

ALIA Professional Pathways Framework

An open letter from health library and information professionals

Thank-you ALIA for a chance to respond to the Professional Pathways framework which is currently out for consultation. However, as health library and information professionals we have concerns with what has been presented.

Firstly, in the prototype framework the listed “foundation domains” fail to include professional knowledge domains – in essence making LIS a content free profession. This implies that library and information professionals’ distinctive areas of knowledge and expertise are not essential, nor needed. We believe it is this unique skillset, the foundation of which is gained from our vocationally focused tertiary qualifications, that sets us apart from other professions. It is crucial that the “professional knowledge domains” are included as “foundation domains” as they underpin LIS as a profession.

Secondly, a “profession” by definition requires a university-based education system. If health librarianship were not considered to be a profession, on a par with other clinical professions, it runs the risk of being reclassified industrially and relegated to nonprofessional, administrative levels of remuneration and poorer conditions. Our understanding of the prototype framework is that after undertaking an “alternative pathway” into LIS, someone like an IT Manager would be considered a LIS professional. This does not fit with the definition of a “profession” as the example gave a micro-credential, not a university-based qualification.

Thirdly, the framework and consultation fail to explain how these alternative pathways would work in practice. Who would run these micro-credentials? How long would they go for? How many do you need to do? Are they university or TAFE equivalents? Are they nationally recognised? Who accredits the courses? Who approves someone as being competent? Without explicit information on how alternative pathways would work in

practice, informed decisions cannot be made.

Fourthly, setting up alternative (cheaper and faster) pathways to “professional” recognition in effect sacrifices and abandons university/TAFE LIS schools by removing their intake stream. This creates a disconnection, in parallel and in competition to the current education system. In turn without LIS schools, there will be a reduced capacity for LIS academics to continue researching and exploring LIS as a profession. The alternative pathways would also make hiring more onerous for employers, because applicants with the ALIA Information Professional title would not necessarily possess a common body of knowledge, nor could be assumed as competent in areas of professional knowledge.

Finally, in the past when concerns have been raised by our sector, health library and information professionals have been told that we are “special and different”. Health librarians should not be segregated from the rest of our profession. All librarians have a unique skillset that is required for effective professional practice and the framework needs to apply to the whole profession, not sectors or specialisations within it. A solid educational foundation must be retained at the core of professional recognition. Health librarians have achieved hard-won industrial parity with other allied health professionals on the back of a strong educational qualification framework. If this foundation is not retained the profession may well fracture.

We believe that ALIA - as our professional association - should be advocating and promoting the unique skillset library and information professionals bring to the organisation, championing the profession, setting standards and encouraging people to gain accredited LIS qualifications – not deprofessionalising us.

Signed,

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