

LIBRARIES AND MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION

SNAPSHOT REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

“...because now information can be anything, alternative facts... you can see it can be spun in so many different ways that it's almost like we're all gaslit to the point where we don't even know what's right. We don't know what's up. We don't know what's down. So how can we create order from this chaos again? Who is good at creating order from chaos? That would be information professionals and librarians.”
(UC Short Course participant)

There is growing recognition of the need for the general public to be guided to engage critically with news and media and to develop media literacy skills and knowledge. The growth of new digital platforms, mis and disinformation, fake news, deepfakes, sponsored content and the rise of the ‘attention economy’ have created an urgent need to understand how people access and engage with information and media content, and how they are impacted by it.

Libraries play a significant role in supporting the public to develop their media and digital literacy. Media technology is rapidly evolving, and the skills people learn during formal education need constant updating.

The task facing libraries and other community information providers and educators is significant but also presents enormous opportunities. A national study¹ on adult Australian’s media literacy shows a lack of confidence in media ability and very few have access to media literacy support when they need it. Media literacy is defined as ‘the ability to critically engage with media in all aspects of life. It is a form of lifelong literacy that is essential for full participation in society’ (Notley, 2021).

In 2021, the University of Canberra (UC) and the Australian Libraries and Information Association (ALIA) collaborated on a national study of ALIA members’ perceptions of media literacy education, with the view to develop a media literacy short course tailored to their needs. ALIA members were surveyed from October to December 2021 and respondents asked how libraries serve the public in their media literacy needs and what media literacy professional development they want.

We found that LIS professionals strongly believe they have a role in educating the public in media literacy. They want to learn more about media literacy and media literacy training. Responding to this, we developed a 7-week course for LIS professionals, undertaken by 44 students in 2022. The internal course evaluation shows LIS professionals reaped value from the course in that they 1) converted existing implicit knowledge to a structured format; 2) upskilled as media literacy educators; 3) developed critical understanding of media and media systems; and 4) developed critical consideration of the public’s and their own media consumption. This snapshot report summarises the key findings from the different research phases.

Read the full report here: <https://doi.org/10.25916/kahm-zr94>

¹ Notley, T., Chambers, S., Park, S., Dezuanni, M. (2021). *Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs*. Western Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology and University of Canberra.

NATIONAL SURVEY: FINDINGS

Summary

To investigate how librarians and library staff perceive their role in educating the public in media literacy, the UC team surveyed ALIA members via a national online survey in October to December 2021 (n=536; public 52%, school 24%, other 24%). The survey asked how libraries serve the public in their media literacy needs and what respondents think of their professional development needs in terms of media literacy.

Key findings include:

- Confidence level and experience of delivering media literacy education differs by sector, job title and demographics.
 - Respondents from school libraries were the most confident in online activities such as understanding terms and services and making decisions about what to share online.
 - Teacher librarians were the most confident in all aspects of media literacy, and library assistants were the least confident.
 - Public library workers assisted community members or the public in using devices (laptop, smartphone, library devices) more than other sectors.
 - Older adults and family/parents were more likely to ask for help in general internet use and using devices.
- Media literacy needs in the community are diverse and growing.
 - The needs of older adults and young people are different.
 - More people – particularly adults – are asking for media literacy support compared to five years ago.
- ALIA members see themselves as the deliverers of adult media literacy education.
 - Respondents feel libraries have a responsibility in delivering media literacy education to the public.
 - Those who work in public libraries feel the most responsible for educating the public.
- Respondents expressed a strong desire to learn about media literacy and media literacy education.
 - The strongest desire was found among those who work in public libraries.
 - Library assistants have a high desire to enrol in a media literacy course, indicating a need for support in professional development.
 - Those servicing older Australians and families/parents are the most interested in a media literacy course.
- Topics of interest varied across the sector.
 - Those in school libraries are interested in learning about finding trustworthy sources and staying safe online, whilst public library staff preferred working out how to best teach media literacy to the public and community.

FINDINGS – IN MORE DEPTH

Confidence Levels

Most respondents have high confidence in assisting others with general online search, using the internet and library resources, using digital devices and apps. ALIA members had lower confidence levels in understanding the terms and services of websites, editing photos or videos, dealing with cyberbullying and

online harassment. Respondents' levels of experiences of assisting in these activities correlate with their confidence levels in them.

