



The Future of Library and Information Science Education in Australia

Discussion paper



Foreword

When I became ALIA Board president, I chose the theme of Library and Information Science Education as my theme for my presidential year. In my work as Service Lead – Libraries and Lifelong Learning, City of Stirling, WA, I am responsible for the strategic and operational management of the Library Services Business Unit, providing the library/museum with vision and leadership in the development and implementation of customer focussed City-wide programs, services and activities (six libraries plus museum, 65FTE, \$9m budget). I see first-hand the value and impact of LIS education in our dedicated library workers and in the delivery of our programs and services.

I am a passionate advocate for libraries and lifelong learning and welcome this Discussion Paper as a means of developing further the dialogue around our future. I see this as a collaborative opportunity where everyone has a role to play in supporting LIS education into the future. Our conversations and decisions should support our educators, students, employers and researchers to create a sustainable future for the library profession.

I encourage you to read the Discussion Paper, follow the progress of this important body of work and contact education@alia.org.au with any comments or questions by 31 October 2020.



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City of Salisbury SA

Introduction

In November 2019, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) published *The Future of LIS Education Issues Paper*¹ to inform a sector-wide discussion about the current state of professional education: the needs going forward, and the challenges we face in trying to identify and deliver the best outcome.

Following the publication of the issues paper, ALIA carried out a survey of members from 12 November to 7 February 2020, which elicited 352 responses from students, professionals, educators and employers. We sought submissions and feedback from important stakeholder groups including National and State Libraries Australia, heads of capital city public libraries, Library Technician educators, and university library senior teams. The ALIA Learning Team hosted focus groups in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney, with a similarly broad range of participants, where various future scenarios were explored. Further consultation in regional Australia was halted by the outbreak of COVID-19.

This activity was to have led to an industry Education Summit alongside the ALIA National Conference, on 4 May at the International Convention Centre in Sydney. However, due to a widespread lockdown on meetings and travel, the approach was reconsidered.

This paper provides a summary of the themes which emerged during the consultation with the sector at the start of the year which has enabled work to start on three possible future scenarios. The scenarios will be presented to participants at the LIS Education Summit, which has been rescheduled to coincide with ALIA Information Online 2021, in February 2021, again at the Sydney International Convention Centre.

While this work has been delayed by the worldwide pandemic, it remains a vitally important focus for the Association, and is ALIA President Viv Barton's theme for her presidential year (May 2020-May 2021).

¹ read.alia.org.au/future-lis-education

The current position for LIS education in Australia

In the 2019 *Issues Paper*, ALIA set out the pathways to becoming a library and information professional, the student and educator perspectives around the sustainability of LIS education, the importance of employer engagement, and from this, a vision for the characteristics of a successful future.

Survey results

Our survey, based on the 10-point vision, showed that respondents felt there was strong commitment from library leaders to a sustainable, evolving library profession (71% thought the sector performed well or very well against this goal), and that ongoing professional learning was an established feature (50%). Less than 20% felt we performed well in the area of maximising the return from LIS research and supporting LIS educators. Less than a quarter of respondents felt the sector did well in terms of the engagement between educators and employers (24%).

Other themes emerging from survey respondents' comments were the cost of courses as a barrier for greater workforce diversity; the need for more dialogue about compulsory professional development, especially for mid-career employees and senior managers; and the potential for courses to focus on emerging areas of librarianship, including IT-related, data science and digital preservation.

There was a strong indication that qualifications are of value, but there is a need for change in LIS education; that ALIA is the organisation to have carriage of the discussion, with the involvement and support of all parties; and that it has to be a visible and transparent process but that we have to be prepared for some difficult conversations.

See Appendix 1 for further survey results.

Other feedback

These findings were echoed in the focus groups and submissions. We asked, 'what is right about LIS education?' Responses included the development of higher education and vocational courses to mirror the changes in the sector; the balance of theory and practice in these courses; the many options on offer for professional development (with a strong presence from ALIA); the sector's attraction for people who share the same values and ethos.

When asked, 'what doesn't work?' feedback included lack of work-ready graduates; the need for course content revisions to keep up with the rapid rate of change in libraries; educator and employer collaboration to meet these challenges; recruitment of people without LIS qualifications.

See Appendix 2 for further feedback.

LIS courses in Australia

A major concern expressed in the *Issues Paper* was the instability of LIS courses in Australian universities and TAFEs.

