and expectations.*

These discussions fed comfortably into the following questions about the possible models of service delivery in government agencies.

## 3.5  Strengths of the agency-centric model of service delivery

Given your knowledge of and experience with government agency library and information services, what do you feel are the strengths of the current model, which sees these services directly associated with a specific department?

There was considerable support for the current model of in-house library and information services, as there were "strengths from being embedded", with the belief expressed that "each agency would benefit from this model". The primary benefits related to being "more responsive and relevant" to client needs:

- Valuable relationships with clients
- Strong understanding of the business of the agency
- Appreciation for the organisational knowledge, both current and past.

The agency-centric model facilitated the 'human side' of the service:

*Strengths are you develop relationships with people. [The librarians] get to know key people in areas across the department, which is huge; where information is needed. I feel I have a contact person who is responsive and helpful when we need stuff in a hurry, or just broadly. Relationships matter, you get what you want and need.*

*The clients have access to [the library staff]. There is a close working relationship, they can be casual and accessible, also visible.*

The individual agency's particular areas of business activity also demanded a needed for specialisation.

*Yes, there are benefits. It is a specialised library [with two specific foci]… both together create a good subject focus.*

These arrangements allowed the librarians to develop highly specialised knowledge and skills which in turn resulted not only in a quick turnaround on information requests, but also the ability to support the skills development of the agency staff when "they suggest some angles for searching". Nevertheless, all respondents were aware of the challenges posed by this model of service, as discussed in the responses to the following question.

## 3.6  Shortcomings with the agency-centric model of service delivery

Do you believe there are any shortcomings or problems with the current model?

The notion of the library as "an indulgence" emerged in the responses to the question about problems or shortcomings with the agency-centric model of library and information services. One respondent felt "it might be a luxury having a library in each department".  One of the main challenges for library staff was to ensure that they had a high profile within the agency and to cast aside the old image of a libraries "as places for books and card systems".  Some respondents believed that there was a lack of awareness on the part of some agency staff about the role of an in-house library and information service, as well as the skills of library and information professionals

could play in the agency. One respondent stated that "I think people just don't know how they can use their libraries".

On the other hand, there was a sense that the agencies themselves could be risk adverse and resistant to change.

> *Anyone who wants to introduce change first sees there is a threat to their job, rather than 'here is an opportunity'.*

Concerns about agency security was raised by one respondent, particularly in terms of the ways in which search engines track a person's online activity.

> *Security is an issue, even in searching we need to be careful what we search on Google, as this is corporate intelligence and is tracked. Analytics of library orders for journal articles or titles may alert others to an interest.*

Interviewees discussed the fact that space equals money, so there was little support for housing library resources in the department itself; off-site storage inevitably meant lower levels of access and usage, so that that downsizing becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Where downsizing of the library service had taken place, there were then inevitably issues relating to the capacity of the staff to meet demand:

> *Downside is we only have two people so we cannot give economies of scale, when they have a lot to do.*

Another negative aspect of the downsizing of library services was picked up by one respondent who highlighted the limited professional direction for the librarians employed:

> *We have not got the critical mass here and no career development opportunities. The librarians cannot move beyond a certain level in their careers.*

> *If they continue with the present model their career is quite limited (and jobs are becoming scarce).*

Respondents reflected on alternative models of service delivery, drawing on their experience in the different agencies, particularly with respect to a cluster model, as outlined in the AGLIN Stage 1 .

## 3.7   Potential value of a cluster model of service delivery

Do you believe there would be value in bringing a number of library and information services together, e.g. the model of a university library system which serves a number of faculties and schools?

Given the focus on reducing costs across the public service, it was not surprising that respondents saw advantages in a cluster model of service delivery, as "by joining forces, they can afford so much more".

The cost of high quality information resources was a major concern to many respondents, particularly when databases were discipline-specific, for example with health information, legal information or patent information.   There was undoubtedly potential to make the most of economies of scale, whereby the Commonwealth Government could gain better subscription and/or paywall pricing structures.

