



Re-conceptualising and Re-positioning
Australian Library and Information Science Education
for the 21st Century

Discussion Paper 1: Project Summary

An Australian Learning and Teaching Council Priority Project
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Forward

This is the first of a series of papers exploring future directions for Australian library and information science (LIS) education. The papers are part of an Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Priority Project which is being led by Associate Professor Helen Partridge from the Queensland University of Technology. The project is being undertaken in partnership with LIS educators from 11 institutions that represent the broad spectrum and diversity of university and vocational LIS education in Australia.

The papers will provide information on the project including preliminary findings and will be released progressively during the course of the project. They are being produced as a way of encouraging open and critical discourse and reflection on a topic that is of fundamental importance to the future of LIS education in Australia. They will also serve as an important component of the project's evaluation and information communication strategies. Your critical comments and questions are therefore encouraged and welcome.

These papers will be of interest to a number of different audiences. Within the LIS discipline they will be of interest to current professionals, employers, educators and students both in Australia and internationally. The papers will also be of interest to colleagues in other disciplines that may inevitably face the need to re-position and re-shape their approach to professional education.

Papers produced during the project will be freely available from the project website at <http://www.liseducation.org.au>. If you have any questions or would like to provide comment or contribute to the project please contact Associate Professor Helen Partridge at h.partridge@qut.edu.au.

Introduction

This paper provides an overview of *Re-conceptualising and re-positioning Australian library and information science education for the twenty-first century*, a research project funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) under its 2010 Priority Projects Program. Commencing in November 2009, the project will be undertaken over a period of approximately 12 months. Information in this paper is based upon the original project application submitted to ALTC. The paper contains a brief summary of the intended directions of the project and is designed to provide overarching context for other discussion papers that will be produced during the course of the project. It outlines the project's aims, motivation and intended outcomes, its timeline and activities, and strategies for evaluation, profile building and communication dissemination.

Project summary

Re-conceptualising and re-positioning Australian library and information science education for the twenty-first century aims to establish a consolidated and holistic picture of the Australian LIS profession and identify how its future education and training can be mediated in a cohesive and sustainable manner. The project is framed around three areas of consideration which represent key stakeholder groups in LIS education. The primary objective of the project is to develop a *Framework for the Education of the Information Professions in Australia*. This framework will provide guidance on how best to re-position and re-shape Australian LIS education to ensure it remains dynamic, sustainable and responsive to the evolving information age and produces graduates with the necessary attributes for professional practice in the rapidly changing twenty-first century.

Project rationale

In recent years much has been written on the development and changes necessary in LIS¹ education. Michael Gorman (2004), President of the American Library Association in 2005-2006, declared that there was a "crisis in LIS education". In Australia, Harvey (2001) asserted that "something's amiss with university-based education for librarianship" and Myburgh (2003) argued that a "fresh approach needs to be taken" by the Australian LIS industry with regard to its education and continuing professional development. Three events occurring in 2008 highlight the Australian LIS industry's focus on reconsidering professional education: on February 11 the *Building a New Type of Infrastructure for Education in the Information Disciplines* seminar was held at the University of New South Wales, followed by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) *Education Summit* which was held on March 28 at the State Library of Victoria and finally the *National Information Management Skills Shortage Summit* hosted by the Queensland Strategic Information and ICT Council was held at the Queensland Parliament House on October 15. Members from all parts of the LIS sector participated in these events.

Library and information science professionals play a vital role in ensuring Australia's future in the information economy and in advancing Australia's ability as a knowledge society. However LIS education in Australia continues to be framed and undertaken in disciplinary and educational traditions that arguably lack the necessary strategic alignment with Australia's current and future needs, limiting the productive future growth of the profession. The current approach to LIS education in Australia lacks cohesion and sustainability, with the result that it ultimately fails to effectively or efficiently provide a diverse supply of graduates with the attributes required for professional practice in the rapidly changing twenty-first century.

To address this educational issue this project will develop a *Framework for the Education of the Information Professions in Australia* that will re-conceptualise the Australian LIS profession and its education and training. The framework will provide guidance on how best to re-position and re-shape Australian LIS education to ensure it remains dynamic, responsive and sustainable to the evolving information age in order to meet the ever-changing marketplace demands of the twenty-first century. It will provide strategic directions and recommendations as well as a detailed action plan for implementation. The project will also provide a vehicle through which LIS professionals and LIS educators can find opportunities for increased collaboration and more open communication. This will help not only bridge the gap between LIS theory and practice, but also foster more inclusive and authentic engagement between LIS educators and other parts of the LIS industry in the education of the next generation of professionals.

