



OPINION

Each month, OPINION features contributions from invited guest writers. The opinions expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect those of the Australian Library and Information Association.

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It won't happen overnight – but it will happen!

No, we're not talking about hair conditioner. Postgraduate education for information management will undergo significant change over the next two to three years. ALIA members have probably heard this before but this time, says University of Canberra's Stuart Ferguson, it will happen.

A number of factors will shape the coming change in post graduate education in our sector. They include the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative, with increased requirements for universities to foster research-led teaching, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), which monitors universities' compliance with national standards, the imminent retirement of many information educators, the continuing demand from employers for graduates with strong generic skills (as well as the understanding and skills specific to the information sector), the opportunities afforded by convergences within the digital information environment, the growth in blended learning and full online course delivery, and the continued availability (or not) of Commonwealth Supported Places for postgraduate coursework programs.

There is one principal driver however, and that is the 2011 Australian Qualifications Framework (www.aqf.edu.au/). The AQF incorporates qualifications from each education and training sector into a single national framework and provides the standards for Australian qualifications, including learning outcomes for each AQF level and qualification type and the policy requirements for qualification linkages and student pathways. The AQF has been around since 1995 and the 25 'librarianship' and 'teacher librarianship' courses listed on the ALIA website as being ALIA-accredited or undergoing accreditation (of which 20 are offered at postgraduate level) are currently AQF compliant. If they are to remain compliant, however, most will need to be radically restructured between now and 2015.

What are the key features of the 2011 AQF that will drive changes in postgraduate information programs? The big one is course duration. 'Volume of learning' of a Masters degree by coursework is specified as one to two years if in the same discipline, one and half years following a Level 7 qualification such as a non-Honours undergraduate degree, or one year following a Level 8 qualification, for example Graduate Diploma or Honours in a different discipline (which would apply to most postgraduate students in the ALIA-accredited courses), two years following a Level 7 qualification such as an undergraduate degree or one and a

half years following a Level 8 qualification. Check out the courses on the ALIA website and you will find that is not the standard at this stage.

There are also rigorous standards in terms of course quality, with a clear division between the learning outcomes of a Graduate Diploma and those of a coursework Masters. To take just one example, Masters' graduates will be expected to have knowledge of research principles and methods applicable to a field of work and/or learning and demonstrate the ability "to plan and execute a substantial research-based project, capstone experience or piece of scholarship". By 2015, therefore, some universities will need to abandon their

current practice of pasting a Graduate Certificate on top of a Graduate Diploma and calling the resultant mash-up a Masters degree. In general terms, this is a positive requirement since

many job advertisements for information professionals call for research skills and there has undoubtedly been significant interest within the profession in evidence-based information practice.

Whether employers and students are willing to accommodate the increased 'volume of learning' required for research training is another matter. Were they consulted?

Information program conveners have important decisions to make over the next two years. At present, the AQF is the only framework in town. The Australian Learning & Teaching Council (ALTC) study, *Re-conceptualising And Re-positioning Australian Library And Information Science Education For The 21st Century*, was intended to provide "A framework for information education in Australia" but, despite the publication of the *Final Report* (www.liseducation.org.au/), that framework remains a work in progress.

What excites me, as an information educator, is that we have a clear set of national standards, good feedback from employer groups about the attributes they're looking for in information professionals, national data on student and graduate experience, an incredibly diverse set of programs and faculty strengths and an urgent need to sit down with our course advisory groups and other stakeholders to rethink our course offerings and ensure we are providing dynamic courses for dynamic information professions. I hope that members of the Association will be part of this process!

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