



SKILLS AUDIT OF VICTORIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY SECTOR 2019



STATE LIBRARY
VICTORIA



Public Libraries
Victoria

Project team

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2013, driven by the *Victorian Public Libraries 2030: Strategic framework* and its two visions of the Creative Library and the Community Library, State Library Victoria (SLV) and Public Libraries Victoria (PLV) undertook a skills audit of library managers and staff to survey the perceived importance of specific skillsets at the time and the anticipated future importance of the skills five years hence. The audit also looked at library staff confidence in these skills. Managers were asked to consider the competencies required across the entire library service, both then and in five years' time.

In 2019, a follow-up skills audit — reported here in *Skills audit of Victorian public library sector 2019* — measured the changing importance of specific skillsets and tracked improvement or decline in staff confidence levels. The 2019 audit once again comprised an Individual survey and a Management survey. The survey questions examined three skills areas: Foundation skills, Professional skills and Behavioural skills.

Key findings: Importance of skillsets

All skillsets continued to be seen as relevant to contemporary public library practice, although differences were noted between managers and individuals as to the relative importance of some skills.

Respondents in the 2019 Management survey presented more moderate views about the current value of many of the different skillsets than did the 2013 research cohort. Another significant difference was also noted when comparing responses from managers of Metropolitan library services with those in Regional and Rural library services: managers in an urban setting were more likely to recognise the increasing value of the skills associated with community development and cultural programming, while the idea of libraries as learning hubs or information centres did not resonate with all the managers in small regional services. Overall, however, managers predicted that the skills which were viewed as priorities for the future Creative Library and Community Library scenarios would increase in importance.

Foundation skills can be characterised as '21st century skills', vital for constructive engagement with the community. Respondents believed that Foundation skills would never lose their value. Literacy, cultural literacy, digital literacy and local awareness were still regarded as the most important Foundation skills, with the demand for digital literacy skills continuing to grow. While managers placed greater emphasis on the skills relating to political literacy and financial literacy, individual respondents highlighted the increasing importance of health literacy and environmental literacy in the community and were interested in learning more to support their work in these areas.

The most important **Professional skills** clearly supported the core business of the public library: the role of information and libraries in society, information seeking and information services. The skills associated with promoting library collections, services and programs, and lending services were also seen as important. Managers focused on the emerging importance of community development skills: community needs analysis, community engagement and community relationships. Individual staff also predicted that they would need to increase their understanding of and expertise in the community development arena.

Changes in user behaviour meant that the competencies associated with the management of a physical collection were expected to become less important; there was an anticipated decline for the skills used by staff involved in acquisitions, bibliographic records and lending services. The need for routine administrative processes would decrease, opening up opportunities for new and fresh strategies for engagement with library users. The value of 'traditional' library and information science (LIS) skills would therefore diminish. As library services expanded into a wider range of community activities, staff would need to embrace different professional skillsets.

The commitment of staff to the delivery of high-quality public library services was reflected in the most valued **Behavioural skills**: customer engagement, ethics and values, empathy and oral communication. Oral communication was seen as a

critical skill for a positive, constructive workplace, with further value placed on teamwork, flexibility and self-management. Managers emphasised the importance of positioning the library service within the wider organisational context, highlighting political and business acumen, building partnerships and alliances, written communication and leadership. Individuals were aware of the need to develop the Behavioural skills that supported effective cooperation within and collaboration beyond the library sector, but they wanted to make sure that they remained true to the essence of the public library.

Key findings: Levels of confidence applying skills

The research revealed that staff confidence levels had risen for nearly all the Foundation, Professional and Behavioural skills. Comparisons between managers' expectations for the future and staff confidence levels indicate that, although the skills gaps tended to be reducing, further training and development would give staff the practical skills required in new areas of professional practice, such as community engagement.

The highest levels of confidence were reflected in the competency areas where individual staff believed they had extensive experience and good training, demonstrating their key strengths in working with library users to access collections, locate information and provide information services to support literacy and cultural literacy across the community. Nevertheless, most respondents were aware that the 'traditional' public library must adapt to a rapidly changing social, economic and technological landscape.

Individual respondents appreciated the sector's concerns about workplace skills and welcomed the opportunities they were offered to expand their skills. They enjoyed both formal and informal learning activities, emphasising the value of people-driven development strategies such as mentoring, coaching and 'buddy systems' for workplace learning. Some managers, however, placed less emphasis on the skillsets that underpin a culture

of learning, including lifelong learning, mentoring and coaching, professional engagement and self-management.

Respondents' qualitative comments noted the interdependency of the spectrum of skills. As the skills required in Creative and Community libraries encompassed a combination of Foundation, Professional and Behavioural skills, a holistic approach to staff development would help libraries work towards the achievement of the *Victorian Public Libraries 2030: Strategic framework*.

The report concludes with three commendations to the SLV Lead and Learn Workgroup and to PLV to recognise good practice, and a series of recommendations to guide future strategic and operational activities which could support the development of a highly skilled and engaged public library workforce across Victoria.

Recommendations

1. A set of priorities to ensure that the Victorian public library sector is well positioned for the delivery of future-focused programs and services, which may include:
 - disseminating the research findings from the *Skills audit of Victorian public library sector 2019* project to its constituents
 - developing and conducting a workshop for Victorian public library service managers to share understandings about the workforce skills, knowledge and confidence required to achieve the vision of the *Victorian Public Libraries 2030: Strategic framework*
 - establishing a set of key performance indicators for staff development in the public library sector
 - liaising with other national and state bodies to engage with the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) *Future of LIS Education* agenda.
2. A training and development framework for Victorian public libraries:
 - to define and establish a staff development program aligned with the public library sector's strategic direction and priorities
 - to develop a program of collaborative staff training activities, structured around key themes
 - to continue using elearning activities to extend the reach of training and development
 - to develop strategies to encourage and support knowledge exchange across and between library services.
3. Use the *Skills framework for Victorian public libraries* as a multipurpose workforce planning tool:
 - to raise awareness among public library staff about the importance of the range of skills that underpin high-quality public library practice
 - to advocate on public library workforce issues with local government stakeholders
 - to review staffing structures and to align the skills requirements with public library programs and services
 - to review current position descriptions and staff capability documents for public library staff
 - to support the recruitment of high-calibre public library staff
 - to support performance planning and review processes in public libraries.

INTRODUCTION

The collaboration between State Library Victoria (SLV) and Public Libraries Victoria (PLV), the peak body for the state's 47 public library services, plays a significant role in improving the quality of library services delivered to communities across Victoria. Much of their work occurs under the auspices of the Statewide Public Library Development Projects program, which aims to build the capacity of the public library sector.

In 2013, SLV released *Victorian Public Libraries 2030: Strategic framework*, designed to inform future directions and priorities for public libraries across the state. Developed after extensive consultation with diverse stakeholder groups, the strategic framework focuses on two visions for the future: the Creative Library and the Community Library. A recent stakeholder review of the framework confirmed the continued relevance of these strategic directions: digital developments drive opportunities for creativity, innovation and collaborative processes in 'creative libraries'; while technological, social, demographic, economic and environmental trends underpin the concept of 'community libraries'.

In terms of capacity building in the public library sector, workforce issues are understandably of prime importance. Achieving the strategic objectives outlined in the *Victorian Public Libraries 2030* framework depends on 'a workforce of well-trained, experienced and valued public library staff' (SLV, 2013, p. 1). This conviction was the stimulus for the initial skills audit undertaken in 2013, which culminated in the research report *Victorian Public Libraries: Our future, our skills* (SLV, 2014a).

Understanding the required competencies was essential to the research. A skills framework built on earlier workforce planning work undertaken for SLV (Considine, Jakubauskas & Oliver, 2008) and was informed by an extensive literature review and environmental scan (SLV, 2014a). This framework encompassed the knowledge, skills and attributes required by a well-trained, experienced and valued public library workforce. Following the model used by Considine, Jakubauskas and Oliver (2008), the structure of the skills framework comprised the following three competency areas:

- **Foundation skills** are based on the premise of general citizenship (Mournier, 2001): 21st century skills which will be required by all citizens and which will underpin the needs of the communities served by libraries (IMLS, 2009); information and media literacy (UNESCO, 2013)
- **Professional skills** include recognised technical skills (Mournier, 2001) and library and information science (LIS) discipline knowledge and skills (ALIA, 2014)
- **Behavioural skills** are the personal skills associated with the ability to deal with interpersonal relationships and to perform in the context of authority relations at work (Mournier, 2001); 21st century skills (IMLS, 2009).

The resulting *Skills framework for Victorian public libraries* shaped the survey instruments used in the skills audit. The project collected evidence about the current skills of public library staff across the state, considered the skills required to deliver the vision of the Creative Library and the Community Library, reviewed staff confidence levels for the diverse skills, and provided recommendations about training needs and strategies to support the future delivery of public library services in Victoria. The research findings subsequently guided a program of workforce and leadership development activities coordinated by SLV and PLV.

A fresh investigation was proposed to comprehensively review the skills, knowledge and confidence levels of public library staff. The replication of the 2013 skills audit in 2019 not only sought to update the skills data, but also to facilitate the comparison of datasets to measure the extent of skills improvements made over the six years and to identify skill areas requiring further development.

The second skills audit, once again encompassing an Individual survey and a Management survey, was undertaken in September–October 2019. The research findings are presented in this report. Section 1 provides an overview of the research methodology; Section 2 introduces the research subjects and compares the demographic profile of the Victorian public library workforce in 2019 with that presented in 2013.

The report reviews the research data collected through questions covering the three areas of skills. Section 3 pays attention to the significant points of difference between the four surveys, i.e. two Individual surveys (2019 and 2013) and two Management surveys (2019 and 2013). The analysis of the quantitative data focuses on the participants' responses to the five-point Likert scale questions and considers their views of the most important skills, now and in five years' time, and the least important skills. The analysis of the qualitative data focuses on the participants' views about the value of the different skillsets in the context of public library services. Individual survey data is also examined to determine how and where staff confidence levels using the various skills has changed, with insights provided about potential areas of support for future skills development.

Section 4 explores the priority skills for the future through the lenses of the current strengths of library staff, skills for the technology environment, skills for the Creative Library and skills for the Community Library. Improvements in staff confidence levels are contextualised within the training and development activities undertaken in recent years and strategies for the future are considered. Section 5 presents research conclusions and recommendations.

SECTION 1: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The principal objective of the *Skills audit of Victorian public library sector 2019* was to survey the current skills of staff working in public library services across the state and identify any skills gaps. The research project sought to examine the findings of the 2013 study *Victorian Public Libraries: Our future, our skills* (SLV, 2014a) and to replicate the Individual and the Management surveys. This would allow the collection of current data about the relative importance of diverse workplace skills along with the levels of staff confidence applying the various skills. Comparisons were to be made between the two datasets (2019 and 2013) in order to determine any significant trends. In this section of the report, the project activities are described.

Skills framework

One of the first steps in the initial audit was the development of a framework that encompassed the knowledge, skills and attributes of public library staff. The *Skills framework for Victorian public libraries* reflected the skills and competencies required by staff to realise the vision of the *Victorian Public Libraries 2030* strategy (SLV, 2013), specifically for the two future scenarios, the Creative Library and the Community Library. The *Skills framework* encompassed 10 Foundation skills, 30 Professional skills and 19 Behavioural skills. Following the review of the *Victorian Public Libraries 2030* document in October 2019, which affirmed the ongoing value of the strategic vision, the Project Workgroup endorsed the *Skills framework* as the foundation for the 2019 skills audit. This allowed direct replication of the original study. The *Skills framework for Victorian public libraries* is reproduced in full in *Victorian Public Libraries: Our future, our skills* (SLV, 2014a).

Research population

As in 2013, the potential research subjects for the study included all staff and managers employed in Victorian public libraries. All 47 library services, including Metropolitan, Interface, and Regional and Rural library services, were invited to participate in the project.

Research instruments

The two questionnaires developed for the 2013 skills audit were replicated and can be found in *Victorian Public Libraries: Our future, our skills* (SLV, 2014a). The Individual survey was to be completed by individual members of staff employed in the different public library services, with the questions focusing on the staff members' own skills as used in their present role. The Management survey was open to selected senior staff of the library services, with the questions relating to the relevance of the various skills to the service as a whole.

Individual survey

The structure of the Individual survey comprised four groups of questions covering demographics, foundation skills, professional skills and behavioural skills. In the demographics questions, participants were asked about their gender, age, educational qualifications, industry experience and employment arrangements. In the three skills sections, respondents were required to indicate, for each individual skill:

- the importance of the skill to their current role
- the anticipated importance of the skill to their role in five years' time
- their current level of confidence applying the skill.

There were open questions at the end of each section which offered opportunities for respondents to indicate where they might benefit from support in further developing their skills, plus add any comments about their understanding of the current and future value of the skills. At the conclusion of the survey, respondents were invited to share thoughts about any 'hidden talents' which might potentially be used in library programs and services.

Management survey

The Management survey was more condensed and asked only two questions for each of the skillsets:

- the importance of the skill to the library service today

- the anticipated importance of the skill to the service in five years' time.

Library managers had the opportunity, through free text fields, to give their views about why there might, or might not, be any change over the five-year period. Respondents could also offer general comments about the skills areas.

Data collection

The project managers were responsible for marketing the skills audit: they communicated regularly with library service managers to encourage strong response rates. The survey opened on 4 September 2019. It was initially scheduled to close on 30 September, but in order to maximise the number of respondents, the window was extended to 7 October 2019.

Research ethics

The principles of research ethics were applied. Respondents were assured of both their anonymity and the confidentiality of their data. A respondent code was used to ensure that, in the analysis, interpretation and reporting of the data, no details could be linked back to any personal information.

SECTION 2: THE RESEARCH SUBJECTS

At the beginning of the Individual survey, a series of demographic questions provided the opportunity to gain some insights into the makeup of the Victorian public library sector at the present time. It was also possible to compare the 2019 data with the 2013 data, to highlight how the characteristics of the workforce may, or may not, have changed.

Individual survey

The analysis and interpretation of the research data focused on 1388 valid survey responses (48% response rate). This compares well with the 2013 study which had 1334 responses (45% response rate). The response rate, as a percentage of the number of staff (headcount) at the individual library services, varied considerably: the highest percentage of responses returned was 100%, while the lowest return was 19%. One library failed to contribute any data.

Public library services in Victoria are grouped by geographical setting: Metropolitan library services, Interface (previously referred to as Outer Metropolitan) library services, and Regional and Rural library services. The distribution of responses by geographic category for the two Individual studies are depicted in Figure 1 (2019) and Figure 2 (2013). In 2019, just under half the respondents were drawn from Metropolitan libraries, which was a little lower than in 2013. Representation from Regional and Rural libraries was therefore stronger in 2019, with one-third of the respondents drawn from these areas. The proportion of respondents from Interface libraries remained constant.

