Submission in response to the Australian Government Soft Power Review
12 October, 2018

1. About us

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the professional organisation and peak body for the Australian library and information services sector. On behalf of our 5,000 personal and institutional members, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support. We represent school, public, academic, research, corporate, law, health, government, National, State and Territory libraries and the people who staff them. We are part of the GLAM sector (galleries, libraries, archives and museums).

The Australian library and information sector is considered an exemplar of best practice in library and information science education, standards and service delivery, by colleagues around the world. Our development of data management skills; evidence-based research support; the introduction of maker spaces, coding and robotics; creation of iconic library buildings and investment in innovative digital technologies have established us as global leaders.

Our members are highly engaged at an international level and active in international organisations dealing with standards, research and education. We are members of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), based in The Hague, and many Australian library and information professionals attend the IFLA World Library and Information Congress each year. ALIA Members are active on many of the IFLA committees; two of our former ALIA Presidents sit on the IFLA governing board, and the IFLA President-elect for 2019-2021 is Australian.

IFLA has Formal Associate Relations with UNESCO, observer status with the United Nations, associate status with the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) and observer status with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

At the regional level, ALIA has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Library Association of Singapore and LIANZA (our equivalent organisation in New Zealand). We held the Asia Pacific Library and Information Conference on the Gold Coast in July/August 2018 as a joint venture between the three associations. Aligned with this, we held a one-day Asia-Pacific Sustainable Development Goals Summit, which brought together 50 library representatives from the region and resulted in an action list for further development.

ALIA and LIANZA have been partners in the INELI Oceania program for emerging library leaders, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. While this program ended in July

2018, it has led to the creation of the Pacific Library Network, which is providing new opportunities for mutual support and regional collaboration.

Governments in the Asia-Pacific recognise that access to information is essential for education, health, wellbeing and participation in society. However, there are many factors inhibiting the free flow of information and the preserving of culture. Libraries help bridge the gap for those who cannot afford to buy books; do not have an internet connection; lack the necessary reading, research or digital literacy skills, or encounter other barriers to participation and archives support retention and access to cultural heritage. Governments in emerging nations see the value of locally trained library and information professionals with internationally recognised qualifications and in 2017, following a panel visit from some of Australia's leading library and information science educators, ALIA accredited the University of the South Pacific (Pacific TAFE) Diploma of Library and Information Services. This was a major achievement for Pacific TAFE and ALIA will continue to support the course educators with regular interaction with their peers in Australia.

2. Introduction

We welcome this opportunity to respond to the Australian Soft Power Review. ALIA, Australian libraries and library and information professionals have a role to play in a number of areas, including:

- Working with colleagues in the Asia-Pacific to progress the UN Sustainable Development Goals
- Promoting Australia's creative industries, especially in the area of literature
- Furthering cultural understanding within our region and internationally
- Supporting the preservation and digitisation of local archives and records
- Accrediting education, promoting professional networks, information sharing and capacity building for library and information workers
- Supporting the development of Blue Shield national committees in the region, to promote disaster planning and awareness for cultural institutions.

3. Responses to specific elements of the review

3.1 Globalisation and technological change

In common with most sectors, libraries and archives have experienced the challenges and benefits of digital disruption. The professions reliable, accessible, authentic information management is a significant asset in uncertain times.

The growth of digital access provides exciting opportunities for sharing cultural collections nationally and internationally. The National Library of Australia's Trove platform (https://trove.nla.gov.au/) is an excellent example of how Australian content, in the past only available to library visitors, is now open to anyone in the world with an internet connection. Digital access helps promote our culture and heritage and ensures that Australian creators' voices are heard.

The digitisation of collections can also mitigate the impact of conflict and natural disasters. Where physical collections are vulnerable, digitisation can ensure a permanent record of objects, images and documents. Our Pacific neighbours in particular value Australian expertise in the area of digital preservation and welcome our support.

3.2 Libraries as soft power assets

International agreements are rarely built on the basis of cultural relationships, but links between our galleries, libraries, archives and museums can strengthen political bonds and enhance public engagement. Relationships can be deepened and diversified through improved understanding of each other's arts, culture and heritage.

We would point to the example of the 2015 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with Singapore, which provided the context within which we were able to develop a three-way partnership with NZ.

From the DFAT website[1]: "Australia and Singapore have agreed to work with New Zealand to promote the library and information sector (LIS) across the three countries. On 12 October 2016, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), the Library Association of Singapore (LAS) and the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA) signed a memorandum of understanding to promote an innovation agenda by making information in all its forms accessible to some 20 million library users."

3.3 UN Sustainable Development Goals

ALIA is already working with DFAT to ensure that libraries play their part in delivering targets around universal literacy, access to information and to technology, and that this work generates the data and narrative required for the Australian Government to report its progress to the UN. Libraries were mentioned three times in Australia's 2018 Voluntary National Review.

