And tell me, do I fit in the big picture?
Reference librarians as a key component of the LIS workforce

A/Professor Gillian Hallam

CAVAL Reference Interest Group Forum
11 May 2007
The big picture...

On and on
The story of our lives goes on and on
The path of time
The sunsets up ahead roll along

In your eyes
The option of a warm embrace implies
You're my friend
Happy endings keep our love alive

And tell me do I fit in the big picture
Do I have a shot at the big part
'Cause I've been up all night looking at the big picture
I've got some good lines for my big star
What is the big picture? …

… How do you fit in this picture?

- Today’s canvas is all about ‘Librarians in the Workforce’, looking at the research project I have been involved in.
- My goals are:
  - To prepare the background to the study
  - To paint a picture of the current LIS workforce in Australia – or perhaps more accurately, to interpret the self-portrait created by the library and information professionals themselves
  - To examine the finer brush strokes applied by reference library staff in this picture
- So that we can use the elements of art – line, shape, form, space, color, and texture – to create a view, a perception and a vision of the library workforce today and into the future
1. The Background
Skills shortage leads to short fuses

By Kate Southwell

The skills shortage so bad it is like a fuse that has been lit, has left some of us floundering. For those looking for work, the term "skills shortage" makes them see red.

I understand the frustration, however, a skills shortage is just that - a shortage of a certain set of skills. The Australian Industry Group says the shortage of 21,000 skilled jobs is set to be even more acute in the trade and manufacturing sector alone. When companies advertise, yes, they do get applications, but according to the AI, in many cases the candidates do not have the skills required.

Another example is a high demand for auditors with experience in helping companies comply with a raft of local and international legislation. The demand followed the string of corporate collapses here and in the US because companies were not paying attention to issues of corporate governance. There may be accountants looking for a new job, but that does not make them suitable for an audit role.

It's a tough one because however valuing people are on a win-win challenge, and it takes years to become a seasoned bookkeeper or computer engineer, auditor, accountant or tax agent.

Economists and recruiters say the skills shortage will continue whether we go through good or bad economic times. Contributing factors include early retirement since the 1970s, a declining birth rate and not enough added education. Australia's skills gap is a future growing problem and that means the need to address it is urgent.

Skills shortage solution challenged

The Australian Industry Group, for example, recently released a strategy to address the skills crisis facing Australian industry.

The strategy, which government and business support, is designed to address the skills gap and the shortage in skills and knowledge of training and education in the Australian industry. It is aimed at skills development, training and education that are needed in the industry, and it is aimed at all levels of the skills pyramid.

It involves investing in the skills of individuals and the productivity of industry.

The broader challenge is to ensure the industry is able to meet the needs of a diverse and complex economy, and to meet the needs of ongoing growth and development.

The Australian Industry Group says, "A skills shortage is a problem that needs a long-term solution. It requires a combination of government and industry investment in education and training."

The strategy outlines the need for a long-term commitment to workforce development and training, and for investment in education and training that is aimed at meeting the needs of the industry.
The state of play

- **Skills shortages in key professions**
  - The shortage of doctors and nursing staff makes (regular) front page news
- **Skills shortages in the trades**
  - The critical need for more apprenticeships
- **Skills shortages in the defence forces**
  - Spending $10m on recruitment
- **Shortage of unskilled labour**
  - eg in the agricultural, hospitality, transport sectors
Skills shortage leads to higher pay
(Nine MSN, 22 March 2007)

• Employers are more likely to pay their own staff more before looking to buy outside talent amid a lack of skills in the jobs market, a survey shows

• This is consistent with tighter labour market conditions, with the unemployment rate steadily falling from 5.3 per cent in January 2006 to the current low level of 4.4 per cent

• Low unemployment levels have reduced the size of the jobs market making it more difficult for businesses to find skilled staff

• The trend in higher pay increases for incumbents showed that businesses were focused on building and retaining staff, rather than paying higher rates to attract new talent

• This indicates that employers are managing rising costs by segmenting the workforce and offering a premium to retain those who hold critical skills or are the best performers
Quantity, yes –

– but, also, what about quality?

