



AN EXCITING FUTURE AHEAD

How important are formal qualifications in librarianship? I qualified initially as a schoolteacher, but I left the profession to travel. In time I retrained as an archivist.

Ten years later I was appointed university librarian at Wollongong. My appointment worried some, who were concerned that I was unqualified. Initially I was mystified by many things taken for granted by those who had library training. Their knowledge of the Dewey Classification System, their innate understanding of acronyms and their professional networks combined to mark me as an uninitiated stranger. It affected my effectiveness as a library manager.

I could have studied for a qualification in librarianship. Instead I chose to undertake broad professional development tailored to the environment in which I found myself. I sought to acquire an understanding of library processes, information technology and management techniques, as well as the ways in which they interacted. Over the next 25 years, I read countless journal articles and books, attended many conferences and training courses and visited a myriad of libraries, learning centres and information resource facilities. I also engaged with publishers and database producers to understand their industries.

By the time I retired, I understood all but the most arcane of library matters. I confess that I am still unable to recite the Moys Classification Scheme, and my understanding of Dublin Core remains rudimentary. On the positive side, I acquired a corpus of knowledge that enabled me to operate effectively in a constantly evolving environment. It was a time that saw many innovations, including the introduction of the Australian Bibliographic Network, online journals, ebooks and the internet.

Future members of the profession will need a mix of formal qualifications and strong ongoing professional development if they are to survive in an information environment that will continue to change. Library and information services educators will face major challenges

as they strive to provide courses that are relevant to an industry that will be increasingly diverse, evolve unevenly and be subject to a host of factors mostly outside the control of its workforce.

Employers will continue to encounter challenges as they constantly restructure services to meet the particular requirements of their communities. For some time, there has been a need for knowledge and skills that existing library workers may not possess. Increasingly, employers will hire new staff with the requisite qualities, but they will also need to encourage existing staff to develop their skills and knowledge.

There will be challenges for ALIA as our industry and the requisite skill and knowledge sets change. The Association will need to re-evaluate the qualifications recognised for membership. ALIA may also need to consider whether a program of personal development should be a requisite for continuing recognition as a professional member. Other professions have requirements of this kind.

Formal qualifications, not necessarily of a conventional library nature, will remain important, and higher degrees will become essential for those seeking promotion to senior or specialist positions. Everyone in the profession will need to show commitment to ongoing structured development of their skills and knowledge. Failure to do so will leave them uncompetitive and redundant.

The future will be challenging but need not be frightening if we continue to anticipate and accommodate change. An essential part of the survival strategy will be to ensure that we develop and maintain skills and knowledge that are unique and appropriate to the services we provide.

JOHN SHIPP FALIA
ALIA President