In July 2018, ALIA organised the Asia-Pacific SDG Summit for library and information professionals from across the region. This event has seeded further ideas for initiatives between libraries to enhance public access to information and resources – print and digital.
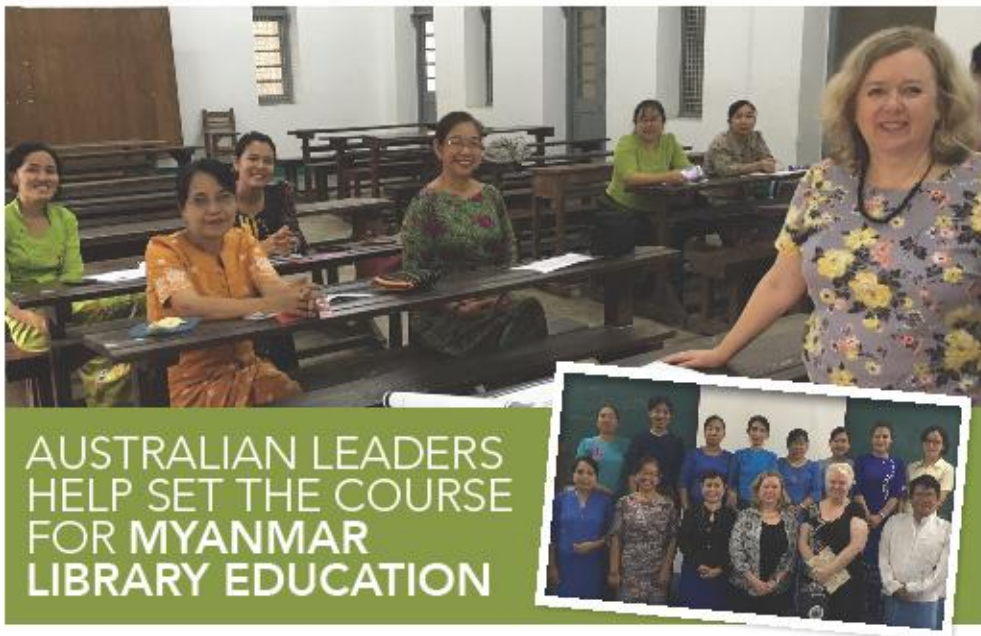

---

[1] http://dfat.gov.au/geo/singapore/Pages/singapore-country-brief.aspx

3.4 Best practice examples

The following example of a joint venture by the Australian National University library and Charles Sturt University featured in the September/October 2018 edition of ALIA's INCITE magazine.

MEMBER AND SECTOR NEWS

AUSTRALIAN LEADERS HELP SET THE COURSE FOR **MYANMAR** LIBRARY EDUCATION

A partnership between two Australian universities aims to help transform library and information science education in Myanmar.

The Australian National University (ANU), together with Charles Sturt University (CSU), are working on a project to assist Professor Ni Win Zaw, Head of the Department of Library and Information Science at the University of Yangon to transform library and information science education at the University of Yangon.

The project aims to develop a new set of graduate outcomes, focused on the digital capabilities required in modern libraries. These outcomes will create graduates able to harness the power of the digital world and develop knowledge for future research through education and libraries.

Mary Carroll, CSU Course Director, and Roxanne Missingham, University Librarian at the ANU, visited Myanmar in June 2018 to run workshops facilitating curriculum review at the University of Yangon. In complex circumstances a series of workshops were delivered that identified the best curriculum and pedagogy for incorporating 'digital' into courses. Roxanne Missingham told *INCITE*, 'The lecturers and tutors were inspiring, and very keen to develop their knowledge and explore partnerships to expand courses and review unit content. Rubrics were a topic of great debate and we will no doubt see further development.'

A significant aspect of the program was that it supports gender equality. It is the only program delivered through the ANU with Government Partnerships for Development funding with a majority female cohort: the library leaders consulted were women, the program was delivered by Australian women and 95.5% of the participants in the workshops were women.

Now that the framework has been set to assist curriculum development for librarians, work is required to establish a digital hub for long term support and explore new courses developing capabilities for school librarians and archivists.

Roxanne Missingham explained, 'this project is remarkable in many ways. Deep discussions on the structure of courses and content have teased out many complex issues. It is a collaboration of a practitioner and educator to work in partnership with the University of Yangon to genuinely transform library and information science education for national progress. It is a project which meets the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and will provide a model for other projects around the globe. A framework for consultation has been developed including leading practitioners and educators from both Myanmar and Australia, providing a basis for future engagement and development of a proposal for infrastructure to support teaching that will integrate with industry needs.'

There are many further examples of Australian libraries contributing to the soft power agenda: Monash University's Malaysia Library and Learning Commons; RMIT University Library in Vietnam; parliamentary library staff exchanges between Australia and Bangladesh and ALIA accredited library and information courses in Fiji and Hong Kong.

4. In summary

Libraries are a soft power asset for the nation. We are already active at the regional and international level, forging strong, mutually beneficial partnerships that demonstrate Australia's leadership in technical innovation, education and social good.

ALIA contact:

Sue McKerracher, CEO, Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA),
9-11 Napier Close, Deakin ACT 2600
t 02 6215 8215 **m** 0404 456 749 **f** 02 6282 2249
w www.alia.org.au **e** sue.mckerracher@alia.org.au