

Our future – as the 21st century library and information workforce – is intrinsically linked to our ability to innovate, initiate and inspire. Can workforce planning help us get there?

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Abstract

The challenges facing us are great: the themes of this conference highlight how digital technologies and social change are impacting on both our working environment and on the communities we serve. The expectations of our stakeholders – our customers and clients, our managers and our funding bodies – are changing rapidly. Our ability to respond to the complex demands placed upon us by this myriad of stakeholders and to demonstrate our true value requires us to have the aptitudes to be nimble, flexible and adaptable. Can we achieve this, at both the institutional and personal levels?

If we believe that our future journey requires innovation, initiation and inspiration, then we need to ensure that we have the capacity not only to retain our talented leaders, but also to inspire others to become committed to professional development to ensure the workforce truly embodies the knowledge, skills and attributes required for a strong and vibrant future. Importantly, we need to have strategies to attract new people to the library and information sector and to scaffold and support their career aspirations. The people we recruit and retain must be able to embrace change and diversity. A propensity to stick to the tried and true is counterproductive – innovation will only be stifled.

The proposed paper reviews the findings of the neXus research project (supported by ALIA, QUT and CAVAL) which sought to better understand the characteristics of the current library and information workforce in Australia, drawing specifically on the survey responses from library and information technicians. While the paper presents an analysis of the data that is of immediate relevance to the paraprofessional workforce, it also challenges us to consider the implications of the findings. Workforce planning is a critical factor in determining our future, whether seen from the institutional perspective of the current and future staffing needs or from the individual perspective of career planning.

Introduction

Many commentators have noted the challenging times being faced by the library and information services (LIS) sector in the early 21st century: “Change the lightbulb or flick the switch – our choice” (Cleyle & McGillis, 2005), “The role of the library in the wired society – compete or withdraw” (Sommers, 2004), “Ambient findability: libraries at the crossroads of ubiquitous computing” (Morville, 2005), “Libraries now have the power to be so much more, or so much less” (Tennant, 2000). The themes of the current conference consider the ways in which digital technologies and societal developments are impacting on both our working environment and on the communities we serve. As a result, the expectations of our stakeholders, that is our customers and clients, our managers and our funding bodies, are changing rapidly. To respond to these challenges and to demonstrate our true professional value, the LIS sector should be nimble, flexible and adaptable. We genuinely need to demonstrate our ability to be innovative, to initiate new services and to inspire not only our diverse stakeholders, but also our own peers and colleagues.

One big question to ask, however, focuses on the degree to which the LIS profession is able to be nimble, flexible and adaptable. To what extent are potential new initiatives stifled by traditional work practices which inhibit, rather than foster, innovation? Does the LIS sector currently have the knowledge, skills and attributes required to ensure a strong and vibrant future? Do we know enough about our current workforce, their careers, and their plans for the future? Do we know enough about the organisations we work for and how effective their policies and practices for staff retention and professional development really are? One project designed to help the Australian LIS profession understand more about the current workforce has been the *neXus* research study. Supported by Queensland University of Technology (QUT), the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and CAVAL Collaborative Solutions, the *neXus* research project has sought to better understand the characteristics of the current library and information workforce in Australia.

This paper draws specifically on the survey responses from individual library and information technicians. The paper presents aggregated, high level data which require a range of interpretations, according to sector, geographical situation and indeed organizational-specific context. While the *neXus* project challenges the diverse players in the LIS sector to consider the implications of the findings, data inevitably will mean different things to different people in different contexts. Nonetheless, the paper argues that not only is the future of the 21st century LIS workforce intrinsically linked to the profession’s abilities to innovate, initiate and inspire, but also that, in turn, the profession’s abilities to innovate, initiate and inspire are actually intrinsically linked to workforce capacity, today and into the future. Workforce planning has emerged as a critical factor in determining our future: we cannot plan the route ahead if we are not able to determine the resources we currently have and the resources we might need on our journey. The data collected in the *neXus* survey can be regarded as the first step in helping the LIS profession in Australia understand the demographic, educational and career paths of both professional and paraprofessional workers.

Why is workforce planning important?

The library world has frequently heard that our goal is to ensure that our customers and clients have access to ‘the right information, in the right format, at the right time’. The value of the collections we hold and the services we deliver is underpinned by our belief in this guiding principle. Similarly, the field of human resources management (HRM) focuses on the principle of ensuring “the right number of people with the right skills, experiences and competencies, in the right jobs, at the right time” (State of California, 2006, p.2). In a recent interview, Nerida Hart, Director of Knowledge and Information Services with the Federal Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA), clearly stated that “Libraries aren’t about books. Libraries are about people.” She argued strongly that information professionals are enabled “to focus on the people, on the people who require our services and *the people who provide them*” (SMR, 2006; emphasis added).

Workforce planning focuses on the people who provide the services, to work towards the goal of ensuring the right number of people with the right skills, experiences and competencies, in the right jobs, at the right time. Workforce planning is very closely aligned with, and indeed integrated into, the strategic planning processes of an organisation: “Just as strategic planning helps you map where you are, where you’re going, and how you plan to get there, workforce planning identifies human resource needs and strategies for meeting those needs in order to ensure you achieve your strategic plan goals” (State of California, 2006, p.5). Workforce planning starts with “mapping where you are”, as well as developing a keen understanding of the context your business is operating in. Some of the key issues libraries need to consider include the external and internal environments (adapted from State of California, 2006):

- What impact do changes in the state, national, and world economy have on the services we provide?
- What legislation is being considered that may change the way we do things?
- What are the employment trends at the state and national levels?
- What are the key economic and environmental factors facing the organisation?
- What are the changes in information technologies that will have an impact on the organisation?
- How are the organisation itself and its culture changing?
- What are the customers’ expectations? How are they changing?
- How are workers’ expectations changing?
- How might technology change the way we work?
- What are the changes in the skill sets of the potential candidate pool that will require re-assessing position duties, roles, and responsibilities?
- What are the changes in the position duties, roles and responsibilities that will require re-assessing the skill sets of the current workforce and the potential candidate pool?

