



ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee
SUBMISSION TO the ALIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Report on the 2020 COVID-19 Survey Results
December 2020



ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee

SUBMISSION TO ALIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS - Report on the 2020 COVID-19 Survey Results

Background

In June 2020, Australia had faced its first lockdown and in many parts of the country we were starting to adapt to the 'new normal'. In the face of this, the New Generation Advisory Committee noticed an apprehension among new professionals during two #AusLibChats. The May topic for #AusLibChat was [Housebound](#) and the June topic was Mindfulness. During both chats it was clear from the tweets that people were struggling to find peace during these stressful times. Many who were casuals lost their jobs. Others looking for employment were voicing their dismay at the lack of opportunities.

Did the people voicing these concerns give an accurate representation of the work landscape for new generation professionals? Was there a difference from state to state? What are the biggest issues new generation professionals are facing in a post COVID-19 world? To investigate these questions further the Committee composed a survey to gather the experiences, opinions, and feelings of new generation professionals on how COVID-19 had, or was currently, affecting their careers. The survey was titled, "How has COVID-19 affected the careers of emerging GLAM professionals?"

Scope

There were 262 respondents to the survey. The survey was released on Twitter on 8 July 2020 and also distributed through ALIA Weekly and the ALIA state managers. The survey was closed on 6 August 2020. It took most participants an average of 15 minutes to complete. Responses were from those employed in the GLAM sector (full-time, part-time and casual), unemployed (job seekers and other) and GLAM students (both employed and unemployed).

Survey Design

The survey was composed in Microsoft Forms ([auto-generated summary](#)). Demographic questions were designed to determine the participants current career situation. Likert scale questions were added for determining sentiment. Free answer questions were also utilized and participants were encouraged to tell us their story. A full list of questions is attached at the end of this report. Questions for those employed focused on how COVID-19 impacted work hours, workload and wage. Questions for the unemployed and students focused on how COVID-19 impacted perceived availability of jobs and opportunities. We did not ask the ALIA membership status of participants.

Were respondents 'emerging' and 'GLAM'?

It is clear from the demographic questions that the majority of the people taking the survey were new generation professionals, either qualifying within the past 10 years or currently a student. By the definition of the Committee, people filling out the survey that were not considered 'new generation' include: those who completed their GLAM degree more than 10 years ago or who had held their current role for more than 8 years. Anyone currently enrolled as a student in a GLAM course is considered 'new generation' by the definition of the New Generation Advisory Committee, even if they have held their current role for over 8 years. Thirteen survey responses (4.9%) are not considered 'new generation' by our definition but they



ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee

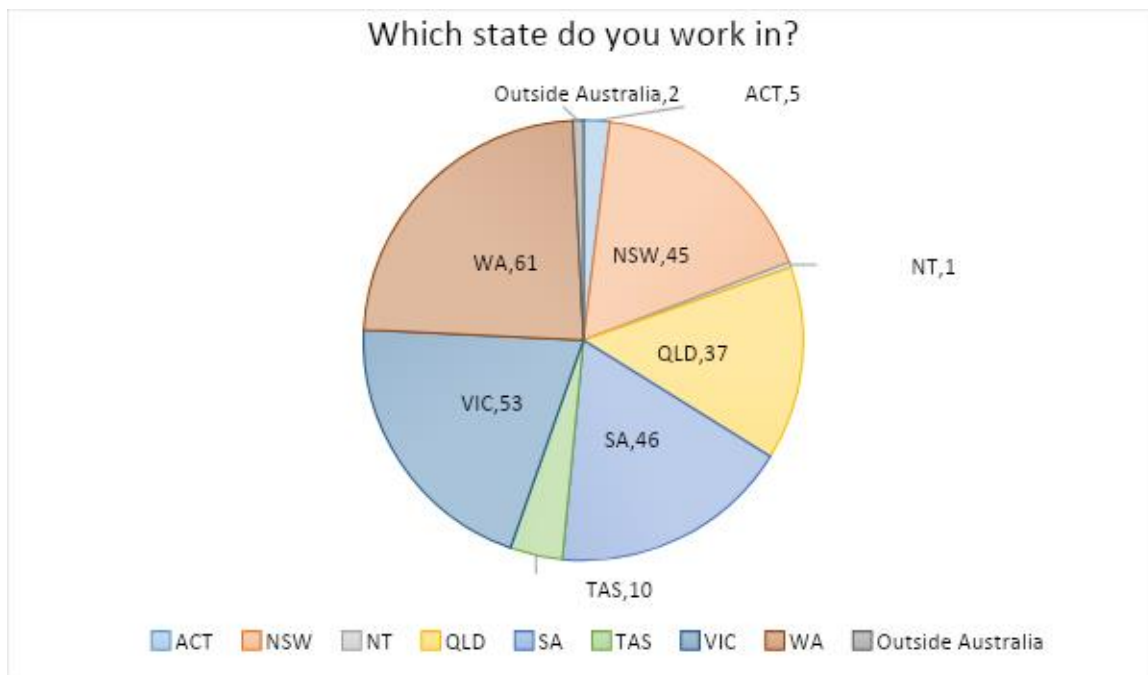
SUBMISSION TO ALIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS - Report on the 2020 COVID-19 Survey Results

were still included in the analysis. This was due to some respondents telling us afterwards they realised they graduated over ten years ago but still filled out the survey because they still felt like 'emerging professionals'.

Despite the title, "How has COVID-19 affected the careers of emerging GLAM professionals?", the responders were mostly studying or working in the library sector, with only 24 (9.5%) of participants identifying themselves as being a galleries, museums or archives professional. Therefore, the results of this study are most representative of library professionals.

