

## **Response**

**ALIA NGAC** - Kate Freedman (chair), Sonja Barfoed, Kirsty Wilson, Romany Manuell, Wendy Davis, Danielle Johanesen, Pixie Stardust, Anne Sara, Jane Nash

## **A Vibrant Future for Libraries**

### **Introduction**

The New Generation Advisory Committee (NGAC) sat down with their tin foil hats on and took a trip in the T.A.R.D.I.S., to think about and discuss the future of the profession and what skills future librarians will need in 2030. We had a great deal of fun imagining teleporting into people's homes to help them on the spot with their enquiry and how our plans for world domination have to come to fruition. More importantly, we generated some ideas about the skills new graduate librarians may need to gain employment in the industry in the future. We believe the future for libraries is exciting and vibrant with endless possibilities shaped by changing technology. The *IFLA Future Trends Report* provided us with a starting point and we have used the five key trends to guide our response.

### ***Trend 1: New technologies will both expand and limit who has access to information***

Access to information will continue to be shaped by the rapid development of new technologies. New graduates will need to know how to use these technologies and be both flexible and adaptable to the changes. Mobile technologies will be central to the way people access information. There may be more widespread use of QR codes or some yet undeveloped technology, providing access to entire subject resources. Almost all books will be published electronically only with the possible development of multi-sensory experience while reading. Physical book collections will be restricted to historic collections or expensive high gloss or handmade limited edition artists' books. Physical libraries will continue to function as important community hubs. This physical presence of the library in the future will be expanded to include mini-mobile libraries within communities such as shopping centres and street corners where people can borrow and return books on the go.

However, libraries will also still need to cater for people who do not have access to mobile technologies or need access to resources which are not (or not yet) available digitally. New

graduates will need to have the knowledge and skills to be able to provide access to information to those users who lack technological skills or resources. Technology will be ubiquitous but the digital divide will still exist and may in fact expand to include those who are unable to afford top of the range products. This is of particular concern for rural and regional Australia where internet speeds and connections may be slower, inhibiting people from accessing the full range of information available online.

### ***Trend 2: Online education will democratise and disrupt global learning***

Graduate librarians will have a key role to play in the changes to education brought about by the growth in online learning. In the future distance learning is likely to be the primary learning mode for post-secondary education. Those engaged in learning whether face-to-face or online will have greater exposure and access to far more resources than ever before as a result of ongoing digitisation initiatives as well as the exponential growth in online data. The ability to access this material through effective federated searching will be integral to learning outcomes.

As the opportunities for formal and informal education and training increase through online courses, the role of the librarian in the future will change significantly. Digital libraries and digital repositories will become more widespread and accessible as universities and further education agencies publish their own research output. There will be greater “support for digital scholarship” (Jaguszewski and Williams 2013, 6) and digital repositories will require greater integration with catalogue interfaces. As noted by RLUK, librarians have a shifting role in the research process (Auckland 2012, 5) and need to stake a claim in the production cycle (Walters and Skinner 2011, 8). Graduate librarians will require skills and knowledge in establishing, maintaining and managing digital libraries within a constantly changing information landscape. Digital rights and copyright management, digital preservation as well as programming and the ability to develop maintain library systems and catalogues will be key skills required for new graduates.

While the traditional librarian skills of collection management and acquisitions will still be required; there will be additional needs for business management, marketing and contract negotiation skills to ensure ongoing and economical access to databases and ebooks. Furthermore, graduate librarians will require skills in evaluating and assessing the quality of information and helping library users to do the same. To enable this, library graduates will need

to come from a range of different educational backgrounds including science, engineering, as well as arts and business to ensure we they have the knowledge from which to make these assessments. Perhaps in the future, library organisations could consider providing cadetships and selling library careers to graduates from different degree areas as a way of actively recruiting into the library profession.

***Trend 3: The boundaries of privacy and data protection will be redefined***

Graduate librarians will need a clear understanding of the changing boundaries and rules around privacy and data protection. All libraries collect data about their users to provide an enhanced, responsive service with tailored recommendations and to inform the collection policy. In accordance with privacy regulations and general goodwill, libraries do not use this information as other private companies would. Examples of user data informing library services include tracking borrowing data and other details such as event attendance at libraries (physical or online) to enable libraries to tailor individualised services, book recommendations and other notifications of library events. This would require a change in privacy regulations governing the operation of libraries and graduate librarians would need to be educated in the implementation of these policies and practices.

On the other hand, as surveillance of citizens by governments becomes widespread and companies track users information for profit (IFLA Trends, 2013) libraries will have an active role in teaching their users to minimise or restrict the information being shared online. Cybersafety initiatives aimed at both children and the wider community, and programs on protecting online data will become areas libraries provide training and support. Graduate librarians will not only need the technical skills to teach this but program development and presentation skills. Libraries may also decide to encrypt and secure their users data to make it more difficult to be tracked.

***Trend 4: Hyper-connected societies will listen to and empower new voices and groups***

Libraries have always played a role in empowering the community by providing equitable access to information, running programs which increase information literacy, entertain and inform, as well as providing physical space for meetings and community gatherings. This uniquely places libraries as the organisation which can reach out to previously unheard voices and groups

allowing a wide range of opinions and new ideas to occupy a visible place in the community. As libraries and librarians believe in principles of free speech and are against censorship we, perhaps more than other organisations will have a role in ensuring voices even those in dissent from the common or popularly held opinion continue to be heard. Librarians we need to develop skills in curation and new ways of presenting subjects and topics which provide a range of resources and differing viewpoints. Therefore as part of our roles, the ability to search, discern the ongoing value, to keep and preserve this information will ensure records of the times we live in will be available.

Libraries exist to serve their communities and thrive because of their ability to relate to and provide resources, programs and services for the range of people from different cultural backgrounds with different needs and expectations. It is therefore key for libraries, regardless of whether they are public, academic or speciality, to continue to listen and be responsive to the community needs, to put people at the centre of libraries services. By putting people first and then providing technology, resources and services which cater to the communities' needs, we will enable the unique voices in the community to participate in democracy, contribute to society and ensure libraries are exciting community hubs.

***Trend 5: The global information environment will be transformed by new technologies***

Except those of us with a penchant for sci-fi it is difficult to imagine what the future of technology looks like. The development of the semantic web and the endless possibilities this will bring for libraries means they will be always be the place to access the latest technologies. Graduate librarians will need to have a thorough knowledge of all aspects of technology, this includes database/LMS building, intranet creation and management, computer programming, as well as working with open source software and programs that are at least at beta development level. Graduate librarians will also need to have a greater understanding of the web and how it is built (e.g. learning coding, and having these skill requirements built into LIS curriculum rather than an IT add-on to LIS qualifications). This also includes understanding how the web stores data / information. Librarians will need to know how search engines retrieve information and will need to be able to manipulate, build and use these to curate and retrieve information which isn't easily or prominently available through whatever the search engine of choice is by then. Librarians will need to be able to answer enquiries at all stages of information literacy development, including in-depth

reference interviews, information literacy skill development and all stages of the research development cycle.

**Conclusion:**

Having looked into the future of libraries, NGAC have landed safely back in the current day. We are excited by the possibilities and hopeful for the future librarians who have the skills, training and the passion, which are the hallmarks of our profession. This will enable new graduates to respond and adapt to the changing technologies, which will be the backdrop to the vibrant library landscape of the future while continuing the important roles librarians play in our communities today. Regardless of whether we can teleport or appear in holograms, or whatever technologies have been developed, libraries and librarians will remain relevant for as long as they continue to serve and be responsive to the needs of the people and communities: libraries are about people not technology.

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