

Will librarianship survive as a profession? Who and how will anyone become a “certified library and information professional” in the new ALIA Professional Pathways framework?

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The survival of librarianship as a profession is at stake – it is now time to have your say in the Professional Pathways Framework consultations.

Twelve months ago, I wrote in *JoHILA* about ALIA’s Professional Pathways project¹, which is looking at alternative options for professional-level entry, and different routes to becoming an ALIA “certified library and information professional”:

This certified status would be achievable via pathways other than the current educational ones, which could see the control of the qualifications and criteria for becoming a professional, shift from the universities/TAFEs (accredited education providers) to the professional body (which is not, itself, a registered education and training provider).

The Project has now reached a consultation phase in which a new “prototype” framework² that would redefine the career pathways “into and within the profession”, is proposed. This is the link to the Consultation Paper, the prototype framework is on p11: https://professionalpathways.alia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/PP_ConsultationPaper_formatted_proof-2.pdf

It is now time to have your say about the prototype framework – you can go to any of the workshops that are being held in all states and territories from August to November 2022, or attend HLA’s online workshop – date in mid-October to be confirmed. Or you can submit your feedback online here: <https://professionalpathways.alia.org.au/have-your-say/>

¹ Ritchie, A. 2021. National Manager Update – August 2021. *Journal of Health Information and Libraries Australasia*. 2(2), pp5-7. <https://www.johila.org/index.php/Johila/issue/view/9>

² Professional Pathways Frameworks Project Consultation Paper, August 2022. See Figure 1: Professional Pathways draft Framework, p11. https://professionalpathways.alia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/PP_ConsultationPaper_formatted_proof-2.pdf

Important points to note

1. The first Recommendation of the Technical Report³ states that ALIA should develop a comprehensive framework of knowledge, skills and ethical behaviour and that:

“The framework should be developed **in consultation with people** across the sector, and draw from the **evidence** in this report and ALIA’s **Foundation knowledge for entry-level library and information professionals.**”
[emphasis mine]

The first piece of evidence documented as Key Finding number 1 in the Technical Report is that:

“Alongside **core professional knowledge**, values and ethics sit **at the centre** of professional practice and professional identity; these **differentiate** the library and information profession from other sectors.” [emphasis mine]

It is critical that this evidence as documented in the first Key Finding – that our **core professional knowledge** sits **at the centre** of professional practice and professional identity – be translated and represented accurately in the new framework.

To do otherwise would be to contradict the research evidence presented in the Technical Report.

2. ALIA’s own **Foundation knowledge** policy⁴ describes the distinctive areas of knowledge that are “**required for effective professional practice** in the library and information sector”.

It is entirely logical and correct that ALIA, as the professional association that sets, regulates and upholds standards of professional practice, should describe the knowledge that new graduates of LIS education should have before entering the profession and before being granted professional status.

³ Hallam, G. 2022. Professional Pathways Framework Project: Technical Report. p264.
<https://read.alia.org.au/professional-pathways-frameworks-project-technical-report>

⁴ Foundation knowledge for entry-level library and information professionals. 2020.
<https://read.alia.org.au/foundation-knowledge-entry-level-library-and-information-professionals>

Thus, it is an oxymoron to suggest that librarianship's distinctive areas of core foundation knowledge would NOT be "required for effective professional practice" – this would require a reversal in ALIA's *Foundation knowledge* policy. And it is even more unthinkable that ALIA would be happy to certify individuals for **ineffective** professional practice.

3. Therefore – using the methodology outlined in the Recommendation number 1, i.e. applying the evidence from the Technical Report and the stipulations of ALIA's *Foundation Knowledge* policy, and in consulting with people in the sector – we suggest that in the new framework, the **core professional knowledge** gained through post-secondary LIS educational qualifications, must be shown to be **central** to becoming a librarian or library technician, sitting alongside values and ethics, as a foundation domain.

BUT – in the prototype framework, **professional knowledge is NOT represented as "core", nor as "central"**; and professional knowledge does **NOT** sit alongside values and ethics, and the other three "Foundation Domains" as a foundational requirement for becoming a professional.

In effect, the prototype framework demotes our professional core knowledge base from being a central, foundational educational requirement for initial entry and professional recognition, relegating our complete set of "Professional Knowledge Domains" to the function of alternative specialised development pathways to Active Professionalism (i.e. ongoing Continuing Professional Development, CPD).

Without a professional knowledge base we are not a profession – this is why we are fearful for the survival of librarianship as a recognised and trusted profession.

4. The alternative pathways approach is, in fact, an apprenticeship model where unqualified individuals (i.e. those who don't have any recognised, accredited LIS qualifications) may learn library skills on the job.

The alternative pathways outlined in the scenarios in the Consultation Paper⁵ show that experience and on-the-job, skills-based training, with some library ethics and values units or other microcredentials (details yet to be provided) are the criteria that ALIA will use to confer professional status on individuals who wish to become ALIA-certified library and information professionals. Some may choose to do LIS

⁵ Professional Pathways Project Consultation Paper, August 2022. p26-31.
https://professionalpathways.alia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/PP_ConsultationPaper_formatted_proof-2.pdf

qualifications along the way, but this is not a requirement for entry into the profession.

There is no entry-level requirement for core professional knowledge in the prototype framework. Studying for an accredited LIS qualification (to gain foundational knowledge) is an optional extra that may be picked up in the course of a career in libraries.

What can we do if we want to see our profession survive, and not:

- “dumbed down” and deprofessionalised, without a requirement for core, foundation knowledge and accredited LIS qualifications;
- turned into a skills-based occupational group;
- reclassified industrially into administration streams with consequent loss of pay and conditions?

We can be part of the consultation process, and participate in the co-design of the framework and specifically address Questions 3, 8 and 9 in the Consultation Paper – to make it into a framework that accurately represents the evidence, recommendations and key findings of the Technical Report, and retains our foundational professional knowledge and education requirements.

The redesigned framework should make it obvious that the core foundation knowledge (acquired through post-secondary LIS education) that defines librarianship as a profession, sits at the centre, alongside values and ethics, so that they both and together, differentiate the library and information profession from other sectors.

In summary – the new framework defining the career pathways *into and within the profession*, should make it clear that:

- The framework applies to librarianship as a whole profession, not simply any of the (sub)sectors or specialisations;
- Core professional knowledge is a central and foundation domain, and (together with ethics and values) differentiates librarianship from other sectors;
- Core professional knowledge must be gained before entering *into* the profession i.e. before an individual is granted professional status and recognition as a professional librarian or library technician;
- Career pathways *within* the profession may be pursued by means of specialised CPD programs or other equivalents that focus on particular Domains of Professional Knowledge. These may lead to specialist recognition

and “Active Professionalism” – see Figure 1, p11 in the prototype for descriptions of these Domains.

Please take the time to read the Consultation Paper and consider what you think professional librarianship should entail into the future. This is your chance to have your say, through any of the workshop or submission channels (see <https://professionalpathways.alia.org.au/have-your-say/>). And come along to our online HLA workshop consultation in mid-October.

References

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