• “Skills shortage a worry for building industry”
  – *There are plenty of ‘tradies’ out there, but it hard to find good tradies*

• “Falling standards a worry as skills shortage continues to hurt”
  – *IT employers are struggling to fill vacancies and to attract additional skills for new projects*
  – ACS Foundation: launched 200 scholarships worth more than $2m in 2006
What about…

• “Skills shortage a worry for the LIS sector”
  – *There are plenty of librarians out there, but it hard to find good librarians*

• “Falling standards a worry as skills shortage continues to hurt”
  – *LIS employers are struggling to fill vacancies and to attract additional skills for new projects*

• So, how about:
  – *ALIA Foundation: awards 200 scholarships worth more than $2m in 2008 ??*
Problems on the horizon

- Unemployment dropping below 4%
- Ageing of the population
  - the baby boomers are all retiring (early)
- Lower levels of fertility
  - fewer children = fewer workers in the future

“Demographic change will develop into the challenge of replacing skilled older workers from a much smaller pool of younger workers”

Professions Australia, 2005
“It seems that skilled workers in their 20s, otherwise known as Generation Y, are either in short supply or have other options. After all, they are forever tossing in their job and heading to some other place. This is a very different world to the workforce that you entered as a graduate 30 years ago. You were grateful for a job. You were respectful of, and even somewhat intimidated by, your boss. You understood that in order to progress though the organisation you had to work hard over an extended period (which meant years, not weeks).”

Bernard Salt

The Australian, 7 March 2007
The heart of the problem:

- In 1975 the number of workforce "leavers", then aged 46-61, comprised 16% of the population whereas the number of "enterers", then aged 16-31, was 23%
- What management bliss: the young-worker population exceeded the old-worker population by 7 percentage points
- In 2007, lots of boomers leaving the workforce (20%) are being replaced by a slightly smaller number of Ys (19%) entering the workforce
- Where "leavers" exceed "enterers" there is a skills shortage
“For those of us left in the profession, collaborative research and development is key to our future. Workforce analysis, especially around public library and academic library personnel is needed. We also need to undertake a current workforce skills audit and plan recruitment and education strategies for the library workforce of the 21st century.”

Dr Vicki Williamson
Some international LIS workforce studies

- **The 8Rs Study** (Canada)
  Canadian Library Human Resource Study
- **Recruit, retain and lead** (public libraries)
  University of Sheffield (UK)
- **Learning for change: workforce development strategy**
  Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (UK)
- **A national study on the future of librarians in the workforce**
  University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (USA), plus a number of universities and professional associations funded by the Institute of Museums & Library Services
- **Other studies:** eg ACRL, Colorado Association of Libraries
Some Australian initiatives

• Libraries of the Australian Technology Network (LATN)
  – Workforce and succession planning
• State Library of Victoria
  – Workforce sustainability and leadership project
• A number of anecdotal reports of workforce planning activities in individual organisations
• Primarily internal focus
  – Risk of duplication of effort
  – Lost opportunities to develop models of best practice to inform and guide workforce planning in the sector as a whole
• The need for research into the LIS workforce in Australia
2. The research

“Research which is planned and carried out in the purpose of assisting the creation of art has sometimes been called artistic research”
The *neXus* project

- To respond to the need for a major study to capture data on:
  - Demographics
  - Education
  - Employment
  - Employment policies and practices
- To endeavour to develop “a comprehensive overview of the [LIS] professional resource issues, challenges and opportunities” (Professions Australia, 2005)
- To understand the issues that represent the nexus between education, curriculum, recruitment, retention, training and development to potentially sustain - and develop - the LIS workforce in Australia
Scope of the project

- Three different, but interrelated, studies
- Key stakeholders:
  - Queensland University of Technology (QUT)
  - Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)
  - CAVAL Collaborative Solutions
- Stage One: online survey of individuals
- Stage Two: workforce policies and practices in institutions
  - a pilot study with CAVAL
- Study tour(s) to learn about the ‘bigger picture’ dimensions of LIS education and workforce planning:
  - Universities, professional associations, government bodies etc
Stage One: Online survey of individuals

- Launched at ALIA Click06 conference, Sept 2006
- Self-administered online questionnaire
- Demographic, educational and employment data
- 2346 valid online responses + 8 paper-based responses

- Click06 paper
The neXus Census to examine the current library and information services workforce in Australia

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and CAVAL Collaborative Solutions are currently undertaking a major collaborative research project to examine the library and information services (LIS) workforce in Australia: the neXus census project. Project leader is Associate Professor Gillian Halfam (please remove '.spam' from address), past president of ALIA and chair of the ALIA Education Reference Group.