Analysis of Responses

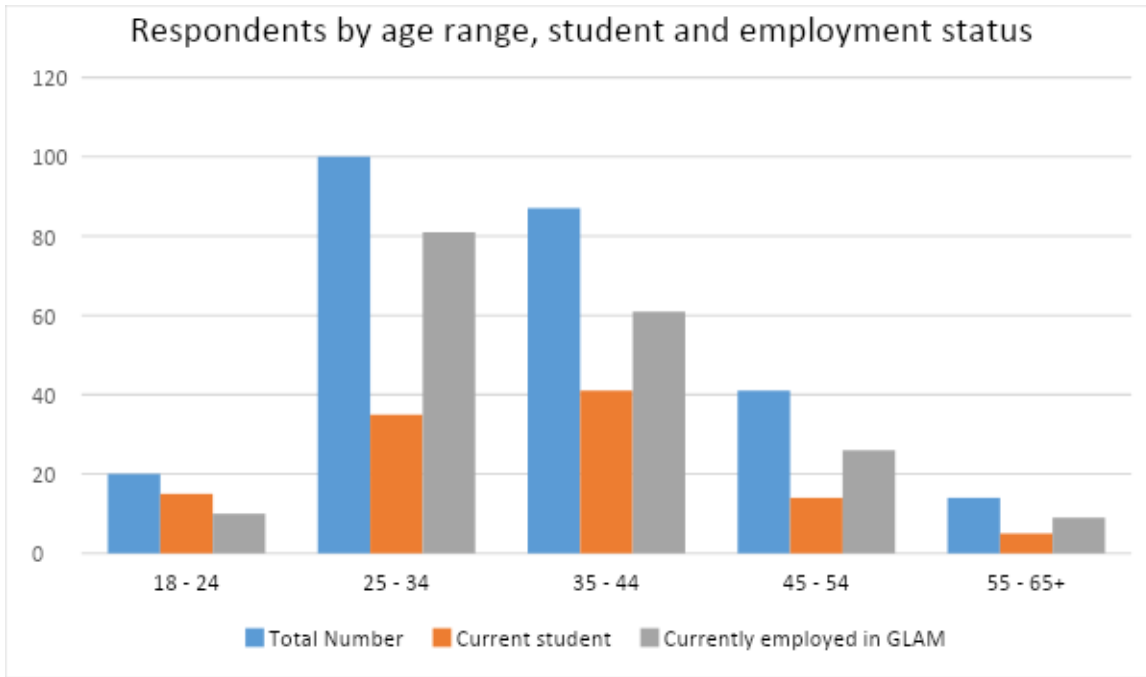
Which state do you work in?



Two people did not record a response to this question. The Committee aimed to get a wide demographic of regions represented in responses and encouraged an informal 'competition' on Twitter among states to get the most respondents. Western Australia had the most respondents with 61 followed by Victoria with 53.



Age range, student and employment status



110 respondents indicated that they were currently studying (one studying an archives focused course, one a galleries or museum related course and 108 studying a library course). Of these students, 60 (54.5%) indicated that they are currently employed in the GLAM sector.

Of the 187 respondents who indicated that they were currently employed in the GLAM sector:

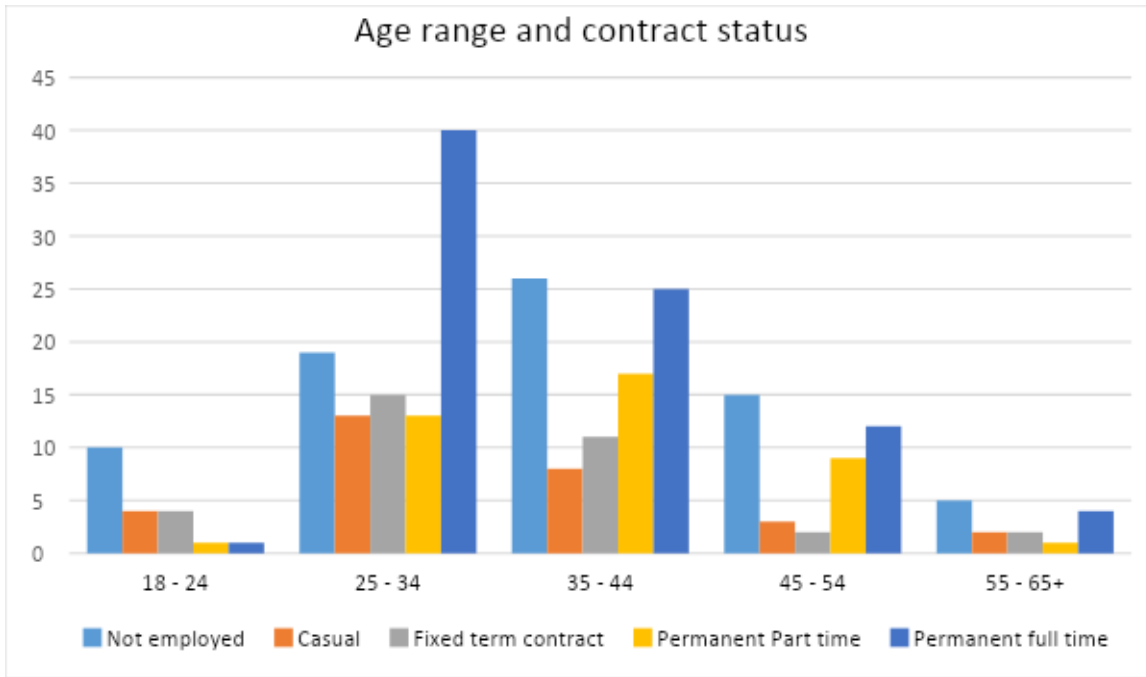
- 14.4% have been in their current position less than 6 months
- 27.8% for 6 – 12 months
- 34.8% for 2 – 3 years
- 11.8% for 4 – 5 years
- 6.4% for 6-7 years, and
- 4.8% for 8+ years



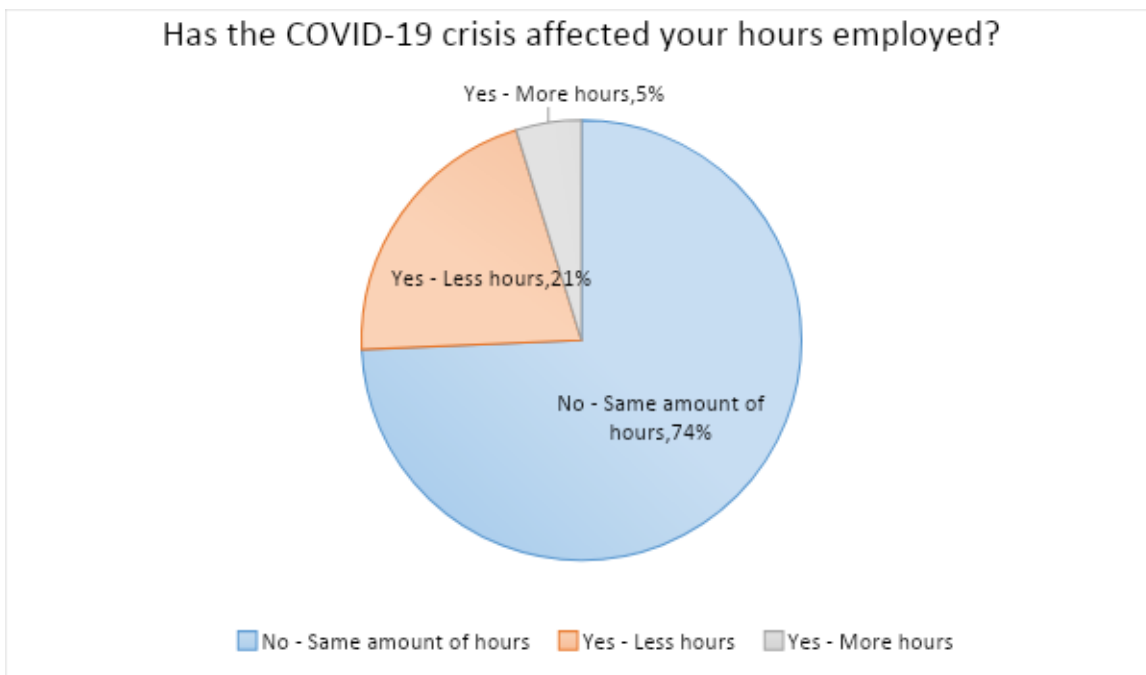
ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee

