WORKFORCE PLANNING: A CASE STUDY –
INITIATIVES TO POSITION THE VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY WORKFORCE TO MEET FUTURE NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

In September 2008 Victoria University Library (VU) adopted a workforce plan that included a series of initiatives to position the Library’s workforce to meet the needs of the Library for the period 2008 to 2010. The initiatives in the workforce plan provide a clear framework for library staff and for the future development of Victoria University Library’s workforce. Each of the initiatives identifies some key areas of the workforce for development and makes recommendations to address these areas.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of Victoria University Library’s workforce plan is to prepare and develop the Library’s workforce to meet the future needs of the Library, ensuring that the Library is aligned with the University’s Strategic Plan, which in-turn assists with the long term viability and sustainability of the University. The workforce plan also aims to create a flexible workforce, one that is service oriented and student-centered, responsive to the changing needs of users, adaptive to changes in technology, and changes to the strategic directions of the University, to deliver quality services and resources to staff and students to support the teaching, learning and research outcomes of the University.

The purpose of the workforce plan is to:

- Develop a sustainable and financially viable staffing model by mapping positions and staff capabilities so that they are aligned with the Library service model
- Further develop Library staff capabilities (skills and knowledge) by providing opportunities to train and develop existing staff to fill identified skill gaps
- Recruit qualified staff with required skills and knowledge to better enable the Library to match staff capabilities with the strategic direction of the Library and the University and to assist with succession planning
• Use the Staff Performance and Development Plans to identify opportunities for staff development.
• Enhance leadership by developing current staff and the strategic recruitment of senior staff to improve the quality outcomes identified in the Library’s strategic plan
• Support staffing initiatives in areas that are considered to be areas of expertise and strength, of strategic importance, a niche market or new opportunity that has potential to enhance the Library’s strategic directions

In implementing the initiatives in the workforce plan VU Library indicated that it would adhere to University policies and procedures and the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement; work closely with the Workforce Planning Office, Human Resources, and Library staff; embed the initiatives into relevant Library branch operational plans where appropriate, and develop implementation plans for all short and long-term initiatives as required

WORKFORCE PLANNING CONTEXT

Why does a library or any other organisation need a workforce plan? There are many reasons – from being sustainable to managing within a constantly changing environment where there are always new ways to think and work smarter, especially during times of economic rationalism, or to simply cope with an ageing workforce. In many cases it is all of the above. Technology has also changed the way we work. New roles are being developed in the library and information science profession. The modes in which we work are changing constantly. As a result new skill sets are required to meet the ever changing needs and demands of library users. Workloads keep shifting, rising in some areas, decreasing in others. It therefore makes sense to develop a plan for the way in which we manage and develop our staff to meet the needs of the changing library and organisation.

Some of the underlying principles of a workforce plan include:

• Ensuring that the library’s operations and services reflect the organisation’s needs and are aligned with the organisation’s strategic plan
• Valuing current staff and appreciating diversity
• Ensuring that staff skills are kept up-to-date
• Providing opportunities to assist staff to take up positions both internal and external to the library
• Assisting with career transition
• Recognizing the high level of service commitment by library staff, and
• A commitment to ensuring work/life balance.
VU Library’s workforce plan is based on these values and its ability to be innovative, provide quality service, be cutting-edge, and be able to attract staff to work on new projects following the principles of plan, do, review, and improve. For the workforce plan to succeed it is vital that the Library is able to live within its means by ensuring that the budget and workforce are sustainable and by re-engineering positions and services as opportunities arose.

For a workforce plan to succeed it is necessary for a library to have an operational or strategic plan. VU Library’s operational plan aims to transform the University community through knowledge and information management resources and services that support collaborative, flexible and life long learning, teaching and research. Library staff expertise, coupled with evolving technologies, facilitate a client-focused and seamless service. The operational plan should be about staff demonstrating the values of the organization. At VU these values include: transforming individuals and the community through knowledge and skills; equality of opportunity for students and staff; diversity for its contribution to creativity and the enrichment of our lives; cooperation as the basis of engagement with local and international communities; integrity, respect and transparency in personal and collaborative action; sound environmental stewardship for future generations, and the pursuit of excellence in everything that we do.