> *To have access to arrange core services and subscriptions, it would be a useful thing. Avoiding multiple subscriptions to the same thing makes a lot of sense.*

The need for a good understanding of licencing was essential when staff were working in multiple locations, although this might inevitably be problematic in the future, should government agencies move to regional areas.

Location was a point of interest, with ideas about the cluster model based on geographical co-location or on related topical focus.

> *I tend to think State-based services might work (i.e. State government) but centralising in the Commonwealth would be such a big task, people would end up having break away entities.*

One respondent recognised the difficulty of a single centralised service, but saw the merit of having "several centralised [library and information services] based on functions, such as policy, research, regulatory, technical function etc." Interviewees were conscious of a de facto cluster arrangement which "sort of exists anyway – there is always a network the librarians can hook into". They also mentioned that some agencies, through research collaborations, had cross-institutional relationships with universities and scientific organisations which opened up avenues for access to and sharing of information.

Some respondents were able to tell a few stories about shared services, e.g. for payroll or IT, and about some attempts that had been

made in the past:

> *The Commonwealth tried to establish a centralised Communications unit, and all business had to go through this bureaucratic group. But in the end everyone managed their own budgets and their own Ministers signed off, and now every agency has its own communications function. Devolution is the way we are going.*

There were concerns about privacy, security and logistics with a multi-agency service: "Who would be allowed in? Physical card systems etc?" One respondent acknowledged the very real challenges of ICT interoperability, with the need for the compatibility of agency intranets.

One of the major disadvantages discussed by respondents related to losing the valued personal relationships which ensured a highly relevant and responsive service. They really appreciated the quick turnaround of an in-house service and were fearful of losing an immediate response to their requests for assistance.

> *If the model is that you still have someone addressing the Department's needs, then that is useful.*

On the other hand, there was sensitivity to the needs of the librarians themselves, with the realisation that there would be professional benefits with a cluster model:

> *Quite attractive economies of scale – critical mass to give you a career… Twenty librarians together, can move further in their careers, need to appoint a director etc.*

Nevertheless, one respondent felt that "even as a centralised service, it could still be vulnerable". While the distributed agency model meant that the risks were associated with smaller entities, a big axe could actually take out the cluster model of library service with one strike, essentially doing far more damage than closing one small library service. Moving away from this pessimistic stance, respondents were invited to consider the untapped opportunities for library and information professionals working in the government sector.

## 3.8 Untapped opportunities for library and information professionals

Do you believe there are any untapped opportunities for government agency library and information professionals?

Some interviewees clearly believed that the library staff were really ahead of the game: "I am always so impressed, they are right onto it". However, there was also a sense that the government environment itself was not very conducive to "untapped opportunities" or fostering innovation, as "unfortunately our organisation is more reactive than proactive". Nevertheless, the ideas about potential areas of practice suggested by the respondents generally reflected the opportunities for librarians to resolve some of the challenges of the digital information environment that had already been discussed during the course of the interviews:

- Data management
- Management and curation of agency resources
- Information and digital literacy.

Data management was the most frequent topic, with respondents very aware of the need for more formal strategies for organising government data sources and making data available to those who needed it.

*Data in the public service is not managed well. Information is generated and needs to be stored, but currently it is done in an ad hoc manner. Libraries have a role to play in storing and making data more accessible.*

Related to this, data analytics and data visualisation were highlighted as areas where library and information professionals could make a difference:

*Big data and analytics and the provision of data externally might be good roles for the library.*

*Data librarian might be a good place to go. New information systems in the department have a data librarian for design, standards, data visualisation etc. With big data – without good management they limit the life of big data… There is too much emphasis on the IT. The research community is lucky to have the Australian National Data Service (ANDS) with significant input from the library community.*

*[Our] valuable historical records need to maintained too… If there was a dialogue around digitising some of our archival materials, it would be good.*

Information management was emphasised as a critical area of future activity. Many respondents reported on the need to manage internally created digital documents which may have an external audience and to ensure that core resources within the agency were digitised: "curation is so important".