SUBMISSION TO ALIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS - Report on the 2020 COVID-19 Survey Results

Age range and contract status



Has the COVID-19 crises affected your hours employed?



Casual staff were most likely to report a loss in hours, with 66.7% indicating that they were working less hours since the pandemic began. This is a significant majority compared with people working on a fixed

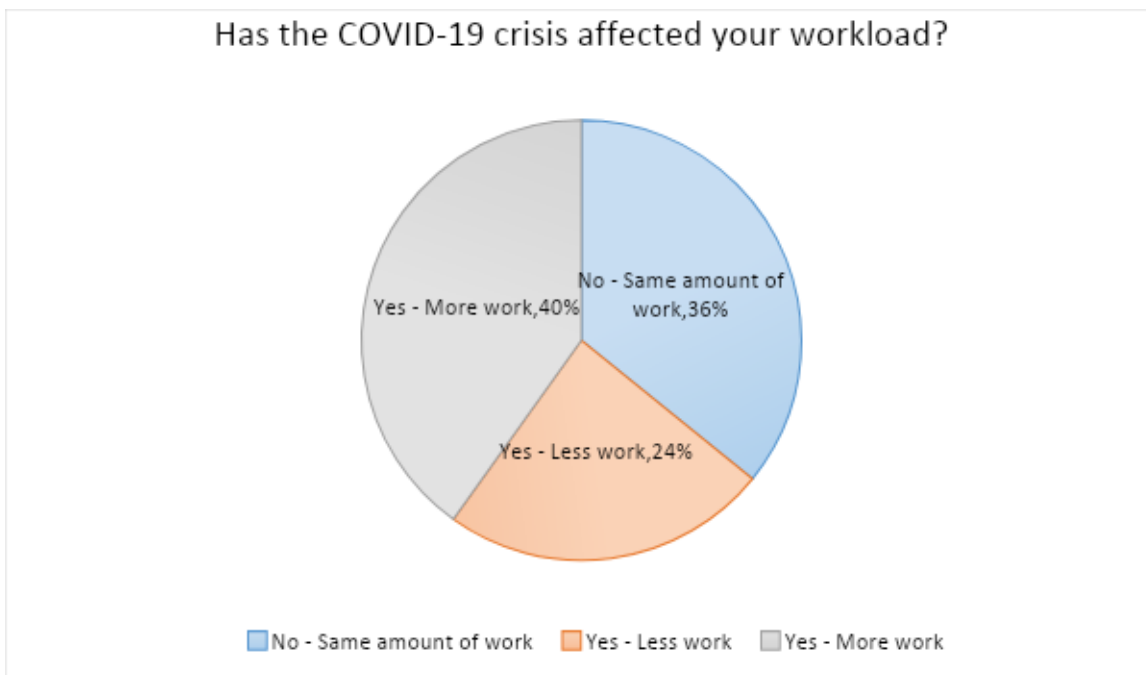


ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee

SUBMISSION TO ALIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS - Report on the 2020 COVID-19 Survey Results

term contract (11.8%), permanent part-time (19.5%), and permanent full-time (2%) who reported working less hours.

Has the COVID-19 crisis affected your workload?



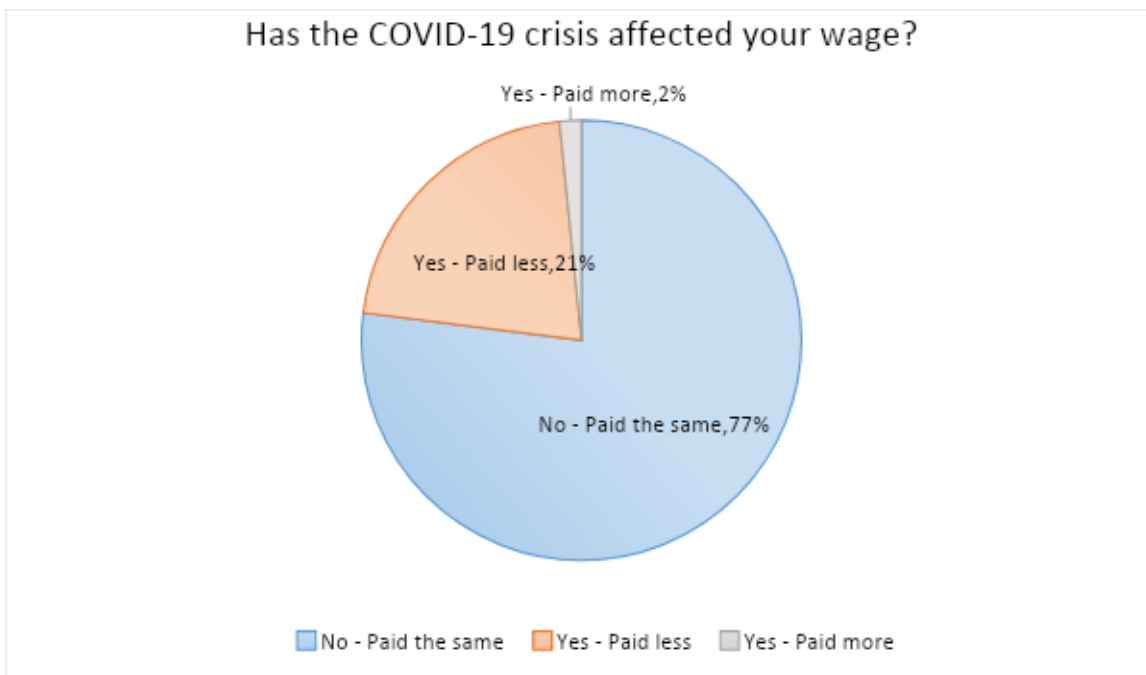
Permanent employees were most likely to report increased workloads due to the COVID-19 pandemic, at 48.8% for both full-time staff and part-time staff. This can be compared with casuals (6.6%) and fixed term contract staff (38.2%).



