

# DIRECTLINE EDUCATION, SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

Last year we produced the first 'ALIA LIS Education, Skills and Employment Trend Report'. As we are the peak body representing the library and information profession, we thought it would be useful to share the knowledge we acquired through the process of accrediting our LIS teaching institutions. Before we began compiling the statistics, we didn't realise how much this would tell us, not only about educators and students, but also about the underlying employment trends in the library and information sector.

Going through a similar exercise this year (you can see the highlights in the *LIS Education Handbook* which accompanies this issue of *INCITE*), and fleshing out some of the areas in the report, we found further trends and insights that explain some of the current dynamics in the industry.

Educators are having a tough time. This isn't restricted to the library and information sector, but as LIS doesn't have the critical mass of engineering, medicine and the other major areas of study, the situation is more acute. Smaller budgets, less administrative assistance, higher teaching loads and the pressure to maintain research outputs mean that educators have less time to take a step back and take stock. In this environment, it's even more important that practitioners and employers provide feedback and support to educators to ensure that course content remains current and graduates have the skills to work at the cutting edge of modern library and information services.

Up to 1,800 students graduate from LIS higher education and VET courses every year. Many already have jobs, others are seeking employment, often a second or third career move. One of the concerns members regularly express is 'Are there enough jobs to go round?'

Over a five-year period, as reported in 2013, we found the number of librarian positions dropped by 23 percent, yet the unemployment level for librarians was below the average

for other occupations. Based on our own membership experience, we believe the reason has something to do with the number of baby boomers retiring, thus providing job opportunities for the next generation.

Over the same period there was a four percent drop in library technician positions and a nine percent increase in library assistant positions. This adds credence to anecdotal evidence that more employers are recruiting people without LIS qualifications to provide frontline services. This has been a cost-cutting exercise for some, but it also indicates the need for a broader range of skills and expertise. Our aim is to encourage non-LIS professionals employed in the sector to study for LIS qualifications, or at least to gain a better understanding of the environment within which they work through our ALIA proficiency recognition program.

It was no surprise to find that LIS workers had significantly higher educational qualifications compared with people employed in all occupations in Australia. For example, some 60 percent of librarians had a graduate certificate or a postgraduate or graduate diploma compared with nine percent for all occupations. A qualification in library and information science is an excellent basis for a career both within and outside the traditional library world.

Looking at the outcomes for VET graduates six months after completing their course, we found that 37 percent were employed outside the LIS sector, but in jobs where their training was relevant. This was welcome evidence of the transferability of LIS skills and the value of a LIS qualification as the basis for a variety of career opportunities.

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