*Our information services staff are working with a whole raft of records, the most valuable and the most fragile. There is a program to digitise all this, with appropriate metadata, to be accessible and findable, not just scanned, but including metadata and OCR.*

*We have two categories of legacy data, hard copy records – some are quite valuable. National Archives is not interested in conserving all of these. Our library staff are digitising these and could do with more staff. Electronic pre-EDRMS records also need curation. This is a budgeting issue: there are large volumes and they are not structured. We have a bit of money for this, but not the staff. There is no need for an information professional to do the work, but they could manage others.*

Consequently, current information practices in the agencies were criticised, where documents which had lost currency were simply deleted.

> *The notion of things having a longer term historical value is not really a discipline that gets applied. There is an opportunity there.*

> *We publish PDFs and place them on a website, but they have no DOIs and there is no way to get more access.*

> *Information professionals understand what it means to have that longer-term view. We can solve today's problems, but we cannot build a base of knowledge.*

The problems faced by public servants in navigating the ever-increasing volume of information were broadly discussed. While there was inevitably a trend for individuals to undertake their own searching, it was felt that there was indeed scope for library staff to provide information and digital literacy professional support and guidance. Many staff in government "don't know what they don't know"; they did not actually realise that they may have very low levels of understanding and competence to operate effectively in an online world, both as users and creators of digital information.

> *People are almost drowning in a sea of information and data. It is about how to manage that data; there is too much undiscovered data. The area where most organisations need (librarians') skills is to help us pull out the knowledge from the data we have. Library staff… could have a role there.*

> *Google and information overload… this is not the best way to obtain highly specific information. Free text searching provides a lot of noise. Specific search training is needed – this would help the organisation.*

> *Librarians should continue to take the lead as advisers.*

One interviewee was concerned about the trend for independent searching, and was unhappy about librarians offering to upskill the agency staff. She felt that her own and her colleagues' high level professional specialisations meant that "it's not a good use of our time to be doing this [searching]". It was important for the agency to have the required capabilities to be, collectively, productive and effective. The specialised skills of the library and information professional should therefore be recognised as part of that mix.

One respondent wondered what the value of librarians today might be, prompting the question about whether there might be the opportunity to redefine the value proposition. This idea was picked up by another respondent, who proposed that library staff should focus on adding value through their work, for example by filtering and sifting search results for clients. In the research environment, it was felt that there was scope for librarians to be "more proactive with literature reviews" or to work "more like researchers":

> *Finding and collecting information, but (also) doing a value-add, e.g. trends, analysis of research results, answering the research question. Not just providing the information.*

The final question extended the respondents' ideas with a question about their own vision for the future of government library services.

## 3.9 The vision for government library and information services

Blue sky thinking: What would your vision for government agency library and information services be?

There were mixed responses to this question. Several interviewees indicated that they were not up to speed with contemporary issues in the wider world of libraries in general, so they couldn't really visualise any alternative scenarios. They did realise that many of their colleagues did not access the library services in their organisation, but they didn't know how to change this.

> *It would need a structural or organisational change to convince those people who do not use it now, to change and start using the library.*

This would inevitably require library and information professionals to promote themselves more, raise their profile and ensure better representation amongst the higher levels of the organisation. Some respondents linked these ideas back to the discussion about a cluster model of service delivery, which would offer the necessary energy and focus: "you need a critical mass to create a network or group…" It was agreed that a model, like the university model, could provide the opportunities for the diversity of professional activities and an informed discussion about service provision.

One interviewee wrapped up his interview with a very clear conceptual understanding of the challenges and opportunities of the digital age:

> *[There is] big growth in what I call knowledge discovery: bringing the right information at the right time. It is becoming a lot harder, there is too much information. It needs to be sifted and presented to those who need it. Then the user has the right information, at the right time and in the right form for the user to turn it into knowledge. It is then put into a knowledge system to be resuable.*

While the IT division was seen to be good at providing the systems, "systems are only part of the solution, unfortunately". Many of the respondents shared their passion about good information services and the skills librarians bring to the agency.

> *If the library was not there, there would be enormous holes.*

> *I am a good user of their services and I speak highly of them.*

They recognised the value of embedding library and information professionals in the team in order to have immediate access to their skills.

> *I wouldn't mind having a library resource on every floor with me.*

Far from facing obsolescence, some interviewees believed that the horizon looked bright.

