

Peak Bodies Forum — May 22, 2009

Item 4: LIS Education: ALIA Course Recognition Review — Challenges facing the profession in 21st century

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1. ALIA recognition qualifications

At the university level there are two qualifications which are recognised by ALIA

1. an undergraduate (bachelor) degree in library and information studies
2. a first degree in any discipline AND a postgraduate (graduate diploma or Masters) course¹

There are six institutions which currently provide ALIA recognised undergraduate degrees

- Charles Sturt
- Curtin University of Technology
- Edith Cowan University
- Monash University
- Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
- University of Technology, Sydney

There are nine institutions which currently provide ALIA recognised postgraduate degrees

- Charles Sturt
- Curtin University of Technology
- Edith Cowan University
- Monash University
- Queensland University of Technology
- Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
- University of Tasmania
- University of Technology, Sydney

There are two institutions which are currently in the process of seeking course recognition

- University of Canberra
- University of South Australia

Undergraduate degrees

In recent years a number of library schools have experienced a shift away from undergraduate to postgraduate entry. Graduate enrolments rose from 1425 to 1539 between 2001 and 2005. In the same period undergraduate enrolments declined from 1209 to 811.² Nevertheless it would appear that among those institutions which do offer an undergraduate degree several have a very broad information management curriculum (for example the BA in Communication (Information and Media) offered by UTS.

¹ See Appendix 1

² ALIA Qualifications - what is the preferred professional qualification, Workforce Summit, 2008.

Postgraduate degrees

There has been much discussion among the educators concerning Australia's postgraduate degrees — the structure, length and the nature. The following are the main points:

Length of postgraduate program, specifically Masters degree

For entry into the information professions there are two levels of postgraduate degrees:

- Postgraduate diploma — typically the equivalent of 1 year (two semesters)
- Masters Degree — generally the equivalent of 1.5 year (3 semesters), in some cases 2 years

There is currently one ALIA recognised 1 year master degree in teacher librarianship which requires and 4 year undergraduate degree in education (the underlying assumption being education is the same discipline as teacher librarianship). However, a second institution is in the process of seeking ALIA recognition for a 1 year master degree in information studies (librarianship) by coursework. The possibility that a Masters degree could be a one year program (with the underlying assumption that it need not have an undergraduate degree in an information discipline) has generated considerable conflicting discussion, giving rise to the following points:

1. The introduction of 12 months Masters degrees will create a situation where we have courses of 12, 18 and 24 months all leading to essentially the same qualification (Curtin, UTS)
2. A Masters degree of 1 year offers little benefit to any stakeholder given that it is identical to the current base level professional qualification, the Graduate Diploma (Charles Sturt)
3. A decline in the perception of Australian LIS educational standards both nationally and internationally (Charles Sturt, Curtin, Edith Cowan, UTS)
4. A defence of a 1 year masters degree that has as an entry requirement of 4 years of tertiary study leading to a degree and hence compatibility with the Australian Qualifications Framework, 2007 [see next point] (University of Canberra).

Nature of a Masters degree

There is among the majority of universities providing LIS education a strong agreement with the statement in the Australian Qualifications Framework, 2007 that a Masters degree should reflect 'a high order of skill in analysis, critical evaluation and/or professional application through the planning and execution of project work or a piece of scholarship'. This raises the following point for serious discussion:

- Is the underlying philosophy of a Masters degree that there must be a research component? Assuming a two-semester Graduate Diploma can meet educational and professional needs, a longer period is required for the research project/thesis component of a Masters.

Postgraduate education culture

Is Australia, as other countries moving towards a postgraduate education culture? 'Some Australian employers have a very strong preference for, and in some cases will only employ, those with graduate (i.e. Graduate Diploma or Masters) qualifications'.³

1. It has been raised that perhaps the 12 month Graduate Diploma may no longer meet the breadth and depth of knowledge expected by employers. Graduate diplomas in

³ ALIA Qualifications - what is the preferred professional qualification, Workforce Summit, 2008

- part has been based on financial realities of a student body — AusStudy support, lower expected salaries (return on investment).
2. Should the Masters degree with a minimum of three-semesters become standard post-graduate entry point into the profession?

