Australian Library and
Information Association

FUTURE OF THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE PROFESSION:
LIBRARY AND INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS

ALIA **FUTURES**

Initiatives for the future of the library
& information sciences profession.

Australian **Library** and
Information Association

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ABOUT THE PROFESSION

Every year, some 800 people graduate from an Australian university or TAFE, with a professional qualification in library and information science. Often it is a second career choice, and this contributes to the diversity of age and experience within the sector. Graduates with a degree or Masters qualification are eligible to become an ALIA Associate member, and those with a VET certificate or diploma, an ALIA Library Technician member.

The library and information sector is characterised by a diverse workforce that is successful in:

- Promoting and defending the core values of the library and information profession.

- Understanding and responding to cultural, social, information and learning needs of clients/stakeholders and customers.

- Managing the storage, organisation, access, retrieval, dissemination and preservation of information and enabling free access and use of information.

- Developing, delivering and evaluating information facilities, services, sources and products in response to client needs.

- Envisioning and planning future directions for the library and information sector.

- Advancing library and information science in its adaptability, flexibility and autonomous application to information services.

- Engaging with clients, community and other industries.

Typical tasks of a professional librarian, teacher librarian or information manager may include:

- Managing and resourcing a branch library, a section of a large library, a small special library, or a research program.

- Supervising and leading staff.

- Designing, directing, formulating policy and applying services to meet the information needs of clients.

- Providing expert advice or consultancy services on strategic information management matters.

- Developing strategic plans, preparing budget submissions and briefings for general management.

- Managing major projects, including information technology systems and applications in a resource environment.

- Providing leadership, managerial and commercial skills and judgment.

- Marketing and promoting a library or information management service.

- Providing expert advice or consultancy services.
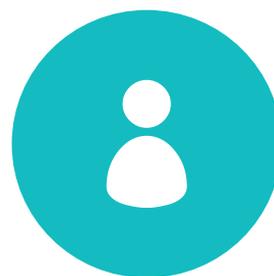
Library and information educators base their courses around ALIA's core knowledge, skills and attributes

The body of knowledge required to become a library and information professional[1] comes under these seven headings:

1. Knowledge of the broad context of the information environment.
2. Information seeking.
3. Information architecture.
4. Information organisation and access.
5. Information services, sources and products.
6. Information management.
7. Generation of knowledge.

1 www.alia.org.au/about-alia/policies-standards-and-guidelines/library-and-information-sector-core -knowledge-skills-and-attributes

Statistics

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, employment in the library sector has been fairly static over the last ten years and remains at approximately 25,000 librarians, library technicians and library assistants. This does not take into account information professionals working outside libraries, nor does it factor in the people from other disciplines who help run our libraries. For example, less than half the employees at the National Library of Australia have library qualifications. As an organisation, it needs HR, finance, security and other staff.

Employment in the library sector (ABS)