> *The next decade of digital disruption is looking exciting! What opportunities might turn up?*

> *Library services people are really important!*

> *I want them to still be there.*

Nevertheless, it was recognised that work needed to be done to ensure that library and information professionals were part of this exciting future, with the primary responsibility resting with the librarians themselves. It was very important for library and information professionals to raise their profile within the agencies – "they have to promote themselves" – and to sell their skillsets in a more strategic way.

The interviewees were all very generous with their time and their willingness to share their views on the issues facing government library services. Textual analysis of the qualitative data collected

through the nine open ended questions revealed that the critical themes for the respondents were the impact of digital information resources, financial and budgetary pressures in government, and the intrinsic value of the services provided. The respondents not only had a strong understanding of the ways in which the 'traditional' work of library and information professionals was changing, but also that they believed that, precisely as professionals, they should be ready and able to adapt to the evolving environment to apply their highly specialised skills in new ways that would support the agencies' goals and outcomes.

## 4   Discussion

Stage 2 of the Commonwealth Government Agency Libraries Review specifically sought to capture the views of senior executives and policy managers in the public service about the focus and relevance of government library and information services. In this section of the report, the responses presented in Section 3 are synthesised through the lens of the key themes which were discussed in the Options Paper (Hallam, 2016). This allows a review of the extent to which the respondents' opinions and beliefs reflect, support or differ from the views of the library and information professionals themselves, as gathered in the focus groups and online interviews. The themes encompass the current government library environment, new directions for government services and a future-focused library and information profession. The discussion concludes with a summary of the respondents' views on the options for the delivery of library and information services in the different agencies.

### 4.1   The current government library environment

It was found that, overall, the views of the senior executives and policy managers were aligned with the ideas collected in the government librarians' focus groups and online survey: the current agency-centric model of service delivery undoubtedly has a number of strengths, although there are inevitably some challenges. Although the wording of the questions specifically used the terminology of "library and information services" and "library and information professionals", it was evident that the interviewees had a strong mental model of the "library as place" and often referred to the print collection as "the library". One respondent stated that "so much stuff is online, so we don't need bricks and mortar".

The Stage 2 respondents were keenly aware of the impact of information being made available online, with the convenience of search engines like Google contributing to the ongoing shift away from the need for mediated search activities provided by library staff. They were also sensitive to the complexity of the digital environment, although there were disparate views about the implications of this for library and information professionals. Some interviewees argued that the mediated model of information access suited them better, so they could focus on and complete their work assignments more productively. Others felt that, as their own need for information was so specialised and the turnaround times were so tight, it was more advantageous for agency staff to develop the tailored search skills they needed and to use the library staff to locate the hard-to-find resources they had identified in the searches.

In response to the opinions that the average public servant's information skills may not be well developed, it was commonly felt that library staff should do more to offer guidance and training, not only to search the various subscription databases, but also Google. One manager specifically highlighted the need to encourage agency staff to move beyond the simple search box and become proficient with the features and functionality of the advanced search pages in Google.

The interviews really underscored the diversity of information needs of staff in agencies across government, with clear differences between the regulatory bodies, the research-intensive institutions and the policy-focused departments. The interviewees spoke very articulately about their specific information requirements within the context of their work.

Those working in research-intensive agencies felt that the research agenda in Australia had created an uneven playing field where academic colleagues were placed at a greater advantage through the research support services and data management activities available in the higher education sector, with librarians front and centre. The push for research collaboration had alleviated some of the problems, but where library services had been curtailed and database and journal subscriptions cancelled, many government research staff were left with the inefficient options of paywalls and contacting authors directly for copies of papers.

The interviewees working in policy believed that librarians made a major contribution towards the mitigation of the risks associated with the likelihood of policy decisions being made based on incomplete or poorly argued information (Shergold, 2015, p.21).

> *Staff get information from Google, but this is risky. We write and have responsibility for all policy areas, so it is vital that we get it right.*

They were very committed to the principles of evidence-based policy and indicated that the relationship with the library staff was critical to the performance of their work, declaring that "the quality of information is a duty of care, to get good evidence". The need to access source documents and original materials which were seldom digitised meant agency staff relied heavily on the librarians' skills, as well as on the library networks which ensured ease of access to authoritative resources.