For the period 2008 to 2010, VU Library’s operational plan identified the following key directions: continue to provide high quality information resources and services; progress Learning Commons projects; extend and embed web 2.0 technologies; implement the Library workforce plan; develop, train and extend Library staff; support research; support Making VU projects; progress Information and Knowledge Management initiatives; and protect VU in terms of copyright risk.

The ageing of the workforce in many countries is an accepted phenomenon. In Australia, the workforce is ageing faster than the general population and in particular workers in education are amongst the oldest workers. In 2004 a Department of Parliament Services report indicated that the average age of all Australian workers was 38.6 years and the average age of workers in the education sector was 43.4 years. This report identified that the ageing of the Australian workforce in the education sector could lead to staff shortages as increasing numbers of workers reach retirement.

In the Australian Library and Information Science (LIS) sector, library workers sit at the older end of the age spectrum. In 2005 the median age of workers in the LIS was 46 with 60% of workers aged 45 years or older. In 2007 the average age of staff in VU Library was 44.9 years. In 2007 54.48% of VU Library staff was over the age of 45. Whilst this figure is lower than the national average it still indicates that VU Library faces a considerable challenge to renew its workforce as more staff approach retirement. At the end of 2007 7.46% of VU Library staff members were over the age of 60.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that predictions of an older workforce and staff shortages are coming true, particularly in the LIS sector, and more so in the educa-
tion sector. VU Library is already facing the challenge of attracting workers in a competitive market into positions that require specific skill sets to meet the future needs and demands of the University and the Library’s clients. The continued ageing of the workforce will increase this pressure. To meet these challenges the VU Library workforce plan developed strategic initiatives that will enable the Library to attract the right people with the required skills into positions that are attractive and sustainable. The plan will assist with providing career paths and opportunities; succession planning; and the development of a flexible workforce that not only meets the needs of the Library and the University, but also understands that change is a constant.

In developing a workforce plan, one of the first things required was an understanding of the Library’s strengths and weaknesses. A simple brainstorming exercise helped with this and assisted with development of strategies and initiatives.

- VU Library’s strengths include: the provision of an innovative and efficient library and information service across 11 campuses, including support to international partnerships; a strong commitment to quality management; well aligned to the University’s strategic plan; able to quickly develop and implement projects; excellent results when benchmarked against other Australian University Library services (top quartile of the annual client satisfaction survey). VU Library also has strong links to academic and teaching staff, is represented at the University level on a variety of committees, has loyal and dedicated staff, a well-developed knowledge and understanding of the University system, and a “one-library” approach to the provision of services.

- VU Library’s weaknesses include: limited resources (when benchmarked against Australian University libraries the VU Library budget is ranked near the bottom); thinly spread provision of staff, services, and resources across 11 campus libraries; low staff to student ratio when benchmarked against other Australian university libraries; some inconsistency in level, mix and skills of library staff (right people in the right place); a perception that salary levels of staff are lower than in other university libraries, and the difficulties of working within a matrix structure.

In preparing a workforce plan it is also important to identify the key challenges that a library faces. At VU Library the main challenge is to develop a sustainable budget that supports the Library’s service model which provides staff and services across 11 campuses which differ in size and which also have diverse student and staff cohorts. This is a particular challenge as staffing costs have been increasing faster than University income. Other challenges include the development of Learning Commons and working collaboratively with non-traditional library staff in the Learning Commons; competition for resources across the University; and implementing new library services. VU Library also needs more flexible staffing capability to be able to move quickly when required so that it can keep up with chang-
ing and growing expectations of clients. It is also challenging to keep up with and take advantage of technological changes.

**IMPORTANCE OF THE FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF THE LIBRARY**

The future direction of a library is often driven by the strategic needs of the parent organisation. Libraries should also be prepared to influence the future directions of their organisations, whether it is through representation on committees, policy or other means. Libraries are at the cutting edge of technology and staff are skilled to provide highly valued support and services in an information society.

