

ALIA Professional Pathways Consultation Paper submission

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Organisation or Group: **Nil**

Are you responding on behalf of a group: **No**

Do you give permission to make this submission public: **Yes**

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Thankyou for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Professional Pathways Framework. I especially appreciate the opportunity to comment on the framework despite having let my ALIA membership lapse several years ago in despair at the direction of the organisation at the time. I hope my comments will be carefully considered in developing the final Framework. I commend ALIA on this draft Framework and the consultation process that has led us all here.

Question 1

This first question is the most significant of all the questions in this consultation paper. It should be a cause of great embarrassment to members that ALIA still does not have any stated opinion on its own ethics and values, having chosen instead to leave this core responsibility to IFLA. This is made worse by the fact that several of the IFLA "values" are weak or meaningless.

It would be problematic to create an entire new process for professional accreditation based on professional ethics and values whilst refusing to outline what the accrediting professional association's ethics and values actually are.

Rather than asking as part of this consultation on the Pathways framework whether IFLA's "ethics and values" are relevant, ALIA should initiate a separate process to develop its own explicit values and ethics. This should include a plan for ALIA to promote these values through its work and hold members to account when their professional behaviour does not align.

Questions 2 to 8

I agree with the general shape of the conceptual design for the Framework. The detail and how it is operationalised will be the ultimate test, but conceptually it makes sense to have Foundation domains, Professional domains, and an overarching Active Professionalism concept.

The **Foundation** domains seem like the right ones to me. I have a suggestion (below) regarding one of the proposed **Professional** domains. I have a few comments on specific aspects, but I am combining all these questions into one response as they are interrelated.

Foundation Domain 1 (Ethics and Values) is a crucial foundational aspect that anyone who wants recognition as a library professional must master. However there is more work needed by ALIA to clarify what those values and ethics are and to ensure they are actually meaningful and measurable. I recommend a system of professional sanctions for professionals breaching these ethics, however that is probably outside the scope of this consultation.

Foundation Domain 2 (Wider Information Contexts) provides space for discussion of the political economy of the creation of informational and cultural works, however I believe this should be given more weight and attention within this domain. Concepts listed for inclusion in other domains, such as copyright, creative commons licensing, and Indigenous knowledge systems would be better understood by professional learners if they first have a foundational understanding of competing conceptions of information ownership, citation/acknowledgment, and under what circumstances it is (and is not) appropriate to transmit knowledge. Without a more robust exploration of these concepts at a foundational stage, there is a risk that the hegemonic ideas within Australian society regarding how knowledge and culture "should" be controlled, accessed, and shared will remain unexamined.

Library professionals should be equipped with the knowledge and habits of thought to question why certain arrangements for the production, control, publication and retention of knowledge exist, how they came to exist, what the consequences and power dynamics of those arrangements are, and how they intersect with the profession's stated ethics and values.

Foundation Domain 4 – Sector and organisational contexts implies that it will focus exclusively on a particular sector. As a professional librarian who has worked in the public library, vendor/cooperative, and academic library sectors, I believe it is crucial to the success, progress and relevance of the entire library profession that librarians have a broad understanding of the context of *all* sectors. Australian librarianship currently has a culture of strict sectarianism that inhibits movement of librarians between library sectors, and this is to the detriment of the profession and the individuals working in it.

Professional Knowledge Domain 8 Leadership and management is both unnecessary and mislabelled. Everything on the list of topics associated with this PKD is about *management*, rather than *leadership*. Whilst obviously all libraries require some kind of management and administration skills, this is not a knowledge domain peculiar to Library and Information Studies. It is already well served by Schools of Management, Schools of Business, and myriad other training and education opportunities. I strongly believe that it is neither appropriate nor desirable to include "management" as a Professional Knowledge Domain for accreditation as a library professional. Having generic "management" or "leadership" credentials in the absence of anything else does not qualify one to be a library professional, and indeed the belief that anyone can manage a library has frequently been the source of controversy and *mismanagement*.

Whilst management should not warrant its own domain, *leadership and advocacy* should explicitly be part of the overall model. I suggest renaming **Active Professionalism 1 - Professionalism** to **Active Professionalism 1 - Professional Leadership**. This would embrace the concept of "leadership from any position" and provide a clearer indication of what this domain means.

Questions 9, 10 and 11

There would be little point to the Framework if it does not form the underlying basis of all LIS professional education, training and accreditation in Australia at all levels, and ensure that they are connected.

Substantial content from all four Foundation domains must be included in all LIS accreditations. That is, it should not be possible for anyone, no matter what professional path they take, to be accredited as a library professional without demonstrating competency in all of these domains.

I suggest that additionally substantial knowledge must be shown in a majority of the Professional Knowledge domains (4 of 7 if my suggestion to remove *Leadership and Management* is taken up, otherwise 5 of the 8).