The last two points require our attention: the supply and demand factors of the right knowledge, skills and attributes are intrinsically linked with education, training and development.

In Australia at the current time, the low unemployment figure and the resources boom are having a major impact on the workforce. At the same time, demographic change is in the spotlight, as governments consider the socio-economic implications of an ageing population and

lower fertility rates. The 2006 census reports that the median age of Australians climbed from 35 in 2001 to 37 in 2006, with the proportion of people aged over 55 years increasing from 22.0% to 24.3%. The proportion of people aged under 15 years had decreased by 1%. An earlier paper presented at the ALIA Click06 conference (Hallam, 2006) highlighted the impact that changing demographics are likely to have on the workforce in Australia in the next 20 years and beyond, particularly in terms of the anticipated competition for skilled workers, as predicted by Professions Australia (2005): “Demographic change will develop into the challenge of replacing skilled older workers from a much smaller pool of younger workers”. The Commonwealth government itself is aware of these growing pressures: “A tighter labour market is in prospect, a factor of wider demographic shifts and the ageing of the population. In the Australian Public Service (APS) we are already experiencing shortages for some skills and will face increasing competition for others. We need to be well positioned to succeed in the 'war for talent'” (APSC, 2005).

In addition, the ALIA Click06 paper provided an outline of the recent and current research into the workforce planning issues in the LIS sector undertaken in the United Kingdom (UK), Canada and the United States of America (USA) (Usherwood et al, 2001; Re:source, 2003; MLA, 2004; Ingles et al, 2005; IMLS, 2006). The primary concerns in these international studies focus on the concept of an ageing workforce and the associated retirement of senior LIS professionals; low unemployment levels which give rise to a dwindling pool of applicants from which to recruit; flattening or potentially even declining numbers of LIS graduates; the increased competition from other career sectors; less than competitive salaries; and the lingering negative image of the profession. The ALIA Click06 paper further argued that, while there were some scattered initiatives taking place in Australia which sought to develop a better understanding of the issues in the local context (Bridgland, 1999; McCarthy, 2005; Whitmell, 2005; van Wanrooy, 2006), there was scope for a major Australian study to capture demographic, educational and employment data about LIS professionals at the individual level, as well as about the specific recruitment, retention and training and development practices at the institutional level. We needed to map where we were to help determine where we might be going and how we were going to get there.

The *neXus* research project

The *neXus* research project sought to build on these earlier local and international research initiatives. The project comprises three different, yet interrelated, studies, with the key stakeholders in the initiative being QUT, ALIA and CAVAL. Stage One, referred to as the *neXus* census, was an online survey of individual LIS professionals conducted in September-October 2006. Stage Two aims to investigate workforce policies and practices in LIS institutions. In late 2006 an institutional survey was developed and piloted as the principal research instrument for Stage Two in collaboration with the Staff Development Coordinators (SDC) Committee of the CAVAL consortium of Victoria, which principally has members in the academic library sector. This pilot study covered four main areas of workforce activity that are considered important pieces of the LIS workforce jigsaw puzzle: general staffing information, recruitment and retention, staff development and succession planning. In addition, two international study tours have been undertaken (October-December 2006 and May 2007) to

capitalise on the opportunity to understand some of the international perspectives that are relevant to the research project.

The *neXus* survey (Stage One) was launched at the ALIA Click06 Conference held in Perth in September 2006. The self-administered questionnaire was accessible online for one month, with a direct link from the home page of the ALIA website, and was promoted widely via ALIA, LIS special interest groups and organisational e-lists. The survey sought to capture a range of data about the LIS profession, including demographic, employment and educational data, to help the research team better understand the nature of our profession in 2006. To date, the data collected has been analysed from a range of perspectives: in its entirety, ie all respondents; state-based (eg Victoria); sector-based (eg public libraries in Victoria; TAFE library staff; reference staff etc). The following discussion presents the data that is relevant to the paraprofessional section of the Australian library workforce.

What do we know about the paraprofessional workforce in the LIS sector?

To begin with, we should consider what we actually knew about the library technician workforce before we started. Through her research, Carroll (2002, 2005) provides valuable insights into the demographic characteristics of library technician students and Richardson (1999) has considered the career articulation of paraprofessional to professional for library technicians who complete university education to become a librarian. Beyond this, the main source of information has been the Australian Job Search website. Drawing on a range of sources published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), Australian Job Search (2006) stated that the LIS sector comprised almost 29,000 workers, with 13,400 librarians (46%), 6,700 library technicians (23%) and 8,800 library assistants (30%). The figure for paraprofessional staff resonates with the 2001 Census figure of 6,132 library technicians (ABS, 2001). It is hoped that more current figures will soon be available with the progressive release of data from the 2006 Census.

