



PROFESSIONAL PATHWAYS

Frameworks Project

Focus Group Consultation Report
Dr Gillian Hallam

May 2022



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. For more information visit: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0>.

Professional Pathways: Frameworks Project Focus Group Consultation Report

Publisher: Australian Library and Information Association, Canberra ACT, May 2022
alia.org.au

Contact: enquiries and feedback are welcomed and can be directed to: education@alia.org.au



Australian Library and
Information Association

Executive Summary

The goal of the ALIA Professional Pathways project is to strengthen the Australian library and information science (LIS) profession by building a valued, supported and diverse workforce, equipped with the knowledge, skills and ethics required to deliver high quality library and information services across the country.

To build the necessary evidence-base for the project, an extensive literature review and environmental scan was commissioned to undertake background research into the professional and academic discussions relating to existing and potential pathways into the profession. The *Technical Report* (ALIA, 2022a), released in March 2022, examined a range of topics, including LIS frameworks, professional ethics and values, qualification pathways, future views of education and training, continuous professional development and professional status.

In the key findings it was noted that while core professional knowledge, values and ethics sat at the heart of professional practice and professional identity, there was currently no sector-wide Australian framework of knowledge, skills and ethical behaviour to support the learning and development needs of all LIS professionals. It was acknowledged that the current academic qualifications accredited by ALIA continued to be very important, and that in addition a range of approaches was required to effectively support the development of the range of knowledge and skills required for the different specialised areas of practice. While there were opportunities to develop new pathways into the profession, it was critical that they were founded on a shared understanding of the wider library and information environment and encompassed the core principles of professional identity, professional values and ethical behaviour.

The ALIA Professional Pathways Board made four recommendations: (1) to develop a sector-wide framework of knowledge, skills and ethical behaviour, informed by the *Foundation knowledge for entry-level library and information professionals* (ALIA, 2020a), the findings from the *Technical Report* (ALIA, 2022a), and stakeholder consultations; (2) to work with LIS educators to strengthen the accredited courses; (3) to develop new professional pathways; and (4) to progress an employer engagement strategy.

As part of the stakeholder consultation activities proposed in Recommendation 1, the Professional Pathways Board commissioned a series of focus groups to explore the ideas of the professional framework, professional identity and active professionalism. Sixty-five people attended the 11 online focus groups held in late February to early March 2022. The focus group participants identified themselves as being at different career stages, with varied educational and professional experiences, and employed in a wide range of roles.

The discussions were guided by three professional scenarios, with the participants' contributions framed by their ideas about LIS knowledge, skills, values and ethical behaviour. The scenarios related to (1) the new graduate's desire for a successful and rewarding career; (2) the experienced LIS practitioner moving from one area of specialised practice to another; and (3) the new employee moving into the LIS field from another industry. The scenarios resonated with the focus group participants and they drew on their own professional experiences to provide insightful examples of their philosophy and practice. They were passionate about the career path they had chosen, but they

recognised that library and information services and programs were becoming increasingly multidisciplinary in nature.

The thematic analysis of the focus group transcripts revealed seven key themes:

- The individual's career journey
- Pathways into the library and information profession
- Education for the library and information profession
- Professional knowledge and skills
- Active professionalism
- The contemporary library and information profession
- Framework of knowledge and skills.

The nuanced discussion of these themes in the report includes the participants' own words integrated into the narrative to illustrate how the thematic interpretations arose from the qualitative data. There was close alignment with the findings from the *Technical Report* (ALIA, 2022a) and, significantly, the focus group participants expressed their keen interest in the development of a comprehensive framework that reflected the requirements for a thriving profession.

Although the majority of focus group participants agreed that they had enjoyed successful and rewarding careers, there was a degree of uncertainty about the future might hold. In a rapidly changing world, there were fears about the profession's ability to stay abreast of all the social, technological and educational developments and the potential impact of a shifting employment market. Much needed to be done in the LIS sector to build a workforce which better reflected the diversity of age, gender, ability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultural backgrounds found in wider society. They believed that the closure of many of the accredited LIS courses in Australia limited the opportunities to meet the demand for new and complex professional skillsets. Employers were therefore finding it increasingly difficult to attract candidates with the appropriate qualifications and skills to design and deliver the evolving range of programs and services offered by library and information services.

At the same time, Australian educators and employers were exploring the potential of moving away from expensive tertiary professional degrees to introduce shorter-form credentials which might better suit a dynamic and flexible workforce. For many professions, micro-credentialling represents the opportunity to reduce the reliance on an academic qualification and, instead, to emphasise the value of an individual's expertise and experience. Focus group participants acknowledged the interdisciplinary nature of contemporary library and information practice and appreciated the diversity of perspectives and skills that were brought in from other sectors. As the importance of welcoming newcomers was recognised, discussions focused on strategies to help them transition into the LIS sector. Flexible short courses or micro-credentials, along with support from a mentor, could help them develop their understanding of the wider library and information environment, the immediate organisational context and the culture, values and ethics of the LIS profession.

The participants found that, in general, the domains of knowledge outlined in the document *Foundation knowledge for entry-level library and information professionals* (ALIA, 2020a) represented the core areas of professional knowledge. It was agreed that, as the immediate professional context could result in areas of specialisation characterised by a distinctive language, culture and mindset,

there was often a danger of silos developing within the profession. There was criticism for the perceived reluctance to appreciate both the transferability of skillsets across the specialisations and the value that multi-sector experience could bring. Employers needed to be more open-minded when recruiting new staff. Participants believed that a toolkit with illustrative examples of how skillsets were applied in the diverse areas of professional activity could help break down the silos and offer people insights into alternative career paths. Again, there was a possibility for micro-credentials to help prepare people to move within and between sectors.

The concept of active professionalism was viewed as a key ingredient for a successful and rewarding career. While the dynamic nature of the library and information field inevitably required a deep commitment to career-long learning and development, responsibilities were shared by the individual, the employer and the professional association. Reference was made to the Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) in the United Kingdom and the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA) in New Zealand, where professional registration programs encouraged members to articulate professional identity by mapping their career experiences to the sector's framework of knowledge and skills, and to revalidate their professional status by completing and reflecting on professional learning activities. The CILIP model included the opportunity for individuals, supported by their employers, to build their career trajectory by levelling up through the different categories of professional registration.

Focus group participants expressed strong support for strategies which would present the knowledge and skills required by active professionals employed in a dynamic and innovative industry and support the potential career pathways that exist beyond the attainment of a specific academic qualification. The key findings from these focus group consultations will guide the development of a draft framework of knowledge, skills and ethical behaviour, as recommended by the ALIA Professional Pathways Board. As an iterative process, the developmental work will feed into a further round of sector-wide consultations about the concepts prepared by the Professional Pathways project team.

Key findings

The focus group consultations represented an opportunity for LIS professionals to explore and discuss the challenges and opportunities of the evolving work environment and to consider strategies to create a sustainable future for the library and information profession. Four key findings have been distilled from the thematic analysis and interpretation of the research data:

1. The value of a sector-wide, whole-of-career framework is recognised. A framework can play multiple roles, including but not limited to:
 - Expressing the vital significance of our core values and ethical principles
 - Providing a visible structure to our field of practice
 - Articulating our contemporary identity
 - Supporting LIS education and training
 - Delineating professional roles in specialised fields of practice
 - Identifying areas where the LIS profession intersects with other disciplines
 - Boosting recruitment into the profession
 - Structuring the ALIA CPD scheme
 - Coordinating CPD activities and resources
 - Underpinning advocacy at the organisational and sector levels.

2. Three essential elements of a potential framework were distilled from the findings from the *Technical Report*, the *Foundation knowledge* document and the focus group consultations: foundation domains, professional knowledge domains and active professionalism.

- Foundation domains
 - Ethics and values
 - Wider information contexts
 - Sector and organisational contexts
- Professional knowledge domains
 - Information services
 - Information management
 - Literacies and learning
 - Digital technologies
 - Community engagement
 - Research
 - Leadership and management
- Active professionalism
 - Professionalism
 - Behavioural skills.

The Professional Pathways project team should draw on these concepts to create a graphic representation of the draft framework.

3. The sector-wide framework of knowledge, skills and expertise will support further consultation about the optimal pathways to professional status, encompassing:

- Accredited LIS qualifications
- Recognised micro-credentials to support transition into the LIS sector
- Professional registration and revalidation
- Levels of professional status aligned with career advancement
- Recognition of commitment to ongoing professional development.

4. The future of the Australian library and information profession depends on constructive collaboration between all stakeholders:

- Individual professionals
- Employers
- LIS educators
- LIS training providers
- Professional associations.

The Professional Pathways initiative is viewed as a major opportunity for ALIA to engage these stakeholder groups in strategies to address the many and varied challenges facing the profession. The sector-wide framework has the potential to serve as a mechanism to foster professional cohesion.

Contents

Executive Summary	i
Key findings.....	iii
1. Introduction	3
2. Focus group methodology	5
2.1 Aims of the focus group consultations	6
2.2 Focus group consultation activities	6
2.3 Focus group participants.....	8
2.4 Analysis of the qualitative data.....	10
3. Thematic analysis of the focus group discussions	11
3.1 The individual’s career journey.....	11
3.2 Pathways into the library and information profession	13
3.3 Education for the library and information profession	16
3.4 Professional knowledge and skills.....	19
3.5 Active professionalism	22
3.6 The contemporary library and information profession	27
3.7 Framework of knowledge and skills.....	30
4. Conclusions and key findings	34
Key findings.....	37
References	39
Appendix	41
<i>ALIA Foundation knowledge for entry-level library and information professionals</i>	41

List of abbreviations

AHRI	Australian HR Institute
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIM	Australian Institute of Management
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
ALA	American Library Association
ALIA	Australian Library and Information Association
ALLA	Australian Law Librarians' Association
ANZOG	Australian and New Zealand School of Government
APLA	Australian Public Library Alliance
ARMS	Australian Research Management Association
ASA	Australian Society of Archivists
ASLA	Australian School Library Association
CAUL	Council of Australian University Librarians
CILIP	Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
EAG	ALIA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Expert Advisory Group
IAP2	International Association for Public Participation
IFLA	International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
LIANZA	Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa
LIS	Library and information science
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
PD	Professional Development
PKSB	Professional Knowledge and Skills Base
SFIA	Skills Framework for the Information Age
UTS	University of Technology Sydney
VET	Vocational education and training

1. Introduction

This report documents the focus group consultation activities undertaken by ALIA in early 2022 as part of the Professional Pathways initiative. The overarching goal of the four-year project is to revitalise the Australian library and information science (LIS) profession by building a valued, supported and diverse workforce, equipped with the knowledge, skills and ethics needed to deliver quality library and information services which anticipate and meet the needs of communities across the country.

In mid-2021, the ALIA Professional Pathways Board commissioned an extensive literature review and environmental scan to examine and synthesise the professional and academic discussions on the wide-ranging topics that relate to the issues associated with existing and potential pathways into the library and information science (LIS) profession. The research activities considered five areas of enquiry:

- What is the competency profile of a library and information professional? How do different skills frameworks present the knowledge, skills and attributes that are required to deliver quality services to our communities?
- What is our understanding of the values and ethics that distinguish the library and information profession from other fields?
- What are the different qualification pathways into the library and information profession here in Australia, and in other countries? How do these pathways compare with those in other professions such as accounting, law data management and architecture?
- With a rapidly changing working environment driven by technological developments, what are the emerging trends in professional qualification pathways? How do different stakeholder groups, including educators and employers in industry and the professions, view the opportunities and challenges of micro-credentials?
- What about the imperative for continuing professional development? How do professional associations encourage and support career-long learning and development?