Librarians · Library Technicians · Library Assistants · Total
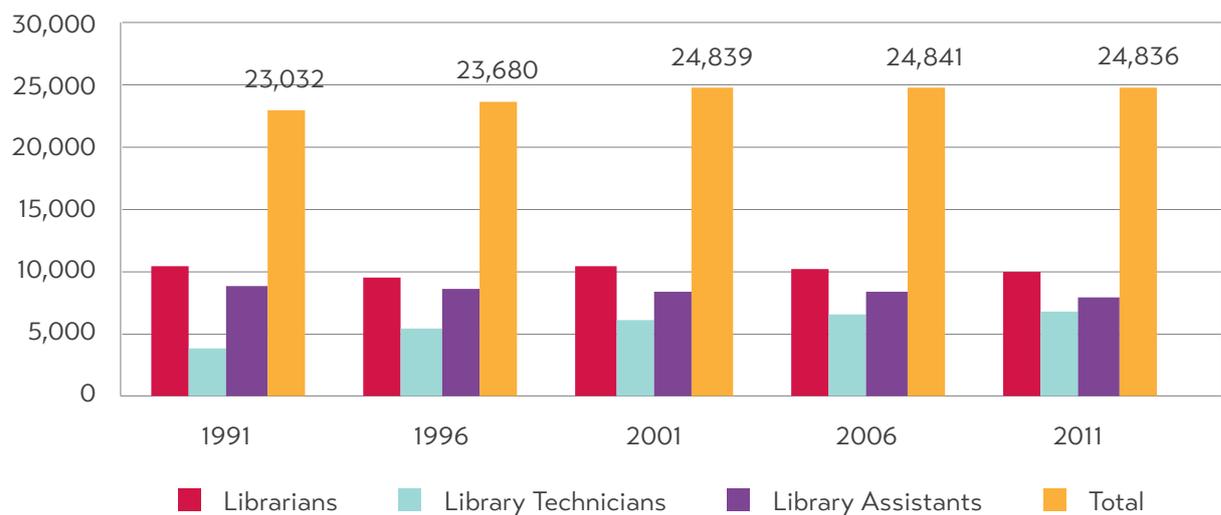
Perhaps in the future, library organisations could consider providing cadetships and selling library careers to graduates from different degree areas as a way of actively recruiting into the library profession.

— ALIA NEW GENERATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

THEMES

THEME 01
BALANCING THE WORKFORCE

In the short to medium term the library and information profession will experience a wave of people retiring. The next generation effect will enable employers to address the age and gender imbalance — currently focused on older, female staff — and further increase the diversity in the sector.

Recent graduates bring new skills and a fresh perspective. While the job market has been fairly static in recent years, the retirement wave will open up more opportunities and instead of jobs for new entrants being hard to find, it could be that we find ourselves by 2020 with too few professionals to fill the vacancies.

THEME 02
HIGHER PAID JOBS

The library and information profession is not highly paid for new entrants and junior staff, although senior managers and library leaders can earn in excess of $100K per annum. A shortage of recruits would encourage employers to review pay levels and, while it would vary by sector, where knowledge has a high commercial value we could expect to see the greatest improvement. In the longer term, earnings for people in female-dominated professions should rise anyway, as the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has a gender equity agenda and will be working to eradicate the difference in earnings between men and women[2].

2 www.coagreformcouncil.gov.au/reports/gender-equity/tracking-equity-comparing-outcomes-women-and-girls-across-australia

We need to address the gender and age issue.
There is a lack of men and young people in the profession.
We need to work with school careers officers and see school
kids working in libraries.

In special libraries, the work of the professionals has to be central to the organisation. Knowledge will be even more important and why shouldn't we see librarians at the highest level of management?

— ADELAIDE ALIA FUTURE OF THE LIS PROFESSION WORKSHOP NOTES

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.

— ALIA NEW GENERATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

AIMING FOR THE TOP

Outside of the National, State and Territory Libraries and universities, library and information professionals rarely have a seat at the top table. Public library managers are generally several steps removed from the council CEO; teacher librarians are not often included in the school's senior team, and special library and information professionals fare worse, reporting through several layers of management, with diminishing understanding of their role and contribution.

We can't expect overnight change, but there are factors in our favour. Library and information professionals are intelligent, well educated, skilled and experienced, and we handle knowledge, which is critical to most organisations. On top of this, we will need to sharpen up our business skills, demonstrate our flexibility and lateral thinking, and show our adaptability, helping to lead change rather than having change imposed on us.

WHAT WE CALL OURSELVES

During the consultation process, there was a great deal of discussion about librarian stereotypes. There were positives — the trust relationship with users; the sense of it being a vocation as well as a job; the ethos that supports 'good' (privacy, open government, open access) and the alignment with the social media environment (grassroots, crowd-sourcing, sharing, connection). The negatives included librarians being seen as old fashioned, rules-based and inflexible.