The *neXus* census returned 2346 valid responses. Of these, 15.3% (n=359) responded to the question regarding LIS qualifications (Figure 1) that they held a Diploma in LIS or an Advanced Diploma in LIS. 78.6% of these respondents had gained a Diploma, 21.4% an Advanced Diploma. 89% had gained their qualifications, while 11% were still studying.

[Only answer this question if you answered 'Already hold a formal qualification in LIS' or 'Currently studying towards an educational qualification in LIS' to question '7']

8. What type of educational qualification in LIS do you hold / are you studying towards?

Please choose only one of the following:

- Certificate Diploma Advanced Diploma
Bachelor LIS course Graduate Diploma Masters by coursework
Masters by research PhD Other Please specify _____

Figure 1. Question regarding LIS qualifications

30% of these paraprofessional workers (n=111) had qualifications beyond their discipline-specific (LIS) qualifications. Of this cohort with additional academic qualifications, 42.4% held an undergraduate degree as their highest qualification and a significant 57.6% held postgraduate qualifications (Table 1).

Qualification	Library technicians
Bachelor	42.4%
Honours	3.6%
Graduate Diploma	36.9%
Graduate Certificate	4.5%
Masters	10.8%
PhD	1.8%

Table 1. Highest qualification held by library technician respondents

However, it has to be admitted that there is a certain lack of clarity about paraprofessional and professional roles in the LIS sector in Australia, which is manifest when a person with library technician qualifications is appointed to a 'librarian' position, or when a person with a degree, graduate diploma or even masters in LIS is appointed to a 'library technician' position. 4.6% (n=74) of respondents who held a university qualification in LIS indicated that their job title was 'library technician'. 13.1% of respondents with a diploma or advanced diploma in LIS (n=47) indicated that the job title of 'professional librarian' best suited their current role. For the purposes of this paper, however, the current analysis of the findings is based on the respondents who specifically indicated that they held a diploma or advanced diploma as their LIS qualification.

Demographics of the respondents

88% of the library technician respondents were female, 12% male. The female:male ratio reported by Australian Job Search (2006) was 85%:15%. 13.4% reported that they had a culturally or linguistically diverse background and 1.1% identified themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The figures for both cohorts are about half the percentages given for the population as a whole: the ABS census data indicated that in 2006, 22% of the Australian population was born overseas and 21% spoke a language other than English in their homes; the Indigenous population was 2.3% (ABS, 2007). If library services in Australia are to reflect the communities they serve, then recruitment activities could potentially target the diverse cultural and linguistic groups that make up the specific communities.

Of all the States and Territories, Victoria had the highest level of paraprofessional responses (24.4%). The State Library of Victoria had expressed a significant interest in the *neXus* project due to the research they had commissioned with the *Workforce sustainability and leadership* study (van Wanrooy, 2006), so the *neXus* census received considerable publicity in Victoria. It was felt that there was a fair geographical distribution of respondents, with comparative figures for the estimated resident population by State and Territory (ABS, 2007) presented in Table 2. It was interesting to compare the geographical distribution with data reported by Australian Job Search (2006), specifically as it indicated that 51.3% of library technicians resided in Victoria,

while there were apparently none in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), whereas 3.9% of library technician respondents in the *neXus* study reported being based there.

State / Territory	ABS Census	<i>neXus</i> : All respondents	<i>neXus</i> : Lib Techs	Australian Job Search: Lib Techs
Victoria	24.7%	24.4%	30.9%	51.3%
New South Wales	32.8%	22.2%	20.6%	12.7%
Queensland	19.8%	15.6%	14.8%	6.1%
Western Australia	9.9%	12.9%	12.5%	14.7%
South Australia	7.5%	8.3%	5.6%	7.1%
Australian Capital Territory	1.6%	6.9%	3.9%	0.0%
Tasmania	2.3%	4.7%	11.1%	6.6%
Northern Territory	1.0%	3.4%	4.2%	1.5%
Overseas	n/a	1.5%	0.0%	n/a

Table 2. Geographic distribution to compare *neXus* respondents with Australian Job Search (2006) and ABS (2007) figures

Figure 2 graphically highlights the comparative distribution for the *neXus*, Australian Job Search and ABS data.

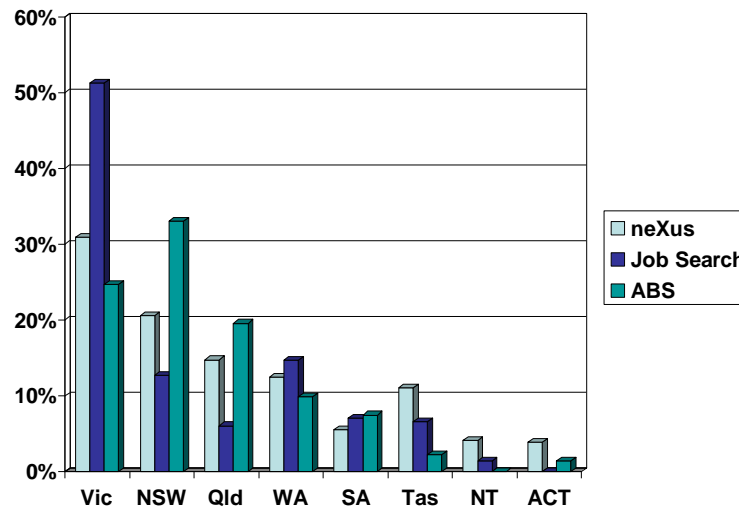


Figure 2. Geographic distribution to compare *neXus* library technician respondents with Australian Job Search (2006) and ABS figures (2007).