The discussion presented in the *Technical Report* (ALIA, 2022a) examined the issues relating to LIS skills frameworks, professional ethics and values, qualification pathways, future views of education and training, continuous professional development and professional status. The findings distilled from the research highlighted some of the key factors impacting on the LIS profession in Australia:

1. Alongside core professional knowledge, values and ethics sit at the centre of professional practice and professional identity; these differentiate the library and information profession from other sectors.
2. When reviewed in light of national and international skills and competency frameworks, ALIA's *Foundation knowledge for entry-level library and information professionals* (2020a) is current and relevant, and provides a solid base for further developmental work.
3. There is currently no comprehensive Australian framework of knowledge, skills and ethical behaviour that represents a sector-wide, whole-of-career resource, capable of supporting the learning and development needs of all library and information professionals.
4. The current ALIA-accredited higher education and vocational education qualifications provide important pathways into the profession. Strong industry engagement and support is important to ensure that courses continue to respond to the needs of the sector.

5. There are many diverse areas of specialised practice, within and across library and information sectors, that are critical to the functioning of the sector. It is acknowledged that the different specialisations require a range of approaches to support the development of the knowledge and skills needed for professional practice.
6. There are opportunities for ALIA to work with library and information educators, employers and key stakeholders to develop new pathways into the profession at different levels. Pathways should encompass the core principles of professional identity, professional values and professional ethics, and an understanding of the wider library and information environment. Successful professional transition programs and/or credentialled pathways may provide useful models.
7. In a rapidly changing world, the imperative for continuing professional development (CPD) is widely acknowledged. Professional associations are in a strong position to encourage and support career-long learning and to formally recognise CPD as an essential component for attaining and revalidating professional status. The current ALIA CPD Scheme could be reviewed and strengthened, with consideration given to the concept of revalidation of professional status.
8. There is scope for further work to encourage active professionalism as an individual and collective attribute that is integral to all areas of practice and all interactions with others. The cultivation of active professionalism will support a whole-of-career perspective of employment in the library and information sector.
9. The challenges and opportunities that ALIA is seeking to address through this project are neither unique to one library and information sector nor to Australia. To respond to the dynamic environment and to address the challenges, a whole-of-sector approach is required. The cross-cutting and global nature of the issues provides opportunities to consult with international professional bodies to achieve common objectives.

Members of the ALIA Professional Pathways Board met to discuss the *Technical Report* and its findings. The Board made four recommendations to guide the next stages of the Professional Pathways Initiative:

Recommendation 1: Develop a framework of knowledge, skills and ethical behaviour

It is recommended that ALIA develops a comprehensive framework of knowledge, skills and ethical behaviour that represents a sector-wide, whole-of-career resource, supporting the learning and development needs of all library and information professionals while recognising specific needs of areas of specialisation. The framework should be developed in consultation with people across the sector, and draw from the evidence in this report and ALIA's *Foundation knowledge for entry-level library and information professionals* (2020a).¹

Recommendation 2: Work with educators to strengthen accredited courses

It is recommended that ALIA work with educators and the industry to strengthen the ALIA-accredited qualifications with specific attention to industry engagement, practical experience, and quality improvement. ALIA should work with educators to better track the student cohort diversity measures and to attract and support talented students from diverse backgrounds.

¹ ALIA's policy document, *Foundation knowledge for entry-level library and information professionals* is presented in the Appendix to this report.

Recommendation 3: Develop new professional pathways

It is recommended that in implementing the new framework (Recommendation 1) consideration is given to new pathways into the profession, professional registration, and revalidation of professional status. ALIA should work with educators and other partners to identify existing and potential CPD offerings which will integrate with the new framework.

Recommendation 4: Progress an employer engagement strategy

It is recommended that ALIA develop an employer engagement strategy to build a deeper appreciation of the importance and value of professionalism, continuing professional development, and the whole-of-career framework as implemented.

Accordingly, the Professional Pathways Board underscored the need for ALIA to develop a comprehensive framework of knowledge, skills and ethical behaviour as a sector-wide, whole-of-career resource to guide and support professional learning and development. Consideration was to be given to the opportunities to strengthen the traditional pathways into the profession, to develop new pathways and to introduce strategies for professional registration and the revalidation of professional status. As part of the consultation process proposed in Recommendation 1, the Board requested that a series of focus groups be conducted to explore the concepts of the professional framework, professional identity and active professionalism.

In Chapter 2 this report, a review of the focus group methodology is presented to introduce the aims of the consultations, to describe the administrative arrangements for the focus group sessions and to outline the profile of the focus group participants. An overview of the processes involved in the collection and content analysis of the qualitative research data is provided. The principal themes identified in the focus group discussions are reviewed in Chapter 3. The themes include issues relating to the contemporary LIS profession, insights into the individual's career journey, concerns about LIS education and the characteristics of the fields of professional knowledge and skills. The challenges and opportunities for diverse pathways into the LIS profession are explored, as well as the concept of active professionalism. The thematic analysis closes with a summary of the focus group participants' views about a potential sector-wide, whole-of-career framework. Chapter 4 presents the conclusions drawn from the research activities and outlines the key findings.

2. Focus group methodology

As a qualitative research approach, the focus group methodology applied in the ALIA Professional Pathways project involved purposeful sampling. Palinkas et al. (2016) described purposeful sampling as a technique to identify and select individuals who are knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Patton, 2015), who are available, willing to participate and provide detailed information based on their unique perspectives (Billups, 2020) and who are able to communicate their perceptions, views and experiences in an articulate, expressive and reflective manner (Bernard, 2017; Spradley, 1979).

Invitations to be a focus group participant were extended to all those people who had already indicated their interest in being involved in the Professional Pathways consultation activities and to those who had provided feedback on the draft *Technical Report* (ALIA, 2022a). A media release was also

distributed through ALIA's social media channels in late January 2022 as an open call for focus group participants (ALIA, 2022b). Efforts were made to ensure that all LIS sectors were represented in the profile of participants.

Recognising that the different pathways and challenges experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in library and information services, the Professional Pathways Board directed the research team to ensure that specific data collection activities were undertaken with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The general focus group activities were undertaken in late February – mid-March 2022. This timing overlapped with the establishment of the ALIA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Expert Advisory Group (EAG), announced on 8 March 2022 (ALIA, 2022c). While the timelines for the consultations unfortunately did not allow sufficient time to invite the new members of the EAG to participate in the scheduled sessions, the research team held exploratory discussions with several representatives of the EAG in early May.

2.1 Aims of the focus group consultations

The principal aim of the Professional Pathways focus group consultations was to invite members of the library and information workforce to consider the areas of knowledge, skills and ethical behaviour that could or should be included in a sector-wide, whole-of-career framework designed to support the learning and development needs of all library and information professionals, including those working in specialised areas of practice. In addition, the focus groups should offer participants the opportunity to explore the concept of professional identity and to reflect on the value of active professionalism in the library and information sector. ALIA's development of a whole-of-career knowledge and skills framework would be guided by the findings from the focus group discussions. It was determined that the resulting framework, along with any strategies required to support library and information professionals in achieving and maintaining professional status, would be disseminated as drafts for further stakeholder consultation.

2.2 Focus group consultation activities

The focus group sessions were scheduled for the period 23 February - 11 March 2022. A range of timeslots, spread across the morning, afternoon and evening, were made available to accommodate the different participants' preferences and work commitments. The actual make-up of each focus group session was determined by the participants themselves, with individuals selecting the day and time of the session they wish to attend. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the discussions were held online using the Microsoft Teams platform. Initially 13 meetings were planned, but this was reduced to 11 as a result of the disruptive impact of the major floods that occurred across Eastern Australia.

In an outline of the principles of research ethics it was emphasised that, while the qualitative data collected during the discussions would be recorded and transcribed, all contributions would be treated confidentially and would remain completely anonymous. It was advised that the research findings would be published in ALIA's research reports, as well as more broadly in the professional literature. It was made clear that the participants' decision to join the focus groups was completely voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the activities at any time without comment or penalty.

The people who registered for the focus groups were provided with an information pack which provided the background to the Professional Pathways project and the objectives of the focus group consultations:

- *Foundation knowledge for entry-level library and information professionals* (ALIA, 2020a)
- *Professional Pathways Frameworks Project: Technical report* (ALIA, 2022a)
- *Professional Pathways Frameworks Project: Technical report overview* (ALIA, 2022d).

Each focus group activity was scheduled as a two-hour event. The sessions opened with an Acknowledgement of Country, after which the participants were welcomed and invited to introduce themselves. The facilitator then provided a short presentation to ensure that participants had a shared understanding about the project and the intentions for the focus group activities. The structure of the discussions was guided by three professional scenarios, with participants encouraged to frame their ideas in the light of professional knowledge, skills, values and ethical practice.

Scenario 1: Career-long learning and development

Your studies have provided you with the requisite *foundation knowledge* and you are employed in the library and information sector. You know that you are working in a rapidly changing and ever-evolving field. What do you think will help you enjoy a successful and rewarding career?

Scenario 2: Changing sectors

Over the past decade, you have really enjoyed working in Library A, with your professional growth recognised through several promotions. At an ALIA networking event, a friend suggests that you might be interested in a new higher-level position that has been created in Library B, which is in a different LIS sector.

You are excited by this opportunity, apply and are offered an interview. In preparing for the interview, you think about the questions you will be asked about moving from one LIS sector to another. What ideas will you share about the transition to a different area of professional practice?

Scenario 3: Employer choice

In the post-COVID-19 world, there is clear evidence of the competition for talent. The pandemic has encouraged people to re-evaluate their employment options, and many are prepared to take a pay cut to move into a more values-driven organisation.

With many older, highly experienced workers retiring from the library and information sector, employers are desperately trying to attract new staff. One library manager offers a job to the 'standout applicant' who has exactly the key skillsets being sought, although their qualifications and experience have been gained in a different industry.

What do you think will help the new staff member quickly adapt to the library and information sector?

To ensure consistency in the data collection, all sessions were facilitated by the same moderator. The three scenarios were presented verbatim, in the same order, to all groups. It was found that the scenarios resonated with many of the participants who confidently discussed their own professional experiences and provided rich examples of their philosophy and practice drawn from the library and information sectors in which they were currently working or had worked in the past. The focus groups concluded with the participants sharing their views about what elements might be included in a sector-wide, whole-of-career framework, along with the potential value of such as resource.

2.3 Focus group participants

A total of 65 people accepted the invitation to attend the focus groups, with the number of participants in each session ranging from two to eight participants. The study involved a relatively homogenous population, with all participants currently employed in the library and information sector, or recently retired. It was common for people's careers to have spanned multiple LIS sectors, with only a very small proportion of participants reporting that they had been employed in a single field. Some participants reported that during their career they had worked across the wider spectrum of the sector, for example not only in libraries, but also with library systems vendors or publishing houses. During the discussions, the participants drew upon their diverse career experiences and shared their perspectives about differences between sectors.

In order to gain an understand the profile of research respondents, the participants were asked to indicate in which LIS sector they were currently or most recently employed. The sectors in which the largest number of participants were working were public libraries (n=14), academic libraries (n=14) and health library and information services (n=13). This was followed by National, State and Territory libraries (n=7) and school libraries (n=6). A smaller number of participants were drawn from vocational education and training (VET) libraries (n=3), special libraries (n=3) and law libraries (n=2). Several other participants identified themselves as consultants (n=3). This data is presented graphically in Figure 1.