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SUBMISSION TO ALIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS - Report on the 2020 COVID-19 Survey Results

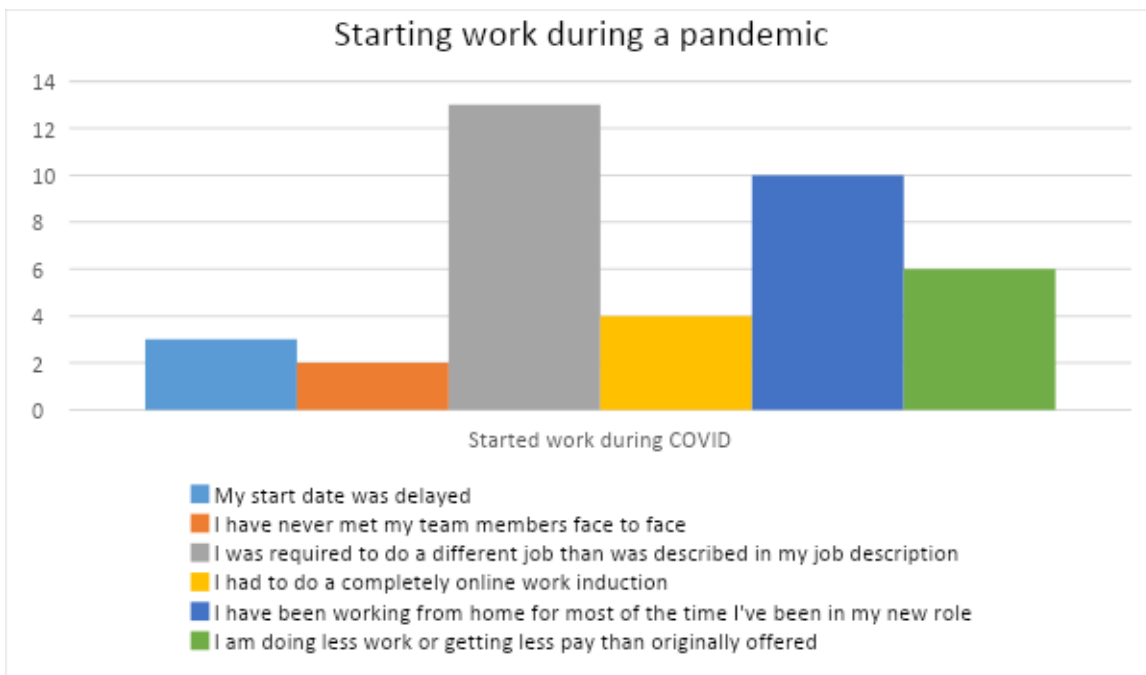
Has the COVID-19 crisis affected your wage?



Casuals were most likely to report reduced earnings at 43.3%. This is followed by permanent part-time staff (21.9%), permanent full-time staff (18.3%), and fixed-term contract staff (8.8%). Many permanent staff mentioned measures that required staff to take leave without pay, or to accept a pay freeze, as reasons for a loss in earnings.



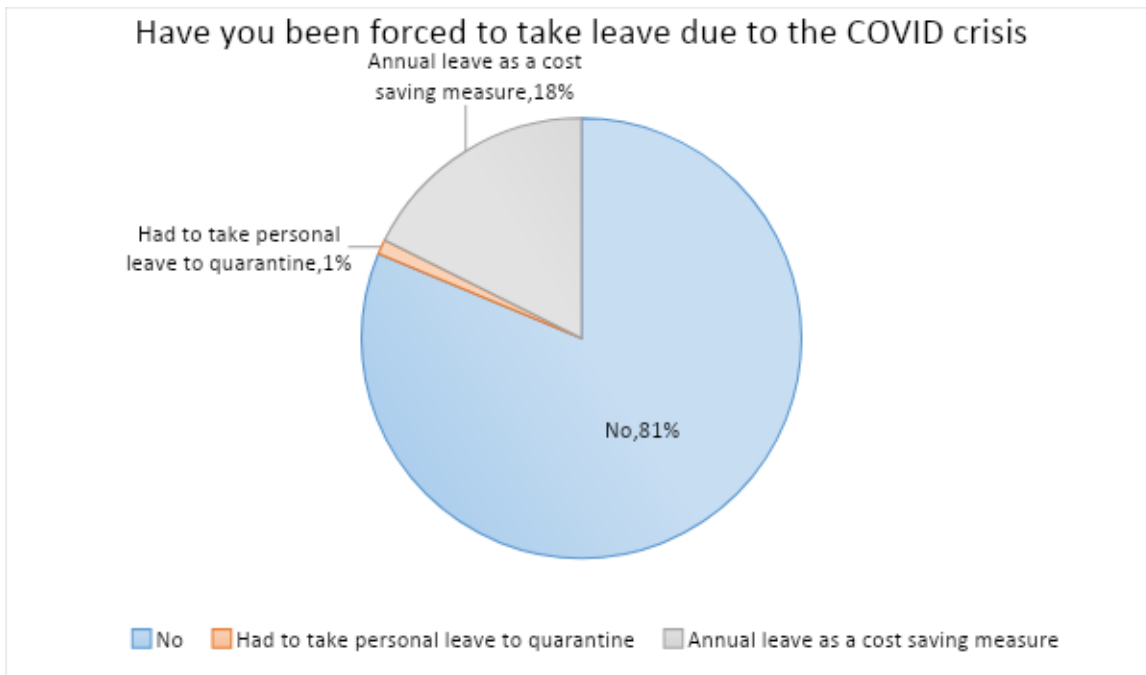
Impact of COVID-19



There were 13 respondents who started work during the COVID-19 shutdown period. These faced a variety of different challenges, the most common being that they were required to do a different job than was originally described.



