

# Museums, Galleries and Libraries

FutureNow is the Western Australian Training Council for the creative, leisure and technology industries. The Council is a skills advisory body that represents the voice of industry, advising the State Government on the training and workforce development needs of our industry sectors.

In November 2020, Western Australia's borders reopened following an 8-month closure<sup>1</sup>, and the new, \$396 million WA Museum Boola Bardip opened its doors<sup>2</sup>. Created with the input of over 50,000 Western Australians, the Museum aims to take a 'People First' approach, placing access, inclusion, diversity, and the celebration of Aboriginal culture at the core of everything they do.<sup>3</sup>

The new Museum is a testament to the crucial role that cultural institutions play in helping communities define themselves, and the timing of its opening, following a quarantine period which might be seen to have served as a period of reflection for the state, bears significance.

WA's galleries, libraries, museums, and heritage organisations (GLAHM) are the guardians of Western Australia's stories and a place to explore shared identity. The standard of WA's cultural institutions and their work speaks to the state's maturity and sophistication, and the vibrancy and liveability of its cities and regions. As well as reflecting our own image back to us, these places project our narrative to the world, helping visitors to make sense of and engage with Western Australia. Libraries, galleries, and cultural institutions serve a vital role in our communities, and as that role evolves in response to technological and social change these mostly free, shared spaces are greatly valued by the people they serve.

## Current environment and emerging trends

Western Australia's cultural institutions, particularly in the regions, have enjoyed an upswell of interest and an influx of Western Australian tourists following the closure of the WA border<sup>4</sup>. While it is too early to judge how this will influence local tourism trends in the medium-to-long term, industry are hopeful that increased awareness of the 'hidden gems' of Australia's cultural collections will drive Western Australians to treasure and engage with their own local histories more.

### Uncertain funding environment

Community cultural institutions and libraries are watchful of a potentially reduced funding environment and consequent redundancies or reduced opening hours and service provision capacity. It is anticipated that many local government authorities in WA may be operating on constricted budgets in the coming year. Councils have had to provide rent relief to local businesses, close leisure centres and reduce rates as ways of supporting their communities during the quarantine period and through recovery<sup>5</sup>. As a result these institutions, which are primarily funded through local government spending, may see reduced 2021-22 budgets. Similarly, university libraries, galleries and museums are concerned that they may face ongoing restrictions owing to a significant reduction in income to universities from international student fees.<sup>6</sup>

### Greater demand for library services

In recent years libraries have changed to house a broader range of community services and this trend has seen a sudden surge in the wake of Covid-19. Libraries may host or provide legal services, career advice or digital support, and act as a hub for community groups such as craft or reading groups. They provide support to the

national literacy agenda through programs for all ages and skill levels, and offer training in areas including job preparedness, self-publishing and learning new technologies such as 3D printing or laser cutting<sup>7</sup>. Industry report an upsurge in demand for community services in line with pressures experienced in the community related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite closures, libraries assisted local communities to access loan laptops, dongles and other technology to assist students to attend classes remotely. As libraries reopened, demand for equipment and assistance relating to job hunting grew, and book borrowing- which surged during quarantine via online order- continues to be higher than previously.

## Workforce trends and opportunities

The GLAHM sector seeks to ensure its workforce is equipped to respond to technological and social change in a way that preserves the state's collections and cements the sector's position as a hub for community reflection and gathering into the future.

### Growing need for digital skills across the GLAHM sector

Technological change is adding to the upskilling needs of the GLAHM sector. On-site digital technologies are enhancing the visitor experience and digital interpretation (the text accompanying a work) and online exhibition allow for different staging of works and installations. These changes are supporting greater visitor access, giving a much wider audience an insight into the collections, including those with limited mobility, aged, remote, and international audiences. Opportunities to monetise collections are also enhanced, providing a potential avenue for increased sector sustainability.

The proliferation of digital content is having a considerable impact on the daily work of the GLAHM workforce, driving a need for new and more sophisticated collections practices and digitising and cataloguing skills for workers. Good data clean-up and cyber security practices are essential, and a high degree of digital literacy is required to manage collections, websites, social media accounts and customer relations management (CRM) software. Audience engagement is evolving in response to online activity, creating a need for training for existing workers across the sector.

A recent review of vocational training for the libraries and information services sectors sought to incorporate more sophisticated digital collections management skills in response to these changes.<sup>8</sup>

### Impacts on the volunteer workforce

The sector relies heavily on its volunteer workforce, and is reporting impacts relating to COVID-19 concerning this cohort. The volunteer workforce is largely comprised of retirees, and this older demographic are also among the most vulnerable to serious consequences from contracting COVID-19. As a result, many volunteers have chosen to continue to stay away from public places as restrictions are eased, with a subsequent reduction in the available volunteer workforce for the museums and galleries sector.