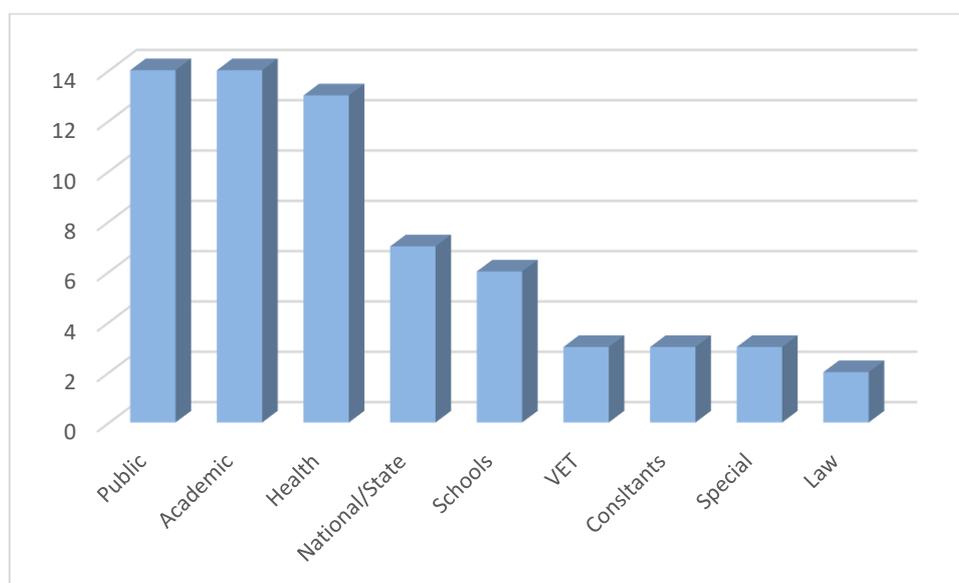


Figure 1: Focus group participants – sector representation

Several reported that they worked in dual sector organisations, such as a combined library and archival service, a university health library and information service, or a joint public and school library service. Beyond this, it was noted that some people had international experience, for example in the United Kingdom, Europe, New Zealand or with international organisations.

The positions held by the participants ranged from library assistants working with smaller regional library services through to the directors of large LIS institutions in metropolitan areas. While the majority of participants held LIS qualifications, a number advised that they had joined the library and

information sector after gaining qualifications in other disciplines and working in fields such as teaching, vocational education and training, youth work, community learning, community arts, research, law, defence, etc.

The interest in a whole-of-career framework stimulated a question about the participants' understanding of their current 'career stage': they were invited to write in the chat stream how they identified themselves, based on the groupings commonly used in human resource management (Early career / Mid-career / Late career / Retired) and/or those referenced by the teaching profession (Graduate / Proficient / Highly accomplished / Lead) (AITSL, 2017). It was found that there was a distribution of career stages across these career stages: early career (n=9); mid-career or proficient (n=22); and late career, lead or retired (n=26). A number of participants felt they sat between the two stages of mid-career and late career (n=8). This data is presented in Figure 2.

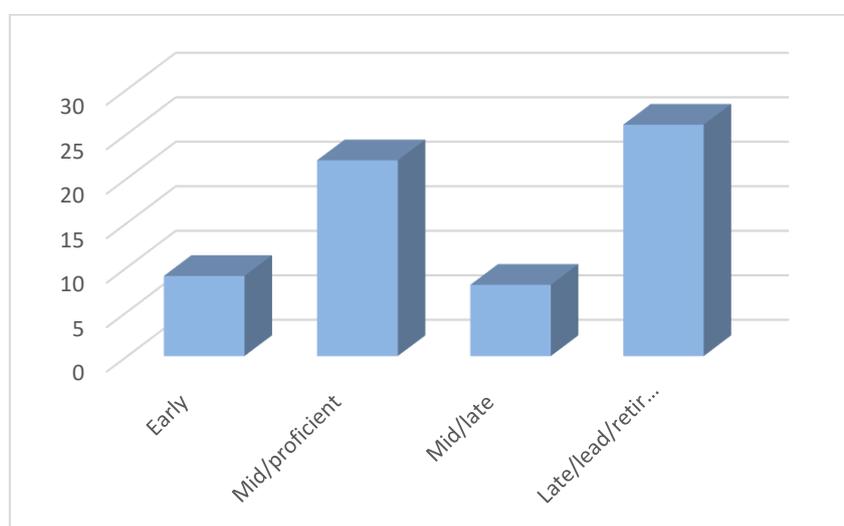


Figure 2: Focus group participants – career stages

While individuals personally selected the timeslot for the focus group that they attended, it was observed that the natural mix of participants in each session reflected a variety of LIS sectors, career stages and geographic locations. It was noted, however, that while the detailed data was not specifically captured, participants were predominantly drawn from metropolitan areas, with only a relatively small proportion working in regional, rural or remote areas.

When asked about the motivation for attending the focus groups, the majority of participants outlined their interest in the ALIA Professional Pathways project and its outcomes. A number of people reported that the professional association had played an important role in shaping their careers and they felt it was an opportunity to 'give back' to the profession by being actively involved in the project. Some participants specifically outlined their deep interest in the skills required for professional practice, especially with the existing sectoral variations and the evolving areas of service delivery. As it was not uncommon to have entered the LIS profession as a second or third career, the notion of barriers to entering the profession and the potential for alternative pathways were also outlined. While some participants highlighted their passion for continuing professional development, lifelong learning and professional growth, others emphasised their interests in staff development and the opportunities for

micro-credentialling in the library and information profession. Significantly, some people had accepted the invitation to participate in the focus groups because of a sense of professional disillusionment, with concerns about the challenges evident in LIS education in Australia, about ALIA's course accreditation activities, and about the quality of graduate outcomes. There was a keen desire to play an active part in the conversations about the improvements that they felt were needed across the library and information profession.

2.4 Analysis of the qualitative data

The focus group discussions were captured using the auto-transcription function in Microsoft Teams. The transcription data was reviewed and cleaned to correct any linguistic misinterpretations resulting from the auto-transcription functionality and to clarify acronyms and local place names. The narrative text was then copied into an Excel spreadsheet in preparation for content analysis. A coding scheme with thematic categories was developed and tested for its validity, with the goal of achieving coding consistency between the two coders (Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Krippendorff, 2013; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). As the coders had worked closely together during the first stage of the Professional Pathways project which involved the literature review and environmental scan, as well as during the planning and operational phases of the focus group activities, they had a common understanding of the topics and issues. This undoubtedly contributed to the high level of inter-rater agreement between the coders, resulting in a positive degree of consistency in the coding schema.

The coding schema was initially developed as a pilot schema by analysing the content of the raw data gathered in the first two focus groups. The initial coding structure comprised 12 thematic codes and 92 sub-codes. In the analysis of the subsequent transcripts, one further thematic code and 23 sub-codes were included to the coding schema to accommodate additional concepts that were presented. The number of sub-codes reflected the interplay between factual data, e.g. the diverse LIS sectors or categories of LIS qualifications, and more descriptive data which required a deeper level of interpretation, e.g. the different nuances of an individual's career journey, the diverse facets of professional knowledge and skills, and the potential role and value of a new professional framework.

Once the validity of the codes had been established, the coding work was undertaken by one coder, with secondary coding of random samples of data undertaken by the second coder to verify the quality of the data analysis. The transcripts of the 11 focus group sessions were analysed to identify the salient themes and patterns stimulated by the participants' discussions about the scenarios. While each focus group discussion had its own flavour as a result of the make-up and dynamic of the group, thematic alignment was evident. Seven themes were distilled from the data:

- The individual's career journey
- Pathways into the library and information profession
- Education for the library and information profession
- Professional knowledge and skills
- Active professionalism
- The contemporary library and information profession
- Framework of knowledge and skills.

These themes are discussed in the following chapter.

3. Thematic analysis of the focus group discussions

As reported earlier, the focus group participants were drawn from different library and information sectors: they identified themselves as being at diverse career stages, had a variety of educational experiences and were working in a wide range of roles. The perspectives they shared in each of the focus groups were rich and nuanced, with seven common themes emerging. These themes are explored in the discussion that follows, with the participants' own words reported to demonstrate how the interpretations have arisen from the qualitative data (Patton, 2015).

3.1 The individual's career journey

Many of the focus group participants shared stories about their career journey, reflecting on the professional and personal attributes that had helped them enjoy 'a successful and rewarding career' as delineated in Scenario 1. They advised that the library and information discipline had initially appealed to them because of the range of skills required – especially the technical aspects – along with the profession's strong focus on helping others. They emphasised the sense of curiosity and the desire to learn as being key factors for them:

LIS people tend to be curious and self-driven and to automatically update their skills.

The Australian Public Library Alliance (APLA) has stated that libraries are defined by the services they offer and the ways they deliver those services to the community (APLA, 2021). This focus on service to the community was found to be a key characteristic of the field for many participants:

Service is at the core of what we do. A lot of our self-directed learning is due to the difficulties that we encounter on behalf of our patrons.

We are customer service based: we need to understand how much our work is about the client.

No matter which sector, we need to understand clients, community. We need to understand personality types, introverts/extroverts. We need to know how to work with people. We need people skills in the widest sense.

Being in touch with the local community. We need the soft skills that relate to understanding the communities we serve.

Thus, the essence of understanding customers and community, underpinned by curiosity, was highly valued by many of the participants. One person added that they were drawn to the field through their deep interest in social justice.

One participant suggested that, for library and information professionals, generic skills were not actually 'generic': they should in fact be considered 'professional' skills. Communication skills were viewed as "non-negotiable for library and information professionals", as they were essential for all areas of practice and were applied in many different professional settings, e.g. when interviewing clients to identify their specific information needs, or when advocating for their library and for the profession.

The ability to articulate our skillsets within the environments we are working in is the number one skill for special library people.

Advocacy is critical in school libraries – both to the student body and the executive. Advocacy must be core.

Nevertheless, participants warned that the career journey could be very challenging for new library and information professionals:

It was difficult to get onto the first rung of the career ladder.

At the start of your career, you are just so happy to get a job!

Some new entrants had “climbed the ladder” within the library service they had joined, attaining their academic qualifications along the way. However, the lack of knowledge about different career options within the sector often resulted in new professionals becoming quickly siloed:

New graduates need to know what opportunities they have to access, especially in regional areas.

When the playing field of potential roles is unclear, then it's tough.

You aren't necessarily aware of the whole library and information landscape. It would be useful to know what the different avenues are that you could be following.

It was noted that since students were seldom given the opportunity to specialise during their course, the duty to explain the sectoral differences often fell to experienced members of the profession. Focus group participants agreed that “new graduates generally come with broad foundation skills” but also stressed that those skills could not exist in isolation. The contextualisation of their knowledge was essential from day one, ideally with guidance and support from their managers and colleagues:

Working with young professionals, I find it valuable to ask them what they want to learn about, what they want to achieve, to encourage self-reflection. Important to be able to link them to something within the library, or to a project, that will help them achieve their personal goals.

It was suggested that some form of professional support at an early stage of their careers would be really advantageous. One participant noted that “a set of guidelines might be useful”, while others pointed to the vital importance of professional interaction: “it helps for new graduates to feel connected to a group”.

It was acknowledged that many people joining the LIS profession were embarking on their second or third career:

They have different ideas about their career trajectory, so they require a different type of support.

These people may be dependent on local employment as their personal life centred on their children and family, or they might need to support the household with a second income. This cohort of new entrants was of immense value to the profession:

Second career people: they are really great! They have great life skills. Many are allied professionals, for example lots of finance and systems professionals. What they all love is the public good aspect. They are really invested in the work. We need to emphasise that.

There was general agreement that the individual needed to be prepared to shape their own career journey:

Once you have your qualifications, then that's when the work starts.

A successful and rewarding career needs to be underpinned by curiosity, initiative, being self-motivated, looking for areas for self-study, and being able to develop their own networks.

Once people had moved into a new job, there was an expectation that they would accept responsibility for their own career development. Several participants provided insights into how they had managed this situation:

For me, I was out doing extra-curricular things: being on committees, doing research, applying for scholarships etc. I grew up in my LIS career in the UK under the CILIP system (pre-PKSB). In the profession it was culturally accepted that you would get chartered, so I did, and that provided me with a wealth of opportunities to develop 'off the job'.

It was stressed that there was always a risk that recent graduates could sabotage their career opportunities if they did not demonstrate self-reliance.

Alternative viewpoints were expressed by other participants, however, who emphasised the role of employers in career development: they have “a responsibility to actively support and develop staff, for example through secondments and project opportunities”. It was therefore incumbent on the employer to ensure that their staff “were not kept in boxes” which could be seen as too easy and comfortable for all parties.

Employers should expose staff to different ideas, to different parts of the library, to counterparts in other libraries. It can be very valuable to be offered this exposure at the beginning of a career.

It was argued that employers should actively foster and promote a culture of professional learning to ensure that the workplace was inherently “a place for lifelong learning” (Thorpe, 2021). The employer’s engagement with their staff was especially important when new entrants commenced work in the LIS sector before they had completed their professional qualifications.