Library technician respondents represented the various LIS sectors (Figure 3), with more one quarter working in academic (university) libraries (25.6%), closely followed by the public

library sector (23.4%). 17.8% worked in special libraries, 8.3% in National/State libraries and 6.7% in TAFE libraries. A further 13.1% of paraprofessional respondents were employed in school libraries, while 5.1% were in non-traditional LIS roles, working overseas or not currently working.

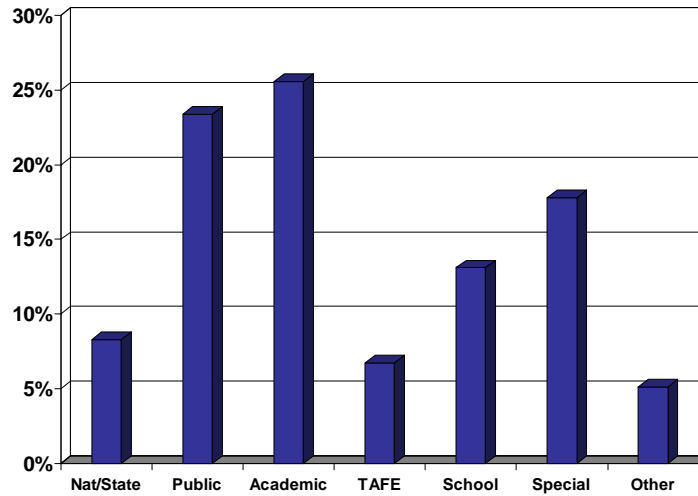


Figure 3. Distribution of library technician respondents by LIS sector

There is considerable discussion in the workforce planning literature in general and in the LIS sector resources specifically about the ‘ageing’ or ‘greying’ of the workers. Australian Job Search (2006) reports that 11.1% of library technicians are over 55 years and 46% are over 45 years old. Respondents in the *neXus* census actually recorded a higher age range, with 20% over 56 years and 56.5% over 46 years. The data for librarians, on the other hand, revealed a younger age profile, with 16.1% aged over 56 years, compared with the Australian Job Search figure of 24.7% being over 55 years (Table 3). It should be noted that there is a marginal difference in the actual age groupings in the two studies, eg 26-35 (*neXus*) compared with 25-34 (Austalian Job Search).

Age range	<i>neXus</i>	Australian Job Search
18-25	4.2%	3.7%
26-35	17.8%	10.4%
36-45	24.0%	40.3%
46-55	36.5%	34.5%
56 +	20.0%	11.1%

Table 3. Distribution of library technician respondents by age: Australian Job Search (2006) and *neXus*

The age distribution of respondents is presented graphically in Figure 4.

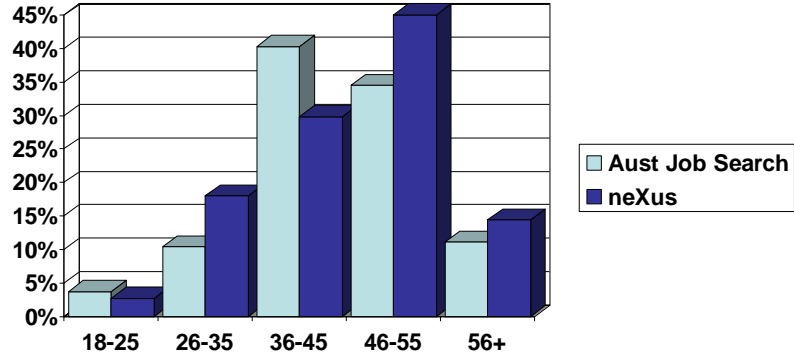


Figure 4: Age profile of library technician respondents: Australian Job Search (2006) and *neXus*

One interesting angle to analyse is the relationship between the length of time working in the LIS sector and the number of positions held). Following the model used in the Canadian study (Ingles et al, 2005, p.43) LIS workers can be grouped into three discrete career stages:

- Recent entrants – 5 years or less in the sector
- Mid career – 6-15 years experience in the sector
- Senior career – 16 years or more working in the sector.

25.3% of library technician respondents identified themselves as ‘recent entrants’, 30.6% as ‘mid career’ and 40.1% as ‘senior career’. Further investigation into this perspective on the data highlights the complex nature of the workforce. Whereas it might be assumed that new entrants would be recent school leavers or in their 20’s and senior career people would be aged in their 50’s and 60’s, almost half of recent entrants (45.1%) were in fact aged 41 years and over, while 14.6% of senior career respondents were under 40 years (Table 4).

Age range	Recent entrants	Mid career	Senior career
Under 30	24.2%	13.6%	0%
31-40	30.8%	18.2%	14.6%
41-50	33.0%	32.8%	32.6%
51-60	11.0%	34.5%	50.0%
Over 60	1.1%	0.9%	2.8%

Table 4. Age profile of library technician respondents by career stage

The concept of career stage is discussed further in the next section.

Career details of the respondents

The *neXus* census has provided a rich body of both quantitative and qualitative information about the respondents’ careers. It was interesting to note that the paraprofessional respondents

recorded a far higher number of recent entrants (25.3%, compared with 16.9% of all respondents and 14.3% of professional respondents), ie they had been working in the sector for 5 years or less. 30.6% could be described as mid career workers (6-15 years experience) and 40.1% fitted into the category of senior career workers (16 years or more experience). The breakdown of career stage by professional and paraprofessional groupings is presented in Table 5 and Figure 5.