### Lack of career pathways limits sector capacity

A number of vocational and higher education qualification offerings to service the museums and galleries (collections) sectors have disappeared in WA over the past decade, and industry have been without any sector-specific qualifications in the state for several years.

While industry have been able to meet labour and skills needs through skilled migration, existing expertise, and through local students gaining national or international qualifications, industry expressly seek accessible pathways

into the sector, and contextualised course content, for Western Australians from diverse backgrounds.

## Workforce enhancement strategies

### COVID-19 Response

Industry had an urgent need for visitor facing-specific infection control training in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Existing training for the hospitality or retail sectors did not meet industry needs. In response Australian Museums and Galleries Association WA released Reopen. Recover. Rise Up., a guide with specific guidelines for WA organisations based on WA State Government advice, and including infection control protocols<sup>9</sup>. At the national level AMAGA have also coordinated advocacy efforts relating to COVID-19, including providing a detailed breakdown of impacts on the sector to the Federal Senate Select Committee in May 2020. Peak body ALIA (Australian Library and Information Association) has collated resources for the sector on their website, including a reopening toolkit, protocol information and research relating to the safe handling of books and other loan materials, and information on contact tracing.<sup>10</sup>

A growing focus on information security in the sector has been accelerated by the need for contact tracing associated with efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19. As an industry concerned with the management of information, the library sector has raised concerns around the type of information readily available to the public in the mostly hand-written contact tracing registers that libraries and other public agencies are being required to keep. Industry advocate for information such as names and phone numbers to be better protected, and note the very widespread implications of current practices in other public-facing industries such as retail and hospitality. The introduction of the SafeWA app is therefore viewed positively in this context.

### Social change drives upskilling needs for the sector

Responding to social change is vital for cultural institutions, and consequently recent and significant cultural change is producing rigorous discussion and an involved response. This year, Western Australian cultural institutions have focussed professional development for existing staff on knowledge and skills development in areas including hyper-local cultural awareness, equal opportunity, anti-bullying, ethical decision-making, accessibility, and inclusivity<sup>11</sup>. Existing collections management, curatorial and interpretation practices are being examined for unconscious bias and effort is being made to amplify under-represented community voices in influential spaces.

### Reconciliation Action Planning

As awareness grows of the impact of Western and colonialist collections management practices on Indigenous cultures, Reconciliation Action Planning (RAP) is of growing importance across the sector, and brings with it an associated upskilling need. The WA Museum delivered Aboriginal Cultural Awareness training to all staff and has employed a number of Aboriginal emerging curators since introducing its RAP in 2015. In May 2019, AMAGA published First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries.<sup>12</sup> The roadmap includes a workforce development strategy, advising:

“Opportunities to attend university and learn courses on art history and fine arts can provide for a pipeline of Indigenous curators and arts professionals. However, other professional skills are needed in the future museum and gallery environment including technology, management, and communications. The creation of scholarships for Indigenous museum professionals should be established.

There should also be increased pathways via vocational education and training (VET). VET Courses should also be offered, including at TAFE, with a view to increasing Indigenous museum and gallery workers... there is a need for more relevant VET courses for Indigenous people to enter employment in museums and galleries.”

### Establishing formal pathways into cultural sector careers

A recent national review of Arts Administration vocational qualifications is due to be put before the Australian Industry Skills Commission in December 2020. The proposed qualifications will introduce specialist streams specific to these sectors through to Diploma level, representing the only currently available qualifications for the sector in WA.

North Metropolitan and North Regional TAFEs have both committed to continuing delivery of the Certificate III Arts Administration with the capacity to tailor to these industries, and these training providers are involved in discussions with industry, the training council and the WA Academy of Performing Arts around building a formalised pathway that can take a student with relatively limited academic experience from the Certificate III through to WAAPA's Bachelor of Arts Management. An intention of developing the pathway is to give disadvantaged Western Australians better opportunities to access influential cultural roles within their own culture.

## Please get in touch with FutureNow

FutureNow is continually seeking broad input from stakeholders and representatives in the Western Australian GLAHM sector. If you would be interested in providing your perspective on this snapshot or related workforce matters for your sector, our Creative Industries Industry Manager would love to hear from you:

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## References

Note that unreferenced information in this snapshot is based on direct consultation by FutureNow with WA industry.

All references current as at 7.12.2020

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