At VU, the Learning Commons is the future direction of the Library. It is an approach that provides seamless, one-stop learning and educational support for Victoria University students and staff. The Learning Commons is a student space that encourages learning conversations between peers and the development of shared reflections around strategies of learning at Victoria University. The development of the Learning Commons is part of a wider transformation in the University toward a culture that is learner-oriented, learner-centred, flexible, collaborative, community building and university-wide. At Victoria University the Learning Commons model incorporates the inclusion of library, teaching and learning support, information technology, and student career services in the one physical space. Student rovers with a peer support role have been employed in the Learning Commons to assist with providing a seamless and student centred service.

The application of the Learning Commons model has produced a different service environment that has impacted the customer service roles currently undertaken by Library staff. These changes – including the broader introduction of student rovers and student assistants – are expected to result in a reduced requirement for library staff to be the frontline for customer queries along with changes to the delivery of reference and liaison services. As part of the approach to the Learning Commons VU Library is committed to getting the most value and flexibility from its collection, being more strategic and flexible in how it uses space, ensuring that technology is portable, and that staff can develop the specialist knowledge and skills required to perform their duties. In addition, Victoria University is likely to consolidate within its most profitable campus locations, thus requiring the library to seek more flexibility for staffing arrangements to support all of the Library/Learning Commons locations. All of these changes are challenges for developing a sustainable workforce for the future.

**SERVICE MODEL AND WORK PROFILE**

What is your current service model? Does it meet the needs of the library? Is it sustainable? Do you need to move to a different service model? Where will the li-
library be in five years? What are your growth areas? What are your declining areas? What is static? What is on the horizon that will inform you service model? These are just some of the questions that need to be asked to inform the development of a workforce plan.

At VU Library it is envisaged that students will become more integrated into the workforce and that there will be more collaboration and sharing of workspace with staff from other areas within the University. Library services will be more electronic and self-serve where possible and the user environment will be virtual as well as physical. The Library will also play an important role in institutional data. Client demands will determine services which in turn will be scalable and responsive to shifts in user demand at specific locations or delivery times. All of these factors will influence services, which in turn will inform the workforce planning process to determine the type of staff and service levels required, and to ensure that staff are skilled and capable to meet the ever-changing environment.

One of the main aims of developing a workforce plan and a staffing framework is to understand and analyse a library’s current workforce to provide an accurate profile of the staff employed. VU Library undertook a detailed analysis of the Library staff establishment from December 2004 until December 2007. It examined such characteristics as age, gender, positions by classification and qualification, and qualification levels by gender. The number of staff and equivalent full-time positions at Victoria University Library has been fairly stable since 2004 (just over 100 equivalent full-time positions). This is in line with Victoria University staffing trends for ongoing academic and administrative staff. The average age of VU Library staff at the end of 2007 was 44.9 years. This is below industry figures and also below the average age of Victoria University staff. Some key statistics of VU Library workforce profile include:

- 92.25% of positions require a qualification (TAFE Cert III & higher)
  - Unqualified (Year 12 or equivalent) 4.38%
  - TAFE certificate 39.07%
  - TAFE diploma 16.04%
  - Undergraduate/Postgraduate 37.14%
- 68.5% of Library positions are full-time
- Staff by gender has seen a slight increase of 3.3% in the number of male staff between 2004 and 2007 (74% female at the end of 2007)
- 54.48% of staff are over 45 years of age
- 14.18% of staff are over 54 years of age
- 17.16% of staff are under the age of 35
- 7.46% of staff are over the age of 60
WORKFORCE PLANNING INITIATIVES

VU Library’s workforce plan is made up of seven initiatives developed from an analysis of the data collated from the Library’s operation plan, the University’s strategic plan, the future directions of the Library, the Library’s strengths and weaknesses, the challenges faced by the Library, identified key areas for growth, the Learning Commons service model, and from data collected from analysing the Library’s workforce profile. An analysis was also made of other workforce plans available in the LIS sector in Australia to inform the methodology for the plan.6 7

Library structure initiative

The Learning Commons model at VU Library demands a staffing structure that is both robust and flexible. At the same time the Library’s budget must be sustainable to support the Library structure and service model. Having this in place enables the Library to quickly change and adapt to technology and the needs of library clients as their needs change. As such, the Library and its staff need to have strategies in place to deal with changes to positions, duties, and the skills required in performing them.

