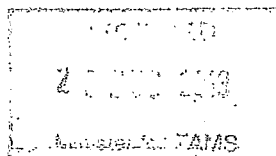




**ACT**  
Government

Territory and Municipal Services



**BRIEF**

TRIM: B13/191

Date 13 December 2013

To Minister for Territory and Municipal Services

- A/g Director-General *SG 20/12/13*
- Director-General's Executive Officer *AW 13/12/13*
- Executive Director, Parks and City Services *Green 13/12/13*
- Director, Finance *AKP 13/12/13*

From , Libraries ACT

Subject Libraries ACT – Library Loans Policy

**Recommendation**

That you

- Agree to proposed changes to the trial Library Loans Policy effective until 28 February 2014;

**AGREED / NOT AGREED / PLEASE DISCUSS**

- Agree to the proposed arrangement for members with existing fees; and

**AGREED / NOT AGREED / PLEASE DISCUSS**

- Approve proposed changes and implementation from 1 March 2014 onwards.

**AGREED / NOT AGREED / PLEASE DISCUSS**

Shane Rattenbury MLA *[Signature]* 13/11/14

**Critical Date**

- HIGH PRIORITY

## **Purpose**

To seek your approval for changes to the Loans Policy for Libraries ACT following evaluation of the current Loans Policy trial.

## **Background**

In May 2012 changes were approved to the Loans Policy from 1 July 2012 (Brief 201100867).

The policy was to be a trial and was to be reviewed after 12 months.

The review has now been completed and recommendations for a revised Loans Policy are proposed in this brief.

## **Evaluation and review of the trial**

Libraries ACT loaned 3.17 million items in 2012-2013. Of these, only around 0.7% were overdue at any time, proving most members return or renew material on time.

The trial introduced a new fee system within the loans policy, which allowed most borrowers some extra leeway when they tried to do the right thing, and penalties for those who did not attempt to renew or return items on time.

The review of the trial of a new Loans Policy included:

- Evaluation of Libraries ACT data, including usage data;
- Customer feedback;
- Staff feedback;
- Research (focus groups) conducted by Orima Research; and
- Review of *Request to Remove Fees* applications and processes.

The review outcome does not support continuation of the trial policy as an effective way to retrieve overdue library materials.

## **Key recommendations of the review are:**

1. Maintain a penalty or incentive system to ensure:
  - a. Appropriate return of library items, allowing them to be reused by other members.
  - b. Responsible asset management on behalf of Libraries ACT as a government agency with a defined budget allocation.
2. Introduce a maximum item borrowing limit (50 items) per member.
3. Revise a penalty structure that eliminates the \$175 fee.
4. Ensure the Loans Policy is compliant with the automated Library management System. This means any fees are calculated on a proportional basis on items loaned, for unique borrowing events, by an individual member. This was a major factor impacting on the difficulties administering the trial.

5. Maintain immediate loss of library privileges when items become overdue.
6. Deem items lost quickly, after 30 days overdue, after which time library members should be charged for the replacement cost of the items.
7. Introduce a catchy slogan to help promote responsible membership, e.g. 'renew online or return on time'.
8. Ensure processes are transparent and instructions are clear on communications sent to members.
9. Communicate changes to the Loans Policy clearly to library members in a more timely fashion, allowing two – three months lead time for the communication strategy.

Specific feedback from focus group participants supports a system where sanctions occur more quickly, are uniformly applied to all users and any penalties are followed up and taken seriously by the community.

**Proposed interim amendments to apply until 28 February 2014**

\$175 fee ceased as of 29 October 2013 as requested by you. No further \$175 fees will be applied.

Implement a communications strategy for a new policy to begin on 1 March 2014.

As a result of the evaluation, Libraries ACT propose that the current Loans Policy will cease as of COB 29 February 2014. This is because two to three months is considered necessary to successfully implement the communications strategy, which would lead to a start date of no earlier than 1 March 2014.

This also allows for the holiday period over Christmas and the implementation of changes to library hours during December 2013.

Process applications for *Request to Waive (Remove) Fees* quickly and notify members of the outcome of their request by 31 December 2013.

\$25 fees will continue to be applied under the current policy until 28 February 2014.

All existing \$25 fees will be considered valid and should be paid. This provides equitable application of the policy and is fair to those members who have already paid fees under this policy.

A new Loans Policy will be communicated to the public from 2 January 2014, and implemented on 1 March 2014.

### **Proposed arrangements for members impacted by the current Loans Policy**

Changes to the policy were widely communicated; however, invoices did not carry warnings about fee escalation prior to 23 January 2013. As a result, all \$175 fees will be waived and/or refunded.

Any members, who have not returned long overdue items, will be sent a 'Final' invoice for the items which are deemed lost. The invoice will be for any replacement costs and include a processing fee of \$6.00 per item. This will be an attempt to recover government assets.

Members with outstanding fees of \$25 will have their borrowing privileges suspended until paid.

### **Proposed changes to Loans Policy from 1 March 2014 (Option 1)**

Return to a pro rata, overdue fee system, similar to the previous 'fine' system, but with improvements.

Library loans will be four weeks (28 days), except for high demand items.

Loan limits will apply – a maximum of 50 items on loan at any time per member card.

Three notices will be sent as courtesy reminders (one pre due notice, two overdue notices).

Items will become overdue on day 28. Penalties may apply from day 30, allowing two days for chute clearing delays in peak periods. This is an internal process, not to be seen as extra loan/grace period.

Members will be blocked from borrowing and other library privileges, such as using computers, when items become overdue on day 30.

Items will accrue a 25 cents per day per item overdue fee to a maximum cap of \$7.00 per item. This fee is premised on a cost recovery basis.

At this point (30 days overdue) the item is deemed lost and an invoice sent for the replacement cost of the item plus the \$6.00 processing fee. The library management system records the original purchase price of all items (this price will be used as a replacement cost).

If item is returned the \$7.00 overdue fee and the \$6.00 processing fee are still payable.

### **Other options considered in the review were:**

- Return to a pro rata overdue fee system (pre 1 July 2012) (Option 2).
- Retain the present policy with \$25 fee only (eliminating the \$175 fee) (Option 3).

- No late fee but items categorised as 'lost' earlier, at 28 days (Option 4).
- \$5.00 flat late fee per borrower (Option 5).

Option 1 was considered most practicable, meeting the feedback provided through the focus groups. It results in a more appropriate fee level that is proportional to the number of items borrowed and will act as a deterrent. It focuses on getting materials returned and back in circulation as soon as possible through early follow up of "lost" materials. The estimated increased revenue (returning to pre trial levels) will assist in addressing the existing cost pressure within Libraries ACT.

### Consultation

In evaluating the trial Loans Policy, ORIMA Research, a market research company, was engaged to run four focus groups. This consultation process was considered along with usage data, budget figures and feedback from members and staff.

A comprehensive Communications Strategy is being developed for any approved changes to the Loans Policy.

### Financial

Prior to the implementation of the trial Loans Policy, revenue from library fines was around \$150,000 per annum.

During the trial, revenue has dropped to \$65,475 with no significant improvement in the timely return of library assets.

### Summary of fees from 1 July 2012 to 31 October 2013

<b>\$25 fee</b>	<b>Qty</b>	<b>Value</b>
Issued	6,254	\$156,350
Paid	2,038	\$ 50,950
Outstanding	4,216	\$105,400
<b>\$175 Fee</b>	<b>Qty</b>	<b>Value</b>
Issued	1,831	\$320,425
Paid	83	\$ 14,525
Outstanding	1,748	\$305,900

Cost of \$175 refunds will be \$14,525.

Cost of \$175 waivers will be \$305,900.

Attempts will be made to recover outstanding \$25 fees.

In summary a new model should support asset management, encourage members to return items in a timely manner and return some revenue to Libraries ACT budget.