¹ LIS is the study of the gathering, organising, storing, retrieving, evaluation and dissemination of information as well as the design and delivery of information services to meet client or community needs.

The project will also provide a model for undertaking collaborative 'whole of discipline' education projects, as changes taking place in higher education (Bradley, 2008) and within Australia's workforce (Professions Australia's Education Committee, 2005) suggest that many other disciplines in Australia may inevitably face the need to re-position and re-shape their approach to professional education. Through this project the LIS discipline will establish and validate an approach for undertaking work aimed at re-positioning professional education for new and different future directions regardless of the field of study or practice.

The project aim

The primary aim of this project is to develop a *Framework for the Education of the Information Professions in Australia*. The framework will provide evidence based strategic directions and recommendations, as well as an action plan for implementation in response to the following question: *How can Australian library and information science (LIS) education produce, in a sustainable manner, the diverse supply of graduates with the appropriate attributes to develop and maintain high quality professional practice in the rapidly changing 21st century?* Key framing considerations will include:

1. Student considerations
 - Who are LIS students in terms of background, past experiences, demographics and socio-economic factors?
 - What are the student experiences and expectations of LIS education in Australia?
 - What degrees do they undertake and why?
 - What are the graduate destinations of LIS students?
2. Workforce considerations
 - What is the nature and composition of the LIS industry in the 21st century in Australia?
 - How do the subfields of study and practice (i.e. records management) relate to each other?
 - What are the number and types of LIS positions currently available in the sector?
 - What are employers' expectations of workforce skills and knowledge (including the anticipated positions and the associated skill and knowledge required for the future by new graduates and experienced professionals)?
 - What are the gaps between employer expectations and needs, and the skills and knowledge of graduates coming out of current LIS education programs in Australia?
 - What organisations are employing LIS graduates?
3. Tertiary education considerations
 - Who are Australia's LIS educators?
 - What is the nature and scope of LIS education in Australia?
 - What are the challenges, opportunities and issues facing LIS educators and LIS education in Australia (and overseas)?
 - How does LIS education fit within the broader national tertiary education context?
 - What is the nature of the LIS curriculum being offered nationally?
 - What organisations are involved in accrediting LIS programs? Why?
 - What are alternative models for the delivery of LIS education in Australia?

LIS education in Australia: Background issues and motivations for the project

LIS education faces a number of challenges which render it unique within the landscape of Australian tertiary education (Hallam, 2007). These challenges include:

- Traditionally, ALIA 'recognised' courses to allow graduates to achieve professional status required for employment within the LIS field. More recently, the LIS field has begun to embrace the multi-disciplinary nature of the profession, with a resulting need for LIS education to consider the course recognition requirements of other associations such as the Australian Computer Society and the Records Management Association of Australia. National standards for curriculum and learning outcomes in LIS degrees are no longer clear cut or consistent.
- LIS education aims to prepare graduates for employment within the LIS sector; however the employment landscape is extensive incorporating academic libraries, school libraries, public, state and national libraries, as well as special libraries and information centres (such as law libraries, health and medical information agencies). Opportunities also exist within areas such as knowledge management,

records management, web development and so on. LIS educators therefore must attempt to accommodate the demands of very broad and diverse professional contexts within the curriculum.

- Entry into the LIS profession can be attained via both TAFE and university courses; these represent the paraprofessional and professional roles within the industry respectively. In recent years however, the boundaries between the two roles have blurred, resulting in some confusion amongst students and employers over the responsibilities, skills and knowledge needed at these different levels of employment.
- University qualifications can be obtained at several levels: bachelor, graduate diploma and master degrees. Degree titles vary considerably from institution to institution² which leads to further confusion for many potential students in locating the degree they should study. There are problems in offering LIS programs at the undergraduate level with falling enrolments and a perception amongst some employers about the poor quality of students. The masters level qualification in Australia is not usually linked to higher levels of pay, so there is little incentive for prospective students to pay the extra costs incurred in studying at this level.
- Across Australian universities LIS education is located in a broad range of faculties and departments including Arts, Information Technology, Education, Business and Social Science. Only one actual 'LIS school' exists in Australia (i.e. Charles Sturt University). The LIS curricula offered in these diverse academic units must not only satisfy industry demands and the criteria of national professional recognition body(s), but the broader disciplinary requirements of the academic unit in which they are situated.
- Ten universities offer LIS degrees in Australia with a number of these offering multiple degrees in the area (and may even be located in different academic units within the same institution). With more LIS courses offered per capita than other countries (e.g. UK, USA, Canada), Australian universities are competing for the small number of students nationally who wish to pursue an LIS career. The relatively small numbers of LIS students at individual universities increases the vulnerability of the courses themselves, especially when compared with degree programs with large enrolments, such as Business or Law. The ability of LIS curriculum to provide 'specialised' sub-fields of study is also diminished (e.g. archival studies).
- The number of LIS academics is decreasing and 'greying'. This situation raises issues in terms of currency and relevance of the curriculum in such a dynamic field as LIS. There are also currently few incentives for LIS professionals to become educators. Without effective succession planning LIS courses are becoming increasingly vulnerable. At present, Australia does not have a formal LIS educators' 'group' that allows for regular workshops, meetings or seminars to investigate and debate issues central to LIS education.