In the tertiary sector, new graduates often come in via the sub-professional roles as their first jobs, e.g. on the reference desk or customer service. The employer needs to give them exposure – both through ALIA and other avenues. Things that you can't gain through a degree.

One participant expressed deep concerns about the current lack of pathways for LIS professionals to move into managerial and leadership roles. She believed that, especially in public libraries, staff could successfully reach a certain point in their career, and then it plateaued. Meanwhile, many managers and directors came into the sector from other fields “with no content knowledge”. She felt very strongly that this issue needed to be addressed, as the managers’ lack of understanding about the LIS sector could stifle professional engagement. It was incumbent on library leaders to model the opportunities to be involved in and contribute to the wider profession.

3.2 Pathways into the library and information profession

In the consultations undertaken earlier in the Professional Pathways project (ALIA, 2020b), employers in the library and information sector reported that they were already employing highly educated people from a range of different disciplines, who brought valuable knowledge and skills into the industry. Accordingly, they would welcome strategies to help people coming in from different fields to

achieve appropriate professional status. In all the focus groups, participants explored the issues associated with this changing professional landscape.

A smart library and information organisation brings in a diversity of skillsets to transform and meet the needs of the university. Diversity of people is brilliant!

It is increasingly the case that people are moving into the library and information field. The work they do doesn't require a library qualification. They get to know how the library works, but the skills they need is what they bring to their role, e.g licensing (publishing background), web designers, managing digital resources...

Lots of people work in the information and library industry in jobs where you don't need to be a librarian, for example a business manager who may rely on a librarian to understand the library.

Participants acknowledged the trend whereby staff from different disciplines were employed by their own organisation:

Two of our leadership team of five don't have any library qualifications or experience. What they bring is diversity, another perspective and skills the other three of us are not strong in.

There was general agreement that workplace strategies of “looking for and bringing in from other sectors” and “tapping into their skills and potential” reflected the growing body of research evidence about the value of an interdisciplinary workplace and how this served to strengthen the industry as a whole. Some people believed there should be a caveat that people coming into the sector “did not assume LIS expertise” because there was a danger that “they did not know what they did not know”. It was critical that the highly specialised knowledge and skillsets of qualified and experienced LIS professionals were not undermined.

The prospect of investigating the potential to broaden the membership of the association was viewed as a positive step. Reference was made to similar strategies in the United Kingdom and New Zealand where the focus had shifted away from professional status being based purely on an academic qualification to emphasise the importance of the individual's commitment to developing and maintaining the knowledge and skills required for contemporary practice.

Participants explored the opportunities and challenges associated with a person moving out of one industry to apply their expertise in the library and information sector. Several people highlighted the importance of a welcoming and supportive workforce.

We need to emphasise the welcoming nature of our sector.

We have to be welcoming to others. It's a two-way street – they can teach us too!

Anecdotes were provided of non-LIS qualified managers who had been met with negativity or even hostility in the workplace. Mentorship, to provide deeper insights into professional issues, was viewed as a valuable approach: “the onus is on us to mentor them into the profession”. It was also agreed that newcomers would benefit from an appropriate program of induction to learn about and appreciate the culture and distinctiveness of the library and information sector. Personal experiences were shared:

When I moved into the library sector, my induction did not include anything about information, information needs or access to information at all. I have just

undertaken the ALIA misinformation course and I was amazed! None of this is really discussed in my workplace. I would have appreciated a better induction into the library context, library language...

I had no qualifications when I entered the LIS field, but I gained a good understanding of where the library sat in the broader context by going to visit other libraries and being involved in project work.

Participants focused on two particular areas of contextual learning: the wider library and information environment, and the immediate organisational environment.

They need to know what the sector IS and what it exists for.

For senior roles: they need to understand how this sector works, i.e., how we collaborate, how our systems work.

Libraries are a sharing economy: that's often an alien concept for people coming in from other fields.

An understanding of and commitment to the culture, ethics and values of the library sector was viewed as paramount.

Ethics and values: I just love them! Library is a trusted brand and that is very valuable. But people think they know it all just because they have been in a library. They don't know what they don't know, which is dangerous.

They have the required skills, but they need the overarching values of the profession.

Ethics are a key part of it. Value alignment is essential.

It was stressed that senior staff should always serve "as ambassadors for professional values and ethics within the institution".

A number of participants were interested in exploring the idea of a short course or micro-credential that could support non-LIS qualified personnel when they moved into the sector. They felt that, while some people had enjoyed an easy transition, it would be advantageous for others to complete a formal learning program that was specifically created for people coming from other fields. Given the fact that these newcomers already had qualifications in other disciplines, had been employed on the basis of their skills and expertise, and were expected to maintain currency in their own specialist area, it seemed futile to expect them to complete a full degree in library and information science.

They don't need an LIS degree, but it would be good for them to do a course to get on board with ethics, access to information etc.

Micro-credentials: to pick up on the key things they need. The specific subjects would depend on the person's role in the library and information service.

Micro-credentials, developed and delivered as part of the offerings of LIS programs, could be very attractive to people who were changing sectors:

A self-paced micro-credential would be great. This would support higher education institutions, without the individual having huge personal and financial commitments. It would be manageable while working fulltime.

Maybe a qualification: a micro-credential or graduate certificate. Macro-credentials carry weight, but they are not practical. They take time.

I would be open to a Graduate Certificate. This in itself shows commitment. Complete the four subjects; take it to ALIA; get it accredited...

Several participants emphasised that the concept of a formal learning program would align well with the goal of broadening the professional profile of the ALIA membership. This could help staff from other fields achieve professional status and ensure that they were accepted and valued as members of a multidisciplinary team in the library.

Micro-credentials were seen as a valuable way to strengthen the ties between learning organisations, which offered formal learning opportunities, and the workplace, which supported informal learning. They were therefore seen as a strategy “to capitalise on the linkages between education and industry”. Micro-credentials would clearly demonstrate the individual’s willingness to invest in their own career development:

There’s a lot of potential with micro-credentials to keep building skills and diversity throughout a career.

It was felt that gaining a ‘library micro-credential’ could also encourage people to stay in the sector: they might leave a specific organisation, but then retain the value of their investment by continuing to build their professional career in LIS.

Participants thought creatively about the potential for micro-credentialling in other professional situations, for example to re-energise people “who had completed their qualifications a while ago” or when they were preparing to move, or had just moved, into a new area of specialisation. Personal strategies for career investment were illustrated with examples of academic librarians who had been “self-motivated to take on a graduate certificate in teaching, off their own bat”. A comparison was also made with the health sector, where healthcare professionals could build on their base qualification by completing micro-credentials that reflected their specialised field of practice. As many academic institutions were currently “unbundling their (macro) degrees to offer smaller, stackable credentials”, there was scope for the library and information sector itself to use micro-credentialling to model different strategies for career-long learning.

Entry-level pathways were also discussed, with the view that apprenticeships and cadetships were worthy of attention: “we need more diversity in the workforce – more younger people”. Apprenticeships could link into work-based learning in schools, as well as flexible study options at the vocational Diploma level, which could result in a long-term commitment to the LIS sector. While opportunities specifically needed to be made available to First Nations peoples, it was acknowledged that the pathways were likely to be different for those students in urban areas and those in rural and remote areas. One participant outlined a program in the Northern Territory designed to ‘grow their own’, achieved through a partnership of the library institution, academic bodies, and the relevant government departments. The potential of expanding the boundaries of the library and information profession was viewed positively by focus group participants.

3.3 Education for the library and information profession

The topic of education for the library and information profession proved to be a burning issue for focus group participants. On the one hand, there was considerable frustration about “the general disregard for the profession”, epitomised by the belief in the wider community that “anyone can do library

work". On the other hand, participants underscored the critical role the academic qualification played for professional status: "a professional is someone with a degree". The significance of having an academic qualification to be recognised as a professional in society was illustrated through examples of other career paths: "a teaching assistant, even with 20 years' experience, cannot be referred to as a 'teacher'" and "accountants can't call themselves an 'accountant' if they don't have the degree".

The vexed issue of nomenclature was raised by one participant:

The public call us all 'librarians'. I've given up explaining that I am not one!

Other participants were not overly concerned by this situation:

You are [a librarian] to them. And that's what genuinely matters.

Absolutely – it's fine if everyone is called a librarian by the public – it promotes our profession.

It was reported that in many industries, salaries were determined by the level of qualification. Some participants were therefore very concerned about the growing trend for library positions, especially in government departments, to be redesigned, with the removal of the requirement for a professional qualification. Comments about current employment practices revealed that in some situations, employers were no longer able to stipulate the need for candidates to hold a specific academic qualification when they applied for a professional role.

ALIA-recognised qualification requirements are also decreasing in my state. This is very concerning. My own role went through a redescription process and there is no longer a requirement for the person in the role to have a LIS qualification.

In other situations it was still possible to encourage applications from candidates who could demonstrate their eligibility for professional membership of an association. Participants reported that these developments could be especially problematic in the health sector, which was regarded as a highly professionalised environment; there was a very real danger that, instead of being classed as 'professionals', library and information professionals would be moved into an 'administrative' stream.

Serious concerns were expressed about the inevitable devaluation of the library and information profession if there were no longer any career pathways based on the academic qualification:

We still support having a LIS qualification, but admittedly this is decreasing. I share the concern about devaluing the profession if the qualification is no longer required.

If there's no requirement to have a qualification, the profession will go backwards.

One participant believed that "a really healthy, strong profession was evident when there was a good range of university options". The ongoing closure of LIS courses across Australia was therefore highly disturbing:

If we stop being a university-trained profession and stop having these strong links with universities, we are really going back to being a trade, rather than a profession. This is a warning sign; I am very concerned about this trajectory.

I would like to see some tenfold number of locations for university study for librarianship and the related disciplines. I also think though, that given the lack of options in that area, if we insist on only that pathway, it will not be a very effective way of modernising the workforce because it is just open to so few people, or to a particular demographic stratum of society.

While there was clear support for the notion of a more diversified profession, it was critical that “the library brand” was retained and protected:

In our sector, there’s a need to embrace both the LIS qualified staff and the ones entering the field with different careers. We need them and we need to build those relationships.

I do support ALIA broadening membership and bringing more people into the profession. We can see that many library sectors are looking for and bringing people in from other sectors. I would like the framework to satisfy the needs of new people coming in who want to enrich the profession, but also to fundamentally protect those who have fought hard to build up to the position they are in and are afraid of losing what they have established. We have to open up and broaden membership and pathways, but we also have to preserve what we have achieved.

Several participants contended that ALIA’s course accreditation processes needed to be strengthened to address the low level of satisfaction with the LIS courses:

The courses simply aren’t good enough. The teaching provided does not teach excellence: the graduates really aren’t that competent.

Teaching staff argued that they also faced a bank of challenges:

The students who apply for our courses are probably not going to be working for NASA; in some ways we have to match the courses to the people who want to be there to graduate.

I get frustrated: I feel like I’m there to produce cookie cutter people who may eventually be specialised out of practice because more and more people have those skills.

We’re educating people and give them a taste of what’s in the bakery, if you like. And if they want to go back and learn a bit more about how you do it, your true pastry, then they’ll go back and do that. And so then they can specialise a bit more.

In the vocational Diploma program, it was believed that the gap between theory and practice was too wide, with a significant disjunct between the classroom learning activities and the realities of the workplace. The clear benefits gained from a work placement were recognised, although it was argued that a two-week or three-week placement period was generally too short to achieve really effective learning outcomes. It was also noted that, for many students, their work placement had been seriously compromised by the pandemic. There were fears that many students were “missing out on developing workplace skills through their practicum, as well as missing out on the personal interactions through networking”.

Participants shared differing views about the value of their own professional qualifications. While the personal perspective naturally depended on the specific course studied, in general their program of study was found to be “too narrow”, with little or no scope to consider a specialisation or to prepare for a choice of careers. Some people were grateful for the strong foundation knowledge they had gained, supported by a sound understanding of the theoretical underpinnings. Other participants argued that they had not found their studies particularly helpful: “I had to get the piece of paper to further my career, but it was the actual experience I gained in the workplace that has been most valuable for my career”.