The Learning Commons and associated service delivery model, along with technological development, has identified several areas of significant growth and gaps that will affect the current and future staffing structure of the Library. Some of these critical areas include:

- Further development of online services
- 24/7 service delivery
- Staff engaging with technology more on a day-to-day basis
- Staff acting as facilitators between Library clients and technology
- Reference and Liaison staff working more closely with faculty,
- Further embedding of user education into teaching, and involvement in curriculum development
- Support services for research

These areas of need become more critical as the Library continues to enhance its range of services. This is exemplified by the increased emphasis on online services and self-service services e.g. self-checkout and self-return, and unmediated inter-library loans.

The Library’s website is also evolving. It is the most important access point for all Library services, including access to the collection (catalogue, e-books, electronic databases and online support services). The increasing reliance on electronic services and the rapid changes in technology means that the Library will need to further develop the knowledge and skills in this area to ensure future capability.

To move towards a more robust and flexible staffing structure the Library has put in place some short and long-term initiatives. Some short term initiatives in-
clude: reviewing positions as vacancies occur with a view to identifying opportunities to re-engineer positions; reviewing the duties of positions on an annual basis; reviewing the electronic information support needs of the Library to ensure that it is positioned to meet the future needs of the Library and its clients; and embedding positions for student assistants in the Library (this is part an ongoing commitment by the library to employ VU students in the Library to support the University’s learning in the workplace initiative).

Some long-term initiatives include: ensuring that the Library (and its branches) have appropriate staffing levels, that positions are at the appropriate level, and that staff have the appropriate qualifications, skills and knowledge. In addition, the Library will continue to re-align sections of its structure to support the internal needs of the library as well as the University as required. Structural reviews may be required in response to University and campus changes. At every opportunity the Library will continue to maximise the use of new technologies and the opportunities these present to re-engineer positions and duties as required. VU Library has also undertaken to review, model, and cost staffing to develop structures that ensure the right mix of staff in the right place at the right time. These structures will be developed over time to ensure the use of more flexible modes of employment.

**Position titles and descriptions initiative**

Having consistent position descriptions and titles is vital to providing an efficient and effective staffing structure that reflects the business and operational needs of the Library, which is also balanced with client needs. VU Library provides a broad range of services across 11 campus libraries and requires consistency between similar positions to ensure staff flexibility to meet the changing needs and demands from clients no matter what campus they are on.

At the end of 2007 VU Library had approximately 134 staff in 102.2 equivalent full-time positions, of which over 60 had different position titles. This has since reduced to 123 staff in 99.24 equivalent full-time positions as of April 2009. Having a large number of similar positions with different titles reduces flexibility and makes the updating of position descriptions and duties an onerous task.

By reviewing position descriptions and titles and by making them more consistent, VU Library has been able to provide a clear distinction between the roles and duties of each position, and at the same time provide clear expectations to library staff on skills and qualifications required at each level. This enables greater flexibility with staff and ensures standardised duties for similar positions across all campus libraries. The reviewing of position descriptions and titles and making them consistent is an ongoing process. The challenge is to ensure that the position descriptions reflect the skill sets required to meet the business and operational needs of the Library.

All positions in VU Library are reviewed as vacancies occur through staff movement or natural attrition and are re-engineered to reflect the strategic needs of
the Library and the University on an ongoing basis. All positions are updated every three years so that they remain relevant to the needs of the Library.

**Recruitment initiative**

Victoria University Library aims to develop and recruit suitable and well-qualified staff to meet the continuing and emerging needs of its clients as well as fill identified skills gaps. VU Library wants a workforce profile that is highly skilled, efficient, flexible, and financially sustainable in the long-term. Recruiting staff with the appropriate skills and attributes will also assist with succession planning and reflecting the cultural diversity of the University community. When recruiting, it is vital that staff understand and are committed to the overarching framework that links all of a Library’s practices. This framework requires staff to share a common vision, mission, values, practices, roles, strategy, culture, and recognition of achievement and development. These are linked to one or more of the following: the work team, work group, department, division, and organisation. The goal and challenge for the Library is to embed this framework on a continuous basis.

When a vacancy occurs, the manager or supervisor should always ask the following questions. Is the work essential to the operation of the work area or the organisation, or could it cease? Is the function or service currently being provided by another work area in the Library or organisation? Could other staff in the work area undertake the work or some of the duties? What would be the best way to structure the work? What are the budget and financial implications of recruiting, both short and long-term?

