




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


The best way to predict the future [of Australian information education] is to invent it!
Professor Helen Partridge
Queensland University of Technology
2012



The 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?

The Context



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The Project Team

- Queensland University of Technology (Project Leader)
- Charles Sturt University
- Curtin University
- Edith Cowan University
- Monash University
- RMIT University
- University of Canberra
- University of South Australia
- University of Tasmania
- University of Technology Sydney
- Victoria University

The Approach


Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) (WK Kellogg Foundation)

“a collaborative approach to research that equally involves all partners in the research process and recognises the unique strengths that each brings. CBPR begins with a research topic of importance to the community and has the aim of combining knowledge with action”




Substudy: Student Considerations	
Focus: To provide a profile of LIS students and an analysis of their choices, experiences and expectations in regards to LIS education and their graduate destinations.	
Theme	Aim
Learning opportunities	To document and review the various learning pathways and study modes currently available to LIS students in Australia
Learner attributes	To review the nature of the LIS student population in Australia
Learning experiences	To explore LIS students' experiences, perceptions and expectations of LIS courses in Australia
Learner outcomes	To review and critically consider the destinations of graduates from LIS courses
Substudy: Workforce Planning Considerations	
Focus: To 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.	
Theme	Aim
Convergence	To review how the 'convergence' of the information professions has and will impact upon their practice and disciplinary knowledge
Employers	To ascertain the current employers and potential employers of LIS graduates
Professional skills	To analyse the generic, disciplinary and professional skills required in workforce planning for the information sector
Qualifications	To review the levels of qualifications required in the information sector
Substudy: Tertiary Education Considerations	
Focus: To provide a profile of LIS educators and an analysis of their characteristics and experiences including the key issues and challenges, it will also explore the current national and international trends and priorities impacting on LIS education.	
Theme	Aim
LIS educators	To critically review the nature and context of LIS educators in Australia
LIS education	To critically review the nature and context of LIS education programs or courses of study in Australia
National & international context	To critically review the key national and international agencies, policies and models that will impact on the future of LIS education in Australia

3 Key Areas




Key Findings: Students

Key Finding	Challenge for LIS Education
Australian LIS current students and recent graduates feel well prepared by their LIS programs for the workforce.	To ensure that graduates have the opportunities when entering the workforce to apply the innovative theories and practices they have developed through their program, and for the LIS sector to provide stimulating professional learning opportunities that ensure the retention of the brightest and best professionals in the LIS field.
LIS lacks a strong profile or direct pathway for vocational development at the secondary education stage.	To develop strategies to increase the profile of the LIS profession at all levels in Australia. In particular there is a need to educate career advisors about the LIS profession and develop clear pathways through high school to LIS.
Evidence-based practice and academic research are essential to the advancement of any profession.	To actively pursue increased research opportunities such as Higher Degree Research scholarships, post-doctoral fellowships, practitioner-academic exchanges and advocacy.
More straightforward pathways between the vocational and higher education sectors are needed to ensure career progression.	To promote and participate in collaborative partnerships between the sectors, to create a seamless, transparent and consistent approach to articulation, for the benefit of both LIS education and the profession.
Graduates need a mix of core LIS knowledge and capabilities as well as problem-solving and critical thinking to address well established and emergent needs.	To ensure that LIS graduates acquire the basic tools and theoretical underpinning from which they can flexibly evolve with rapidly changing information and workplace environments – at local, national and international levels.
LIS education offers multiple pathways to a professional qualification. Concerns have been raised about the apparent inequalities in recognition of qualifications by professional associations and associated barriers to their employment as LIS professionals.	To ensure that program outcomes and professional recognition of graduates equitably align whilst meeting needs of an expanding LIS professional environment. In addition, these programs must be developed and accredited in light of existing national policies and frameworks (e.g. AQF, TEQSA).




Key Findings: Workforce

Key Finding	Challenge for LIS Education
Generic and personal qualities are seen as increasingly desirable within Australia's LIS sector, particularly those associated with learning potential, flexibility, workplace communication and teamwork, and potential for personal growth, including leadership.	To assess the extent to which it is possible to train in these areas of generic skills, or the degree to which they need to be recruited with incoming students.
The impact of information technology is an unavoidably transforming feature of the current workplace. It is apparent that graduates from all LIS programs are expected to have a good working knowledge of modern information and communication technologies and their use in the collection, management, storage and transmission of data and information.	To produce graduates who are capable of adapting emerging technologies and applications to an information service, and in negotiating needs and services with IT staff.
Academic and special libraries and some non-traditional employers have an increasing demand for staff who have a good understanding of the research process and evidence-based practice.	To stimulate interest in higher degree research and provide viable pathways for practitioners interested in obtaining research qualifications.
There is demand for graduates with a knowledge base that spans the major collecting areas of libraries, archives and records.	To devise programs that prepare students across two (or even more) of these diverse areas, by balancing generic information skills with the need for knowledge and skills that remains specific to these still distinct professional areas.
There is evidence from special libraries of demand for subject specialist skills. These roles may require an enhanced knowledge of the core discipline or business of the parent organisation that cannot be acquired within the context of a first LIS qualification.	To attract entrants to graduate programs from a wide variety of disciplinary and professional backgrounds, and in the case of undergraduate programs to formulate appropriate and varied double-degree structures.