3.4 Professional knowledge and skills

The themes of professional knowledge and skills were explored at length in the focus group discussions, viewed through the lens of the new graduate (Scenario 1), the lens of the experienced professional changing LIS sectors (Scenario 2) and the lens of the someone joining the LIS sector from another field (Scenario 3). Participants presented differing viewpoints about whether the various areas of knowledge and skills might be considered common, specialised and/or transferable.

There was general agreement that the domains of knowledge outlined in the *Foundation knowledge for entry-level library and information professionals* (ALIA, 2020a), presented in the Appendix, were relevant to professional practice:

The foundation knowledge document underpins the academic qualifications: it articulates our core skills.

At the beginning of my career, the knowledge areas presented in the Foundation Knowledge document were at the heart of what I did.

Some participants described how they drew on their core professional knowledge when applying for positions in a different LIS sector:

Moving across sectors: it was all about the foundation knowledge. The provision of access to information etc. was at the heart of it all.

Core skills: that is what I have always sold. Information management and interpersonal skills. You can always learn specific skills on the job.

Core skills and learnings as librarians is what is transferable. Subject knowledge of the immediate field of employment is what is missing when we go from library sector to library sector.

Despite the general agreement about “the commonality across sectors”, some participants believed that the skill areas were now becoming less homogenous, with evidence of increasing divergence occurring across the different areas of practice, e.g. public libraries, academic libraries and special libraries. As this was arguably making it more difficult to transfer between the different sectors, people believed that it was critical to be able to identify, interpret and adapt their skillsets to the specific professional environment:

It was the language that was different, the different public and their different needs.

The key concepts, language of practice, client engagement, leadership and management in each of the key sector areas.

We have so much jargon: we need to learn the language. Working on the job can help socialise you into it. It can be very isolating to not know it at the beginning.

Many participants felt passionate about the fact that the library and information sector had many facets, resulting in a variety of career opportunities. Nevertheless, in several focus groups sessions, concerns were expressed that it was not a level playing field: there tended to be a “hierarchy” amongst the sectors which could impact on the value of the employees’ skillsets. It was mentioned that “public libraries are often perceived to sit at the bottom of the ladder in terms of professionalism” which could then infer that the skillsets of people working in that field were not as highly valued as those in other fields:

There was a sense that soft skills were core to service delivery in public libraries, but in more specialised areas of practice, technical skills were of greater importance.

This attitude was viewed as “unhealthy”, with the danger of damaging the profession as a whole. It was stressed that, as the national association, ALIA needed to cater more widely to the entire profession. Some participants felt that it was not currently inclusive of all sectors: “there is too much focus on public libraries”, to the detriment of other areas of professional practice. It was argued that that ALIA’s principal remit appeared to be to people working in libraries, rather than to those employed in the broader information fields.

Some participants reported that they had made the most of the opportunity to complete a short course or micro-credential that helped them move into the new field of practice, for example in health librarianship, legal research or research support services.

Although some people appreciated the fact that each sector was “special”, with the different fields of practice having their distinctive mindset and culture, comments were also made about the associated risks of compartmentalising the profession:

In my experience, the profession is too siloed.

The profession is also siloed in other countries.

However, this was found to be less apparent in regional and remote areas of the country, where recruitment activities could often be particularly challenging:

From the rural perspective, we are less siloed.

That’s one of the challenges of remote areas: it’s hard to get librarians at all.

Some don’t have the requisite skills, but you have to hire someone.

When library and information professionals had worked in the same sector for a long time, they could find it difficult to see the opportunities that may be offered in other fields:

When you are a new graduate, the first job you get can determine the rest of your career. You need to see diversity at the early career stage. There is too much specialisation too early.

There is a lack of knowledge about other sectors. After the first job, it is easy to stick to that area. Having some knowledge about what opportunities are available would be a benefit.

Given the current tightening of the employment market in Australia, there was some urgency to address the issue:

This is the future of where we are going. Some people have been in sectors for a long time and tend not to move or see commonalities. We need to break the mould.

It was noted that there were barriers to transferring between LIS sectors:

When we recruit, we are struck by how hard it is to change streams at mid-career, e.g. from public libraries into specials or health.

Changing sectors has lots of obstacles: it is difficult and there’s not much support.

I agree that it’s still quite difficult to transfer between sectors: now more than when I started in the profession when I went from school libraries to State libraries to academic libraries. I feel it is more closed off now.

“Employer reluctance” was identified one of the primary factors. The value of looking more broadly to attract staff from other LIS sectors was recognised, but it was felt that managers often failed to understand and appreciate the transferability of LIS skills:

Employers are sometimes unable to see the comparability of skills. Work needs to be done on the part of employers. Employers are often the ones who keep the strict streams between sectors, especially at senior levels.

In my experience, the profession is too siloed and transferable skills are not taken for granted or assumed by employers in the new sector: you have to make a very strong case for them.

Therefore there was a strong desire for managers to become “more open-minded” and to “make it easier in the way they conducted interviews and asked questions”. Several managers emphasised the inherent value of personal qualities:

As an employer, my hiring decisions are based on their attributes and their ability to learn.

In my library service, there’s a perception that you can teach skills, but you can’t teach attitude. So they hire people based on their aptitude and their ability to learn.

Many participants were enthusiastic about the opportunities offered when diverse perspectives were leveraged:

Mixing with people drawn from a range of sectors can be really valuable for the cross-pollination of ideas.

It was found that multi-sector networks were very valuable: while the activities were similar, radically different approaches could be applied in practice.

When engaged in community work, I enjoyed networking with my counterparts in other organisations: such an approach was very valuable in the library and information sector.

The benefits to be gained from LIS professionals moving around and “try different sectors” were noted, although some participants reported that this process could be challenging:

My background in corporate libraries meant that the public library wasn’t interested in me.

I believe that skillsets are versatile – but others’ expectations can be very different. Others may tend to think that you wouldn’t know something because you haven’t been in THAT library. However, the skills are similar and transferable.

Professional networking was emphasised as a valuable strategy to learn about a new field: “you should be talking to colleagues in other sectors so you’re not coming in cold”. One participant advised that transferring into a new sector provided people with the incentive to “re-conceptualise their environment” by being open-minded and quickly learning about the specific subject knowledge and culture of the immediate field of employment so they could apply familiar skillsets in fresh ways.

All skills are transferable, all sectors have their unique things, but we are fortunate that the base level skills are relevant across all sectors.

If you are applying for a job in a different LIS sector, you really need to do all the background research, then you need to articulate the transferability of your skills.

Job applicants needed to be able to present a strong case about understanding the common professional challenges, the relevance of their experience and the value they would bring to the new role:

I see transferable skills not only as possible, but highly relevant. They are being put into practice. But you have to argue the case for them in job interviews as you would in any other sector.

It's how you describe the work you have done and demonstrate the transferability – that's key.

Although the relevance of ALIA's foundation knowledge document was noted, there were concerns that many people had not thought deeply about how to articulate and interpret their professional experience within a framework of knowledge and skills. Recommendations were made about the guidance and support required to strengthen these professional understandings, perhaps by providing an overview of the characteristics of the major LIS fields of practice, their typical client base and the services that they provide. It was suggested that little vignettes could be developed to present "a day in the life" of library and information professionals employed in the different sectors.

Participants were very aware of the ways in which the LIS profession was changing and evolving. Libraries were offering their communities an increasingly wide selection of programs and services which inevitably demanded a broader range of skillsets. There was therefore scope to establish and formalise new multi-sector networks which would help LIS staff to recognise and appreciate the invaluable interrelationships that existed between different professional groups. Focus group participants also considered the personal qualities required by anyone working in the library and information sector, pointing to the "generic", "interpersonal" and "behavioural" skillsets and "aptitude and attitude", including curiosity, the passion for learning, and communication skills.

3.5 Active professionalism

The concept of 'active professionalism' was viewed as a vital attribute for the contemporary library and information profession, whereby members actualise their passion for continuous learning, widening their knowledge and mastering new skills in the search for professional excellence.

Whether you are a colourful, qualified librarian or whether your qualifications are from elsewhere and you are coming into the industry, I think there needs to be a really strong demonstration of ongoing commitment to the industry, because you know it works both for the library and for librarians.

Concern was expressed about 'career stasis' where library staff failed to undertake any professional development for many years; there was deep disappointment about the way some people felt that they could "complete their qualification and then stagnate".

There are some people who have been there for 30 years... They have not invested in themselves.

We need to stop the mediocrity, with people cruising around in their jobs.

There are some people who are not ambitious: what do we do with them?

Participants believed that there was an imperative for a sector-wide commitment, indeed dedication, to professional development and lifelong learning:

Just because you have a qualification doesn't mean that you are a 'professional'. It is ongoing learning that makes you a professional.

If you are employing someone who you want in your team, you want them to embrace the values and vision of LIS. You need to tell the person upfront that they have to embrace the dynamic environment they are working in.

We need more career-focused people, rather than those who just want a job.

The topic of career-long learning stimulated a rich discussion on continuing professional development. Reference was made to IFLA's *Guidelines for continuing professional development: Principles and best practices* (IFLA, 2016) where the roles and responsibilities of five stakeholder groups are identified: individual learners, employers, professional associations, LIS educators and LIS training providers. The significance and value of CPD for library and information professionals was widely acknowledged, with focus group participants considering the issues of importance to them. These discussions focused mainly on the interplay between three of the stakeholder groups: the learner, the employer and the professional association.

The learner: the individual learner is primarily responsible for pursuing ongoing learning that constantly improves knowledge and skills. Best practice places responsibility, based on regular assessment, on the individual practitioner. It demands actions to address current gaps in knowledge and skills and to prepare for future responsibilities. The goals of the individual's CPD activities are to support the organisation's goals for excellent service, to further one's own career development, and ultimately to contribute to profession-wide growth and improvement (IFLA, 2016, pp.1-2).

The employer: employers of library/information personnel are responsible for providing staff development programmes and support for continuing education. Best practice requires organisational commitment and leadership from library managers' effective policies and procedures; allocation of adequate budget and time for staff learning; and a multifaceted program that delivers training and development opportunities (IFLA, 2016, pp.2-3).

The professional association: in the interests of advancing the profession, associations and other organisations are active providers, advocates and arbiters of continuing professional development quality. Best practice begins with the recognition of the importance of professional development for staff effectiveness, which in turn enables superior information services. Best practice also ensures that there are resources and strategies that enable high quality CPD and that there are incentives for librarians and information specialists to pursue continuous learning (IFLA, 2016, pp.3-4).

The responsibilities of the individual library and information professional were weighed against the obligations of the employer. Some participants emphasised the importance of self-reliance:

There has to be a personal commitment to CPD: too few people in LIS are doing enough.

Career professionals need to keep evolving and be recognised for this. They need to be able to change perspectives, not be locked into one world view.

In the health sector, I would only employ new staff who would commit to the health PD scheme. Change is too constant and the discipline too hard to keep on top of otherwise.

It was noted that while “many staff members are proactive and go looking for PD opportunities”, a negative attitude could be evident in some workplaces where staff would only agree to participate in a PD activity if it was scheduled in work time and was funded by the employer.

It was agreed that employer commitment was a critical factor for the profession:

We need employers to support their staff; CPD is not adequately supported by employers. There are no employer incentives to do PD.

Support for CPD needs to come from leadership.

There is a need for supervisors to know about the different external PD opportunities, but it is also important that they recognise the value of on-the-job training.

The significance of employers encouraging on-the-job training was highlighted in references to the 70:20:10 model of professional learning, whereby 70% of learning time should be spent on experiential learning in the workplace, 20% on social or collaborative learning, and 10% on formal learning (Deakin University, 2018). While on-the-job learning was viewed as an imperative, given “the new demands being made of staff all the time”, one participant argued that the learning should not only be limited to the immediate practical work context, but also encompass the relevant theoretical underpinnings. Job shadowing, job exchanges, secondments and mentoring were all identified as opportunities for informal knowledge transfer.

