Creating a workforce that reflects the diversity of the community through workforce planning - *Efforts made, outcomes achieved and lessons learned from Wollongong City Libraries*

The ALIA Strategic Plan 2020-24 prioritises the need for a diverse workforce. ALIA has demonstrated its commitment to '…*support a resilient, diverse workforce: attracting and developing talented, committed individuals from different cultural backgrounds, who will have the strength and agility to navigate a rapidly changing workplace.'* Wollongong City Libraries (WCL) has been undergoing workforce planning over the past few years as part of an ongoing cycle of continuous improvement to address changing environmental and business needs, to attract a skilled, diverse and dynamic workforce to deliver extraordinary library experiences and outcomes for our community. WCL would like to provide an overview of the workforce planning process undertaken, the outcomes achieved and lessons learned; we hope this paper promotes a discussion around inclusion, employment and the future of the workforce for public libraries in Australia.

Background

The City of Wollongong is a Local Government Area (LGA) in the Illawarra region about 80km south of Sydney and is the fourth largest city in New South Wales. It is a key regional city, with strong linkages to the Sydney metropolitan area and neighbouring LGAs; geographically, the Wollongong LGA occupies a long, narrow coastal margin, between the escarpment and the ocean with Lake Illawarra providing a natural border to the south.

Wollongong LGA is located on Dharawal country and is home to nearly a quarter of a million people. According to the data in Our Wollongong 2028 Community Strategic Plan[1] 2.6% of the population identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; and 20% were born overseas in countries like the UK, China, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Italy and New Zealand. 78% of the population only speak English at home.

The Wollongong community (compared to NSW as a whole) is characterised by[2]:

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[1] https://wollongong.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0025/34918/Our-Wollongong-2028.pdf
[2] https://wollongong.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0026/45647/Libraries-Strategy-2017-2022.pdf

- A high proportion of young adults (20-24 years);
- A high proportion of people 70 years and older;
- High proportions of lone person households and group households
- Some level of disadvantage with low average household incomes and higher levels of unemployment (also reflected in the SEIFA index score of 979.6);
- Higher levels of need with a higher proportion of people needing assistance with core activities;
- Lower levels of car ownership;
- Lower levels of access to the internet at home;
- A higher proportion of people living in medium and high-density dwellings; and
- A higher proportion of people renting.

2030 population projections for the LGA indicate there will be a significant increase in the proportion of[3]:

- People aged 70+ years, increasing from 11.8 percent of the population to 15 percent;
- Couples without children, increasing from 24.3 to 27.5 percent; and
- Lone person households, increasing from 25 to 26.3 percent.

The current and projected characteristics of the Wollongong community indicate some specific areas of focus for planning for WCL services and programs, outlined in the Wollongong City Libraries' Strategic Plan 2017-22:

- *Ageing of the population indicates a need for services and programs for older people who are both "ageing well" and those who are facing health and mobility challenges – for example tailored programs, an increased focus on large print and audio-visual items in the collection, response to anticipated increases in demand for home library services and learning options to provide technology skills for seniors.*
- *An increase in the number of people who will require assistance for core activities of daily living points to a need for increased online access and the creation of accessible spaces, with adaptive technologies.*

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[3] https://wollongong.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0026/45647/Libraries-Strategy-2017-2022.pdf

- *Higher levels of community disadvantage indicate a need for services that are free, inclusive and accessible to all members of the community and that provide opportunities for lifelong learning. Staff need to be responsive to a range of customer needs and expectations.*
- *Lower levels of internet access in people's homes indicate the importance of maintaining and expanding technology services, free public computers, Wi-Fi access and technology learning and skills support.*
- *Lower levels of car ownership, combined with limited public transport infrastructure and the geographic characteristics of Wollongong, underline the importance of a dispersed library service.*
- *The forecast increase in lone person households and increased housing density highlight the need for spaces for individuals, groups and communities to visit, spend time and to feel a sense of ownership and belonging.*

Organisational context of Wollongong City Libraries

Wollongong City Libraries (WCL) is a dynamic and valued service of Wollongong City Council (WCC) and the community. WCL's seven libraries play a core role in delivering on Council's commitment to creating a community that is informed, engaged, creative and connected, with a vision to "…engage with our community to inspire reading, lifelong learning, creativity and inclusion". WCL sits within the Library and Community Services (L&CS) Division, one of the larger and more dynamic of Council's thirteen Divisions. L&CS comprises three business units: Community Support Services, Social Infrastructure and Wollongong City Libraries. It provides a range of proactive and responsive services, at direct interface with the local community and in collaboration with a range of stakeholders and partners. Our work is based on relationships, rather than on transactions and is built on engaging with our community, connecting with community and connecting people, groups and organisations together so that they can create collective impact.

