



The New Generation National Library (B)

“The uncertainty facing the National Library of New Zealand at the moment...presents a real leadership opportunity,” National Librarian Penny Carnaby wrote to her senior leadership team in May 2010.

She emphasised that the core vision of a new generation National Library, developed in detail in 2007 and designed to fit the Library for a leading role in the digital information age, continued on track despite a number of significant changes.

The Library had completed the enormous logistical challenge of “decanting” its contents to temporary locations to enable the redevelopment of its central Wellington building. But the rebuild had been scaled back so that while staff and users would return in 2012 to a strengthened building with state-of-the art storage and without leaks, it would no longer have a striking new glass exterior. And in March, the government had signalled that Penny Carnaby would be the last Chief Executive, though not the last National Librarian. While the National Librarian would retain statutory independence, the Library itself, along with National Archives, would come under the auspices of the Department of Internal Affairs.

For Library staff, this brought yet another element of uncertainty after a turbulent year. At the end of April 2009, the Library’s then Minister Dr Richard Worth announced that the extensive revamp of the Library building, approved by the previous government, could not go ahead.

Dr Worth said the Government had been forced to reconsider the previous government’s decision in light of the international recession, and would address the

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critical problems the Library faced. It would allocate \$52 million, including \$35 million in capital spending and \$17 million in operational spending over the next four years. This funding, which would also cover the decant and relocation of the library's holdings, would ensure that "the nation's treasures are protected by increasing storage, fixing leaks, upgrading equipment and addressing deferred maintenance."¹

In telling her staff of this decision Penny Carnaby was very clear that the change to the building redevelopment programme did not compromise the New Generation National Library strategy.

"The modernisation of the National Library was always much more than a building, and we will continue to work hard to deliver a 21st century library with services that will be relevant and responsive to the next generation of New Zealanders," she said. She again committed to maintain the timetable for relocation and return to the restored building in 2012.

In June 2009 Nathan Guy became the new Minister for the National Library² and at the end of October he confirmed that the scaled-back building revamp would proceed. By then much of the decant was complete, with high-use materials from the Alexander Turnbull Library housed temporarily at the National Archives, and other staff and content dispersed around a variety of Wellington buildings, most of them nearby.

While staff were adapting to different places of work, users from around the country – and the Library's telephone operators – were coming to grips with where people and collections could now be found. Some confusion remained and professional historians repeated their concern about access to essential material. There was good news that progress was being made with building a new, more visible presence for the Library in the main population centre of Auckland.

On 25 March 2010 it was formally announced³ that government was investigating the merging of the National Library (where Penny Carnaby's contract would end 11 months hence) and the National Archives (where Greg Goulding had been Acting Chief Executive since 2009). Both entities would become part of the Department of Internal Affairs, as part of a wider drive to improve public sector performance that would also create a new Ministry of Science and Innovation and re-join the New Zealand Food Safety Authority to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Legislation would ensure that the next National Librarian and National Archivist retained their statutory independence, the Cabinet Paper said. It also noted that the National Librarian had opposed a complete amalgamation, preferring to begin the process with a merger between the Library and Archives. However, in a joint statement also issued on 25 March, all three chief executives said they were

¹ <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/govt+scale+back+national+library+revamp> downloaded 7/5/2009

² Richard Worth resigned his ministerial responsibilities, and ultimately from Parliament, over perceived conflicts of interest and other issues unrelated to the National Library.

³ Details of the proposal were earlier leaked to the media, which prompted an investigation by the State Services Commission.

“committed to ensuring the integration of the three agencies takes place smoothly, and delivers the benefits Cabinet wants.”⁴

“The functions and services we provide now will continue, and our intention is to strengthen the institutions that have grown up around archive and library services,” the statement quoted Penny Carnaby, Chief Executive and National Librarian, Greg Goulding, Acting Chief Archivist and Chief Executive of Archives New Zealand, and Brendan Boyle, Chief Executive of the Department of Internal Affairs. Changes would affect staff at all three agencies, the joint statement noted.

The amalgamation plans, and the decision to take away departmental status from the Library/Archives, prompted an outpouring of support for the continued independence of both agencies, some of it from the same groups that had been critical of the Library’s bold new building plans.

Once again, Penny Carnaby found herself looking for ways to maintain and boost morale. In May she wrote to encourage her senior leadership team to see these fresh leadership challenges as new opportunities. Once again she emphasised that

“...while there is absolutely no intention to derail the ...new generation vision, and to stifle organisational innovation or agility, for which we now have a well-earned national and international reputation, this may not be the perception of others. National Library of New Zealand staff and communities of interest may lose confidence and trust, and we may need to be proactive with other Ministries who won’t know our work and capability as an organisation.”

“Each one of us will need to look hard at our own leadership modelling. People will be influenced by how we respond and quite frankly, the choice is ours. We can be cynical, discouraged, or see only the spit on the footpath, or we can see the stars in the sky and lead with optimism, vision and inspiration. Both are valid positions and both could be our reality if we choose it to be so. Personally I will do everything I can to lead with you all to deliver an inspirational New Generation National Library for this country which all New Zealanders understand, and are proud of.”⁵

Postscript

On 1 June 2010, New Zealand’s State Services Minister Tony Ryall confirmed that the National Library would merge with the National Archives and both entities would become part of the Department of Internal Affairs. The same day, the Minister responsible for Internal Affairs and for the National Library, Nathan Guy, announced that the Government had provided \$12.6 million in new Budget funding over the next four years to develop a Government Digital Archive, to be created by extending the National Library’s National Digital Heritage Archive system so that it can be used by Archives New Zealand and other agencies.

“This funding shows how seriously the Government values the work of Archives New Zealand and the National Library. This endorses the digitisation work already

⁴ Department of Internal Affairs, Press Release, Statement by DIA, Archives and National Library CEOs, 25-3-2010.

⁵ Memo from Penny Carnaby, personal communication to Paul ‘t Hart, May 2010

underway by both departments.”⁶ The same day, the Minister launched the new \$1.9 million base designed to bring the Library’s Auckland presence, previously a nondescript and hard-to-find building, into the public eye.

In December 2010 the National Library secured \$13.4 million of existing, deferred maintenance funds for additional modest refurbishment work on the Molesworth Street building. This additional work would deliver improved public areas on the lower ground and ground floors as well as a modest refurbishment to staff areas.

⁶ New Zealand Government, Press Release, New funding for Government Digital Archive, 1-6-2010.