Since the paper was released, two ALIA accredited LIS courses at the higher education level have closed: the undergraduate program offered by Curtin University (in conjunction with Open Universities Australia), and the LIS postgraduate program at University of Technology in Sydney. This means that one undergraduate program remains in Australia; Charles Sturt University, and five postgraduate programs: Charles Sturt University, RMIT, Monash University, University of South Australia, and Curtin University. There is one postgraduate program at Charles Sturt University teaching the Master of Education (Teacher Librarianship). There remain 14 ALIA accredited Diploma of Library and Information Services programs.

Changes in the education sector

Higher education

Universities are under stress, which means our remaining LIS courses are vulnerable. The impact of COVID-19 on revenue from international students had already caused Universities Australia to talk about the pandemic having a more devastating effect than the global financial crisis². Further uncertainty was created on 19 June, when a proposed new course fee structure for Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) was announced by the Education Minister in the Australian Government's Job-ready Graduates Package³.

In the proposed new framework, LIS courses would fall into Cluster 1, with business and social sciences, requiring students to pay more than \$14,000 per annum for their course. By comparison, those studying teaching or IT would pay \$3,700 per annum. ALIA has written to the Education Minister setting out the case for librarianship to be aligned with the latter courses.

At the same time, ALIA has been working through the Australian Council of Professions, of which we are an active member, contributing to the review of the Australian Qualifications Framework⁴;

providing guidance for professional accreditation processes in the COVID-19 environment⁵, and engaging in the discussions around the role of micro-credentials.

Vocational education

Vocational education has undergone significant structural change in every state over the last five years, with the amalgamation of TAFE NSW continuing. Teaching has moved online and local TAFEs are competing nationally.

For the library and information sector, the diploma is an important pathway into the bachelor program. It provides the opportunity for people to gain Library Technician professional status in its own right, or to continue with their studies and become both a Library Technician and a Librarian. All ALIA accredited TAFE courses are due for reaccreditation in the second half of 2020 and a new qualifications package, negotiated by ALIA on behalf of the sector, will be published in October, with an 18-month transition period.

A July 2020 Australian Education Union *State of our TAFEs* survey⁶, the first such survey in ten years revealed major issues with workload, resourcing, staff support and increased compliance requirements. More than three quarters (76%) of respondents said that they had considered leaving the sector in the last three years.



University of Melbourne

² www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-20/coronavirus-impact-on-universities-research-worse-than-gfc/12264606

³ www.dese.gov.au/job-ready

⁴ www.education.gov.au/australian-qualifications-framework-review-0

⁵ www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/joint-statement-principles-higher-education-sector-covid-19-response.pdf?v=1588910909

⁶ www.aeufederal.org.au/news-media/news/2020/aeu-survey-reveals-impact-morrison-government-budget-cuts-tafe

Based on your own experience, how well does the library and information sector currently perform against the following goals?



Well and very well

Considerations

The library and information sector in Australia is not alone in identifying the need to take a potentially radical approach to the education of professionals. Practitioners in other fields, in Australia and overseas, are engaged in similar discussions.

Local stakeholders

ALIA, the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) and Records and Information Management Professionals Australasia (RIMPA) are involved in joint accreditation of several postgraduate library and information courses and course closures affect us all.

As active members of the Australian Council of Professions, ALIA hears from peak bodies in other industries about the issues affecting health, engineering, accounting, computing and other professions.

International stakeholders

In any discussions about the future of LIS education, we need to consider how the library and information profession in Australia is connected globally and how other countries are tackling shared issues. For example, the UK Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) is having discussions about 'an open, inclusive and progressive definition of libraries, information and knowledge as a 'profession'⁷. The context to the 2019 discussion paper reflects similar issues around a model of formal qualifications, and seeks to define a profession, a professional and professionalism.

ALIA currently has reciprocal recognition agreements with four organisations.

- Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) (UK)
- Cumann Leabharlann na hÉireann, The Library Association of Ireland (LAI)
- American Library Association (ALA)
- Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA)

Any changes to LIS education would impact on these agreements and they would need to be reviewed and renegotiated.

ALIA also has a process of overseas qualification recognition if the professional qualification is not recognised by CILIP, LAI or ALA and the applicant is not a current RLIANZA member⁸.

The need for LIS education

Before discussing the future of LIS education, we asked focus group participants whether LIS as a profession was necessary and sustainable.

