

Response to Professional Pathways Phase 2

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I am writing this response to the Professional Pathways Phase 2 consultation in my personal capacity as a member of the library profession and not as a representative of any organisation. I am not currently a member of ALIA but participation by non-members was sought through this process, so I offer this for your consideration.

It was distressing to see that after Phase 1 the Professional Pathways project has moved from a hopeful project aimed at diversifying and modernising the profession, to merely a vague promise to add even more formal training and credentials on top of the existing system.

The consultation paper states:

We are trying to put in place the frameworks and structures necessary to support a diverse, valued and supported library and information services (LIS) workforce with the skills, knowledge and ethics needed to deliver quality library and information services that anticipate and meet the needs of the population into the future.

Expecting that leaving everything exactly as it is - just with an extra layer of “badging” over the top and more energetically encouraging participation in a stratified CPD program - is unlikely to result in any progress towards a “diverse, valued, and supported workforce”.

There is a curious absence within this document of any reference to the sudden collapse of over half of the accredited higher degree courses in recent years. Presumably this was part of the motivation from ALIA to review professional pathways, yet there is no acknowledgement of this reality whatsoever in the Phase 2 plan.

The current higher degree system is unfit for purpose, precarious, and highly concentrated. Simply adding “micro-credentials” or “badges” over the top of this system will do nothing to improve diversity within the profession, and leaves us at the whims of the latest university restructure.

ALIA needs to genuinely recognise that the best libraries are run by teams of skilled and knowledgeable professionals from a range of backgrounds. ALIA also needs to face the fact that increasingly library management teams are open to hiring highly skilled people with relevant skills and knowledge that ALIA does not currently consider worthy of the name “librarian”. In Phase 1 it seemed that ALIA *did* accept this and was moving to a flexible mix of formal degree education, recognition of prior learning in both formal and informal settings, and a more open approach to people with transferrable skills and qualifications. This initial proposal was hopeful, smart, and sophisticated. With the Phase 2 proposal, all of this seems to have been set aside to appease a small but noisy minority of the profession terrified of losing their positions in their workplace pecking order.

Doubling down on a restrictive list of specific degrees taught by two or three universities with a complex series of micro-credentials and specialist stratified CPD programs on top is a foolish response to the reality we live in. One small sector of the profession (health) and a university with a near monopoly on higher degree LIS training (CSU) cannot be allowed to hold the Association and the profession to ransom, crushing the dream of a better profession because they are terrified of the wrong sort of person joining us, or of losing their grip on the market for LIS training.

If this final proposed model is adopted, the result will be the complete opposite of a “diverse, valued, and supported workforce”. Instead what we will have is more of the same: a library profession that is overwhelmingly white and middle class, half of it sneering at the others for having the wrong piece of paper, trained in universities with no incentive to change how or what they teach. It will be a catastrophe.

I urge ALIA to return to the concepts outlined in Phase 1, and present a model that truly recognises the multiple pathways people can take to learn relevant knowledge to become appropriately skilled library professionals.

Some brief responses to the specific questions asked in this phase 2 consultation are below.

Questions 1 to 3

The Framework looks fine to me - I think ALIA has done a good job developing the Framework and making small improvements based on feedback.

Question 4

I do not support further credentialing. Creating additional graduations of library professional is divisive, pointless, and wasteful of everyone's time and energy. As someone involved in hiring decisions in a library I can say confidently that I would at most give cursory interest to whether a candidate had an "ALIA badge" for a relevant area of expertise.

Question 5

It's not clear to me what this question is asking. Credentials recognised as conferring the status of a professional library worker should certainly adequately cover the "core domains".

Question 6

I do not support any distinction between "general" and other members of ALIA.

Studying for a qualification is obviously CPD so it makes sense that working professionals undertaking further formal study should gain recognition under CPD (so they don't have to double up), but it doesn't make a great deal of sense to me that students who are not yet working in the sector would participate in the CPD program since they wouldn't be doing anything different to simply completing their degree - or if they are, perhaps should focus on their degree instead.

Question 7

I have always questioned the value of CPD specialisations, but there seems little point in having a Framework if ALIA does not align all CPD and course accreditation to it.

Question 8

ALIA should "retire" all CPD specialisations and simply have one scheme based on the Framework. If the point of the Framework is to enable people to be guided to where they have gaps in their knowledge, then corralling them into "specialisations" seems counter-intuitive.

Question 9

I proposed this to ALIA in Phase 1, so yes, I support it :)

I support this both as an employer and a worker. Workplaces that support professional growth of employees should be publicly recognised. From the worker perspective, everywhere says they are an "employer of choice" and "want employees to thrive" but without any third party audits there's no way to know. It also feels problematic for the organisation that represents the profession to expect workers to prove they are continually developing new and better skills whilst not expecting employers to take any responsibility to support that development.

Questions 10 and 11

I think the Framework is clear, particularly with existing background material.

I believe some people have had trouble understanding it precisely because it is not linear and provides multiple pathways. I think it would be a huge mistake for ALIA to provide guides and documentation that may be considered an exhaustive list of “correct” ways to navigate it.

Questions 12 and 13

Other than my opening comments, I think the big thing missing from this plan is engagement with the likelihood (or otherwise) that it will be used (and usable) in the real world outside of ALIA CPD programs and conference talks.

How (and whether) the Framework is used in restructuring the tiny number of university courses remaining would certainly be a key question.

It's not clear what is meant by “stress testing”. I would suggest ALIA's review and “stress testing” needs to include thorough research into whether and how the Framework is actually used and/or influences hiring, promotion and training in workplaces. If this is absent, the Framework will be a nice document that is irrelevant to the real lives of library professionals and their employers - a terrible fate for something that has taken so much time and so many resources and consultations to create.