ALIA FUTURE OF THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE PROFESSION SPECIAL LIBRARIES

Introduction

In 2013, we set out to investigate the big questions about our future.

- How will libraries remain relevant for users?
- What changes will institutions and individuals in the sector experience?
- Will 'library and information professional' continue to be a necessary and desirable occupation?

We received challenging, insightful, inspiring responses to our request for feedback at events held all around Australia. As a result, we were able to identify themes and develop actions to support positive outcomes. The findings from the project were produced as seven reports, available as pdf downloads from the ALIA website www.alia.org.au. These were published in May 2014, to coincide with ALIA's Annual General Meeting.

Three years on, we have reviewed the themes, actions and what we have learned since the original investigation. This is our May 2017 update.

Themes: Did we get it right?

There were 10 themes that emerged, specific to special libraries and information services.

1. **Radical transformation**
   We will play an active role in developing the next iteration of libraries and information services.
2. **Value proposition**
   A powerful business case can be built from meaningful data.
3. **DIY information**
   Instant gratification – we will compete with Google.
4. **Ready to use**
   Clients will look to us for data that is packaged and ready to present.
5. **A seat at the top table**
   Leveraging the importance of knowledge will secure us management team positions.

6. **Centralise and embed**
   Bringing technical services together is offset by embedding information professionals in teams.
7. **Big data**
   We can work with IT to source data and make it discoverable.
8. **Digitisation**
   The future for our physical collections is online.
9. **Subject specialists**
   Professionals from other disciplines move into information management.
10. **Space**
    Rapid access to information will be more important than the library footprint.

The themes remain relevant, and, to a great degree, aspirational. Change is endemic in business and government, and organisations are still catching up to the idea that library and information professionals can help manage big data, access resources that a Google search won't uncover, and merit a seat at the top table. Library and information professionals in special libraries and information services must be confident users of technology, but that doesn't mean they need to sit within the IT division. This confusion of the roles of IT professionals, who manage the pipeline, and information professionals, who manage the content that flows through it, continues to be unhelpful.

Scorecard: How did we perform 2013-2017?

This was the action list for ALIA.

1. Greater collaboration to enable benchmarking of services is required. This will mean the development of standard metrics, and data gathering and analysis by an independent third party such as ALIA.	In 2013/2014, ALIA worked with other associations to develop return on investment studies for health and other special libraries. The results were based on a survey of the different types of libraries and revealed $5-worth of benefit for every dollar invested in special libraries[1] and $9-worth for health libraries[2].
	At the ALIA National conference in 2016, we held a Special Libraries Summit, bringing together representatives from corporate, government, health, law and research libraries to look at how we could advocate more effectively from a strong evidence base[3].
2. We must work with LIS educators and look at how new areas of practice such as big data can be incorporated into our ALIA PD and Training.	The inclusion of digital technologies and digital capabilities in the LIS curriculum has been an important element of the discussion between ALIA and educators around foundation skills. They have been a focus for the (bi-annual) Higher Education and (annual) VET LIS educator forums.
	ALIA Health Libraries Australia developed the first ALIA PD Scheme specialisation[4], based on competencies and a skills checklist in 2013. The ALIA Learning team has since gone on to develop specialisations for government, research and academic libraries.
	In 2016, we ran Australian National Data Service information sessions and promoted the ANDS 23 Research Things program. ALIA Training courses for 2015-2017 include *Digital DIY*, *Infographics 101* and *Digital Trends Round Up*.

This was the action list for special libraries.

1. Library and information professionals will need to build on their resilience and adaptability.

2. Value propositions must be strengthened and any weaknesses addressed.

3. Library and information professionals need to work with their IT colleagues to create a fast, effective federated search, tailored to the needs of the organisation.

4. Ongoing learning will be essential for library and information professionals to stay abreast of new environments and new technologies.

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[1] https://www.alia.org.au/roispecials accessed 8 May 2017
[2] https://www.alia.org.au/advocacy-and-campaigns/advocacy-campaigns-0/australian-health-libraries-return-investment accessed 8 May 2017
[3] https://www.alia.org.au/special-libraries-summit-2016 accessed 8 May 2017
[4] https://membership.alia.org.au/pdinfo/specialisations/alia-pd-scheme---specialisations accessed 8 May 2017

Conclusion: What have we learned?

The sheer variety of special libraries and information services in terms of client groups, organisational structures, size and activities makes benchmarking difficult. Each entity is, indeed, "special".

Through our ALIA Special Libraries and Information Service Advisory Committee and Health Libraries Australia, we have gone some way to addressing the advocacy, training, education and professional development needs of this sector, but without a solid base of data about libraries, information services, and the professionals who run them, it is hard to build a business case and value proposition.

We can only estimate the number of locations, the scope of the service, the volume of user enquiries, and surveying our Members does not provide scalable results. Sampling, which could be effective in other sectors (for example school and public libraries), where constituents have more in common, can present a skewed picture.

The ALIA Special Libraries Summit in 2016 brought together professionals from across industry to address these issues. As a result, we have a strategy and action plan covering advocacy, professional development, education, support and research, for the next three years.