

Refreshing the staffing profile at Flinders University Library

The Graduate Trainee Librarian program at Flinders University provides newly qualified and inexperienced professional librarians the opportunity to work in a university library. Aimed at providing new librarians the chance of being competitive for positions within the workforce, the program was also established to counteract the staffing profile of the library which had remained fairly static for many years. While competent, productive and experienced, the staff was conservative in their approach to problem resolution and were not as innovative as they might have been. What was badly needed was an influx of new blood, of energy, and of enthusiasm. What better way to do this than by employing bright new graduates?

Since the program began in 1994, we have appointed 15 Trainees. Four have since moved on to work in other organisations, leaving 11 staff that commenced their career as Trainees that are now working in a wide range of areas, most at higher levels of employment.

The program begins by firstly assessing whether the vacant position is suitable for re-designation as a Graduate Trainee Librarian position; usually classified at the Higher Education Officer 5 level, one level below our entry level for experienced librarians.

The salary is reasonable for a person commencing their career with no experience. The positions are advertised as being suitable for newly qualified librarians, with an interest in a career in university libraries and with little or no experience, meaning that there is no competition with more experienced librarians. The response from new graduates has been enthusiastic. One commented, "this is the first time my lack of any experience has been seen as an advantage when applying for a job!"

The Trainee positions are general library appointments rather than specific positions. This means that the appointees must accept that they will be moved around into various locations during their first three years in the library. This is a key element of the program, ensuring that the Trainees gain a wide range of experience before their appointment to a relatively fixed position.

Another key feature of the program is that appointments are to permanent continuing positions, subject to satisfactory completion of an initial probation period. After three years of satisfactory performance and annual salary increments, the Trainees automatically progress to the next classification level, Higher Education Officer 6. The Trainees, of course, may apply for appointment to any vacant positions advertised at any time, in competition with other library staff.

While only advertising in South Australia, our vacancies attract a large response with usually 40 to 60 applicants. The quality of applicants has been very high making the final choice difficult. On several occasions, we have had to arrange a second interview/presentation for the best two candidates before making a final decision.

What are the benefits of the program?

The benefits are two-fold. The Trainee is given an opportunity to apply for an appointment without competing with people with more experience, receiving a good grounding in most aspects of university librarianship before settling into a particular position while the salary is reasonable for a commencing position in the profession. Meanwhile library management benefits as well; welcoming a fresh outlook, enthusiasm, new ideas and flexibility into the library. There are also some initial budget gains when replacing higher level positions with Trainee positions; however, the increased training load on managers and supervisors must also be taken into account.

Some final thoughts...

A professional librarian never ceases to be a trainee, with the profession constantly evolving and changing. All of us need to ensure that we retain a least some of the enthusiasm, vitality and readiness to accept new ideas which is so evident in the young Flinders Trainees. As an employer, I also have an obligation to provide job opportunities for entrants into our profession, and I urge other employers of library staff to create employment opportunities for new graduates.

For more information visit the Flinders University Library web pages at <http://www.lib.flinders.edu.au/info/trainee/index.html>

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For more information on ALIA Professional Development opportunities visit <http://www.alia.org.au/pd>

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