

Better job prospects for librarians by 2001?

Peter Judge excerpts two reports that suggest increased activity and new directions for our sector

THE FIRST OF these reports, *Australia's Workforce in the Year 2001* (DEET Economic Policy and Analysis Division, AGPS 1991, ISBN 0 644 14626 5), appeared nearly 12 months ago but justifies a fresh look in view of the current preoccupation with professional training opportunities. How many library and information staff will Australia need, ten years hence? Shall we find, as some bitter letters last year in *inCite* suggested, that we are training more librarians and information professionals than the job market can absorb?

The report expects population growth in Australia generally to slow down over the next decade. There will be considerable variation across regions: Queensland and WA will grow faster, Tasmania and SA more slowly. The labour force will also grow more slowly than in the past, perhaps only 1.7% annually over the 1991-2001 period compared with 2.3% between 1966 and 1989. The ageing of the population will have long-term ramifications, but will not imply an increased burden for the working population to the year 2001.

The industries in which people work will be affected by a wide range of economic factors. The key factors affecting industry employment are productivity growth, micro-economic reform and the pattern of investment. The *industries* expected to grow fastest, in terms of their output, are mining, building and construction, transport, and manufacturing. But *employment* is expected to grow fastest in recreation and personal services, building and construction, wholesale and retail trade, community services and health, and public administration. Employment is expected to contract in agriculture and electricity, gas and water.

The implications for the States of these structural changes will depend upon their current industrial structures. If national trends are mirrored at State level, then projected types of new jobs created over the next ten years will differ from recent job growth patterns in most States. Occupations with best prospects are professionals, sales workers and tradespersons. Those with the poorest prospects are machine operators and labourers.

Within broad occupational groups individual occupations can have quite different prospects for employment growth. Among professionals, changes in occupational share within industries explain most of the variability in prospects. For

example, computing professionals have very good prospects whereas school teachers are not likely to gain employment share, and so will have lower employment growth than most professionals. On the whole, the workforce will become more 'clever'. Above average growth is expected for occupations with above average skill levels (particularly for those with the highest skill levels).

School enrolments are projected to grow rapidly over the next decade, after having been fairly flat during the last 15 years. This will be due primarily to demographic factors, rather than increases in school retention. Higher education and TAFE enrolments are expected to continue the growth of the last ten years, assuming that increases in educational participation continue.

The output of the tertiary education system is expected to continue at a high level. Over the next ten years the number of persons in the workforce with degrees is projected to increase by about a half while the number with other post-secondary qualifications is projected to increase by just over a quarter.

Changes in the size and structure of the workforce mean that substantially more persons with degrees and other post-secondary qualifications will be required. The rapid expansion of the qualified workforce, however, will far exceed this requirement. In general terms, the expansion of the education sector should minimise the number of occupations experiencing skill shortages. Most occupations are expected to at least maintain the proportion of their workforce with relevant qualifications.

The report groups occupations into 'clusters', based on similar characteristics in terms of the three 'effects' (industry structure, occupational share and 'hours') used to construct the projections. These effects reflect, respectively, changes in industrial output and productivity, changes in the occupational 'mix' of various industries (e.g., how many computer programmers), and changes in the ratios of full- to part-time employees.

Librarians are in Cluster 1, the cluster of occupations expected to have the fastest growth in employment in 1991-2001. Within this cluster, librarians are projected to be one of the fastest growing occupations, at nearly five times the overall national average.

If it all turns out like this, it is very good news indeed for us. ▶

Cluster	Brief description	Industry structure effect	Occupational share effect	Hours effect	Total Employment Growth 1991-2001
1	Professionals (health, social and business)	17.8	39.6	0.7	58.1
	(Librarians are in this cluster, with these figures:	22.7	50.8	0.7	74.3)
2	Professionals (health, business), para-professionals and trades	18.2	16.4	0.9	35.5
3	Engineers	3.1	26.5	0.8	30.4
4	Managers, teachers, construction and vehicle trades and service workers	25.0	2.0	0.8	27.9
5	Managers, health professionals and para-professionals, clerks, drivers and labourers	16.3	-3.1	1.0	14.2
6	Farmers, metal trades and machine operators	-1.1	-0.1	0.6	-0.6
	Total	15.0	0.0	0.9	15.9

Table 3.3: Projected Employment Growth by Cluster, 1991-2001 (Per Cent)

But bear in mind that these *are* only projections: a change of government policy, or unforeseen shifts in the economic climate, may undermine the assumptions on which the forecasting models were based.

The second report, *Aiming Higher*, was prepared by the Business/Higher Education Round Table and published by them as Commissioned Report N° 1 of their 1991 Education Surveys (ISBN 0 646 05333 7). The report examines the concerns and attitudes of leading business executives and university heads to education priorities in Australia in the 1990s. This influential report clearly has profound implications for the nature and effectiveness of future education in Australia.

Two studies investigated the educational attitudes and beliefs of a sample of chief executive officers from business and vice-chancellors from universities. In the first, respondents were asked to express their judgement about the relative importance of thirty key issues of special significance for Australian education in the coming decade. The outcome of this study showed that their concerns mainly focussed on *secondary* education and the need to improve standards relating to knowledge, problem-solving, literacy and numeracy in preparation for higher education, employment and life-long learning.

The second study examined other concerns of particular importance. These included finding ways to develop communication and numeracy skills at all levels of education, and the need to improve and sustain university teaching and research and enhance the teaching and research interface between business and the universities.

The respondents largely agreed on the concept of a general secondary education followed, for those proceeding to university, by a professionally-orientated tertiary education, with a very strong concentration, at both levels, on the development of skills in communication, thinking, decision-making and teamwork.

Two tables in the report (at right, numbered as in the report) summarise thinking on the desirable objectives of the educational process, and its required output.

In a nutshell, if those projections work out as we hope, the future for the library/information fields looks splendid. But the best jobs will continue to go to the best qualified individuals and we all need to work on those communication skills...

Table 3

Respondents' rankings of the desirable **objectives for university education** in order of importance. Note that in most instances the business and university representatives agree, but there is an interesting reversal of ranks 4 and 7.

	Business ranking	University ranking
Learning thinking/decision-making skills	1	1
Learning communication skills (e.g. writing, speaking)	2	2
Learning professional skills—theoretical studies	3	3
Developing standards of personal/business conduct	4	7
Learning professional skills—practical studies	5	5
Learning skills of co-operation and teamwork	6	6
Learning a broad range of general academic subjects	7	4
Learning about work and career choice	8	8
Receiving on-the-job work experience	9	9

Table 4

How should they turn out? This table ranks the **desirable characteristics of university graduates**. Here there is agreement between business and university on what is **least** important, but there are different views on what is **most** important. *Communication* is given the highest priority by business, but only achieves fifth ranking from the university respondents, who put *learning* and *problem solving* capacities at the top. Is there a message there for our educators?

	Business ranking	University ranking
Communication skills (e.g. writing, speaking)	1	5
Capacity to learn new skills and procedures	2	=1
Capacity to make decisions and solve problems	3	=1
Ability to apply knowledge to workplace	4	6
Theoretical knowledge in professional field	5	4
Capacity to work with minimum supervision	6	3
Capacity for co-operation and teamwork	=7	=8
Capacity to use computer technology	=7	=8
Understanding of business ethics	9	7
A broad background of general knowledge	10	10
Career motivation and ambition	11	11
General business knowledge	12	12
Specific work skills	13	=13
Asian language skills	14	=13

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