## Media

Changes to Library Loans Policy will be communicated via media.

This is a topic of interest to ACT residents and media coverage would be expected.

There may be negative reactions by the public to another change in loans policy, no matter what process is applied.

Contact Officer: , Operations Manager, Libraries ACT

## **Libraries ACT Loans Policy**

### **25 July 2013**

#### **Background**

- On 1 July 2012 we introduced a new loans policy. This was to be a one year trial to apply the new process with the aim of items being returned on time so that they can continue to be made available to the community.
- As at 1 July 2013 Library members are were no longer charged fines for overdue items, but are instead encouraged to return or renew them before the due date.
- This means that all members, who make the genuine mistake of accidentally not returning items on time, are now given a greater opportunity to do so without facing any library fines.
- Early data has shown that many long overdue items have now been returned to the library. We have also had feedback from many library borrowers who have appreciated the advantages of no library fines.
- Borrowers are reminded of their responsibility to ensure that library items are returned or renewed by their due date. They can be renewed up to three times (excludes items requested by other members) and this can be done simply by accessing you account online, over the phone, by email or in person at any Libraries ACT branch.

#### **Fine/Fee comparison**

- As at 29 June 2012 there was \$0.719m of library fines outstanding on the Libraries ACT library management system. This amount was wiped from members accounts prior to the new policy commencing.
- In the 2012-13 financial year Libraries ACT received \$45,225 in administration fees paid (new policy).
- In the 2011-12 financial year Libraries ACT received \$175,629 in library fines paid (old fines policy).
- \$334,600 in administration fees are yet to be paid from the 2012-13 financial year (under new policy).
- There has been a decrease in items that are long overdue (3 months or more) approx 500 items less in 2012-13 than 2011-12 . Libraries ACT does not keep statistics on this information for privacy reasons but can confirm that on most occasions the request for a payment plan would be granted.
- Items overdue in 2011-12: 12,657. In 2012-13 there was less: 12,380.

## Discussion points for the way forward

- Trial began on 1 July 2012 but new lag times (84 days before second invoice generated) meant it was not until December 2012 that we started to see any real trends.
- We want to ensure we have adequate community consultation and evaluation processes prior to making any changes
- Data is not conclusive, but some indication that short term overdues increased (extra time with no penalty); Long term overdues (over 84 days) decreased.
- Only 7% of our members have overdue loans – that means 93% bring things back on time
- At any time only around 12,000 items out of a collection size of 616,244 are overdue.
- Library errors are high because the system needs to be changed to be system generated, and we need a new LMS which is sophisticated enough to handle this process. Library staff need to be able to waive any fee generated in error immediately.
- Around a third of all requests to waive fees have genuine extenuating circumstances (often with medical evidence, death certificates, police reports for thefts, etc). These need to be able to be approved quickly as borrowers are vulnerable and in distress.
- New models to be explored include
  - early barring of borrowing privileges but less financial penalties
  - A shorter period of overdue – aging to lost more quickly. Borrower then responsible for lost costs and administration fee per item, which is much easier to manage on our current system
  - Incentives for early returns - perhaps a reward system (more loans) or draws for a prize (iPad, ebook readers etc)
  - Amnesties which may bring a social benefit (e.g. Yellow Van Donations) but unplanned and rare (once a year?)
- Current trial not obviously effective, very labour intensive and needs overhaul; but we need to engage our borrowers in consultation processes (focus groups planned)
- Can we have longer to develop a comprehensive program including a mix of incentive/penalty based on research into customer demand, and current best practice ?



## **Libraries ACT**

### **Library borrower's research**

September 2013

Melbourne Canberra Sydney  
[www.orima.com](http://www.orima.com)



## Table of Contents

<b>I.</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
A.	<i>Background .....</i>	<i>2</i>
B.	<i>Research objectives.....</i>	<i>2</i>
C.	<i>Research methodology .....</i>	<i>3</i>
D.	<i>Presentation of findings.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<b>II.</b>	<b>ACT Library usage and perceptions .....</b>	<b>5</b>
A.	<i>About this chapter.....</i>	<i>5</i>
B.	<i>Overall findings .....</i>	<i>5</i>
C.	<i>Usage of library services .....</i>	<i>5</i>
D.	<i>Perceptions of public libraries in ACT.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<b>III.</b>	<b>Borrowing behaviour.....</b>	<b>9</b>
A.	<i>About this chapter.....</i>	<i>9</i>
B.	<i>Overall findings .....</i>	<i>9</i>
C.	<i>Borrowing behaviour .....</i>	<i>10</i>
D.	<i>Returning behaviour .....</i>	<i>11</i>
E.	<i>Motivators to returning items on time .....</i>	<i>12</i>
F.	<i>Barriers to returning items on time .....</i>	<i>13</i>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>Library loans policies .....</b>	<b>16</b>
A.	<i>About this chapter.....</i>	<i>16</i>
B.	<i>Factors contributing to an effective loans policy.....</i>	<i>16</i>
C.	<i>Awareness of current loans policy .....</i>	<i>17</i>
D.	<i>Penalty systems.....</i>	<i>20</i>
E.	<i>Incentive systems .....</i>	<i>23</i>
<b>V.</b>	<b>Conclusions and recommendations .....</b>	<b>26</b>
A.	<i>Conclusions.....</i>	<i>26</i>
B.	<i>Recommendations .....</i>	<i>27</i>
	<b>Appendix A: Profile of participants .....</b>	<b>30</b>
	<b>Appendix B: Loans policies tested .....</b>	<b>33</b>

# I. Introduction

## A. Background

Libraries ACT delivers public library services to the ACT community. As the only public library service in Canberra, Libraries ACT serves a population of over 350,000 people, and had 9 million visitors in 2012-13. With its extensive and diverse customer base, Libraries ACT faces the ongoing challenge of ensuring that library members return their items in a timely manner, so as to protect and conserve government assets and ensure the needs of other customers are met.

In 2012, Libraries ACT introduced a new fee trial loans policy to encourage the timely return of items. This policy, which includes penalty fees (administrative costs of \$25 at one month, and \$175 at 3 months) when any amount of items are long overdue, replaced a previous policy in which a daily fine of 20 cents per item was charged.

In light of feedback from library members, Libraries ACT decided to conduct research to investigate the concept of library fines and fees and explore options (incentives or penalties) to encourage library members to return their library material on time.

Libraries ACT commissioned ORIMA Research to conduct the research via 4 focus groups with the target audience of library borrowers.

## B. Research objectives

The research objectives were to:

- ◆ Understand motivators and barriers to the timely return of library items;
- ◆ Explore the appeal, preferences and likely call-to-action of different loans policies; and
- ◆ Provide recommendations to Libraries ACT on the most effective loans policy to encourage the timely return of items.

## C. Research methodology

A total of 26 people participated in the research, which was conducted between 10th and 11th September 2013 via 4 focus groups.<sup>1</sup>

The research was conducted in two different libraries in the ACT:

- ◆ Gungahlin; and
- ◆ Tuggeranong.

Research participants were recruited by ORIMA research from customer lists provided by ACT Libraries. Participants were reimbursed \$50 to cover their expenses to attend focus groups of up to 1.5 hours in duration.

During the groups, participants were presented with three different library loan policies (see Appendix B):

- ◆ The current loans policy;
- ◆ The previous loans policy; and
- ◆ An alternative incentives loans policy suggestion.

Table 1 shows the research design and locations adopted for the research.

**Table 1: Sample Design**

		Tuggeranong Library	Gungahlin Library	TOTAL
<i>Focus groups (FG) n=6-8 participants</i>				
Library patrons and borrowers	Participants who were <b>non-compliant</b> with library lending period	1 x FG n = 5	1 x FG n = 7	2 x FG n = 12
	Participants who were <b>compliant</b> with library lending period	1 x FG n = 7	1 x FG n = 7	2 x FG n = 14
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>2 x FG n = 12</b>	<b>2 x FG n = 14</b>	<b>4 x FG n = 26</b>

<sup>1</sup> Between 6 and 8 people were recruited for each focus group.

