

ALIA EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE SUMMIT 2008

Submission from the Council of Australian University Librarians

Introduction

CAUL welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the ALIA Education and Workforce Summit. CAUL's purpose is to support its members in the achievement of their objectives, especially the provision of access to, and training in the use of, scholarly information, leadership in the management of information and contribution to the university experience. In pursuit of these objectives, CAUL develops a national perspective on issues relevant to university libraries, provides a forum for discussion and collaboration and works to promote common interests.

In order to achieve CAUL's objective, CAUL must have a skilled workforce that is responsive to changes in information, research, learning and teaching. The quality of university library services is highly dependent on the skills and capacities of staff. The key issue for CAUL members is to develop a diverse and skilled workforce to meet service requirements. This workforce will contain professional librarians of course – but university libraries also need information technology specialists, library technicians, marketing and promotions staff, and, probably sooner than we expect, fund raisers.

Current Workforce Issues and Initiatives

CAUL shares similar concerns with other library sectors: skills development, recruitment, succession planning, age profile. Many CAUL members report difficulty in attracting staff to senior level or specialised positions, especially in regional areas.

CAUL members strive for practical responses to these concerns. These include:

- Staff development. CAUL's activities are at institutional, sectoral and regional levels. Notable regional examples include QULOC (Queensland University Libraries Office of Cooperation) and WAGUL (Western Australian Group of University Libraries). CAVAL is a major supplier of training and staff development services to the sector. CAUL works with other peak bodies on staff development activities.
- Leadership development. With the support of Universities Australia (formerly the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee), CAUL has delivered a two day development event targeted at the deputies and senior staff every two years since 2000. The annual CAUDIT (Council of Australian University Directors of Information Technology) Institute includes a CAUL member on its faculty and participants from CAUL institutions, and many CAUL members use the Aurora Institute to provide leadership development opportunities for their staff.
- Workforce planning. Several CAUL members and sectors have developed workforce planning strategies. A recent example comes from LATN (Libraries of the Australian Technology Network).

CAUL Industrial Context

CAUL notes the issue of qualifications in other submissions to the summit. Like many other organisations, universities have streamlined staff classifications which are described in enterprise agreements. Library staff are usually included in the class of general (or professional and technical) staff. Most enterprise agreements do not spell out particular requirements or qualifications for library staff. Instead, more general statements about education and experience are included in descriptions of classification levels. As an example, some libraries no longer consider it essential to include eligibility for associate membership of ALIA on a position description. It is up to each university library to spell out what educational qualifications are deemed essential or desirable.

This has led to positions not always being called 'librarians' or having 'librarian' in titles. This has attracted criticism, but the flexibility, capacity and diversity of the workforce are strong influences.

Workforce and Education Needs

CAUL members, like other employers, seek attributes in its professional and paraprofessional staff: team work abilities, critical thinking, fundamental literacies, communication skills. Professional librarians and library technicians are needed in many areas of university libraries, particularly in services to academic staff and students and information organisation. However, the curriculum needs to reflect different ways of doing things and changed emphases in the mix of duties. These include:

- Relationship management skills. Professional librarians need to be credible in the eyes of the academy. They need to position themselves as colleagues and partners. They need to understand the various disciplines and find ways to communicate in credible ways. This requires substantial behavioural, communication and marketing skills. Academic staff do not need to physically visit the Library as much any more. Professional staff need to market and communicate their services and skills effectively both in person but increasingly online to academic staff so as to let them know what they are missing and what they can get: importantly, librarians have to show the academy what they know. Disciplinary knowledge is very useful in these conversations. It is important that professional librarians have disciplinary knowledge as well as librarianship. This is clearly achieved in librarianship being a postgraduate qualification. It raises an issue for the curriculum in undergraduate librarianship programs. Relationships with other parts of the university will occur too: with IT staff, learning and teaching specialists, research offices.
- Legal skills. Librarians need to know their way around contracts, agreements and licences. In our digital world, they need a very thorough understanding of copyright and privacy. They need to understand risk and how to manage it. They must retain common sense.
- Information organisation and retrieval. It's not just about cataloguing rules and MARC and subject headings any more. The discipline of information science in computer science has revolutionised retrieval. There's more than one way to describe an information resource. The technologies are moving fast. Libraries still seem vaguely old-fashioned in the way we approach information organisation and retrieval.
- Management skills. Financial, human resource and project management skills are essential. University libraries are one of the larger organisations on a campus with substantial budget responsibilities. A new librarian is likely to be supervising other staff or leading or participating on a library or university wide project team fairly soon after entry. Some of this can be acquired 'on the job' but the curriculum could give them a framework for understanding what will be needed and for teaching specific skills such as project management.

- Information management and information technology skills. As academic libraries assume greater responsibility in their institutions for management of repositories and research data, it is clear that there is a dearth of people who have the skill to work in these areas.
- Teaching skills. Increasingly academic librarians are working in partnership with academic teaching staff to integrate learning and research skills into coursework. Librarians need to be able to upgrade their skills to have the confidence to perform these roles well. Increasingly a Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Teaching; or Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training; or an equivalent qualification that demonstrates an understanding of teaching and learning skills is either a required or desired certification for appointment and/or promotion.

CAUL members, like other employers, face workforce planning issues and a skills shortage as baby boomers leave the workforce and experienced replacements with the right skills prove hard to find. No one strategy can address this problem. As employers CAUL members aim both to recruit and retain new librarians while at the same time providing educational incentives through staff training and development programs for all levels of library staff to ensure succession planning. Employment practices are becoming more flexible in response to the needs of the profession.

Conclusion

Libraries have changed and will continue to change. CAUL sees risks in adopting a rigid qualifications framework in workforce development for university libraries especially given our ongoing problems with recruitment. There are careers in libraries for all sorts of professions and they will be needed for the increasing range of services, operations, activities and relationships undertaken by university librarians. We will continue to need professional librarians too but their job descriptions are changing. Keeping this diverse workforce cohesive and directed will be the major challenge for the next generation of university librarians.

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