Figure 1. Categories of library service, Individual respondents, 2019

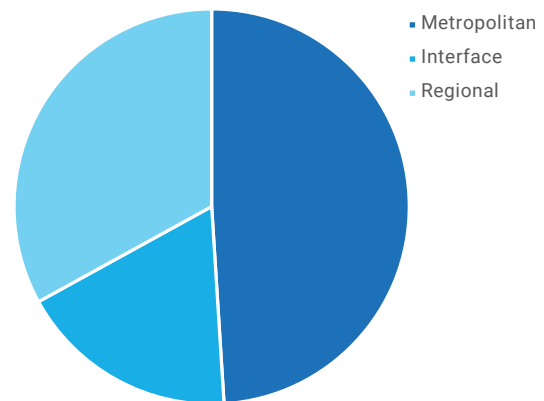
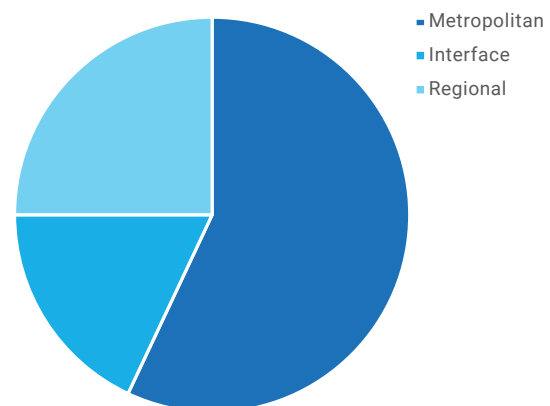


Figure 2. Categories of library service, Individual respondents, 2013



Management survey

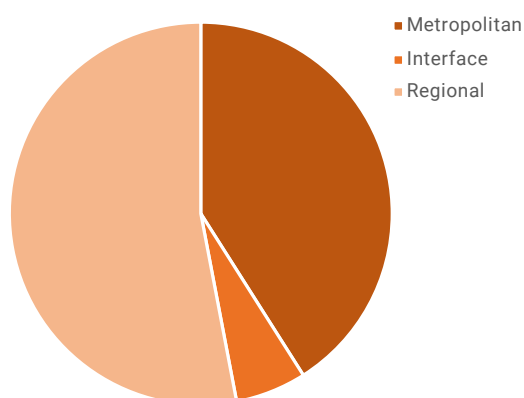
The Management survey was open to senior staff working in Victorian public library services, with the goal of capturing data about the skills required for the service as a whole. The managers were asked to contribute personal responses about their own skillsets in the Individual survey. Responses to the Management survey were received from 33 of the 47 library services, although the data provided by one library service was deemed invalid. This compares with the 2013 figure of 37 of the then 45 library services in Victoria responding to the survey.

The level of engagement with the research study was higher in 2013, with a total of 78 valid responses

received from the 37 library services. The response rate dropped significantly in 2019, with only 34 received from 33 library services (at one library service, responses were received from two senior staff members). The responses submitted by one library service were excluded due to the submission of invalid data. The analysis in the current study was therefore based on only 33 responses, compared with 78 in 2013. In 2019, the margin of error was 9.42%, compared with 6.87% in 2013.

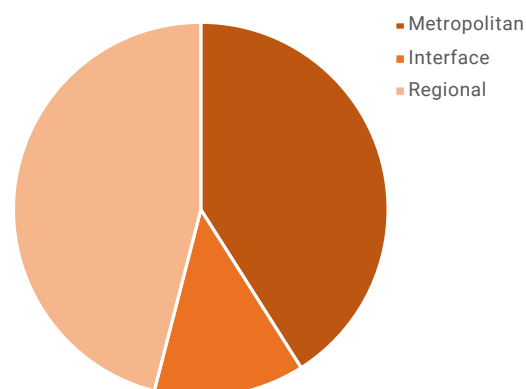
The distribution of responses by geographic category for the two Management studies is presented in Figure 3 (2019) and Figure 4 (2013). While the proportion of respondents from Metropolitan library services remained constant, in 2019 there was a slight increase in representation from Regional and Rural library services, along with lower representation from Interface library services.

Figure 3. Categories of library service, Management respondents, 2019



In the 2019 Management survey, just over half of the respondents represented Regional and Rural libraries. As the priorities for staff skills in the public library sector are not necessarily consistent across all geographic regions, the different proportions of respondents in the different surveys should be noted. In particular, the lower representation of respondents from Interface library services and the higher representation from Regional and Rural library services may have had an impact on some of the findings.

Figure 4. Categories of library service, Management respondents, 2013



Demographic data

The demographic questions in the first part of the Individual survey focused on gender, age, educational attainment and industry experience.

Gender

The public library workforce has long been acknowledged to be predominantly female. In the present study, the respondents were 83% female and 16% male. Twenty responses were recorded as 'Other' and four blank responses were submitted.

Age profile

It has been widely reported that library and information professionals represent an older demographic profile. The responses from the Individual survey revealed that there was, overall, a spread of respondents across the various age groupings, as outlined in Figure 5.

The pattern of mature age people entering the public library sector was confirmed. The data revealed that, while there had been a drop in the proportion of 'new entrant' respondents who were aged under 25 years, there was a balanced distribution across the age profile. Of the respondents who reported that they had been working in the sector for under two years, one-third were aged 16–34, one-third were aged 35–44, and one-third were aged 45 years or older. Six of these 'new entrants' were aged over 65 years.

Figure 5. Age profile of respondents
Individual survey respondents, 2019 and 2013

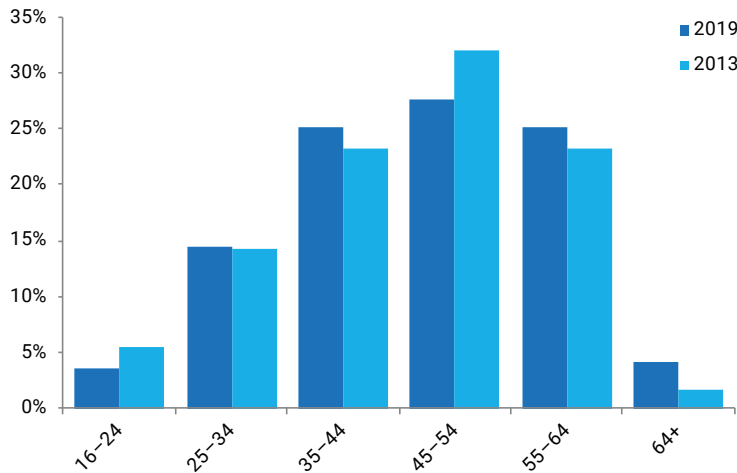
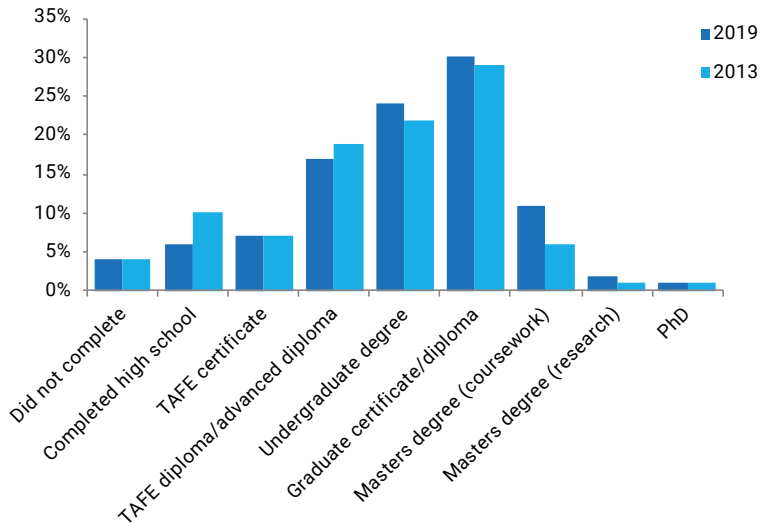


Figure 6. Highest educational qualifications completed
Individual survey respondents, 2019 and 2013



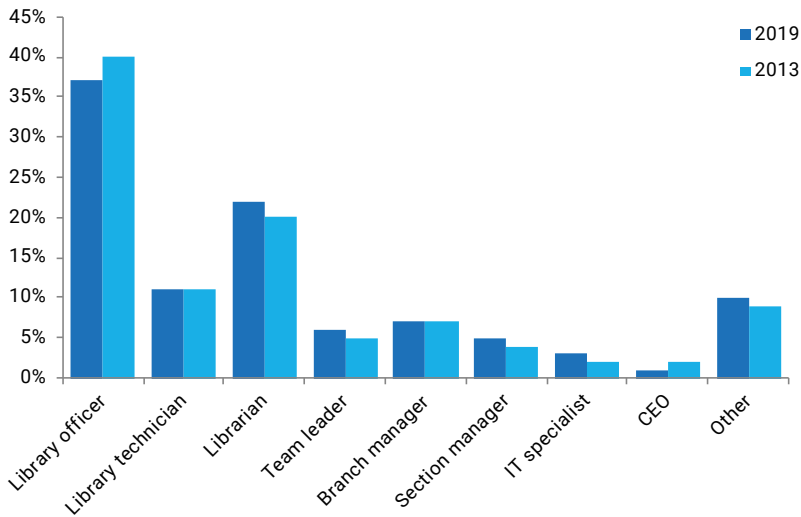
Educational attainment

The responses to the question about the highest qualification attained by participants provided interesting data. The push towards higher academic credentials was clearly noted: the number of respondents with a university education had increased, with over two-thirds holding undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. In 2019, 44% of respondents held postgraduate qualifications (graduate diploma, graduate certificate, masters

degree by coursework or research, PhD), compared with 24% of the Australian population (ABS, 2018). The distribution of educational attainment is presented in Figure 6.

One-quarter of respondents indicated that they were currently studying or had plans to study in the coming two years to gain further formal qualifications, ranging from completing high school through to being awarded a PhD.

Figure 7. Position categories that best describe the respondents' roles
Individual survey respondents, 2019 and 2013



Industry experience

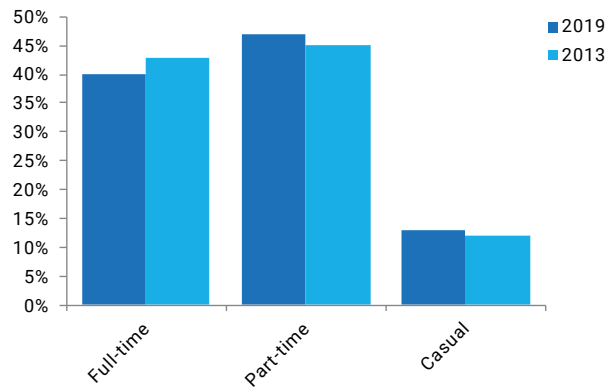
In terms of the current position respondents held in the library, the pictures painted by the 2019 data and the 2013 data were markedly similar (Figure 7). In the current survey, just over one-third reported that the position category ‘library officer’ best described their role, one-fifth were ‘librarians’ and 11% were ‘library technicians’. Smaller numbers of respondents indicated that they were ‘team leaders’, ‘branch managers’, ‘section managers’, ‘library services manager’ or ‘CEO’, or ‘IT specialists’.

It was found that employment arrangements did not necessarily align with professional qualifications. The vast majority of respondents who recorded their position as ‘librarian’ held university qualifications, although 7% did not. Over half of ‘library officers’ indicated that their highest qualification was a university degree, with a balance between undergraduate and postgraduate awards. Over one-third of ‘library technicians’ also held a university degree, principally at the postgraduate level.

Looking at the participants’ basis of employment, there had been a slight increase (+2%) in people being employed in a part-time capacity or in casual roles and a drop (-3%) in those working full-time. In

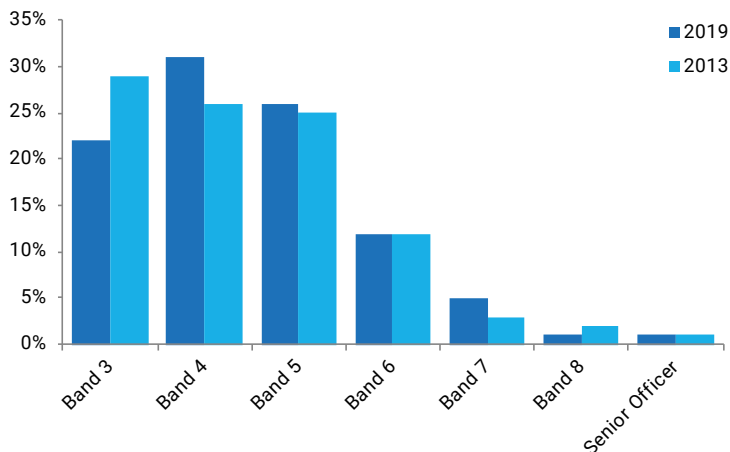
2019, just under half of the respondents (47%) were employed in part-time positions, 40% in full-time roles and 13% as casual staff (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Basis of employment
Individual survey respondents, 2019 and 2013



As in 2013, over three-quarters of the respondents were employed in Band 3, Band 4 or Band 5. Noting again that the respondents’ position categories (library officer, library technician, librarian and so on) were similar in the two surveys (Figure 8), the data revealed that the proportion of staff in Band 3 had dropped, with a corresponding increase in staff employed in Band 4 and Band 5 (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Employment bands of respondents
Individual survey respondents, 2019 and 2013



The present study continued to depict workforce stability in Victorian public libraries. Over half the respondents had worked in public libraries for more than a decade, one-quarter working in the sector between 10 and 20 years and one-quarter recording over 20 years' service.

While many public library staff had been in the same job for a long time, there were also many who were working in newer roles. It was found that in 2019, almost one-third had been in their present position for less than two years. Nevertheless, around one-quarter had been in their current position for over ten years. A small number (6%) reported that they had been in the same position for over 20 years.

Summary

The use of the same survey instrument in both the 2019 and 2013 research projects allowed meaningful comparisons to be made between the datasets. It is important to note that the two Individual studies involved similar representative samples of library staff. The anonymity of the participants was ensured; no attempt was made to use a longitudinal study design where the responses provided by individual respondents in the two surveys could be compared.

There was less congruency, however, between the cohorts of participants in the two Management surveys. The sample size in the 2019 study, with 33 valid responses, drawn from 47 library services, was much smaller than in 2013, when there were 78 valid responses representing 37 of 45 library services. The ratio of respondents from the different geographic settings also differed, with a higher proportion of respondents representing Regional and Rural library services in 2019. Library services referred to as Interface library services were underrepresented (6%) in the current study. These factors should be taken into account when considering the research findings.

SECTION 3: ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Respondents in the Individual survey were asked to answer three questions for each of 59 skillsets included in the three competency areas (Foundation skills, Professional skills and Behavioural skills):

- How important are these skills to your current role?
- How important do you think these skills will be to the same role in five years' time?
- How confident do you feel in your ability to apply these skills now?

For the Management survey, managers were asked to consider the same issues of the importance of the skills within the context of their library service:

- How important are these skills to your library service currently?
- How important do you think these skills will be to your library service in five years' time?

In both the Individual and Management surveys, the questions used a five-point Likert scale to measure the levels of importance for each skill, ranging from the value of 1 'not at all important' to 5 'extremely important'. In the Individual survey, levels of confidence were measured through the value of 1 'not at all confident' to 5 'very confident'. The value of 0 represented the response that the specific skill was 'not relevant' to the respondent's role.

At the end of the series of quantitative questions, respondents had the opportunity to provide qualitative comments to share their ideas about the value of the skills and about where they felt they would benefit from support to become more confident. These free text comments offered a deeper richness to the research findings.