The demographic profile of research participants (refer to Appendix A) shows that people from a range of demographic backgrounds participated in the research.

## **D. Presentation of findings**

The research was qualitative in nature and hence, the results and findings are presented in a qualitative manner. This research approach does not allow for the exact number of participants holding a particular view on individual issues to be measured. This report, therefore, provides an indication of themes and reactions among research participants rather than exact proportions of participants who felt a certain way.

The following terms used in the report provide a qualitative indication and approximation of size of the target audience who held particular views:

- ◆ Most—refers to findings that relate to more than three quarters of the research participants;
- ◆ Many—refers to findings that relate to more than half of the research participants;
- ◆ Some—refers to findings that relate to around a third of the research participants; and
- ◆ A few—refers to findings that relate to less than a quarter of research participants.

The most common findings are reported except in certain situations where only a minority has raised particular issues, but these are nevertheless considered to be important and to have potentially wide-ranging implications / applications.

Quotes have been provided throughout the report to support the main results or findings under discussion.

## II. ACT Library usage and perceptions

### A. About this chapter

This chapter presents contextual findings from the research, reporting on participants' usage of ACT libraries' services as well as their perceptions of public libraries in the ACT.

### B. Overall findings

Overall, the research found that most participants considered ACT public libraries to be an important community resource.

*"I think it's amazing that you can get all this for free"—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

Most participants were positive in relation to the quality of services and programs provided by ACT libraries. Additionally, those participants who had been exposed to public libraries in other States / Territories or countries reported that public libraries in the ACT compared favourably to these.

### C. Usage of library services

*"I borrow books, CDs, DVDs... I sometimes use the computer in the library to use the internet"—Non-compliant, Tuggeranong*

The research found that most participants primarily used public libraries to access their borrowing services. Participants reported borrowing books, DVDs, CDs, audio books and / or magazines for themselves and / or other family members such as children and partners.

*"I use the order online more now"—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

Many participants reported that they accessed the library catalogue at home via the internet, as they found this to be a convenient way to browse for and reserve items. The research also found that some participants, generally those who had more spare time during the day (i.e. retirees and students), spent time in libraries:

*"Recently I've been here to study. It's a quiet place"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

*"I read the newspapers from all around Australia"—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

- ◆ Browsing;
- ◆ Studying;
- ◆ Reading;
- ◆ Using the internet; and / or
- ◆ Accessing newspapers and current edition magazines that were not available for loan.

Some of these participants indicated that they visited the library multiple times a week for such activities.

In addition, a few research participants reported using the following library programs and services:

*"[I borrow] language DVDs, Japanese and Korean for myself and my wife"—Non-compliant, Tuggeranong*

- ◆ Kids programs, including Story Time and Giggle and Wiggle;
- ◆ Multicultural services, including accessing materials from the libraries' multicultural collection;
- ◆ eResources, including eBooks and eAudio; and
- ◆ Office facilities e.g. photocopiers, the internet and scanners.

## D. Perceptions of public libraries in ACT

The research found that most participants considered public libraries in the ACT to be an important and valuable community resource. Participants identified a number of personal and community benefits provided by public libraries. These included:

*"It provides services to people who wouldn't be able to afford internet"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

*"It's [Story Time] a good thing to encourage kids to go to libraries"—Compliant, Gungahlin*

*"The library here has that social aspect to it... it's an essential community space"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

*"In this climate, I suspect some people go there because it's warm"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

- ◆ Free access to materials that they otherwise would have to purchase and store themselves;
- ◆ Expanding community access to cultural materials as well as some services and facilities (e.g. the internet)—participants noted that without public libraries, access to such resources would be unaffordable for some community members;
- ◆ The promotion of reading and education in the community, in particular amongst children, through library programs and activities; and
- ◆ The provision of an important public space—participants felt that public libraries provided opportunities for social interaction which was particularly valuable for socially isolated community members. They were also seen to provide public leisure space that was "warm" and protected from the elements.

Most research participants were also positive towards the services and programs provided by ACT public libraries. Participants reported that the library catalogue had a "good range" of materials and was kept "up-to-date" with

*"I like their range... even a book that's just been released, they'll bring it in"—Compliant, Gungahlin*

*"We've done research on Antarctica for primary school ... the diversity of books just wasn't there... for me it's [more of] an entertainment medium"—Non-compliant, Tuggeranong*

*"The staff in the library are very helpful... they're very understanding if you're an offender like me"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

*"You get people coming in to use mobile phones and have a chat. Libraries always used to be a place where quietness was encouraged"—Compliant, Gungahlin*

"current" and "new release" items. Participants also appreciated the ability to request items that were not currently available.

However, a few participants reported that, on occasions when they had been researching a particular topic of interest in detail, the range of resources available had been limited. These participants generally felt that ACT libraries were better suited to leisure activities than academic pursuits.

Participants were complimentary of the customer service provided by library staff, who were considered to be:

- ◆ "Friendly";
- ◆ "Helpful";
- ◆ Motivated to do the best by library customers; and
- ◆ Appropriately understanding of individual circumstance—participants reported that library staff were willing to take personal situations and events (e.g. financial situation, age and legitimate reasons for items being returned late) into account when enforcing library lending policies.

Research participants also appreciated the linkages that existed between the different public libraries in the ACT. They reported that they valued the convenience of being able to source and return materials to any of the public libraries. This was particularly appreciated by participants who had been members of libraries in other States / Territories where this was not possible.

Many participants reported having noticed several changes to the public libraries in the ACT in recent years. This included:

- ◆ The introduction of more internet and digital services;
- ◆ An increased number of public libraries located alongside colleges;
- ◆ A reduction in the number of "quiet" areas / spaces inside libraries; and
- ◆ The introduction of cafes inside some libraries.

Some participants welcomed the above changes and felt that they encouraged the use of libraries amongst younger



*"If it gets them [younger people] in here maybe it's a good thing"—  
Compliant, Gungahlin*

generations. However, some other, generally older, participants felt that such changes had contributed to a "louder" and more "disruptive" library atmosphere.

Although participants were positive towards the library services and programs they had been exposed to, the research found that many participants were unaware of the full extent of services and programs available through ACT public libraries (such as kids programs, youth resources and social events). The few participants who had participated in such library programs were appreciative of these and most participants felt it would be beneficial if such programs were more widely publicised.

*"The ACT government [funds them] I suppose, from our taxes"—  
Compliant, Tuggeranong*

The research also found that most participants had limited knowledge of how public libraries were funded in the ACT. While many participants assumed that public libraries received funding from the ACT Government, the details of library funding arrangements were not widely known or considered.

### III. Borrowing behaviour

#### A. About this chapter

This chapter discusses the research findings relating to item borrowing and returning behaviour. It also reports on the motivators and barriers impacting on the timely return of materials to the libraries.

#### B. Overall findings

Overall, the research found that there were a number of factors impacting on the timely return of library items.

Participants who returned their items within the lending period were mostly driven by intrinsic motivators, including a belief in their social responsibility / obligation as a library member and knowledge that someone else required their item/s. Avoidance of penalties was also a strong motivator for many participants.

For participants who regularly failed to return items within the lending period, the research found that a number of intrinsic and extrinsic barriers superseded these motivators.

The key motivators and barriers identified through the research are summarised in table 1 below.

