

**ALIA Education Summit  
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Briefing Paper**

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**Scope:**

**Undergraduate Qualifications in LIS**

**Attributes of Graduates**

**What is the appropriate level for professional education for LIS?**

**Demand for graduates**

**Skills Shortages**

Research undertaken in 2007, including a **survey of employers of LIS** graduates in Australia, and a survey of the coordinators of Australian undergraduate LIS programs, to be published in a couple of journals mid-2008 (incl. ALJ), provides useful and compelling data for the discussions.

**Summary**

- The survey was responded to by libraries representing over 10% of the professional library workforce;
- Undergraduate programs provide more than 25% of the qualified professionals entering the profession in Australia each year;
- Professional positions are filled by Bachelor graduates 32.4%, Grad. Dip. Graduates 43.6%,
- Masters graduates 7.0%, Other / Unsure 17.0%;
- 76.1% of employers overall stated that they had **no real preference** between bachelor and postgraduate graduates;
- 82-84% of employers believe that the education provided in LIS programs in Australia does equip graduates with the attributes required of professional librarians in their organisation, and that this does not depend on the education being at either of the two levels available for professional entry to the profession;
- several employers expressed the unsolicited view that they are not prepared to endorse a postgraduate (professional masters) only profession;
- 57.1% of respondents indicated that the need for professional librarians had increased in their organisation, with the strongest 'growth' coming from public libraries (63.2%) and university libraries (60.2%);
- 68.4% of university libraries expect the need for professional librarians to increase in their organisation over the next 5 years, and 63.2% of public libraries agree;
- university libraries are increasingly needing to recruit professionals with skills other than librarianship, including IT skills, web design and business analysis, teaching/education qualifications;
- public libraries mentioned skill shortages as diverse as service delivery to children, information evaluation, systems management, stronger skills in IT, supervision and management, finance and marketing.

**Background**

Major impetus for the survey is in reaction to some recent analyses of LIM education in Australia which have questioned the need for, and value of, undergraduate LIM education, and a suggestion by some of the profession in Australia that we move towards postgraduate qualifications as the only means of entry to the profession. (Harvey, 2001, p.17) (Hallam, 2006, p.7) (Genoni, 2005)

The findings of another recent Australian study exploring the current situation in education for information in Australia show 'support for the relevance of traditional subjects of information management or library and information science and expansion of core knowledge into behavioural aspects of information use, for the need for specializations or electives, for a stronger focus on digital libraries and issues in digitization, such as IP, copyright, integrity and authentication of information.' (Yu & Davis, 2007).

### Employer Survey responses

Library type	Responses	Percentage Responding
TAFE	12	63.2%
University	20	50.0%
Public	40	26.8%
Parliamentary	2	25.0%
Specials	22	22.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>29.9%</b>

Labour Force data from the 2006 Census shows there were 10,085 librarians in Australia (Australian Library and Information Association, 2007a), meaning this survey was responded to by libraries representing over 10% of the professional library workforce.

### Professional positions are filled by

Bachelor graduates 32.4%  
 Grad. Dip. Graduates 43.6%  
 Masters graduates 7.0%  
 Other 5.8%  
 Unsure 11.2%

### Level of qualification preferred

When employing qualified professional librarians for their staff, 76.1% of employers overall stated that they had **no real preference** between bachelor and postgraduate graduates. Only 9.1% expressed a firm preference for bachelor graduates, and 13.6% for Graduate Diplomas, the latter figure boosted by 33.3% of university libraries professing their preference for these graduates.

Comments from public libraries, of which 89% expressed no preference to level of qualification, overwhelmingly indicated a desire for any level of qualification provided that the applicant came with appropriate experience. Public library respondents indicated through their comments that they place more emphasis on employing candidates with practical library experience and those who express an interest and or experience in working in a public library. Several comments suggest that public libraries are on the lookout for the attitude and ability to learn and innovate, suggesting that a combination of qualifications and experience are key to public library recruitment needs.

### Selection Criteria and Professional Qualifications

Overall, the results showed that the level of the qualification was considered most important by more than half of the respondents, with the next most important factor being the subjects studied in the degree or diploma.

Who awarded the qualification was least important to more than half of those surveyed, with the major comparative difference being that public libraries showed less interest (6.5%) in the grades obtained than did university libraries (29.4%), the latter rating the grades obtained equally in importance with the subjects studied.

**Several libraries commented that these factors are not really considered when making appointments, as long as the qualification is recognised by**

**ALIA. This reflects the recent unsubstantiated statement that "many employers still require eligibility for ALIA associate ... membership as a pre-requisite for employment" (McVicker and Murphy, 2006, p.36), and suggests that the ALIA recognition processes are accepted to the extent that employers of LIS graduates can concentrate on other contextual selection criteria.**

In addition, several public, university and research libraries commented that they are more interested in the person than the qualification (e.g. '*none of these criteria figure in our selection process*'; '*the reasons for students choosing particular institutions or subjects do not necessarily relate to our selection criteria*'; '*we often employ on the potential of the person rather than specific knowledge*').

