



# AUSTRALIAN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION ASSOCIATION

---

## Qualifications - what is the preferred professional qualification

The number of students coming through LIS programs throughout Australia is in decline <http://www.alia.org.au/employment/enrolment.courses/>.

Some employers are saying the fields for graduate positions are not high and that the quality of the applicants is low. Attracting high quality students into LIS courses and the profession, and designing the right courses to produce the required sets of skills and attributes, are challenges shared by employers, ALIA and the library schools.

Discussion about the preferred form of a first qualification takes place at a time when there are indications of changes within the workplace and in higher education for the professions.

Firstly, employers such as the National Library are currently employing staff who do not have library qualifications but have specialist knowledge in other areas not associated with library and information science. By not limiting employment opportunities to library qualified staff they are deliberately widening the pool of applicants for positions in their libraries. They are in effect saying that part of the librarianship training can be 'on the job' with formal librarianship qualifications completed at a later date. Possessing a qualification in a subject area that meets particular needs (ie degree in health to work in a health library) is becoming more common. This issue is but one of a number of issues and challenges the profession faces at present in trying to attract the 'best and brightest' into library and information careers.

Employers in this situation may be able to build student numbers by:

- Supporting staff as they complete LIS programs
- Appointing a new graduate in a Cadetship/traineeship arrangement each year
- Being proactive in encouraging staff to upgrade qualifications
- Examining employer practices and criteria for positions
- Providing staff with the opportunities to experience the different types of library work available

It also opens up the possibility of other pathways to professional qualification that can build numbers in the profession, such as traineeships or cadetships.

Secondly, a major change taking place in higher education is the reforms flowing from the 'Bologna process', a significant and influential change to higher education thinking within 45 European countries. DEST has noted that:

The (Bologna) process will most likely have a profound effect on the development of higher education globally, as observers from other continents are taking a close interest in the reform process and beginning to consider how of their own systems might to respond to 'Bologna' thinking.

<http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/GovernmentActivities/BolognaProcess/default.htm>



# AUSTRALIAN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION ASSOCIATION

---

One element of the process is the implementation of uniformity in degree structures, and a notable shift towards graduate education for professional areas (the '3+2' option). DEST talks of the benefits of 'Bologna compatibility', and it is likely that Australia may eventually join the shift towards graduate qualifications in professional areas. According to some scenarios, change driven by Bologna compatibility may be forthcoming irrespective of the preference expressed by any professional body. The impact of this thinking can already be seen in the development of the so-called 'Melbourne Model'.

In Australia there are currently two main entry level qualifications that allow for professional membership of ALIA.

1. Undergraduate (three year) Bachelors degree with a significant LIS component.
2. Graduate Diploma (degree in another discipline, plus one year LIS).

The Masters (degree in another discipline, plus 18 months or two years LIS) is also offered widely, and is the only qualification deemed appropriate to join the American Library Association as a professional member.

## **Context for possible change:**

Some Australian employers have a very strong preference for, and in some cases will only employ, those with a graduate (ie Grad Diploma or Masters) qualifications.

In recent years a number of library schools have experienced a shift away from undergraduate to postgraduate entry.

Graduate enrolments rose from 1425 to 1539 between 2001 and 2005. In the same period undergraduate enrolments declined from 1209 to 811.

Undergraduate courses in Australia have been under pressure and the focus of closures. Universities that run undergraduate LIS programs often use these programs as feeders into graduate studies in the same area. The loss of a bachelor program can prove detrimental to the health of a LIS School.

There is also a general belief that 12 months (ie a graduate diploma) is a very short period of time in which to prepare somebody for the LIS workforce given the ever increasing complexity and range of the curriculum that needs to be covered. Are employers reacting to this shortened period by not worrying about this qualification at all and employing staff on the merit of their non LIS degree?



# AUSTRALIAN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION ASSOCIATION

---

While a shift from the current situation would require significant planning and a transition period of several years, this is an appropriate time for ALIA to consider the profession's preference in terms of preferred professional qualifications.

There appear to be three options.

1. Retention of the current system of dual (Bachelors and graduate) pathways, with a 12 month Graduate Diploma and a masters degree 'add on' of a further 6 or 12 months.
2. Retention of the current dual pathways, but with a requirement that a graduate qualification be at the Masters level, with this qualification being of either 18 months or 24 months (ie elimination of the 12 months Graduate Diploma option). This graduate pathway will be compatible with the current US pathway and with the likely Bologna pathway.
3. Phasing out of the Bachelors pathway, and the implementation of a graduate only entry level to the profession. This would again be at the Masters level, with this qualification being of either 18 months or 24 months (ie elimination of the 12 months Graduate Diploma option). This graduate pathway will be compatible with the current US pathway and with the likely Bologna pathway.

## **Issues for consideration in assessing these three options include:**

1. Which pathway to a professional qualification will produce both the *number* and *quality* of graduates required by the profession?
2. Which pathway to a professional qualification is likely to be attractive to high calibre entrants to the profession?
3. What are the appropriate skills and attributes for a new LIS graduate, and in what minimum duration of study can these reasonably be developed?
4. Which pathway will allow for the implementation of units of study in areas of professional practice which have been identified as 'lacking', ie children's librarianship?
5. What will be the impact on library schools of any changes in terms of likely student numbers and revenue flows?
6. What will be the impact in terms of the overall cost of completing a first professional qualification?
7. What will be the implications for library technician graduates who may wish to upgrade to a professional qualification?

Other matters that need to be considered are:

- 1 How can the profession and educators work together to create better programs and curricula?.



# AUSTRALIAN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION ASSOCIATION

---

2. Are graduating students too focused on librarianship without a strong understanding of another knowledge area outside of librarianship?
3. Is having a generalist undergraduate degree in arts, commerce etc sufficient to work in some 'librarianship' positions that were previously thought to be suited to ILS qualified graduates?
4. What elements of training and skill development be done on the job? If so to what level? When should the formal training start?