This project will build upon current work in the LIS field, including:

- the 2008 ALTC Associate Fellowship by Associate Professor Helen Partridge³;
- the *neXus* LIS Workforce Planning Project by Associate Professor Gillian Hallam (2008);
- a study into changing LIS employer expectations as evidenced by job advertisements by Mary Anne Kennan, Patricia Williard and Concepcion Wilson (2006);
- an exploration into the graduate destinations of LIS alumni from the Charles Sturt University programme by Jane Heazlewood, Bob Pymm and Roy Sanders (2006);
- the study by Hallam and Partridge (2005) exploring LIS students backgrounds and expectations;
- the DNA Model of the 21st century LIS professional by Partridge and Hallam (2004).

Recent work in this field has provided invaluable insight into the LIS profession and its education and training however studies to date have been limited by their focus on either a specific institution, or geographic region. Furthermore, not all key issues or areas of consideration have been fully explored. This project will for the first time establish a consolidated and holistic picture of the Australian LIS profession and its education and training. This picture will allow evidence based directions and recommendations to be articulated for the future education of the profession at a national level.

² Eg. Bachelor of Applied Science (Library and Information Management), Bachelor of Arts in Communication (Information and Media), Graduate Diploma in Information and Library Studies, Master of Information Services.

³ Library and information science education 2.0: guiding principles and models of best practice

The project team

The project is being lead by Associate Professor Helen Partridge from Queensland University of Technology, and will be undertaken in conjunction with LIS educators from 11 institutions representing the broad spectrum and diversity of university and vocational LIS education in Australia within both metropolitan and regional locations. Members of the project team include:

- Associate Professor Helen Partridge, Queensland University of Technology (Project Leader)
- Dr Hilary Hughes, Queensland University of Technology
- Associate Professor Philip Hider, Charles Sturt University
- Barbara Combes, Edith Cowan University
- Dr Sue Reynolds, RMIT University
- Dr Jo Hanisch, University of South Australia
- Maureen Henninger, University of Technology Sydney
- Dr Mary Carroll, Victoria University
- Sally Burford, University of Canberra
- Dr Paul Genoni, Curtin University
- Dr Kerry Tanner, Monash University
- Dr Leonie Ellis, University of Tasmania

Intended outcomes

The deliverables and outcomes of the project include:

- A complete analysis of LIS education practices and issues in Australia and internationally;
- A *Framework for the Education of the Information Professions in Australia* that provides a set of strategic directions and recommendations for sustainable LIS education in Australia, as well as an action plan that will outline the mechanisms by which the direction and recommendations can be implemented;
- A project website to facilitate national and international information sharing and discussion;
- A half day forum⁴ to facilitate the sharing and dissemination of LIS education issues in Australia;
- An interim and final report on the project;
- Resources including dissemination presentations, publications and discussion papers;
- LIS educators community of practice initiative that will support and guide the future of LIS education in Australia, provide an opportunity to exchange innovative practice and undertake collaborative ventures;
- Enhanced profile of the LIS profession, with LIS education regarded as a leading academic discipline that promotes best practice in higher education;
- Positioning Australia as a national leader in LIS education;
- Recognition of the LIS discipline as a role model for other disciplines which may ultimately face the imperative of re-shaping and re-positioning their discipline's education.

