

# Your Voice



## Dear Editor

I wrote a letter to you last year [*INCITE* June/July 2015] introducing my Curtin University Masters degree research project. Later, a request for survey participants was published in the *ALIA Weekly* newsletter. I am grateful for ALIA's support and I am pleased to share some of my findings with you.

My project investigated the perceptions of human resource (HR) practitioners of librarian competencies in relation to traditional library roles (such as university librarian) and non-traditional roles (such as competitive intelligence specialist). I chose to research HR practitioners because they are not only key figures in hiring, but also in the ongoing employment processes for librarians, such as retention. Their perceptions are especially valuable now that there have been significant changes to communities, collections, technology and services, affecting the required competencies and the job market.

I had 54 respondents from across all library sectors and suppliers in various Australian states.

My survey asked participants to rate the importance of each of the ALIA core knowledge, skills and attributes for traditional library roles, and for non-traditional roles. One example: understand, analyse and interpret the contexts in which information is originated, described, stored, organised, retrieved, disseminated, modified and used. The data showed that a similar level of importance was placed on this skill for both types of roles.

The ratings for employability skills, such as accounting and project management, often had high levels of variance. For example, despite participants stating that they wished LIS graduates had skills in accounting; the skill itself was rated as less important for traditional library roles than non-traditional roles.

Participants were also asked open-ended questions, including to comment on job-seeking by experienced professionals compared to new graduates. One participant commented: 'I feel that seasoned professionals have more hiring appeal.' This is partly because the current diploma, bachelor and masters degrees tend to be fairly broad and general, which means that recent graduates have a lot of on-the-job learning to do. However, roles that involve the

most modern technologies and social media are often well suited to recent young graduates.

I also examined the interrelated issue of librarianship occupational prestige by asking participants to rate six dimensions of prestige. 'Level of responsibility' had the most variance. Comments for all the dimensions were mainly positive, including the following: 'Within the broader community librarians stand in positions of high trust in terms of dealing with children, protecting free access to information and promoting literacy and learning.'

My findings led to a number of suggestions, including changing LIS courses, especially to practicum (work placement); introducing IT and customer service training; and forging deeper alliances with HR practitioners. The launch of ALIA's mentoring scheme coincided (and was included) with my conclusions for the profession to go forward.

I am now writing up my findings and submitting them for journal publication later in 2016. In the meantime, I can be contacted via email.

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## Dear *INCITE*

How sad I was when I read the email recording the passing of a dear colleague and namesake, Kerry Webb. And now having read the story of Kerry's life [*INCITE* January/February 2016] I could reconnect with him in the ways he represented, challenged and mentored so many of us. Oh, how many times did I read 'Webb's Web' in *INCITE* and feel so thankful that he seemed to be on top of all that was going on in this domain and was doing his best to keep us posted too. Farewell, dear colleague, and my sincere sympathy to your family and friends.

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DR KERRY SMITH, FALIA