Career stage	All respondents	Professional	Paraprofessional
Recent entrants: < 5 years	16.9%	14.3%	25.3%
Mid career: 6-15 years	31.8%	33.7%	30.6%
Senior career: >16 years	43.8%	43.6%	40.1%
n/a	7.4%	8.5%	3.9%

Table 5. Career stages of respondents: all respondents, professionals and paraprofessionals

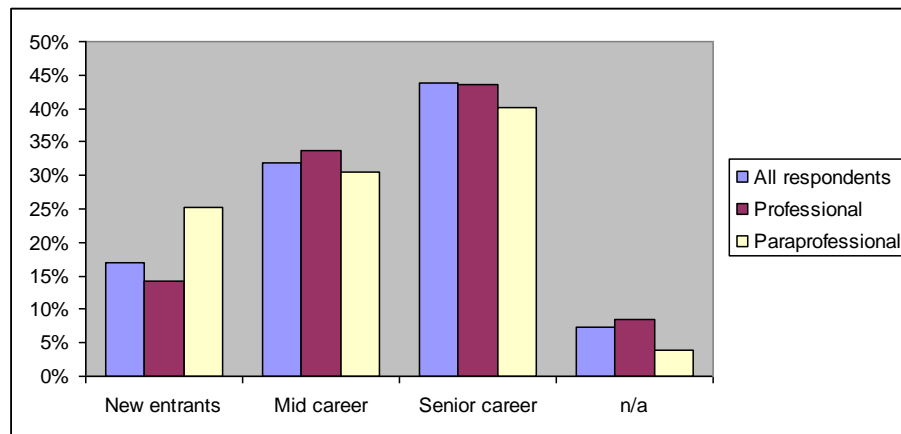


Figure 5. Career stages of respondents: all respondents, professionals and paraprofessionals

26.2% of paraprofessional respondents described themselves as ‘new graduates’ (ie they had completed their studies within the past 5 years). More than one third of library technicians had been working in the sector for 10 years or less, which can be viewed as a fertile opportunity for innovative and inspirational practice. It could be argued that more than half (55.9%) of paraprofessionals currently working in the LIS sector have been in the sector for 15 years or less, compared with 40.1% who had been working for longer than 15 years. There needs to be clear opportunities for fresher, creative ideas to overtake some of the more staid and traditional workplace practices.

Nevertheless, these views may be tempered by the fact that the LIS profession records a high level of mature-age, career change entrants. On commencing their studies, 35.4% described themselves as changing careers, while 38.2% indicated it was a first career qualification and 19.2% were returning to the workforce after a break. As noted above, 45.1% of library technicians who identified themselves as ‘new entrants’ were over the age of 40 years; however, that still leaves the majority (55%) of new entrants being aged under 40 years: about one quarter

were aged under 30 years. People changing careers may of course also bring with them considerable experience and ideas from other disciplines that may provide new insights or alternative approaches to traditional problems.

A further determining factor about the potential nimbleness of the paraprofessional workforce that was examined was the length of time respondents had been with their current employer (Table 6) and, beyond this, in their current position.

Length of time	Library technicians
Less than 1 year	11.4%
1-2 years	9.5%
2-3 years	7.2%
3-5 years	12.5%
6-10 years	19.5%
11-15 years	16.2%
16-20 years	9.5%
Over 20 years	10.3%
No answer	3.9%

Table 6. Length of time working for current employer: library technician respondents

These figures indicate that around 40% of respondents have been with their current employer for less than 5 years. Nevertheless, it appears that paraprofessional workers have worked for their employer longer than their professional counterparts: 36% of paraprofessional respondents had been with the same employer for more than 11 years, compared with 28% of professionals.

Respondents were also asked to indicate how many different organisations they had worked for in the LIS sector during their career. The responses provided to this question indicated very strongly that paraprofessional workers were considerably less mobile than their professional colleagues. 68.8% of paraprofessional respondents had worked for between just 1 and 3 organisations, compared with 47.5% of professionals. Only 10.9% of respondents had worked for more than 6 institutions (Table 7), compared with 20.1% at the professional level. While security of tenure is important to many individuals, the benefits of a flexible workforce gaining experience in a variety of settings should not be overlooked. In practice, innovation and inspiration require the frequent and ongoing exchange of ideas and experience, which may be stymied by a more conservative, established work environment.

Number of LIS organisations	Library technicians
1	26.2%
2-3	42.6%
4-5	16.4%
6-7	6.4%
8-9	2.8%
10 or more	1.7%
n/a	3.9%

Table 7. Number of LIS organizations worked for: library technician respondents

Beyond this, in order to measure flexibility and nimbleness, respondents were also asked to report on how long they had been in their current position. The number of people in their current position for less than a year was insightful: 15.3% of paraprofessional respondents had been in the role for less than 12 months (Table 8). However, at the other end of the scale, almost one half (46.8%) of paraprofessional respondents had been in the same position for more than 5 years, and a substantial number of them for longer than 10 years (26.7%).

Length of time	Library technicians
Less than 1 year	15.3%
1-2 years	11.7%
2-3 years	8.1%
3-5 years	13.6%
5- 10 years	20.1%
Over 10 years	26.7%
n/a	4.5%

Table 8. Length of time in current position: library technician respondents

A comparison between professional and paraprofessional respondents indicated that 16.7% of professional staff had been in the same job for more than 10 years, while 26.7% of paraprofessional staff had been in the same role for a decade or more. Around 63% of library technician respondents who had worked for the same organisation for more than 10 years had actually also had the same job for more than 10 years.