COVID-19 and leave arrangements



Working from home

The period of data collection preceded Victoria's second lockdown (commencing in July). Reporting on their experience of the nation-wide lockdown:

- 34.6% of respondents indicated that they did not work from home during the lockdown
- 24.1% indicated that they had returned to the office full-time
- 23.5% indicated that they had returned to the office part-time
- 17.6% indicated that they were still working from home
- Of those who had spent some time working from home, 61.3% of respondents agreed with the statement that they have felt anxious returning to work
- Responding to the statement, I have enjoyed working from home:
 - 34% strongly agreed
 - 44% agreed
 - 5.5% disagreed
 - 5.5% strongly disagreed
 - 10% were undecided

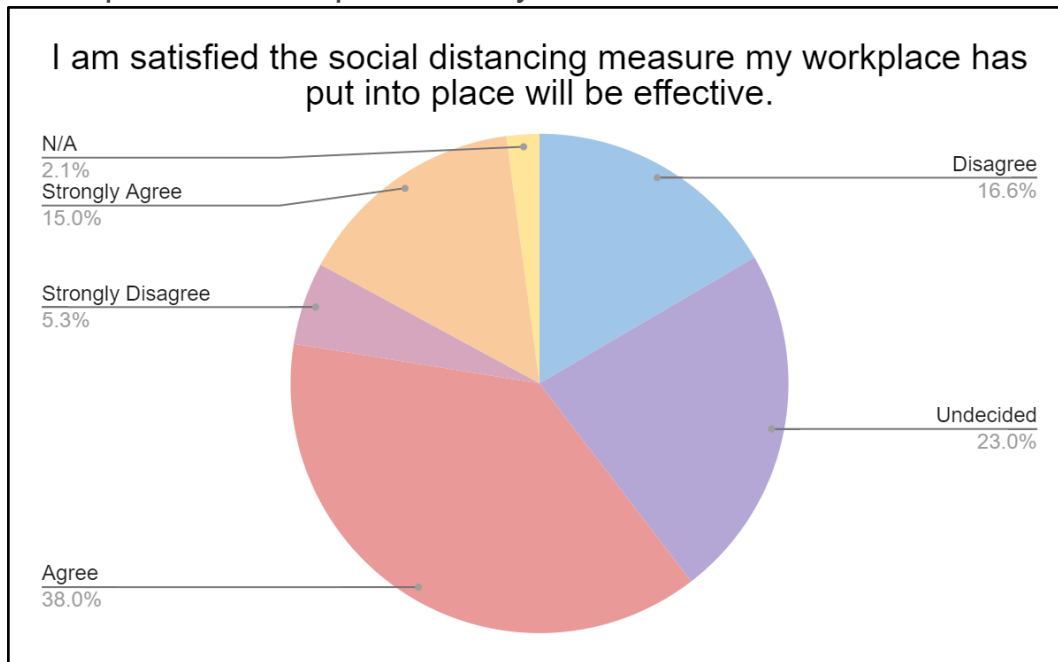


ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee

SUBMISSION TO ALIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS - Report on the 2020 COVID-19 Survey Results

- Responding to the statement, I would like to be given the opportunity to work from home in the future:
 - 41.8% responded strongly agree
 - 34.1% responded agree
 - 7.1% responded disagree
 - 4.1% responded strongly disagree
 - 12.9% were undecided