The goals of the neXus census are to develop a demographic, educational and employment picture of the library and information profession today and to identify the diverse workforce planning activities currently being undertaken in the library and information services (LIS) sector in Australia. The research project is aligned with similar projects undertaken in Canada, the United States of America and the United Kingdom, to enable a comparison to be made between the situations in Australia and in other countries.

The project involves two parts:

1. Individual survey
2. Institutional survey

Further information about the institutional survey will be available soon.
Stage Two: Institutional survey

- Instrument developed in conjunction with the Staff Development Coordinators (SDC) Committee of CAVAL
- Updates earlier studies into training and development practices
- Four main foci:
  - General staffing information
  - Recruitment and retention processes
  - Staff development
  - Succession planning
- Run as a pilot with the 13 members of CAVAL in Nov-Dec 2006, academic libraries in Victoria and NSW
- Hoped to be reviewed and refined to be used in a wider study of policies and practices in Australian libraries
Developing a picture of the LIS profession in Australia

- An important first step in the process of understanding our professional future is to develop a clear picture of:
  - who is currently in the profession, and
  - where they think they are heading
- The demographic, educational and employment data could potentially be updated every five years to track changes and emerging trends, cf census
3. The details
neXus survey respondents by LIS sector

- University: 24.6%
- Public: 23.4%
- Special: 21.1%
- National/State: 8.5%
- School: 7.5%
- TAFE: 5.3%
- Non traditional: 2.0%
- n/a: 7.3%
LIS qualifications (or studying)

- 2346 respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional quals</td>
<td>72.1%</td>
<td>1690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraprofessional quals</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not qualified in LIS</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall breakdown of ‘relevant’ respondents

• 1364 of all respondents indicated they preformed “reference, information service or research support” often or very often (58.2%)

• A number of paraprofessionals, non-qualified and ‘no response’ people indicated their involvement in reference work

• The data analysis today looks specifically at professional LIS staff (qualified or studying) who perform reference work often or very often (n = 1048)
## Regional distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Capital city</th>
<th>Regional city/town</th>
<th>Non-metro/rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference staff</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Gender breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>85.5%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reference staff</strong></td>
<td>87.9%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The respondents

• Qualified/studying

85% [93%] had completed their studies in LIS

8% [7%] still enrolled in a course

18% [22%] were ‘new graduates’
  ie gained qualifications in last 5 years

[Professional reference staff]
## Age profile of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-25 years</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35 years</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45 years</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55 years</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-65 years</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66 years +</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 45</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 56</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Age profile of librarians
## Career age of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recent entrants (&lt; 5 years in sector)</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid career workers (6-15 years)</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior career workers (&gt;16 years)</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Correlation chronological age : career stage
- Career change = older ‘recent entrants’
  - 40% [46%] of new grads indicated career change
  - 44% [41%] of new grads were over 40 years old
  - 37% [32%] of ‘recent entrants’ were over 40 years old
Impact on workforce planning through interplay between

- New entrants who may wish to gain variety of experience and diverse employment opportunities

  - 53% [59%] in current job for less than 5 years
  - 29% [34%] in current job for less than 2 years

  - 42% [49%] with current employer for less than 5 years
  - 20% [23%] with current employer for less than 2 years

- Means more frequent hiring and induction

- Stable workforce in mid to late career stages

  - 20% [20%] in same job for more than 10 years

- Means little change in personnel but significant changes to tasks/functions
Will there be a dramatic exodus of workers?

- Loss of older workers is directly related to the skills debate:
  - The ability to attract and retain a skilled workforce
  - The critical importance of succession planning
  - The need to introduce more flexible employment options
  - All in a highly competitive labour market
Retirement plans

- At what age do they wish to retire?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 55 years</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-60 yrs</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-65 yrs</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At 65 yrs</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 65 years</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Anticipated time until retirement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3 years</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5 years</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 2006-2015 32% 28%
cf 56 years and over 18% 14%
What skills will be lost through retirement?