School library staff have higher confidence in finding information and resources about media literacy education (79%) compared to public library staff (70%) or other libraries (67%). Those working in school libraries were also more confident in understanding the terms of services of online sites and making decisions about what to share online.

Teacher librarians are the most confident in all aspects of media literacy and library assistants are the least confident.

Media literacy needs of patrons

Public library professionals more likely to assist the public in using digital devices

The experience of helping the community members or the public was different by organisation type. Those working in schools assisted others in finding resources from the library catalogue or at home, media and copyright, and deciding what to share online, more than those in public or other libraries. Public library professionals assisted community members or the public in using devices more than other sectors.

Older and younger Australians have different media literacy needs

Older adults and family/parents are more likely to ask for help in general internet use, and using devices. Younger people are more likely to need help in finding information and using library resources. Very few people asked for help at the library about apps, editing photos or information about online sites.

Patrons mostly need help in finding information and using devices

The most common activities patrons ask for help are (1 finding information online (2 general internet use and (3 using devices (smartphones/laptops & computers).

Number of patrons needing help has increased

Respondents reported an increase in the number of clients or patrons requiring help or advice. 8% say there is a decrease in demand. About one-third (32%) felt the demand was roughly the same as before.

45% of respondents say more people are asking for help or advice about media and media technology.

Respondents believed that needs of the general public, families/parents and older Australians have grown in recent years.

More public library patrons asking for help

Those who work in public libraries feel that community members or the public are asking for more help in recent years (54%), compared to school libraries (31%). More than half (55%) of school library staff feel the demand is about the same as five years ago. Very few respondents report fewer people asking for help.

Responsibilities for media literacy education

When asked who they think is responsible for helping citizens become more media literate, respondents chose schools (75%) as the most responsible party to provide media literacy education, followed by libraries (73%).

Fewer people (40%) think individuals should be responsible for their own media literacy. However, depending on the type of organisation, respondents had different views on who is responsible for educating the public in media literacy. Almost all of those working in school libraries (94%) included secondary and senior schools in the top three parties that are responsible for educating the public. On the other hand, 78% of those working in public libraries included libraries in the top three responsible entities.

Media literacy training

High demand for online

We asked respondents about a potential media literacy course and their desire to enrol in such a course.

The majority (73%) of respondents expressed a need to learn media literacy through an online short course. Only 11% said they were not interested in an online media literacy short course.

Public library staff showed higher demand (83%) for a media literacy course compared to those in school (67%) or other libraries (60%). Library assistants (85%), librarians (76%), management/admin/outreach staff (74%) show higher demand for the course compared to teacher librarians (72%) and library technicians (63%). Those catering to parents, families and older adults (84%) showed more interest in the course compared to those whose main customer base is general adults (80%) or young people (76%).

Topics of interest

Among the list of topics that could be offered in a media literacy course, respondents expressed the most interest in learning about 'finding and identifying trustworthy sources', 'how to teach member of the public or community' and 'staying safe online'. They are least interested in learning about copyright and social media trends.

The topics of interest differed by the type of organisation. Those in school libraries prioritised finding trustworthy sources and staying safe online, whilst public library staff preferred working out how to best teach media literacy to the public and community.

Librarians are interested in learning about finding trustworthy sources (56%), how to teach media literacy (51%) and developing practical skills in social media (37%). Teacher librarians are interested in finding trustworthy sources (55%), the impact of digital technologies on people's behaviour (49%) and staying safe online (37%).

Those working with young people are mostly interested in finding trustworthy sources (51%) and working out how best to support and teach the public and community (50%). Those working with general adults are interested in working out how best to teach media literacy (60%), finding trustworthy sources (48%) and staying safe online (36%). Those working with older adults are most interested in how to best teach media literacy (62%), finding trustworthy information sources (45%) and developing practical skill in social media and digital platforms (36%).

Training and professional development

High participation in professional development activities

Among respondents, the vast majority (89%) participated in professional development activities in the past year, indicating that ALIA members are receiving regular professional development training.

The most common types of professional development activities are (1) webinars and seminars (2) professional reading and (3) training courses. About a quarter (23%) of respondents engage with research activities as part of their professional development.