Perceptions of workplace safety

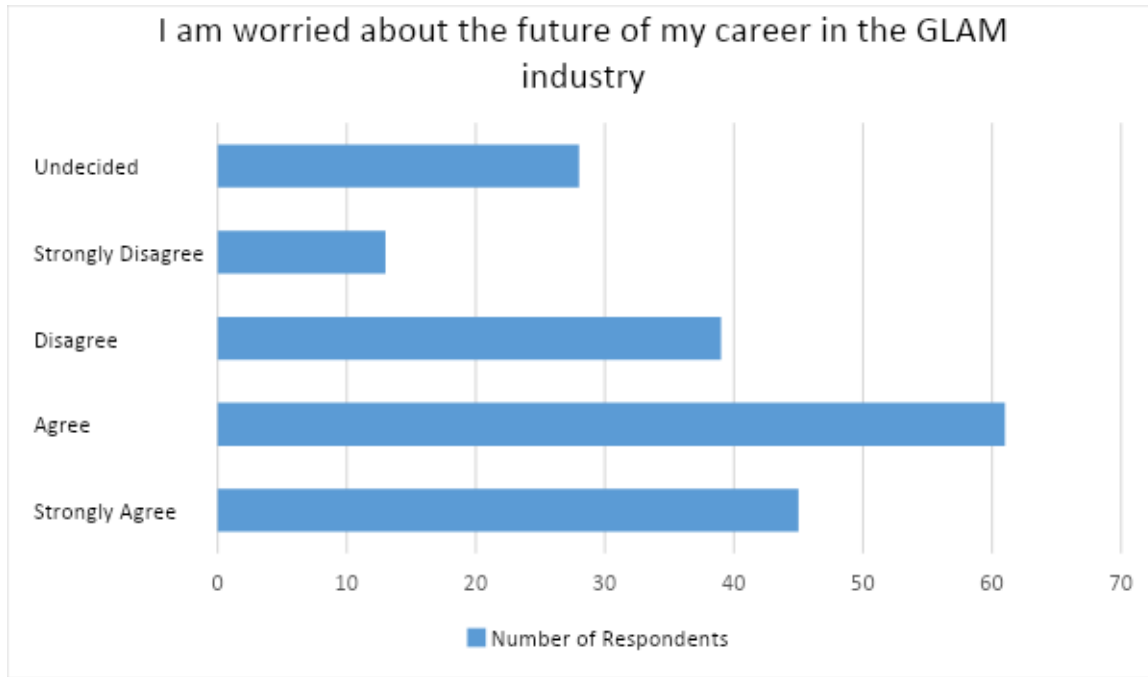




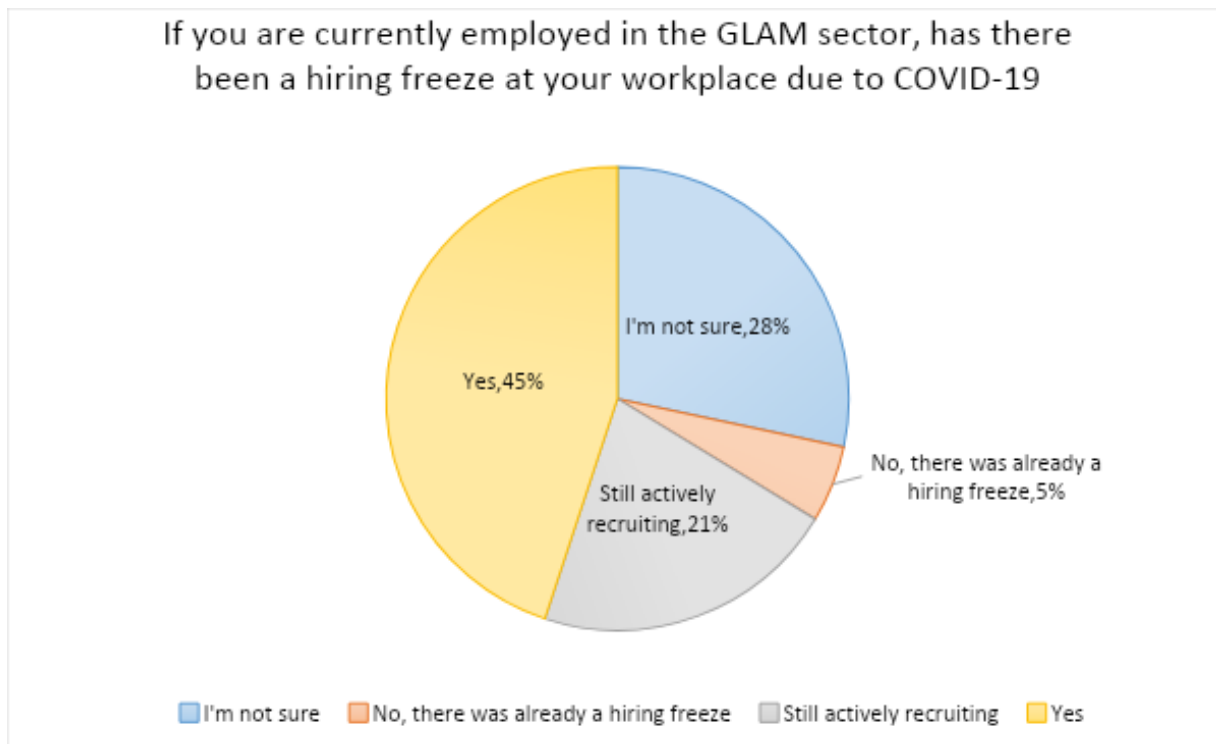
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SUBMISSION TO ALIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS - Report on the 2020 COVID-19 Survey Results

Perceptions of future prospects in GLAM



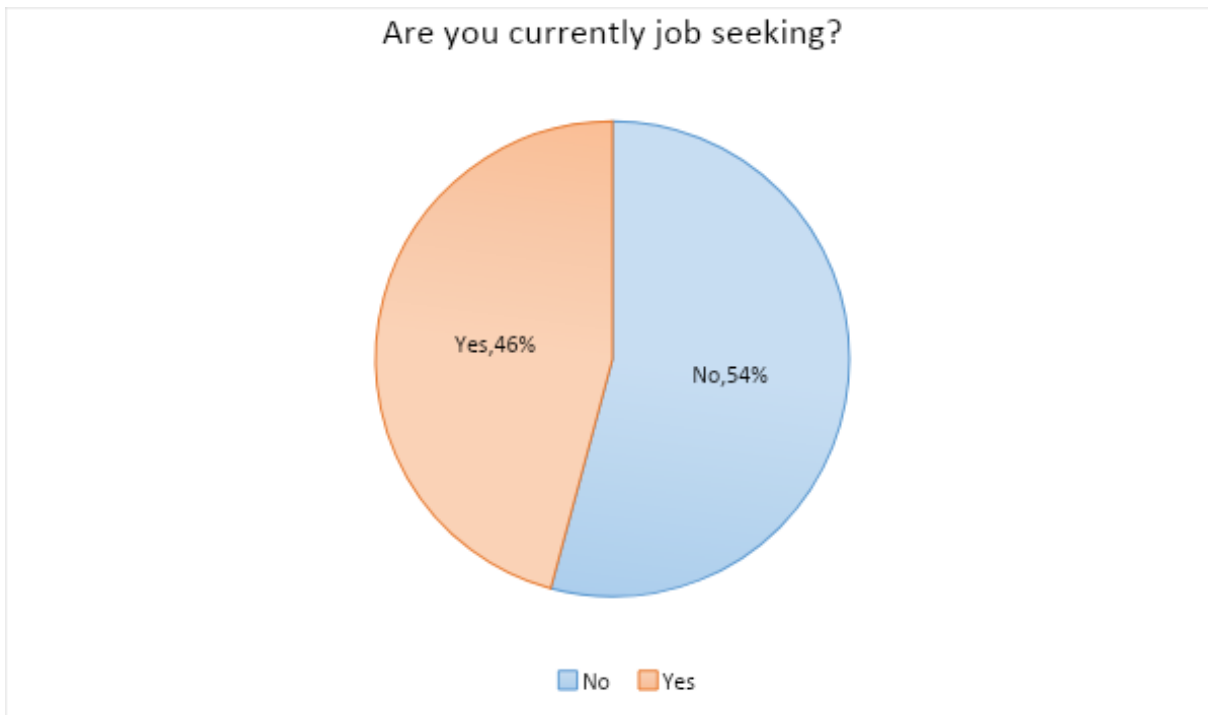
Job seeking



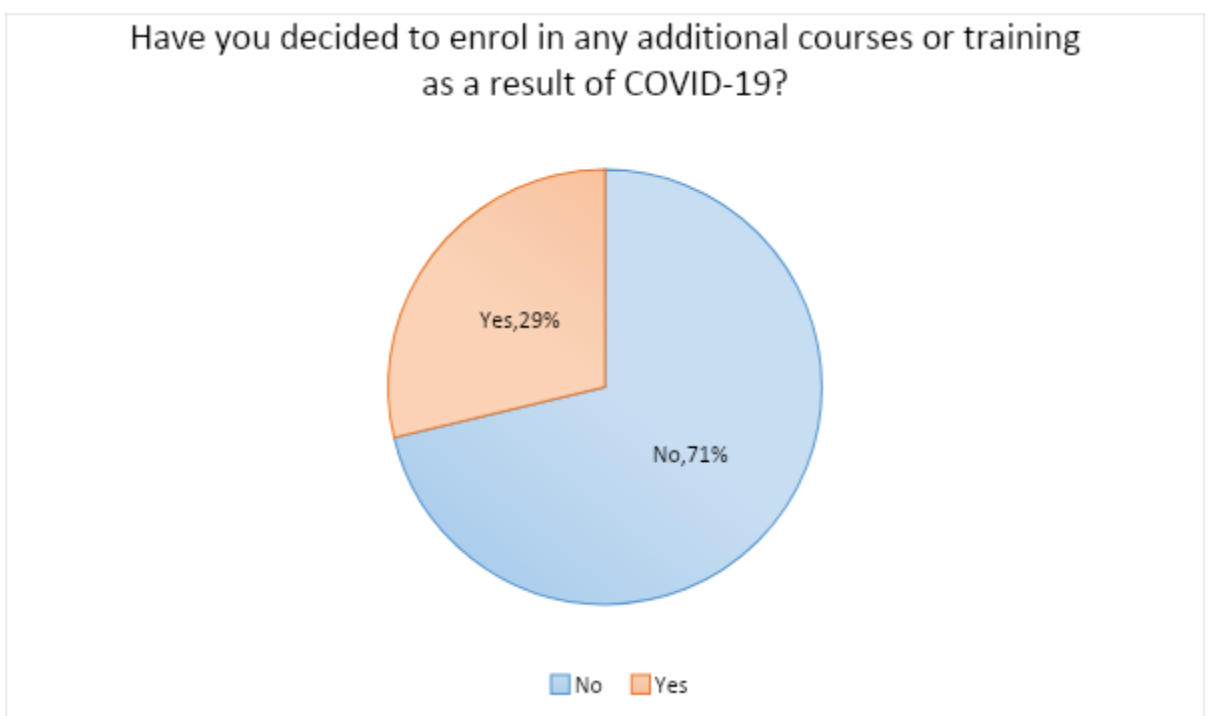


ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee

SUBMISSION TO ALIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS - Report on the 2020 COVID-19 Survey Results