Foundation skills

1. Literacy
2. Numeracy
3. Digital literacy
4. Cultural literacy
5. Political/civic/citizen literacy
6. Financial/economic/business/entrepreneurial literacy
7. Health literacy
8. Environmental literacy
9. Local awareness
10. Global awareness

Foundation skills have been described as the skills required by members of society, based on general citizenship. The specific Foundation skills presented in the Victorian public library study include '21st century skills' (IMLS, 2009), i.e. the range of contemporary skills that enable people to function in and contribute effectively to the workplace and the community. These skills encompass the diverse literacies required for constructive communication and collaboration in an increasingly online world (UNESCO, 2013). Their inclusion in the research study draws on the premise that, if these skills are integral to modern life, library staff will require the appropriate level of skills to ensure that public libraries can play a meaningful role in supporting the skills developments of their users in the wider community.

There was a strong element of consistency across the perceived value of the various Foundation skills in the 2019 and 2013 Individual surveys. The value placed on the skills by respondents in the two studies was very similar, although there was a subtle increase in the percentages across all skillsets except for financial literacy.

The picture that emerged from the Management data revealed a different story, with lower value evident for seven of the ten Foundation skills in the 2019 survey, compared with the 2013 study. The greatest increase was apparent in the data for political/civic/citizen literacy and very slight increases were noted for the skillsets related to literacy and health literacy.

This pattern of the significant difference between the views of managers in 2019 and in 2013 was also found with the Professional skills and the Behavioural skills.

The most important Foundation skills

Individual survey

- Literacy
- Cultural literacy
- Digital literacy
- Local awareness

Management survey

- Literacy
- Cultural literacy
- Digital literacy
- Local awareness
- Political literacy

In 2019, as in 2013, the four most important Foundation skills for public library staff – recorded as the number of respondents who determined that a specific skill was extremely important to their present role at work (Likert scale 5) – were identified as literacy, cultural literacy, digital literacy and local awareness. Significantly, the same skillsets were also noted by respondents in the two Management surveys (2019 and 2013) as being the most valued skills for the library service as a whole.

Respondents in both surveys recorded literacy as the most valued Foundation skill: 94% of managers and 84% of staff believed that the skills were critical for work in public libraries. Managers accorded higher value on political literacy than did individuals, whereas library staff placed more emphasis on the importance of cultural literacy, digital literacy and local awareness.

Looking five years ahead, library staff anticipated that digital literacy and cultural literacy would overtake literacy as the most important skills for their work in public libraries. Managers, however, continued to place a very high value on literacy skills. They also expected an increase in importance for local awareness and political literacy, whereas Individual staff felt that environmental literacy would be as important as political literacy.

Considerable granularity in the importance of the different Foundation skills was noted in the Management survey when the data was analysed from the angle of respondents in the different geographic categories of library service: Metropolitan (n=14), Interface (n=2) and Regional and Rural (n=17).

It was found that managers in Regional and Rural libraries considered many of the skillsets to be less important than did their colleagues in Metropolitan and Interface libraries.

There was a lack of alignment for the areas of cultural literacy, political literacy, local awareness, health literacy, environmental literacy and global awareness, with managers of urban libraries valuing the skillsets far more highly than did those in regional areas.

The least important Foundation skills

Individual survey

- Financial literacy
- Numeracy
- Global awareness
- Environmental literacy
- Health literacy

Management survey

- Global awareness
- Environmental literacy
- Numeracy
- Financial literacy
- Health literacy

The two Management studies (2019 and 2013) revealed that the full range of Foundation skills was required in the public library service. Very few responses were recorded for the skillsets being 'not relevant' (Likert scale 0), 'not at all important' (Likert scale 1) or 'not very important' (Likert scale 2).

A small number of respondents in the Individual survey indicated that certain skills were not used in

their current role, e.g. financial literacy, numeracy and health literacy. Nevertheless, it is stressed that these skill areas were valued by managers in terms of their relevance to the library service as a whole.

The lowest number of responses for 'extremely important' (Likert scale 5) provided by managers were for global awareness and environmental literacy. These skills were in fact less important to the managers when considering the whole library service than to the individual respondents in their work roles.

Increasing importance of Foundation skills

Individual survey

- Digital literacy
- Environmental literacy
- Political literacy
- Global awareness

Management survey

- Digital literacy
- Environmental literacy
- Health literacy
- Financial literacy
- Global awareness

In the 2019 survey, the four Foundation skills that library staff believed would increase significantly in importance for their jobs over the coming five years were digital literacy, environmental literacy, political literacy and global awareness. In 2013, digital literacy had been identified as a skillset that was anticipated to become far more important in the future.

Managers determined that the main skills that would become far more important for the library service in the future were digital literacy and environmental literacy, along with health literacy, financial literacy and global awareness.

Staff confidence levels using Foundation skills

High confidence

- Literacy
- Cultural literacy
- Digital literacy
- Numeracy

Low confidence

- Financial literacy
- Global awareness
- Health literacy
- Environmental literacy

A further perspective was added to the research, with Individual staff asked to indicate the level of confidence they felt about applying the different skills in their work. Participant responses were provided using a five-point Likert scale indicating 'not at all confident' (Likert scale 1) to 'very confident' (Likert scale 5). The value of 0 could be awarded if a skillset was 'not relevant' to the staff member's role.

In the 2019 study, the three skill areas where over one-third of staff felt very confident (Likert scale 5) were literacy, cultural literacy and digital literacy. Financial literacy was found to represent the lowest level of respondent confidence.

Importantly, the Individual survey data collected in 2019 revealed that confidence levels had increased for all ten Foundation skills since the previous skills audit in 2013.

The data for all ten Foundation skills was also analysed from the aggregated perspectives of respondents declaring their confidence levels to be 'confident' (Likert scale 4) or 'very confident' (Likert scale 5). Importantly, the Individual survey data collected in 2019 revealed that confidence levels had increased for all ten Foundation skills since the previous skills audit in 2013. It should be noted that, as confidence levels for literacy and cultural literacy were already very high in 2013, there was little margin for further growth. The largest jump was noted for digital literacy (+23%).

One respondent believed that it was their personal responsibility to continue to build confidence in the context of Foundation skills, indicating that ‘independent and regular professional reading and development already keep my skills and experience relevant and this gives a good basis for confidence in the work I do’.

The value of Foundation skills in public libraries

The Individual survey included an open-ended question inviting respondents to share their views about how changes to their role over the next five years might impact on the Foundation skills they applied in their work activities. In 2019, 57% of respondents submitted comments. The growing value of Foundation skills in the future was acknowledged.

I believe there will be an even greater need for solid foundation skills coupled with the agility in thinking to adapt to change and greater awareness of social and cultural diversity in our communities.

The central theme that came to light through the participants’ comments was the inevitability of change and how this might influence both public library services in general and the roles of public library staff. Many respondents looked beyond their immediate work context to consider where and how change may occur in the world around them, with public libraries needing to anticipate and respond to these changes. There was a clear sense that change would be embedded in all the different areas relevant to the ten Foundation skills, with digital transformation central to much of this change. This would inevitably impact on the skills needed by library staff, as well as on the programs and services provided to their communities.

There was an awareness that society’s ‘greater reliance on technology’ would mean that digital skills would be needed by many members of the community who may not be very competent using technology, ‘especially those who are vulnerable’. The role of library staff to develop and enhance

both literacy and digital literacy would ‘continue to escalate in line with the pace of change’.

Respondents recognised that there was a growing need ‘to help and support patrons with online tasks, including education in digital literacy’.

A strong community focus was evident in the comments provided, particularly from the perspective of the roles played by library staff in the context of expanding diversity and social inequity. In the future, public libraries would require staff to have the skills to build the professional connections in order to develop and deliver the services and programs to address some of these social issues.

There was a stronger sociological focus to the comments provided by many of the respondents in the 2019 survey, with a clear sense that it was vital for library staff to keep up to date with wider societal matters, with the need to consider the ‘changing social, global and economic issues’. The crucial skill for those working in the public library sector ‘will be adapting and accepting change and being able to respond proactively to changed community expectations’. The changing profile of their communities would stimulate a renewed focus on the value of Foundation skills, for members of the community as well as themselves, as library staff.

Support for the development of Foundation skills

Priority areas

- Digital literacy
- Teaching skills
- Multicultural communities
- Support services in the community
- Health literacy
- Environmental literacy

The Individual survey provided an open-ended question to allow respondents to provide their views about the specific Foundation skills where further support could help them become more confident. Respondents were generous with their contributions, with 45% providing their ideas for training and development.

Support for the ongoing development of digital literacy skills was in most demand, with over 250 comments provided. People felt that their skills would always need updating, as the digital world was not only constantly changing and evolving, but also because this aspect had 'increased importance in the public library'. The areas for support mentioned by respondents encompassed all aspects of technology, IT, computer skills and learning new software, in terms of both individuals' own skills and their ability to assist users of the library. There was a specific interest in learning more about a range of online government processes such as MyGov, Centrelink, health records and passport applications.

By extension, some respondents highlighted the need for developing their understanding of good practice in teaching technology skills, including adult literacy and assessment. Beyond the immediate digital environment, there was desire to gain more skills relating to 'the teaching and communication of different types of information to a diverse range of people', including teaching methods 'to support the teaching of early literacy in early years and in schools', as well as a general knowledge of curriculum to work with young people: 'Teaching skills - conveying information in a well organised and accessible way'.

In line with the comments respondents provided about the value of Foundation skills to engage with the increasingly diverse demographic in the communities served by public libraries, the importance of training and development to further build their knowledge and understanding of community issues was emphasised. Topics of interest were 'a greater knowledge of cultures in our community' and 'community program design and implementation'. As the demographic profile of the library workforce was also changing, skills relating to multicultural issues in the workplace were of immediate relevance.

Some respondents highlighted the need for supporting staff to deal with the 'complex needs of the community'. They wanted to develop a clearer understanding about support services in general, to be able to make the appropriate referrals when

the library is the first point of contact for groups in the community, e.g. low-income families and the unemployed.

Health literacy was a theme that flowed from the interest in community awareness, with respondents identifying it as an area where they would benefit from further development. They were keen to improve their skills in providing services to some of the groups in the community which had special needs in terms of health information, e.g. the ageing population and those with mental health issues.

As the impact of climate change begins affecting the local community directly I think the library's role as a source of information, as a disseminator and facilitator of information and community debate, as a community space that offers refuge from heat and shares the environmental cost over a large number of people (as opposed to one person using the air conditioning in their home) will become more important.

The need for skills relating to Environmental literacy was also noted, as 'libraries will need to improve the environmental literacy of their staff and patrons' and to potentially reimagine their role in the community.

Foundation skills were viewed as being vital for the library service as a whole: 'ongoing support to understand our place within the changing cultural, financial, civic and local contexts within which we work is always worth the time and energy'.

Foundation skills: Summary

Respondents' comments submitted in the 2019 survey revealed that digital literacy remained the most critical area where staff sought further development opportunities. Nevertheless, there was also a keen awareness of the changing world in which public libraries operate, with community, health and environmental issues high on the agenda. The associated Foundation skills would therefore become increasingly important for library

staff, with ‘all staff needing to be constantly up to date on these changing issues’.

Some managers considered the impact of generational change: with the anticipated retirement of staff working in some of the libraries (29% of Individual respondents were aged 55 years and over), managers were expecting some shifts in competencies, with younger staff potentially bringing a range of fresh skills that would be of benefit to the local authority as an employer, as well as to the community. It was emphasised that public libraries should be very closely aligned with the communities they serve. If Foundation skills are seen as the skills that are integral to contemporary life and enable people to function in and contribute effectively to the workplace and the community, ‘we need all staff to role model what we are hoping to achieve in the community’.

Professional skills

The full range of Professional skills is presented in Section 2 of the *Skills framework for Victorian public libraries*. A total of 16 primary competency areas are listed, with six of these broken down into a number of subordinate skillsets. The scope of all 30 skill areas, with the descriptors for the areas of knowledge and skills, is outlined in the framework.

This extensive range of skills was viewed as representative of the traditional and emerging functions performed by the staff of public libraries, including both front-of-house and back-of-house activities. Importantly, there are areas of specialisation within a library service that determine individual skill requirements: not all staff in a given library service require the same levels of expertise.

The analysed data captured in the 2019 and 2013 studies is presented in terms of the most important and the least important Professional skills, the increasing and decreasing importance of specific skillsets and the value of these skills in public libraries. Attention is also paid to the perceived levels of staff confidence and the scope for development to build some of the skills.

1. Information and libraries in society
2. Information and communication technologies (ICT)
 - 2.1 ICT policy and planning processes
 - 2.2 ICT systems in the library
 - 2.3 Social media and mobile applications
3. ICT support
4. Information management
5. Information organisation and access
 - 5.1 Bibliographic records
 - 5.2 Metadata schema
 - 5.3 Lending services
6. Information seeking
7. Collection management
 - 7.1 Collection development
 - 7.2 Acquisitions
 - 7.3 Managing digital resources
 - 7.4 Collection maintenance
8. Information services
9. Literacies and learning
10. Cultural programming
11. Creative making
12. Community development
 - 12.1 Community needs analysis
 - 12.2 Community engagement
 - 12.3 Community relationships
13. Management and administration
 - 13.1 Library policy and planning
 - 13.2 Library operations
 - 13.3 Performance monitoring and evaluation
 - 13.4 Library finances
 - 13.5 Library staffing
14. Marketing
 - 14.1 Marketing the library
 - 14.2 Promoting library collections, services and programs
15. Project management
16. Generation of knowledge

The most important Professional skills

Individual survey

- Libraries in society
- Information seeking
- Information services
- Library promotion
- Lending services

Management survey

- Community needs analysis
- Libraries in society
- Lending services
- Community engagement
- Community relationships
- Collection development
- Acquisitions

In reviewing the findings, it was important to be aware of the different perspectives of respondents in the Individual and the Management surveys. In the Individual surveys, people were asked to consider the importance of the range of Professional skills for the actual role they played in the library; while in the Management surveys, respondents considered the need for the various Professional skills across the whole library service.

In the Individual survey, it was found that the Professional skills identified as the most important (Likert scale 5) in 2013 continued to be the most important skills in 2019. Greatest value was placed on the role of information and libraries in society, information seeking, information services, library promotion and lending services. These skills were all viewed as wide-ranging, with over 60% of respondents stating that they were important to their roles. The remaining Professional skills were associated with more specialised roles in the library.

The data revealed that the value of several skillsets had increased, including creative making, ICT support, libraries in society and community relationships. However, the value of other skills relating to the physical library collection had dropped: lending services, acquisitions and collection development. The most surprising

downward shifts were arguably for marketing the library and managing digital resources.

In the Management survey, the most important Professional skills for the library service as a whole, with over 60% of responses for 'extremely important' (Likert scale 5), included the role of information and libraries in society, community needs analysis, community engagement, community relationships, lending services and acquisitions. However, comparison between the data collected in the 2019 Management survey with that in the 2013 findings found a significant drop in the value placed on Professional skills by managers, with lower responses recorded in 2019 for 16 of the 25 skill areas. The greatest decreases were recorded for information seeking, ICT systems, collection development, project management and information management. Small increases in value were noted for the skills associated with acquisitions, collection maintenance, and literacies and learning.

There were no significant differences between the responses provided by the managers as representatives of Metropolitan or of Regional and Rural library services, other than for the skills relating to performance monitoring and evaluation. Managers from Metropolitan library services valued these skills far more highly than did their colleagues in Regional and Rural library services.

