

Submission by the ALIA National Library Technicians Group for the ALIA Education and Workplace Summit.

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For the purpose of this submission, the ALIA National LT Group is using the phrase ‘library and information professionals’ to refer to those members of the profession who have completed an entry level qualification in library and information management at either Associate or Library Technician level as per the defining statement under ALIA’s role in education of library and information professionals <http://www.alia.org.au/policies/education.role.html>

1. Skills and attributes required by employers

What are the key skills and attributes required by employers of library and information studies (LIS) graduates?

The competencies outlined in this document are a general set of tools for professional growth, recruitment, and assessment. Specific jobs will require specific sets of competencies at various skill levels.

Professional Competencies relate to the LIS graduate's knowledge of information resources, access, technology and management, and the ability to use this knowledge as a basis for providing the highest quality information services. There are four major competencies, each supplemented with specific skills:

- A. Managing Information Organisations
- B. Managing Information Resources
- C. Managing Information Services
- D. Applying Information Tools and Technologies

Personal Competencies represent a set of attitudes, skills and values that enable practitioners to work effectively and contribute positively to their organisations, clients and profession. These competencies range from being strong communicators, to demonstrating the value-adding of their contributions, to remaining flexible and positive in an ever-changing environment.

Core Competencies underpin these professional and personal competencies. Two core competencies are critical to the value and viability of the profession and are absolutely essential for every LIS graduate. All LIS graduates should understand the value of developing and sharing their knowledge; accomplished via ALIA and personal networks and through conducting and sharing research at conferences, in journal publications and in other collaborative arrangements. All LIS graduates should also acknowledge and adhere to the ethics of the profession.

Core Competencies

- 1) Information professionals contribute to the knowledge base of the profession by sharing best practices and experiences, and continue to learn about information products, services, and management practices throughout the life of his/her career.
- 2) Information professionals commit to professional excellence and ethics, and to the values and principles of the profession.

As all areas of library and information practice will continue to evolve and develop over time, the overall framework of core knowledge, skills and attributes needs to be able to encompass the changing nature of the discipline to ensure a flexible, adaptable and innovative profession.

Interested persons should also refer to the suite of documents on the ALIA website that identify core knowledge, skills and attributes required by library and information professionals.

<http://www.alia.org.au/policies/core.knowledge.html>

Do employers currently have problems in recruiting qualified people with these skills and attributes?

There are a number of factors that may contribute to difficulties in recruiting qualified staff, e.g. regional areas, location within an organisation, subject speciality. The salary inequality within different sectors and levels of government is a significant factor.

What is the appropriate balance between education and training, and skills and knowledge acquired on the job?

Many workplaces do not have the time or the resources to provide intensive training in basic library operations and undertake cursory induction and orientation for new staff. In this day and age, it is almost expected that new graduates are able to 'hit the ground running' once they are employed. Anecdotal evidence would lead us to believe that some university courses are too academic and therefore do not provide practical opportunities for students to learn the skills required, apart from the practical work placements that are undertaken during studies.

How can we best meet the needs of employers in our industry for appropriate staff? What kinds of staff do they want?

Employers are looking for well trained staff with a variety of life experiences, with greater gender equality and ethnicity and a positive, flexible outlook or 'can do' attitude. Prospective members of the profession should be given the opportunity to visit libraries and see the work undertaken by staff. Advertising should promote the 'helping people' aspect of the profession.

2. Defining the industry

What is the scope of the library industry?

These libraries, archives, research organisations, records managers, vendors, software and information service providers may be in any environment from corporate, education, public, government, to non-profit organisations.

What is the best approach to addressing this issue of definition?

The identification of what constitutes a library and the role of staff has been lost or has been converged over the years with a plethora of different titles and various role descriptors, e.g. Information Manager, Knowledge Manager. The profession needs to go back to basics of the provision of library and ancillary services. How we provide that service and the tools we use in doing so should remain peripheral.

What are the most common perceptions from outside the library industry of what characterises it?