Our consultation highlighted concerns among library and information professionals about what they saw as a watering down of the profession. People without LIS qualifications have been recruited into libraries at the entry level, for example in customer service positions in public libraries, and we have seen newcomers with qualifications and experience in other disciplines brought in at senior levels in organisations. There were deep concerns that these appointments were a result of cost-cutting measures, however, it was also said that they reflected the changing nature and increasing complexity of libraries.

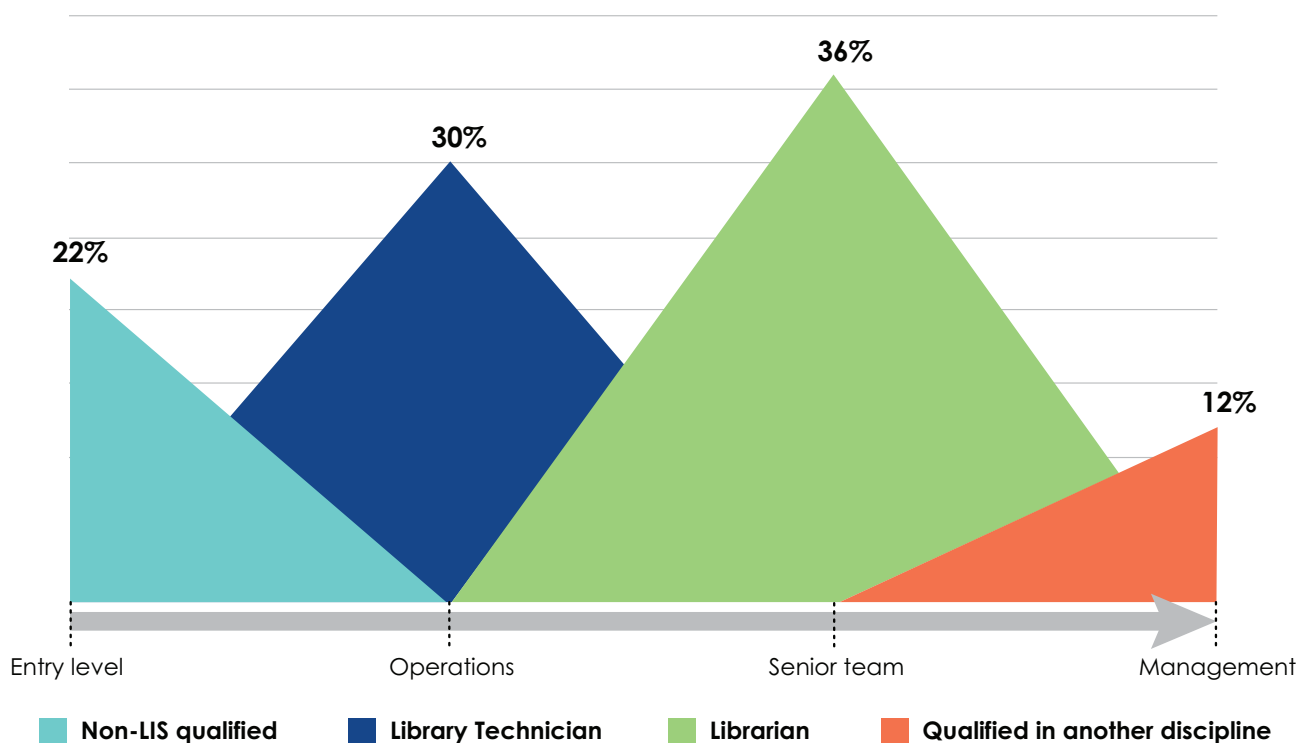
The chart shows that at least two-thirds of people employed in the library and information sector remain LIS qualified. The government data for Teacher Librarians is folded into schools data and not readily available.

⁷ www.cilip.org.uk/page/professionalismdefinition

⁸ membership.alia.org.au/membership-information/eligibility#overseas

Employment figures for assistants, Library Technicians and Librarians, qualified in another discipline (estimate)

Source: Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, 2019



It is true that non-LIS qualified newcomers have replaced qualified professionals in some roles, but Librarians and Library Technicians remain essential and comprise the majority of the workforce. Libraries need to be run by people with a particular body of knowledge. This body of knowledge is expressed in ALIA's statement of the core knowledge, skills and attributes of library and information professionals⁹, which forms the basis for university and TAFE accredited LIS courses.

