

Is there a career path for Library Technicians?

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ALIA 2009 Library Technician Research Award

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About the author

Janette Telford is currently the loans coordinator at the Australian Catholic University, North Sydney Campus. Since commencing in libraries over 20 years ago Janette has worked in government and academic libraries in Australia and Tonga. Over the years Janette's career has changed beginning with her TAFE Library Technician Certificate, working at Atenisi University Library, Tonga, obtaining her Bachelor of Science (Library Technology) from Edith Cowan University, awarded the ALIA Professional Development Fellowship and lastly being awarded in 2009 the ALIA Library Technician Research Award.

Is there a career path for Library Technicians?

The 2008 ALIA Library Technician Research Award was sponsored by Charles Sturt University NSW.

Abstract:

The aim of the project is to see if there is a career path for Library Technicians or must they upgrade their qualifications to Librarian or Teacher Librarian to have one. Also the project would include looking at Library Technicians who have upgraded their qualifications to other degrees and those Library Technicians who have not.

Proposal

To investigate whether there is a career path for Library Technicians without the need to upgrade their qualifications to Librarian or Teacher Librarian. To begin the research I visited and discussed this topic with students and teachers/lectures at TAFE Colleges, Institutes of Education and Universities in Australia and Canada. I also sent a survey via various e-lists to colleagues working in the library industry and compiled a listing of their answers. I then discussed these issues with colleagues working in libraries and other industries together with Librarians and other staff interested in my topic. My last section was to email a questionnaire to Library Technicians not working in traditional roles.

Methodology

To commence with I constructed a wiki <http://ltcareerpath.wikispaces.com/> and send bimonthly emails to the following ALIAelists: alialibtec, aliastudents, aliaPD, Latin and COLT to advise and ask for feedback from colleagues of my current research topic. During the last two years I have attempted to visit TAFE, Universities and other places that employ or teach Library Technicians. In 2009 I sent a short survey out via the elists to colleagues to assist me in locating Library Technicians not currently employed in traditional library positions. I then visited TAFE Colleges, Institutes of Education and Universities to discuss my research and to advise them where my wiki was located. I also spoke to Library Technicians in Canada about my research.

Literature search

I conducted a literature search in a number of areas using the following keywords: career, career path, Library Technician, Library Assistant, School Media Officer, e-portfolio, professional development, conferences, skills transfer. I conducted the searches in Proquest, EbscoHost, Emerald, Google, GoogleScholar and YouTube.

Scope of literature search

The scope of the literature search was to investigate what has been published on career paths, social networking, professional development and eportfolios since 2000. Overseas material has been included as there has not been a lot written in Australia about these areas either by or about Library Technicians. I hope in the future more Library Technicians will write about these areas.

I also reviewed the previous Dunn and Wilson Scholarship recipient's results from the ALIA webpage. These included:

- 📖 1997 – Lorraine Denny (Job descriptions: improving their currency, accuracy and usefulness)-
- 📖 1999 – Meredith Martinelli (Changing roles, changing goals; transferring library technician skills beyond the library)
- 📖 2001 – Kerrie Blyth (a comparison of education and training opportunities for library technicians in UK, USA, NZ and Australia)
- 📖 2007 – Sharron Ultmann (Multi-skill: library technician national secondment opportunities)

What is a Library Technician?

According to the ALIA Webpage

<http://www.alia.org.au/education/qualifications/library.technician.html> a Library Technician “usually work under the supervision of a librarian and have a strong focus and vital role in customer service.” Tasks include

- focussing on operational and technical aspects of library and information:
 - assist with loan and reference queries at the counter and by phone
 - assist with internet and online database searches
 - maintain library resources, records and systems
 - enter and edit data into computerised databases
 - operate photocopier

- arrange inter-library loans
- develop and present promotional programs, including displays and library tours
- undertake copy cataloguing and classification
- at a senior level - supervise other library or clerical staff; manage a small library or information service or head a section in a large library or information

In 1991 Alan Bundy stated “Library technicians are like many other library workers. They are mature aged, educated, concerned about the lack of funding, job security and the future of the profession. Some consider they have a career in the profession, while others will go outside. They are willing to take on other duties which no-one else wants, with the reward mainly being the satisfaction of a job well done.”

