



Charting the future of library and information science in Australia and New Zealand through research, education and practice partnerships

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Abstract

Introduction. This paper reports on a year-long research project examining the state of library and information science (LIS) in Australia and New Zealand (ANZ), where there is a decreasing number of LIS programmes and ensuing concerns around the future of LIS education, and hence LIS research and LIS practice.

Method. Data was collected through three workshops at three different LIS conferences in ANZ, where conference attendees participated through menti.com, an interactive audience-participation platform displaying live anonymous results, followed by an open discussion.

Analysis. Data was analysed using thematic content analysis and affinity diagramming of the menti.com anonymous data and the notes from the post-workshop discussions that arose dynamically from the live results.

Results. A majority of participants indicated LIS education to be of the most concern, tying it in with consequences for future research and professional practice, with other concerns including government and university policies, funding and research assessment.

Conclusions. One of the strongest conclusions that emerged from all the workshops was the role of LIS professional associations in bringing together theory, praxis and education through more dialogue and broad consultations that are inclusive of contemporary societal priorities while ensuring a future for the discipline.

Introduction

University-level library and information science (LIS) education in Australia emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s, transitioning from practitioner-led training under the auspices of the Library Association of Australia to programmes within universities and higher education institutions (Wilson et al., 2012). This shift led to the academicisation of teaching staff. Prior to the movement to universities, educators had been experienced professionals. After the move to universities, educators were required to have formal academic qualifications such as a PhD and meet university expectations for academics to conduct and publish research (Wilson et al., 2010).

Thus, between 1964 and 2008 there was a notable rise in LIS higher education professional qualifications offered at universities, including research master's and PhDs, which enhanced educators' research expertise, disciplinary knowledge and scholarly communications skills (Wilson et al., 2010). However, after an initial rise, there has been a steady decline in the number of Australian LIS programmes. In 1988, Australia had sixteen higher education institutions offering LIS programmes. By 2008, this number had dropped to ten (Wilson et al., 2010). As of 2024, only three universities in Australia are still admitting students into LIS professional programmes, with two others phasing out their courses. In New Zealand, things have been fairly stable, and there are currently three LIS programmes: one online-only undergraduate, one face-to-face postgraduate and a hybrid, bilingual undergraduate degree for Māori speakers.

For many graduates, employment in the profession depends also on completion of a course accredited by a professional association. In Australia, this function is performed by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), and in New Zealand it is overseen by the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA). Other allied professional associations in the field include the Records and Information Management Professionals Alliance (RIMPA), the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA), the Australian School Libraries Association (ASLA), the Special Libraries Association (SLA) and the Archives and Records Association of New Zealand (ARANZ). Many of these professional associations and groups work in partnership with the higher education sector to ensure quality professional education and a high professional standard (Universities Australia, 2024; Universities New Zealand, 2025; New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2023).

For LIS education to remain effective in Australia and New Zealand (ANZ), the curriculum must continuously integrate current published research and relevant local case studies from the profession. However, the dwindling number of educational institutions offering LIS programmes, along with the loss (retirement or move outside of the LIS fields) of educators and researchers from within these institutions, has created a twofold challenge. LIS doctoral graduates face limited academic career prospects, while libraries are finding it harder to fill available professional librarian positions due to a shrinking pool of accredited graduates – many of whom can secure better-paying jobs in other industries. Fewer LIS programmes have resulted in a decline in research output from both academia and the profession, and fewer collaborative practice-based research projects.

Based on the interconnected issues detailed above, this research started with the following research questions:

- RQ 1. How might we ensure that university LIS education in ANZ remains supported, understood and sustainable?
- RQ 2. How might we maintain integrity, trust and identity in the LIS professions in a rapidly changing world?
- RQ 3. How might we ensure that LIS research in ANZ stays relevant to LIS practice and to LIS education despite the decreasing number of LIS academics?

Underlying our research questions is the assumption that LIS practitioners are professionals working within a defined profession, and that a university education, informed by research in the LIS disciplines, is essential for qualifying them as professionals.

To address these questions, we adopted a collaborative and participatory approach, conducting research workshops at three LIS conferences in ANZ, with participation from LIS researchers, educators and practitioners.

Literature review

Since the advent of the Internet, there have been claims that the world will no longer need libraries. There are some, even within our own profession, who argue that a specific education in librarianship is not required to be a professional librarian. Others question whether librarianship meets the criteria for a profession. These claims, coupled with changes in Australian higher education funding priorities – particularly in the applied areas of research involving practitioner researchers and academic researchers (Middleton and Yates, 2014; Nguyen and Hider, 2018) – have contributed to a decline in LIS programmes in Australia. Several factors have contributed to this situation, including workforce stratification through varying levels of education; the merging of independent LIS schools into larger academic units in which LIS has diminished visibility and influence; tensions between education focused on *learning to be* and that focused on *learning to do*; and a lack of succession planning (Hider et al., 2023; Weech et al., 2019).