**Table 1**

Motivators	Barriers
<b><i>Intrinsic</i></b>	
A belief in social responsibility / obligation	Complacency
A desire to avoid inconvenience to other library members	Assumption no one else was interested / wanted items borrowed
	Belief that loans policy / penalty system would not be strongly or quickly enforced
<b><i>Extrinsic</i></b>	
Avoidance of penalties	Forgetting to return items on due date
Reminder messages via mobile phone and email	Keeping track of a large numbers of returns

An effective personal reminder system	Taking longer than the allocated lending period to read / watch items
Afterhours and inter-library returns	Time restrictions / "too busy"
Online / telephone renewal	Interstate travel
	Unsafe / inaccessible return chutes
	Items with shorter lending periods

### C. Borrowing behaviour

*"It's not uncommon for me to have something between 15 -20 books at a time"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

The research found that, when borrowing items from the library, most participants would borrow between one and twenty items. Participants reported that the amount they borrowed generally depended on:

- ◆ How many items they felt they could read / watch within the timeframe allocated;
- ◆ The number of people they were borrowing for—participants with younger children, partners or someone else in their care (i.e. an elderly parent) tended to borrow more items;
- ◆ How many items they had previously ordered (i.e. online) that had become available; and / or
- ◆ How many items they could physically carry.

*"I borrow for my Mum... she's in a nursing home"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

*"I carry one of those supermarket bags and once that is full I stop"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

The research found that most participants assumed there was a limit on the number of items they were allowed to borrow, with most placing this limit between eight to twenty items. Only a few participants were aware that they were allowed to borrow an unlimited number of items.

Most participants felt that the number of items they were allowed to borrow should be limited. Participants felt this would benefit the library by:

- ◆ Mitigating the risk of lost items by reducing the number that any one borrower could lose / misplace; and
- ◆ Encouraging library members to return their items before borrowing more items.

*"It's about mitigating the risk... if someone borrows 100 books there could be a lot that go missing"—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

*"I think limits are a really good idea... it may encourage me to return books early so I can get more"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

The research found that participants also had limited awareness of the amount of time they were allowed to borrow books and other library materials for. Many

*"If it's on a waiting list it's only two weeks"—Compliant, Gungahlin*

participants assumed that the lending period for all items was three weeks. Only some participants were aware that the lending period for books was four weeks, and for DVDs was two weeks. These participants also reported that "more popular" books, or books that had been requested by other members, tended to have a shorter lending period (i.e. two weeks).

*"That confuses me a little... I was much better when everything was the same number of weeks"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

Most participants felt that the lending periods were appropriate. However, a few participants reported that the varying timeframes for different library materials was "confusing" and made it difficult for them to remember when their items were due back. Other participants disagreed, reporting that the borrowing docket / receipt clearly explained the lending period of the different items.

#### D. Returning behaviour

The research found that, generally, returning items on or before the due date was less of a priority for participants who regularly breached library loan periods. Many of these participants felt that it was acceptable for them to return their items within a "reasonable period of time" from the due date (i.e. two weeks).

*"I always try to renew, especially when I get an overdue notice... but if someone else is waiting for it I can't renew it... and I am still reading it"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

Many participants reported that, if they realised they would require the item they had borrowed past the due date, they would renew it online or via telephone. However, participants who had been non-compliant with the loans policy reported that, when renewing was not an option (i.e. as another library member had requested it), they would sometimes retain the item until they had finished reading / watching it.

For participants who had received reminder notices from the library that their items were overdue, most reported that they took action within a few days. Some other participants, however, waited for a few weeks. The research also identified one participant who had failed to return their library items. This example is explored in the 'Current loans policy' section of this report (pp20-21).

## E. Motivators to returning items on time

The research found that there were a number of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that motivated the timely return of items.

The research identified the following **intrinsic** motivators:

*"It's a social obligation, other people are entitled to read the books as well"—Compliant, Gungahlin*

- ◆ A belief in **social responsibility / obligation**—many participants, particularly those who had not breached the library lending period, had a strong belief that they should return their items in a timely manner as it was "the right thing to do". These participants reported feelings of "guilt" and / or "embarrassment" if they did not abide by the library loans policy.

*"If that book's on order I don't want to inconvenience anyone else by my tardiness"—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

- ◆ A desire to **avoid inconvenience to other library members**—most participants reported that there was a higher impetus for them to return their borrowed item in a timely manner if they were aware that someone else required / desired it.

The research identified the following **extrinsic** motivators:

*"I didn't want a big fine so thought I had to return it"—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

- ◆ **Avoidance of penalties** for not returning item—most participants reported that the penalties, including fees / fines and loss of library privileges, were a strong motivator to encourage them to return their items.
- ◆ **Reminder messages** via mobile phone and email—the research found that participants who were aware of the alert system and received reminder emails or SMS messages were more likely to return their items in a timely manner. These participants reported that the alerts were effective in reminding them two to three days before their item was due, which provided them sufficient time to:

- arrange a trip to the library to return their items; or
- renew their items online / via the telephone.

*"I return or renew them on time... there's a reminder, a text message reminder"—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

The research found that most participants who regularly breached the library lending period were unaware of the option to receive alerts, particularly via SMS, and felt that it would be an effective mechanism for prompting them to return their items.

*"An SMS reminder would be great"—Non-compliant, Tuggeranong*

*"I use the reminder function on the iPhone"—Compliant, Gungahlin*

*"It doesn't matter which library we return them to"—Compliant, Gungahlin*

- ◆ An effective **personal reminder system**—participants who had a system to remind them to return their books generally seemed more likely to return their items on time. Such systems included:
  - Leaving items on a shelf / bookcase near the front door;
  - Taking items to car when finished with them;
  - Keeping return docket in prominent location (i.e. on fridge) as a reminder; and
  - Scheduling reminder into mobile telephone.
- ◆ **Afterhours and inter-library returns**—participants reported that the ease of returning items had improved through the availability of afterhours return chutes. Additionally, participants appreciated that they could return their items to any library within the ACT, as this provided them with additional drop-off points.
- ◆ **Online / telephone renewal**—many participants reported that they used the online renewal system to extend the return time on their item and avoid penalties. A few older participants also reported that they called up to renew their items, as they did not have internet access at home. These channels were felt to be an effective and efficient way to allow for easy renewal.

## F. Barriers to returning items on time

The research identified the following **intrinsic** barriers that impeded the timely return of library items:

*"My son's a notorious offender... he just didn't care. And 3 years later there are all these library books. I was horrified!"—Compliant, Gungahlin*

*"A lot of stuff I am looking at I know nobody else is looking for... it's not*

- ◆ **Complacency**—many participants who regularly breached library lending periods reported that returning books on time was not a priority for them. These participants generally felt that, as long as they returned their items within the broad proximity of the due date (i.e. within two weeks from the due date), they were not inconveniencing the library or other library members.
- ◆ **Assumption no one else was interested / wanted items borrowed**—if participants felt that the items they were borrowing were unlikely to be required by other library members due to a niche interest or

*hurting anyone”—Non-compliant,  
Tuggeranong*

specialised topic area, they indicated they were less likely to ensure the items were returned by the due date.

- ◆ **Belief that loans policy / penalty system would not be strongly or quickly enforced**—while the penalty system was a motivator for many participants to return their items, some participants did not believe that the system would be enforced and the penalty (i.e. fines, fees and loss of privileges) acted upon. This assumption was based on:

- Past experience, with a few participants reporting the fines / fees had been waived, or that library privileges had “taken a while” to be revoked; and / or
- The perception that the library staff were “caring” and “compassionate”, and thus avoided inflicting penalties on library members where possible.