Terminology for Library Technician positions

I sent a request via the various ALIA-elists and requested a listing of terminology of positions held by Library Technicians. I received answers from Australia, Canada and USA and was impressed by the various terms employed to describe a Library Technicians position in libraries. It was interesting to note that only a few of the titles of positions actually contain the words Library Technician. As technology increases so do the diverse roles of a Library Technician. A complete listing is available on my wiki but some of the titles included:

Cultural Officer	Library Specialist	Research Assistant
Information Architect	Workshop Support Officer	Imaging Officer

Professional development – an international perspective.

There are many different ways that you can pursue your career development, such as social networking, increasing knowledge of technology, conferences or workshops, professional development, mentoring and e-portfolios. Straatmann, M. (2008) states “staff development is not solely concerned with creating more effective resources, but rather viewing staff development as an empowerment tool to help address inequalities, real and perceived, between paraprofessional staff and library professionals”. Conferences or workshops are held regularly in all states and territories that library technicians are eligible to attend. Some of the examples are the Library Technician Conferences held every two years; Rivers of Opportunity held every two years and Unconferences. ALIA advertises these activities in a number of ways including advertising Incite magazine, via elists and personal emails if you subscribe to pd elists.

In today’s environment library technicians need to have a career path but not necessarily skills from libraries. Kim Gosling at the 2005 Library Technician conference presented a paper and stated that “Skills are transferable. No experience is wasted. If you have great customer service skills, the fact that you gained those skills working at McDonalds is usually

irrelevant”.

Australia

To increase your professional development you can participate in events in the workplace, though a professional organisation or individually. In order to see how library technicians can have a career path I have investigated professional development schemes. In Australia ALIA has a PD scheme which individual members are able to join for free and is located at <http://www.alia.org.au/education/pd/>. There is also a comprehensive form that needs to be completed and sent to ALIA. At the end of the 3 years you are able to have CP placed after your name in recognition of finishing the course. If you wish to further this you can apply to become an Associate Fellow for CPD of ALIA and have the following after your name AFALIA Tec(CP).

In Australia there are also a number of other professional development groups that library technicians can join. ASLA (Australian School Library Association) <http://www.asla.org.au/index.htm> and http://twitter.com/ASLA_National is one of the groups that library technicians can participate in. This group is aimed particularly at people employed in the school section of libraries.

Canada

During 2010 I attended and presented a poster presentation at the Canadian library conference in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. My poster presentation was about career paths and courses for Library Technicians in Australia. I received many enquiries about professional development courses and how the PD scheme worked. These queries were directed to the ALIA webpage.

One session at the conference was about Library Association of Alberta and their pilot program for the CP scheme. As each Province in Canada has their own associations, in addition to the Canadian Library Association, the Library Association of Alberta commenced a professional development scheme for their Province. In order to communicate to colleagues about the progress of the pilot program a Facebook page was created at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Library-Association-of-Alb-Continuing-Education-Certification-Program-Pilot/186875326840>

Another of the papers presented was by the The CASLNetwork – Canadian School Library which can be viewed at <http://www.slideshare.net/casl/librarian/caslnetwork>. CASLNetwork also communicates effectively with colleagues by using Facebook.

Electronic aspects

E-portfolio

Electronic portfolios has been defined by Rowth (2008) as different “from social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook. An e-portfolio is an online display of your skills and talents. It’s specifically targeted to employers or others you’d like to impress for educational or professional reasons”. That means that you can use e-portfolios as an extension of your resume or covering letter when applying for positions.

As in everything E-portfolios have advantages, disadvantages and stages of development. Advantages include portability, easier to distribute to relevant people, inexpensive, support documentation not easily to print and not committed to one format. Disadvantages include expensive to purchase software, must have knowledge of technology already, time to develop, technology must be compatible with other side, and may not be useful for your needs at that time. Another disadvantage of using e-portfolios is that the receiving company many not have the same programmes as that of the sender and hence it cannot be viewed properly.

A literature review was done on relevant e-portfolio and the way it is implemented in libraries. I discovered that Gillian Hallam from QUT has presented a number of relevant articles. I further enquired with private enterprise companies that employ Library Technicians and on their use of e-portfolios and discovered that they are rarely used at the moment.

e-lists, YouTube and facebook

Why include elists, You Tube and Facebook in my research?

Here is where the talents of Library Technicians shine and hence can lead to a different career path in and out of Libraries. At present Australian Library Technicians communicate via a variety of e-lists. During my visits to TAFE and University libraries there was a lack of knowledge about and understanding of the ALIA e-lists.

