

Conservation Survey 2006 – implications for ALIA

Veronica Bullock, Development Officer,
Collections Council of Australia Ltd

The Collections Council of Australia (CCA) published its study of human and financial resources in Australian conservation and preservation in October 2006. The report, which presents information for 2003–2008, is available at: <http://www.collectionscouncil.com.au/conservation+survey+2006+report.aspx>.

Conservation Survey 2006 shows that insufficient funding is available to achieve reasonable conservation and preservation goals for collections; not enough conservation and preservation workers are available or suitable for advertised positions; and the workforce demographic profile suggests the shortfall in skilled staff will intensify through retirement and low recruitment.

The current funding climate has curtailed the expectations of a majority of collecting organisations. Lack of funds is blamed for their inability to access suitable conservation/preservation workers. However, the minority of organisations able to systematically test the market have realised that the shortage of suitable workers is in fact a separate issue from lack of funding. More conservation and preservation workers are required in many specialisation and skill areas, across all the major domains in the collections sector, including archives, galleries, libraries and museums.

Comparing information about the conservation and preservation sector workforce between 2003–2005 and 2006–2008, it is clear that employer expectations regarding qualifications, terms of employment and specialisations / skills are changing. A move away from Bachelor-level qualification toward postgraduate and paraprofessional qualification coincides with offerings of fewer permanent positions and more temporary contracts. Significantly increased need exists for workers specialising in items that are 'carriers of information' (for example, film, audio, sound, reformatting or copying, books, archival materials, photographs) and with skills covering collection maintenance, reformatting/copying, archival materials, paper (non-archival), electronic media, audiovisual, books and photographs. Deteriorating collections, increased public access, and rapid technological development appear to be driving these changes.

Employer requirements for particular skilled or specialised workers can be met by education and training, including paid internship and professional development opportunities, for both new and lifelong learning candidates. Employers can take a more pro-active role in co-ordinating training with the employment environment. This would lead to greater control over the availability and suitability of workers in conservation/preservation, and contribute to making the collections sector more sustainable. Professional organisations can also make valuable contributions. For example, ALIA is to be congratulated for its current efforts in workforce planning (arising from the 2006 neXus census).

The six recommendations arising from Conservation Survey 2006 fall into four categories: education and training, workforce planning, promotion and advocacy. Each recommendation *continued page 13...*

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includes at least one 'Action' that concerned groups or individuals can take. Two of the Actions urge organisations to consider the Conservation Survey 2006 and to collaborate in developing better education and training pathways and achieving better alignment between employer demands and the workforce.

Some recent Collections Council projects work towards these recommendations. A moderated Open Forum has been established on the Collections Council website to collect feedback on the report and fresh ideas (now available at: <http://www.collectionscouncil.com.au/open+forums.aspx?afgroup=5>). The Council is also co-ordinating a web page showcasing work in conservation/preservation (now available at: <http://www.collectionscouncil.com.au/Default.aspx?tabid=303>.)

The Collections Council relies on the use of its research by interested individuals and organisations to bring about effective change. Please read the Conclusions and Recommendations of the Conservation Survey 2006 Report and decide where your contribution to enhancing the role of conservation and preservation in Australia can best be made.

You may decide that you are best able to arrange a risk assessment of your organisation's collections, and so provide input into the Further Research recommendation of the Conservation Survey 2006 Report. Certainly, the collections sector needs to anticipate collection needs better, and how these needs will affect staffing. Here are some further suggestions:

- Contribute feedback to the Open Forum on Conservation Survey 2006.
- Develop stronger connections with, and be open to approaches from, other collections sector professional organisations and peak bodies to work collaboratively on collections sector wide issues like education and training, workforce planning and risk assessment.
- Be prepared to work with organisations outside the collections sector (such as industry skills councils and education bodies) to achieve good outcomes for the collections sector.
- Point potential entrants to the field to the Conservation / Preservation Showcase for Careers, Projects and Resources information and think about ways of showcasing conservation and preservation in your own public programs.
- Have resources ready to share with advocacy bodies like the Collections Council of Australia and the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS).

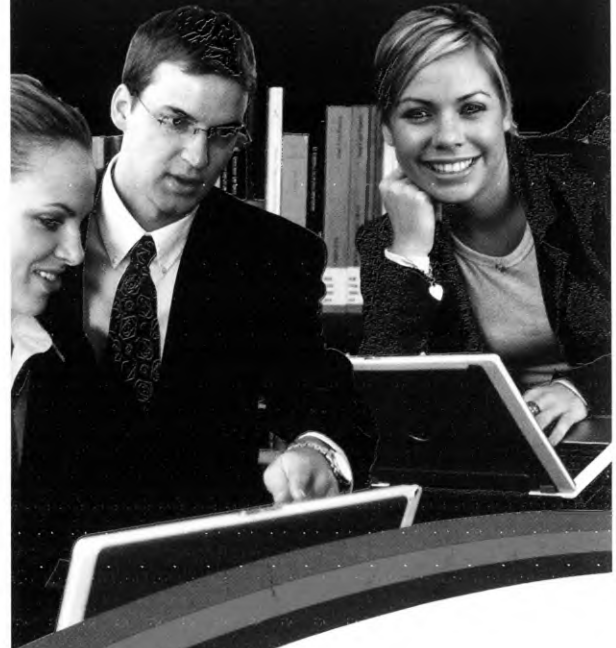
The Collections Council was established to advance the sustainability of collections in Australia through nationwide co-ordination. However, your involvement is critical to improvement in the conservation and preservation of collections. Now is a perfect time to put your energies into advocating for conservation and preservation to visitors, to the management of your organisation, to the rest of the collections sector, and to other sectors.



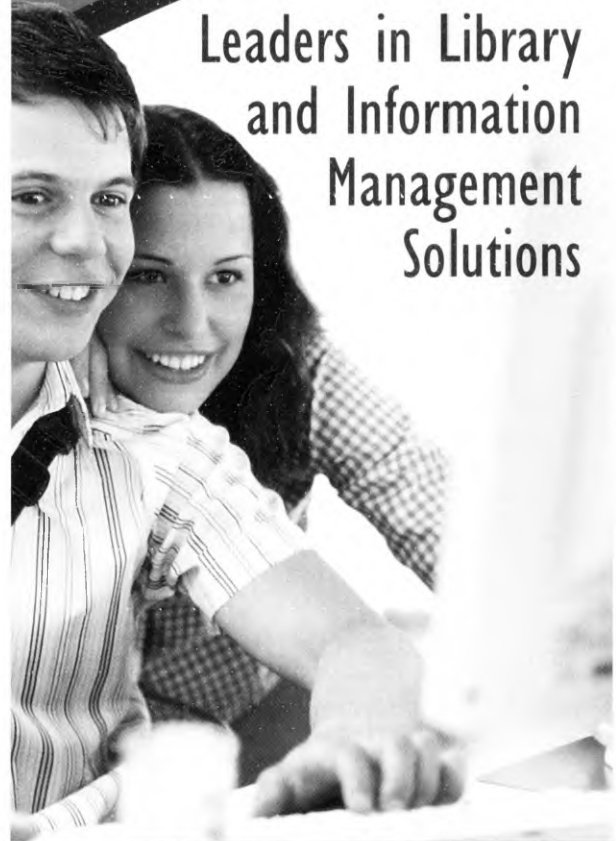
Please contact Veronica Bullock at research@collectionscouncil.com.au for further information about the survey, the CCA and CHASS.

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