The research identified the following **extrinsic** barriers that impeded the timely return of library items:

*“I want to return my books on time, but sometimes I forget”—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

*“I am very absent-minded...”—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

*“It’s mostly the kids’ books I don’t return on time... sometimes they get lost in other books”—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

*“The primary reason I don’t return them on time is that I can’t renew them and I am three quarters of the way through them”—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

- ◆ **Forgetting to return items** on due date—the research found that one of the key barriers for those who regularly breached the library lending policy was forgetting that their items were due back. Many of these participants reported being “disorganised” or “forgetful”.
- ◆ **Keeping track of a large numbers of returns**—participants who borrowed items for other family members, particularly children, reported that it was often hard to “keep track” of all the items they, or others in their family, had borrowed. Research participants reported that children’s books and magazines were most commonly lost, as they were smaller and easily misplaced.
- ◆ **Taking longer than the allocated lending period to read / watch items**—some participants reported that, if they took longer to read / watch the item they had on loan, they would retain the item until they had completed it. This was particularly an issue if participants could not renew the item as another library member had requested it. These participants then reported being concerned that, should they return the item, they would not re-

*"I've got young kids... it's not always convenient"—Compliant, Gungahlin*

*"I rang them up and said I was away in Sydney ... they pulled it up on the computer and renewed it for me... I didn't want a big fine"—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

*"At my library there are certain days and times at night when it's too late and it's not safe... it's not well lit"—Non-compliant, Tuggeranong*

acquire it for "some time".

- ◆ **Time restrictions / "too busy"**—many participants reported that their busy schedules meant they had limited time to visit the library to return their items. This was particularly the case for participants who had younger children or busy work schedules.
- ◆ **Interstate travel**—a few participants reported that they were frequently away (i.e. travel for work), and as a result could often not return their items on the due date. A few participants who complied with library lending periods also reported that they were sometimes away when their items were due. These participants reported that in these situations they contacted the library (i.e. via telephone or email), or renewed the items they had on loan.
- ◆ **Unsafe / inaccessible return chutes**—a few participants reported that some of the return chutes had limited lighting and were located in "unsafe" locations. These participants reported that they did not "feel safe" returning items to these chutes once it was dark, which limited the timeframe within which they could return their items.
- ◆ **Borrowed items with shorter lending periods**—some participants reported that, if they had borrowed items with shorter lending periods (i.e. DVDs or popular books with a limit of 2 weeks), they were less likely to return the items on time. A few participants reported that they were likely to wait to return these items until any other items they had borrowed were due (i.e. after 4 weeks), to reduce the required number of trips to the library.



## IV. Library loans policies

### A. About this chapter

This chapter discusses factors that were felt to contribute to an effective loans policy, and awareness of the current loans policy. It also explores participants' perceptions and experiences relating to penalty loans policies (including the current and previous Libraries ACT policies), and perceptions relating to the introduction of incentives.

### B. Factors contributing to an effective loans policy

Overall, there were five key factors that participants identified as important in the effective implementation of a library loans policy:

- ◆ **Effective and wide-reaching communication**—participants felt that any policy that was implemented should be clearly communicated to library members. This included displaying it in prominent locations and ensuring that it was communicated in “simple” and “easy to understand” language so that all library members could understand it.
- ◆ **Equal implementation for all library members**—most participants felt that it was important to ensure that the policy was enforced uniformly. This included most senior participants, who felt that any penalties that applied to other library members should also apply to them.
- ◆ **Reasonable and fair penalties**—participants felt that the penalties for overdue / lost items, and the associated administration costs, should be appropriately matched to the offence and be “affordable” to suit the range of library members. Participants felt this would ensure that people of lower socio-economic status, including students, seniors and immigrants, would not be dissuaded from using library services and borrowing materials as a result of fees / fines.
- ◆ **Consistent and prompt enforcement**—participants felt that the policy, once implemented, should be consistently enforced to encourage credibility. A

*“I think it needs very clear guidelines”—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

*“I think they needs to make this information more clear on their website”—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

*“Somewhere between \$10 and \$25 for the total amount”—Compliant, Gungahlin*

*"I've had a book on hold since 13<sup>th</sup> September last year... obviously somebody has lost it... it's incredibly frustrating"—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

*"I think you need both... some people will react to being punished and others will react to being rewarded"—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

few participants reported that, as fines / fees had been rebuked previously, they did not believe they would be penalised for overdue items. This lack of credibility was found to diminish the viability of the penalty system, and led some participants to breach the loans policy.

Additionally, other participants reported that they had been on "waiting lists" for items that had effectively "disappeared" as other library members had failed to return them. These participants found this frustrating, and felt that information needed to be kept "up-to-date" in relation to the status of an item, to ensure expected receipt dates were appropriately revised for the benefit of other members.

- ◆ Include **penalties and incentives** to motivate return—participants felt incorporating penalties with incentives would be effective in encouraging the diverse range of library members to return their items in a timely manner.

### C. Awareness of current loans policy

Overall, the research found that most participants had limited awareness and understanding of the current library loans policy. Many participants were unaware that a new loans policy had been introduced into ACT libraries and thus assumed that, as per the previous policy:

- ◆ Overdue fees were charged per item per day; and
- ◆ Seniors would not be charged for late items.

Of the participants who were aware that the loans policy had changed, the research found that only a few of these knew the details of the current policy, including the charge-free period and the administration fees charged for overdue and lost items.

*"I recall reading it somewhere but it certainly wasn't set out as clear as it is here"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

Additionally, a few participants who had read about the change reported that they had not fully understood the details of the loans policy as it had been written in "a complicated" manner that was "hard to understand".

The research found that this limited awareness / understanding of the current loans policy impacted on its

*"It's important for the library to let people know. Because that's their encouragement to get people to bring their books back"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

effectiveness as a motivator for the timely return of items. Some participants who had not complied with the loans policy reported that, had they been aware as to the extent of fees charged under the current system, they may have been more "careful" to return their items prior to being charged.

*"When I joined in February or March they ran through everything with me"—Compliant, Gungahlin*

Participants who were aware of the change to the loans policy reported they had heard about it through:

- ◆ Library staff explaining the new policy either to them or to other library members;
- ◆ Receiving an invoice for their lost items and administration fee—a few participants reported being surprised by an unexpected invoice. These participants felt that it was "unfair" they should be expected to pay the fees as they had been unaware that the policy had changed;
- ◆ Searching the Libraries ACT website—a few participants had been triggered to seek out further details via the library website, mostly as a result of receiving an invoice from the library for their late items. A few of these participants reported that the information had been hard to find on the website and should be in a more "prominent" position (i.e. on the homepage); and / or
- ◆ Newspaper and radio announcements—a few participants reported they had heard about the change through the media.

*"I can remember it being publicised on the radio"—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

All research participants felt that it was essential that the details of the library loans policy be clearly communicated to them. Participants felt that, as they were entering a contract with the library by borrowing items, it was important that they were aware of the details of the policy and the repercussions of not complying with it. Participants reported that they would like to be informed of the policy:

*"It's important for the library to let people know... if you go to the library you're entering a contract"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

*"You need to know what the rules are for borrowing... it should be clearly accessible on the website"—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

- ◆ On the library website in a clearly visible location (i.e. on the homepage)—many participants reported they would be likely to see this when visiting the website to search the library catalogue or when reserving / renewing items;
- ◆ Via signs in the library displayed:
  - On the borrowing machine / counter;
  - On the library walls near the entrance;

*"[Put it] just under the return box... have it clearly marked"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

- By the return chute;
- In a leaflet available at the borrowing counters and distributed to new library members;

*"They should have bookmarks with the borrowing system"—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

- ◆ On a bookmark that could be distributed to library members when borrowing items;
- ◆ Via an email to all library members;
- ◆ On borrowing docketts / receipts—participants felt the loans policy should be in clear, bold font either at the top or bottom of the docket / receipt; and
- ◆ Via the automated voice on the 'Canberra Connect' telephone line (i.e. played when on hold).