The skills associated with the management and administration of libraries were considered as a separate group. The skillsets included library policy and planning, library operations, performance monitoring and evaluation, library finances and library staffing. Less than one-quarter of respondents in the Individual survey identified these five skillsets as extremely important (Likert scale 5) to their role, plus a significant number indicated that these skillsets were not directly relevant to their role (Likert scale 0). Not unsurprisingly, however, library managers stated that these skills were critical for the library service itself. Over two-thirds of managers reported that the portfolio of management skills was extremely important (Likert scale 5).

The least important Professional skills

Individual survey

- Metadata
- Generation of knowledge
- Bibliographic records
- Creative making

Management survey

- Creative making
- Generation of knowledge
- Metadata
- Bibliographic records

In line with the findings in the 2013 study, it was found that views about the least important skills required by library staff were shared by respondents in both the 2019 Individual and Management surveys: creative making, generation of knowledge, metadata and bibliographic records. Respondents in the Management survey viewed the skills relating to creative making as the least important Professional skills, whereas Individual respondents regarded metadata skills as the least relevant.

Fewer than one-quarter of respondents viewed any of these skills as 'extremely important' (Likert scale 5). These findings correlated with the high number of responses recorded for the skills being 'not relevant' to an individual's role (Likert scale 0), 'not at all important' (Likert scale 1) and 'not very important' (Likert scale 2). Over half the respondents reported that these four skills were of little or no importance to their role.

Increasing importance of Professional skills

In terms of the increasing importance of the different areas of Professional skills, the data was considered from the perspective of the skillsets that respondents believed would be highly important in the future, and from the perspective of specific skills which were likely to grow in importance.

Most important skills in five years' time

Individual survey

- Libraries in society
- Information seeking
- Information services
- Library promotion
- Community needs analysis
- Community engagement
- Community relationships
- ICT support

Management survey

- Community relationships
- Community needs analysis
- Community engagement
- Literacies and learning
- Social media
- ICT support
- Information management
- Collection development
- Libraries in society

In the 2019 Individual survey, four of the five skill areas identified as the most important skills were expected to remain highly valued in the future. Library staff anticipated that, in five years' time, they would continue to rank the following skills highly: information and libraries in society, information seeking, information services and library promotion.

Individual respondents also felt there would be an increase in importance for the skills required for community needs analysis, community engagement and community relationships, as well as ICT support. In the predictions for five years ahead, these skillsets all received response rates of over 60% for 'extremely important' (Likert scale 5). It should be noted that these predictions about community development competencies introduced closer alignment with the views of respondents in the Management survey who had ranked them highly for the library services today.

In terms of the skills that would be of greatest value to the library service in the future, respondents in the Management survey considered a range

of Professional skills, including community development skills, ICT support and social media, as well as the core skills areas of information management, collection development and the role of libraries in society. Over three-quarters of respondents felt that these skillsets would be extremely important (Likert scale 5).

Significant increases in importance in five years' time

Individual survey

- Social media
- Cultural programming
- ICT policy
- Creative making
- Marketing the library

Management survey

- Social media
- Community relationships
- Literacies and learning
- Community needs analysis
- Information management

Looking to the future, significant increases in importance, coming from a relatively low ranking initially, were anticipated for social media, cultural programming, ICT policy and planning, creative making and marketing the library.

Decreasing importance of Professional skills

Individual survey

- Lending services
- Acquisitions
- Bibliographic records
- Collection maintenance

Management survey

- Lending services
- Acquisitions
- Bibliographic records

Although respondents in the 2019 Management survey were positive about the increasing

importance of many of the Professional skills, the impact of alternative models for technical services was clear. The growth of outsourcing and cross-institutional resource-sharing would mean less need for the skills required for acquisitions work, along with the skills needed for creating bibliographic records. Competencies for lending services, which represented one of the more valued skillsets at the current time, would inevitably also decline.

These sentiments were echoed by Individual respondents, who expected lending services to become less important. They anticipated a flat environment for the skills used by staff involved in acquisitions, bibliographic records and collection maintenance. Both cohorts of respondents, Management and Individuals, believed that the skills needed to help library users find information (information seeking) would plateau.

Staff confidence levels using Professional skills

High confidence

- Information seeking
- Lending services
- Libraries in society
- Collection maintenance
- Information services

Low confidence

- Metadata
- Generation of knowledge
- ICT systems
- Bibliographic records
- Managing digital resources
- Creative making

In both 2019 and 2013, five skill areas were identified where respondents had high levels of confidence (Likert scale 5): information seeking, lending services, libraries in society, collection maintenance and information services. In 2019, information seeking had overtaken lending services as the skillset with the highest level of confidence overall (Likert scale 5). However, it should be noted that, while these skills were included in the group of skills ranked as the most important currently,

there was also an expectation that their value could plateau or diminish in the future.

It was noteworthy that the levels of confidence reported by respondents in the 2019 Individual survey had increased since the 2013 study across nearly all Professional skill areas. The biggest jump in confidence (Likert scale 5) was for the role of libraries in society, followed by information management, literacies and learning, and ICT support.

Of particular interest was the rise in confidence levels relating to community development: community relationships, community needs analysis and community engagement. In 2013, it was found that a good proportion of respondents had felt underprepared or were neutral about their level of confidence for these three skills. In 2019, the data was more positive, with around two-thirds of respondents feeling 'confident' (Likert scale 4) or 'very confident' (Likert scale 5). The increase in confidence (Likert scale 5) is depicted in Figure 10.

The skills that attracted the highest response rates for the lack of relevancy (Likert scale 0) included the generation of professional knowledge, metadata, managing digital resources, acquisitions and project

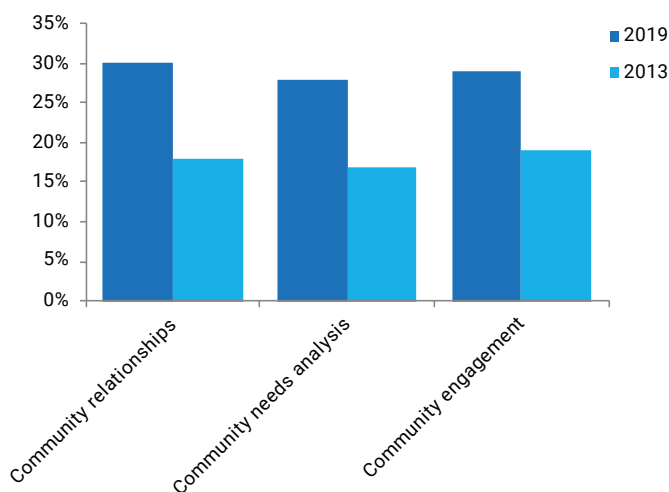
management. This group of skillsets also had high numbers of responses for 'not at all confident' (Likert scale 1) and 'not very confident' (Likert scale 2). Confidence levels were also low for ICT systems and creative making.

The value of Professional skills in public libraries

Plentiful comments about Professional skills were received, with 42% of respondents submitting ideas about how these skills might change in their role in the future. The notion of 'change' was once again the central theme in these qualitative comments. Change was ubiquitous: external factors such as technological change, societal change and demographic change would inevitably result in the need for roles in the public library to morph.

Respondents specifically acknowledged that, 'as technology advanced', library staff would be challenged by new user expectations, alternative ways of doing things in the library and the need for fresh skills. Library staff would need 'to remain relevant and up to date'. It was recognised that technological developments would allow staff to

Figure 10. Highest levels of confidence for Community development skills
Responses for 'very confident' (Likert scale 5)
Individual survey responses, 2019 & 2013



move away from manual administrative tasks, with new opportunities for interactions with library users through ‘community programming, involvement, planning, responding to community needs’. Some respondents were conscious that an increasingly online world could in fact enhance the value of the library as a physical place in the community to enable people to connect and interact with others.

As the shape of the community itself evolved through sociodemographic changes, there would be additional foci for library staff. They would need different skillsets to respond to diverse community issues. A key characteristic for future roles and skills for library staff was therefore likely to involve more community liaison activities, rather than being primarily the ‘deliverers of library resources’.

In this changing world, it would be important for the wider community to become more aware of and interested in the ways that public libraries were evolving, meaning that the skills relating to outreach, marketing, networking and community building would be in demand.

The increased focus on library users with the associated need to understand, anticipate and adapt to their expectations would bring with it the demand for skills in collecting, analysing and interpreting data to support evidence-based advocacy initiatives and to communicate the value of the library service in innovative and creative ways.

Managers firmly believed in the importance of ‘community consultation, advocacy and partnerships, and being entrepreneurial’. Some managers recognised the imperative to shift their own focus and adopt a more external perspective for their work, requiring interaction with many more units across local government than before. Significantly, managers acknowledged that they would need to have a broad and deep understanding of the relationships between the programs and services provided by the library service and the specific skillsets of their staff, emphasising that it was crucial for ‘all libraries to have access to highly qualified and well-educated staff’.

Support for the development of Professional skills

Priority areas

- Emerging digital technologies
- Community development
- Cross-organisational collaboration

One-third of respondents in the 2019 survey were eager to share their thoughts about where they believed further training and development would boost their confidence using Professional skills. The principal themes for skills development that emerged from their comments were generally aligned with the issues impacted by change: digital technologies, community development and strategies to establish partnerships and cross-organisational collaborations.

Library staff reported that they were looking for guidance to learn how to better support library users, but their own expertise needed to be developed first.

New technologies need to be better explained to staff members, particularly ones that the library users will be utilising. It is important for us to be able to assist them when they have problems, and this can be difficult when we are trying to learn the program alongside them!

While individuals recognised the increasingly diverse characteristics of the community, they were looking for support to help them build the knowledge and understanding required for the new roles that library staff were expected to play. Managers also acknowledged that it was necessary for future staff competencies to extend beyond the more routine aspects of traditional library work. As the library did not need to be the sole provider of specific services, a strategic emphasis on effective partnerships across the community would be required. In this context, strong communications skills were vital for successful collaborations, including ‘project management, report writing, grant applications, finances, event planning’.

Some respondents expressed a desire to learn more about performance monitoring and evaluation, informed advocacy and marketing strategies, which collectively encompass many of the different skillsets associated with service evaluation and continuous improvement.

Professional skills: Summary

There was a sense that the relevance of traditional Professional skills was diminishing, with some respondents expressing concerns about core LIS skills in contemporary public library services. They felt that 'professional skills, experience and qualifications in librarianship need better recognition'. The situation was seen to be fraught, with some staff feeling that they no longer had the opportunity to use the Professional skills they had acquired through study and experience. There was a degree of uncertainty about what the future might hold, given the 'de-skilling and generalising of roles and functions within public libraries in Australia'.

The ongoing relevance of formal LIS qualifications was questioned, as respondents pointed to the need for a more diverse range of skills to develop and deliver programs and services. The core business of libraries was changing, and the more multidisciplinary nature of library work should mean that libraries should 'welcome and respect individuals with a range of qualifications (e.g. social work) working alongside qualified [LIS] professionals'. In the future, 'new staff will come into the team with a different set of skills, integrating into the team'.

Different recruitment strategies would be required to accommodate 'specialist areas of expertise' and collaboration with other agencies, through 'greater relationship and partnership building with the community, organisations and businesses'. This could also offer opportunities to use more diverse skillsets. Managers also stressed that 'we need skills relevant to our communities needs and that is not necessarily Librarian skills'. They believed that non-LIS qualified staff could learn many of the Professional skills on the job.

Behavioural skills

1. Ethics and values
2. Oral communication
3. Written communication
4. Non-verbal communication
5. Customer engagement
6. Empathy
7. Teamwork
8. Leadership
9. Self-management
10. Flexibility
11. Creative thinking
12. Critical thinking
13. Problem solving
14. Political and business acumen
15. Building partnerships and alliances
16. Critical reflective practice
17. Lifelong learning
18. Mentoring and coaching
19. Professional engagement

Behavioural skills relate to an individual's intrinsic abilities to act autonomously, to deal with interpersonal relationships and to make a productive contribution in the workplace. Section 3 of the *Skills framework for Victorian public libraries* presents 19 Behavioural skills.

In the 2019 Individual survey, there was an increase in the number of respondents reporting that Behavioural skills were extremely important (Likert scale 5) in their current roles, particularly in the areas of oral communication, written communication, non-verbal communication, teamwork, problem solving, and ethics and values. The only skills that were ranked less important in 2019 were mentoring and coaching, political and business acumen, and leadership.

However, the picture was different for the managers. When considering the value of Behavioural skills to the library service, respondents rated many of the skills as being of lower importance in 2019, compared with 2013. Significant decreases in the responses were reported for 14 of the 19 Behavioural skillsets. The data revealed that, in 2019, a greater proportion

of managers held more moderate views, reporting that the skills were ‘important’ (Likert scale 4) as opposed to being ‘extremely important’ (Likert scale 5). Small increases in importance (Likert scale 5) were identified for lifelong learning, written communication, non-verbal communication and partnerships.

The most important Behavioural skills

Individual survey

- Customer engagement
- Ethics and values
- Teamwork
- Empathy
- Oral communication
- Flexibility
- Self-management

Management survey

- Customer engagement
- Ethics and values
- Empathy
- Flexibility
- Leadership
- Teamwork

In 2019, Individual respondents determined that the most important Behavioural skills in their present roles – with over three-quarters recording that they were extremely important (Likert scale 5) – included customer engagement, ethics and values, teamwork, empathy, oral communication, flexibility and self-management. These seven top skillsets were very similar to those that were rated highly in 2013.

Six skills were viewed as extremely important (Likert scale 5) by over 60% of managers: customer engagement, ethics and values, empathy, flexibility, leadership and teamwork.

The least important Behavioural skills

Individual survey

- Political and business acumen
- Partnerships
- Professional engagement
- Leadership
- Written communication

Management survey

- Professional engagement
- Political and business acumen
- Lifelong learning
- Mentoring and coaching
- Oral communication
- Self-management
- Critical reflective practice

The 2019 survey data revealed that, for Individual respondents, the five least important Behavioural skills were political and business acumen, partnerships, professional engagement, leadership and written communication.

Managers viewed professional engagement as being of the lowest significance for the library service, with less than one-third of respondents recording the skills as extremely important (Likert scale 5). Respondents also placed lower value on political and business acumen, lifelong learning, mentoring and coaching, oral communication, self-management and critical reflection.

The disparity between the views of managers in Regional and Rural library services and managers in Metropolitan library services was evident. Less than one-third of managers in regional areas believed the skills relating to professional learning (i.e. lifelong learning, mentoring and coaching, critical reflective practice and professional engagement) to be extremely important (Likert scale 5). In contrast, two-thirds of managers in urban areas placed high value on critical reflective practice and the ability to achieve personal goals, and around half believed that lifelong learning and mentoring and coaching were crucial skills for their library services.

Increasing importance of Behavioural skills

Individual survey

- Partnerships
- Creative thinking
- Political acumen
- Mentoring and coaching
- Professional engagement
- Lifelong learning
- Flexibility

Management survey

- Flexibility
- Customer engagement
- Partnerships
- Leadership
- Creative thinking
- Teamwork

As in 2013, many of the 2019 Individual survey respondents believed that the Behavioural skills which were already recognised as extremely important would continue to be important. While the value of customer engagement and empathy would remain stable, there was scope for some of the skills at the lower end of the listing to become more significant. Respondents highlighted the increasing value of partnerships, creative thinking and professional engagement. Library staff anticipated that the value of the skills associated with managing the challenges of a changing world would increase: flexibility, lifelong learning, mentoring and coaching, and professional engagement.

