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FUTURE OF THE PROFESSION WORKSHOP

Mount Druitt TAFE, NSW, 30 July 2013

On Tuesday 30 July, more than 20 public, school, special and TAFE and academic library staff, together with TAFE educators, gathered at Mt Druitt TAFE, in the western suburbs of Sydney to talk about the Future of the Profession. This is their submission to the ALIA Future of the Professional project.

Summary of outcomes

There are both challenges and opportunities in the political, economic, social, technological, and workforce and skills environments.

For individuals it will be important to engage in continuous professional development and to show greater confidence in marketing their skills. Managers will need to work on succession planning and support for emerging leaders. Institutions will need to invest in taking the library and information services of the future to the clients, rather than expecting users to visit the physical space every time.

ALIA's role will be especially important in training and ongoing learning; providing networking opportunities, and providing an overall umbrella for marketing the profession.



1 Trends and issues

The first part of the workshop involved identifying the most important trends and issues facing participants, their organisations and the sector over the next three years, and working through what this would mean in terms of challenges and opportunities.

	Challenges	Opportunities
Political	<p>Proposed NSW council amalgamations will have a high impact on public libraries. There may be moves to close libraries and operate existing libraries with fewer staff</p>	<p>Council amalgamations may mean the opportunity to introduce one library management system across a wide area – perhaps even statewide.</p> <p>Mobile library services could be introduced or extended to provide an even better service to library users.</p> <p>More sharing of resources, noting that licensing agreements may hinder this.</p>
Economic	<p>TAFEs are being reviewed in NSW and the impact of changes will be felt by libraries.</p> <p>Libraries are likely to be impacted by the NSW and federal budgets, with funding cuts experienced across all sectors.</p> <p>Electricity bills have increased as clients bring their own devices and need to charge them in the library.</p>	<p>Libraries are looking at ways of doing the same or more, with less, which leads to partnerships eg between public and academic libraries.</p>
Social	<p>Libraries, especially public libraries, need to be social hubs, to help counteract social isolation.</p>	<p>Libraries as places of social connection, with flexible layouts and flexible furnishings, will please the community and help increase visitor numbers.</p>



Technological

Library users are being encouraged to think of 24/7 services but there is not 24/7 support.

There are high expectations from library users and it is assumed that library staff have the technological know-how, both to help library users and to organise information and resources in a digital setting.

New technologies are being introduced, but without more hours and/or new staff to work on them.

The digital environment expands the reach of library services.

Library staff are required to develop new skills to keep ahead of the demands from clients.

The role of libraries in language, learning and information literacy is becoming more critical.

Social media – Twitter and blogging – increase the channels for communication.

Workforce and skills

Some organisations are experiencing a recruitment freeze, in others positions are becoming made casual rather than permanent. This means there are no guarantees for casual staff.

Special libraries are renaming themselves information services.

There are more applicants than there are jobs in the library and information sector.

Succession planning is needed to address the ageing profession.

NSW is the only state to mandate qualified teacher librarians in schools.

Casual positions work both ways and provide employees with the opportunity to try different roles before settling on one.

In the digital environment, new skills are needed for negotiating licensing agreements.

Promote the transferable skills of library and information professionals.

Library and information professionals can put themselves in a better position by engaging in continuous professional development.

A good school library experience encourages people to use other libraries.



2 Maximising the opportunities; minimising the challenges

The second part of the workshop looked at what could be done by individuals, institutions, ALIA and other stakeholders to secure the future of the library and information profession.

2.1 Continuous professional development (individuals)

This was seen as the single most important method for individuals to secure their future in the sector. In such a rapidly changing environment, keeping abreast of new trends and developments, and being able to work with new technologies, were vital factors in making oneself more employable and improving the likelihood of promotion.

2.2 Highlighting skills (individuals, managers)

Individuals should take pride in their skills, wherever possible demonstrating the value of their contribution to colleagues in other parts of the organisation.

Also, position descriptions should be revamped regularly (possibly every three years) to reflect the changes taking place in the sector.

2.3 Succession planning (managers, institutions)

Participants agreed that succession planning was lacking in the sector and that there was a danger that when the baby boomer generation retired, there would be well-qualified library and information professionals to take their place but without the necessary experience. New ways needed to be found to identify and cultivate emerging leaders.

2.4 Taking the library to the client (institutions)

Institutions should be investing in library services delivered both in situ and remotely, through new technologies. Improving accessibility will increase client satisfaction, increase the return on investment and ensure that there is greater equity of access to information and resources across the population.

Marketing via social media should be seen as a big opportunity, rather than as something about which to be overly-cautious.



3 How ALIA can support the profession

Participants felt that ALIA would play an important role in relation to:

3.1 Training and ongoing learning

The Association can ensure that there are opportunities for training and ongoing learning post graduation for library and information professionals. ALIA's PD Scheme and the new Certified Professional with specialisation status, will promote the value of library and information skills. (One group expressed concern about a perceived 'dumbing down' of the profession).

3.2 Networking

ALIA provides the opportunity for library and information professionals to get together in an open forum to discuss the issues facing everyone who works in the sector. This was felt to be important, as other gatherings tend to be specific to public libraries or school libraries, etc.

3.3 Marketing

It was seen as ALIA's role to galvanise efforts to market the profession and raise the profile of library and information services within organisations.

4 Comments

'We don't get a lot of respect in school libraries. I want to gather some ideas of how we can spark more interest and make the library an important place to go.'

'I have had over 35 years in TAFE libraries and I have had a great time. I want to share that with the next generation.'

'I am always telling students that LIS is evolving and it's going to keep doing that. What can I tell my students to look forward to?'

'In public libraries we're constantly looking at programs that make us more community-focused. We're constantly looking at how we evolve.'

'We're a little insignificant in the current structure, so now is the time to make a place for ourselves in our councils.'

'We're about people, not just information and resources, but people and spaces. I think the future is quite open and not as scary as people think.'



'As the community learning librarian I have to learn about new technology so I can teach it. It's a fun job!'

'I always believe librarians will never lose their jobs completely - positions will be moved around and change all the time, and it will be challenging to keep up with the changes. What will our patrons like in the future? What skills will we need? What will happen with the collections – take ebooks as an example; would the library lose its current hard copy collection after establishing an e-book subscription?'

'I'm a student and I am optimistic about the future but I'm concerned about budget cuts. I want to retire in libraries.'

'I knew someone once who left libraries part way through her course because she said all the books would soon be replaced by cassettes. I think we need to be thinking outside the "I" for libraries. Where can we use our transferable skills and experiences?'

'I'm interested in staying relevant and enthusiastic for my students. I'm excited about the industry. I love finding out what's happening in libraries overseas on Twitter. What sort of Masters is best to do? What's happening in IT? What issues are coming up for policy and planning? What are those additional skills we will need as librarians?'

'Is there a disconnect in what's being taught at diploma or degree level and what's needed in the real world?'

'Kids know how to be socially active online, but not how to search for information. This is where libraries can play a role to help them find resources they can use.'

'Let's build on the strengths we already have and the services we deliver.'

'We're spending millions on databases and people are still Googling. Why?'

'There are many examples of people stepping up to take on other roles. There are more promotions than demotions. People don't realise librarians have all these skills. There's a promotional opportunity to show people we're about more than books.'

'Collaboration is a keyword in the language of politics, and collaboration is something we do well.'