The data was also analysed to consider employment patterns of the specific cohort of young, newly qualified paraprofessionals (cf ‘young new graduates’), which involved examining the responses of respondents who had qualified within past 5 years and were aged under 30 years (n=18). 72% of this cohort had been in their job for less than 2 years, with 33.3% less than a year. As a comparison, of staff over the age of 50 years, only 12% had been in their job for less than 2 years, 7.5% for less than one year.

Responses to a later set of questions revealed that almost three quarters of paraprofessional respondents (74.3%) would be happy to spend the rest of their career with their current employer, with about one quarter happy to stay in the same position (25.9%). However, it was interesting to note that only 40% of those happy to continue working with the same employer actually agreed or strongly agreed that they were actually committed to the goals of that organisation.

In terms of employment status, respondents were asked to report on their current work arrangements. The data for paraprofessionals (Table 9) revealed a lower level of full time employment (57.4%, compared with 65.7% for professional staff) and a corresponding higher

level of part time employment (26.2%, compared with the figure of 15.8% for professionals). Australian Job Search (2006) reports a far lower level of full time employment for library technicians (46%).

Employment status	Library technicians
Full time employed	57.4%
Part time employed	26.2%
Casual employed	1.9%
Contract employed	7.5%
Job share	1.9%
Volunteer	0.6%
n/a	4.5%

Table 9. Current employment status: library technician respondents

The *neXus* census revealed considerable variation across the different states and territories. New South Wales recorded the highest level of full time work, at 70.3%, while Tasmania had the lowest at 30.0% full time, with a far higher part-time percentage of 40%. The highest level of contract work was in the Northern Territory (20.0%), closely followed by Tasmania (17.5%). The lowest figure for contract work was in New South Wales (2.7%). Of library technicians working full time, 9.2% reported working more than 40 hours per week, which compares strikingly with the 24.6% of full time professionals who work more than 40 hours. Of those working part time, 31.9% worked between 11 and 20 hours and 55.3% worked between 21 and 30 hours per week. However, 27.7% of those part time staff would like to work more hours, while 17.0% would actually like to work fewer hours. 39.3% of full time paraprofessional workers would like to work less than they currently do, and only 2.4% wanted more hours.

Focusing on remuneration, respondents were asked to indicate their gross annual salary level in 2005. The data is presented for those paraprofessional respondents who indicated that they worked full time. The data reveals that almost 40% of library technicians earned under \$40,000, while more than one third (34.7%) earned between \$40,000 and \$60,000. 41.0% of professional respondents fell into the same salary range. 14% of paraprofessionals earned over \$60,000, compared with 35.1% of professionals. Almost 15% of professional staff received under \$40,000.

Salary range	Library technicians	Librarians
Unpaid	5.3%	1.1%
Under \$39,999	39.3%	14.8%
\$40,000-\$59,999	34.7%	41.0%
\$60,000 - \$79,999	12.0%	26.2%
Over \$80,000	2.0%	8.9%
n/a	6.7%	8.0%

Table 10. Distribution across broad annual salary ranges (2005), full time staff: library technicians and librarians

The questions regarding work and professional functions produced a vast volume of data about the activities and responsibilities of the various levels of staff in libraries and information centres. The list of activities reflected the list developed by the Canadian research team (Ingles et al, 2005), so that the Australian data would be comparable with the international studies. The data collected has been synthesised to indicate the areas of most frequent activity for paraprofessional staff. Table 11 presents the aggregated figures for paraprofessionals to highlight the most frequent areas of work activity, ie the functions that were performed ‘often’ or ‘every often’.

Functions performed	Often or very often
Technical and bibliographic services	
Circulation and discharge of library resources	64.9%
Sorting, shelving and filing of library resources	57.1%
Creation and maintenance of bibliographic records	44.0%
Acquisition, receipt and payment of library resources	31.5%
Interlibrary loan activities (borrowing and lending)	30.9%
Database content management and organisation of resources (eg metadata schemes, OPACs)	29.5%
Public service and outreach	
Reference, information service and research support	52.1%
Instruction in information literacy, library use, library resources and research	49.6%
Public programs, readers advisory, information and research support to adults	30.7%
Collections	
Collection development, evaluation and management	36.2%

Table 11. The highest areas of workplace activity: library technician respondents

While there was scope for respondents to also provide open comments about areas of work that were not presented in the list, the areas they mentioned remained traditional ones, eg local studies, children’s activities, audio-visual services etc. It is evident that library technicians are working across a range of reference, technical services and collection development work. As might be expected, the main focus of their work was in the area of technical and bibliographic services, with a high level of activity performed in the areas of public service, outreach and collections.

In the *neXus* survey, respondents were asked a range of questions about their retirement plans: the age they would be when they retired; how long it would be until they retired, whether or not they might wish to retire early; whether or not they might consider delaying their retirement. Almost 35% of paraprofessional respondents proposed to retire before they turned 60 (Table 12). Males planned to work longer than females, with 46.5% of males planning to retire at 65 years or older, compared with 25.5% of females. 25.6% of males planned to continue working beyond 65 years, compared to only 13% of females.