Participants were evenly divided between those who wanted to retain 'librarian' and make it more contemporary, and those who wanted to switch to 'information professional' and carry across the trust and ethos. Both had advantages and both were long term goals.

ALIA's take on this is that we are talking about the same skills but different perceptions, and while they are not mutually exclusive, the best outcome would be to modernise 'librarian' and separately promote the 'new' title of information professional, creating a future landscape where both co-exist. This will be driven partly by sector — we can't see communities welcoming a change to information professionals in public libraries, but it could well be a strategic advantage in special libraries.

We should come up with an umbrella term for the profession to embrace the varied information roles — archives, knowledge management, librarian, library technician, records management — for example, data professional, and move away from librarian.

— DARWIN ALIA FUTURE OF THE LIS PROFESSION WORKSHOP NOTES

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.

— ALIA NEW GENERATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The next generation may not be as concerned about privacy, maybe because they haven't yet learned the consequences. A role of the librarian will be to protect people's choices with the level of privacy. Libraries should advocate that privacy levels are available, we shouldn't advocate for one or the other, but for choice.

— ADELAIDE ALIA FUTURE OF THE LIS PROFESSION WORKSHOP NOTES

All libraries collect data about their users to provide an enhanced, responsive service ... In accordance with privacy regulations and general goodwill, libraries do not use this information as other private companies would ... 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.

— ALIA NEW GENERATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

GUARDIANS OF PRIVACY

The IFLA Trend Report states 'the boundaries of privacy and data protection will be redefined …' and asks 'who's profiting from your personal information?'[3]. In this sector, our instinctive reaction is to help shield data, but what happens when library and information professionals are the ones to profit? There are several ways this can happen.

- By using data to find out more about library users' habits, we can tailor our service to better meet their needs.

- We anticipate that library and information professionals will find new roles in the big data revolution, helping to collate, process and make useful the enormous volume of information generated through consumer transactions.

- Information and knowledge management professionals in businesses will find it is part of their job to make consumer data available.

Just as library and information professionals are the copyright watchdogs, ensuring that organisations fulfill their obligations, we see our members taking on a similar guardianship relating to personal privacy — enabling data that is appropriately harvested to be used in an ethical manner by their organisation.

3   trends.ifla.org/files/trends/assets/insights-from-the-ifla-trend-report__v3.pdf

TECHNOLOGY FOR ALL

ALIA currently recognises two forms of professional membership — librarian (degree or higher) and library technician (vocational qualification). With technology so much a part of everyone's job in the library and information sector, it was felt that this would no longer be a relevant distinction in the future and that everyone would need to be at least as proficient in IT as their average user.

As someone else said, getting information from the internet is like trying to take a drink from a fire hydrant. We are the people who filter the information down to a manageable flow.

— ACT ALIA FUTURE OF THE LIS PROFESSION WORKSHOP NOTES

We believe the future for libraries is exciting and vibrant with endless possibilities shaped by changing technology.

— ALIA NEW GENERATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

I knew someone once who left libraries part way through her course because she said all the books would soon be replaced by cassettes.

— MOUNT DRUITT FUTURE OF THE LIS PROFESSION WORKSHOP NOTES

You don't have to work in a library to be a librarian.

— SYDNEY ALIA FUTURE OF THE LIS PROFESSION WORKSHOP NOTES

Focus on the client groups using an informationist model or the embedded model. We can still have assistants to be reactive to questions on the spot but blend this with online help.

— MELBOURNE ALIA FUTURE OF THE LIS PROFESSION WORKSHOP NOTES

The future is all about creating a flexible workforce.

— QUEENSLAND ALIA FUTURE OF THE LIS PROFESSION WORKSHOP NOTES

There are many examples of people stepping up to take on other roles. There are more promotions than demotions. People just have to realise librarians have all these skills.