Some respondents criticised management decisions to reduce the number of information professionals in the various agencies. There was a strong emphasis on the need for good internal information management practices in all agencies. The presumption that information skills were generic was viewed as short-sighted as it was believed that there was no depth of understanding about the value of internal documents or about the need for strategies to curate and archive key resources for future reference. During the interviews, the topic of the management of grey literature was discussed, but very few of the respondents were aware of external open access resources such as Analysis and Policy Observatory (APO), which is described as "a research collection and information service curating key resources supporting evidence-based policy and practice" (APO, 2017). Respondents respected the librarians' ability to monitor the information environment on behalf of the agency and thus alert them to relevant resources to support them in their work.

The Options Paper highlighted the opportunities for data management across government. Some of the interviewees were concerned about the implications of the lack of rigour in the ways in which data and data sets were currently managed in their agencies. They felt that while library and information professionals had a significant role to play in improving data management practices, IT departments and data scientists had taken the lead in this area.

## 4.2   New directions for government services

In the interviews there was little discussion about the agencies' own future directions. The theme of new ICT-driven models of service delivery, driven by the Commonwealth Government's Digital Transformation Agenda (DTA), was discussed in the literature review (Hallam & Faraker, 2016) and explored in the library staff focus groups (Hallam, 2016). In contrast, it was found that senior executives and policy managers did not consider the external implications of the digital environment

in the same way. Only one respondent mentioned that he had heard of the DTA, "but it has no impact on my little patch yet".

It was therefore not surprising that the notion of a participative approach to the development of public policy, or open access to government information, as discussed in the Options Paper, were not raised as topics of interest by the interviewees. Once again, the perspective presented was predominantly that of the public servant's immediate work environment. However, there was recognition that information sharing and access to resources in the external environment was facilitated though library networks; respondents valued the inter-organisational connections their library staff had established and nurtured. They regarded this as a real strength of the agency-centric model of service: the library and information service represented a window of access to the outside world of information.

The low levels of engagement with information resource management in government agencies, when "we live in an information age" (The Mandarin, March 30, 2016), echoed the findings of the earlier study. It was noted there that, in response to an increased awareness of information management skills, the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) had introduced a framework to help build staff capabilities in the digital information environment (Easton, 2015). A couple of managers expressed concerns about some librarians' slow response to demonstrate leadership in this area:

> *As an information profession they could support and manage statistical data, metadata...*
> *This data needs managing as well as records and archives. After digital disruption, they*
> *should be managing digital information… They should also be managing the information*
> *policies in the organisation, not just books and articles. You think they are experts in*
> *information management, but they still manage paper…*

Many of the interviewees believed that library and information professionals should be leading the campaign for improved practice, agreeing with the ideas presented in the Options Paper that "library and information professionals must step out from the shadows to stake their claim in this space, to emphasise the value of the qualifications they hold and to demonstrate their potential for active leadership roles" (Hallam, 2016, p.40). Significantly, however, it was recognised that they were not living up to this potential, with the belief that the downsizing that had already happened in many agencies had reduced the capacity for librarians to demonstrate strategic leadership in this area.

## 4.3    A future-focused library and information profession

The literature review (Hallam & Faraker, 2016) and the Options Paper (Hallam, 2016) focused on the importance of building the profile of government library and information professionals to articulate the value of the services and programs they provide, highlighting the work undertaken by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) (ALIA, 2010, ALIA 2014). Several of the senior executives and policy managers who were interviewed also stressed the imperative for library staff to "proactively demonstrate their value to senior colleagues" (Lord, 2014, p.258) as "the organisation is always looking at the value contribution". One respondent reported that he had saved one library closure by proving that "the library saved $10 million in one project". Such strategies are, however, very rare, and it was felt that library and information professionals needed to work harder to promote the work they do.

> *They need to demonstrate visibility; they need a mission for the library.*

The relative 'invisibility' of library and information professionals was noted in the Options Paper as a challenge associated with professional isolation. Interviewees noted that the downsizing of library services had contributed to the isolation and the loss of professional influence in the agencies.