Some of the social networking skills and technology, including YouTube, Facebook and Twitter have played an important role in the development of career paths for library technicians. During my research I located numerous instances where library technicians have either produced or stared on YouTube. An example of this is Trekkie Wars - The battle for AACR2 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUJc1y6FDZk>. Here the student has adapted the theme of Star Wars to the assignment of AACR2. Knowledge of this technology can greatly assist Library Technicians as libraries are constantly changing as technology changes.

Facebook and twitter has come into their own right recently with organisations advertising their career development and conferences for everyone to view. One example has been this conference here in Perth where library technicians or those interested in library technicians meet to discuss issues that affect them. The Canadian Library Technicians communicate their job advertisements and other professional development activities through facebook <https://www.facebook.com/#!/groups/2295803362/>.

By attending conferences and workshops these activities have increased your personal networking. At each function your personal social networking skills increase as well as your knowledge of how library technician’s skills are varied. This can be done in various activities ranging from first timers dinner and having conversation with other Library Technicians, visiting the trade and joining other Library Technicians at workshops.

Searching the internet for YouTube and face book pages was very enlightening. There are a number of talented Library Technicians that have downloaded their talents onto YouTube. These include interviews with Library Technicians, Library Technicians assignments and Library Technicians displaying their talents.

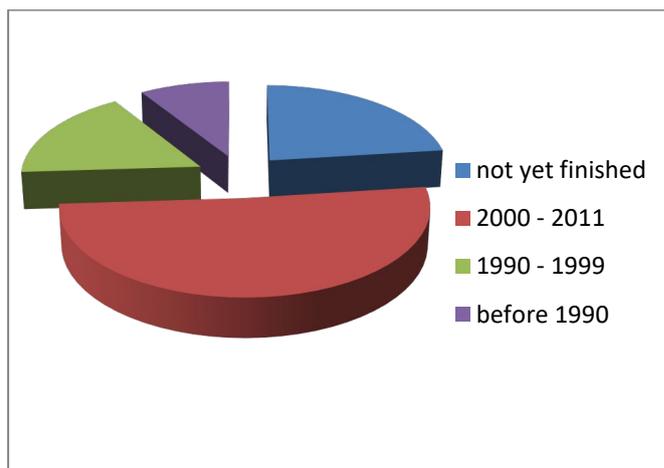
Facebook pages have been developed by Library Technicians as a way of communicating to colleagues across their country or overseas. While attending the Canadian Conference in 2010 I was introduced to the Library Technicians of Canada face book page. Here Technicians communicate across Canada with queries and job advertisements. In Australia we have the equivalent via e-lists which can be accessed by anyone interested in libraries and how they work.

Results of survey

A brief survey (Appendix 1) was emailed to interested Library Technicians with approximately 100 replies. One of the reasons for the poor response was that Library Technicians did not know about the ALIA e-lists and hence did not know about my research. The first results are from Australia. It was interesting to note that some of the students were also employed in addition to studying hence it has lent to the statistics not being 100%.

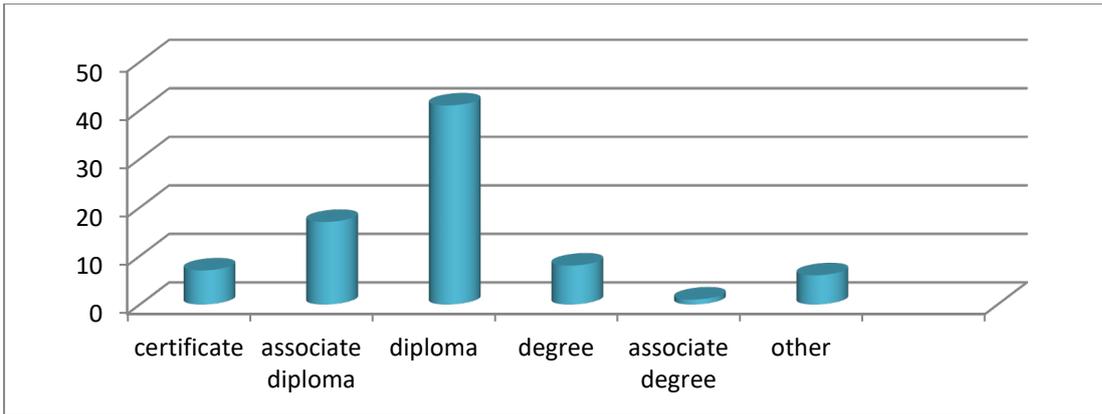
Question 1 related to when they received their Library Technician Qualification