Libraries and other information organisations have found it increasingly difficult to hire graduates with accredited LIS degrees due to the reduced number of graduates entering the profession. This issue has been particularly pronounced in academic libraries, where an LIS degree or equivalent experience is typically required for professional roles. However, there is no clear explanation about what *equivalent experience* might include, and hence employers have used ad-hoc criteria to suit their own preferences. Covid-related voluntary retirements and forced redundancies have also contributed to staffing challenges (Universities Australia, 2021). As a result, individuals with non-LIS-specific backgrounds such as those with administration, teaching or research experience are increasingly being hired into librarian roles. These individuals bring valuable skills and new perspectives, but without an LIS education, often require significant on-the-job training and support to adapt to library work. They also face challenges in engaging with, or contributing to, LIS research. There is a pressing need for ‘committed graduates who are not only knowledgeable and skilled but who are also actively engaged with the [LIS] professions and able to understand and articulate the value of their chosen professions to the wider community’ (Reynolds et al., 2016, p. 318).

The most recent data shows that while LIS institutions have remained relatively stable in terms of staffing, academic libraries were hit particularly hard by the pandemic and responses (Australian Library and Information Association, 2021). These complex sets of issues have also led to a reduction in research activities by both academics and practitioners, as well as diminished collaborative efforts, posing significant challenges for the profession as a whole. Additionally:

the merging of previously independent LIS schools to form part of other, generally larger, academic units within their parent institutions ... with other ‘information’ fields such as computer science, information science, business, and communications ... [has] resulted in a reduction of LIS educators as they share teaching with non-LIS educators in multidisciplinary or multi-field schools, ...reducing the ability of LIS educators to advance LIS approaches in these areas of study. (Kennan et al., 2018, p. 168)

A report by Middleton and Yates (2014), commissioned by the ALIA, found that publications reflect different professional concerns for practitioners and academics. The report indicated that most local publishing in Australia is undertaken by practitioners (60 per cent), with LIS academics contributing 14 per cent of publishing. However, the report does not differentiate between peer-

reviewed research publications and other types of publications. Australian LIS academics contribute a higher proportion of publications as primary authors in overseas journals (51 per cent), likely due to institutional pressure to publish in highly ranked international journals rather than in Australian journals. While this study is ten years old now, it highlights a need for more local publishing from academics to better inform and bridge the gap between research and practice.

For the profession to be sustainable, it needs to be informed by research and scholarship which creates new knowledge, helps us to understand the world around us and provides evidence to ground LIS education in helping produce future professionals and researchers in the field. The ALIA, previously the Library Association of Australia, has over time been the publisher of several journals, the longest running being the *Australian Library Journal* (ALJ) (1951-2016) and *Australian Academic and Research Libraries* (AARL) (1970-2016). Over time, the ALJ came to focus more on practice and applied research from all library sectors and the AARL on research and academic and collecting institutions. In 2016, the association decided to merge the two journals into one, which would focus on both domains and created the *Journal of the Library Association of Australia* (JALIA) (2017-present). While this had some positive effects in bringing research and practice together, it did diminish the local outlets available for ANZ research and practice-based papers and contracted the publishing of the journal to a commercial publisher (Weatherburn and Harvey, 2016).

Addressing these challenges necessitates active engagement, knowledge sharing and collaboration among LIS stakeholders. In response, we engaged with fellow researchers, practitioners and educators to participate in collaborative dialogue, aimed at envisioning a sustainable future for LIS.

Research design

We invited educators, researchers and practitioners to participate in our study at three LIS conferences held over one year: the Research Applications in Information and Library Studies (RAILS) 2023 conference in Wellington, New Zealand (November 2023); the ALIA Library Applied Research Kollektive (LARK) Symposium 2024 in Brisbane, Australia (October 2024); and the RAILS 2024 conference in Perth, Australia (November 2024). All three conferences were aimed at LIS stakeholders and many of our participants also presented their own papers at these conferences. The three conferences were chosen as they are smaller, more affordable and collegial conferences in the region that bring theory and practice together. Importantly, these events were self-organised by LIS educators, researchers and practitioners (RAILS) and a community of practice (LARK), creating space for critical and candid conversations. While most participants were from ANZ, occasional international participants brought unique perspectives from their contexts, enriching the discussions. Institutional ethics clearance (UTS Ethics #ETH24-9765) was obtained for the collection of data through workshops in all three conferences.