For a LIS university course to be accredited, I suggest the following as the basis for any program (assuming subject content is of sufficient quality):

- All four foundation domains
- Information management
- ATSI Professional Knowledge
- At least 2 (3) other Professional domains

This question has not been asked directly, but I believe that whilst ALIA is considering professional pathways it is time to ask hard questions about the Library Technician qualification. This is an anachronistic qualification that serves primarily to enable school libraries to underpay library professionals by hiring staff as Technicians rather than as librarians, and secondarily to lock low-income workers into low status jobs, with no way to progress further without undertaking an entire new university degree. If we are talking about alternative pathways towards full accreditation as library professionals, it is time for the hard distinction between "technical" and "professional" library accreditation to be dissolved. It may be appropriate for TAFEs to teach short courses, standalone units, or certificate courses that form part of a final accreditation as a library professional. But the concept of "para-professional" library technicians as a separate, low-class qualification should be ended: it is toxic and divisive to the library profession.

With specific regard to micro-credentials, these may be appropriate if ALIA is able to provide a robust framework for the quantity and quality of knowledge and aptitude that must be demonstrated in order to be considered "qualified" in each domain. That is, ALIA should be open to a range of microcredential models, but must still maintain quality to ensure that professional accreditation is meaningful. Attending a two-hour cultural competency

micro-cred wouldn't be sufficient to cover off on *ATSI knowledges, cultures, and Country*, for example.

Questions 12 to 16

Professional recognition is important to me. Libraries are complex organisations with a very long history. The work we do and how we do it is the result of centuries of dedicated work and a body of knowledge passed down generations. It is offensive and dangerous to have people appointed to powerful positions within libraries without regard for the body of professional knowledge required to act competently.

Having said that, there are problems with credentialism. The profession is extraordinarily white and middle-class. If we are serious about diversifying the profession, we cannot insist that everyone complete a Bachelor degree or Graduate Diploma *specifically in LIS* in order to be considered professionally competent. The disdain with which some in the profession look at their colleagues with years of experience and relevant study, but no formal LIS-specific qualifications, is deeply troubling and a cause of great and unnecessary friction within the profession.

A university degree from an accredited institution is a useful heuristic for assessing whether someone has gained an adequate level of competency in a body of knowledge. If universities in Australia wish to teach LIS courses aligned with ALIA's knowledge domains, they should continue to be used as proof of adequate competency in relevant knowledge domains.

However, ALIA should explicitly open professional recognition beyond this to a range of ways to show competency in the relevant domains. This could include, but should not be restricted to:

- Knowledge gained through other university degrees and TAFE certificates, e.g. Education or Community Development;
- Knowledge gained through professional practice, e.g. as an ICT professional or academic researcher;
- Knowledge gained through short courses provided by ALIA or other organisations;
- Knowledge gained in non-professional contexts, e.g. through life experience as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, volunteering in a community engagement role, or computing as a hobby

ALIA's focus should be on creative yet credible ways to assess an individual's competency within the relevant domains, rather than focussing purely on accrediting formal courses. This could look like CILIP's process for Chartering, or LIANZA's process for Revalidation, where a person could submit a portfolio outlining the various paths they have taken to gain the requisite knowledge and competencies.

The purpose of ALIA professional recognition should be to ensure that librarians have the required knowledge and competencies, not that they have the right piece of paper.

Question 17

The answer to this question depends on what ALIA means by "professional progression".

Each sector has its own pecking order of classifications and job titles, and workers in those sectors are very aware of what those titles and classifications mean.

If ALIA means "demonstrate that their body of knowledge and aptitude has reached a certain level" this would only matter if employers were interested in using ALIA post-nominals or formal CPD status when making hiring decisions. In my experience both applying for library jobs and hiring many librarians, I have seen little evidence that this is ever considered.

I do not support any scheme to create additional gradings or statuses beyond recognition as a library professional.

Question 18

The Consultation Paper notes that earlier consultations identified frustration from professionals regarding the lack of interest of many employers in supporting further professional development, training, and education – employers of course want their staff to be highly skilled and up to date, but all too often do not want to take any responsibility for making this happen.

ALIA should seriously consider certification of *employing institutions* based on their demonstrated practical support for employees' involvement in Active Professionalism and CPD. Human Resource departments love to boast that their organisation is an "employer of choice". An **ALIA Certified Professional Employer** status assessed regularly along similar lines to the existing CPD scheme would allow employers to prove it. This should include alignment with ALIA's policies, ethics, and values (e.g. regarding use of volunteer labour).

For a library professional looking for opportunities to thrive and contribute as an Active Professional, this would be an invaluable way to vet potential employers. For the profession, it would put upwards pressure on employers to provide genuine professional development opportunities beyond mere training.

Question 19

If the Framework comes into effect I see that it may possibly help to clarify and promote the idea that libraries are locations where allied professionals work together, underpinned by shared values.