*"I didn't realise they had a problem... it would be nice to know how big a problem it is"—Compliant, Gungahlin*

*"They should have more promotion about the lost books. How much is it costing us?"—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

The research also found that there was limited awareness amongst participants that the timely return of items was an issue that affected Libraries ACT. Many participants felt that Libraries ACT should communicate the extent of the problem, and the impact of the problem on library services and patrons, to encourage library members to consider the impact of their non-compliance. Some participants who had breached the library lending period felt that the provision of such information would be sufficient to encourage them to return their items. It was felt that this information could be communicated:

- ◆ Through the media (i.e. the local / community papers or via the radio);
- ◆ On the library website; and / or
- ◆ In emails / letters to library members reminding them to return their overdue items.

*"I really liked the amnesty they had, you could bring in cans of food for your books that were overdue... you didn't feel so guilty"—Compliant, Gungahlin*

The research found that some participants were aware of the "amnesty" that had been held by ACT Libraries, and felt that this had been an effective way of recouping lost items. A few participants reported that they had used this as an avenue through which to return overdue library items. Some participants felt that it was a "good idea" that could be used to reclaim lost books on a regular basis (i.e. each year at Christmas). However, most other participants felt that this may encourage "bad behaviour" and result in the assumption by some library members that items need not be returned until the amnesty. These participants felt that, should this strategy be employed, it be done so in a "random", "ad hoc" and "sporadic" manner.

## D. Penalty systems

Most participants felt penalties were important to encourage the timely return of items. Many participants reported that the knowledge they would be charged acted as an effective impetus for the return of items.

*"Since I turned 60 there is no fine so 'what the heck' I'll drop it off whenever"—Non-compliant, Tuggeranong*

Additionally, some senior participants reported that they were less likely to return their items on time under the previous loans policy as they knew they would not be charged.

While there were a few participants who felt that financial penalty systems should not be employed due to the inability of some library members to pay (i.e. students, seniors and immigrants), these participants generally felt that this could be overcome by ensuring the penalty was fair and reasonable.

### D.1. Current loans policy

*"With \$200 people would give up... it's too much... they're not going to bring it back"—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

The research found that, on exposure to the details of the current loans policy, most participants felt that it would not be effective in motivating the timely return of library items, or in encouraging library members with overdue items to return their items.

#### Example

*"A part of me feels like I am not a bad person... the fines are a bit unreasonable for the offence"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

*One participant in the research received the initial \$25.00 administration fee and determined it to be "unfair" and "unreasonable" considering the relatively "minor" nature of her offence (i.e. overlooking to return her library items).*

*"I feel like if I still have the books I may be able to negotiate reducing the fines"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

*This participant held onto her numerous overdue items rather than returning them, in the hope that she could later use them as a "bargaining chip" to reclaim the cost of the fee.*

*"The shame, the size of the fines, it's just gotten too high... it's in the 'too hard basket'"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

*As time lapsed, and no one from the libraries contacted her to discuss the issue, the items were eventually deemed lost. The participant then received the escalated administration fee of \$175.00. The participant reported feeling*

*"I do feel incredibly guilty with my current stash but when it gets to the stage I am now I am far too embarrassed to go into a library"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

*"embarrassed" and "trapped", as she did not desire to keep the items but could not afford to pay the fees. At the time of the research, the participant had stopped going to the library due to "embarrassment" and "fear" of repercussion, yet still retained the library books in the hope she could one day return them and reverse the fee.*

The research identified the following **favourable** findings relating to the current loans policy:

*"I think losing privileges is a great one... just make it automatic"—Non-compliant, Tuggeranong*

- ◆ Immediate loss of library privileges—most participants felt that it was appropriate to rebuke library privileges straight away if an item was overdue. However, participants also felt that this should be immediately communicated to the library member (rather than waiting for two weeks before communicating this, as currently occurred); and
- ◆ "Grace" period—participants appreciated that there was a period in which they were not charged fees / fines following the due date of the item. Participants felt that it was appropriate to wait a reasonable time before introducing fees / fines, to allow for any unforeseen circumstances and / or difficulties in returning items. Participants felt that this period should last for at least seven days to ensure the inclusion of weekend days for any library members who found it hard to return their items during the working week.
- ◆ Item/s deemed lost when 28 days overdue—some participants felt that it was appropriate that items were deemed lost following a month of library members failing to return them. This was particularly appreciated by participants who reserved items, as they felt this would allow for quick communication on the status of the item. However, some participants felt that a month was too soon as it may not allow for an unexpected occurrence (i.e. an illness). These participants felt that allowing for six weeks prior to deeming an item as lost would be more appropriate.
- ◆ Library members charged for the replacement cost of lost items—participants felt that this was appropriate and reasonable for the library to recover the expense of ordering new items.

*"I would be happier if the fee started at 7 days... it guarantees you a weekend to get to the library"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

*"14 weeks is too long... it should be lost after 28 days"—Non-compliant, Tuggeranong*

*"It gives other people a fair chance to know what's happening with their[reserved] books"—Compliant, Gungahlin*

*"The full replacement cost of each book should be in any system"—Compliant, Gungahlin*

The research identified the following **unfavourable** findings relating to the current loans policy:

*"There is no compelling reason for anyone to get them back under the new system because there's no fines"—Non-compliant, Tuggeranong*

*"It's pretty harsh. People on a low income would find this impossible [to pay]—non-compliant, Gungahlin*

*"I think this [fee] would discourage people on a low income from going to the library"—Compliant, Gungahlin*

*"It goes from being reasonable to being the Gestapo"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

*"There's no additional administration between steps 3 & 4. Why call it an administration fee?—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

*"A phone call after it gets to a certain point [would be good]... with the library enquiring whether the books are lost"—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

- ◆ No motivator for the timely return of items—participants felt that the current policy was unlikely to encourage the timely return of items as there was no penalty, beyond loss of library privileges, until 28 days after the item/s were overdue. Participants felt that they would be more likely to return an item on time if they were charged a daily fine / fee.
- ◆ Excessive administration fees—most participants felt that both the initial \$25.00 fee and the following \$175.00 fee were unduly excessive. It was felt that the heftiness of these fees may discourage library members from returning their overdue items and using the library. In particular, participants reported that:
  - The initial \$25.00 fee was "too high" following an item being just one month overdue. Participants did not believe that the administration required to "chase up" one or more items would be this costly, and felt that this would be "too much" for some members of the community to pay; and
  - The final \$175.00 administration fee was considered too large an increase, with participants questioning how it could rise so substantially when little extra effort was required of the library staff. This led participants to question the viability and credibility of the loans policy, with many believing it was unlikely to be strongly enforced.

Additionally, participants felt that it would be important for the libraries to follow-up on any overdue items that had escalated to the later stages via a telephone call, as this would assist in determining the cause of the tardiness as well as the status of the item/s.

## D.2. Previous loans policy

The research found that, when shown the previous loans policy, most participants felt it was more likely to encourage the timely return of items than the current loans policy. However, many participants reported that it did not

present enough of a penalty to motivate the return of items.

*"The 20c per day is too weak... people would ignore that"—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

The research found that the key **favourable** finding relating to the previous loans policy was the daily charge per item. Participants felt that implementing such a charge would encourage the timely return of items. Participants also felt that it was reasonable and appropriate to charge per item, as each item that was overdue was inconvenient for the library and other library members. However, many participants felt that 20c per item per day was a "minimal" charge that was unlikely to motivate many library members, particularly those on higher incomes, to return their item/s. These participants suggested that charging 50c per item per day may be more effective.

*"If I wanted to keep a book \$6.90 is not enough to stop me from calling up to say it was lost"—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

Participants also appreciated that there was a "cap" on the amount that could be charged, as this kept the cost reasonable for library members who may have difficulty affording fees / fines. However, most participants considered the \$6.90 cap as "too low" to motivate the return of items.