Despite structural re-alignment and the development of new job roles in Wollongong City Libraries and within some parts of the Community Services team, L&CS Division had not undergone significant change in job design, structure or workforce alignment, since 2013. During this period, core services had changed in type and

scale, new technologies were introduced to the sector and to the business, the demands of our community have diversified and intensified and new opportunities have emerged.

In addition, a Workforce Diversity Plan 2016-2019, underpinned by a Workforce Diversity Policy, was adopted by Council in 2015, "…*to create and foster a workplace that is fair and inclusive, and promotes a workforce which better reflects the diversity of our community.*"[4] It integrates the principles of equal employment opportunities (EEO) to include under-represented groups – *women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, people living with a disability, people from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds and young people under 25 years* – in the workforce and in particular areas of our workforce, including managerial and leadership roles, job families and work areas. Identified priorities in achieving a diverse workforce are:

- Attracting and retaining a diverse workforce;
- Retaining and developing a diverse workforce in all areas and levels within our organisation; and
- Incorporating workforce diversity as part of everyday council business.
- Supporting young people (e.g., high school-based library trainees) to progress into permanent roles and further study when their traineeship/cadetship is finished
- Identifying critical positions (specialist knowledge/skills) and developing an approach to succession and knowledge transfer
- Ensuring the window of opportunity is as open as possible for future leaders to step up

Finally, it is important to note that the terms and conditions of employment for all Wollongong City Council employees are regulated by an Enterprise Agreement (EA). Most local governments operate under the Local Government Industry Award managed by the Fair Work Ombudsman, adhering to National Employment Standards. Wollongong City Libraries operates under the organisational Wollongong City Council Enterprise Agreement agreed upon at a local level by several parties,

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[4] https://wollongong.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/33581/Workforce-Diversity-Plan-2016-to-2019.pdf

including four unions[5]. The EA provides a "*Change Management framework to manage the people side of change. This structured approach will be applied to ensure employees understand, adopt and have the ability and skills to manage change. We recognise that organisational change requires individual change and understand results depend on individual transitio*ns and that there are costs and risks of mismanaging the people side of change."[6]

Challenges to be addressed through Workforce Planning

Workforce Planning for Wollongong City Libraries (WCL) was approached as a distinct phase, or element of a broader workforce development program that was undertaken within L&CS Division between 2019 and 2022.

The Wollongong City Libraries' workforce operates within an internal and external context that is constantly changing and to which it must respond. These contextual influences include an ageing demographic, technology and automation, diversity and inclusion, providing flexible work options and building the skills and capabilities of our people. The most valuable resource when it comes to managing change, challenges, opportunities and threats, is a capable and sustainable workforce.

Despite increasing community demands and the impacts of new service directions, technologies and standards, the WCL budget is fixed and finite. This means we must ensure that we are clever, far-sighted and flexible, with the resources available to us. There is a rule of thumb that 80% of any business unit budget is spent on salaries and employee-related expenses, so getting the most out of this significant investment – and ensuring that the investment results in happy, committed and productive staff is an obvious goal.

The Workforce Planning (WfP) Project was based on the following principles:

- WfP is part of an ongoing cycle of review and re-shaping as our environment and business changes

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[5] NSW Local Government, Clerical, Administrative, Energy, Airlines and Utilities Union (USU); Automotive, Food, Metals, Engineering, Printing and Kindred Industries Union, New South Wales Branch (AMWU); The Local Government Engineers Association of New South Wales (LGEA); and The Development and Environmental Professionals' Association (DEPA)
[6] https://thegong.sharepoint.com/sites/Hub365/Documents/Enterprise%20Agreement%202021-2024.pdf p73

- WfP is complex and not necessarily self-explanatory or well-understood by middle-level team leaders and supervisors. As such, an educative approach to WfP was a critical element of the change process, commencing with introducing the broader Divisional leadership team to workforce data, human resources concepts and strategic planning methods, such as SWOT analysis

- Engagement of the broader leadership team is critical to collaborative planning and decision-making and encourages awareness, participation and ownership of the process and outcomes

- Transparency, fairness and due process, negotiated with relevant stakeholders, such as staff and unions are central values

- WfP will seek to create greater flexibility in staffing and structure - more flexible job titles and JDs, rotation of staff across locations