The costs of professional development activities were raised as a major issue:

As a library manager, I believe we need more opportunities to network, with training at a price point that people can afford. Too little funding is allocated to training for smaller library services.

Need for affordable training. Need to find ways to offer economical training.

Some participants believed, however, that the COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted the traditional models of CPD: as learning activities moved online, PD and learning had become much more accessible, particularly in a country as large as Australia where travel always added a significant additional expense to any development activity.

There have been some positive outcomes: the ability to do things remotely and online. The pandemic has meant that remote learning has blossomed.

The boom in online learning is excellent for me, having lived remotely. Since it is cheaper, it has been easier to get employers on board.

Some participants believed that CPD activities were often not sufficiently inclusive:

Career-long learning and development has to be comprehensive. ALIA conferences are primarily targeting library managers, not library staff – and they are so expensive. Early career people see little in the conferences for them... There needs to be more CPD aimed at early career development.

There were concerns about the idea of ‘generic’ PD activities: people wanted to see more opportunities for learning and development in the specialised areas of LIS practice. Examples were provided relating to the PD avenues in nursing where different streams of specialisations were available within the professional framework for lifelong learning (e.g. Rehabilitation, Oncology, Cardiology or Neurology) (Queensland Health, 2018), with appropriate recognition given to the

learners' achievements. While it was agreed that widening the range and scope of learning offerings within the LIS sector could be problematic, it could open up new partnership opportunities:

We are a very small group of LIS professionals in this country. Therefore, we could explore the opportunities to partner with organisations such as FutureLearn, Amigos, Library Juice Academy etc. While many of their training sessions are asynchronous, the providers could be open to shifting delivery times to suit the Australian time zones.

One participant noted proposed cross-sector collaborations with agencies such as the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), Australian Society of Archives (ASA), Teaching Australia and Oral History Australia “to provide learning pathways for people across disciplines to maintain currency in their specialist areas within the library sector”. Many other organisations were identified as potential partners: CILIP, LIANZA, ALA, OCLC, Australian Research Management Society (ARMS), Australian Institute of Management (AIM), Australian and New Zealand School of Government (ANZOG), Australian HR Institute (AHRI), along with MOOC platforms like Udemy, Coursera etc. It would be important to look beyond the immediate sector to encompass emerging topics such as AI and machine learning. Partnerships could also be established with universities and RTOs to develop and deliver specialised learning programs as micro-credentials. It was suggested that ALIA could also investigate the opportunity to introduce an accreditation scheme for CPD activities, as CILIP had recently done.

On several occasions, comparisons were made with other professional fields, such as doctors, nurses, therapists, engineers, teachers etc., where there were formal professional requirements for CPD. It was acknowledged that, as registered professions, a proven commitment to career-long learning through mandatory CPD was easier to administer. Focus group participants working in the health sector pointed out that “when the organisation your library service is in is constantly engaged in CPD, you have to fit in”. Librarians working in schools were also keen to see how ALIA might be able to support them, as professional learning was compulsory for their teacher colleagues.

Some participants explored ideas relating to a “mid-career check-in”, or a mid-career qualification, ideally a micro-credential which was aligned with the person’s field of practice. It was noted that in Japan, for example, a program of professional certification was available to public librarians with ten years’ experience.

Several participants believed that the Professional Pathways project represented an excellent opportunity to rethink training and development and to review and reconceptualise the ALIA PD scheme. The association was challenged “to lead the way” and introduce a professional registration scheme which involved mandatory CPD, as was the case for members of CILIP in the United Kingdom, LIANZA in New Zealand, and some allied associations:

It should be a requirement to do ongoing CPD: RIMPA has a requirement for ongoing PD, to be called a ‘records professional’.

It was felt that a professional recognition pathway, like CILIP’s avenue to chartership, would be effective in attracting more public recognition and garnering greater respect for the profession:

I like the idea of registration. It provides gravitas. CPD should be baked in.

As the attainment and revalidation of professional status would serve to support the association members’ ongoing engagement with the industry, there was interest in diverse pathways that would

embrace both LIS-qualified staff and those with who had joined the sector to provide their knowledge and expertise gained in another field.

I work with a large number of people who are developing chips on their shoulders about their commitment to this sector, the amount they've put in over the years, and the fact that we don't give them any level of recognition. They don't want to catalogue. They want to continue to work on library data systems which are quite specific, or support managing consortia for e-resources. But they do want to be recognised as part of our professional community because that's important. So I think we if put that recognition piece into play, that helps that cohort as well.

One person indicated that she found the alternative pathways presented in the LIANZA documentation very easy to follow and she hoped that ALIA would ensure that any new pathways would be simple and clearly articulated.

A participant who had worked in the United Kingdom believed that CILIP's pathways to achieve registered status were "culturally accepted by the profession". It was emphasised that any new professional registration scheme should be flexible, with differing levels that supported "different pathways so that people can plan their own way to be recognised":

It would require flexibility, with multiple pathways, allowing people with differing experiences to validate their skills.

The focus should be on skills, rather than qualifications. We don't place enough value on professional experience.

Some concerns were expressed about the possible negative impact that mandatory CPD might have: there was a risk of people only undertaking professional learning activities "if they were made to do it". It was agreed that the argument for professional registration should be founded upon the ethos of active professionalism.

Several participants reported that they had become active professionals early on in their career due to the encouragement, guidance and support from a mentor:

When I started work, I had a mentor who took me to ALIA meetings, left brochures and conference information on my desk: she was a beacon of opportunities.

Mentoring was important: I was very lucky to be in a public library with people on an ALIA committee who showed me the value... And then I joined ALIA and went onto the committee too.

It was found that mentoring opened people's eyes to so many different professional experiences beyond their work role:

Only knowing life in the immediate workplace is too narrow: it is essential to understand the wider environment, to open your eyes to what is there and what might be different or missing in the local context.

I was exposed to group meetings that were 'above level' where I learned a lot.

Other participants genuinely regretted the fact that they had not had a similar mentoring experience: they often had to "learn the hard way" as at the beginning of their career, when they really did not know what they did not know:

I worked for years solo where there was no mentor and I had to work out a lot on my own.

I was too isolated in a small library: I would have appreciated someone to guide me during the early days.

It was acknowledged that the ALIA mentoring program had been “hugely successful” in helping people adapt to and understand the context and environment in which they were working and become more aware of the trends and the inherent challenges across the sector.

One of the greatest benefits from mentoring was learning about the value of professional networking, with the mentor “facilitating the ability of new people to get involved in networks and to attend events”.

Networking provides opportunities to meet people. To see what’s out there.

Networking: it’s a really defining aspect of our profession.

The main thing is knowing who knows what and how to call on them. And this comes from being useful yourself. Cultivating opportunities to be useful.

Participants asserted that the advantages of networking extended beyond local and national boundaries:

It is also important to look beyond Australia. Become a member of other professional associations – LIANZA, CILIP, ALA etc. Participate in their events!

It was stressed that the process of networking and mentoring was a two-way street. Those people who had benefitted from having a mentor recognised the significance of becoming a mentor themselves, to support and guide others as they built their career:

The onus is on us to mentor new people into the profession, new graduates and career change people.

It was felt that mentorship arrangements should be a streamlined process to make mentoring easy to access, whether that was internally within the organisation or externally through bodies like CAVAL or ALIA. There was high regard for the way in which candidates in CILIP’s professional registration program were provided with a mentor to guide them on the journey to chartership, as well as the way this collaborative engagement with the PKSB ensured that it was a living framework of knowledge and skills. This all contributed positively to the concept of an active profession.

3.6 The contemporary library and information profession

The participants generously shared their interest in, as well as their concerns about, a range of issues relating to the contemporary library and information profession. While the term ‘information professional’ was used to emphasise that the scope of employment in libraries was much broader than ‘librarians’, a number of rhetorical questions revealed a lack of clarity across the field:

What is understood as an ‘information professional’?

Who does work in a library?

Who is even a librarian in the 21st century?

As noted earlier, the context of ALIA's Professional Pathways initiative for the focus groups meant that the topic of LIS qualifications was top of mind for many participants. It was acknowledged that, while there were opportunities to develop a more diverse workforce, nomenclature remained a critical issue:

I have no qualms about hiring people who have the right skillset, only with calling someone a 'librarian' when they are not qualified in LIS.

If a person is appointed to a role that does have 'librarian' in the title, they need to be supported to get the LIS degree.

In counterpoint to these views, some people expressed their distrust in the education system and argued that more weight should be given to professional experience:

The importance of experience is often overlooked: we don't place enough value on experience.

Experience – if it is extensive – can replace a formal qualification.

When recruiting, go for the competent and keen, rather than just the piece of paper...

Critical comments were made about the LIS profession being a field that was often misunderstood:

We don't advertise our profession very well, so we need to make sure that we explain our discipline better.

One participant was concerned about the introspective nature of the LIS profession:

We have been very insular and inward thinking, I would say for more than a century, and then it goes back beyond. That's just my take on it. So how do we actually make it better and be proud of what we have to offer?

Library directors and senior managers reported that they were experiencing difficulties in hiring 'the right people' in the current highly dynamic employment environment. They believed that the complex role of information in society was driving the need for more, rather than fewer, people who could work in information management roles. Library and information professionals were viewed as having very employable skillsets, as noted in anecdotes about colleagues who had moved to information-intensive jobs outside the sector, e.g. with Google, government intelligence agencies and, during the COVID-19 pandemic, as contact tracers.

The situation was made more complex when, increasingly, libraries were no longer managed by librarians: "it could be, for example, a recreation centre manager with no LIS skills". The fear of an impending shortage of job applicants underscored the need for the sector to think really seriously about future employment options. Many participants believed that it was counter-productive to have different categories of staff based on 'librarians' and 'non-librarians'. There was a danger that this could introduce "a pecking order" which was not only unwelcoming to people interested in moving into the sector but was also at odds with the LIS profession's values and culture of diversity, equality and inclusion (ALIA, 2018; IFLA, 2019).

Focus group participants agreed that "we definitely don't attract a diverse workforce". Recommendations made in the *Workforce diversity trend report* (ALIA, 2019) had underscored the importance of increasing the number of Indigenous workers in the LIS sector, but much more needed to be done to translate good intentions into measurable progress in terms of both policy and practice (ALIA, 2021). The findings from the *National survey on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders employment in Australian libraries: Research report* (Thorpe, 2021) revealed the critical lack of

representation on the part of First Nations peoples employed in the LIS sector and the need for a range of initiatives to encourage and support the employment of Indigenous staff members.

One of the things that preoccupies me is diversity of the workforce: we talk so much about it but we find it very difficult to actually shift. I do think that's why this conversation we are having is really important.

I'm not only talking First Nations, but socioeconomic status, cultural backgrounds...

Some participants believed that, although career change situations were already common across the sector, structural barriers could hinder the search for employment flexibility and work-life balance. As the LIS field in this country was commonly recognised as having a very high proportion of female workers, there was considerable interest in the issue of gender equity. Another recommendation presented in the *Workforce diversity trend report* (ALIA, 2019) stressed the need to find ways to significantly increase the number of male library and information workers.

Confidence in a positive future for the LIS profession arguably depended on successfully attracting more younger people into the profession so that the cohort of LIS staff entering retirement could be replaced:

I don't see that there is an issue in many other professional specialties, but the numbers of people who are going to retire in the next five years is really striking. So, where's the new blood coming from? Gosh, we can't turn our backs on this now. This is too sad.

One participant believed that the Professional Pathways project had the potential to encourage diversity, but argued that diversity was also heavily influenced by an organisation's recruitment strategies:

We will only get so far without diversity being an aspect of recruitment.

It was also contended that the sector urgently needed to introduce new skillsets that many of these older LIS workers did not have to have. This view was accompanied by genuine concerns that "the changing nature of libraries is not recognised by many of our professional colleagues, yet it is a big part of being effective in our respective organisations". The demand for enhanced digital skills was specifically highlighted, especially in libraries located in regional, rural and remote areas. A low level of technological understanding was found to be at variance with the core professional value of embracing the shift to digital (IFLA, 2019). One example was provided of a public library where a digital media lab had been established, but there were no staff with the skills to run the facility. The importance of adequate remuneration to attract the right people was discussed.