While respondents in the 2019 Management survey expected all Behavioural skills to increase in importance for the library service in the future, they specifically highlighted the greatly increased value of partnerships, creative thinking, political and business acumen, lifelong learning and flexibility.

Staff confidence levels using Behavioural skills

High confidence

- Ethics and values
- Customer engagement
- Empathy
- Teamwork
- Oral communication

Low confidence

- Political and business acumen
- Partnerships
- Professional engagement
- Leadership
- Critical reflective practice

Individual survey respondents were invited to indicate how confident they felt in making use of their Behavioural skills. Given the more generic nature of Behavioural skills, there were fewer responses to indicate that the diverse skills were 'not relevant to my role' (Likert scale 0), compared with the data collected for Professional skills.

Respondents in both the 2019 and 2013 Individual surveys reported that the highest levels of confidence (Likert scale 5) were associated with the skill areas of ethics and values, customer engagement, empathy and teamwork. This data could be directly correlated with the skillsets reported to be the most important Behavioural skills for Individual respondents.

The number of respondents stating that their confidence levels were high (Likert scale 5) rose from 2013 to 2019 for all Behavioural skills. The most significant increase in confidence was noted for oral communication, followed by teamwork, self-management, flexibility and problem solving. This range of skills may be described as some of the more positive characteristics of a productive workplace.

The combined data for the positive levels of confidence (Likert scales 4 and 5) for the skillsets was very positive, with very high values (96% or 97%) recorded for the skillsets of ethics and values, customer engagement, empathy and teamwork.

These skills align with the core competencies for high-quality service delivery in public libraries.

At the other end of the scale, the lack of relevancy (Likert scale 0) or low levels of importance (Likert scales 1 and 2) were noted for five skill areas: building partnerships and alliances, political and business acumen, written communication, leadership and professional engagement. The 2013 data reflected similar patterns. In these areas, therefore, it was found that confidence levels were low. It should be noted that, as this grouping of skills contributes to a stronger understanding of effective advocacy, further development to increase staff confidence will be crucial.

The value of Behavioural skills in public libraries

Respondents had the opportunity to comment about how they thought Behavioural skills might change in the future and where they would benefit from support to increase their confidence applying the skills. Behavioural skills were held in high regard, with many people believing that they were vital to the delivery of high-quality library and information services. The fact that libraries are essentially a service industry means that these skills are integral to working with customers and to interacting with colleagues.

Nevertheless, a few negative comments were received, with some respondents making reference to the culture of their workplace not being particularly happy and productive. It was felt that the lack of emphasis on the importance of positive Behavioural skills resulted in low morale. Some respondents noted that there was a personal responsibility to focus on the Behavioural skills that enabled every individual to contribute to a constructive work environment.

While respondents' comments generally affirmed the essential nature of soft skills, there was also a strong sense of their growing significance. Many comments once again considered the theme of change, noting how changes in technology, in communities and in the way people communicated impacted on library services. As the library services

themselves adjusted to this changing world, to become 'less book-orientated and more society minded', Behavioural skills would remain critical.

Changes in society resulted in a higher need for understanding about diversity in the community and empathy with those facing the challenges of homelessness, mental health issues, social isolation and marginalisation, resulting from the 'lack of technology, skills and income'. Strong leadership would be needed to support the change management processes and help staff become 'more flexible, self-reflective, resilient and more professional'.

Beyond this, changes in the way libraries operated would see an increasing need for collaboration and cooperation within and beyond the library sector, drawing on enhanced interpersonal and communication skills, the ability to build and maintain partnerships and alliances, teamwork and professional engagement.

Support for the development of Behavioural skills

Priority areas

- Partnerships and alliances
- Political and business acumen
- Communication skills
- Dealing with difficult customers

In the 2019 survey there was a balance between those respondents who felt comfortable with their Behavioural skills and accepted responsibility for continuing to grow and develop in line with the changing library environment, and those who believed that they needed support to build their skills. Key areas where training would be appreciated included the skills where people reported having low levels of confidence, especially in building partnerships and alliances and developing political and business acumen. These skills were viewed as enablers for successful collaborative activities.

There was interest in further support for the development of communication skills within a changing community context, including face-

to-face and online communication, non-verbal communication and written communication. Echoing the comments made in the 2013 survey, respondents continued to highlight the importance of training to support them when dealing with difficult customers and coping with issues such as aggression, domestic violence and substance abuse.

The development of Behavioural skills was believed to be more effective in a personal context, e.g. through mentoring and coaching strategies, with a formalised framework to provide some structure. Leadership was mentioned by a number of respondents as an area where they hoped to build their skills, often in conjunction with critical reflective practice and professional networking. A couple of people highlighted the benefits they had gained through participation in the Shared Leadership program coordinated by SLV and PLV.

Behavioural skills: Summary

Respondents' confidence levels indicated, collectively, commitment to delivering high-quality public library services and to creating a positive, constructive workplace. The theme of change was central to the respondents' perspectives on Behavioural skills. While it had been acknowledged that the portfolio of Professional skills would need to expand to encompass more advanced technological competencies and a pragmatic understanding of community development issues, very little would be achieved without strong Behavioural skills.

Nevertheless, the fact that very few managers in Regional and Rural library services placed high value on the skillsets associated with learning and development – such as lifelong learning, mentoring and coaching, critical reflective practice and professional engagement – could be construed as a red flag for some areas of the public library sector. This was regarded as 'a real challenge'. Library leaders would need to be 'courageous' with the capacity to 'create library services that can really effect change'. As powerful change agents, they will need 'strong skillsets'.

Self-reflective practice, creative and logical thinking, financial and political acumen, cultural understandings and a hunger for change and openness for collaboration... these are the necessary building blocks required for our sector.

Through leadership, teamwork and strong people skills, a work environment could be created that encouraged creative and critical thinking and built resilience and ability to adapt to change.

Hidden talents

In the 2019 Individual survey, as in the 2013 survey, respondents were invited to provide some insights, if they wished, about any 'hidden talents' they might have. While there were naturally some parallels between the responses submitted in the two studies, some new interests and skills were presented. Some respondents noted enthusiastically that 'the library staff are a creative and diverse group who have a lot of hidden talents'.

SO MANY LIBRARIANS HAVE A CREATIVE SIDE HUSTLE! Artists! Sculptors! Writers! Poets! Musicians! Calligraphers! Costume design! Street performance! Photography! Comedians! Musical theatre! Singers! And seriously that is just listing what staff do on the side at my library service! There needs to be more scope for creative outlets in library positions... Find a way to harness our creativity and we will be so much happier!

Indeed, there were many different skills and abilities shared by the respondents, encompassing business, science, environment, health, technology, communication, languages, the arts and more.

Comments about 'hidden talents' were generally positive, with respondents indicating that there were often opportunities for library staff to draw on their diverse interests and skills in library programming. Some bilingual staff reported that their language skills were put to daily use, while people who were musicians used their talents in programs designed for customers with

special needs, as well as storytime and school holiday activities. Those with skills in written communication, graphic design and photography contributed to the library through the development of resources for marketing, promotion and community development purposes. One respondent with a background in public relations and journalism reported that they used their skillsets in preparing media releases, social media marketing and relationship building.

Some respondents commented that they 'could do more in this space', if they were only given the opportunity to undertake a project or run an event that allowed them to share their expertise with the community at large, showcasing the key resources in the library collection as part of the process. Other respondents really resisted the idea of introducing their personal skills to the workplace, viewing it as 'unpaid labour', with the organisation wanting to 'own' the skills.

Analysis of the research findings: Summary

The research findings for the three categories of skills (Foundation skills, Professional skills and Behavioural skills) have been viewed through the lenses of the most important skills, the anticipated shift in importance in the future, the value of the various skillsets to public libraries, and the confidence levels of the staff applying the skills. In the 2019 survey, the responses were specifically contextualised within the notion of the changing technological, social and economic landscapes.

Respondents in both the Individual and Management surveys fundamentally believed that training and development were key factors for staff working in a successful public library service in these times of rapid change. Investment in skills development was 'appreciated by most library staff', with individuals eager for opportunities to build new competencies. However, some respondents felt that they were being sidelined in terms of professional development because of their employment arrangements. It was equally important for part-time and casual staff to 'grow their skills'.

The Behavioural skill of lifelong learning highlights the value of library staff being 'adaptable and proactive in self-educating'. Some individuals stated that they took responsibility for their own ongoing learning and professional development, e.g. through participating in informal workplace learning activities, exploring new technologies, engaging in independent learning and developing a professional learning network. Nevertheless, given the pace of change, the prospect of staying up to date was found to be daunting for some library staff who felt that they would benefit from some guidance.

There was a broad understanding that professional development did not have to involve attending face-to-face workshops, but that library staff across the state could instead participate in online learning activities. People-driven learning opportunities were particularly valued, such as 'buddy systems for workplace learning', professional networking, and mentoring and coaching.

There was a general sense that the research study was a useful initiative, specifically because of the rapidly changing environment of public library services. It was hoped that the skills audit would provide strong evidence to help identify the key needs for training and development across the state.

SECTION 4: PRIORITY SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

The context for the *Skills audit of Victorian public library sector 2019* is provided by the *Victorian Public Libraries 2030* framework. The strategic framework seeks to help the public library sector think strategically about societal trends impacting on library services, focusing on two principal concepts: the Creative Library and the Community Library. The workforce imperative ‘to develop an inclusive culture that attracts and retains people with the right skills and attitude to deliver public library products and services into the future’ (SLV, 2013, p. 9) was seen as a high priority.

The knowledge, skills and attributes needed to deliver the Creative Library and the Community Library strategies were central to the 2013 study. The disparity between library managers’ expectations for the skillsets required in the future and the statements of staff confidence levels allowed a gap analysis to be made. The evidence informed the program of workshops and training activities which were delivered over the following years to address the skills gaps and build staff capacity.

Participants in the 2019 study highlighted their awareness of the changing world in which we live and considered some of the ICT and societal trends impacting on public libraries. One respondent commented that ‘our profession is constantly changing to adapt to and incorporate new technology, demographic changes and our community needs’. As new priorities emerge for public libraries, the roles of staff will inevitably change. Some traditional LIS skills will become less relevant and there will be a demand for new skillsets.

The analysis of the 2019 survey data, with comparisons made with the 2013 data, has enabled examination of the progress made in terms of the development of the desired skillsets over the past few years. The current strengths of staff across Victorian public libraries are discussed, followed by an examination of the skills required in the strategically significant areas of the rapidly changing technology environment, the Creative Library and the Community Library.

Current strengths of public library staff

A comparison between the 2019 and 2013 datasets revealed that staff members’ levels of confidence had increased across all skill areas. Significantly, confidence had grown across nearly all 59 skillsets in the *Skills framework for Victorian public libraries: Foundation skills* (all 10 skills), *Professional skills* (28 out of 30 skills) and *Behavioural skills* (18 out of 19 skills).

In terms of the current strengths of staff, as viewed through the lens of high levels of confidence, 40% was used as a threshold figure, i.e. the focus was on the skillsets where over 40% of Individual respondents reported being very confident (Likert scale 5). The relevant data could be mapped to two Foundation skills (literacy and cultural literacy), five Professional skills (libraries in society, information services, information seeking, collection maintenance and lending services) and nine Behavioural skills (flexibility, customer engagement, teamwork, empathy, ethics and values, critical thinking, self-management, oral communication, and mentoring and coaching).

It was found that individual staff members continued to have a strong understanding of the role that libraries play in society and they had very sound experience in the ‘traditional’ services offered by the libraries, i.e. providing information services, helping customers find information, keeping the library collection in good condition and undertaking routine lending services. They also felt positive about their skills in literacy and cultural literacy.

To support the analysis of the gap between the views of managers about the future importance of these skillsets and the views of individuals about their level of confidence, the data relating to the two Foundation skills and five Professional skills is shown in the format of spidergrams. The 2019 data appears in Figure 11; the 2013 data is presented in Figure 12. The stronger levels of confidence across the spectrum of skills in 2019 are evident in the larger dark blue element in the spidergram in Figure 11 (compared with the lighter blue area for

the 2013 data in Figure 12), set against the brown areas plotted on the graphs, which depict managers' expectations about the future importance of the skillsets.

Figure 11. Current strengths of public library staff: Foundation and Professional skills
 Gap analysis – Responses for 'very important' (Likert scale 5) in five years' time in the Management survey and for 'very confident' (Likert scale 5) in the Individual survey, 2019

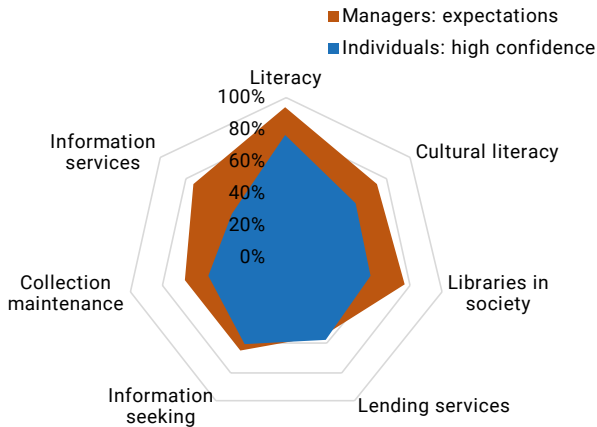
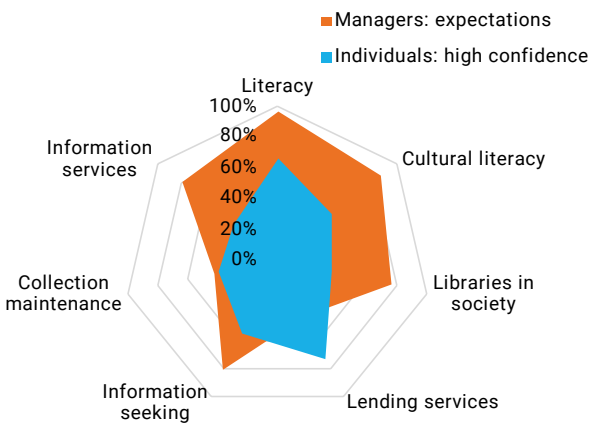


Figure 12. Current strengths of public library staff: Foundation and Professional skills
 Gap analysis – Responses for 'very important' (Likert scale 5) in five years' time in the Management survey and for 'very confident' (Likert scale 5) in the Individual survey, 2013



These images illustrate the relative correlation between the current strengths of the staff and managers' expectations for the skills needed in the library in the future. Individuals' stronger levels of confidence, as recorded in the 2019 survey, have resulted in closer alignment between the two datasets.

The analysis of Behavioural skills reveals that the respondents' ongoing strengths lie in areas where staff interact with library users, especially customer engagement, empathy, and ethics and values. A positive workplace culture continued to be evident in the responses relating to teamwork, self-management, flexibility and oral communication.

When the Behavioural skills data is presented in the form of spidergrams, the closer alignment between managers' expectations about the future importance of the skills (brown) and the levels of confidence reported by staff members (dark blue) is apparent in the 2019 image (Figure 13), compared with 2013 (Figure 14).

