

## ALIA FUTURE OF THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE PROFESSION LIBRARY AND INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS

### Introduction

In 2013, we set out to investigate the big questions about our future.

- How will libraries remain relevant for users?
- What changes will institutions and individuals in the sector experience?
- Will 'library and information professional' continue to be a necessary and desirable occupation?

We received challenging, insightful, inspiring responses to our request for feedback at events held all around Australia. As a result, we were able to identify themes and develop actions to support positive outcomes. The findings from the project were produced as seven reports, available as pdf downloads from the ALIA website [www.alia.org.au](http://www.alia.org.au). These were published in May 2014, to coincide with ALIA's Annual General Meeting.

Three years on, we have reviewed the themes, actions and what we have learned since the original investigation. This is our May 2017 update.

### Themes: Did we get it right?

There were 10 themes that emerged, specific to library and information science professionals.

- 1. Balancing the workforce**  
New recruits will help increase age diversity.
- 2. Higher paid jobs**  
Salaries will better reflect the importance of our role.
- 3. Aiming for the top**  
We will need to sharpen our business skills, demonstrate flexibility and help lead change.
- 4. What we call ourselves**  
Librarians and information professionals will co-exist.
- 5. Privacy watchdogs**  
We see an expanded role as guardians of our users' personal privacy.
- 6. Technology for all**  
Every LIS professional will need to be proficient in IT.
- 7. Beyond the library**  
We will find new employment opportunities outside traditional library settings.
- 8. Ongoing learning**  
Professional development will be a necessity for anyone on a career trajectory.
- 9. Future leaders**  
Succession planning and support for emerging leaders will be essential.
- 10. Visibility**  
Remaining visible in an increasingly digital environment will be one of the challenges.

These themes have been endorsed over the last three years.

We are a decade away from the baby boomer generation (born 1946 to 1964) leaving the workforce, but we are already seeing greater diversity in the age profile of ALIA Members. The majority of our new recruits are students, some in their 20s, others taking up library and information science as a second career.

While pay rates have not increased significantly over the last three years, the ABS Labour Survey 2013 stated that librarians' average weekly pre-tax full-time earnings were \$1500, compared with \$1152 for all occupations.

There can still be a glass ceiling for library and information professionals seeking to break into higher management levels and some senior members of the profession voice their frustration at not having a place at the top table within their organisation from which to advocate for their service.

Privacy and open access are competing priorities for information professionals. The challenge is to make as much useful data as possible available for research and reuse, while protecting the individuals' confidential information.

Digital technologies have affected every library and information service in terms of management, programs, services, and staff skills. They have enabled remote access to collections (challenging the visibility of the service), 24/7 delivery, news alerts and more efficient ways of working. At the same time, library users are turning to library and information professionals for help in using devices and digital resources. Digital skills are increasingly important and ongoing learning is essential to stay ahead.

**Scorecard: How did we perform 2013-2017?**

This was the action list for ALIA.

<p><b>1. We will map and monitor the LIS workforce to identify the ebb and flow of job openings to new entrants. This will help identify when we have sufficient people in the workforce and when we need to run active recruitment campaigns.</b></p>	<p>Since 2014, we have published annual <i>ALIA Education Skills and Employment Trend Reports</i>. These have provided valuable information and insight for educators, students and employers.</p> <p>In 2016, our ALIA Health Libraries Australia Group published a census, which showed that there was a potentially critical shortage of health librarians ahead of us, providing the prompt for remedial action.</p>
<p><b>2. ALIA Training will develop further courses to support LIS professionals seeking to improve their general business and leadership skills.</b></p>	<p>ALIA Training courses in 2017 include <i>Negotiation skills for librarians</i> and <i>Performance metrics</i>. In previous years we have run <i>Project management tools and techniques</i> and <i>Fundamentals of supervision</i>.</p> <p>Since 2015, we introduced ALIA Leadership and Innovation Forums with the intent of providing an annual networking and learning event that helps aspiring future leaders.</p> <p>Each year we have presented a major knowledge conference – ALIA Information Online in the odd years, ALIA National in the even years. These carefully programmed three-day events, with additional workshops and tours, provide networking, learning and PD opportunities for around 800 delegates each time.</p>

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**3. We will work with educators to ensure that LIS courses continue to evolve their technology units.**

The inclusion of digital technologies and digital capabilities in the LIS curriculum has been an important element of the discussion between ALIA and educators around foundation skills. They have been a focus for the (bi-annual) Higher Education and (annual) VET LIS educator forums.

The ALIA Learning team has worked with our VET Skills Council (IBSA until 2016, PwC since then) to move the library technician training package from cultural services to business services, reflecting the greater emphasis on digital. This change was effected from January 2017. On the same date, a new Diploma of library and information services was introduced, incorporating a stronger technology element.

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**4. ALIA will introduce ongoing learning as an essential part of professional membership by 2020.**

Our ALIA Learning team introduced the Certified Professional specialisations for professionals in July 2013, with the first PD Specialisation for health libraries. In 2016, the first Distinguished Certified Professional (Health) certificates were awarded to 21 health librarians who completed three years in the ALIA PD Scheme, based on their specific areas of interest. Since 2013, public library, school library, government library, academic and research library specialisations have been added.

There are now more than 1000 members of the ALIA PD Scheme and growing, with continuous PD becoming the new standard for professional membership in 2020.

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This was the action for individuals: "Library managers can aspire to management and leadership positions within their own organisations, confident that their skills make a valuable contribution."

## **Conclusion: What have we learned?**

The professional nature of the library and information role has continued to experience challenges over the last three years, with positions being downgraded and unqualified staff being put into roles that would previously have required a library and information professional. We know that the Association must stand firm on quality curricula, rigorous course accreditation processes, meaningful qualifications and a strong framework for ongoing learning, if we are to provide the necessary support for our professional Members. The fact that we accredit 26 universities, TAFEs and registered training organisations, and nearly half our eligible Members have voluntarily joined the ALIA PD Scheme, is testament to the importance of our work in this area.

Our Learning team has kept abreast of trends in professional education and PD and applied best practice in our own organisation. As a result, ALIA has been held up as an exemplar for other library associations around the world.

We are a small industry and if we are to maintain a strong voice and presence, it is essential for us to collaborate with other organisations with similar interests. We began discussions with the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) and Records and Information Management Professionals Australasia (RIMPA) in 2014, and in 2015/2016 carried out four joint accreditations of university courses.