The culture in the library is really great. Many people return to this, but the turnover in technical staff is high. There's competition for talent in the major centres. So, we have a great culture, but we can't compete with the dollars.

Participants outlined the dilemma experienced by some employers who were not always sure whether "the better option would be to hire a librarian or an IT specialist". The need for a much clearer understanding about the skillsets was critical.

3.7 Framework of knowledge and skills

The focus group discussions revealed that there was general consensus about the potential for a framework of knowledge, skills and ethical behaviour for the Australian library and information profession, as recommended in the ALIA Professional Pathways Board's response to the *Technical Report* (ALIA, 2022a).

I fully support that we need a framework. We are struggling academically without one. In our recent reorganisation of the university library, we needed a framework to map skills. However, we could not identify one that would help us.

There was strong support for strategies that would present the knowledge and skills required by active professionals employed in a visionary, innovative and vibrant industry, thereby inviting interest in potential career opportunities beyond those which depended on the attainment of a specific academic qualification.

Participants believed that the value of a framework lay in the provision of a visible structure to the overall field of practice which could articulate our contemporary professional identity:

It could help garner support and respect for professional roles: it would underscore our professional status.

Such a framework could open up opportunities to engage with the wider community and to shape public perceptions about the library and information world. It was felt that the present lack of clarity about the actual scope(s) of practice frequently led to a low level of understanding about professional roles, a failure to respect LIS qualifications, and a risk of libraries serving as the 'catch all' for miscellaneous non-professional activities on the part of the parent body. The framework should therefore serve as "a mechanism to show what we do and what we don't do as a profession" and enable "new people or the public to see the edges of what we do".

It would be useful within my organisation, both for the librarians working within it, as well as the managers, some of whom don't have LIS skills or background.

The framework should therefore present the core elements of the profession, i.e., "what makes the profession distinctive". The core elements of the framework needed to be "grounded in practice, not based on theoretical notions". One participant also saw the framework as the opportunity "to provide a way to present the diverse contexts for our soft skills".

It was believed that a framework could "help anchor people", so that, even if they wanted to leave the organisation where they were working, they could see alternative career avenues within the sector. It could enable people to have more fluid careers: by moving in and out of the sector at various times, they could introduce fresh external perspectives to invigorate the services and programs on offer in the LIS sector.

The argument was presented, however, that LIS competencies were not simply black and white. There was a danger that the inclusion of some skillsets in a framework could be confusing: conceptually they could lack definition; they not been "tested in the field, they weren't practical for students to understand". Teaching staff pointed to the inherent complexities of knowledge and skills:

I make an effort to point out to them that things are ambiguous. Things don't work when we get to the fuzzy edges... But a framework should try to cope with the

ambiguities. It needs to be robust enough, but also accommodate that fuzziness and ambiguities.

Others surmised that by delineating the scope of professional practice, the framework could be very useful in revealing “those fuzzy boundaries” where library and information science intersects with other disciplines.

Public library staff need to be more embedded in the council and linked with other community organisations, so they can see what is going on across the wider sector. They need to be aware of what skills can be shared. There is value in the cross-fertilisation of skills.

When working with colleagues in other professions, for example in hospital or health libraries which usually sit in bigger organisations, a framework would help identify the areas of differentiation.

Different ideas about the application of a framework were explored by the participants. Some envisaged “a whole-of-life approach” to present the “suite of overarching things that apply to all”, enhanced by the ability to apply a lens that differentiated between the early career, mid-career and late career stages:

A framework for all age groups: a sort of career journey framework so people can envisage a career trajectory.

It was proposed, however, that a whole-of-career perspective should not be presented as a simple linear progression; the wheel diagrams designed by CILIP for the PKSB (CILIP, 2021) and by SFIA to illustrate the human capital development context (SFIA, 2021) reflected the growing body of academic and practice-based research evidence about non-linear careers. Ezra (2021) considers the image of the climbing nets common in children’s playgrounds (Ezra, 2021):

Career paths are becoming less like ladders and more like large nets. We can still climb up the net, but we can also move sideways, diagonally, and even use it for safety. Nets are flexible, they can protect us, and we can choose how to move.

It was felt that “a more specialised, targeted approach” to a framework could help articulate the sector-specific elements, while simultaneously illustrating the commonalities that exist across these different sectors, thereby “facilitating movement across LIS sectors and different sizes of library”.

We could have one general framework, plus a framework for specialisations that would attract people into those specialisations.

It would create a better understanding of what the sectors are – and what those working in those sectors really do.

Clearly indicating which skills are most prevalent in the various sectors would help guide people.

People appreciated the idea that a framework could “make things easier for LIS professionals” and “help them to think conceptually about the differences between general skills, contextual skills and specialist skills. Language was critical: “specific terminology can mean different things to different people, there can be diversity of interpretation”. It was accepted that there were challenges associated with transferring from one professional lexicon to another, but there was potential to develop some resources to help people learn and interpret the professional terms used in other areas.

Several people felt it would be advantageous for the framework to offer “a sort of different lens for the different sectors, so you could put a lens over and see things from the perspective of that sector”. This could help employers understand how specific skillsets could be applied across different areas of practice:

We need to focus on helping LIS professionals move from a job mindset to a career mindset. A lot of staff are struggling to understand the difference between their functional expertise with the skills they are using, whether you call them interlibrary loan librarians or document librarians, subscriptions and renewal librarians. We have got so many of those titles without understanding what the underlying skillsets are.

The lens concept could therefore also work for different roles and responsibilities:

If you want to be a systems librarian, for example, you see what the top skills and competencies are. Otherwise it can be overwhelming.

Knowing the top three skills for a particular LIS role would be great!

Reference was made to the resources that CILIP had published to interpret the PKSB for library staff in the education sector (Band et al., 2019) and the healthcare sector (NHS Health Education England & CILIP, 2021). It was also noted that resources had been developed to help librarians employed in Australian schools interpret and apply the formal framework of teaching standards (ASLA, 2014), but currently there was nothing similar that was relevant to their library and information practice. They would welcome strategies that add credence to the role of teacher librarians in the education context. One participant believed that a framework could support action research activities in the school library arena to enable teacher librarians to build on their current knowledge, present the impact of their expertise and promote the library to the whole school community.

It was stressed that a framework could serve as a practical resource for educators in both the VET and higher education sectors, both to facilitate the students’ and new graduates’ understanding of the wider library and information landscape and to identify the different professional avenues they could follow:

We need a framework that brings more people in, while protecting the specific needs of the areas of specialisation.

We need to understand how to make sector skillsets clear so that other sectors know what you can do.

Many participants indicated that they would like to see illustrative examples of how the skillsets were applied in diverse professional contexts, for example “profiles of people in different jobs in different industries”, case studies “so that people can identify themselves”, or guidelines for managers “to encourage them to seek more widely for their personnel”.

In terms of the framework document, there is potential for the dot points to be expanded to provide greater information, even link to short videos. It’s up to us to provide the material required to help people transition to a new sector.

One person creatively suggested that the framework could offer a “choose your own adventure” approach to navigating the sector, which could be attractive “not just for those entering the profession, but also for retaining talents and attracting diversity of skillsets”.

It was further suggested that a framework could help boost recruitment into the profession:

It could be something for schools advisors and careers counsellors.

It would be great if careers counsellors knew more about the profession and could put it forward as an attractive option for young people.

It was therefore hoped that, from one perspective, the framework might help to build confidence in the traditional educational pathways and raise interest in the studying for an LIS qualification, while also addressing some of the issues related to professional diversity:

It is important not to dilute the traditional professional pathways, but a framework may be good to distinguish the different pathways to get acceptance.

I really would support a framework that can identify pathways, attract good people, grow the profession. We want diversity of capability and experience; we need to strengthen the profession.

Participants were keen to see the framework support closer engagement with First Nations communities and introduce new migrant communities to the LIS profession in this country.

Diversity is lacking in the workforce: the sector is too homogenous. We need to attract people from different backgrounds and we need to work on our ability to welcome them.

People who were familiar with the PKSB framework developed by CILIP (2021) appreciated its clear emphasis on skillsets, with ethics and values located at the centre of professional practice. An Australian framework should emphasise the importance of core professional values and ethical principles and outline how these might differ from business or corporate ethics.

It was suggested that the framework could highlight how the sector's value-driven behaviour is applied externally with clients and the community, as well as internally with staff and colleagues. One participant believed that a commonly understood framework had the potential to improve culture and collegiality and increase professional engagement.

The idea that the framework could serve to coordinate and promote continuing professional development opportunities was strongly supported, with the opportunity to map CPD activities, events and resources to the structural elements of the framework:

There is a plethora of training available: a framework would bring things together.

The framework could provide guidance about the organisations that run PD courses.

Participants believed that the framework could powerfully present "external proof of the critical importance of professional development" for the LIS sector as a whole:

The framework could present the breadth of PD offerings and prove to employers that the training is legitimate.

If you were the only person doing library work in an organisation, the framework would help you argue the case for your PD.

If training activities were mapped to the different domains of knowledge and skills, rather than being just sector-based, the framework could serve as a valuable tool to underpin career development and provide "clarity of career progression":

A framework could provide clarity, plus the right PD, training and variety of education opportunities: the LIS sector can really benefit from this initiative.

Some participants felt that since “the real contribution we make to the community and to society” was not always understood, the framework could be used to promote and advocate for the library and information profession:

We would benefit from better advocacy – we need to be proud of what we offer and market our knowledge and skills.

We need to prove the worth of the profession.

This would in turn contribute to a more unified profession:

It would help in promoting cohesion. We can't afford to fracture. Libraries are at risk in lots of organisations, especially where there has been bad succession planning.

If there could be an agreement (a framework?) that brought people from different sectors together, that would be a thing of beauty.

Focus group participants advised that, if the framework was underpinned by the domains of knowledge and the professional topics presented in the *Foundation knowledge for entry-level library and information professionals*, ALIA would need to develop effective strategies to ensure that the additional resources used in internal and external advocacy activities were reviewed and updated regularly. The profession needed “living resources” which could illustrate the changing skillsets as they evolved:

The framework should be supported by booklets, toolkits etc. Something to point to, to link to. To provide a common language and united messaging.

Finally, ALIA was challenged to be really bold and creative and use the Professional Pathways initiative as an exciting opportunity to reconceptualise our understanding of and commitment to the library and information profession.

4. Conclusions and key findings

At their meeting in February 2022, the ALIA Professional Pathways Board agreed that the research activities undertaken in the discovery phase of the Professional Pathways initiative and presented in the *Technical Report* (ALIA, 2022a) provided a sound evidence base to inform the subsequent consultative stage of the project. The Board recommended that the development of a framework of knowledge, skills and ethical behaviour should draw on the research evidence and be shaped by sector-wide consultation. A series of focus groups was therefore scheduled to be held in late February – early March 2022.

The library and information professionals who participated in the series of 11 focus groups have made an invaluable contribution to the ALIA Professional Pathways project. The primary aim of these focus groups was to provide the opportunity for sector-wide consultation to explore the potential for a framework which could support the learning and development needs of library and information professionals in this country. The focus group discussions were guided by three scenarios which related to different career situations: the new graduate contemplating their career trajectory in the LIS profession, the experienced professional moving from one LIS sector into a new one, and the

professional with academic qualifications moving into a new role in the LIS sector. The discussions were framed by the participants' understandings of the knowledge, skills and ethical behaviour required for LIS practice, their concept of professional identity and the attributes of active professionalism.

The mix of participants in each of the focus groups allowed the narrative of the discussions to flow from the individuals' personal experiences and their professional interests and concerns. The analysis and interpretation of the wealth of qualitative data collected during the research activities revealed that, despite the varied perspectives presented by the participants, there was a significant degree of cohesion in the views they shared. The participants' ideas and opinions have been distilled into seven key themes:

- The individual's career journey
- Pathways into the library and information profession
- Education for the library and information profession
- Professional knowledge and skills
- Active professionalism
- The contemporary library and information profession
- Framework of knowledge and skills.