Figure 13. Current strengths of public library staff: Behavioural skills
 Gap analysis – Responses for 'very important' (Likert scale 5) in five years' time in the Management survey and for 'very confident' (Likert scale 5) in the Individual survey, 2019

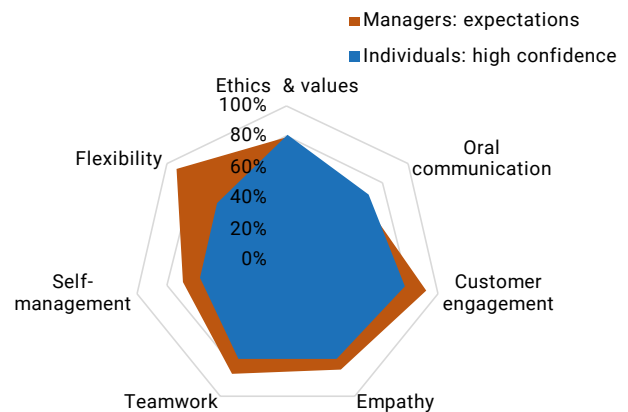
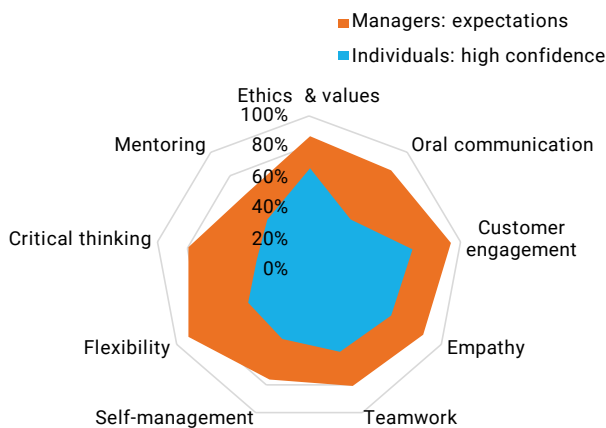


Figure 14. Current strengths of public library staff: Behavioural skills
Gap analysis – Responses for ‘very important’ (Likert scale 5) in five years’ time in the Management survey and for ‘very confident’ (Likert scale 5) in the Individual survey, 2013



The data collected in 2019 presented a picture of a workforce that continues to be confident and competent when delivering the services that have long been valued by library users. Nevertheless, the qualitative comments provided by the survey respondents underscored the rapidly changing world in which public libraries are situated: ever-evolving technologies, sociodemographic shifts in the community, economic uncertainties and environmental concerns are all impacting on the roles libraries play in society.

The earlier research report *Victorian Public Libraries: Our future, our skills* specifically examined the 2013 survey data to consider how the findings about workforce skills related to the three perspectives that were key to the strategic framework: the technology environment, the Creative Library and the Community Library. The 2019 survey data provides an opportunity to consider what progress may have been made over the intervening six years in terms of development of the skills for these contexts.

Skills for the technology environment

Victorian Public Libraries 2030 pointed to digital transformation as being one of the primary drivers for societal change: ‘technological advancements and improved access to technology continue to enable scientific breakthroughs and new social behaviours to emerge’ (SLV, 2013, p. 11). The Creative Library concept is underpinned by innovation in the design and use of technologies, while user expectations are increasingly influencing the Community Library scenario, particularly with the widening rift between the ‘digital-haves’ and the ‘digital-have-nots’ in society.

It was noted in *Victorian Public Libraries: Our future, our skills* (SLV, 2014a) that many public library managers and their staff were anxious about the fast-changing technology environment. The 2019 study revealed that these concerns remained; indeed, the ICT issues facing public libraries were perceived as ever more complex and challenging.

The ability to work productively and confidently in a technology-driven environment requires a blend of Foundation skills, Professional skills and Behavioural skills. Digital literacy was recognised as a vital Foundation skill needed by staff in an increasingly online world and respondents in both surveys anticipated that its importance would continue to grow.

Within the area of Professional skills, a range of competency areas have a technological focus: ICT policy and planning, ICT systems management, social media and mobile applications, and ICT troubleshooting and support. The fact that managers placed less value on these skills in 2019 may reflect the trend towards fewer proprietary IT systems managed in-house, replaced by more networked or cloud-based services. In the Individual survey, ICT skills were regarded as ‘specialised’: only around one-quarter of individual respondents indicated that these skill areas were extremely important to their current work profile.

Behavioural skills also come under scrutiny. An increasingly technological world would require staff to use a specific range of skills to adopt and

adapt to new developments: flexibility, creative thinking, problem solving and lifelong learning. Over three-quarters of individual staff members in both studies reported that flexibility was already a key Behavioural skill they used in their current role. In 2019, over half of the Individual respondents believed creative thinking was an extremely important part of their role, along with two-thirds who used skills in problem solving.

Individuals' levels of confidence for the suite of Foundation skills, Professional skills and Behavioural skills associated with the technological environment in public libraries were compared with managers' views on the future importance of the same skills. Once again, it must be stressed that some of the skills, such as ICT policy and planning and ICT systems, were considered highly specialised. While they potentially play a defining role for the library service as a whole, not all individual staff would require these professional competencies. However, the increasing demand for digital literacy as a Foundation skill and for flexibility as a Behavioural skill for all staff should not be ignored.

The disparities between managers' expectations for the future importance (Likert scale 5) of the different skill areas and the number of staff who stated that they felt very confident (Likert scale 5) about using these skills in their current role were evident. In 2019, as in 2013, relatively strong levels of confidence were recorded by library staff for the Behavioural skills, but they were clearly much lower for the group of Professional skills. The increase in the levels of confidence reported by Individual respondents was evident. The number of respondents declaring they were very confident (Likert scale 5) increased sharply for digital literacy, ICT support, flexibility and lifelong learning.

The stronger levels of individual confidence across the spectrum of skills in 2019 are evident in the expanded blue area in Figure 15. The predicted increase in importance (managers) and the higher levels of confidence (individuals) are noticeable for the skills of lifelong learning in 2019, compared with 2013 (Figure 16).

Figure 15. Skills required for the technology environment
Gap analysis – Responses for 'very important' (Likert scale 5) in five years' time in the Management survey and for 'very confident' (Likert scale 5) in the Individual survey, 2019

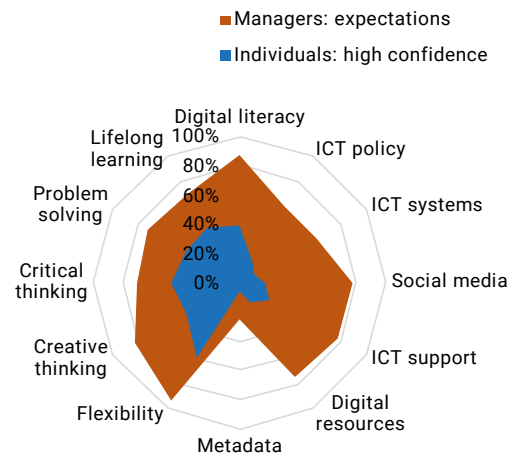
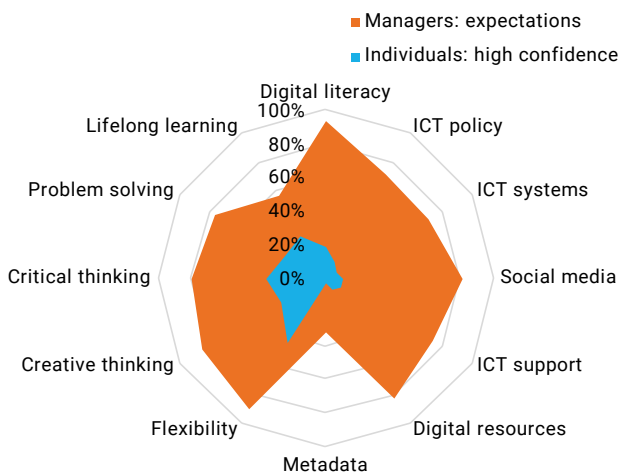


Figure 16. Skills required for the technology environment
Gap analysis – Responses for 'very important' (Likert scale 5) in five years' time in the Management survey and for 'very confident' (Likert scale 5) in the Individual survey, 2013

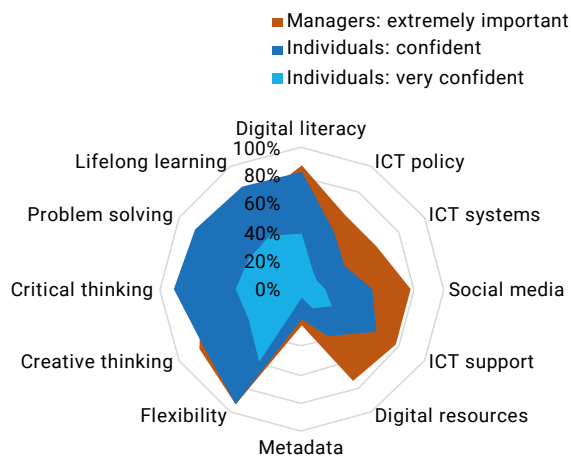


A more granular view of individuals' levels of confidence is gained by considering the responses for 'very confident' (Likert scale 5), as well as the combined responses for 'very confident' (Likert scale 5) and 'confident' (Likert scale 4).

Figure 17 presents the skills required for the technology environment: managers' expectations for future skills requirements for the library (brown) are contrasted with the aggregated responses for 'confident' (Likert scale 4) and 'very confident' (Likert scale 5) (light blue), as well as the specific data for 'very confident' (Likert scale 5) (dark blue).

Figure 17. Skills required for the technology environment

Gap analysis – Responses for 'very important' (Likert scale 5) in five years' time in the Management survey, for combined 'confident' (Likert scale 4) and 'very confident' (Likert scale 5), and for 'very confident' (Likert scale 5) in the Individual survey, 2019



The graph shows that there is a small kernel of staff who are very confident, plus a broader distribution of confidence across the library workforce. It also shows that, in the context of the technological environment, individuals' Behavioural and Foundation skills are far more developed than their Professional skills. In the narrative comments, respondents highlighted ICT support as a service that was in high demand across the public library sector: this skillset stands out as one area where

staff confidence levels were strong (Likert scales 4 and 5).

For the skills of critical thinking, problem solving and lifelong learning, the area of light blue (Individual survey data, Likert scales 4 and 5) extends beyond the brown area (Management data, Likert scale 5). This implies that respondents' levels of confidence exceed managers' expectations about the future importance of the skills within the context of the library service.

The positive scores captured for the combined responses of 'confident' (Likert scale 4) and 'very confident' (Likert scale 5) for digital literacy, lifelong learning, critical thinking and flexibility augur well for the future. Opportunities for learning new skills in the digital world include independent learning activities and informal knowledge exchange in the workplace, as well as targeted workshops or online courses. While considerable progress has been made in recent years in terms of upskilling, ongoing training and development activities will further extend the range of digital skills and continue to raise the levels of staff confidence. This was stressed in the plentiful comments about the need for support to build digital skills.

Skills for the Creative Library

The concept of the Creative Library, as outlined in *Victorian Public Libraries 2030*, sees public library staff stepping into new roles as 'facilitators of creative development, expression and collaboration' (SLV, 2013, p. 21). The public library is described as an active learning centre for members of the community, where digital technologies support artistic creation, innovation and collaborative processes. In addition to the technology skills that underpin the creation of digital resources in a range of media formats, library staff are required to use a wide range of skillsets to coordinate and support creative and collaborative activities within the library and across different stakeholder groups.

The skills relevant to the Creative Library can be mapped to all three domains of the *Skills framework for Victorian public libraries*, including Foundation skills (digital literacy and cultural

literacy), Professional skills (cultural programming, creative making, and literacies and learning) and Behavioural skills (creative thinking, problem solving, customer engagement, building partnerships and alliances, and lifelong learning). Beyond this, other Professional skills should not be overlooked when endeavouring to encourage and support creative practices in the library, e.g. having a clear understanding of the ICT environment, management of digital resources, information services, project management, marketing and promotion.

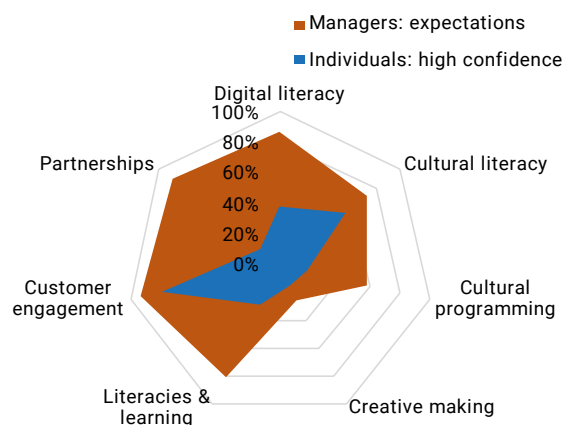
The range of Professional skills central to the Creative Library concept were underpinned by expertise using the various technologies that support discovery, learning, creativity and innovation. In order to interact productively with library users, cultural programming was viewed as a key skillset. Around one-third of individual respondents reported that this was extremely important (Likert scale 5) to their current role, which aligned with the figure for managers' thoughts about the value of the skills for the library service.

The different responses provided by the managers of Metropolitan library services and the managers of Regional and Rural library services were evident. Over half the respondents from Metropolitan libraries believed the skills in cultural programming would be extremely important (Likert scale 5) in the future, compared with less than one-fifth of managers in Regional and Rural libraries. Similarly, the value of the skills relating to literacies and learning was much higher in urban areas than in regional locations.

Library staff did not relate as positively as their managers to the skills associated with the process of building and sustaining partnerships and alliances with external agencies. One-third of individual respondents indicated that these skills were significant to their present role, while around half of the library managers emphasised the value of these skills to the library service. There was a clear sense that these skills would grow in importance in the years ahead.

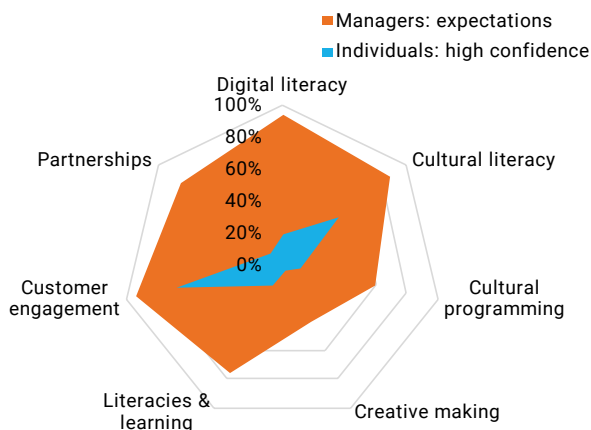
Managers' expectations about the future importance of the skillsets that were key to the Creative Library concept were compared with staff confidence levels applying the skillsets. The high levels of confidence recorded for customer engagement and cultural literacy contrasted strongly with the lower levels of confidence recorded for the areas of literacies and learning, cultural programming, creative making and building relationships and alliances. The datasets are presented as spidergrams to highlight the subtle changes between 2019 (Figure 18) and 2013 (Figure 19).