Librarianship in Australia is part of the global infrastructure of library and information work, through international standards, for example resource description; cooperative arrangements such as interlibrary lending and digital access to collections, and formal agreements, for example ALIA's reciprocal arrangements for recognition of qualifications and Memoranda of Understanding, such as ALIA Health Libraries Australia with the Medical Library Association of the US.

⁹ www.alia.org.au/about-alia/policies-standards-and-guidelines/library-and-information-sector-core-knowledge-skills-and-attributes

The library and information professional of the future

Having had confirmation that the profession is necessary and sustainable, we then asked how we would define a library and information professional in the future.

Current definition

According to the By-laws of the ALIA Constitution¹⁰, to hold professional personal membership of ALIA, you must have completed the following:

- **Library Technician:** Library Technician. Members in this category must hold an ALIA accredited library technician qualification.
- **Librarian:** Associate. Members in this category must hold an ALIA accredited library and information science qualification at undergraduate or postgraduate levels.
- **Teacher Librarian:** Associate. Members in this category must hold an ALIA accredited library and information science qualification at undergraduate or postgraduate levels.

Librarians have a strong focus on assisting people and organisations, and possess unique skills to manage and retrieve information. Librarians develop and implement policies and deliver programs and services to meet the needs of library clients. This can include collection development, the organisation of resources, the provision of assistance to users in the retrieval of information and library resources, and the delivery of programs and services.

Library Technicians have a strong focus and a vital role in customer service. They operate and maintain systems that support the acquisition, accession and organisation and care of library materials. They are often the front facing customer service staff in a library service.

Teacher Librarians play a special role in their school communities. They are uniquely qualified within the broad fields of education and librarianship, with curriculum knowledge and pedagogy combined with library and information management knowledge and skills. Teacher Librarians have a key role to play in the planning, implementing and evaluating of educational policies, curricula, outcomes and programs,

with particular reference to the development of students' literacies including digital literacy.

In addition, ALIA has introduced Allied Field Professional membership to recognise allied professionals who work within the GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) sector, and to encourage them to learn about and engage with the LIS profession, join ALIA and undertake professional development in LIS especially within the formal recognition provided by the ALIA PD Scheme.

People raised the issue of positions being downgraded from Teacher Librarian to Librarian to Library Technician in schools; from Librarian to Library Technician in other libraries, for the purposes of cost-cutting. In some schools, where staff numbers had shrunk, Library Technicians were tasked with running the library single-handed. This was also the case in some special libraries. While some Library Technicians saw this as recognition of their skills and experience, others felt it bordered on exploitation. There was also some confusion about ALIA recognition of the bachelor, graduate diploma and masters courses, as all give Associate membership of ALIA yet cover different Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)¹¹ levels, spanning levels 7 to 9.

Future definition

During our discussions, there were different perspectives on the division between Librarians and Library Technicians. Some felt this was a necessary distinction; that Librarians should be conceptual thinkers and Library Technicians should have the technical expertise, for example with resource description and technology devices. Others felt that the lines had now blurred to such an extent that everyone working in libraries needed to have a similar range of knowledge and skills, albeit with areas of specialisation.

The importance of Teacher Librarians in schools was endorsed but the challenges of maintaining this role were also acknowledged. Outside the private and independent sectors, Teacher Librarians were in danger of being seen as unaffordable, despite the value they brought to students and other teachers. There was also a realisation that, with only one university providing this qualification, it would be increasingly difficult to replace retiring professionals at this level.

Q1 What should be the future structure of the Australian library and information profession with consideration to teacher librarians, librarians, library technicians and allied professionals?

¹⁰ www.alia.org.au/node/426/laws

¹¹ www.aqf.edu.au/aqf-levels

The scope of the LIS profession

Feedback shows that while the core business of operating libraries and information services is clearly the remit of library and information professionals, there is overlap with other areas of expertise.



One of the reasons why recruiters look outside the profession for people with qualifications in other disciplines is that some roles have a high degree of overlap with another area, for example IT or business management. While some library and information professionals have gained skills and experience in other fields through their work, and LIS courses include options for specialisations, there was debate among workshop participants

about how far the profession should go to embed allied knowledge and skills within the core of librarianship.

Discussions also took in the opportunities for information professionals outside libraries. There was some debate about defining LIS skills beyond the confines of a library space and the value of transferable skills.

Q2 What should be included in future iterations of the LIS core knowledge, skills and attributes?