There is very little understanding of the range and scope of occupations that make up the workforce in a large library or academic institution. Most secondary students are influenced by opinions of their own teacher librarians, or by the portrayal of library staff on the big screen. We need to convey that library workers are adaptable, great communicators, techno savvy, modern, smart and dynamic. Unfortunately, in many cases, particularly in regional areas and with smaller libraries, the salary range offered to new graduates often matches the perceptions that we are an aging, daggy and 'uncool' profession.

What issues arise with use of the term “library”? Should we use another term, and if so what and how? How do we want to position our “brand”?

The use of the term “library” is fine and defines exactly the kinds of services we provide. Perhaps it is more the communicating of what a library is, its collections, services and role in the community that needs reinforcing, not the actual brand.

3. Recruitment issues – getting and keeping the best people in the library industry.

Are there areas in which you have problems recruiting good people? Which areas are they?

There is anecdotal evidence in the Victorian public library arena that it is difficult to find suitable staff to undertake children's holiday activities and deliver pre-school story time – but a recent discussion with a staff member from one metropolitan service indicated that the opposite is true.

How much is our popular image a problem when we recruit people to library studies courses, or to work in libraries?

The popular image of people who work in libraries could lead to people entering library courses with the wrong idea of what the work entails, e.g. reading books all

day. Similarly, there may be little opportunity for recruiting to library studies courses as much of the applications are made through VTAC, or similar processes, which do not allow for face to face assessment of suitability, or competency to graduate successfully.

**Is the impending retirement of large numbers of older library staff a problem?
What is the problem?**

The impending retirement of older staff and the corresponding employment opportunities has been mooted for some time. However, recent research would indicate that this is not a true depiction. Similarly, another factor that has to be taken into consideration that once a person retires this provides employers with the opportunity for a restructure and the job may no longer exist.

What actions can employers take to enhance the library workplace?

Employers could do the following: take on volunteers, Year 10 secondary students as part of the formal work experience program, and consider taking students from TAFE and higher education sectors for their practical placements. In addition, they could offer professional development opportunities, informal and formal training, and allow staff to participate in secondments, job exchanges within and outside the organisation and opportunities to move into different roles in order to gain more experience.

4. Basic professional qualifications

What should be the minimum qualification to become a library professional?

An approved undergraduate degree or graduate diploma for librarians and the Diploma of Library and Information Services or equivalent for library technicians.

**What should be the relationship between librarians and library technicians?
Should we make it simpler to move from one to another?**

The role and responsibility for librarians and library technicians as defined through ALIA's work level descriptions clearly outlines and clarifies the relationship between the two, however, what has happened in the past - will occur again in the future. In smaller libraries, the roles are often interchangeable and there is convergence between the two roles in many special libraries. Due to advances in technology some tasks have become less specialised over time and are now included in roles of paraprofessionals. When this occurs, librarians can be released to undertake their core or value added activities.

The current situation where a library technician needs an undergraduate or post graduate degree to change roles legitimately is sufficient. If a system of certification, assessment of competency or recognition of prior learning or experience was implemented it would need to be mapped specifically to university qualifications.

What role does systematic professional development have in accreditation of library professionals, if any?

The library profession is not a regulated profession and therefore professional development is not a requirement for membership.

Are there ways in which library schools at universities and TAFEs should be working together more closely? To what end?

TAFEs and universities, if they aren't already doing so, should be working more closely together to ensure their curriculum is in keeping with the groups they are teaching.

5. What should be the role of ALIA in library education and workforce development?

Is ALIA using the course recognition process effectively? What outcomes should we aim to achieve by this process?

The universities and TAFEs need to have their courses recognised by the appropriate professional association to ensure their graduates are employable. The question should be do they take the ALIA course recognition process seriously? Courses have been moved to faculties that have little obvious professional relevance and the same applies to the titles of some of the qualifications.

Should there be additional pathways to professional status in the library industry?

Individuals can not work or regard themselves as professionals in specific fields, such as medicine, psychology, engineering, without having the appropriate qualification and this should apply to professional status in the library industry. People with overseas qualifications should have their qualifications recognised, or not, in line with their professional association guidelines.