120 people responded to the question, "Did you become a job seeker as a result of the COVID-19 crisis?" and 95 people (79%) were job seeking before the pandemic. The remaining can be equally divided into people who were job seeking as a result of losing their job, and those who were job seeking because their hours had been cut.

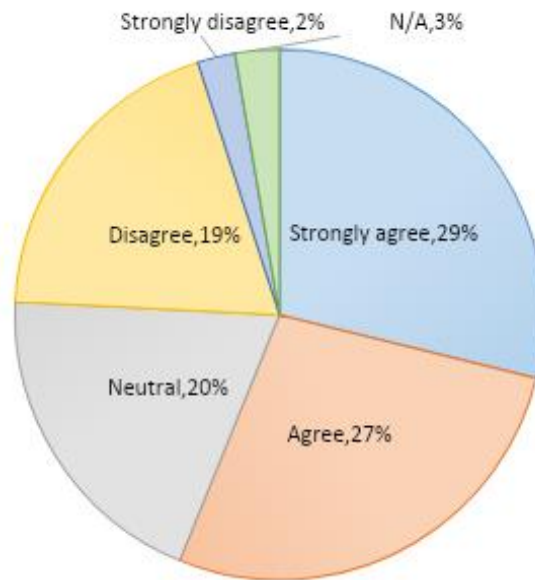




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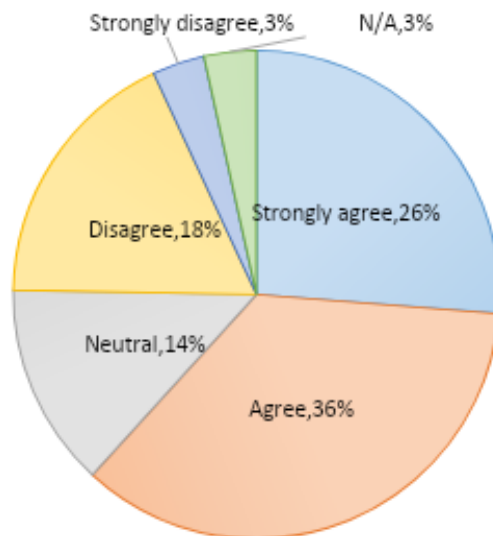
SUBMISSION TO ALIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS - Report on the 2020 COVID-19 Survey Results

I feel that COVID has slowed the progress of my career



Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree N/A

I feel that COVID has negatively impacted my ability to work, study, or look for a job

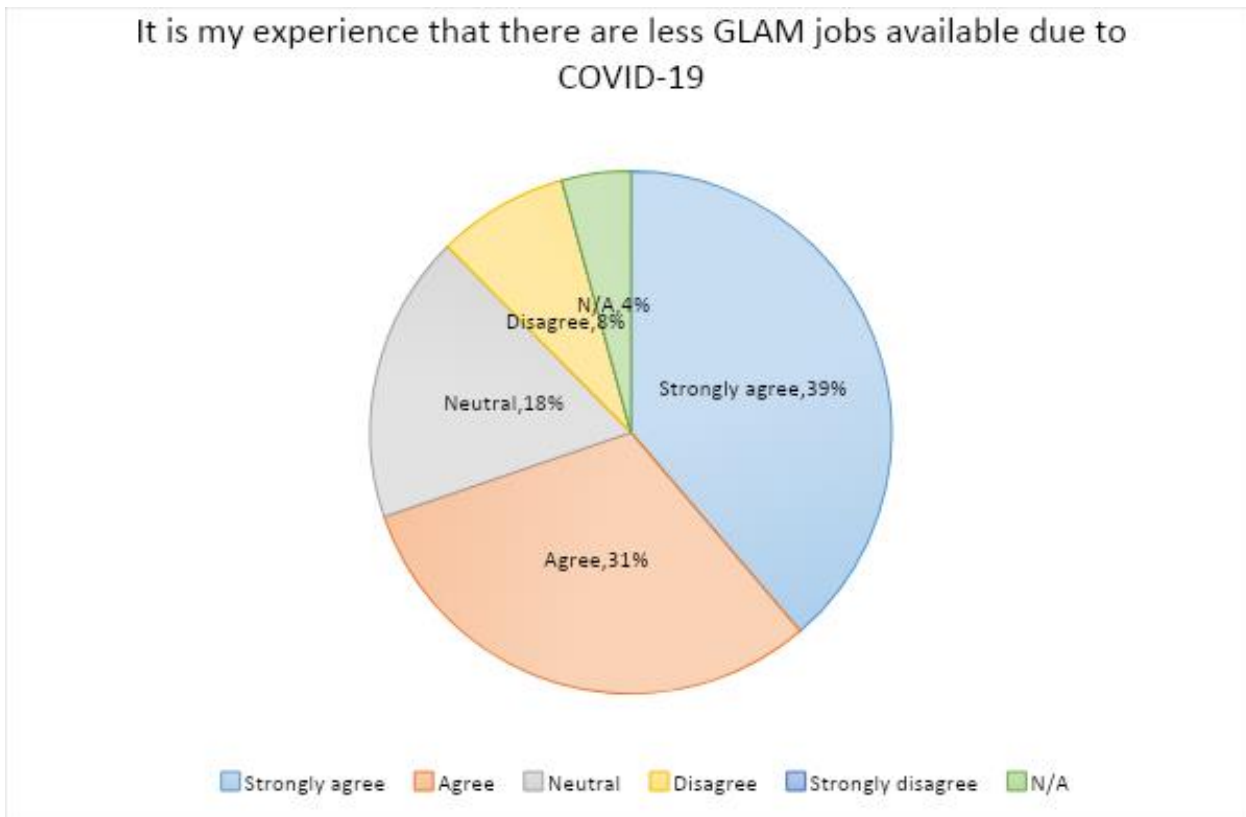


Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree N/A



ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee

SUBMISSION TO ALIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS - Report on the 2020 COVID-19 Survey Results



When asked: “Have you picked up any new skills due to the COVID-19 crisis that you think will help your career in the future?”

