Australian Library and Information Association

ALIA Special Libraries Summit 2016
Adelaide Convention Centre, Friday 2 September

1. Introduction

ALIA invited leaders from special libraries in government, health, law, research and other fields to come together and discuss the issues affecting the sector, with the aim of developing the basis for a collaborative national action plan.

This document summarises the conversation, chaired and facilitated by former ALIA President Julie Rae, now Chair of the ALIA Special Library and Information Services Advisory Committee.

Presentations by Ann Ritchie, Convenor of ALIA Health Libraries Australia, Angela Vilkins, Executive Manager of GRAIL, and Leanne Griffiths, Senior Manager Information Outreach, CSIRO Library Services, provided highly relevant examples of successful management and advocacy in the specials sector.

Left to right: Leanne Griffiths, Angela Vilkins,
Julie Rae and Ann Ritchie

2. Participants

Amanda Lawrence	Australian Policy Online
Angela Vilkins	Government Research and Information Library (GRAIL)
Ann Ritchie	Health Libraries Australia (HLA)
Annmaree Harper	Victorian Government Library Service
Chris Nelson	Geoscience Australia
Edmund Balnaves	ProSentient
Fiona Emberton	ALIA Board
Gemma Siemensma	Health Libraries Australia (HLA)
Gemma Steele	Museum Victoria
Jan Bordoni	Australian Government Library and Information Network (AGLIN)
Jenni Jeremy	Australian Law Librarians' Association (ALLA)
Jenny Young	SafeWork SA
John Weste	Association of Parliamentary Libraries of Australasia (APLA)
Julie Boyd-Reynolds	Special Libraries Association ANZ
Julie Rae (Chair)	ALIA Special Libraries Information Services Committee
Kirk Nicholls	RMIT Student
Kym Holden	Special Libraries Association ANZ
Leanne Griffiths	CSIRO
Lindsay Harris	Queen Elizabeth Hospital Library
Louise Langridge	Australian Law Librarians' Association (ALLA)
Lyn Whitney	ALIA Specials SA
Mandy Furlan	Department of Defence
Mary Peterson	SA Health Library Service
Melissa Francis	ALIA Specials SA
Michele Gaca	Health Libraries Inc
Siew Chin Scholar	ALIA Specials SA
Sue McKerracher	ALIA
Trish Murphy	Australasian Libraries in Emergency and Security (ALIES)

3. Priorities for collaboration

Delegates were asked to identify their priorities for the Summit and these can be summarised as follows:

Theme	Detail
Advocacy	How to establish LIS within the value supply chain and innovative ways to make LIS central to the organisation Raising the profile of specials Unification of message across all sector associations
Learning	What other specials are doing that we can learn from
Research and best practice	Advocacy Benchmarking Consistent data Possible standards
Support	Smaller libraries connected with the broader network of LIS professionals Shared priorities

4. How the past influences the future

Past	Current and future
Our strengths have always been in intelligent, insightful customer service.	When the library and information service joins another part of the organisation, LIS professionals are seen as a conduit for interacting with clients.
Organisations and the public were not as litigious as they are now.	Risk management has emerged as a critical factor – the risk of clients not seeking information or sourcing incorrect information. Understand the risk element in your information provision – health, defence, privacy. (Professional indemnity insurance recognises the importance of the librarian role.)
There were defined edges to the library. Clients and organisations had a better understanding of the value of our service and we were better able to communicate it.	Often services are delivered remotely and we can have long term relationships with people we never see physically. (Photos on website to help recognition and keep relationships strong). Reluctance of the team to use webcams but we must overcome this, face to face remains important to read body language and other non-verbal signals.
Clients and LIS professionals were not so time poor.	No time to browse, little time for conversation, we need to provide clients with something that they will immediately find valuable.
There have always been challenges with organisational changes and machinery of government changes.	Job losses are often a feature of change, which makes it much more threatening, and job security is a greater issue. We need to be flexible, responsive, skilled and constantly learning. Strong skills in leadership, strategy. Be aware that change is constant, be brave and be prepared to develop interests in a broader range of topics.