Although there was a strong interest in the focus groups to discuss the changing and evolving skillsets required by library and information professionals, the interview discussions in Stage 2 were less granular. The interviewees understood the positive results of the application of the librarians' skills, with the associated contribution made to their own work activities, but there was no detailed discussion about education and professional development. They were therefore appreciative of the ways in which their own library staff had a good understanding of their information needs, their abilities to search very proficiently, and their willingness to locate hard-to-find resources. The librarians' connections and networks were acknowledged to be very effective.

In 2014, LexisNexis published a white paper which outlined the skillsets required by information professionals in an increasingly digital world. The interviewees intuitively knew that their agencies would benefit from the development and application of the skills presented in the white paper, which have been discussed earlier in this report in the context of adding value:

- Aggregating and synthesising the information they retrieve
- Helping others interpret the outputs of the information that they have aggregated and synthesised
- Presenting information in different ways for different audiences
- Present information in ways that can be more easily understood by others, e.g. visualisations and dashboards.

Senior executives were looking for decision-ready information in order "to transform mountains of information into pinnacles of knowledge" (Shergold, 2015, p.17). These activities are therefore regarded as "untapped opportunities" for government library and information professionals, with comments such as "they should be supporting the selling of insights". However, concerns were expressed that other professional groups would move into this space faster than the librarians themselves, so that there would be many "missed opportunities".

## 4.4    Options for future models of service delivery

The Options Paper (Hallam, 2016) presented a detailed discussion of the four options for future service delivery for Commonwealth Government library and information services:

Option 1: Status Quo
Option 2: Shared Services Model
Option 3: Cluster Model
Option 4: Collaborative Projects Model.

In the interview questions in the Stage 2 study, respondents were asked specifically about the benefits and shortcomings of the current agency-centric model of service delivery, i.e. the Status Quo, and the perceived value of bringing a number of library and information services together, e.g. the model of a university library system, i.e. the Cluster Model. The specific advantages and disadvantages of these two models were presented in the Options Paper: the Status Quo (Hallam, 2016, pp.45-46) and the Cluster Model (Hallam, 2016, pp.49-52).

For the respondents, the agency-centric model of service delivery represented the current model, while the "university model" was a hypothetical concept. As a result, it was found that the interviewees had a clear understanding of and experience about the agency-centric model. All respondents were familiar with the university model, so they could envisage how this might be introduced as a model for government libraries.

It is stressed that the questions were answered from the perspective of the senior executives' and policy managers' immediate experience. The organisational advantages of the agency-centric model were acknowledged:

- All library and information staff located in the agency
- Strong relationships with users
- Subject specialisation for information resources.

In terms of the disadvantages, the respondents identified:

- Funding insecurities
- Agency firewalls
- Professional isolation.

Issues such as autonomous decision making, direct responsibility for budget, library technology issues and the impact of Machinery of Government (MoG) changes were not discussed.

Interviewees also saw value in the potential advantages of the university model of service delivery:

- Opportunity for strategic leadership and direction
- Facilitates cross-agency research collaboration
- Coordinated administrative functions
- Collective purchasing arrangements
- Streamlined licencing arrangements: opportunities for whole-of-government licences
- Increased collaboration
- Opportunities for innovative practice
- Career progression.

Several respondents highlighted some of the challenges:

- Geographic distribution of government agencies
- Differing values and expectations
- Disparate user requirements across agencies, including security and access arrangements
- Physical relocation of staff to new sites
- Potential for agencies to grow back mini services
- Differing ICT priorities (including intranet interoperability).

Once again, the back-of house library issues such as collection management, library management systems and financial management did not feature. The discussions did not conclude with any specific preferences for future service models.

# 5  Summary and recommendations

Stage 2 of the Commonwealth Government Agency Libraries Review, sponsored by AGLIN, built on the earlier study of the management and operations of the library and information services funded by the Federal Government. The Options Paper (Hallam, 2016) included an analysis of the qualitative data collected in the focus groups where library managers and staff explored the issues associated with government libraries. The research was expanded in Stage 2 to capture the view and opinions of senior executives and policy managers about the library and information services provided in their agencies.