Figure 18. Skills for the Creative Library Gap analysis – Responses for 'very important' (Likert scale 5) in five years' time in the Management survey and for 'very confident' (Likert scale 5) in the Individual survey, 2019



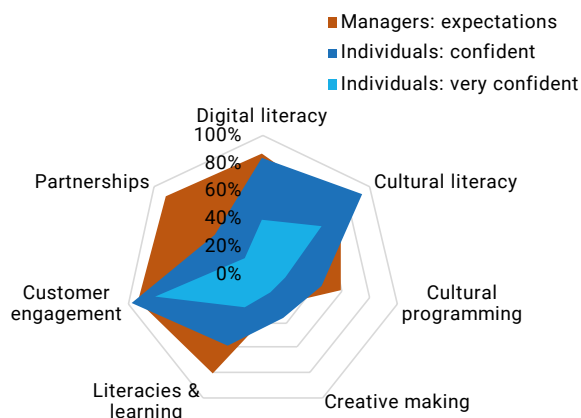
While the increase in individual confidence levels can be noted in the larger area of blue plotted on the graph in Figure 18, there was still only a relatively small degree of alignment with the managers' views about the future Creative Library. The stronger levels of confidence for customer engagement and cultural literacy are apparent, but these stand in contrast to the skills relating to partnerships, cultural programming and creative making. It appears that library staff could demonstrate their understanding of the cultural dimensions of the community, but had, as yet, little practical experience in planning and running creative programs.

Figure 19. Skills for the Creative Library
Gap analysis – Responses for ‘very important’ (Likert scale 5) in five years’ time in the Management survey and for ‘very confident’ (Likert scale 5) in the Individual survey, 2013



In Figure 20, the 2019 data is reflected in the managers’ expectations of this group of skills for the future, compared with the two sets of confidence data: high levels of confidence (Likert scale 5) (dark blue) and the aggregated levels of ‘confident’ (Likert scale 4) and ‘very confident’ (Likert scale 5) (light blue).

Figure 20. Skills required for the Creative Library
Gap analysis – Responses for ‘very important’ (Likert scale 5) in five years’ time in the Management survey, for combined ‘confident’ (Likert scale 4) and ‘very confident’ (Likert scale 5), and for ‘very confident’ (Likert scale 5) in the Individual survey, 2019



The combined datasets from the Individual survey indicated that confidence levels are extremely high across the public library sector for customer engagement and cultural literacy. The data also demonstrated that library staff would benefit from further training and development in the areas of literacies and learning, cultural programming and creative making. Further encouragement should be given to help people better understand how to build and maintain partnerships, drawing on connections within and across the community.

Skills for the Community Library

The Victorian public library sector is committed to the notion of the Community Library, as outlined in *Victorian Public Libraries 2030*. The Community Library has been referred to as ‘a learning village’ (SLV, 2013, p. 25): public libraries represent learning hubs where staff facilitate the gathering and sharing of knowledge and resources about the historical and sociocultural dimensions of the local community.

The essential competencies for staff working in the Community Library can be mapped to the three areas of the *Skills framework for Victorian public libraries*. Local awareness is a critical Foundation skill, along with the various 21st century literacies – including political literacy, financial and economic literacy, health literacy and environmental literacy – as they specifically pertain to the individual’s immediate community setting.

The most significant Professional skills are those that underpin community development, i.e. community needs analysis, community engagement and community relationships. Staff require knowledge about sociodemographic data collection and analysis, as well as the sensitive understanding of the issues associated with social and economic marginalisation. The ability to establish collaborations with other community groups and volunteers is linked to the Behavioural skillset of building and maintaining partnerships and alliances. Skills in political and business acumen enable constructive initiatives to be contextualised within and tailored to the local environment.

In the 2019 study, over half the respondents in the Individual survey indicated that local awareness was extremely important (Likert scale 5) to their current role. The figure for managers was similar, with half the respondents recognising the high value of the skillset. There was far greater conviction about the significance of the skillset, as noted by three-quarters of the managers of Metropolitan library services compared with just over one-third of the managers of Regional and Rural library services. However, this contrasted with the 2013 findings, when three-quarters of the managers of Regional and Rural library services rated local awareness skills as extremely important for their service.

The importance of financial literacy, environmental literacy, health literacy and political literacy was also examined. The pattern of distinctive perspectives presented by the Metropolitan library managers and the Regional and Rural library managers was again apparent. While the collective data showed that half the managers valued political literacy, the skillset was very important for 85% of urban managers, compared with 44% of regional managers. Similar ratios were evident in the data for health literacy and environmental literacy. There was an expectation that the skills relating to all four 21st century literacies would increase in importance in the future, with environmental literacy likely to increase the most (+29%).

Little difference was noted between the 2019 and 2013 Individual surveys in terms of responses for the three community development skillsets: around one-half of the respondents reported that the skills were already very important in their role, anticipating slightly higher levels of importance in the future. In the two Management surveys, around two-thirds of managers rated the skills as extremely important (Likert scale 5). Managers acknowledged that these areas were likely to become far more relevant to future library services, scoring 94% for skills in community needs analysis and community relationships, and 87% for community engagement.

In the context of skills for the Community Library scenario, around one-third of respondents in the 2019 Individual survey believed that the skills associated with building partnerships and alliances

and political and business acumen were the least relevant Behavioural skills in their current roles. Just over half the managers stated that skills in building partnerships and alliances were of high importance for the library service, with their future importance to rise significantly. There was no notable difference between the views of managers in Metropolitan libraries and those in Regional and Rural services.

The divergent perspectives of these two groups of managers came back into play, however, when the datasets relating to political and business acumen were examined. Collectively, 39% of respondents viewed the skillset as extremely important (Likert scale 5). However, it was found that only 13% of the managers of Regional and Rural services placed high value on these skills, compared with 69% of managers of Metropolitan services. The different viewpoints were also noted in their expectations for the future: 92% of Metropolitan library managers believed that the political and business skills would be extremely important in five years' time compared with 60% for Regional and Rural library managers.

The Community Library concept embraces a mix of skills drawn from the Foundation skills (local awareness, political literacy, financial literacy, health literacy and environmental literacy); Professional skills (community needs analysis, community engagement and community relationships); and Behavioural skills (building partnerships and alliances, and political and business acumen). Once again, the future importance of these ten skills, as determined by the managers, was contrasted with individuals' current levels of confidence.

Managers placed very high value on the three Professional skills associated with community development (community needs analysis, community engagement and community relationships), as well as the Behavioural skills of building and maintaining partnerships and political and business acumen. However, while the number of individual respondents reporting high levels of confidence (Likert scale 5) had increased since 2013, the figure was still relatively low.

Around one-third of respondents felt very confident (Likert scale 5) about applying the skills that reflected an understanding of the immediate community context (local awareness, community needs analysis, community engagement and community relationships). Much lower levels of confidence were associated with understanding the political and business environment in which the library operates and how to build partnerships and alliances.

The emerging roles that public libraries can play in building stronger communities will require the wider range of literacies to be able to understand and interpret community issues. Managers placed less importance on these skillsets, and confidence levels were also relatively low. The views presented by managers in the 2019 survey (Figure 21) were generally consistent with the 2013 data (Figure 22), although greater emphasis was placed on the value of political literacy in the current study.

Figure 21. Skills for the Community Library Gap analysis – Responses for ‘very important’ (Likert scale 5) in five years’ time in the Management survey and for ‘very confident’ (Likert scale 5) in the Individual survey, 2019

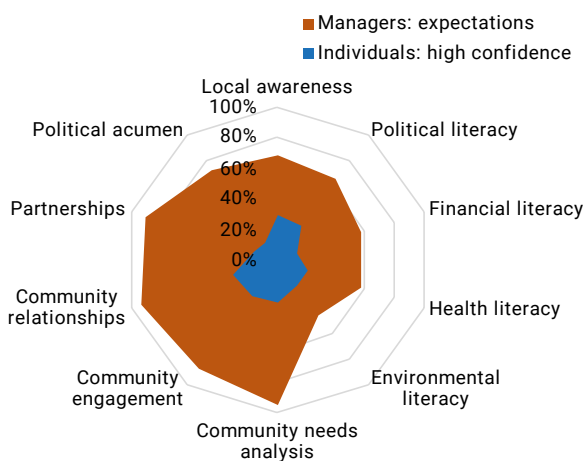
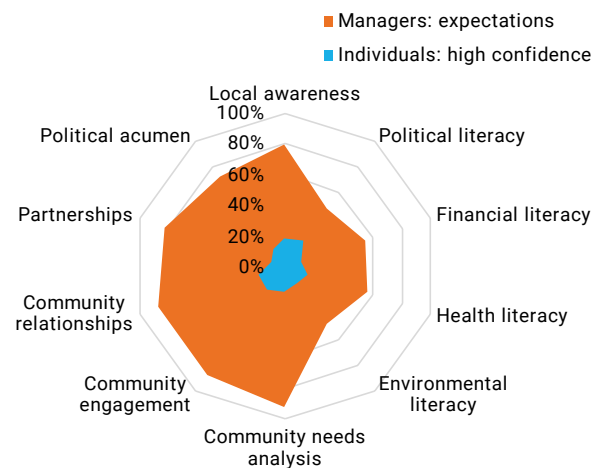
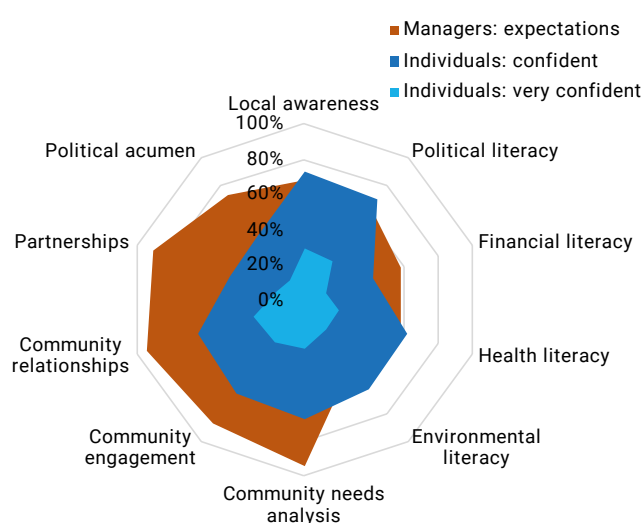


Figure 22. Skills for the Community Library Gap analysis – Responses for ‘very important’ (Likert scale 5) in five years’ time in the Management survey and for ‘very confident’ (Likert scale 5) in the Individual survey, 2013



While the low levels of individual confidence for the skillsets that underpin the delivery of quality services and programs in the Community Library were particularly noticeable in 2013, the picture was a little more positive in 2019. When the individual responses for ‘confident’ (Likert scale 4) and ‘very confident’ (Likert scale 5) are combined (Figure 23), there is a broader sphere of confidence (light blue) which extends beyond the kernel of high confidence (dark blue).

Figure 23. Skills required for the Community Library
 Gap analysis – Responses for ‘very important’ (Likert scale 5) in five years’ time in the Management survey, for combined ‘confident’ (Likert scale 4) and ‘very confident’ (Likert scale 5), and for ‘very confident’ (Likert scale 5) in the Individual survey, 2019



In the free text comments, many individual respondents stated that they would benefit from training and development in the areas of community needs analysis, community engagement and community relationships. Public libraries represent just one player in the community development space, so there was also interest in developing skills in identifying potential partners to support collaborations with other stakeholders in the council and with a wider group of local organisations.

Strategies for the future

The recent review of the *Victorian Public Libraries 2030* framework affirmed the vision of the Creative Library and the Community Library, but also recognised that the environments in which public libraries operated were changing. It was acknowledged that ongoing digital developments and shifting user expectations would have a major impact on the sector’s ability to plan and

deliver relevant programs and services. It would be important for public libraries to benefit from appropriate investment in technological infrastructure so that the evolving opportunities for the Creative Library and Community Library scenarios could be realised, particularly to facilitate creativity and collaboration in the communities served by the libraries.

Victorian Public Libraries: Our future, our skills identified the priority areas for skills development. The report informed the Workforce Development Action Plan, which guided the statewide training program for the key areas of digital literacy, library programming and partnerships.

The technology environment

A grant to support training in digital literacy stimulated the development of the *Jump Start* learning program. An online course was made available to library staff (Bands 3–6) across the state to help them develop digital literacy skills, to increase their confidence in applying the skills and to enhance their capacity to learn in a dynamic environment. The online learning context helped build practical skills in working with digital information, using social media and participating in discussion forums.

The *Jump Start* program was well received and has undoubtedly contributed to the increase in the levels of confidence recorded by staff for digital literacy (+20%), ICT support (+13%) and social media (+6%). Respondents in the 2019 surveys acknowledged that the increasing pace of technological developments meant the goal posts were constantly moving, challenging staff to keep their own knowledge and skills current, to introduce innovative digital services within the library and to provide ICT support to library users. The ongoing development of digital skills should remain a priority for future staff development activities.

As cloud-based and networked technologies become more commonplace, including in libraries, the skillsets associated with ICT policy and planning, ICT systems management, social media and mobile applications are likely to become less specialised.

Public library services would therefore benefit from a broader range of staff becoming involved in digital programming.

The award of the 2018 Margery C Ramsay Scholarship for a project that examined best practice in virtual and augmented reality technologies and their potential application in libraries represents a valuable example of broadening the skills base. It is essential that the project outcomes are disseminated widely and that the expertise attained through the project is shared with peers. Investment in innovative project work represents a focused way of building staff expertise across the public library sector. Funding opportunities through grants and scholarships have the potential to encourage library staff to take responsibility for their learning and to develop professional communities of practice.

The Creative Library

The objectives of the Creative Library are underpinned by digital skills. A toolkit to support the planning and implementation of creative spaces was created and a series of Creative Libraries workshops was held across the state to explore strategies that would enable staff to develop greater awareness and understanding about the roles the public library sector could play in the creative economy.

Skills are needed in facilitating content creation, supporting arts studios and collaborative work spaces, and understanding and applying insights from brain science. These skills already exist within public libraries but have been overshadowed by a focus on what are currently seen as core library competencies. If Victorian public libraries want to continue to expand their role as creative incubators, these cultural skill sets need to be made explicit and actively fostered. (SLV, 2014b, p. 67)

The findings from the 2019 skills survey indicated that many public library staff valued the cultural dimensions of their communities, but they had

little experience in planning and running creative programs. This resulted in the low levels of confidence reported for the practical dimensions of cultural programming and creative making. *Creative Communities: The cultural benefits of Victorian public libraries* (SLV, 2014b) presented several case studies to illustrate examples of good practice in different libraries, but some of the challenges were also highlighted.

As the research study revealed that many public library staff already have ‘hidden talents’, especially creative talents, there is the potential for cultural programming to move into untapped areas of creativity. The 2017 Barrett Reid Scholarship was awarded for a project that investigated the application of design thinking methodologies within public libraries. The outputs from the project, a design thinking toolkit and a series of workshops to help people understand how to work with the toolkit, have the ongoing potential to encourage library staff to adopt new and creative ways of engaging with users.

PLV has noted that ‘new library spaces, technologies, skillsets and service models have enabled contemporary libraries to stimulate hybrid forms of social or participatory creativity’ (PLVN, 2015). Importantly, public libraries can benefit from partnering with other agencies to extend their reach. A seminar was run to teach staff how to create effective partnerships to support creativity in the community and a series of workshops on partnership development were held in different venues. The more recent involvement of SLV with Victoria’s *Creative State* strategy through initiatives such as Smart Space and Foundry658 has seen library staff interacting with a range of people across the creative industry sector.