Age of retirement	Library technicians
Before 55 years	7.0%
55-60 years	27.9%
61-64 years	20.6%
At 65 years	13.4%
After 65 years	14.5%
Don't know	12.3%
n/a	4.5%

Table 12. Planned age of retirement: library technician respondents

One of the major issues associated with this question in the survey is the current age of respondents. As almost one third of respondents were aged 40 years and under, they were ostensibly some way away from the reality of retirement. It should be noted that researchers in the field of workforce planning have reported that, given the dynamics of socio-economic issues impacting on the population and on employment, it is indeed very difficult to make a direct correlation between people's stated retirement plans and their actual behaviour, so that the data collected may be only indicative. An alternative perspective is therefore to explore the anticipated time until retirement, specifically in the short to medium timeframe (Table 13)

Time until retirement	Library technicians
Less than 1 year	0.8%
1-2 years	3.3%
2-3 years	3.1%
3-5 years	12.5%
6-10 years	17.3%
11-15 years	12.8%
16-20 years	12.8%
More than 20 years	32.6%
n/a	4.7%

Table 13. Anticipated length of time until retirement: library technician respondents

The data indicates that more than one third (37%) of paraprofessional workers aim to retire in the next 10 years¹ (Table 14)

Time until retirement	Library technicians
1-3 years	7.2%
3-5 years	12.5%
6-10 years	17.3%
Total 2006-2015	37.0%

Table 14. Anticipated length of time until retirement (2006-2015): library technician respondents

¹ The *neXus* survey data was collected in September-October 2006.

It was interesting to then make a correlation between the anticipated time until retirement and the age demographics of the respondents. Taking the age of 65 as the ‘accepted’ age for retirement, the number of respondents reporting that they would retire in the next 10 years (2006-2015) were compared with the number of respondents currently aged over 56 years, ie those ‘eligible’ to retire by 2015, taking 65 as the ‘accepted’ age of retirement. While 37% of paraprofessionals planned to retire in the next 10 years, less than half of these (17.6%) were actually in the age demographic for ‘accepted’ retirement at 65 years. The findings indicate that a significant people who were younger than the ‘accepted’ retirement age will take early retirement. 30.7% of library technicians planning to retire in the immediate 3 year period after the survey (2006-2008) were aged under 55 years, with 11.5% under 45 years. Nevertheless, 22.3% of respondents currently aged over 56 years planned to work for at least a further 6 years or more. In a world characterised by rapid change, the ability to adapt and learn new skills is critical.

Professional development and professional engagement

One of the significant issues associated with the current paraprofessional workforce may in fact counter the idea of flexibility and nimbleness. As indicated earlier, a large number of staff have been employed with the current employer, in the current position for a considerable length of time. It is essential that professional development is used as a tool to ensure this sector of the workforce continues to develop new knowledge and skills to help them cope confidently with the changing environment.

The questions about attendance at formal and informal training and development activities were incorporated into the questions about job and professional functions (Figure 6), with a Likert scale recording the degree of frequency of activity, from ‘1 = never’ through to 5 = ‘very often’.

6. Professional development / participation						
a	Participation in professional <u>organisations</u>	1	2	3	4	5
b	Attending formal conferences, workshops and training events	1	2	3	4	5
c	Participating in informal workplace learning activities	1	2	3	4	5
d	Research and publishing in the field of librarianship	1	2	3	4	5

Figure 6. Questions regarding professional development and participation.

‘Formal’ training and development events included conferences, workshops etc, while ‘informal’ training events principally covered workplace learning activities. Levels of participation in formal training events were considerably higher amongst professionals than paraprofessionals: 30.8% of professionals attended formal training and development activities ‘often’ or ‘very often’, compared with 20.6% of paraprofessionals. At the other end of the scale, around one third of paraprofessional respondents (30.1%) reported that they ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ attended formal training, compared with 19.9% of professional workers.

The data for informal workplace learning activities were also examined. Again, professional staff reported slightly higher levels of participation, ie ‘often’ or very often’ (43.8%), compared with paraprofessional staff (37.4%). Nevertheless, it should be noted that a significant percentage of paraprofessional staff indicated that they received little or no workplace training (22.3%). This figure is markedly above the professional figure of 13.4%.

Respondents were asked to identify areas of knowledge and skills where they had completed some form of training and development in their current workplace, and beyond this, to consider the extent to which they felt that the training had improved their ability to perform their job. The areas of knowledge and skills covered topics that would be handled more often in formal training events such as workshops and seminars (eg customer service, technology, management and leadership, or job-specific topics), as well as workplace learning (eg through mentoring, job rotation, job swaps and job sharing).

The data were therefore reviewed from the perspective of those paraprofessional respondents who reported involvement in the various aspects of training and development, as well as the number of respondents reporting a positive impact on work performance (ie the ability to perform their current job had improved to some extent’ or ‘to a great extent’) as a result of being involved in the training and development activities (Table 15).

Knowledge and skills	% participating in training	Positive impact on work performance
Job-oriented skills	82.7%	66.3%
Technology skills	87.2%	68.0%
Customer-service	73.5%	48.9%
Management	60.7%	27.0%
Leadership	59.9%	25.1%
Other professional development (eg subject speciality, library issues)	73.7%	52.1%
Mentoring	51.4%	17.3%
Job rotation	53.8%	14.7%
Job swap	51.3%	10.0%
Job sharing	50.4%	11.2%

Table 15. Participation in training and impact on work performance: library technician respondents

The data analysed indicates not only that the LIS sector needs to consider the extent to which training is available to paraprofessional workers to enable them to grow and develop, thereby increasing both their commitment to their work and the quality of their performance on the job, but also that there needs to be a closer examination of the impact of the actual training and development activities undertaken. Respondents believed that formal training activities (eg workshops and seminars) had a more positive (yet not perfect!) impact on their work performance than the alternative, more informal arrangements such as job rotation and job swaps. Managers may, however, place greater emphasis on personal learning outcomes resulting through formal training events, as distinct from the informal arrangements which may be

regarded more specifically as resolving workforce requirements, rather than as developmental opportunities.

