

## ALIA FUTURE OF THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE PROFESSION

### 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 the sector and the library and information science profession.

- 1. Libraries and information management**  
The same skills, differently interpreted.
- 2. Fair**  
People's love of libraries is underpinned by our contribution to a fair and just society.
- 3. Equality of opportunity**  
We help to overcome the gap between advantage and disadvantage.
- 4. Funding**  
Library users and funders have a different perception of the value of our services.
- 5. The library experience**  
Others provide information, but no one else provides the library experience.
- 6. Analogue and digital**  
We will need to look good and work well both online and in real life.
- 7. More space not less**  
More space for people, less space for books in our future libraries.
- 8. Stretching collection budgets**  
More content, in multiple formats – we will need to be smart with our money.
- 9. Community created content**  
Libraries will help connect readers with all kinds of new content from surprising creators.
- 10. Unimaginable technologies**  
Technology will continue to have a massive impact on how we work and the services we deliver.

The themes we described in 2013 are just as relevant in 2017. The skills of library and information professionals are highly applicable in an information rich, big data environment – and in the fake news, post-truth landscape, the ethical stance of library and information professionals is more important than ever before.

With a growing digital divide, the role of libraries in providing equitable access to information is vital. This can mean supporting digital literacy training, exposing people to new technologies or providing the hardware, software and free wifi that is essential for engagement.

Advocacy remains a top priority for the Association. We continue to find that funding decisions are made by top management, principals, government department heads and so on, without a full understanding of the value and contribution of the library and information service to the rest of the organisation or community.

While the introduction of more electronic resources has been treated by some organisations as an opportunity to reduce the library footprint, others have seen the potential to accommodate group study rooms, media labs, makerspaces and enterprise hubs. The inaugural ALIA Library Design Awards in 2017 attracted nominations for 33 libraries, all of which were outstanding examples of modern learning environments, hubs for digital engagement, and spaces that were in tune with their community's needs. These examples of organisations that have had the foresight to invest in their libraries can be used to inspire others to follow suit.

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

This was the action list for ALIA.

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**1. We will ensure that we recognise and promote the 'I' in ALIA.**

In 2014, we launched FAIR (Freedom of Access to Information and Resources) as our main advocacy platform, with the emphasis on *Information* rather than *Library*.

We renamed our Special Libraries Advisory Committee the Special Library and Information Services Advisory Committee and held a Summit in August 2016 to identify ways of promoting information professionals working within and outside the traditional library setting. One output from this Summit was a report, which will be published in June 2017 on the ALIA website, setting the role of the information professional in the context of other business, IT and data job descriptions.

ALIA contributed through consultation and advice, to the National Archives of Australia's ongoing project to raise the recognition and professionalism of information management positions across Australian Government.

While our vocabulary has changed from *librarian* to *library and information professional*, there is more to do in this area.

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**2. We will continue to lobby the Australian Government for copyright reform and the introduction of a Digital Lending Right.**

In 2015 ALIA ran the Cooking for Copyright campaign through FAIR, which contributed to the sector's success in lobbying for copyright reform. The Copyright Amendment (Disability Access and Other Measures) Bill was released in December 2015 and was finally introduced into Parliament in March 2017. While discussions continue with government and book industry stakeholders about a Digital Lending Right, there is no further progress on this issue.

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**3. We will continue to promote the value of library and information services to funding bodies and develop evidence and materials to help members advocate within their own organisations.**

Every year ALIA runs Library Lovers' Day and Library and Information Week (including National Simultaneous Storytime) to provide a platform for our Members to advocate for their library and information service.

In 2013, ALIA Schools prepared a report<sup>1</sup> that identifies how teacher librarian practice can meet the Australian Institute for Teachers and School Leaders [AITSL] *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*. The Group went on to create four films, which are illustrations of quality practice<sup>2</sup> and help professionals explain their role and value.

In 2013/2014 we produced return on investment studies for public libraries and special libraries. These studies showed that every dollar invested generated at least \$3-worth of value and, in the case of health libraries, \$9-worth.

In 2015/2016, we ran the Great School Libraries campaign on behalf of a coalition of school library associations<sup>3</sup>. The list of more than 200 Great School Libraries was published in *Australian Teacher* magazine in March 2016. At the same time, we produced *The impact of Great School Libraries* report<sup>4</sup> and the coalition also commissioned the Australian Council for Education Research to produce a report entitled *What the staff in Australia's schools tell us about teachers working in school libraries*<sup>5</sup>.