Workforce diversity

The cost of LIS qualifications was said to be a significant disincentive and a barrier to greater diversity in the workplace. In order for the library and information workforce to be more diverse and inclusive, LIS education needs to be more readily affordable, accessible and flexible. While welcome and commendable, this objective has moved further out of reach with COVID-19 and its predicted effect on university and TAFE budgets.

If the proposed changes to Commonwealth Supported Places and the university fee structure are passed by the Australian Parliament, LIS will be seriously disadvantaged, with a three-year undergraduate course costing in excess of \$40,000.

The cost of acquiring LIS qualifications was not felt to be balanced by the pay rates offered to new graduates and to more established staff. Most people said that their reason for being a library and information professional was based on their commitment to the values of the sector rather than to any expectation of high earnings.

Qualifications framework

There was support throughout the consultation for a qualifications framework which allowed flexibility and for people to take different pathways. Traineeships, apprenticeships, micro-credentials, PD boosts for mid-career professionals – these were all ideas that emerged through discussions.

There was support for informal education targeting those without LIS qualifications working in the sector. For example, ALIA offers the Public Library Proficiencies program to give entry level assistants in public libraries a basic understanding of their work environment and the Library Orientation Program for senior managers who find libraries within their portfolio.

Employers' own programs were felt to be of high value, providing quality training closely centred to workplace needs. While these could be used by ALIA Members to acquire PD points, there was no formal qualification or recognition of prior learning attached to these.

Q3 What shape could a future qualifications framework take, to encompass a variety of formal and informal professional learning?

Education infrastructure

Underpinning the discussions with educators and employers were concerns about the sustainability of current university and TAFE LIS courses. As highlighted in the *Issues Paper* and earlier in this report (page 5), there have been steady closures of undergraduate and masters courses as universities have decided to focus on higher volume disciplines with a greater rate of

financial return to the institution and a greater impact in terms of internationally-recognised research outputs.

ALIA's priority has been, and continues to be, supporting our accredited courses. However, it would be negligent for the sector not to consider a 'Plan B' in the event of the university system failing us. It is somewhat ironic that Australia has one of the world's largest and most successful LIS schools in Charles Sturt University, yet our other institutions are struggling for survival.

Q4 How can the sector support our LIS educators and what measures should we put in place to ensure the future sustainability of the LIS profession?

Conclusion

In summary, curtailed as it was by the advent of COVID-19, the ALIA consultation on the future of LIS education achieved the engagement of nearly 500 people across the sector – Members, non-Members, LIS professionals, people from other disciplines, academics, leaders, staff and other stakeholders.

Feedback confirmed the issues described in *The Future of LIS Education* paper and the 10-point vision, leading to the objective of 'a secure future for current and next generation LIS professionals, supported by an employer-driven LIS learning framework, including meaningful and affordable qualifications and on-going learning, delivered through a robust education infrastructure'.

The process has identified four key questions for the ALIA LIS Education Summit, now scheduled for February 2021 and it provides the basis for us to prepare scenarios which the participants at this event will be able to explore.

It is our intention to produce a draft LIS education strategy and plan in the first half of 2021, for implementation from mid-2021.

Further reading

This paper should be read in the context of other reports produced by ALIA, including:

- *The Future of LIS Education* Issues Paper¹²
- The annual *LIS Education, Skills and Employment Trend Report*¹³
- The *Workforce Diversity Trend Report 2019*¹⁴
- The *LIS Pay and Employment Snapshot 2020* will be available on the ALIA website mid August.

Please contact education@alia.org.au with any feedback or comments by 31 October 2020.

¹² read.alia.org.au/future-lis-education

¹³ www.alia.org.au/employment-and-careers/alia-lis-education-skills-and-employment-trend-report

¹⁴ read.alia.org.au/workforce-diversity-trend-report-2019

Appendix 1

Survey result themes emerging from the comments

LIS courses

There was felt to be a disconnect between courses/educators and employment/employers. One respondent wrote *'There needs to be a closer link between LIS education and employment, both that employers need to provide opportunities to new graduates and that the education needs to more closely mirror the kind of work that will be done'*. Another person commented *'I'm currently a student working towards a library studies undergrad. I feel the realities of what I see in the library are very different from the concepts I've studied in 80% of the degree I've done'*.

Courses are expensive and the profession is not known for high wages. *'Cost of study is prohibitive for people without the privilege of being able to incur debt / pay out thousands of dollars. It contributes to the non-diversity of the profession'*. Another comment was that *'...the remuneration for having a masters qualification is not enough. I am earning less now as a librarian with a masters than in a former profession with a grad dip'*.