Participants were generally experts in their field due to the nature of the conferences. This qualitative approach can be considered a heuristic evaluation by experts, for which five to eight participants is considered sufficient. Heuristic evaluations work best when performed by a group rather than a single evaluator, as even experts may overlook some issues (Nielsen, 1994).

Our approach drew on design methods and the co-design process, which emphasise collaboration, creativity and gathering diverse perspectives. This methodology builds on previous work applying design thinking in LIS contexts (Hider et al., 2024; Luca and Narayan, 2016; Luca and Ulyannikova, 2020). The first stage of the design thinking approach is the empathy stage, which, in an LIS context, focuses on understanding the needs, pain points and experiences of all stakeholders irrespective of their status in regard to the issue at hand.

Co-design is a participatory approach where designers, users, potential users and other stakeholders are all involved as co-designers of a solution (Hider et al., 2024). Co-design principles

have become a common framework for collaboratively designing library spaces and services. However, while co-design is often cited as a preferred approach, it rarely extends beyond consultation to achieve true participatory design (Wakeling et al., 2022). As a first step in this project, we prioritised designing a participatory environment where participants could meaningfully contribute towards shaping solutions for the challenges faced in LIS education, research and practice without repercussions for speaking up in public. We also drew on the concept of the teaching-research-practice nexus, which emphasises the interconnectedness of these domains as a framework to achieve sustainability in applied teaching through a holistic framework (Schneider et al., 2018).

Each workshop was conducted using post-it notes and menti.com, following a brief panel discussion from the authors. The menti.com questionnaire is summarised in Table 1. The workshops were 60-90 minutes in length and involved 14-39 participants. Conference workshops such as this can be considered a form of *deliberative discourse* within the discipline, which refers to a mode of communication aimed at carefully weighing options, exploring arguments and collaboratively reaching decisions or solutions through reasoned discussion (Michaels et al., 2008). It emphasises the exchange of ideas and evidence, fostering mutual understanding and informed decision-making within a group. In our workshops, participants (audience members) could join and leave the meeting anytime, or choose to listen but not participate. All audience members were informed in advance of the anonymous data being collected and provided with details of the institutional ethical clearance.

Question	Answer
1. What's your background?	Answer choices: Researcher, Educator, Practitioner (Information Professional) - participants could choose more than one.
2. Are you happy with the state of LIS in Australia and New Zealand?	Answer choices: Yes, No, Somewhat
3. What concerns you most in relation to LIS in Australia and NZ? Rank them in order.	Answer choices to rank were: LIS Education, LIS Research, LIS Professions, and Other
4. If you wrote Other what concerns you?	Free text answer
5. What concerns you most about LIS education?	Free text answer
6. What concerns you most about LIS research?	Free text answer
7. What concerns you most about LIS practice?	Free text answer
8. Do you have any further concerns?	Free text answer

Table 1. Summary of questions included in the menti.com survey.

Since menti.com is a live-answering system with real-time display, participants could see both their anonymised answers and others' responses live, promoting further dialogue and listening without identifying whose responses were being discussed. In the second and third workshops, we also briefly presented the findings from the previous workshops after participants had contributed their own views.

We had a total of 81 participants for the three workshops (14 in Wellington, 28 in Brisbane, and 39 in Perth), with just three people other than the authors who attended two of the workshops. In Wellington, almost all participants were academics with only two practitioners present; in

Brisbane, almost all were practitioners except four academics; and in Perth, the participants were evenly spread across the professional identities. Here, we should also note that many LIS academics had worked as librarians in the past, while some researchers were actually retired academics who continued to engage in research.

All the free text answers were imported into Miro, an online whiteboard tool, as digital post-it notes. These notes were initially categorised into LIS education, LIS research and LIS practice based on the menti.com questions. From here, the post-it notes were grouped into more specific categories using affinity mapping, an approach for grouping ideas based on similarity. Affinity mapping is commonly used in qualitative user experience research to organise large amounts of user data (Harboe and Huang, 2015).

Findings

The findings presented below are organised by the three main aspects of our questions and our reporting below integrates the findings from across all three workshops.

LIS education

The key issues highlighted in LIS education included the limited programme and course offerings, concerns about the relevance and breadth of curriculum content and questions regarding the value and recognition of LIS qualifications. A selection of themes and audience responses from the LIS education category are included in Table 2.

