

12 August 2022

Dear Cathie and Trish,

**Re ALIA Pathways project**

I and others I have spoken with are concerned that providing options to qualify as a librarian outside of the university system (which is what it seems ALIA Pathways as doing) will see the de-professionalisation of librarianship. Professionalisation which occurred with the moving of librarianship from training in libraries and by the professional association to an education conducted in a university in the 1950s and 1960s in Australia was a hard-fought battle of the generation of librarians before us for the recognition of librarianship as a profession. You will know from the sociology literature that to qualify as a profession rather than an occupation, one of the conditions is a university education in that profession's body of knowledge – a body of knowledge which should be built upon discipline specific research. Indeed, in some countries one cannot practice as a librarian (e.g. the USA and Canada, but also elsewhere in) without post graduate qualification (a Master in Librarianship). Many are concerned that the Pathways Program will be the “thin end of the wedge” and see a beginning of de-professionalisation.

Andrew Abbott, an internationally respected sociologist, wrote a seminal and still cited book titled “The System of the Professions” (1988) and later in response to queries from a number of professions/occupations wrote a series of essays, including one on librarianship, which is quite old (1998) but none the less relevant. He starts off discussing the difference between occupations and professions and listing a number of what have previously been called “semi-professions” which included social work, teaching and librarianship. He then claims that the major difference between the older “professions” (medicine and law) and what were then known as the “semi-professions” are that the latter are mainly conducted by women and of course thus they are historically put down for that reason rather than because they do not meet the criteria for a profession. That was changing then and has certainly changed now. He says that the professions really all sit at one level and he consistently refers to the “profession of librarianship”. Of course, I simplify – the arguments are much more complex than that, but that is them in a nutshell. Librarianship is a profession and a university education in librarianship informed by research in the discipline and profession is required for it to qualify as a profession.

Connie Wilson, myself and others wrote a book chapter on the move of Australian LIS professional education into the universities titled *From practice to academia: 50 years of LIS education in Australia* (2012) conceived in 2008 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the move of library and information education into universities (1959) in which we explain the reasons for the move, which have not changed.

In addition, Australian Librarians have won pay battles based on the professional nature of their work (see for example Kate Burnham (2004)), and it would be a shame to see any losses in this regard with any move to education outside of universities, which may see the de-professionalisation of librarianship.

There are only a few universities left in Australia teaching library and information studies, and given the current nature of universities, the LIS programs within them need the support of the relevant professional association (ALIA). I hope that you will be able to reassure me and others that the Pathways program will not see the de-professionalisation of librarianship through the replacement

of a university education in librarianship with entry to the profession through other less professional routes?

With best wishes

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<https://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/en/publications/from-practice-to-academia-50-years-of-lis-education-in-australia>