

National Manager Update | August 2021

Ann Ritchie
HLA National Manager
Ann.ritchie@alia.org.au

As HLA's recently appointed National Manager my role is to spearhead the priorities and projects that are set by HLA's Executive at our annual strategic planning meeting. At this meeting, the five Portfolio leaders present the critical issues and proposed actions for their portfolios – Education and Professional Development; Partnerships and Collaborations; Membership; Demonstrating Value or ARMA – Advocacy, Research, Marketing and Awards; and Publishing. The priority projects for the National Manager fall out of these discussions. These are the priorities for the next 12 months:

- The future of LIS education, health specialist continuing professional development (CPD) and ALIA's Professional Pathways Initiative
- Review of the *Guidelines for Australian Health Libraries*
- Being part of the specialist health information professional workforce
- Developing partnerships and collaborations

In this short piece I'll outline the first of these. Please feel free to get in touch if you would like to hear more about or contribute to any of the priorities.

The future of LIS education, health specialist CPD and ALIA's Professional Pathways Initiative

The future of LIS education and ongoing CPD for health librarianship as a specialty area is the most important and critical issue for our profession right now. Our recognition as one of the health information professions is at stake, and there are implications for our roles, responsibilities and scopes of practice in the digital health information workforce. The main reason for this existential threat is the weakening of the traditional tie that stipulates that accredited post-secondary education courses are a necessary pre-condition to gaining professional status. Let me explain.

The well accepted route to professional recognition as a librarian or a library technician and ALIA's responsibilities in setting educational standards are outlined in the document: *ALIA's role in the education of library and information professionals* (2019)¹. This policy states that "the phrase 'library and information professional' refers to those members of the profession who have successfully completed an

¹ *ALIA's role in the education of library and information professionals*, 2019.
<https://read.alia.org.au/alias-role-education-library-and-information-professionals>

entry-level qualification in library and information science at either Associate or Library Technician level.”

The inaugural meeting of ALIA’s Professional Pathways Board (for which I am the health libraries representative) was held on 5 July. This is from the take-home messages:

The Professional Pathways Frameworks project was considered in some detail. This project aims to develop appropriate frameworks to enable alternate [sic] options for professional-level entry into the library and information profession, and clear pathways for people to specialise within the library and information profession.

ALIA’s Professional Pathways Initiative is looking at alternative “options for professional-level entry” including different routes to becoming a “certified library and information professional” or “certified ALIA library technician”. This certified status would be achievable via pathways other than the current educational ones, which could see the control of the qualifications and criteria to 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).

Our HLA Executive has convened a national consultation group of those who have expressed an interest in the future of general LIS education and health librarianship as a specialisation. We have made submissions to ALIA on your behalf, particularly outlining our aims:

- to strengthen the current system of LIS education and course/provider accreditation processes, especially the ties between educators, employers, our professional association and our broadly based health library workforce;
- to develop our health specialist model of requiring a baseline LIS qualification conferred by an accredited provider, leading to competency-based specialist qualifications and ongoing CPD, a model that emulates the training programs of the clinical health professions.

We have expressed our concerns about the change in focus from the original presidential theme of “the future of education” to one of “alternative pathways” as the mechanism for becoming a recognised professional librarian or library technician.

We have also outlined the risks of deprofessionalisation and the industrial repercussions in terms of professional vs administrative awards and conditions, if a route that attenuates or severs the link between post-secondary education and professional status were to be followed.

HLA has received assurances from ALIA that health libraries will be recognised as a “special case” (along with school and law libraries) which may not fit neatly when general principles are applied and detailed action plans are implemented in specific sectors.

The HLA committee is committed to pursuing our aims, as stated above - to strengthen the current LIS accreditation processes to ensure quality graduates and a firm basis on which to build health specialist qualifications, and will work within the Professional Pathways framework to achieve these goals.

As your health libraries representative on ALIA’s Professional Pathways Board, I have undertaken to represent the views of our sector, champion the approach, and support its implementation. I will aim to develop and implement the projects constructively, so they lead to the best possible long-term outcomes for health libraries. Please get in touch with me if you have any thoughts. You may also contact the ALIA team “who will be conducting further consultations including with expert reference groups... ALIA Director of Policy and Education Trish Hepworth trish.hepworth@alia.org.au”.