RPL and entry to postgraduate degrees

There is a general consensus that all candidates for entry into a postgraduate degree must have an undergraduate degree. Only in very exceptional cases should 'extensive professional experience' as a basis of RPL in lieu of an undergraduate degree, be considered (Charles Sturt University, Curtin University, Edith Cowan University, UTS)

Concerning these very exceptional cases we, the educators, would ask ALIA to 'advise higher education providers as to what the profession understands as "extensive relevant professional experience"' (Charles Sturt).

3. Changing careers of information professionals

The changing face of careers and employment requirements of information professionals is well known; this has been raised in many fora, for example Workforce Summit 2008, Education for Information iForum Series, 2008, National Information Management Skills Summit.

Discussion at the iForum series highlighted 'the lack of a clear identity for the information fields and in the professions. The general consensus of both groups was that the information disciplines need to express more clearly who they are, what they offer and describe and market the roles information professions play in creating new business and opportunities in industry, government and society'.⁴

This change has created a challenge for ALIA in their dual role as the recognising body and provider of support services to information professionals, for educators whose curriculum must keep up with the changing environment and employers' expectations and for the information professional themselves.

ALIA Core, skills and knowledge

Discussion concerning core skills and knowledge often appears to be based on two opposing beliefs sets: the generalist view (information management) and the technical specialist (for example cataloguer, information architect). Perhaps it is time for the discussion on how the core skills and knowledge accommodate both within the framework of a professional accrediting association.

Keith Webster in his paper presented at the Workforce Summit 2008 asked 'is [ALIA] to be a narrowly-defined group of those involved in "traditional" library environments and near friends or a wider body of those whose work involves *inter alia* information or knowledge management, records management, information literacy and so on?'

One of the questions that ALIA has posed concerning core skills and knowledge is 'does there need to be a wide-ranging review?' There has been a lot of informal discussion in which many people have indicated there should be, however the ALIA education wiki has been remarkably silent on this question. Management of digital resources is a specific example of skills/knowledge absent from ALIA's recognition criteria is illustrative of the need for a review⁵.

⁴ *I-FORUM 1 — Education for information: Towards effective integration for the information disciplines*. Report on the first meeting, 11 February 2008.

⁵ This last point is my personal view.

An analysis of information professional job advertisements (Kennan et al, 2006⁶, of which 57% were from the government or corporate sectors, 47% specified Web design and maintenance skills and 23.7% required skills in managing E-Resources. Furthermore the study showed a marked decline in requirement of the ALIA accreditation (32.5%, down from 74% in 1974).)⁷

In the United States 'almost 30% of LIS graduates do not enter library jobs and the proposed prescriptive emphasis on specific competencies will displace content that addresses non-library related knowledge and skills' (ASIS&T Letter to the Office of Accreditation, American Library Association, April 13, 2009)

Kennan et al 2005⁸ in their survey of job advertisements noted 'the trend to down-play recognised qualifications suggests de-professionalisation. The decline in the explicit mention of ALIA-recognised qualifications (down from 74% in 1974 to 33% in 2004), and the rise of no stipulated qualification (from 23% to 47%) does not seem to be a healthy sign for an accrediting professional association.'

Course recognition 5 year model

The above points concerning the dynamic and diverse nature of skills and competencies of information professional does bring an enormous challenge to any review, including the length of the ALIA recognition period.

There does not seem to be any formal consensus on the length of the ALIA recognition period. Mark Brogan of Edith Cowan (ALIA wiki, 24 March) has noted that 'industry association standard seems to have moved to 5 years — ASA, ACS; however Bonna Jones pointed out in the same forum that 'accreditation as a process examines both content and program structure — the former is easy to change and the latter is not so easy to change (RMIT, 23 April).