Research interviews were conducted with 13 executives, with an additional three online questionnaire responses, representing eight Commonwealth agencies, including research-intensive institutions, policy-focused departments and regulatory bodies. Accordingly, it was found that the responses were broadly representative.

The analysis of the research data has been completed with the aim of deepening the interpretation of the discussion presented in the Options Paper through the inclusion of the managers' experience

of library and information services. This process has validated the findings of the earlier study which noted the mix of positive and negative factors associated with government libraries in Australia. Overall, the respondents were supportive of the library and information services within their agencies, but recognised the challenges they faced in times of budgetary constraint across the public service.

They appreciated the commitment of the library staff and admired the skills they used in supporting their clients, with whom they had developed strong relationships. They were aware, however, that only a small proportion of their colleagues made use of the information services and that many of them had no understanding of the ways in which the library staff might contribute to the quality of their own work.

There seemed to be a disconnect, however, in the minds of many of the respondents between the management of print information and the management of digital information. There was a comfortable association of library staff with the "bricks and mortar" of the library and an acknowledgement of the skills they used to locate hard-to-find print and historical materials, yet it did not appear that librarians had put their stamp on digital information, even though their roles would include organising the management of and access to electronic resources.

On the one hand, senior executives and policy managers identified that the digital world presented major challenges for library and information professionals; on the other hand they were also aware that it offered great opportunities for librarians to reconceptualise their work. The re-awakening of the commitment to evidence-based policy offered the potential for increased support for the provision of access to high quality, authoritative information sources and the development of well-honed information retrievals skills through the education and training roles within the agencies.

It was noted that as, generally speaking, many government agencies lagged behind the corporate sector in terms of effective information management practices, there was immense scope for library and information professionals to demonstrate their expertise. The need to move into the world of data management was also seen as a new imperative. However, the legacy of management decisions made over recent years, particularly in terms of funding and space, meant that there had been a significant loss of strategic direction and leadership. Senior executives and policy managers emphasised the need for library and information professionals to focus on communications: to sell their skillsets, to raise their profile in the agency and to advocate for higher level representation in the organisation.

A number of risk factors were identified, particularly in terms of the transactional cul-de-sac that had ensnared some library staff, and the initiatives to build the information management skills across the agency and to work with data scientists to take the lead in the emerging area of data management. Conclusions presented in the Options Paper were supported by the interviewees:

> It is critical that library and information professionals are forward thinking, proactive and strategic in their understanding of technology solutions to safeguard their roles and to enhance the government's access to, use of and creation of information assets.
>
> (Hallam, 2016, p.41)

The interviewees were all very supportive of the AGLIN research project. They openly expressed their personal interest in libraries and firmly believed that there would be a big hole if the decision was made to close the library service. However, there was no clear consensus about the options for a model for service delivery, whether an agency-centric model was preferable to a cluster model. The respondents stressed that it was a tough world in for the public service these days: the library and information professionals needed to take the initiative to seek out the champions who could provide active support in their organisation, but most significantly, they need to be self-motivated

and committed to face the challenges and to develop strategies for success. One respondent wrapped up the interview philosophically, declaring that "the best way to predict the future is to invent it" (Alan Kay[2], *Financial Times,* November 1,1982).

The Stage 2 study enriches the findings from the original study by adding the perspectives of active users of the agencies' library and information services, who are also senior managers in the organisation. The interviewees' responses validated the library managers' own interpretation of the issues and challenges they face, but it was also made clear that they could not be regarded as the 'white knight' who will ride in and save the day. The AGLIN Executive is encouraged to play a leadership role by drawing on the research findings of both the Options Paper (Hallam, 2016) and the Stage 2 report in order to engage the membership to build a sound and secure future for library and information services in the government sector.

