**Submission in response to the draft legislation to implement the Australian Government's Job-ready Graduates Package**
**13 August 2020**

## 1. About us

### Australian Library and Information Association

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. On behalf of our 5,000 personal and institutional members, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support.

### Libraries in education settings

There are approximately 9,400 school libraries and 450 university and TAFE libraries.

School libraries employ Teacher Librarians (qualified teachers with a post graduate qualification in librarianship), Librarians (with an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification in librarianship) and Library Technicians (Diploma level). School library staff work with teachers to develop collections (books, print materials and electronic resources) around the curriculum; they assist students with IT and digital literacy, and they deliver programs to maximise educational outcomes.

University and TAFE librarians provide similar services at the tertiary level. University and TAFE libraries are important learning spaces and library staff provide essential services to students and faculty, including collection development, handling reference enquiries, assisting researchers and providing access to digital resources.

### Public libraries

The nation's 1500 public libraries or 'street corner universities' provide books for leisure and study, free WiFi, PC internet access, educational programs, and expert staff guidance. There were more than 9 million registered users in 2018-19 and 110 million visits to libraries.

Over the last 20 years, public libraries have increased their role in educating people in the digital space, enhancing people's online experiences, helping people connect to this new virtual world, and providing a safety net for those who are in danger of being left behind, particularly in terms of the ability to access government information.

**National, state and territory Libraries**

Our national, state and territory libraries – nine in total – are located in capital cities around Australia, attracting more than 9.5 million physical visitors each year and more than 47 million visits to their websites.[1]  These libraries are part of the nation's research infrastructure. Their physical and digital collections are used extensively by academics and students, both on-site and remotely.

**Other libraries**

In addition to the libraries already mentioned, there are approximately 2,000 special libraries (health, law, government, corporate, heritage, arts, media). All libraries contribute in some way to education, the uptake of technology and the development of a knowledge-rich society.

## 2. Education and IT focus for library and information science

In order to run these institutions and provide these services, we need tertiary qualified library and information professionals.

Library and information science (LIS) is an internationally recognised discipline, with a long and successful history in Australia. For example, Charles Sturt University is home to one of the world's largest schools of information studies, with a strong global reputation, and there are other highly regarded centres for LIS education in South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia. We have a significant number of LIS PhD students all around Australia, guaranteeing a future cohort of academics, researchers and thought leaders.

LIS crosses a number of areas but we are embedded in the education agenda, whether through libraries in schools, formal VET and higher education, or through informal lifelong learning in public libraries.

We are also strongly and increasingly involved in technology and IT-powered content. The role of information as an asset makes LIS knowledge and skills highly appropriate to business, government and organisations that rely on high quality data.

We have longstanding connections with arts and humanities, through our relationship to galleries, archives, museums and other cultural institutions, but education and IT are the areas of greatest focus for LIS professionals now and into the future.

## 3. How we fit with the Job-ready Graduates Package

In a letter from the Minister for Education (4 August, Ref MC20-021835), we received the welcome news that teacher librarianship units of study will be funded in line with teacher education units of study in the proposed new model. However, we are advocating for all library and information science courses to be reassigned from Cluster 1 to Cluster 2, alongside IT and education, given our professions' close alignment.

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[1] https://www.nsla.org.au/index.php/about

Our case for this is three-fold.

**a. We are more closely aligned with IT and teaching than with the other studies listed in Cluster 1.**

Library and information professionals provide the content that populates the platforms created by IT professionals; IT pipelines are only useful if there is quality data flowing through them. For example, the National Library's Trove[2] is one of the most-visited federal government websites. National edeposit (NED)[3] is another ground-breaking initiative from national, state and territory libraries, creating a valuable digital resource for Australians and the local book industry.

Creating and enabling access to digital collections, including digitised and born-digital materials, is a fundamental part of library and information science courses, along with digital literacy training for all ages. For example, school library staff have a special focus on cybersafety and assisting young people to navigate the internet confidently; public libraries have been key partners in the Australian Government Be Connected[4] program; university libraries have undertaken digital dexterity training for all staff to enable them to support students, faculty and researchers. Increasingly LIS courses also include units specifically on data management, including research data management, and data curation.

Library and information professionals in all sectors – not only school libraries – have an important educational role. Clearly this is the case for Librarians employed in TAFE and university libraries, but it is also true of public libraries, where there are more than 270,000 programs run each year, with over 7 million attendees[5]. Around half of these are storytimes for families with young children, contributing to vital early years education, the rest are strongly inclined towards IT topics, including Be Connected, Tech Savvy Seniors, coding and robotics.

In our 2,000 special libraries, including government, law, health and corporate libraries, staff support employees with their professional development and skills training. This is particularly noticeable in hospital libraries, where support is provided not only to qualified medical professionals, but also to students undertaking mandatory work placements as part of their practice qualification.

It is also worthy of note that, following representations from ALIA regarding the changing nature of librarianship, the recently-concluded ANZ Standard Research Classification review placed library and information studies within Division 46 'Information and Computing Sciences'.