- Concerns about the quality of future management and leadership skills
- Of those planning to retire in the next 5 years
  - 35% [38%] at middle management level
  - 18% [18%] at senior management level
  - 11% [10%] at supervisor level
  - 36% [34%] at non-management level
- Examined according to tasks performed ‘often’ or ‘very often’
- Senior managers
  - 90% [85%] involved in organisational planning activities
  - 88% [88%] involved in budget and financial activities
  - 84% [77%] involved in policy development
  - 82% [81%] involved in management of training/staff development
Middle managers

• Differences in managerial responsibilities between:
  – Those who would retire within 5 years, and
  – Those who would be employed for 6 years or more

• Those who would be working longer already had higher levels of managerial responsibilities
## Comparative levels of managerial functions performed by middle managers retiring within 5 years and those planning to work for 6 years or more

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional functions</th>
<th>Middle managers retiring within 5 yrs</th>
<th>Middle managers working 6+ years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marketing &amp; public relations</td>
<td>38% [54%]</td>
<td>53% [62%]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space, facilities &amp; buildings management</td>
<td>42% [50%]</td>
<td>50% [55%]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing training &amp; staff development</td>
<td>49% [57%]</td>
<td>65% [68%]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR planning &amp; management</td>
<td>49% [54%]</td>
<td>59% [60%]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy development</td>
<td>53% [61%]</td>
<td>64% [74%]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting &amp; financial management</td>
<td>60% [69%]</td>
<td>65% [67%*]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision &amp; evaluation of staff</td>
<td>66% [70%]</td>
<td>77% [80%]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational planning</td>
<td>67% [77%]</td>
<td>78% [77%*]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Middle managers : age issues

• All those planning to retire within 5 years were > 46 years
  33% [34%] were 46-55, so retiring before ‘normal’ retirement age
• Those planning to work longer were considerably younger,
  53% [55%] < 45 years
  30% [34%] < 40 years
• The comparison between chronological age, career stage and
  professional functions performed augurs well for the future
• Evidence that progress is being made in succession planning
• Younger middle managers are acquiring greater responsibility
  for a wide range of managerial activities
• Far less the case with their older, pre-retirement colleagues
• But further analysis required!
Managerial aspirations

• Retirement by 2015
  32% [28%] of all respondents - 18% [14%] by 2010
  but
  64% [53%] of senior career/senior managers - 35% [39%] by 2010
  52% [45%] of senior career/middle managers - 29% [24%] by 2010

• Ambitions for senior management roles within 10 years:
  26% [28%] of senior career/senior managers to continue the role
  14% [17%] of senior career/middle managers
  29% [35%] of mid career/middle managers
  11% [15%] of mid career/supervisors
  9% [9%] of new entrant professionals
Perceptions about qualifications and experience

• Senior career/middle managers
  62% [69%] believe they are overqualified for their current role
  36% [36%] of these believe they could be promoted*

  58% [58%] believe their career would benefit from management training
  4% [4%] believe their career would benefit from leadership skills training

  Only 6% [6%] have those * ambitions to be a senior manager

• Mid career/middle managers
  62% [63%] believe they are overqualified for their current role
  24% [25%] of these believe they could be promoted**

  61% [72%] believe their career would benefit from management training
  3% [1.6%] believe their career would benefit from leadership skills training

  Only 13% [15%] of those ** have ambitions to become a senior manager
Further academic study

21% [22%] respondents expressed interest in further study

10% [9%] of those considering Master of Business Administration

0.2% [0.4%] considering a Master of Public Policy

… BUT 60% of professionals stated their career would benefit from management training …
Research studies

13% [10%] of those wishing to study were considering PhD studies  
= 3% [2%] of all respondents
15% [16%] of those wishing to study were considering research Masters  
= 3% [4%] of all respondents

5% [6%] of all respondents
9% [5%] of senior managers
are involved ‘often’ or ‘very often’ in research & publishing in the discipline
Involvement in professional activities