- Our workforce composition should reflect the faces and experiences of our community – our teams should be diverse across a range of demographic factors, to recognise and represent our diverse community

- The well-being of our staff is important and their job security is a key commitment of a public organisation such as Council – therefore there will be no redundancies

- There is no additional budget available to fund workforce change, therefore there is a need to re-design job roles and to make the best use of the salaries budget available – wherever possible staff will be placed into new roles, based on merit and the 80:20 principle, so they do not have to compete against one another via recruitment

Wollongong City Libraries faces numerous challenges in maximising the effectiveness of our workforce. Several of these relate to workforce diversity (Figure 1):

- The demographic profile of our staff shows that we are largely female, para-professional and aged over 40.

- 40% of staff have worked in WCL for over 10 years; and 27% for over 20 years.

- 66% of staff are permanent; 52% are part-time and 48% are full time.

- Our staff profile does not reflect the demographic diversity of our community, in relation to age, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background,

participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and representation of people with a disability. In 2020, 83% of library staff identified as female; 40% were 55 years of age and older; 2% of the workforce were living with disability; 2% of staff were from CALD backgrounds; and 1% identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

- We need to build the resilience and adaptability of our staff to deal with uncertainty, challenges in direct service delivery, organisational change, the impacts of the CV-19 pandemic and other internal and external pressures.

- We need to plan for and support greater flexibility, ongoing capability development, alignment with organisational culture and values, as well as continuing to build teamwork and integration.

- We need to build the capacity of our staff to work effectively within new workplace paradigms – the increasing reliance on technologies and online service delivery, the increasing complexity of customer needs and expectations and service improvement and innovation.

Libraries Staffing Profile (2020)	Council Staffing Profile (2018)	Wollongong LGA Profile (2016)
66% permanent	82% permanent	
40% employed > 10 years	Average tenure = 14.75 years	
27% employed > 20 years		
52% PT	36% PT	
48% FT	64% FT	
83% female	43% female	51% female
40% > 55 YO	31% > 55 YO	41% > 50
2% live with a disability	5% live with a disability	6.4% 'in need of assistance'

1% Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander	1.7% Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander	2.6% Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander
2% Born overseas	21% Born overseas	22% Born overseas (16% ex- UK / NZ)

Figure 1 What does our workforce profile tell us?

An overview of the Workforce Planning process

Workforce Planning (WfP) is about developing strategies and actions to ensure that an organisation's workforce is structured, supported and developed to ensure that it has the capabilities to achieve business and strategic outcomes. It is a methodical process of analysing the existing workforce across a range of dimensions, determining future workforce needs, identifying the gaps between the present and the future and implementing solutions.

WfP is future-focused. It facilitates a proactive approach to addressing business sustainability and responding to environmental change and challenges; it identifies the issues and designs the strategies and actions required to deliver a sustainable workforce that can maintain high quality services to the community.

Purpose of Workforce Planning

The Workforce Plan will provide a future focus for Wollongong City Libraries. It will:

- enable us to consider the community expectations, changes and challenges we are facing and come to a consensus about the outcomes we need to deliver now and in the future;
- act as a framework for the Division to review and analyse the skills, values, knowledge and attributes that we have within our workforce and assess them against the demands and expectations of our community and organisation.
- in turn, put us into a position where we can scope out the skills, values, knowledge and attributes – and therefore job roles and people – we need, so

that we can get 'the right' people on deck to deliver the outcomes we are required to deliver.

- support us in responding in the best way we possibly can, to demands for service expansion and contraction and in managing uncertainty and complexity.

- cover off opportunities to deliver services more efficiently and effectively, making the best use of the people and resources that we have available to us; and

- support WCL in offering satisfying career opportunities and work experiences for our people. Its scope encompasses professional development, career development, flexible work arrangements, inclusion and a range of other activities that focus on workforce sustainability.

A good Workforce Plan will enable us to deliver our 'why' with great 'how'.