There seemed to be a degree of confusion amongst the respondents (although it might be argued that this uncertainty exists within the entire LIS profession, and perhaps also in other professions) about the definitions and scope of the two concepts of ‘management’ and ‘leadership’. Respondents were asked to comment generally on their views about training, career development and organisational commitment, including how their own career might benefit from further training and development, eg in the areas of technology skills, business skills, management skills and leadership skills. The data were recorded for paraprofessional respondents who ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with the statements presented (Table 16).

	Library technicians
I currently have sufficient education, training and experience to allow me to perform my job effectively	70.7%
Given my education, training and experience, I am overqualified for my current position	51.5%
Given my education, training and development, I am qualified to move to a higher position	32.4%
My career would benefit from technology skills training	54.6%
My career would benefit from management skills training	40.4%
My career would benefit from business skills training	32.8%
My career would benefit from leadership skills training	3.1%
I am interested in moving to a position with more responsibility	42.6%
My organisation provides me with sufficient opportunities to participate in training	53.2%
I believe I spend too much time on training courses	54.9%
I am committed to the goals of the organisation I work for	38.4%
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with the organisation I work for	74.3%
I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in my current position	25.9%

Table 16. Views about training, career development and organisational commitment: library technician respondents

53% felt that they had sufficient opportunities for training through their employer, while the higher figure of 55% felt they already spent too much time in training. More than half of the library technicians sought further technology training (55%) while 40% would appreciate training in management skills and 33% in business skills. One issue that stands out significantly is the view that leadership training is perceived to be of very little value to the respondents’ careers, with only 3.1% (n=11) of paraprofessional respondents believing they could benefit from leadership training. Interestingly, in an open-ended question, 33 paraprofessional respondents specifically stated leadership training would be useful to them.

In terms of the value of their training and industry practice to their current job and their future careers, 70.7% agreed or strongly agreed that they had “sufficient education, training and experience” to perform their current job effectively, with more than half (51.5%) stating they

believed they were overqualified for their current role. Almost one third (32.4%) felt they were qualified to move to a higher position, although only about one third of those people (31%) were also interested in taking on more responsibility. While 32.0% of all paraprofessional respondents were interested in seeking greater responsibility, there was a marked difference between the views of the younger and older cohorts of respondents: almost 75% of those aged 30 years and under reported they were interested in moving to a position of greater responsibility, compared to only 27% of those aged over 50 years. However, not one of those noting promotion as a goal and who were 30 years or under were interested in leadership training. It is believed that there is immense scope to develop a clearer focus on the topic of 'leadership', what it means and what it represents within the LIS profession as a whole.

Conclusion

The current paper is undeniably data rich; yet there are, without question, numerous angles that can be explored further to continue to investigate the details of the paraprofessional workforce, which is, of course, only one key component of the LIS sector in Australia. It is stressed once again that the aggregated, high level data that has been presented undoubtedly require a range of context-specific interpretations, for example according to sector, geographical situation and indeed individual organisations. The brief insights illustrated in this paper invite the different sectors of the profession and the diverse LIS institutions to consider ways examine in greater depth the extent to which the data adequately reflect the immediate employment and career situations in the local context, for example through professional forums or focus groups. The paper further invites stakeholders to consider the demographic, career and training issues relevant to paraprofessionals in the LIS sector, to develop a roadmap for the future. Stage One of the *neXus* project investigates the individual players in the LIS sector; Stage Two promises to go further and to examine the organizational context: the policies and practices associated with recruitment, retention, training and development, so that additional dimensions, colours and textures can be added to our understandings of the LIS workforce.

If, following the theme of the current conference, the future as the LIS profession is directly linked to our ability to innovate, initiate and inspire, and our ability to innovate, initiate and inspire is linked to workforce capacity, then the challenge is for the LIS sector to give serious consideration to the web of current workforce issues. The demographic data gathered through the *neXus* project paints an interesting, yet very complex picture. Will the current workforce be truly flexible and nimble enough to ensure that innovation, initiation and inspiration are in their hands? Are there factors within the LIS sector itself that will limit the potential to be innovative and creative? Are library professionals and paraprofessionals inherently too old, too conservative and too narrowly focused to productively respond to the challenges of our time? Can we recruit, accommodate and foster a new generation of LIS workers who are future-focused, yet simultaneously embody some of the core philosophies of our profession?

“Libraries are about people” (SMR, 2006). The LIS workforce is indeed multifaceted and multidimensional. This paper has looked at the current players. The impact of the retirement of the older workforce, for example, is an issue that demands further review and analysis. In terms of human resource planning, the recruitment of younger workers to the profession and the

retention and rejuvenation of older members of the profession require quite different strategies, but both are equally important and relevant in the current industrial and economic climate. We will be working with a multigenerational workforce: multigenerational in terms of both chronological age and career age. Leaders in the human resources arena are already challenging us to educate, develop and manage a workforce which is truly diverse, which is a flexible, nimble, technologically advanced workforce with high level problem solving and communication skills. For the sake of our professional future, we must achieve this sooner rather than later.

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