- 131 (50%) of participants answered ‘Yes’.
- 77 (30%) answered ‘Maybe’.
- 52 (20%) answered ‘No’.

Despite respondents discussing hardships and decreases in wages, only 6 (2%) participants have received help from a relief fund.

Open Ended Survey Questions

The final two questions of the survey were open ended and produced a wide and informative range of qualitative data. It was mentioned several times in the May and June #AusLibChats that many individuals were both learning new skills and feeling a lack of certain skills due to COVID. The Committee further pursued what these new skills were with the question “What job skills do you think would be most useful to learn in a post-COVID world?”

An analysis of the responses to the above question indicate the most frequently mentioned skills (with 59 mentions) was digital literacy and digital dexterity. The second highest in frequency of mentions (27) was tied being flexibility/adaptability and IT skills. The next most popular were soft skills (21), working remotely (19) and communication skills (17). A full list of skills mentioned can be found [here](#).



ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee

SUBMISSION TO ALIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS - Report on the 2020 COVID-19 Survey Results

Below is a sample of the survey responses to the question, "Use this space to tell us your COVID-19 story. How has COVID affected your career?":

"I'm worried that I've lost the next 3-5 years. I was hoping to move overseas and I don't think that's possible. I'm scared to see the impact on the industry in this time frame because there will be even more unemployed graduates than normal and it will be even more competitive to find work. I'm really lucky to have a full time job and it makes me feel scared to imagine ever taking a leap and leaving it now. Also I am concerned about diversity in the industry when it's likely that the higher up positions (predominantly white) will be retained while entry level positions are scrapped due to budgets."

"I was planning on looking for a new role this year to diversify my professional skillset, I am now staying in my current role due to the lack of other full-time permanent roles on offer. I am thankful to be working, but do feel that my decision was taken away from me which makes working more difficult."

"Thankfully it hasn't really affected my career personally. Our workplace was closed for two weeks while everything got sorted out, then we came back to work while closed to the public. "

"COVID has caused many employers to stop recruiting, and causes funding issues for councils and universities. I am concerned that my workplace will restructure and remove positions. I am also concerned that if I lost my job there is reduced potential for finding similar work. I also think that due to the economic climate people at my work will be less likely to retire in the next few years, which influences the job opportunities in my workplace.

I thrived working from home and would definitely be keen to build in some more job flexibility into my current role."

"I am still early-ish career and I am looking to move upward in the sector, had been doing additional volunteer work, advising committees, networking extensively, writing and such. COVID hit and everything was shattered. The sector is looking so poorly I don't know how I am ever going to be able to build a career to sustain a family I wanted to have, there is such potential but no jobs that can pay a living wage that are available to younger workers. And when there are jobs for younger workers they are so significantly less than peers in other sectors, or they do not have the job security that so many people need. While I am lucky in my job, I have been looking and at the moment I am starting to think about moving out of the sector as I can't see how it can get better with the established ways of thinking about GLAM sectors/workers."

"I lost two out of three of my library jobs which severely impacting my income and scholarship funding for my phd was gutted. I was lucky in that I was still able to work a few hours a week at my remaining job which allowed me to just get by and a month ago I managed to pick up another 1 day per week at another job but I'm worried that once things open up and my overhead costs go up again I won't be able to survive."

"I was a casual library assistant that got let go. Then the library service changed how it staffed libraries and would only hire casuals for on-call shifts with little notice. It wasn't worth it for me to go



ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee

SUBMISSION TO ALIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS - Report on the 2020 COVID-19 Survey Results

back, I live to far away. There is so much more competition for library jobs now too. I've been trying to get permanent work for 2 years with no luck. Every needs information organisations now more than ever, and so many more people want to work in them. But the government won't increase budgets. So information organisations keep struggling, and those wanting work have to just keep trying. If only the government would realise how much our nation could improve if it just increased funding. We could improve our society and inclusion! Surely that matters even more now. I just want to help.”

“I have had the opportunity to display leadership which will be good for future job opportunities. However without face to face programming which is central to my role I am stressed about redundancy and concerned about future job prospects due to redundancies and stand downs at other public libraries.”

“Having to study from home had a big impact on my learning having to defer some units due to not being confident in studying those units online instead of in class. Not feeling motivated to study at home as there is always something else that needs doing instead of studying and doing assessment work. Taking longer to finish my course due to deferring units.”

“I don't think that it is a case of there being less jobs but there are now more people looking for jobs so you become one of many - trying to stand out from the group is more of a challenge.”

The full data set and further answers to the question above can be found [here](#). Committee member, Claire Murphy, has coded the responses and arranged them according to theme in [this document](#).

- 9 respondents indicated that COVID had no or minimal effect on their career.
- 36 respondents indicated that they experienced professional growth during COVID through taking on new responsibilities and roles.
- 28 respondents indicated that their mental health was negatively affected by COVID with feelings of isolation, stress and anxiety.
- 11 respondents referenced issues with workloads in their current role due to COVID.
- 61 respondents referenced issues with job seeking with 49 indicating their job seeking had been stalled.
- 29 respondents discussed education issues with 10 citing concerns of a delayed graduation because they were unable to complete placement requirements.

Recommendations

The New Generation Advisory Committee suggest that ALIA consider the following:

- One issue re-iterated among those surveyed was an overall lack of career opportunities in the GLAM field post-COVID and a perceived increase in competition for advertised roles. The committee recommends that ALIA investigate this situation further and address it as part of the Professional Pathways program.



ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee

SUBMISSION TO ALIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS - Report on the 2020 COVID-19 Survey Results

- The members of the committee are aware that new generation professionals are feeling heightened levels of anxiety around their career prospects. It is recommended that ALIA examine ways to promote mental health support services and similar resources to help struggling professionals.
- It is recommended that ALIA share this report and survey data with LIS education stakeholders to raise awareness of the above issues. In particular, education stakeholders should be aware of the list of skills that new generation professionals feel are most important post-COVID.
- ALIA could encourage the Committee to run this survey again in 3 to 6 months time, to see if attitudes have changed.



ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee

SUBMISSION TO ALIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS - Report on the 2020 COVID-19 Survey Results

Prepared by

ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee members:

Claire Murphy, Holly Randuz, Paige Wright, Samantha Hay, Jade Koekoe, Sara Altmann, Lorraine Rose and Liz Harris

Endorsed by

Sara Altmann (Chair), ALIA New Generation Advisory Committee