*"... just because you're old doesn't mean you don't need to bring books back"—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

The research identified the key **unfavourable** findings relating to the previous loans policy as:

- ◆ Seniors were discounted from the policy—most participants felt that everyone should be treated equally under the loans policy;
- ◆ 14 weeks was felt to be too long for an item to be deemed lost—participants who reserved items felt this was an excessive amount of time to wait before finding out the item they sought was deemed lost;
- ◆ Some participants felt that the minimal daily fee would be cumbersome for the libraries to administer; and
- ◆ No "grace" period—participants felt that library members should be allowed at least one week before being charged for overdue items.

## E. Incentive systems

The research found that, for some participants, including incentives in the loans policy would motivate the timely return of items. However, all participants felt that this



should be implemented in conjunction with a penalty system, as it was unlikely to be a strong enough incentive on its own. Additionally, participants reported the incentive would need to be widely communicated if it were to be effective, to ensure all library members were aware of what they could gain from maintaining a “good borrowing record”.

Most participants felt that **increasing library privileges** (as per example 1 on the alternative incentive policy tested), would be an effective incentive to encourage the timely return of items. Participants reported that it would be appropriate to start with a lower borrowing limit when someone was new to the library (i.e. 8 items maximum), and then reward “good borrowing behaviour” by increasing this limit (i.e. to 20 items). However, participants felt that the following would need consideration if introducing this policy:

*“It needs to be proportional to the number of kids you’ve got”—Non-compliant, Tuggeranong*

- ◆ The borrowing limit should be extended for library members with younger children on a per child basis to ensure children had the opportunity to borrow enough items to assist in their learning and development; and
- ◆ Library members who already had a good borrowing should retain their current “good record” and gain the benefits of an incentive system immediately to ensure it didn’t act as a penalty for these library members.

*“I like the idea of the opportunity to borrow more books or more chance to borrow newer books”—Non-compliant, Gungahlin*

Participants also suggested that the library could consider allowing library members who had good borrowing records to have priority on waiting lists for new release items. Many participants felt this would be a strong motivator that would encourage them to maintain a good record.

The research found that the following should be avoided when considering the introduction of an incentive in the loans policy:

*“Why should you be rewarded for doing what you should be doing?”—Compliant, Gungahlin*

- ◆ Introducing a “prize draw”—while a few participants, particularly younger, felt this may encourage them to maintain a good record, many participants did not appreciate the concept as:
  - It was felt to reward a behaviour that should be expected of all library members;
  - For some, the purchase cost of the prize was

*"My church doesn't believe in going into draws... so it would need to be opt-in"—Compliant, Tuggeranong*

perceived to be a "waste of taxpayer money"; and

- A few participants did not want to be entered in a prize draw due to religious reasons (i.e. any form of "gambling" was perceived to be inappropriate); and
- ◆ Implementing different lending timeframes—participants felt that all library members should be restricted to the same lending timeframes. Some participants felt that reducing these timeframes for library members with poor borrowing records (as suggested in example 1 of the incentive loan policy) would result in an increase in overdue items amongst these library members.

## V. Conclusions and recommendations

### A. Conclusions

The research identified a range of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators and barriers to participants returning their borrowed items on time. It was found that participants who returned their items within the lending period were mostly driven by intrinsic motivators, including:

- ◆ A belief in their social responsibility / obligation as a library member; and
- ◆ Knowledge that someone else required their item/s.

Avoidance of penalties was also found to be a strong motivator for many participants.

For participants who failed to return items within the lending period, the research found that a number of intrinsic and extrinsic barriers superseded these motivators.

Overall, the research found that most participants had limited awareness and understanding of the current library loans policy and many participants were unaware that a new loans policy had been introduced into ACT libraries.

The research found that, on exposure to the details of the current loans policy, most participants felt that it would not be effective in motivating the timely return of library items, or in encouraging library members with overdue items to return their items.

Overall, there were five key factors that participants identified as important in the effective implementation of a library loans policy:

- ◆ Effective and wide-reaching communication of the policy;
- ◆ Equal implementation of the policy for all library members;
- ◆ Reasonable and fair penalties;
- ◆ Consistent and prompt enforcement; and
- ◆ Inclusion of both penalties and incentives to motivate returns.

The research identified a number of recommendations that Libraries ACT could implement to encourage library members to return their borrowed items in a timely manner. These are outlined in the recommendations section below.

## B. Recommendations

The following recommendations, based on findings from the research, relate to the library loans policy.

Overall, ensure:

- ◆ The loans policy is communicated widely, and in clear and simple language (could consider a 'slogan' or 'acrostic poem' to assist in raising awareness). Consider communicating the loans policy via:
  - The library website (in a prominent position, such as on the homepage);
  - Signage inside the library, including:
    - On the borrowing machine / counter;
    - On the library walls near the entrance; and
    - By the return chute;
  - A leaflet available at library counters and to be distributed to new library members;
  - A bookmark that could be distributed to library members when borrowing items;
  - An email to all library members;
  - Borrowing dockets / receipts; and
  - Automated voice on Canberra Connect telephone line.
- ◆ The loans policy is equally implemented for all library members (i.e. no special privileges for seniors);
- ◆ The loans policy is consistently and promptly enforced; and
- ◆ Any penalties that are introduced are reasonable and fair—i.e. ensure final fee is not so excessive that it discourages the return of items (consider a cap).

More specifically, consider:

- ◆ Introducing a maximum item borrowing limit of 20 items, with a per child exception for parents;
- ◆ Re-introducing a minimal late fee (i.e. 50 cents) per item per day to encourage the timely return of items;
- ◆ Allowing a grace period of seven days before introducing late fees / charges;
- ◆ Deeming item/s lost after six weeks (after which time library members should be charged for the replacement cost of the item/s);
- ◆ Maintaining immediate loss of library privileges when item/s become overdue, however ensure this is communicated to library members earlier (within three days);
- ◆ Introducing an incentive system in conjunction with a penalty system. The following could be adopted as incentives:
  - Priority access to new release materials; and
  - Extended borrowing item limits (i.e. allowed 20 items).

The following loans policy was developed in the research groups and can be considered in the development of a new library loans policy:

1. When an item is overdue, implement immediate loss of privileges, with notification of this to be distributed within the first three days.
2. From day seven of item/s being overdue, introduce an overdue fine of 50c per item per day, with a cap of \$10.
3. After 6 weeks, deem item/s as lost and charge library member the replacement cost of item/s as well as a \$10 administration fee (which replaces earlier overdue fine) for 1 item, with \$2.00 extra administration fee charged per item. Cap the maximum fee at \$20 per invoice.

The following recommendations are based on the research findings and relate more generally to library communications and the recovery of library materials:

- ◆ Communicate the availability of SMS and email alerts to all library members;
- ◆ Communicate the extent of the problem of lost and un-retuned items for ACT libraries and for their other library members;
- ◆ Follow up extended breaches of loans policy with telephone calls; and
- ◆ If using amnesties to recoup books, conduct on an infrequent and ad hoc basis (i.e. less than yearly) to prevent creating an expectation of regular occurrence.

While the qualitative research has provided a deeper understanding of the motivators, barriers and perceptions relating to timely item return, a quantitative research phase could assist in quantifying these findings to assist Libraries ACT in developing strategic priorities.

## **Appendix A: Profile of participants**

The demographic profile of research participants shows that people from a wide range of demographic backgrounds participated in the research. The demographic profile of the research participants is presented below.<sup>2</sup>

Age:

- ◆ 18 – 25 years – 4%
- ◆ 26 – 35 years – 12%
- ◆ 36 – 45 years – 19%
- ◆ 46 – 55 years – 12%
- ◆ 56 – 64 years – 8%
- ◆ 65 years and over – 46%

Gender:

- ◆ Female – 54%
- ◆ Male – 46%

Marital status:

- ◆ Married – 42%
- ◆ De facto / partnered – 19%
- ◆ Single – 19%
- ◆ Widowed – 12%
- ◆ Divorced / separated – 8%

Highest level of education completed:

- ◆ Year 10 or equivalent – 4%
- ◆ Year 12 or equivalent – 15%
- ◆ TAFE, Diploma, Certificate – 8%
- ◆ University degree (undergraduate) – 46%
- ◆ University degree (postgraduate) – 27%

Centrelink payments received (multiple response question):

- ◆ No Centrelink payments received – 61%
- ◆ Family Tax Benefit – 13%
- ◆ Parenting Payment (Single) – 4%
- ◆ Age Pension – 22%
- ◆ Other – 4%

<sup>2</sup> Percentages are based on the total number of valid responses made to the question being reported on. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.