Our ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance produced a fully revised version of the guidelines and standards for Australian public libraries<sup>6</sup>, including outcome measures to demonstrate value and impact. These were launched at Parliament House in November 2016.

In 2017, we have produced a series of 10 ways handouts (available on the ALIA website) describing how libraries support communities, schools and organisations.

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**4. We will look at developing a user experience toolkit to help managers assess and refine their offering.**

We have not yet published a user experience toolkit but we have run workshops at our conferences. In 2014, it was *Designing awesome customer services for your library*, facilitated by State Library of Victoria and Meld Studios<sup>7</sup>, and in 2015, *Brand libraries*, in partnership with LIANZA and BRR<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/ALIA-Schools-AITSL-Standards-2014.pdf> accessed 4 May 2017

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.alia.org.au/groups/alia-schools> accessed 4 May 2017

<sup>3</sup> <https://fair.alia.org.au/greatschoolibraries> accessed 4 May 2017

<sup>4</sup>

<https://fair.alia.org.au/sites/fair.alia.org.au/files/u3/Great%20Australian%20School%20Libraries%20Impact%20Report.pdf> accessed 4 May 2017

<sup>5</sup> [http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1026&context=tll\\_misc](http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1026&context=tll_misc) accessed 4 May 2017

<sup>6</sup>

<https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/Guidelines%20Standards%20and%20Outcome%20Measures%20for%20Australian%20Public%20Libraries.pdf> accessed 8 May 2017

<sup>7</sup> <http://nationalconference2014.alia.org.au/content/conference-workshops> accessed 8 May 2017

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**5. Our ALIA PD and training will reflect the needs identified in this report, including enhanced skills in areas such as purchasing, community publishing and managing big data.**

ALIA Training courses in 2017 include *Negotiation skills for librarians*, and *Grow the Love* (library promotion and program development). In 2016, we ran Australian National Data Service information sessions and promoted the ANDS 23 Research Things program. 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.

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**6. In partnership with other associations, we will investigate new relationships between libraries, content creators and publishers.**

Over the last three years, we have developed a closer relationship with the Australian Publishers Association (APA), Australian Society of Authors (ASA) and Australian Booksellers Association (ABA), based on greater mutual understanding and trust. In 2016, we were pleased to announce a landmark agreement with the APA enabling libraries to use images of book covers for promotional purposes without fear of copyright infringement.<sup>9</sup> In 2017, The Reading Hour will be a truly cross industry event, a partnership between the ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance, APA, ASA and ABA.

We have regularly supported the Children's Book Council (CBCA), the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature (NCACL) and the Society for Children's Writers and Book Illustrators (SCWBI) through hosting their events at ALIA House, and are investigating ongoing opportunities for further partnerships.

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**7. We will continue to research and report on trends to assist our members to plan for the future.**

In 2016, in partnership with Charles Sturt University, we ran Relevance 2020 workshops in six cities, bringing together researchers and practitioners to talk about gaps in our knowledge and in the LIS research infrastructure. We announced the results of this investigation<sup>10</sup> at the ALIA Information Online conference in February 2017.

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This was the action list for the sector.

1. Libraries and information services will need to focus on the user experience, not only in terms of content, but also how the service looks and feels in the real world and online.
2. User data, gathered with consent, will play an important part in tailoring the library experience to individuals.
3. Websites will need greater attention to turn them from purely functional devices to an easy, engaging and useful part of the library experience.
4. Opportunities to collect, curate and disseminate community created content will be open for investigation.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://information-online.alia.org.au/content/conference-workshops> accessed 8 May 2017

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.alia.org.au/copyright-and-book-covers> accessed 3 May 2017

<sup>10</sup> <https://read.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/alia-relevance-2020-lis-research-in-australia-online.pdf> accessed 8 May 2017

## Conclusion: What have we learned?

Change is a constant. We have to be alert at all times for the next wave of innovation to sweep the sector, often, but not always, as a result of technological advances. Funding issues are a constant. There is rarely enough money to carry out core services, explore new projects, provide alternative formats and invest in the fabric of the building.

The need for advocacy is a constant. A strong statement of value and impact is worthwhile, but people have short memories. They need to be reminded regularly about what library and information professionals have to offer. Where advocacy is creative, clever and persistent, it is possible to find the funding needed to be innovative.