We used to have large print collections and we owned the content.	Today, we spend at least 50% of our budget on collections but we don't own them – we are licensing them from publishers and this dictates the terms. For example we may not be able to engage in interlibrary loans. Contract is overriding copyright.
It was relatively easy to collaborate and share physical objects.	In the digital era it isn't efficient and affordable for every library to hold all the digital material available. There is free content on the web. It is time-consuming for each LIS to package this content individually for clients; it would be much more efficient to take a collaborative approach. Trove is a national distributed collection.
We held paper records for the organisation; important documents were in print format.	There is value in older reports and grey literature but digitisation is a hurdle. There is the potential to use volunteer help eg hospital volunteers, fellows. The end of the financial year is a good time to be bidding for funding for retro-digitisation. Digital access also requires a central information hub so that researchers don't have to search across multiple websites to find reports. AustLII and APO are collective information sources, which enable special collections to be aggregated without developing new databases for niche sectors. This will be aided by government publications moving to Creative Commons.
We had defined librarian skills in the print environment.	In the digital environment, we need to learn new skills – information management, data visualisation – we have to think more broadly. Up-skilling will enable us to take leadership roles.
LIS was a well known and attractive profession.	LIS has extended into new areas. It provides an exciting career opportunity but less well defined in the continuously evolving environment. This makes it difficult to attract new people. We need to explore mentoring for staff and the next generation of leaders, improving our succession planning.
There have been very few academic studies.	Academic research is needed to help identify best practice and future trends specifically in special libraries.
Physical space was essential when we had print collections.	The physical space remains important, as it is used for study and collaborative purposes, but it can come under threat. Organisations may seek to decommission the physical aspects of the library and to go purely digital. On the other hand, where LIS is valued, it has meant the library staff being consulted about what technologies are needed for new collaborative spaces.
Information was packaged.	We need to find ways to make raw datasets readily available to our clients, as well as packaged data, but we're not very good at this yet. There are no off-the-shelf platforms and we don't always have the time, expertise and resources to develop our own digital repositories. Work with ANDS, Research Data Australia and upcoming APO repository.
Value proposition around creating metadata, cataloguing, organising information.	We have competition. For example, high performance computer science database engineers can do similar things.

5. Presentations

Ann Ritchie, Health Libraries Australia (PPT attachment)

Mary Peterson noted that in the past, in SA Health, PD was at the discretion of individual hospitals, so there was neither the guarantee of a consistent approach nor of funding being available. The library service approached a body representing allied health professionals, with evidence developed by Lindsay Harris, to seek recognition of librarians as allied health professionals. This was achieved by pointing to the 2011 HLA report, which described health library competencies, and to the ALIA PD Scheme, with implied compulsory professional development. The approach was successful and SA Health libraries were able to apply for funding for PD for staff. This resulted in 15 people attending an important workshop, and an approximate budget of $2000 per annum for PD for each member of staff.

Angela Vilkins, GRAIL

GRAIL (Government Research and Information Library) is a unit of the State Library of Queensland providing service to eight central agencies across the Queensland government. GRAIL is e-preferred with very little print added, e-book access is patron driven and older material scanned on demand. GRAIL has brought significant benefits to its member departments and continually works to demonstrate value. Examples include providing ROI equivalent dollar value on resources, the offer of Press Reader hotspots and Lynda.com to all member departments, new media platform for broader alerts and engaging with procurement areas on discussions for whole of government subscriptions.

Leanne Griffiths, CSIRO (PPT attachment)

6. Scenario planning

In the future .... Google, Amazon and Apple have merged and, using advanced Artificial Intelligence, are offering services that compete with, and potentially replace, special libraries. What could we have done to prevent this scenario arising and what should we do to ensure the survival of LIS in this environment?

Strategies	Comments
Raise awareness	Raise awareness of the value of our services now, to ensure our value continues to be recognised (ROI of information management). Promote critical appraisal/evidence-based substance of our approach.
	Use language that has meaning for the organisation – library/information/research/knowledge.
Be part of it	Add more content to the Google/Amazon/Apple conglomerate. We need to be leaders of that change, joining with Google.
Draw on new technologies	Look at using AI technology ourselves. Offer an alternative to Google in terms of intuitive, simple, comprehensive search.
	Position ourselves in the space with data, repositories.

Considerations	Organisations will be reluctant to surrender their competitive advantage through production and ownership of their own knowledge.
	Engage in strong advocacy for open access.
	We need to up-skill – 23 Things, literature research.

7. Outline action plan

7 Areas to develop	Detail
1 Who we are	Mapping the sector – a census approach (HLA)
	Creating consistent data with the potential for regular benchmarking surveys (CAUL)
2 Our value proposition	Consider a ROI study on the value of special libraries and digital collections for information access and management (APO statement)
	Real work on the value proposition, identifying and acknowledging competitors in the marketplace and unpicking the true value of the librarian
	Case studies demonstrating the value of LIS in a risk sense
3 How we fit into the professional landscape	Use HLA as a template for establishing professional status
	Conversation with LIS educators about specialist courses – Grad Cert, QUT special courses for specials
	Create ALIA PD specialisations for law and other areas, in addition to current health, government, academic/research
	Compulsory CPD for Certified Professional status
4 Practical ways we can achieve better performance	Consortium approach to negotiations – model licenses
	Sharing best practice – GRAIL, CSIRO, HLA
	Specials conference to engage leaders, staff and other stakeholders
5 And do new things	Creating platform for raw datasets
	Training courses in developing and managing digital repositories
	Working group to package free content on the web for different sectors
	Open up dialogue with Google and other competitors in the information landscape
6 Find out more	Scope further research projects
	Describe the future so we can take this to our organisation – be brave about identifying the competition and be adamant about identifying our continuing intermediary role
7 Sustainable LIS	Graduate programs, internships, recruitment for LIS and specifically the specials sector

8. Next steps

- Create a work plan based on the outline action plan (ALIA)
- Follow up meeting/teleconference, with schedule of further forums (All)
- Agree a collaborative approach to a series of projects (All)
- Identify teams of volunteers willing to work on each element (All)
- Develop project plans, timelines and funding sources (Team leaders)
- Delivery and implementation (Teams)