The vast majority (90%) of those who work in school libraries attended webinars or seminars as part of their professional development and 87% engaged in professional reading. They were less likely to conduct research (19%). Those in public libraries had high levels of participation in webinars or seminars (84%) and participating in training or education course delivered by an external trainer (75%).

Teacher librarians are the most active in professional development activities with 95% of them engaging in professional reading in the past year, 81% attending webinars or seminars, and 70% participating in internal or external training courses.

When asked about the most needed area of professional development as an open-ended question, 'media literacy (including digital literacy/information literacy)' was cited as the top. Management and leadership skills and sector-specific professional development were also high in demand.

MEDIA LITERACY FOR LIS PROFESSIONALS

SHORT COURSE EVALUATION

The Course

The Media Literacy for LIS Professionals Short Course assists LIS professionals to develop critical-thinking skills around the use of media as part of the professional development and build up their own Media Literacy Toolkit for educating others. The course was delivered in a flexible seven-week, self-paced online learning mode of six distinct topics and a final reflection in week seven. The total intended learning time was 50 hours of self-paced learning.

The evaluation is based on the first two intakes of the short course offered in 2022 with 44 students. Course participants were primarily from NSW, but were also from WA, ACT, Victoria, QLD, Tasmania and New Zealand, with two from the United States and Slovakia. Participants were from colleges, universities, schools and public libraries.

Evaluation methods

For each intake, a series of evaluation methods were employed to receive feedback from the students during and after the course: online real-time seminars, midpoint-survey, endpoint survey and post-course interviews. In addition, students were provided with an online forum to ask or discuss course-related matters on the Canvas site as well as access to the team through a specific email mailbox.

Summary

In summary, the short course evaluation highlighted that:

- Key motivations to enrol in the media literacy short course include:
 - A culture of lifelong learning and curiosity among LIS professionals
 - An opportunity to put structure and formal learning around what was known implicitly
 - The importance of understanding media literacy for LIS professionals as educators
 - A desire to broaden their skills for professional development.
- In the LIS sector there is a range of media literacy support and training available to the public:
 - Incidental media literacy awareness and technical help and education for library patrons
 - Passive education and awareness
 - Informal media literacy training
 - Formal training/courses.

Findings - in more depth

Course Surveys

A total of 24 valid responses were collected from the midpoint and endpoint feedback surveys during the two intakes of the course. Course participants found that the course provided a good start point for them to further their existing understanding of media literacy and to be introduced to the new knowledge and tools. Most of them found the course content complemented their existing knowledge (mid-point 100%; end-point 70%).

Peer interactions and discussions were valued by the course participants. Weekly time spent on the course learning varied from 19.5 to 2.5 hours, with around 3 hours of learning per week being the most common.

A critical understanding of news and information and understanding how to leverage media literacy resources were perceived as the most important learning elements of the course.

Participants responded that the course was good value for money (83%), that they enjoyed the course (94%), learned new skillsets (94%) and would recommend the course to their colleagues (94%).

Post-course interviews

In addition to the course evaluation surveys and feedback during real-time seminars, students enrolled in the two courses were invited to participate in in-depth interviews after the course. Eight participants agreed to be interviewed and the interviews were conducted between August and October 2022.

Motivations to enrol in the Media Literacy Course

During the course and in the research during and after it, participants talked about **a culture of lifelong learning and curiosity** amongst librarians and information services professionals. *‘I just think we’ve always got things to learn’* (interview #1). They also talked about the culture of sharing information, the requirements of ongoing professional development and the enthusiasm for learning about an emerging and relevant topic. Some talked about an opportunity to put some **structure and formal learning** around what was known implicitly.

The **combination of media/journalism and information services** was appealing to some – it was seen as a unique pairing which made the education broader and more appealing.

Current media literacy offerings in Australian libraries

Participants discussed a range of ways that media literacy education is already incorporated into their programming, such as:

- **Incidental media literacy awareness and education**, when patrons come to the library for straightforward technical help, and library staff slip in information about contemporary issues such as privacy and misinformation, related to media literacy;
- **Passive education and awareness** comprised techniques such as information stalls in the library with pamphlets and materials, with QR codes that lead to information on the website;
- **Informal media literacy training** through booked or drop-in sessions, and over the counter help with tasks such as setting up MyGov accounts, managing photos and help with Borrowbox; and
- **Formal training/courses** such as ‘iPad basic courses’ ‘Taming Technology’ monthly talks and workshops on timely topics such as ‘safe online shopping for Christmas’.