The Workforce Planning Project

In 2019, the Library and Community Services (L&CS) Division embarked on a Workforce Planning (WfP) Project to pave the way for the development of a capable, resilient and sustainable workforce, with the kinds of skills, attitudes and attributes our customers and our community expect of the Division and of Wollongong City Council. The L&CS Workforce Plan comprised six key components: environment, future directions, capability, sustainability, diversity and performance (Figure 2).
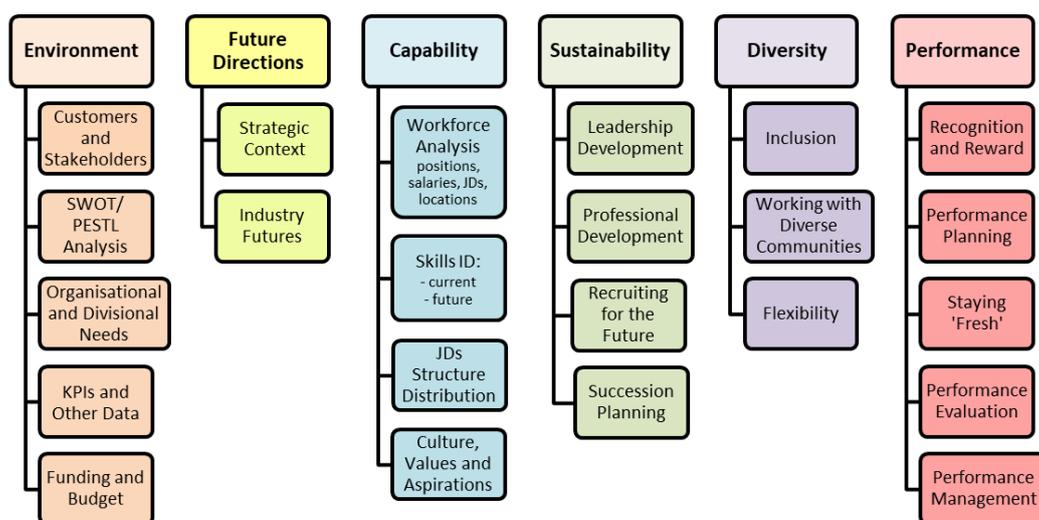
Figure 2 The components of the L&CS Workforce Plan

The objective of the project was to engage the L&CS team in the development of a holistic, staged workforce plan that will provide the strategic framework to ensure that we have the right people, with the right capabilities, in the right place at the right time to deliver high quality services to the community now and into the future. The outcome of WfP process was intended to assist in developing an innovative future for the Wollongong City Libraries.

The L&CS Leadership Team led the project, providing opportunities for coordinators and team leaders to participate actively and in an ongoing way in the workforce planning process. They participated in visioning and design of the future workforce, gathered and collated feedback from their teams and expressed their views about the process at bi-monthly WfP meetings.

All L&CS employees, including casual and temporary employees had the opportunity to participate in the process and have their say by responding to survey questions designed to elicit their aspirations for the future and providing feedback to three WfP Working Groups.

Each Working Group was led by a manager, with coordinators and team leaders being responsible for developing specific aspects of the WfP. Each group was made up of representatives from the three functions of the L&C Services Division: Libraries, Social Infrastructure & Community Support. The Working Groups were:

1. **Working Group 1 *'Capabilities & Attributes'*** identified the kinds of capabilities (knowledge, skills, abilities and qualities/ characteristics) that we use in our current roles and what we might need into the future.
2. **Working Group 2 *'Workforce Structure'*** looked at the capabilities and attributes explored by Working Group 1 and examined how they can be integrated with our existing skill sets and job roles. Existing roles and structures were examined, and changes were suggested to address the future needs of the library services to maximise function, integration, and effective service delivery. Where gaps were identified, new roles were suggested.
3. **Working Group 3 *'Development and Sustainability & Performance'*** developed recommendations, based on research, relating to a recruitment and retention strategy and developing a diverse and inclusive workforce with

the skills and attributes required to ensure customer focus and reflect organisational values.

This approach was designed to be educative and inclusive, relying on co-design and collaboration with staff from across the L&CS Division.