— MOUNT DRUITT FUTURE OF THE LIS PROFESSION WORKSHOP NOTES

BEYOND THE LIBRARY

Within libraries, service points are on their way out, and in the future expert assistance will be delivered at the point of need, whether this is through roving staff with handheld devices, or through staff responding to enquiries online. Services will move beyond the library walls, into the online environment.

There will also be more jobs outside traditional library settings, in information management; as part of research and special project teams; working in any organisation that requires the kind of skills we have to offer, embedded in information-hungry teams.

As well as library and information professionals finding new roles outside the library walls, there is also the probability that jobs will move to different points in the supply chain. Outsourcing is a strong possibility. There are currently companies providing library staff or carrying out fee-for-service duties such as cataloguing, but none offer a comprehensive outsourced service for library and information services in Australia at this time. That could easily change. It is a relatively small step from centralising library and information technical services to outsourcing them.

ONGOING LEARNING

It is clear that every professional, no matter what their discipline, will need to take part in professional development to keep their skills current. Scientific, technological and social advances are creating a constantly shifting landscape and disruptive change is something we all have to accommodate.

By 2020, ongoing learning will be compulsory to retain ALIA professional membership status. While some will see this as an imposition, others will recognise the increased value this will give them on their career track.

It was felt ALIA should work with major employers to make membership a requirement to hold a librarian position and that ongoing CPD should be essential. Professionals needed hard evidence of the value they bring and libraries needed to promote their role in education and literacy.

— ADELAIDE ALIA FUTURE OF THE LIS PROFESSION WORKSHOP NOTES

Continuous professional development 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.

— MOUNT DRUITT FUTURE OF THE LIS PROFESSION WORKSHOP NOTES

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.

— MOUNT DRUITT FUTURE OF THE LIS PROFESSION WORKSHOP NOTES

There is a lack of understanding and recognition for what we do and the skills required to undertake our professional tasks. People use our services but don't know who provides them or how we do it.

— MELBOURNE ALIA FUTURE OF THE LIS PROFESSION WORKSHOP NOTES

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

— MOUNT DRUITT FUTURE OF THE LIS PROFESSION WORKSHOP NOTES

THEME 09
FUTURE LEADERS

Many senior library and information professionals will be included in the retirement wave and it is essential that we build the next generation of library leaders. Succession planning is happening in many organisations and, as an association, ALIA will support this through the development of masterclasses in various aspects of leadership.

THEME 10
VISIBILITY

Something we have to be mindful about is making sure library and information professionals remain visible in their organisations, even as many services move more online.

ACTIONS ARISING

In common with other professions, the library and information profession is in a state of flux. The fundamental skills remain necessary and desirable, but organisations don't always recognise this through appropriate status and pay. There is uncertainty among professionals about how we should position ourselves, and technology brings its own special challenges and opportunities. New career paths are opening up alongside existing ones and we need to ensure we have the people, the skills and the visibility to take full advantage of these.

ALIA

- We will map and monitor the LIS workforce to identify the ebb and flow of job openings to new entrants. This will help identify when we have sufficient people in the workforce and when we need to run active recruitment campaigns.
- ALIA Training will develop further courses to support LIS professionals seeking to improve their general business and leadership skills.
- We will work with educators to ensure that LIS courses continue to evolve their technology units.
- ALIA will introduce ongoing learning as an essential part of professional membership by 2020.
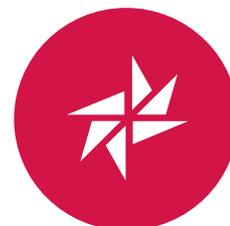
Advocacy

- We will promote the library and information sector as a positive career choice, with the aim of increasing the diversity of the workforce.
- We need to support the title 'information professional' and help construct brand values around it.
- We must ensure that library and information professionals are seen to have an important role in the big data space, potentially acting as privacy legislation watchdogs for their organisations.

Professionals and their organisations

- Library managers can aspire to management and leadership positions within their own organisations, confident that their skills make a valuable contribution.