Research approach

The research will take a Community Based Participatory Research approach (CBPR) (W K Kellogg Foundation, n.d.). CBPR is a "collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognises the unique strengths that each partner brings. CBPR begins with a research topic of importance to the community and has the aim of combining knowledge with action" (W K Kellogg Foundation, n.d.). In CBPR the community participates fully in all aspects of the research process. CBPR is an iterative process, incorporating research, reflection and action in a cyclical process. CBPR seeks to "transform research from a relationship where researchers *act upon* a community to answer a research question to one where researchers *work side by side* with community members to define the questions and methods, implement the research, disseminate the findings and apply them" (Hartwig, Calleson & Williams, n.d). Community members become "part of the research team and researchers become engaged in the activities of the community" (Hartwig et al.). The 'community' in the current project comprises all those individuals who have a role in, or a vested interest in, LIS education. The relevant stakeholders in this

⁴ This will be conducted in September 2010 as part of the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) Access Conference being held in Brisbane. This will help to capitalise on engagement with the Australian LIS community and provide an opportunity to promote the project on the international level.

community include LIS educators, professionals, employers, students and professional associations. Individuals from these sub-groups within the broader community will be invited to participate in the design and execution of the project. A comprehensive spectrum of stakeholders is vital to ensure that national education practices and approaches within a discipline are critically reviewed.

Proposed timeframe and activities

The project commenced in November 2009 and will be undertaken over a period of approximately 12 months. The project is framed around three areas of consideration which represent key stakeholder groups in library and information science education. These areas are students, employers and tertiary education. The formation of these areas has been informed by the study background and project rationale and by the project team members' understandings of national and international issues and priorities regarding the LIS profession and its education. The specific tasks or activities within each of the three areas are likely to be revised and reviewed during the study, but will fundamentally guide, without limiting, the proposed undertaking. Each team member involved in the project has been allocated to one of the three areas based on the expertise and focus of their institution and its academic staff. Allocations were also made to ensure diversity in the teams (i.e. east coast vs. west coast, metropolitan vs. regional).

Consideration Area	Expected Activities	Team Composition
<p>Student considerations: Provide a profile of LIS students and an analysis of their choices, experiences and expectations with regard to LIS education, including their graduate destinations.</p>	<p>Self administered questionnaires and focus groups will be used at all participating institutions to explore issues such as student demographics, socio-economic backgrounds, past experiences, expectations and rationale behind course choices. In addition the destinations of graduates will be explored.</p>	<p>Queensland University of Technology</p> <p>Edith Cowan University</p> <p>University of South Australia</p> <p>Victoria University</p>
<p>Workforce considerations: Provide an overview and analysis of the nature of the current LIS workforce, including a focus on employer expectations and employment opportunities, and comment on the core and elective skills, knowledge and attitudes of current and future LIS professionals.</p>	<p>Focus groups and analysis of employment advertisements and agencies will be used to explore issues such as employers' expectations of workforce skills and knowledge, including the anticipated positions and the associated skill and knowledge required for the future and the number and types of LIS positions currently available in the sector. In addition literature reviews and interviews will be used to define the nature and composition of the LIS industry in 21st century Australia. Is it a discipline? A profession? How do the subfields of study and practice (for example records management) fit together?</p>	<p>University of Technology Sydney</p> <p>RMIT University</p> <p>Curtin University of Technology</p> <p>Monash University</p>
<p>Tertiary education considerations: Provide an overview and analysis of the current state of LIS education in Australia, as compared to alternative models overseas.</p>	<p>Literature review, interviews, focus groups and analysis of existing documents will be used to explore issues such as the profile of LIS educators in Australia (ie demographics, qualifications, expectations, experience) as well as the type and nature of courses offered nationally. In addition data will be gathered exploring the key issues and challenges faced in the provision of LIS education in Australia. This will include consultation with LIS educators as well as senior management in the higher education sector. Alternative models of delivery will be explored by an environmental scan of LIS education practices internationally.</p>	<p>Queensland University of Technology⁵</p> <p>University of Canberra</p> <p>Charles Sturt University</p> <p>University of Tasmania</p>

⁵ There are two team members from QUT, as such QUT is listed twice with one team member working on one consideration area and the second team member working on the other consideration area.

Reference group

A reference group will be formed to provide critical commentary on both the program process and outcomes. The group will include national and international members representing the full spectrum of potential stakeholders including LIS professionals, employers, students, representatives from professional associations, higher education experts, and representatives from institutions providing other 'information' degrees and programs.