If educators are continually updating and/or changing the curriculum content in line with employer and student demand and within the framework of their institutions, then perhaps the length of the ALIA recognition period is a decision for ALIA.

2. Aging population of the profession of librarianship

This general aging factor is of great concern to the library profession, not only in Australia but also overseas (for example the US, Canada and the UK). There are numerous studies which have detailed the reasons for this and for the various strategies and initiatives to address this. While the sentiment 'let's hope that a significant number of Australian kids, choose to become librarians'⁹ is a valid one, it maybe that a conservatism embedded in the current core skills and knowledge is contributing to the perception that there is a lack of cultural diversity within the information professions. It may be that the system is attempting to replicate the librarian of earlier times. While a

⁶ Kennan, MA; Willard, P and Wilson, CS 2006, 'What do they want? A study of changing employer expectations of information professionals', *Australian and Academic Research Libraries*, 37(1):17–37 <http://www.alia.org.au/publishing/aarl/37.1/kennan.willard.pdf>

⁷ Kennan, MA; Willard, P and Wilson, CS 2006, 'What do they want? A study of changing employer expectations of information professionals', *Australian and Academic Research Libraries*, 37(1):17–37 <http://www.alia.org.au/publishing/aarl/37.1/kennan.willard.pdf>

⁸ Kennan, MA, Cole, F, Willard, P and Wilson CS 2005, 'Changes in the workplace: transformation of the information professional? *Research applications in Information and Library Studies Seminar*. Centre for Information Studies, Wagga Wagga, NSW.

⁹ Hutley, S and Solomons, T, 2004, *Generational Change in Australian Librarianship: viewpoints from Generation X*, a paper presented at ALIA 2004.
<http://conferences.alia.org.au/alia2004/pdfs/hutley.s.paper.pdf>

great deal has been done at the individual institutional level to broaden curriculum to meet the current challenges, perhaps one strategy which could be initiated immediately is a review of this core in the light of the wider world of information management. Such a review would need to recognise that many people working in libraries, as in other information-rich environments have a broader skill and knowledge set than those of the aging professional librarian.

3. Bradley Review

Much of this background paper has been written without reference to the Bradley Review and the recent education component of the Commonwealth government budget. There needs to be a serious discussion about the impact of this vis à vis the issues raised in this paper.

Appendix 1

Table 1 Current undergraduate degrees recognised by ALIA

Charles Sturt	Bachelor of Applied Science (Library and Information Management)
Curtin University of Technology	Bachelor of Arts (Librarianship and Corporate Information Management)
Edith Cowan University	Bachelor of Information Technology/Bachelor of Science (Library Technology)
Monash University	Bachelor of Information Technology and Systems (IM Major)
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology	Bachelor of Business (Information & Knowledge Management)
University of Technology, Sydney	Bachelor of Arts in Communication (Information and Media)

Table 2 Current postgraduate degrees recognised by ALIA

Charles Sturt	Master of Applied Science (Library and Information Management)
Curtin University of Technology	Graduate Diploma in Information and Library Studies Master of Information Management (Librarianship)
Edith Cowan University	Master of Information Services Graduate Diploma of Science (Information Services)
Monash University	Graduate Diploma in Information and Knowledge Management Master Business Information Systems Professional (MBIS Professional) Master of Business Information Systems (MBIS)
Queensland University of Technology	Master of Information Technology (Library and Information Science)
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology	Graduate Diploma in Information Management
University of Tasmania	Graduate Diploma of Information Management
University of Technology, Sydney	Graduate Diploma in Information Management Graduate Diploma in Knowledge Management Master of Arts in Information and Knowledge Management

Table 3 Postgraduate degrees currently seeking recognition by ALIA

University of Canberra	Master of Information Studies in Librarianship
University of South Australia	Graduate Diploma of Library and Information Management