The majority of the respondents, 51%, graduated between 2000-2011 with the Library Technician diploma or Bachelor of Science (Library Technology). The next group were the students with 23%. Students graduating 1990-2000 were 17% and colleagues graduated before 1990 made up 9%



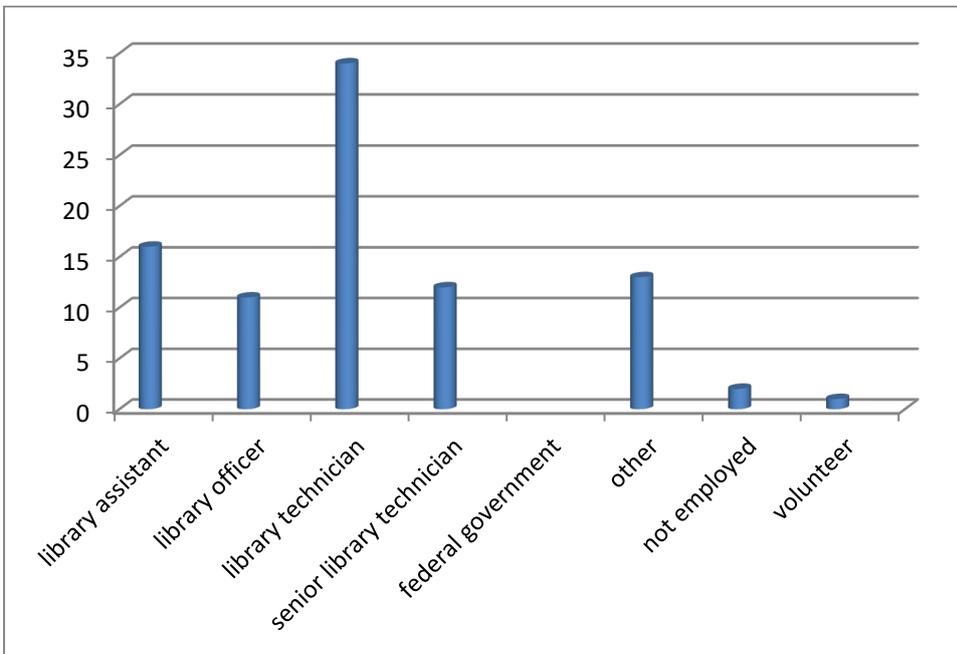
Question 3 related to what was their qualification.

Colleagues that had graduated with a Diploma had 41%, Associate Diploma with 17%, Degree with 8%, Certificate with 7%, Associate Degree with 7% and other qualifications 6%



Question 5 at what level are you employed

Colleagues employed as Library Technicians were 34%, Library Assistant were 16%, other levels not mentioned were 13%, Senior Library Technician 12%, Library Officer 11%, not employed 2% and volunteer 1%.



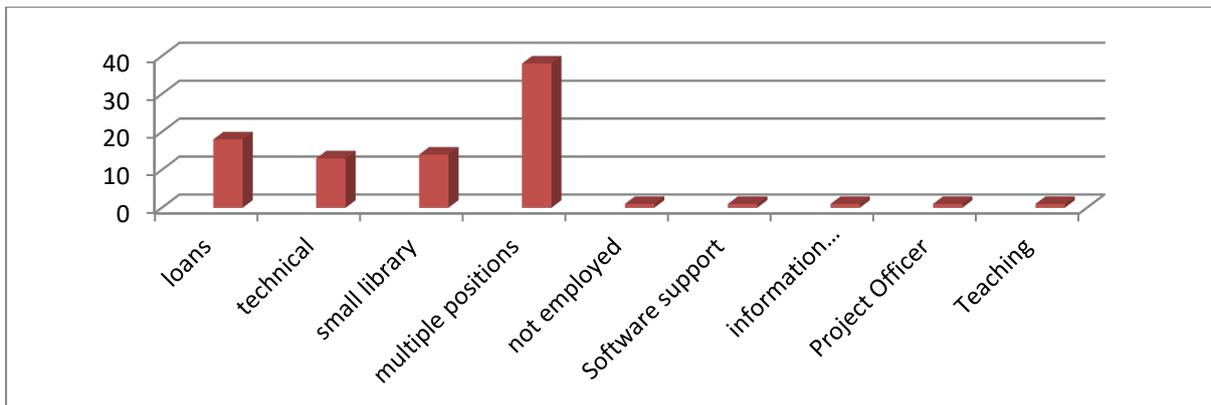
Question 6 do you see any room for advancement.