Diversifying the workforce through Workforce Planning – Outcomes achieved

A diverse workforce was identified as one aspect of an inclusive library service alongside collections, programming, physical accessibility and partnerships through the Workforce Planning Project (Figure 3). Traditional library roles, cumbersome and outdated Job Descriptions (JDs) and complex recruitment processes were three key challenges to workforce diversity to be addressed through the WfP process among numerous other actions.
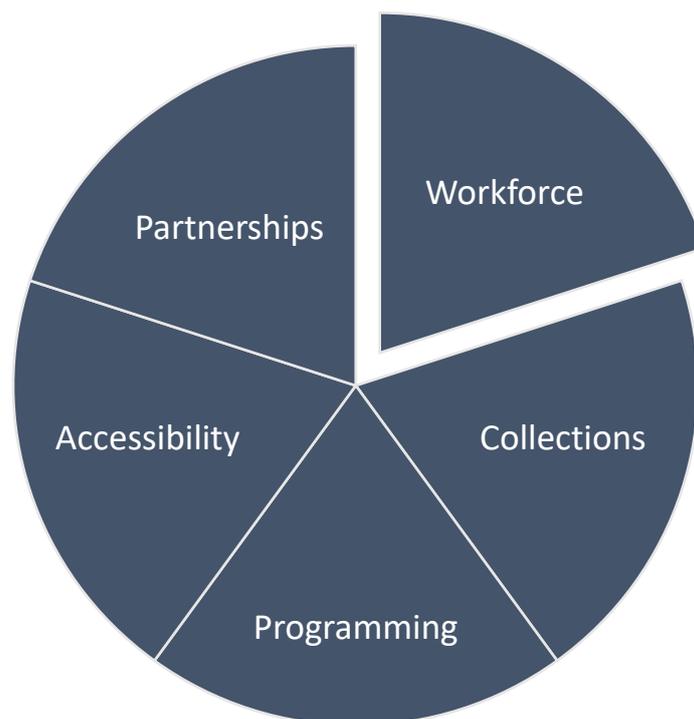
Figure 3 A diverse workforce was identified as one aspect of an inclusive library service

1. **Diversifying the workforce through the creation of new roles**

The WfP Project identified the need to create specialist roles to meet current and future needs of WCL customers and the business environment, and to better reflect

the cultural diversity of the Wollongong community. So far, five new roles have been created that do not require a library qualification or library experience but focus on the capabilities and attributes needed to get the job done.

i.   A non-library professional with a Communications qualification is acting in a Digital Experience Team Leader position.

ii. The successful candidate for a Project Leader Learning City role held undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in education, Australian and international tertiary education sector appointments, and no experience working in the library sector.

iii. A Library Trainee position was created as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander designated position. This role was developed and recruited with the support of WCC's Aboriginal Engagement Officer and local Aboriginal employment services.

iv. A Marketing Specialist position was created. The successful applicant holds marketing qualifications, comes from the creative arts sector and has no experience working in the library sector.

v.   A Coordinator Service Quality & Development position was created. The successful applicant holds qualifications business administration, project management, enterprise and business architecture and '*SixSigma*' and has no experience working in the library sector.

The requisite capabilities and attributes for these roles are adaptability, a willingness to learn, excellent interpersonal skills and the ability to develop working relationships with internal and external stakeholders, and relevant qualifications.

2. **Diversifying the workforce through the revision of job descriptions**

The WfP Project found outdated lengthy, detailed JDs to be detrimental to an adaptable, future-focused workforce. As a result, an environmental scan was conducted to compare the ways in which libraries across New South Wales and Australia described the responsibilities, skills and attributes of library staff. To promote flexibility and diversity in the WCL workforce, JDs were revised to:

• Be more generic, allowing for greater flexibility in a rapidly changing world.

- Focus more on the desired capabilities and attributes of effective library professionals as opposed to specific tasks and responsibilities.
- Relax qualification requirements, such as professional and paraprofessional membership of ALIA, for entry-level library roles so that the barriers to entry are reduced for disadvantaged members of the community.

3. Diversifying the workforce by reviewing recruitment processes

The recruitment process is daunting for most people but it can be particularly challenging for young people, members of CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and people with disabilities. A few concerns have been raised when recruiting for a diverse workforce:

- Overly detailed, specific selection criteria in job advertisements is one barrier to employment for disadvantaged community members with limited access to training and employment.
- Merit-based recruitment should be about finding the most suitable candidate for the role, not necessarily the most qualified or experienced candidate. Points-based recruitment systems can reduce access to employment for disadvantaged community members as they rank candidates with a bachelor's degree higher than someone with diploma or certificate, and rank candidates with 10 years' experience higher than someone with 5 years' experience.
- Indirect discrimination is still a challenge in recruitment as people still tend to employ people who look like them and who they can easily relate to.

A few steps have been taken to increase employment equity in WCL recruitment processes and level out the playing field:

- Selection criteria are being simplified alongside the revised JDs.
- Recruitment panels are reminded of the true meaning of 'merit' prior to shortlisting and interviewing activities.
- Targeted roles, such as the Library Trainee position, have been created in collaboration with the WCC Aboriginal Engagement Officer and local Aboriginal employment services.