### **Selection Criteria and Personal Factors**

Less than 30% felt that professional qualifications rated more highly than other factors such as grades obtained, and subjects studied. This was reflected in the many comments which accompanied the responses, which can be summed up in one comment: *While professional qualifications are essential, when deciding between two candidates who both have ALIA accredited qualifications, personal characteristics, experience and references are of more importance than the level of the actual qualification.*

### **Attributes of Graduates**

Respondents were asked to consider whether different levels of qualification indicate certain attributes will be held by the recent graduates:

- demonstrate a broad overview of the field of LIS
- are able to communicate effectively in a manner relevant to LIS
- graduates demonstrate analytical skills, including the exercise of critical and reflective judgement
- are likely to have the ability to apply knowledge to the workplace
- are able to address unfamiliar problems
- are able to plan their own work
- are able to work as a team member
- are likely to have the adaptability/capacity to cope with change

The responses showed that over the whole range of libraries, the perception is that graduate diploma graduates (68%-80%) always or usually display these attributes more than Bachelor graduates (51%-80%). What is clear from the many individual comments on this set of questions is that these are not necessarily academic qualities, that it really depends on the individual, that work and life experience are where these are gained, and that the need for these qualities is recognised by libraries when employing staff, but realistically, most do not expect university study to have taught these.

### **What is the appropriate level for professional education for LIS?**

As discussed above, some recent commentators on the profession have indicated that professional education for LIS is appropriate at the undergraduate level. In that context, respondents were asked if they thought that **the education provided in Bachelor programs equips graduates with the attributes required of professional librarians in their organisation.**

Yes	64.8%
No	18.2%
Depends on where they studied their degree	17.1%

In the same context, respondents were asked if they thought that **the education provided in Graduate Diploma programs equips graduates with the attributes required of professional librarians in their organisation.**

Yes	65.9%
No	15.9%

Depends on where they studied their degree 18.2%

**These results suggest that 82-84% of employers believe that the education provided in LIS programs in Australia does equip graduates with the attributes required of professional librarians in their organisation, and that this does not depend on the education being at either of the two levels available for professional entry to the profession.**

### **Masters as the entry level?**

In commenting on the above questions, several employers expressed the unsolicited view that they are not prepared to endorse a postgraduate (professional masters) only profession:

*A Masters degree on its own would make for a very green professional but no different from a Bachelor degree with no industry experience. That's why I prefer to consider training and experience as a 'package' accommodating several pathways to professional librarianship/information management. If there was only the Masters pathway, then the experience would take greater weight in appointing to senior positions.*

*GradDip is sufficient.*

*With a quality degree I don't think it is necessary to require a Masters.*

*Masters only would just give us more graduates with less on the job experience.*

*I don't believe that professional education for LIS should be at Masters only, as this greatly reduces the eligibility of students to enter the profession in a timely and cost-effective manner.*

From a course coordinator, whose comments relate to the statement in the survey that some recent commentators on the profession have indicated that professional education for LIS is not appropriate at the undergraduate level.

*I think this concern is based on a desire by librarians to ape other professions which have graduate only entry rather than on the merits of the arguments. It is perhaps also based on the idea that a librarian has to be a subject specialist in the area that they provide services in, which has some merit for the employment of some staff in university or research libraries, but is not generally a necessity. It also assumes that the undergraduate programs are preparing students only to become librarians which is manifestly not the case. Other information related areas of employment do not have these status concerns.*

### **Demand for graduates**

57.1% of respondents indicated that the need for professional librarians had increased in their organisation, with the strongest 'growth' coming from public libraries (63.2%) and university libraries (60.2%).

**At the same time, 68.4% of university libraries expect the need for professional librarians to increase in their organisation over the next 5 years, and 63.2% of public libraries agree.**

In contrast, 54.5% of special libraries indicated a slackening of demand, and opinions are almost equally shared as to whether there or not will be a future increase in demand.

Overall, 58.9% of respondents felt that there is currently a shortage of professional librarians, something which a federal government website, Australian JobSearch (2005), confirms in reporting that unemployment for librarians is low (2%), and that *employment in this medium sized occupation (12,300 in February 2007) rose strongly in the past five years, and fell slightly in the long-term (ten years).*

**An issue raised by several libraries, especially public, TAFE and Specials, is the difficulty of attracting graduates to rural and remote areas.**

**Comments indicate that this is a transition time for the profession in terms of the size, growth and retention of staff**, with the main issues raised regarding future demand for professional librarians being the ageing of the profession, the difficulty of attracting staff to rural, regional and remote areas; and the attraction of good graduates to other than library careers.

### **Skills Shortages**

**University libraries** indicated that, in addition to an understanding of, and ability to operate in, the library knowledge domain, these libraries are increasingly needing to recruit professionals with skills other than librarianship, including **IT skills, web design and business analysis, teaching/education qualifications**, and would like to employ people with an understanding of the RQF and an **ability to assist academics with data management and bibliometrics**.

**Public libraries** who commented on the availability of staff mentioned skill areas as diverse as **service delivery to children, information evaluation, and systems management, and more than one stressed a need for stronger skills in IT, supervision and management, finance and marketing**. **One comment:** *There is a critical shortage of professional librarians and of librarians with the contemporary outlook required for modern public library services. We still seem to be seeing large numbers of graduates who come from a process based focus rather than a customer focus. Another stated that 'attitude and customer service orientation is central to providing innovative public library services'.*

Finally, there were some comments indicating a need for graduates with the ability to work with **metadata** (one special library commented that there is a shortage of specialist cataloguers for special collections), and with **project management training**.