## Annual total household income:

- ◆ Under \$30,000 – 13%
- ◆ \$30,000 – \$59,000 – 21%
- ◆ \$60,000 – \$89,000 – 21%
- ◆ \$90,000 – \$119,000 – 8%
- ◆ \$120,00 – \$149,000 – 21%
- ◆ \$150,000 – \$199,000 – 13%
- ◆ \$200,000 or more – 4%

## Frequency of visiting library:

- ◆ More than once a week – 24%
- ◆ Once a week – 16 %
- ◆ 2 – 3 times a month – 36%
- ◆ Once a month – 16%
- ◆ Once every 3 months – 8%

## Library services used:

- ◆ Borrowing services – 100%
- ◆ Internet and computer access – 27%
- ◆ Kids services and programs – 12%
- ◆ Multicultural services and programs – 4%
- ◆ Digital downloads – 15%

## Library fees incurred for late return of items to a public library in Canberra in the last 12 months:

- ◆ No fees incurred – 65%
- ◆ Fees incurred – 35%

## **Appendix B: Loans policies tested**

### CURRENT LOANS POLICY

1. When an item is overdue library members **lose library privileges** including borrowing and computer use until items are returned or renewed.
2. When an item is **14 days overdue** a **reminder notice** is sent to remind member that item/s is overdue and should be returned immediately. Also receive notification of **loss of library privileges**.
3. When an item/s is **28 days overdue** it is deemed as **lost**. An invoice will be sent for replacement cost and **\$25 fee per invoice**. If item/s is returned following the issue of this invoice, the replacement cost is removed and only \$25 admin fee is payable.
4. When an item is **84 days overdue** a final invoice is sent for replacement cost of the item/s and an additional administration fee of **\$175.00**, making the total administration fee payable **\$200.00**.

### PREVIOUS LOANS POLICY

1. When an item is overdue library members are expected to return or renew it. An **overdue fine of 20 cents per item per day** is charged, with a maximum fine applicable per item per loan period.
2. When an item is **14 days overdue** a **reminder notice** is sent to remind member that item is overdue and should be returned immediately. Also receive notification of **loss of library privileges**.
3. When an item is overdue for **14 weeks** it is deemed lost and the replacement cost of the item/s and a processing fee of \$6.50 is applied to the borrower's library account.

### ALTERNATIVE (INCENTIVE) LOANS POLICY/S

1. Borrowers start with a loan limit (eg. 20 items) and reduced loan period (eg. two weeks) and receive an increase to these limits by adhering to the Loans Policy (returning items on time, etc)
2. If a borrower has no overdue items for a certain period (eg. 3 months or 6 months) they go into a draw for a prize (eg. a tablet or 10 eReaders)

8

## Loans by month Feb 2013- Mar 2015

Month	Loans	Yearly
Feb-13	245906	
Digital Hub	250977	
Apr-13	275856	
May-13	276338	
Jun-13	255529	1304606
Fines abolished, trial policy	285115	
Aug-13	275365	
Sep-13	245855	
Oct-13	281478	
Nov-13	253294	
Dec-13	211654	
Jan-14	266044	
Feb-14	242414	
Fines reinstated	256610	
Apr-14	241972	
May-14	256270	
Jun-14	237443	3053514
Jul-14	279936	
Aug-14	268833	
Sep-14	247988	
Oct-14	257046	
Nov-14	238635	
Dec-14	206608	
Jan-15	287831	
Feb-15	239605	
Mar-15	253079	

Summary of library fees collected

12 months prior to the new fees policy  
GL 840434 - Library fees

Mar-13	Apr-13	May-13	Jun-13	Jul-13	Aug-13	Sep-13	Oct-13	Nov-13	Dec-13	Jan-14	Feb-14	Total	Average monthly fees
(4,579.11)	(5,094.55)	(5,427.43)	(4,806.24)	(4,477.36)	(5,367.39)	(3,696.74)	(4,709.26)	(3,772.95)	0.00	(5,676.43)	27,700.12	(20,007.31)	(1,667.28)

Inclusive of refunds

Mar-14	Apr-14	May-14	Jun-14	Jul-14	Aug-14	Sep-14	Oct-14	Nov-14	Dec-14	Jan-15	Feb-15	Total	Average monthly fees
(5,417.62)	(9,084.46)	(20,764.43)	(14,518.75)	(16,102.36)	(19,571.29)	(16,295.74)	(20,096.22)	(14,821.81)	(15,516.41)	(14,838.01)	(15,357.74)	(182,384.84)	(15,198.74)

12 months from the introduction of new policy  
part of GL 823314 - Other user charges - Non- ACT Govt

Overdue fines July 2012 - Sept 2015

	Date	On Time	Late	Total	% Late
S Z 5 A D M I N F E E P O L I C Y	Jul-12	244584	38045	282629	13.5%
	Aug-12	240197	39794	279991	14.2%
	Sep-12	229105	38223	267328	14.3%
	Oct-12	230958	39696	270654	14.7%
	Nov-12	220821	40707	261528	15.6%
	Dec-12	175728	30954	206682	15.0%
	Jan-13	242036	38856	280892	13.8%
	Feb-13	210593	35743	246336	14.5%
	Mar-13	213795	39426	253221	15.6%
	Apr-13	223472	43913	267385	16.4%
	May-13	236682	43928	280610	15.7%
	Jun-13	217662	40900	258562	15.8%
	Jul-13	236480	41686	278166	15.0%
	Aug-13	234729	43510	278239	15.6%
	Sep-13	208639	39672	248311	16.0%
C U R R E N T	Oct-13	237735	44274	282009	15.7%
	Nov-13	216658	40657	257315	15.8%
	Dec-13	185240	33902	219142	15.5%
	Jan-14	226831	40068	266899	15.0%
	Feb-14	199714	36401	236115	15.4%
	Total	4431659	790355	5222014	15.1%
	Mar-14	243184	17195	260379	6.6%
	Apr-14	228384	12127	240511	5.0%
	May-14	241336	14497	255833	5.7%
	Jun-14	229198	11324	240522	4.7%
	Jul-14	240512	13593	254105	5.3%
	Aug-14	238543	14015	252558	5.5%
	Sep-14	226236	11001	237237	4.6%
	Oct-14	227611	11816	239427	4.9%
	Nov-14	215182	10691	225873	4.7%
P O L I C Y	Dec-14	180895	7686	188581	4.1%
	Jan-15	246790	9859	256649	3.8%
	Feb-15	210430	9246	219676	4.2%
	Mar-15	220807	10339	231146	4.5%
	Apr-15	203992	9894	213886	4.6%
	May-15	221707	11506	233213	4.9%
	Jun-15	251493	12240	263733	4.6%
	Jul-15	221966	11248	233214	4.8%
	Aug-15	208536	10944	219480	5.0%
	Sep-15	202635	10936	213571	5.1%
	Total	4259437	220157	4479594	4.9%

	Implementation	On Time	Late	Total	% Late
Pre July 2012 Policy	up to Jun 2012	3869340	307546	4176886	7.4%
\$25 Admin Fee	Jul 2012 to Feb 2014	4431659	790355	5222014	15.1%
Current Policy	Mar 2014 onwards	4259437	220157	4479594	4.9%