Diversifying the workforce through Workforce Planning – Lessons learned

The WfP process presented many challenges along the way. Here are some key reflections around the approach to workforce planning and the aspects of the project that aimed to increase workforce diversity:

- A workforce plan could have been drafted solely by the L&CS Divisional Manager in a much shorter amount of time than it was through the WfP Project; however, a deeply held commitment to taking an educative, collaborative approach to workforce planning meant it was a resource and time intensive process.

- The COVID-19 pandemic had two key impacts on the WfP process: first, it caused several delays to the project as staff health and wellbeing and business continuity were prioritised over WfP; secondly, discussions and workshops around WfP are not well suited to online forums.

- There are organisational variables that influence the expediency of a WfP process. L&CS are just one cog in a large machine making us dependent on other systems, processes and staff from Human Resources, Organisational Development, Industrial Relations, and the union.

- WCL have, over time, evolved to be multi-functional and require a multi-disciplinary approach, yet we are labouring under an embedded organisational norm that reified qualifications in library practice / information systems over other qualifications (e.g., teaching and learning, community development, customer service) that are more relevant to the outcomes we are seeking – unpacking what qualifications (if any) are required to do the job is a critical part of the process – as much as we hate to say it, '*Librarians can't necessarily do everything*'.

- Requiring a library qualification as an entry point for work within libraries is an indirect form of discrimination, particularly as the cost and limited availability of TAFE qualifications in library practice create barriers for access to a career in libraries for many in our community. If we want our libraries to present a diverse face that welcomes, recognises and represents our diverse community, we need to remove barriers created by credentialism.

- Job descriptions and job evaluations rely heavily on capabilities, competencies, skill sets – task oriented and tangible. While these dimensions

are preferenced in merit-based selection, they can be learnt and we should be paying equal attention to the attributes, personal qualities and values – getting the right type of person who can develop the skills, based on the right mix of attributes.

- We also need to be aware of the influence of unconscious bias, both as we visualise the people we want to work with and in libraries and as we go through recruitment processes – the unconscious desire to recruit people 'just like us' and the interplay between this predisposition and the ways we frame 'fit' and 'merit' require reflection.

- The WfP process was challenging and stressful for many library staff who may have had limited experience in workforce change and/or were fearful of change:
    o Some library staff expressed disappointment and frustration that the WfP process was taking too long in 2020 but then expressed heightened levels of stress when it was announced in November 2021 that changes would start to be implemented in January 2022.
    o Despite the opportunity presented to all library staff to participate in the WfP process via surveys, some library staff expressed disappointment that all levels of the WCL workforce, like Library Officers, were not represented in the WfP working groups.
    o The fear of organisational change saw some library staff focus more on the personal impacts of WfP rather than adopting a broader focus on how WfP could enhance the workforce to meet the changing needs of our diverse community.
    o Some library staff demonstrated reservations about some changes, such as working in different library locations, or having/accepting new JDs, but welcomed others, like pay increases.
    o Some staff took their concerns to Council union leaders, or to union head office, rather than discuss their concerns with senior WCL staff in the first instance to seek clarity or assurances they felt they needed.
    o Some staff sought support from community members, asking them to express their (the staffs') WfP concerns to senior WCL staff.

- o Some staff demonstrated resistance to changing position titles e.g., Team Leader Librarian to Service Team Leader, Adult Programs Librarian to Community Engagement Specialist, Local Studies Librarian to Local Studies Specialist.
- o Some staff were disengaged in the WfP process seeing it as 'another restructure' to endure.
- o Some WCL leaders reportedly displayed frustration and negativity about the WfP process at times, requiring their staff to remain resilient and upbeat for the sake of team morale.

WCL leaders had to demonstrate resilience and commitment when faced with resistance from affected library staff. It was important for leaders to try not take things too personally, maintain committed to the rationale for WfP and be able to bounce back after setbacks. The key lesson here is to establish strong principles and rationale in the beginning of the process and stick to them. Copious GnTs did assist in this.

Despite many challenges, Wollongong City Libraries' WfP Project has had some positive outcomes in developing a more flexible and diverse workforce. Firstly, new roles have been created that focus on desirable attributes and capabilities as opposed to specific library qualifications and experience. New entry-level roles have also been created to promote equitable access to a fulfilling career in public libraries. Secondly, JDs have been simplified to allow for greater flexibility and adaptability in all aspects of the library service, meaning that WCL can continue to meet the diverse needs of the Wollongong community in a rapidly changing world. Finally, barriers to employment for disadvantaged community members are being removed from recruitment processes wherever possible. All in all, it takes committed and resilient library professionals to take the long and winding path towards workforce diversity through a collaborative workforce planning process.