42% [47%] of respondents were currently members of ALIA
10% [11%] planned to join in next 12 months
23% [26%] lapsed members

Other memberships
Australian Law Librarians Group 4.6% [7.5%]
Australian School Libraries Association 4.4% [5.9%]
Public Libraries Australia 2.5% [1.9%]
Australian Institute of Management 2.1% [1.8%]
SLA 1.4% [1.6%]
Records Management Association of Australia 1.3% [1.0%]

Professionally active
28% [35%] ‘often’ or ‘very often’
25% [29%] ‘sometimes’
47% [35%] ‘rarely’ or ‘never’
Professional engagement as determinant for interest and participation in training and development activities

- **Formal PD**: 41.50% (ALIA member) vs. 20.30% (Non ALIA member)
- **Informal PD**: 52.70% (ALIA member) vs. 35.70% (Non ALIA member)
- **Rarely/never**: 14% (ALIA member) vs. 29.60% (Non ALIA member)

Correlation between membership of ALIA and participation in continuing education events
[cf Reference staff – less marked differences – more training and development overall]
So – what about the big picture?
Some conclusions about the Reference domain of LIS in Australia

• In ‘better shape’ than some other domains – but a real comparison needs to be done between the different areas, eg Tech Services, Resource Management
• More younger - and therefore fewer older - staff
• Slightly more professionally mobile
• Fewer heading towards retirement (but still 14% in 5 years, 28% in 10 years)
• Evidence of succession planning in middle management
• Stronger ambitions to move into senior management
• More people want management training
• Fewer people want leadership training
• More professionally active
• Less academically ambitious
However, concerns remain within the profession…

- The need for academic leadership
- The need for professional leadership
- The lack of clarity about the profession itself
- The need to really focus on recruitment, retention, education, curriculum, training and development, and the neXus between all of these
Messy paint distorting the picture…

• The profession is confused about its educational pathways
  – Bachelor, Graduate Diploma, Masters
  – Associate Diploma, Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Graduate Diploma
  – From both sides – the prospective student and the prospective employer
  – Where we fit in the global education context (Bologna and beyond)
• Confusion over the core knowledge, skills and attributes for the profession
• Confusion over ‘management’ and ‘leadership’
• Confusion over what employers are looking for and what they say they are not getting
• The lack of interest and support for new people entering the profession
  – Very few openings for new graduates: graduate programs, internships etc
• The impact of the brain drain
• Confusion amongst professionals about options for a career path
The need to understand the line, shape, form, space, colour and texture

• The individual perspective is one side of the coin
• We have so much data – while it is very rich, it is still monochrome, one-dimensional
• The organisational perspective is the other side of the coin – we need to better understand the policies and practices to build a multi-dimensional, technicolour picture of our profession
• Can we identify best practice to inspire and encourage continuous improvement within the whole sector?
• Can we build on the preliminary analysis of Stage Two of the project and to move forward from the pilot to a mainstream study?
Can we bring the painting alive?

• An overview of the current research in Australia
  – Some of the preliminary findings relevant to reference staff
  – The importance of sharing the data with the specific stakeholders
• How do we get the data out of the database and make it usable?
• How do we apply this research?
• The Canadian 8Rs study has called for submissions to determine ways that the data could become meaningful information
• How can we use the data to develop strategic activities?
Preparing our next canvas

• The LIS sector cannot ignore the reality and the impact of its own dynamic environment
• The faster the pace of change, the greater imperative for staff development
• LIS professionals – and LIS institutions – should not be allowed to stagnate; they must be given the opportunities for ongoing growth and stimulation
• How do we shrug off the past and reinvent ourselves?
• Are there parallels with our environment – do we need to change behaviour?
The future starts now…

• If our goal is to sustain and develop a highly skilled LIS profession in Australia…
• If we are to attract and retain good staff – or even the best staff…

• How do we prepare the canvas (plan for the future)?
• How do we create the (internal and external) image of the profession as being dynamic, engaged and in a state of perpetual growth?
• How do we motivate and challenge individuals to work keenly and productively in a career – not just a job?
So tell me, do you fit in the big picture?
Questions, feedback, comments & ideas…

Gillian Hallam

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