Considerable thought and preparation should also be given to the best time to recruit. Libraries, in particular academic libraries, experience busy periods at different times of the year. The recruitment process should be thought out properly with consideration given to the requirements of the position and the attributes required from applicants. Positions should be re-advertised if the initial pool of candidates is insufficient or if the applicants do not meet all of the selection criteria for the position. When recruiting it is important to consider the following:

- What skills are vital to the position?
- What personal attributes is the library looking for?
- What areas of training and experience are essential?
- Who is the target audience for recruitment? Is it local, national or even international?
- Where is the appropriate place to advertise? e.g. internal only, internal and external, on-line, in a newspaper or professional journal? Advertising vacancies both internally and externally ensures that the best person for the job is selected and contributes to the sustainability of the workforce.
- Always promote the benefits of working in your organisation
When recruiting it is important to know in advance the key personal attributes that are required in potential staff. Some examples sought by VU Library include:

- **Clear communicator** – able to exchange information easily and have strong interpersonal skills; a good presenter
- **Team worker** – able to work well in teams and achieve team goals together
- **Friendly & approachable** – able to build rapport with fellow staff and library clients
- **Self motivated** – able to work independently, performance oriented
- **Enthusiastic and positive** – demonstrate enthusiasm and a positive attitude. Employees who demonstrate these traits attain results!
- **Resilient** – able to work with staff and library clients at all levels and overcome barriers
- **Adaptable & flexible** – able to deal with environment and organisational change
- **Punctual & reliable** – at all times. This can impact on the team goals
- **Thinker** – strong problem solving skills; able to think strategically, analytically and critically
- **Interest** – demonstrated interest in position and the goals and objectives of the Library and the University
- **Professionalism** – demonstrated dedication and professional behaviour with a good understanding of Victoria University’s values
- **Leadership** – ability to lead and take other staff on the journey.

**Student work experience initiative**

As part of Victoria University’s Making VU strategy of learning in the workplace and community, VU Library has an agreement with the Library & Cultural Studies Unit to provide guaranteed work experience placements for up to 20 of their students per year. VU Library offers the students a one or two semester placement. This arrangement gives the students valuable work experience and the Library also receives some value from the effort put into training the students. It is not uncommon for some of the work experience students to obtain casual student assistant positions in the Library and eventually an ongoing role. VU Library is also committed to supporting the placement of students studying to become professional librarians from other tertiary institutions.

The benefits of having students in the workplace include a demonstrated commitment to the University’s strategic direction, building networks with educators, access to skilled graduates and a potential pool of casual and ongoing workers. This in turn assists with creating a sustainable workforce profile.

VU Library is also investigating the introduction of student traineeship positions into the Library. A variety of similar schemes and models is already occurring in various university libraries and organisations throughout Australia. The introduction of student traineeship positions demonstrates a commitment to student
work experience and also to the provision of opportunities for LIS students to gain valuable workplace experience. In 2008 VU Library also employed over 20 students as casual student assistants to assist with extending Library opening hours. These students were from a variety of courses. This strategy has been highly successful and was reflected in the results of the Library’s 2008 client satisfaction survey where VU Library achieved an 80% customer satisfaction rating that put it in the top quartile of all Australian University libraries. 9

**Staff capabilities initiative**

VU Library staff skills and capabilities, with technology as an underpinning link-enabler, are a strategic focus area for the Library. VU Library appreciates the current skills and knowledge of Library staff and their commitment to their jobs. However, as the Library moves forward it is vital that staff also take responsibility to maintain and develop their knowledge and skills to ensure their relevancy and to meet the business and operational needs of the Library.

The opening of Learning Commons at Victoria University is a strategic initiative that has had a direct impact on the focus for developing library staff skills and capabilities. VU Library is committed to assisting staff to build on their existing skills, preparing them for the future, as well as improving their marketability and employability. VU Library is also committed to supporting staff to obtain suitable professional qualifications. This is managed via a staff development committee responsible for overseeing the planning, budgeting and delivery of a targeted professional development program for staff. The challenge is for this budget to be sustainable given the increased demand for staff development. In 2006 an analysis of staff needs identified the following key areas for staff development: user support/ICT skills; leadership/management skills (including financial skills); electronic resources; learning commons; copyright; customer service; attending professional conferences/seminars, and web development skills. In 2008 a subsequent analysis identified the following areas for continuing library staff development: project management; web 2.0 related skills; HR related skills – job interviewing, applications, resumes; presentation skills, and interpersonal communication.