**b. There is an immediate industry need for new graduates.**

A soon-to-be published ALIA survey of more than 1,000 library and information professionals, representing 12% of the workforce with undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications, has

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[2] https://trove.nla.gov.au/
[3] https://ned.gov.au/ned/
[4] https://beconnected.esafety.gov.au/
[5] *Australian Public Libraries Statistical Report 2017-2018*, National and State Libraries Australia, March 2020

found that 9.9% of Librarians plan to retire in the near future. The highest levels of imminent retirements were for Librarians in TAFE libraries (32%) and Teacher Librarians in schools (29%).

We have between 300 and 400 Librarians and Teacher Librarians graduating from Australian universities each year, but there is a wide gap between qualified new graduates and retirees (approximately 800 per annum).

### c. Pay does not reflect the cost of qualifications

As public sector, user-centric employees, requiring an undergraduate degree as a minimum, we compare Librarians (and Teacher Librarians) with Teachers and Nurses. The Australian Government Job Outlook[6] states that the weekly pay for Librarians is $1,654, compared with $1,914 for secondary school Teachers and $1,909 for Registered Nurses. On this basis, Librarians are paid approximately 15% less, yet the full-time course cost to a library and information student in the proposed new structure would be $14,500 a year compared with $3,700 for teachers and nurses.

## 4. Summary

Library and information professionals are a small but highly influential workforce. While there are only 8,900 Librarians[7], our public libraries alone have more than 9 million registered users, representing 36% of the total Australian population. Our role in formal education, through school, TAFE and university libraries, is well established. Our role in informal lifelong learning through public libraries is similarly widely understood, and there are many examples of how special libraries support learners and emerging professionals in their own organisations. It is also clear that an increasing volume of our activity is in the digital space.

## 5. Recommendation

ALIA recommends that 091300 Librarianship, Information Management and Curatorial Studies and 091301 Librarianship and Information Management be reassigned to Cluster 2, together with IT and education. This would more accurately reflect the role and value of the library and information sector and would help ensure that we are able to recruit and train the graduates we need for our future workforce.

We are supported in this by the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) and National and State Libraries Australia (NSLA).

**CAUL** 'CAUL fully endorses the points made by ALIA in relation to the alignment of library and information studies with Information Technology and Teaching. Library and information professionals in university libraries are boundary spanners in an increasingly digital world. They are key partners in the education of students across all academic disciplines and their achievement of graduate capabilities such as digital competence. A high proportion of university library staff are employed in specifically educative positions or spend significant

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[6] https://joboutlook.gov.au/Career
[7] https://www.alia.org.au/employment-and-careers/alia-lis-education-skills-and-employment-trend-report

time engaged in educational activities, including imparting knowledge and skills relating to knowledge management, copyright and intellectual property.

The achievement of digital literacies, including digital fluency and digital security, as well as other information management skills are often integrated in the curriculum across various academic disciplines, with the involvement of university library staff. Additionally, library and information professionals in university libraries facilitate student learning through collaborative, creative and real-world projects in facilities such as library makerspaces.

Librarians in university libraries also contribute to lifelong learning through providing resources to alumni, adults studying short courses and through facilitating access to open access digital scholarly content for the wider community.

Our members have indicated strong support for the realignment of library and information courses from Cluster 1 to Cluster 2.'

**NSLA** 'Together, Australia's national, state and territory libraries – the nine members of NSLA – employ over 2,000 staff. Last year we served 9.5 million visitors in our buildings, with another 47 million visits to our websites. The library professionals in our employment are among the most qualified in the country, and we are well placed to advise on the rapidly changing skills required of the profession.

As well as over 700 linear kilometres of physical collections, NSLA libraries hold over 7,000 terabytes of digital collections. This number continues to grow exponentially as Australian publications are deposited with our libraries in electronic form every day, and annual web harvests collect the entire .au domain. Collections are delivered through Trove and library catalogues, and linked to external platforms such as Wikipedia. We work with aggregators, universities and cultural institutions in Australia and overseas to link collections data, providing increasingly sophisticated ways of accessing and analysing information. This content is used in turn at every level of Australia's education system, from graduate students, researchers and academics to high school students, teachers, primary school students, community groups and parents. Our staff design and deliver the educational programs and resources accessed by all of these groups.

Library graduates today and in future years must have the skills to understand and build upon the advanced IT systems behind collection delivery, and to create educational resources for Australian communities. We know that if these collections and resources are to reach the full diversity of the Australian population, we must also attract a more diverse workforce – and our best hope for this is new graduates.

The placement of LIS in Cluster 1 points to a misunderstanding about the work of modern libraries, threatens the diversity of our future workforce, and will lead to a dearth of qualified librarians in the near future. The proposed arrangements make the pathway to postgraduate library and information qualifications – so necessary for work at national and state level - prohibitively expensive. We need librarians not only with a solid grounding in the humanities, but with advanced skills in IT and education. We seek graduates with knowledge and a capacity for analytical thinking, as well as the practical skills to share it.

Right now, as Australians contend with a radically different job market, a creative sector in recovery, new channels for learning and teaching, and a demand for invention and entrepreneurship, the contribution of libraries to the Australian economy is vital. If we are to serve the informational and educational needs of Australians in the immediate future, we must have a workforce with the skills to match.'

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