The results were very close with 35% yes, 29% no and 20% maybe.



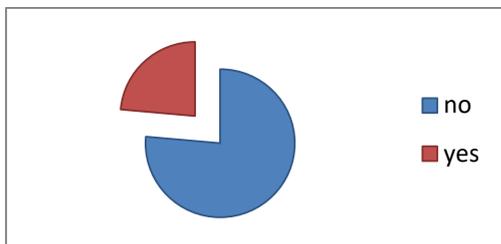
Question 7 concerned the area that the Library Technician worked in

Here the respondents gave more information regarding where they were currently working. The results were 38% in multiple positions, 18% in loans, 14% in small libraries, 13% in technical services and 1% were in teaching, not employed, software support, project officer and information literacy.



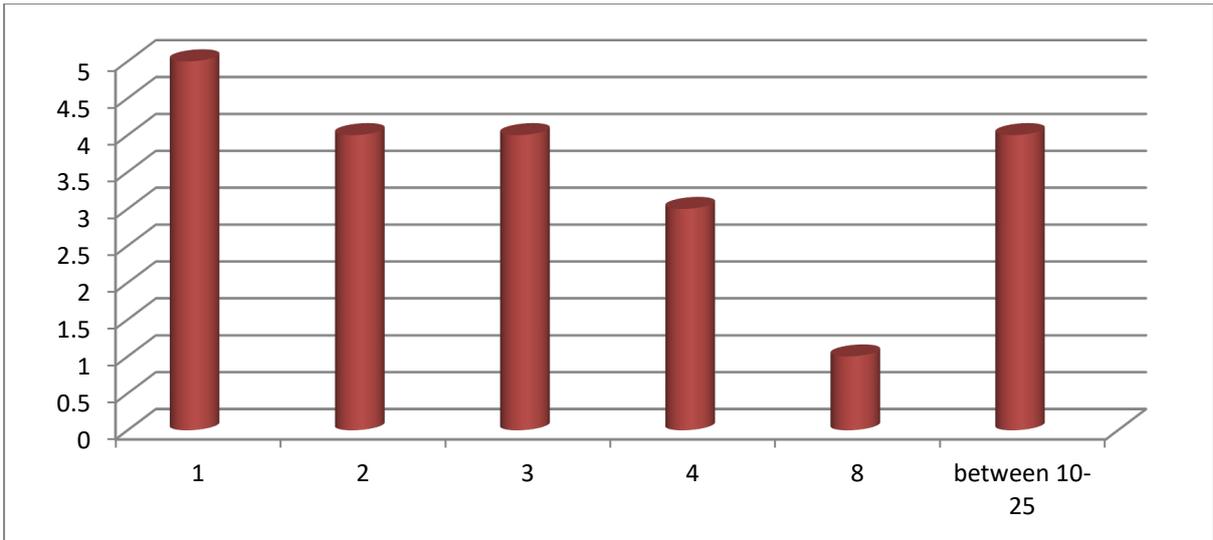
Question 8 – regarding supervision

With over 68% were not in supervisory positions at the time.



Question 9 – related to the number of staff they supervised

There were 5% who supervised one member of staff and surprisingly 4% who supervised over 10 staff. 4% supervised between 2-3 staff, 3% had 4 staff and 1% had 8 staff they supervised.



Question 10 – regarded upgrading your qualifications

Here the statistics were fairly even with 29% stating no and 23% stating yes. There were also 9% who were undecided.



Question 13 – What do you see as a future career for Library Technicians.

The answers were both positive and negative from the respondents.

