

ALIA Professional Pathways Frameworks Project – Consultation Paper

A Response from the School of Information and Communication Studies, Charles Sturt University

We thank ALIA for another opportunity to respond to its 'Professional Pathways' initiative. Our response to this Consultation Paper can be summarised as follows.

- We recognise the potential value of reframing the knowledge, skills and attributes required for working in the library and information profession
- We endorse ALIA's continued commitment to support and recognise information professionals' *ongoing* development
- We are however firmly of the view that an alternative pathway to professional status for information specialists that bypassed formal education would serve to undermine the status of information professionals and would be detrimental to the interests of the library and information profession in Australia.

Our response to the previous Pathways consultation exercise in 2020 can be found [here](#).

In this new response, we address specifically questions 13 and 14 in the list of consultation questions in appendix A of the Consultation Paper, in light of the Professional Pathways Advisory Board's recommendation 3 on page 38 of the Consultation Paper, for consideration to be given to new pathways into the profession and professional registration. Question 13 asks,

What should professional recognition be based upon?

The School sees the proposed new framework of knowledge, skills, and attributes for professional accreditation as expanding on the existing framework under which its courses have been recently reaccredited by ALIA, and welcomes modifications that reflect more thoroughly the current needs of libraries and other employers, and embed more fully the values of inclusion and diversity. We pride ourselves in producing graduates who are both 'job ready' and 'job understanding'. They are ready to step into professional positions and are aware, as they do so, of the important role that information and their profession plays in society.

What concerns the School is if the existing or proposed framework is *not* used to rigorously assess the knowledge, skill, and attributes (KSAs) of those seeking admission to the information profession by way of professional membership of ALIA. The globally accepted, standard way of rigorously assessing for a foundational level of KSAs is through a program of formal education. As the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) state in their [Guidelines for Professional Library and Information Science \(LIS\) Education Programmes](#) (2022), 'formal education, leading to a degree, provides the qualification for a professional career' (p.1). Universities are required to demonstrate in considerable detail the validity of their students' learning outcomes, through systems of internal moderation and external benchmarking, while professional accrediting bodies, such as ALIA, ensure the industry relevance of their curricula. Micro-credentials, on the other hand, rarely undergo equivalent levels of quality assurance around their learning outcomes, and it would require a very large number of them to equate to the minimum volume of study ALIA requires of programs for its professional accreditation, i.e., one year of full-time study or equivalent (for the graduate diploma).

The introduction of an alternative pathway to ALIA professional membership is consequently likely to result in a diminution of the status of ALIA professional membership in terms of the KSAs this

membership represents, and ultimately of the status of the profession that ALIA represents. It may also lead to employers not accepting ALIA professional membership as the base qualification for entry-level professional positions, and ultimately of the diminution of the relevance of ALIA itself.

Question 14 from the Consultation Paper asks:

What distinctions do you think are important for professional recognition? Should there be distinctions between: a. people with accredited qualifications in LIS and people with other qualifications or experience?

A profession, by definition, defines and regulates its membership. Our profession's membership is defined in terms of standards such as ALIA's '[foundation knowledge, skills, and attributes](#)'. Anyone who can *fully demonstrate* these KSAs should be admitted to ALIA's professional membership, as per ALIA's existing policy. In practice, the KSAs are usually demonstrated through completion of an ALIA-accredited course. If people with 'other qualifications and experience' do not possess the foundation KSAs as stipulated by ALIA, they can nevertheless join ALIA as affiliate members. Clearly people cannot join a profession if they do not meet the profession's requirements for entry. If there is to be a profession, there must be criteria for membership. Without criteria for professional membership, ALIA would lose its status as a professional association and become some form of special interest group.

The School remains puzzled by some of the examples of the kinds of worker being proposed as beneficiaries of the alternative pathway. The first example cited in part 4 of the Consultation Paper is that of an Information Technology Manager in a library. We do not understand why an IT Manager would not identify as an IT professional, i.e., a member of a different profession and a different professional association (such as the ACS). It would be appropriate and potentially beneficial for the IT professional to be an *affiliate* member of ALIA, given their working relationship with libraries, but not a professional member, no more than it would be appropriate for the library's caterer, say, to become a professional membership of ALIA. Unless of course the IT manager wanted to *become* a librarian, in which case they could undertake the same program of education that other aspiring librarians take, to qualify them for a librarian's position.

b. librarians and teacher librarians?

The School has for many years provided professional education specifically for prospective teacher librarians, as well as librarians and other information professionals. The distinction between teacher librarians and other information professionals, on the basis of the former's specialised KSAs, has served the teacher librarian community well, and should be upheld for as long as the teacher librarian community determines the utility of this distinction. The School views the teacher librarian profession to be a particular component of the broader information profession. Components of a broader profession *can* have more specific entry requirements. This is by no means unique to the information profession; similar distinctions are made in a range of other professions (such as information technology, accounting, and medicine).

c. people at the beginning of their careers and people with more professional expertise? d. people who invest in ongoing CPD and those who don't?

The School has no issue with any initiative that seeks to support and recognise information professionals' *ongoing* development and sees it as entirely appropriate for ALIA to advance its CPD (i.e., continuing professional development) offerings for the benefit of its professional membership. Likewise, the School supports the revalidation of professional status through an evidence-based

exercise. Different professionals in different positions and at different stages of their careers will need different CPD, and this can only realistically be covered by the sorts of micro-credentials that ALIA and its partners, as well as other agencies, offer.

Conclusion

For over 45 years the School has prepared thousands of Library and Information Studies students for entry into the information profession, and engaged hundreds of practitioners to ensure that the foundational skills and knowledge we teach them will serve them well as they embark on their careers, and serve their employers equally well. Our postgraduates would typically have spent three years part-time obtaining their professional qualification, and our undergraduates six or more years. They do not undertake such a course of education lightly; they do so because they have a very strong desire and commitment to become an information professional. Likewise, the School's educators (along with the educators at other universities and colleges) care passionately about providing the best possible preparation they can for their students, continually adjusting the content and delivery of their courses to this end. It is a partnership, between students, educators, and industry, which has stood the test of time and continues to drive the profession forward.

It is in fact increasingly challenging to cover all the 'foundation knowledge, skills, and attributes' required by ALIA for professional accreditation of our courses, and we fail to see how this requirement aligns with the proposed alternative pathway to professional status that would likely require significantly *less* study. If so, surely the learning would be inadequate. If students have *prior* learning that covers some of the foundational KSAs, this learning can be recognised as credit for the corresponding part of their course.

An alternative pathway to professional status that is based on something other than the learning required as *foundational* for professional status is self-contradictory and would compromise the integrity of ALIA's entire framework for professional recognition. It would also undermine the countless amounts of hard work put in by generations of students, educators, and industry leaders to build a profession that is seen as such by employers and by the wider community, including the university community. In short, it would constitute a highly retrograde step that would jeopardise the long-term future of both ALIA and the library and information profession ALIA represents.