The research activities undertaken in Stage 2 confirmed the value of the seven recommendations presented to the AGLIN Executive in the Options Paper:

> While the recommendations presented to AGLIN do not propose that a single model of service delivery should be adopted, they do seek to encourage the Executive and membership to review the findings and to collaboratively consider the strategies which will help build the capacity of AGLIN. By securing a strong and relevant future for the association, there will be, by extension, immense benefits for the individual member library and information services.
>
> (Hallam, 2016, p.56)

## 5.1   Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. The AGLIN Executive establishes a Future Directions Taskforce, comprising a representative sample of the membership, charged with the responsibility to review this research report.
2. The AGLIN Executive and the Future Directions Taskforce host a workshop for members to discuss the research findings and to commit to a preferred model for library and information services across the Commonwealth Government.
3. The AGLIN Executive and the Future Directions Taskforce use the research findings presented in this report to inform the discussion and development of the future strategic directions for the organisation, with associated responsibilities and operational plans, to lead the changes required to develop a new model of service.
4. The AGLIN Executive and the Future Directions Taskforce host a sector-wide forum to identify and prioritise the areas for valuable, effective collaboration across and beyond government library and information services.
5. The AGLIN Executive and the Future Directions Taskforce develop a government-wide advocacy campaign to promote the current and potential roles of library and information professionals, the value of high quality information and research services to government stakeholders and the benefits to be achieved through a new model of service. This campaign should be supported by a media and communications plan to ensure AGLIN members commit to and participate in the advocacy activities, both individually and collectively. Champions, who will play a leading role in supporting and promoting the government-wide advocacy campaign, should be invited to be involved.

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[2] Cited in *Yale Book of Quotations,* p.415. The quotation "the best way to predict the future is to invent it" has also been attributed to Peter Drucker and Abraham Lincoln.

6. The AGLIN Executive and the Future Directions Taskforce work with the Consortia Taskforce to examine the current licensing arrangements for eResources across the government agencies to identify opportunities to offer more equitable, cost-effective access to high quality information.

7. The AGLIN Executive and the Future Directions Taskforce work with the Training & Development Taskforce to commission and/or develop and deliver a CPD program of future-focused activities designed to inspire government library and information professionals and enhance their skillsets.  Members should be encouraged to participate in the ALIA PD Scheme, with its Government Library specialisation.

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# Appendix: Stage 2 Interview Schedule

# Commonwealth Government Agency Libraries Review

## Consultation with Senior Executives/Policy Managers

Consultation with stakeholders represents an important element in the data collection activities for the Commonwealth Government Agency Libraries Review (CGALR). The Review has been commissioned by the Australian Government Libraries Information Network (AGLIN) to identify the challenges and opportunities facing library and information services today.

The research team is aware that government library and information services are highly specialised and have long played an important role to support the work undertaken by government staff in a wide range of positions. The current model of current library and information services within the Commonwealth government is department-centric.

The research team invites you to contribute your views and opinions as a senior executive/ policy manager with responsibility for library and information services.

### Confidentiality

In line with the principles of research ethics, all responses will remain completely confidential and anonymous. All data will remain with the project leader. The overall research findings from the review will be analysed and summarised in the report.

**Dr Gillian Hallam**
Adjunct Professor, Library and Information Science Discipline
Queensland University of Technology

e: g.hallam@qut.edu.au
m: 0423 373 547

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# Interview Questions for Senior Executives/Policy Managers

1. Please provide:
   - Your position title
   - The name of the unit and government agency you represent

2. To what extent do you believe that library and information professionals support your own work in government policy development / research / service delivery?

3. What do you believe is the single most important contribution that the library and information professionals make to your agency?  What is the impact of this contribution?

4. Do you feel that there are any specific barriers to the role that library and information services might play in supporting the achievement of the government's strategic objectives?

5. Concerns have been expressed about the current climate for government library and information services, with evidence that these services have lost traction, influence or representation in many government departments.  What do you believe are the underlying causes for this situation?

6. Given your knowledge of and experience with government agency library and information services, what do you feel are the strengths of the current model, which sees these services directly associated with a specific department?

7. Do you believe that there are any shortcomings or problems with the current model?

8. Do you believe there would be value in bringing a number of library and information services together, e.g. into the model of a university library system which serves a number of faculties and schools?

9. Do you believe that there are any untapped opportunities for government agency library and information professionals?

10. Blue sky thinking: What would your vision for government agency library and information services be?


Thank you for your support for this study.