Positive answers

Some LT courses also give you additional qualifications (records management, archives)

Technicians have the ability to solve problems, thinking on their feet

Secondment

Ability to change with technology and able to implement it

If you put the energy into the position it reaps rewards

Professional Development

Librarians are now less territorial and see the value of library technicians

Multi skilled

Negative responses

Not very rosy – losing individuality becoming integrated

Too much responsibility and no authority

Employers should be educated in what a library technician's role is

Not much room for advancement

Limited by levels at employment – librarians can go ahead and LT are limited

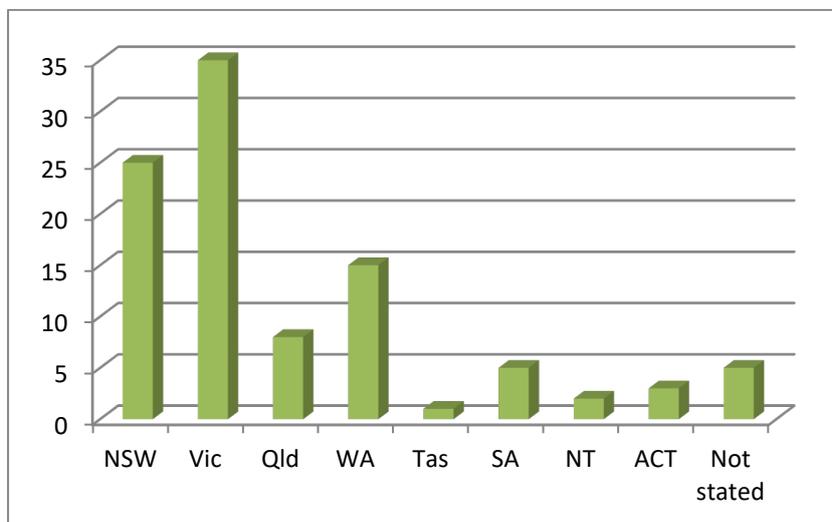
Not recognizing qualifications

Replacing technicians with admin staff, volunteers

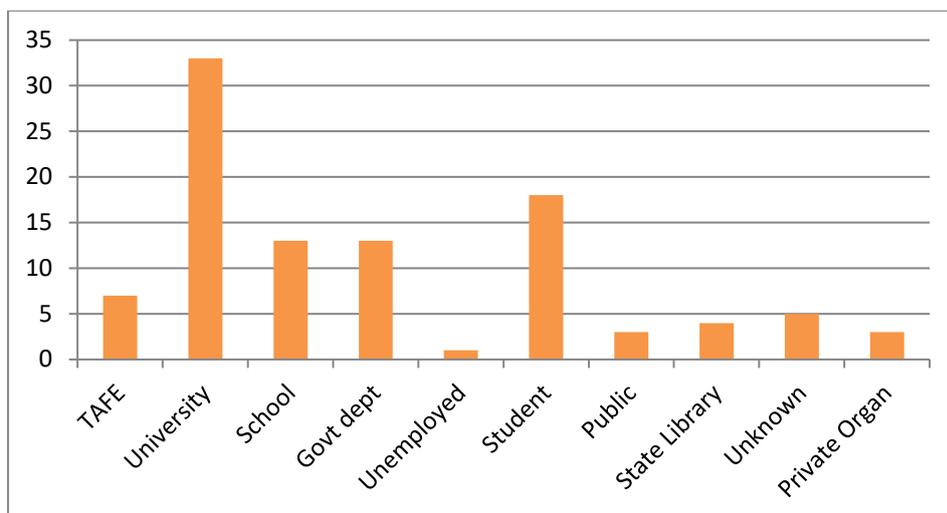
Jobs can be very boring and monotonous

States and sections

I further divided the information from the survey in states.



From the statistics the second highest response was from students when I visited their classes at their institution.



Second questionnaire

After visiting the TAFE, Institutes of Technology, Universities and colleagues I sent a second questionnaire to selected colleagues for additional information (Attachment 3) and these colleagues are employed in non traditional Library Technician roles. From the responses I received on average they had been in their current position over 3 years and had obtained these positions either internally or through network of colleagues in the industry. The respondents on average have all worked in libraries for approximately 10 years.

The duties that these Library Technicians have range from coordinating and developing reports, occupational health and safety, liaising with managers for implementing new procedures for their employee, liaising with builders and outside contractors, and also demonstrating new technology to clients and staff. They all have attended conferences, workshops and staff training to assist with the implementation of their duties.

They all agreed that Library Technicians need to actively participate in networking with colleagues both in libraries and those working outside libraries. This could include attending conferences, workshops, seminars or ALIA group meetings.

Also by keeping up-to-date on current technological changes is another way Library Technicians can increase their career path. Library Technicians also can obtain knowledge through subscribing to facebook sites, ALIA e-lists, conferences and other professional development workshops.

The majority of respondents agreed that Library Technicians future will either increase or stay the same. They also agreed that Library Technicians need to constantly upgrade their skills, not necessarily upgrade to Librarian, to obtain positions in the future.