The discussion of these discussed included illustrative comments made by the participants. Significantly, it was found that the thematic elements were closely aligned with the key findings of the *Technical Report* (ALIA, 2022a):

- Alongside core professional knowledge, values and ethics sit at the centre of professional practice and professional identity.
- ALIA's policy statement, *Foundation knowledge for entry-level library and information professionals*, is considered current and relevant, and represents a sound base for further developmental work.
- There is strong interest in developing a comprehensive Australian framework of knowledge, skills and ethical behaviour which supports the learning and development needs of all library and information professionals.
- The current ALIA-accredited higher education and vocational education qualifications provide important pathways into the profession, but they require strong industry engagement and support.
- The diverse areas of specialised practice require a range of approaches to support the development of the distinctive areas of knowledge and skills.
- There are opportunities to develop new pathways into the profession to reflect the broadening of the fields of practice and the diverse skillsets required by contemporary library and information professionals.
- There is an imperative for career-long learning in the library and information profession. While continuing professional development is acknowledged to be an essential component of attaining and revalidating professional status, the ALIA PD Scheme should be reviewed and strengthened.
- Active professionalism should be cultivated as an individual and collective attribute that is integral to all aspects of a career in the library and information sector.
- The whole-of-sector approach which is required to address the challenges presented by a dynamic professional environment, should include consultation with international library and information associations.

The majority of focus group participants expressed their passion for their profession and for their career, yet a sense of discontent and uncertainty was woven through the discussions. It was feared that the LIS profession was not able to keep abreast of the social, technological and educational changes in today's world. Australian library and information services were held in high regard in the community, but the shifting employment market revealed many cracks and flaws. It was believed that many of the 'traditional' applications of some LIS skillsets were no longer fit for purpose, but the general stability of the workforce plus many workers' reticence to upskill were problematic. As libraries embraced an evolving range of programs and services, fresh career opportunities were opening up for people who had a different spectrum of qualifications and experience. These newcomers to the sector were keen to be accepted as library and information professionals, but tensions were apparent in terms of the professional recognition of 'librarians' and 'non-librarians'.

At the same time, it was felt that education for the LIS profession was fractured. Participants were alarmed by the number of academic programs that had closed in recent years and they wanted to make sure that the professional focus and the quality of the available courses flourished. The increasing demand for new, more diverse and increasingly complex professional skills and knowledge not only placed strain on the curriculum, but also on the ability to attract suitable teaching staff. As the potential to prepare students for niche areas of professional practice had faded over the years, employers had no option but to look beyond LIS education for 'the right people'.

In higher education and vocational training contexts, there was a growing interest in the modularisation of macro-qualifications (degrees and diplomas) as stackable, shorter form credentials. In the business sector, micro-credentials are increasingly being promoted as a recruitment strategy to facilitate entry into the workforce, with the emphasis placed on non-traditional education and soft skills. As the notion of a portfolio career gains traction and the value of an expensive terminal professional degree wanes, a micro-credentialled pathway is viewed as advantageous in multi-disciplinary fields of practice.

Focus group participants supported the concept of active professionalism, which embraces the passion for career-long learning, building knowledge and understanding, mastering new skills in the search for professional excellence, and modelling ethical behaviour. Nevertheless, it was contended that too few people in the LIS sector demonstrated true commitment to continuing professional development, with failings evident both on the part of staff and employers. Comparisons were made with associations like CILIP in the United Kingdom and LIANZA in New Zealand which had introduced mandatory CPD for all members, plus the opportunity for members to express their professional identity through a professional registration scheme. These strategies had naturally stimulated an increase in the range and quality of PD events, which in turn promoted greater interest in and engagement with professional learning.

The information gathered through the focus group consultations will support the realisation of the recommendation made by the ALIA Professional Pathways Board: to develop a comprehensive framework of knowledge, skills and ethical behaviour that can serve as a sector-wide, whole-of career resources to support the learning and development needs of all library and information professionals, while recognising the specific needs of areas of specialisation. The development of the framework will be achieved through an iterative process of public consultation, involving representatives of the different

stakeholder groups of library and information professionals, employers, LIS educators and training providers, as well as the allied professions, to contribute their ideas.

Key findings

The focus group consultations represented an opportunity for LIS professionals to explore and discuss the challenges and opportunities of the evolving work environment and to consider strategies to create a sustainable future for the library and information profession. Four key findings have been distilled from the thematic analysis and interpretation of the research data:

1. The value of a sector-wide, whole-of-career framework is recognised. A framework can play multiple roles, including but not limited to:
 - Expressing the vital significance of our core values and ethical principles
 - Providing a visible structure to our field of practice
 - Articulating our contemporary identity
 - Supporting LIS education and training
 - Delineating professional roles in specialised fields of practice
 - Identifying areas where the LIS profession intersects with other disciplines
 - Boosting recruitment into the profession
 - Structuring the ALIA CPD scheme
 - Coordinating CPD activities and resources
 - Underpinning advocacy at the organisational and sector levels.

2. Three essential elements of a potential framework were distilled from the findings from the *Technical Report*, the *Foundation knowledge* document and the focus group consultations: foundation domains, professional knowledge domains and active professionalism.
 - Foundation domains
 - Ethics and values
 - Wider information contexts
 - Sector and organisational contexts

 - Professional knowledge domains
 - Information services
 - Information management
 - Literacies and learning
 - Digital technologies
 - Community engagement
 - Research
 - Leadership and management

 - Active professionalism
 - Professionalism
 - Behavioural skills.

The Professional Pathways project team will draw on these concepts to create a graphic representation of the draft framework.

3. The sector-wide framework of knowledge, skills and expertise will support further consultation about the optimal pathways to professional status, encompassing:
 - Accredited LIS qualifications
 - Recognised micro-credentials to support transition into the LIS sector
 - Professional registration and revalidation
 - Levels of professional status aligned with career advancement
 - Recognition of commitment to ongoing professional development.

4. The future of the Australian library and information profession depends on constructive collaboration between all stakeholders:
 - Individual professionals
 - Employers
 - LIS educators
 - LIS training providers
 - Professional associations.

The Professional Pathways initiative is viewed as a major opportunity for ALIA to engage these stakeholder groups in strategies to address the many and varied challenges facing the profession. The sector-wide framework has the potential to serve as a mechanism to foster professional cohesion.

References

- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). (2017). *Learn about the career stages*. <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/standards/understand-the-teacher-standards/career-stages>
- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). (2018). *ALIA core values policy statement*. <https://read.alia.org.au/file/662/download?token=UKaVv63u>
- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). *Workforce diversity trend report 2019*. <https://read.alia.org.au/file/932/download?token=GLzbUVcT>
- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). (2020a). *Foundation knowledge for entry-level library and information professionals*. <https://read.alia.org.au/file/1472/download?token=qt9EzI4m>
- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). (2020b). *Professional pathways: The future of library and information science (LIS) professional recognition in Australia*. <https://read.alia.org.au/file/1505/download?token=6ZFWt7sA>
- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). (2021). LIS workforce diversity survey. Workforce diversity: Digital *Incite* supplement. *Incite*, 42(4), 4-7. <http://read.alia.org.au/file/1750/download?token=g6QZ6Yyi>
- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). (2022a). *Professional pathways framework project: Technical report*. <https://read.alia.org.au/file/2120/download?token=rwXePxb6>
- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). (2022b). *Final call for participants for Professional Pathways focus groups*. [https://www.alia.org.au/Web/News/Articles/2022/1-January-2022/Final call for participants for Professional Pathways focus groups.aspx](https://www.alia.org.au/Web/News/Articles/2022/1-January-2022/Final%20call%20for%20participants%20for%20Professional%20Pathways%20focus%20groups.aspx)
- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). (2022c). *Announcing members of the ALIA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Expert Advisory Group*. [https://www.alia.org.au/Web/News/Articles/2022/02-February-/ALIA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Expert Advisory Group.aspx](https://www.alia.org.au/Web/News/Articles/2022/02-February-/ALIA%20Aboriginal%20and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20Expert%20Advisory%20Group.aspx)
- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). (2022d). *Professional pathways framework project: Technical report overview*. <https://read.alia.org.au/file/2123/download?token=R4stMgVO>
- Australian School Libraries Association (ASLA). (2014). *Evidence guides for teacher librarians*. <https://www.asla.org.au/evidence-guides-tls>
- Band, B., Pavey, S., Roche, C. & Chambers, L. (2019). *PKSB for school librarians: A breakdown of the categories*. [https://www.cilip.org.uk/resource/group/d73d9fce-5850-4276-a51f-00d38d6c901c/documents/pksb for school librarians i.pdf](https://www.cilip.org.uk/resource/group/d73d9fce-5850-4276-a51f-00d38d6c901c/documents/pksb_for_school_librarians_i.pdf)
- Bernard, H.R. (2017). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. 6th ed. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Billups, F.D. (2020). *Qualitative data collection tools: Design, development, and applications*. Sage.
- Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). (2021). *The Professional Knowledge and Skills Base: Introduction and overview. Developing skills for success*. https://www.cilip.org.uk/resource/resmgr/cilip/membership/benefits/pksb/pksb_intro_overview_v5.pdf
- Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL). (2021). *Respecting Indigenous knowledge*. <https://www.caul.edu.au/programs-projects/respecting-indigenous-knowledge>
- Cresswell, J.W. & Plano Clark, V.L. (2017). *Designing and conducting mixed method research*. 3rd ed. Sage.
- Deakin University. (2018, November 12). *Developing world-class employees with the 70:20:10 model*. <https://credentials.deakin.edu.au/developing-world-class-employees-with-the-702010-model/>
- Ezra. (2021, May 25). Non-linear career paths in the 2020s. *Insights*. <https://helloezra.com/resources/insights/non-linear-careers>
- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). (2016). *IFLA guidelines for continuing professional development: Principles and best practices. Executive summary*. 2nd ed. <https://repository.ifla.org/bitstream/123456789/1111/2/ifla-guidelines-for-continuing-professional-development-summary.pdf>
- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). (2019). *Chapter 3: We are united in our goals and values. IFLA Global Vision Report*. <http://repository.ifla.org/bitstream/123456789/24/4/gv-report-3.pdf>

- Kleinheksel, A.J., Rockich-Winston, N., Tawfik, H. & Wyatt, T.R. (2020). Demystifying content analysis. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 84(1), 7113. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5688%2Fajpe7113>
- Krippendorff, K. (2013). *Content analysis: An introduction to the methodology*. Sage.
- NHS Health Education England & Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). (2021). *Professional knowledge and skills base (PKSB) for health*. [Resource for members only]
- Palinkas, L.A., Horwitz, S.M., Green, C.A., Wisdom, J.P., Duan, N. & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(5), 533-544. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1007%2Fs10488-013-0528-y>
- Patton, M.Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. 4th ed. Sage.
- Queensland Health (2018). *Framework for lifelong learning for nurses and midwives*. <https://qheps.health.qld.gov.au/nmoq/professional-capability>
- SFIA (2021). *Using SFIA: Introducing the SFIA wheel diagram and how SFIA supports the full human capital development cycle*. <https://sfia-online.org/en/tools-and-resources/using-sfia>
- Spradley, J.P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Thorpe, C. (2021, May 3). Transforming a university library into a learning organisation. *Library Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LM-01-2021-0003>
- Thorpe, K. (2021). *National survey on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in Australian libraries: Research report*. https://opus.lib.uts.edu.au/bitstream/10453/152458/2/final_uts_research_report_national_survey_in_digenous_employment_libraries_2_december_2021.pdf
- Zhang, Y. & Wildemuth, B.M. (2009). Qualitative analysis of content. In: B. Wildemuth (Ed.). *Applications of social research methods in information and library science* (pp.308-319). Libraries Unlimited.

Appendix

ALIA Foundation knowledge for entry-level library and information professionals