Courses should offer and support the many different areas of librarianship and library sectors, so offer more options and more choice for students. This could be in IT, data science and research techniques. Others commented that they wanted more courses, offered all around Australia, and both online and face to face.

An overhaul of LIS education

Survey respondents indicated the need for this body of work. They wrote about a need for a framework or standards for LIS education reformation, although they acknowledged that this will be complicated: *'There is absolutely no reason why the professional leadership both within LIS education and outside of it (but within LIS sector) cannot grasp this challenge and forge ahead with new verve and corrected vision'*.

Other people suggested alternative options and pathways such as apprenticeships or trainee positions. They wrote of the need for greater flexibility in course offerings, with comments such as: *'I like the idea of micro credentials. I am interested in our educational institutions taking a greater role in providing ongoing training for people already in the sector - for instance to specialise'*. Innovative and wide-ranging options were suggested: *'It will be interesting to question whether there are other ways to look at education structure and pathways for the profession. Even to consider some radical but transformative approaches, with a longer term aim of how the LIS sector will evolve in anticipation of or response to the evolving broader education and employment (opportunities) environment'*.

Ongoing professional development

There was a theme about the need for ongoing dialogue and commitment to continuing professional development, at all career stages, from early to mid-career to senior leaders and managers. Other comments indicated that professional development should be valued, employer supported, and compulsory: *'As well as having new ALIA members join the professional development program in 2020 implement this for current members too, making it a requirement of retaining "Associate" membership annually for example'*.

Advocacy and communication

The role of libraries and librarians was felt to be misunderstood and this limited people joining the profession. *'I think that there is a lack of knowledge and awareness about special libraries such as law, and health, and how a student or new graduate could go about pursuing a career in these libraries'*.

Qualifications should be valued. Participants said they were often undervalued and misconceived and needed promotion, in line with the general theme that the role of libraries and librarians was often not clearly defined.

Appendix 2

Themes emerging from the consultations and workshops

Future/now skills

All consultations involved robust discussions around skills needed now and into the future:

- Data – using business intelligence tools to inform practise around collection acquisition, using systems around large data sets
- Inclusion – gender diversity, social inclusion and Indigenous matters, ethical collecting
- Digital collecting, digital preservation
- Data science
- Digital economy
- Soft skills in negotiations, customer service
- Change management
- Project management, budgeting
- Teaching, coaching and presenting skills
- Create curious, creative, responsive people

There was also much discussion however about retaining the ethics, values, principles perspective of being a library and information professional.

People and qualifications: *'it's complicated'*

There was an overall acknowledgement that it is still important to have qualified library staff in libraries because of the ethos and values and knowing the technical aspects of librarianship.

It was important to have a good balance of professionally trained LIS people and staff with allied skills. To be effective, libraries need employees from a range of professions that will strengthen capacity in the future.

A need to address the lack of qualified library staff in leadership positions was indicated.

We participated in interesting discussions around what makes an information professional – a mix of professional experience and skills combined with soft skills, business and research skills.

Many people go into libraries as second or third careers, so how do we acknowledge the different non-library experiences and transferrable skills that people bring to libraries?

Professional development

There were lots of comments and suggestions around the area of ongoing professional development. Opportunities for ongoing learning were described as multifaceted and varied. This could range from in-house and workplace training to external training, and recognised staff exchanges, mentoring, rotations, secondments, and internships. There was interest in improved recognition of workplace experience.

It was important that all these types of ongoing learning were documented, certified and validated and made up a living credential that also includes formal VET or higher education qualifications.

Participants talked about making short courses and statements of attainment robust and flexible. Continual upskilling and ongoing learning should move with the changing roles of library, be available at the point of need, and developed with employers and industry. Staff should be able to grow through competency-based short courses. This would help to address the varying needs of all the library sectors and specialisations.

There was interest in highlighting the different pathways that people take to become modern-day information professionals. It was suggested there was a need to promote role models and best case scenarios to profile what is possible.

LIS education

University structures were said to make it difficult to change courses, the process often taking several years. The different entry points to becoming a LIS professional were important, and so was the flexibility in moving from diploma to undergraduate and beyond.

There were comments at several workshops that LIS education does the 'L' library part well, and the 'I' information part less well – more information architecture, data management and analytics, digital information management.

Other considerations

It was important to keep international recognition and reciprocal agreements.