Some of the areas they considered Library Technicians need to concentrate on for furthering their career include:

Management skills

Computer and technology skills

Continuing professional education

Communication skills

Statistics for LT

From the Census of 2006 the Australian Bureau of Statistics published information on persons employed in libraries and archives industry. This information was located in 4172.0 – Arts and Culture in Australia: a statistical overview. From the report there were 1378 Library Technicians and 1431 Library Assistants. I also received statistics from Charles Sturt University on the number of students that received advance standing on their Library Technicians qualifications that have enrolled in the Librarian Course

Students with LT qualifications enrolled in CSU courses

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Intake	131	130	115	130	208	135	849
LT	61	60	60	65	88	70	404

Recommendations

Some of the recommendations I have included are:

Visits by ALIA representative to institutions to promote professional development and other courses

Practising Library Technicians to visit students to advise what the groups do and activities that are available

More promotion of elists to students and colleagues

Better use of elists by colleagues to promote activities

Creating a Facebook page that colleagues both in Australia and overseas could contribute to.

Conclusions

I do see a clear career path for Library Technicians provided that Technicians attend conferences, workshops or other professional development opportunities, keep up-to-date

with changes in technology. Finally, I would like to thank Charles Sturt University and ALIA National Office for providing me the opportunity to complete this research project. I would also like to thank my fellow colleagues who have assisted me through this journey. I would encourage my fellow technicians to step out of your comfort zone. I have found this to be a challenging but fulfilling opportunity on my journey through my career path.

Appendix 1

Survey for research award

1. When did you finish your Library Technician qualification?
2. If you have not completed your Library Technician qualification when will you complete it?
3. What is your qualification?
 - a. Certificate
 - b. Associate diploma
 - c. Diploma
 - d. Degree
 - e. Other (provide details)
4. Are you currently employed in a library?
5. At what level are you employed?
 - a. Library assistant
 - b. Library officer
 - c. Library technician
 - d. Senior library technician
 - e. Federal government
 - f. Other (provide details)
6. Do you see room for career development in your current employment?
7. What area are you currently working in?
 - a. Loans
 - b. Technical
 - c. Small library
 - d. Multiple positions

8. Are you in a supervisory position?
9. If yes how many people do you supervise
10. Are you currently considering upgrading your qualification?
11. If so at what level
 - a. Associate Diploma to Diploma/Advanced Diploma
 - b. Certificate to Diploma/Advanced Diploma
 - c. Diploma to Undergraduate Degree.
12. Has your career changed since you completed your qualifications?
13. What do you see as a future career for Library Technicians?

Appendix 2

Results of survey – Australia

Question 1 - when did you finish your course?

not yet finished	23
2000 - 2011	51
1990 - 1999	17
before 1990	9

Question 3 - what is your qualification

certificate	7
associate diploma	17
diploma	41
degree	8
associate degree	1
other	6

Question 5 - At what level are you employed?

library assistant	16
library officer	11
library technician	34
senior library technician	12
federal government	
other	13
not employed	2
volunteer	1

Question 6 Do you see any room for career development in your current employment?

yes	35
no	29
maybe	20

Question 7 - What area are you currently working in?

loans	18
technical	13
small library	14
multiple positions	38
not employed	1
Software support	1
information literacy	1
Project Officer	1
Teaching	1

Question 8 - Are you in a supervisory position?

supervisor	no	68
	yes	21

Question 9 - number of people supervised

1	5
2	4
3	4
4	3
8	1
between 10-25	4

Question 10 - Are you currently considering upgrading your qualification?

yes	23
no	29
maybe	9

What state are the replies from

NSW	25
Vic	35

Qld	8
WA	15
Tas	1
SA	5
NT	2
ACT	3
Not stated	5

What section are you working in

TAFE	7
University	33
School	13
Govt dept	13
Unemployed	1
Student	18
Public	3
State Library	4
Unknown	5
Private Organisation	3

Appendix 3

Questions for library technicians not in traditional roles

1. Describe your present position, including type and organisation (If you would like this information confidential please advise me).
2. How long have you been in this position?
3. Brief history of your career, including how you gained this position (e.g. internal appointment or job application etc).
4. How has your networking skills increased (social and personal)?
5. What do you consider the future role for library technician's, increasing or decreasing?
6. Do you think that Library Technicians need to upgrade their skills to further their career?
7. What areas do you consider Library Technicians need to concentrate on for furthering their career?

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