Having staff members who are suitably qualified and skilled to support the operational and strategic needs of the Library goes a long way to the development of a sustainable workforce. Work practices in the LIS sector have experienced rapid change in recent years, and continue to change and develop as technology offers new opportunities and challenges. Technological developments have subsequently had an enormous effect on traditional library work. It is now standard for services to be delivered online, with many services now self-serve.

The role of technology in work has meant that staff members are engaged with technology on a day-to-day basis. The library staff of today use email, the internet or intranet, blogs or wikis to engage with their clients, whether they be students, general staff, academics, or researchers. Web 2.0 developments have also high-
lighted the social importance of learning. With the rise of social communication tools such as Facebook, libraries now face the challenge of using tools like this to communicate with and develop their “communities.” The emphasis and importance of technology in libraries has led to the development of electronic support service teams, and the associated need for staff to have well developed IT skills to support the provision and delivery of services and resources.

It is also important to support and encourage staff to undertake relevant study to further develop their qualifications and skills. VU Library has always valued and recognized LIS qualifications and supports staff in their personal and professional development. VU Library also recognizes and assists staff without formal qualifications and encourages them to undertake relevant study. Where appropriate the Library will pay for staff to undertake qualifications as part of their continuing professional development. This is particularly aimed at the lower level staff without a formal qualification. This also helps to develop career paths.

A way to monitor the ongoing professional development of staff is to have a process that monitors the importance of the relationship between staff development and performance. A performance and development process can also be used to identify and support the professional development needs of staff and can feed into an annual training program.

The LIS profession is changing and the challenge will be to retain positions that require professional LIS qualifications as a minimum. As positions change and develop due to technology or business needs, position descriptions and selection criteria will be reviewed and changed as appropriate to incorporate more relevant qualifications (e.g. IT systems, web development etc.). The challenge is for library educators to develop curriculum that will meet the future needs of the LIS sector.

While Victoria University Library staff members are highly qualified, it is vital that the Library provides the resources to ensure the development of its future leaders. These leaders will provide direction and ensure that the Library remains relevant to the University community and continues to provide targeted and strategic services. However, the ageing of the library’s workforce is an issue. The library has a dedicated and long-serving cohort of staff; many have been with the library for over ten years. As some of these staff move closer to retirement the Library is at risk of losing a great deal of knowledge and experience. At the end of 2007, 14.18% of VU staff were over the age of 54 and 54.48% were aged 45 and older. This supports the need for multi-skilling staff to ensure that knowledge and skills are retained.

Up until 2006 VU Library also experienced a fairly low rate of staff turnover. However, since then there has been a noticeable increase in the turnover rate. At the same time the Library experienced some difficulties in attracting and recruiting staff with the appropriate knowledge, experience and skills. Turnover is likely to continue and possibly increase in the next few years. It is therefore imperative that the Library develop succession management strategies to offset the risks.
It is also important to support staff considering retirement. VU Library works closely with the University’s Human Resources department who assist staff to explore more flexible working arrangements as they transition to retirement. This can include the use of pre-retirement contracts, job sharing, part-time employment and/or leave without pay.

Some short-term initiatives adopted by VU Library to ensure staff capability include the offering of short-term internal secondments to multi-skill staff to ensure that knowledge and skills are transferred between staff; calling for internal expressions of interest to fill short-term vacancies to provide opportunities for existing staff to develop their knowledge and skills; providing staff with the opportunity to rotate jobs; supporting staff to apply for secondments, either internal or external to the Library and University; supporting staff to undertake staff exchanges, either locally, nationally or internationally; and encouraging staff to participate in the University’s Leadership Development programs. In the long-term VU Library will develop the strategies to communicate the knowledge, skills and key attributes for positions considered at risk.