Strategy for profile building and dissemination

Southwell, Gannaway, Orrell, Chalmers and Abraham (2005) noted that a "climate of readiness [for change] is important if successful innovation and dissemination are to take place". Because there is strong sectoral push – by both academics and professionals⁶ – to move the LIS education agenda forward and to instigate curriculum renewal, this suggests a "climate of readiness for change" exists. As such the LIS profession is well-placed to engage with the project and its outcomes. The project has been designed to intentionally engage LIS academics, students and industry (professionals, employers and professional associations). Dissemination will be through engagement and information provision, with the emphasis on the former, and will occur across all phases of the project. A multi-dimensional and iterative model of dissemination is proposed. The iterative nature of dissemination will allow the process to be utilised as an evaluation tool throughout the project. A multi-dimensional approach is being used to maximise engagement of stakeholders and potential users. In practical terms this will be achieved by the framework outlined below. It will remain flexible to ensure that dissemination activities are reviewed and revised during the project to ensure the most effective opportunities are realised.

- LIS professionals, employers, students, educators and professional associations will be involved in the environmental scan. This will provide the opportunity for raising the profile of the project as well as progressive evaluation on the process and outcomes.
- The Reference Group will involve national and international members of the LIS profession (and higher education generally). The group will play a large role in profile building and dissemination opportunities for the project. The group will also contribute to the progressive evaluation of the project process and outcomes.
- The website is a major dissemination strategy of the project. It will include a feedback mechanism that will be used to encourage comments and questions from stakeholders. Progress reports will be written at appropriate times during the project and will be made available on the website.
- A final report will be submitted to the ALTC.
- Discussion papers will be produced at key points during the project and added to the website and promoted via LIS e-lists and newsletters.
- Articles will be written at key points during the project and published in LIS newsletters.
- Conference presentations and journal articles are planned to encourage engagement with the LIS and higher education sectors nationally and internationally.
- In September 2010 the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) Access Conference is being held in Brisbane. A half-day forum about the project will be conducted to provide an opportunity to disseminate the findings and outcomes and obtain evaluation on the project process.

⁶ As evidenced by three events in 2008: UNSW Building a New Type of Infrastructure for Education in the Information Disciplines Seminar, 11 February, Sydney; ALIA Education Summit, 28 March, Canberra & Information Management Skills Shortage Summit, 15 October, Brisbane.

Evaluation strategy

A number of evaluation strategies have been designed to inform the project process as well as measuring the level of success, effectiveness and usefulness of project outcomes. Key strategies include:

- Comment on the design and conceptualisation of the project from the Program Evaluator, Ms Sue McKnight. Ms McKnight is the Director, Libraries and Knowledge Resources at Nottingham Trent University in the United Kingdom. She has extensive experience in Australia and internationally, in both the higher education context and the knowledge of the LIS profession. In her capacity as Program Evaluator she will contribute to the design and implementation of the formal external evaluation strategy developed.
- The Reference Group will provide comment on the design and conceptualisation of the project as well as the quality and usefulness of outcomes (e.g. the website, the forum). Opportunities for receiving feedback from the Group are embedded into the project activities (i.e. regular teleconferences) and will occur for the full duration of the project.
- LIS professionals, educators, employers, students and representatives of professional associations taking part in the project activities (i.e. case studies and environmental scan) will provide comment on the design and conceptualisation of the project as well as the quality and usefulness of outcomes (e.g. the discussion papers, the website, the forum).
- The quality and usefulness of the outcomes (e.g. the *Framework*, the discussion papers) will be evaluated by the number of times they are accessed via the website as well as the extent to which they are used by educators to inform curriculum development, and citations in the literature.
- The website is a key information dissemination strategy. It will contribute as an evaluation strategy by measuring the level of engagement with potential stakeholders (i.e. user feedback, number of visits).
- Comment from LIS and higher education sectors on the quality and usefulness of the project outcomes (e.g. the *Framework*, the forum) will be obtained either directly (i.e. presentations and meetings held during the project, email communication during and after the project) or indirectly (via the website during and after the project).
- Peer review on conference papers and journal articles published during and after the project will provide another layer of evaluation to both the process and the quality of the outcomes.

Conclusion

This paper has presented an overview of the research project *Re-conceptualising and re-positioning Australian library and information science education for the twenty-first century*. It is intended that further papers will be released progressively during the course of the project as a way of encouraging open and critical discourse on the topic and the project's findings. Comments and questions in relation to this paper are encouraged and welcome and can be submitted through the project website at <http://www.liseducation.org.au> or to the Project Leader, Associate Professor Helen Partridge at h.partridge@qut.edu.au.

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