The Community Library

The notion of public libraries being at the heart of the community is central to the vision for the Community Library. Over the past few years, a number of Workforce Development projects have enabled libraries to work to their strengths in supporting the development of skills and expertise among different sections of the community. In

particular, the strategic focus on literacy and reader development, underpinned by the *Reading and literacy for all* framework, has been valuable. Training programs and toolkits have been developed to support library staff in the design, planning, delivery and evaluation of early childhood programs, adult literacy activities, and initiatives tailored for culturally and socially diverse groups in the community. These activities emphasise the importance of recognising and interpreting the specific community characteristics.

The findings of the 2019 skills survey revealed the disparity between managers' expectations about the importance of community development skills (around 90%) and the levels of staff confidence in using these skills (around 30%). It was found that staff required a better understanding of the practical strategies involved in undertaking community needs analysis, including the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. The qualitative comments provided by participants clearly indicated that they could relate to the 'what' and the 'why' for community development activities, but were lacking the expertise required to translate the 'how', 'where', 'when' and 'who' into action. Increased practical knowledge in these areas would facilitate opportunities for more effective community engagement and more productive community relationships.

The impact of economic, demographic and technological change leading to feelings of social displacement have stimulated 'the desire to reconnect with the local community' (SLV, 2013, p. 5). The 2019 skills study emphasises that, rather than working independently, library staff should be actively engaged in the community debate and ready to work with professionals from other disciplines in the community development space. It is essential that public libraries partner productively with other agencies to offer collaborative programs designed to build strong communities. While survey respondents confirmed that the value of skills relating to building partnerships and alliances was increasing, staff confidence levels in this area remained low. A holistic approach to upskilling library staff to work constructively with other organisations to achieve the vision of the

Community Library should be considered. There is the potential to model community relationship processes by working with allied agencies to deliver cross-sector training activities.

Health and wellbeing

The comments provided by respondents in the 2019 survey emphasised their desire for better skills to work with people with special needs, including those suffering from anxiety, depression, dementia, physical disabilities and drug dependency. Staff would need to draw on their skills in health literacy to gain a deeper understanding of how personal and community choices impacted on health and wellbeing, and how to locate and interpret evidence-based information on health issues. The demand for skills in this area was growing, but staff confidence levels were low. One respondent commented that she felt confident in accessing health information for herself, but she was less confident in navigating the health system and community support services to assist others.

There is a growing awareness about the importance of good health and wellbeing in Australian society. Public libraries are well-positioned to offer safe, inclusive spaces where visitors can access trustworthy information resources, and to build connections with other support agencies to develop community-centred programs and services. The Workforce Development proposal for the *Libraries for Health and Wellbeing* program is topical and timely: library staff will welcome the opportunity to develop their skills in developing and delivering initiatives to support health and wellbeing in the community.

Advocacy

Respondents in the 2013 study reported that they wanted to build their skills in advocacy in order to help key stakeholders – as well as the public in general – recognise and appreciate the roles libraries play in building stronger and healthier communities. Successful advocacy draws on a complex mix of skillsets, including the role of libraries in society, local awareness, community development, financial literacy,

political and business acumen, partnerships and alliances, evidence-based practice and effective communication skills.

The *Advocate* program has supported skills development through seminars and workshops across the state, especially in the area of oral and written communication: presenting with confidence, working with the media, grant writing and business storytelling. These activities were run alongside other community-focused initiatives such as *Reading and literacy for all*, *Libraries Change Lives* and *Libraries Work!* The *Share your Stories with the World* project presents evidence to local government about the roles played by libraries to support the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Skills in advocacy have value beyond the senior management team. Public library staff have been encouraged to undertake the online training program *Advocacy for Libraries*, which specifically seeks to develop skills in identifying and engaging stakeholder groups, creating and evaluating an advocacy campaign, and managing different channels of communication. Discussion groups provide a collaborative aspect to the program to encourage knowledge sharing and networking. Advocacy activities are continual: issues evolve, new government policies are introduced, the stakeholder mix changes... A dynamic training program is required to encourage library staff to see every interaction with members of the community as the opportunity for an 'advocacy moment'.

Learning and development

The 2019 skills audit revealed that while staff confidence levels for literacies and learning had increased, there was room for further development. The scope of this skillset includes understanding formal and informal learning approaches and designing learning programs that stimulate and engage learners. While the focus has generally been on running learning activities for different groups of library users, these same skills can help foster a positive culture of learning for staff working in the public library sector itself.

The *Shared Leadership Program* is an example of a successful initiative that encourages cross-institutional interaction and knowledge exchange. Aimed at the development of leadership and teamwork skills, the program is open to all library staff. The philosophy of shared leadership considers the value of self-awareness, critical reflective practice, peer networks and mentoring within the context of change management. Participants work in teams to undertake a collaborative action learning project that focuses on an issue of strategic importance to Victorian public libraries.

It is unclear how the learnings from the projects are shared within and beyond the teams' own contexts, but the topics of recent projects relate to areas where respondents had indicated that professional development would contribute to higher levels of confidence, e.g. establishing learning communities, creating community connectedness, navigating online government services, designing engaging information services and building community partnerships. Webinars and podcasts on topics such as these would help increase awareness and interest in emerging practice, particularly in Regional and Rural library services where access to face-to-face training events is more limited.

To build capacity, the public library sector must take advantage of opportunities to transfer knowledge and skills to a wider cohort of library staff. The value of library staff working together to encourage each other's learning, e.g. through communities of practice or personal learning networks (PLN), should be encouraged. In the past, SLV has been involved in supporting PLNs within the wider education community; there is certainly potential for the strategy to be used as a cross-organisational approach to learning. One respondent emphasised the need for 'developing co-operative work teams, accessing mentoring opportunities, more networking opportunities between library services and ongoing peer observation'. Mentoring and coaching were recognised as effective ways 'to inspire through vision and innovative thinking'.

Summary

The key role played by staff in shaping public library services in the future is underscored in the *Victorian Public Libraries 2030* framework. Staff members already have a clear understanding of the core business of public libraries, with close alignment noted between managers' expectations for future skills and individuals' high levels of confidence. This confident and competent workforce provides programs and services that are valued by the public. Respondents were aware, however, that the changing world would impact on future service delivery, and therefore also on their skills. The rapid pace of technological change was identified as one of the biggest challenges. There had been a positive rise in levels of confidence, but as ICT issues became increasingly complex, ongoing training would be required.

Digital skills, cultural programming, and literacies and learning were identified as being important for the concept of the Creative Library, but greater value was placed on these skills by managers in urban areas than by those in regional locations. It was found that staff were aware of community expectations for cultural activities and creative spaces, but that they were lacking experience in the development of content or the facilitation of programs.

Staff were also sensitive to the social, economic and health issues affecting many members of the community. They were aware of the emerging roles they could play in helping to build stronger communities but felt that they lacked confidence in analysing and interpreting community needs and building the required cross-agency relationships. Respondents believed that they would benefit from training in all aspects of community development work, with particular emphasis placed on the skills needed to support health and wellbeing.

Outcomes from the Workforce Development Action Plan included the range of learning activities which had supported skills development, e.g. the *Jump Start* program to build digital skills and the *Reading and literacy for all* initiatives. Action learning projects represented key elements of the *Shared*

Leadership Program, while scholarships and grants stimulated interest in new and innovative ideas. Sector-wide dissemination of the project outcomes was important to extend the reach of learning to wider communities of practice. Research participants acknowledged the value of projects such as the skills audit to help the sector plan strategically for the future.

SECTION 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Investing in staff is the only way to build a resilient organisational culture that is able and willing to embrace the continuous change required of a responsive contemporary learning organisation. (Sindel, 2014, p. 145)

Undoubtedly, public library staff represent the sector's most valuable resource. In a rapidly changing world, community dynamics are pressing library staff to reflect on their current professional responsibilities and challenging them to redefine their future. In Victoria, the approach has been to think broadly about what changes might take place in society so that public libraries might not only stay relevant, but also play a transformative role within the community. The vision presented in the *Victorian Public Libraries 2030* framework will continue to guide the strategic priorities of the Creative Library and the Community Library.

Over the past few years, the Statewide Public Library Development Projects coordinated by SLV and PLV have contributed significantly to the upskilling of library staff through a range of training and development opportunities, including conferences, seminars, workshops and online learning activities. The findings from the *Skills audit of Victorian public library sector 2019* have revealed the positive impacts of these development programs, with an increase in staff confidence recorded for all but two of the Foundation, Professional and Behavioural skillsets.

When the data relating to managers' expectations for the importance of specific skills in the future was compared with staff confidence levels, it was found that the skills gaps identified in the earlier study were reducing. Nevertheless, as public libraries continued to follow the strategic directions of the Creative Library and the Community Library, staff would benefit from further training and development. The disparity between the views of managers of Metropolitan library services and those in Regional and Rural areas about the importance of specific skillsets demonstrated that there were different priorities in different geographical areas of the state.

The analysis of the areas where confidence levels were high painted an encouraging picture: public library staff demonstrated their commitment to the core values of the profession and had a mature understanding of the mission and purpose of public libraries in society. There was no room for complacency, however: library staff were very conscious of the changing world around them. The theme of change was woven through the many comments provided in the 2019 skills audit, revealing that respondents' thoughts were aligned with the sector's insights into societal trends, characterised by the rapidly changing technological, social and economic landscape.

In an increasingly online world, digital literacy was identified as a major skills gap in 2013. The steep increase in confidence for these skills recorded in the 2019 study highlighted the positive outcomes achieved by statewide training programs such as *Jump Start*. Nevertheless, the pace of technological developments is not slowing, so digital skills development continues to be a priority.

The staff development programs that focused on reading and literacy in the community were well received. Confidence levels associated with literacy skills, cultural literacy and customer engagement were already high in 2013, but they have continued to increase. The concept of the successful Creative Library also requires strong skills in cultural programming and literacies and learning. Some training activities to support the management of creative communities resulted in slightly higher confidence levels, but there is room for additional targeted programs, particularly to upskill staff to become effective facilitators of learning in the community.

Library staff were very aware of the principles of community development, acknowledging the expanded roles that public libraries could play. Individual respondents indicated that they needed help to translate theory into practice, so that they could become active participants in community needs analysis and contribute their knowledge to the development of appropriate community programs. They recognised that it was not feasible for public libraries to operate autonomously in this

area, pointing to the need for skills development to support community connection through their abilities to initiate and sustain meaningful partnerships. For many library staff, collaboration with other support agencies represented a move out of their comfort zone, as evidenced by the current low levels of confidence.

Many of the qualitative comments submitted in the survey focused on respondents' deep concerns about health issues in the community and the associated increase in the demand for informative programming around positive health and wellbeing. Staff admitted that their confidence levels for health literacy were low. As this area of activity also required the capacity to work with other support organisations, skills in building alliances and partnerships were again requested. A practical grasp of community development work was vital, as well as understanding effective advocacy strategies to explain and promote the positive contributions public libraries can and do make to a healthy community.

Over the past few years, the Lead and Learn Workgroup has gained a wealth of experience in planning, implementing and evaluating staff development activities that address the skills gaps identified in the 2013 data. Evidence of the workgroup's achievements is shown in the increasing levels of skills and confidence outlined in this report. It is hoped that the findings from the research project will stimulate dialogue across the public library sector and inform the future directions for a program of staff development and training designed to support the strategic vision. Sindel (2014, p. 151) emphasised the connections between staff development, organisational culture, and individual flexibility and resilience in changing times: 'An overarching culture of valuing learning and ongoing development contributes to the attitude and the capacity of staff to embrace new challenges'.

Digital technologies offer opportunities for independent learning and group learning, with support through PLNs and communities of practice. Staff development activities run in face-to-face and online modes will not only foster a wider

understanding of the value of different formats for training and development, but also help emphasise the importance of continuous learning across the public library sector. As a profession, the imperative for career-long learning is in the spotlight, and ALIA introduced a formal ongoing professional development requirement for members of the Association in July 2020.

In the area of workforce planning, dissemination of the research findings will help a wider audience comprehend the rich portfolio of skills required by public library staff to achieve the sector's strategic goals. The demographic profile of the workforce reveals a high proportion of older workers. As they transition to retirement, a different cohort of professionals will enter the sector, bringing with them a fresh worldview and a different range of values and interests. Library managers can use the *Skills framework* to evaluate current staffing structures, review position descriptions and envisage future recruitment requirements so that the staff are all 'well-trained, experienced and valued' (SLV, 2013a, p. 1).

This report concludes with three commendations to recognise good practice and a series of recommendations to guide future strategic and operational activities to support the development of a highly skilled and engaged public library workforce across Victoria. The focus of the Commendations and Recommendations reaffirms the tenets of *Victorian Public Libraries: Our future, our skills* (SLV, 2014a).

Commendations

The Lead and Learn Workgroup of State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria is commended for driving and supporting the *Skills audit of Victorian public library sector 2019* research project to examine workforce skills and to foster a wider understanding of the importance of skills and competencies in the public library sector.

The Lead and Learn Workgroup of State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria is commended for their commitment to developing the Workforce Development Action Plan to guide the statewide

staff development programs, including the *Shared Leadership*, *Jump Start* and *Advocate* programs.

The Lead and Learn Workgroup of State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria is commended for coordinating the Margery C Ramsay and Barrett Reid Scholarship programs to inspire Victorian public library staff to extend their professional learning.

Recommendations

1. State Library Victoria and Public Libraries Victoria, through the Lead and Learn Workgroup, develop a set of priorities to ensure that the Victorian public library sector is well positioned for the delivery of future-focused programs and services. These may include:
 - disseminating the research findings from the *Skills audit of Victorian public library sector 2019* project to its constituents
 - developing and conducting a workshop for Victorian public library service managers to explore and share understandings about the workforce skills, knowledge and confidence required to achieve the vision of the *Victorian Public Libraries 2030: Strategic framework*
 - establishing a set of measurable and achievable key performance indicators for staff development in the public library sector, to be monitored and evaluated through appropriate metrics
 - liaising with other national and state bodies in the public library sector to engage with the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) *Future of LIS Education* agenda to ensure the sector's commitment to a sustainable and evolving library and information workforce.
2. A training and development framework developed for Victorian public libraries:
 - to define and establish a staff development program that is aligned with the public library sector's strategic direction and priorities
 - to develop a program of collaborative and participative staff training activities, structured around key themes or streams, e.g. technology environment, Creative Library, Community Library, health and wellbeing, and advocacy
 - to continue using elearning activities to extend the reach of training and development, e.g. facilitated (group) programs and independent (individual) learning
 - to develop strategies to encourage and support knowledge exchange across and between library services, e.g. staff exchanges, job swaps, mentoring and personal learning networks.
3. The *Skills framework* developed for the *Skills audit of Victorian public library sector 2019* is used as a multipurpose workforce planning tool:
 - to raise awareness among public library staff about the importance and value of the range of skills which underpin high-quality public library practice
 - to advocate on public library workforce issues with local government stakeholders
 - to review staffing structures and to align the skills requirements with public library programs and services
 - to review current position descriptions and staff capability documents for public library staff
 - to support the recruitment of high-calibre public library staff
 - to support performance planning and review processes in public libraries.

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