There are critical skills and knowledge required for staff to succeed in positions, particularly in leadership roles. This is vital as libraries provide a client-centred business service that operates in a constantly changing and challenging environment that is also heavily influenced by innovative technological developments and shifts in the educational industry. To contribute and make a difference in the library of today and the future, a worker’s skills base is required to be broader than the professional skills taught by many current library educators, who themselves are experiencing issues with an ageing workforce and lack of educators.2 A review of the literature has identified the following areas that are considered vital for current and future staff and leaders:10, 11, 12

- Communication – including highly developed interpersonal skills
- Strategic planning
- Technology
- Cross-cultural skills
- Project management
- Ethics and values
- Ability to prioritize
- Organizational skills
- Diplomacy and tact
- Energy and motivation

To meet these challenges VU Library is committed to developing training programs that target the skills required and align them to job functions and business needs. The benefit of focused training programs targeting critical skills and knowledge include increased productivity and efficiency of staff and the ability to retain and attract staff by investing in their development.
VU Library like many libraries has staff that can be categorized as non-professional, para-professional, or professional. At the end of 2007 4.38% of VU Library staff were employed in non-professional positions, 55.11% as para-professional positions, and 37.14% as professional Librarians. These figures reflect the staffing profiles of university libraries across Australia. To progress through the classification levels staff are often expected to meet relevant qualifications at each level. However, career paths are not always clearly enunciated. Career paths can be clarified by ensuring that position titles and descriptions, and the qualifications required, are consistent and clearly detailed.

Extended opening hours initiative

In 2007, VU Library conducted a review of opening hours which revealed a number of areas for improvement in extending access, particularly on weekends and at a wide range of campuses. Feedback from the Library’s primary users (students) indicated that they wanted longer hours of access most days of the week. The students indicated that their main library activities included PC use and printing; group work (discussion rooms) and places to socialise; books and borrowing (although statistics indicate that this activity is decreasing), and individual study. The students gave widespread approval for self-access or minimal staffing outside of core hours. Technical support and troubleshooting is their main priority.

In response, at the beginning of 2008 VU Library commenced a pilot project to extend library opening hours using student assistants. The challenge was to introduce student assistants into the workforce without alienating library staff. The subsequent success of the project has been partly due to the fact that student assistants were promoted as having a role complementary to current positions.

Student assistants are engaged casually for up to 12 hours per week during the semester (so it doesn’t affect their study commitments) and must be a currently enrolled student at Victoria University. Some of the attributes required include completion of first year of study, well developed communication and interpersonal skills, basic IT troubleshooting skills, the capacity to deal effectively with students from diverse backgrounds, and experience working in a team or small group environment. VU Library is committed to ensuring that all student assistants are provided with the training and support that they need to perform their duties and where possible they are included in training sessions held for all Library staff and are invited to general Library staff meetings.

Cultural awareness initiative

Australia has followed an active policy of multiculturalism since 1972. The diversity of Australian communities is reflected in the Australian workforce of today. VU Library’s workforce is typical in that it reflects the local community. VU Library’s workforce also reflects the diversity of the University’s student community.
In recent years many tertiary institutions in Australia have developed the international side of business and institutions like Victoria University now have a large cohort of international students. Having a diverse workforce and student community entails a commitment to ensuring that staff are informed of cultural issues within the University, and continue to develop their cultural knowledge and the understanding required to develop strategies for increasing the cultural safety of staff and students at the University. VU Library develops in-house cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication workshops and participates in University Staff College programs to increase the understanding of different cultures, to explore attitudes, beliefs, facts and myths and how they affect our perceptions. The Library also includes cross-cultural awareness in the staff induction process.

CONCLUSION

One of the challenges for the Library of today is to have a knowledgeable and skilled workforce that is relevant to the business and strategic needs of the organisation. Workforce planning is a tool that can be used successfully to develop a skilled and sustainable workforce. By following the “workforce” plan do-review-and-improve process it is possible to develop a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce. The analysis of a workforce and the identification of key skills and gaps can assist with the development of a model that employs strategic initiatives to provide ongoing support for staff to develop their knowledge and skills.

VU Library is the only unit within Victoria University that has developed a workforce plan to date. The Library is therefore well placed to meet the changing needs of the University, often at short notice. The commitment to maintaining a skilled and knowledgeable workforce can only lead to ongoing benefits for both the organisation and the individual.

REFERENCES