Key Findings: Educators


Key Finding	Challenge for LIS Education
Recruitment of new LIS educators has emerged as a pressing issue. At the university level another key issue to consider is the need for new educators to have a doctoral qualification, yet a PhD remains a relatively scarce commodity in Australian professional LIS culture. In addition, there is evidence more broadly that becoming an educator, regardless of discipline, is a less than an enticing career choice with long hours and high workload.	To find ways now to entice new educators into the field.
Nationally and internationally LIS education is moving from a focus on specific agencies (e.g. libraries, archives) in the broader information landscape. Care must be made to ensure LIS education does not become too broad or too general and unable to meet the needs of the industry it supports.	To establish programs that are able to not only position the LIS discipline more firmly within the broader educational context, but are also able to provide quality learning outcomes that will adequately prepare students for the realities of work as an LIS professional.
With more institutions offering more LIS programs per capita than other countries (e.g. UK, USA and Canada) Australia's LIS education providers are competing for a small number of students nationally who wish to pursue an LIS career. In addition the small number of LIS educators based within each institution has implications for program quality, research performance, workload and burnout. Although the master's qualification has emerged as the dominant program internationally, there is little agreement as to the appropriate degree level for entry into the LIS profession within the Australian context.	To establish LIS education programs that are sustainable, attractive and relevant to the future for the discipline, and competitive within the international market.
There is a growing focus on research performance and standards within Australia's tertiary education sector. Research has been identified as crucial to Australia's future. If the LIS discipline is to continue to have a sustainable role within the nation's tertiary education sector then it must become more research active and build a stronger research profile.	To continue to develop a strong and active research culture, both within and across practice and the academy.
Australia's LIS education must continue to provide innovative and quality learning environments that meet students' need for greater flexibility and variety in their study options. Australia's LIS educators will need to continue to develop their skills and knowledge in online pedagogy.	To continue to develop a strong culture of teaching and learning both within and across institutions.



Framework for the Education of the Information Professions

1. It is recommended that a broader and **more inclusive vocabulary** be adopted that both recognises and celebrates the expanding landscape of the field, for example 'information profession', 'information sector', 'information discipline' and 'information education'.
2. It is recommended that a **self-directed body composed of information educators** be established to promote, support and lead excellence in teaching and research within the information discipline.
3. It is recommended that Australia's information discipline **continue to develop excellence in information research** that will raise the discipline's profile and contribute to its prominence within the national and international arena.
4. It is recommended that **further research examining the nature and context of Australia's information education programs** be undertaken to ensure a sustainable and relevant future for the discipline.
5. It is recommended that **further research examining the pathways and qualifications available** for entry into the Australian information sector be undertaken to ensure relevance, attractiveness, accessibility and transparency.

6. It is recommended that strategies are developed and implemented to ensure the **sustainability of the workforce of information educators**.
7. It is recommended that a **national approach to promoting and marketing the information profession** and thereby attracting more students to the field is developed.
8. It is recommended that Australia's information discipline continues to support a **culture of quality teaching and learning**, especially given the need to accommodate a focus on the broader information landscape and more flexible delivery options.
9. It is recommended that strategies are developed that will support and encourage **collaboration between information education within the higher education and VET sectors**.
10. It is recommended that strategies and forums are developed that will support the information sector working together to **conceptualise and articulate their professional identity and educational needs**.
11. It is recommended that a **research agenda be established that will identify and prioritise areas in which further development or work is needed** to continue advancing information education in Australia.



So what next?
What can we do?
How can I help?



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The views expressed in this activity do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council.



Recognising
excellence
in Australian
Higher Education
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Questions/Further Information?

Project web site – <http://www.liseducation.org.au> (including link to final report)

Partridge, H. & Yates, C. (2012) A framework for the education of the information professions in Australia, *Australian Library Journal*, 61(2), 81-94.

Professor Helen Partridge, Project Leader h.partridge@qut.edu.au