The role of libraries in media literacy education

The importance of understanding media literacy as educators was a prevalent theme, either because they were going to be involved in their library’s development of media literacy programs; because of a view that digital literacy is an important issue, particularly for librarians in their roles as educators; or that they wanted to broaden their skills base and undertake CPD.

Library staff felt they not only play an important role in digital media literacy, they have a responsibility to do so. This was demonstrated through the initial survey, where 73% of ALIA members believed that libraries had a responsibility to teach media literacy. This also emerged in the interviews with themes of being at the frontline of battling disinformation.

Challenges of teaching media literacy

Participants mentioned the **time pressures of training and education for their peers**, and the challenges of developing ways to encourage their staff or colleagues to upskill. Library staff were pressed for time to do additional learning.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) patrons, and youth, were mentioned as being two audiences that presented particular challenges in terms of media literacy education. The respondents were unfamiliar with the different social media platforms used by these cohorts which meant they were not confident in having the knowledge to discuss how to identify misinformation or disinformation. The youth cohort was recognised to be more difficult to engage more generally, not just around social media or misinformation.

Older people and seniors were noted by many participants as being a cohort that need particular support. The use of iPads was frequently mentioned as a source of stress for seniors who were often given iPads by families to stay in touch, but didn't know how to use them or lacked confidence or knowledge to access apps or platforms.

Others talked about older people 'being forced online' by corporate and government forces by having to book medical appointments through HotDoc, downloading Covid apps to access retail or restaurants or use QR codes, having to purchase goods online that aren't available in their regional towns and all the while having multiple apps open and being unaware of the impact of this.

No common ground in media literacy levels was noted by some participants as being a challenge of educating patrons in libraries, particularly given the diversity of demographics and ages that are serviced by public libraries.

Course impact

Conversion of implicit to explicit knowledge

Participants talked about their conversion of implicit to explicit knowledge: that they might have done things intuitively previously but didn't realise there was a framework. Lateral reading was particularly mentioned in this context. Participants were also made aware of the gaps and limitations of their knowledge in certain areas. This included tools for verification and assessment of information, and an understanding of advertising.

Critical awareness of media consumption

A number of participants reported a greater critical awareness and understanding of media – including advertising and marketing – and critical consideration of their own media consumption.

Some participants talked about the understanding of marketing and advertising being quite revelatory in how it changed how they experienced media. Participants talked about consuming media in a different way, and being far more critical of why they were being shown certain advertising online. The statistics and content on the media use of different cohorts was a surprise to many and a concern to some, particularly around critical consumption of news by younger people.

Contextualising misinformation and disinformation in the changing media landscape

Interview participants talked about their greater understanding of the marketing, advertising and media landscape after doing the course, and of the commercial drivers of the media institutions driving agendas and media use.

Feedback from the respondents suggested that the short course had the potential to have more wide-ranging positive impacts than just on the participants themselves, and that the benefits could extend to colleagues and library patrons.

Measures taken by respondents to share their newly acquired knowledge included: updates during course on Microsoft Teams for colleagues; staff presentations after the course using the course content and Media Literacy toolkit; piggybacking of other program content in channels such as school talks, and distribution and use of their collated resources in their individual 'Media Literacy Toolkits'.

Conclusion

The National Survey of LIS professionals in 2021, the development and delivery of two short courses on media literacy for LIS professionals in 2022 and the subsequent course evaluation demonstrates a rapidly growing need for media literacy education amongst public and school library patrons and a growing demand for upskilling by LIS professionals to enable them to meet this need.

This research shows that libraries play an essential role in supporting the public to develop and upskill their media and digital literacy, and that LIS professionals feel this responsibility keenly. They need and want ongoing education, support and connection through peer communities of practice; they want the pedagogical skills to assist them in teaching others, and they want examples of best practice to learn from and emulate.

The holistic program of formative research resulting in the development, delivery and evaluation of a short course which will continue to evolve in response to that evaluation is a useful model. It ensures that professional development programs for cohorts such as LIS professionals are tailored and refined in response to ongoing feedback and evaluation, which is particularly necessary given the rapidly changing media landscape, and the need for constant upskilling in media literacy.

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