Emergent themes	Input from audience
Issues with the curriculum	Increasingly squeezed curriculum
	Simplification of the qualification
	Many specialised skills/knowledge not covered
	Capturing the breadth of librarianship contexts through the course of a qualification
	Too worried about structure instead of knowledge
	Not enough communication between education providers, the professional sectors and students to make sure relevant and current LIS education is offered
	Ensuring it's up to date with today's practices and social backgrounds
	Not tracking to new science and professional trajectories e.g. AI
	Short sighted; public library focused at the expense of everything else
	Not enough focus on management and problem solving. These skills are essential for promoting leadership in the profession. Technical skills can be learned on the job.
	Seems to be focused on what was not what is or will be
Value of LIS qualifications	Education not covering new and emerging technologies that are extremely relevant to current practice
	Qualifications are no longer valued by employers
	Alignment with AQF frameworks and the industrial awards which govern working conditions for practitioners
	Lack of support for it by library managers
	Having the right qualifications
	Advocacy to employers to emphasise value of quals
	Studying for a qualification and finding that it is not required to work in the sector
	Cost of studying LIS degree has gone up due to Aus Government privileging STEM and health degrees as priorities under their job-ready graduates initiative
Relevance of LIS education	Point of difference to mean you hire a LIS graduate over another profession for a LIS job
	Lack of agility and relevance to current LIS professions
	Lots of theory but does not apply to practice
	Desired skills in practice don't match what is taught?
	Irrelevance to actual professional work
	The need to understand how translate theories into current practice
	Lack of relevance to practice
	Capacity to make fundamental change and adapt
Value of LIS	Loss of opportunities
	Lack of institutional support
	Lack of support in wider society
	Lack of unis understanding our value and roles
	Seeming lack of government policies and funding model to support the programmes
	Recognised for importance
	Nobody knows what we do!
	Lack of knowledge affects university appreciation/support

Table 2. Selection of audience responses to Q5. What concerns you most about LIS education?

Many participants were concerned about the small number of LIS courses remaining in Australia, which not only limits options for students but also raises questions about the viability of the few programmes still available. All three remaining university-level LIS courses in Australia are offered in online-only mode. In contrast, vocational education and training in LIS is provided through technical and further education (TAFE) institutes, which are government-funded registered

training organisations. TAFE offers hands-on, face-to-face certificate and diploma courses, qualifying graduates as library assistants or technicians. Many TAFE graduates, school leavers and graduates from face-to-face bachelor's degrees in other disciplines who wish to pursue university-level studies in LIS find it challenging to complete these programmes entirely online.

Participants expressed concerns about access and its potential impact on diversity – not only in terms of the student cohort but also in maintaining a diversity of ideas and priorities necessary for the evolution of the profession. Some suggested that the reduction in programmes was linked to declining student numbers, and that education providers had not effectively demonstrated the continuing relevance of the profession. There were difficulties attracting students to the remaining courses, as the profession was becoming increasingly invisible due to the shrinking number of education providers, and the lack of PhD-qualified academic staff to deliver the programmes, exacerbated by hiring constraints and the casualisation of staff in universities.

Participants were concerned about the breadth of content that should be covered in an LIS qualification, believing that the curriculum did not address new and emerging trends necessary for current practice. They noted that capturing the full scope of librarianship within a single degree programme was a near impossible task, leading to a perception that qualifications had become overly simplified. One participant described their degree as *'public library focused at the expense of everything else'*. A lack of communication between education providers, professional sectors and students was cited as a barrier to maintaining relevance. Regarding contemporary content, participants suggested a need for greater emphasis on emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, as well as a stronger focus on developing management and problem-solving skills. Others identified a lack of cultural competency and cultural perspectives in the curriculum, with a *'reliance on western knowledge, concepts and systems'*. Placement opportunities, particularly paid internships, were also a concern, with one participant asking, *'where's the drive from industry for this to happen?'*

Some participants questioned the value of LIS qualifications, citing that they are not required by hiring managers at all libraries. One participant mentioned studying for a qualification and later finding that it was not required to work in the sector. Another questioned what sets an LIS graduate apart from other professionals in the job market. Linked to this was a sense that the remaining degree programmes lacked agility and relevance to current professional practice. In follow-up discussions, some academic librarians noted that their LIS degrees had not prepared them for teaching pedagogy *'I was asked to do library instruction on the first day of my job - I had no training in teaching'*; almost all of them were routinely asked to teach classes to students, be it for information literacy or other library training. They also had no training in project management, which was now a routine part of their job. Similarly, public librarians felt their LIS degrees did not prepare them for the social work aspects of their roles. Many also expressed concerns about the lack of research training in their degrees, affecting their confidence and capacity to conduct research, although they were interested in generating research from practice.

Participants also shared views on the composition and availability of educational pathways. One expressed that the graduate diploma (often an exit qualification from the master's), often provides the same professional certification as a degree, but lacks sufficient LIS content to prepare students for practice. Many mentioned that professional associations, who normally provide continuing professional development opportunities, have also moved into the education space to provide alternative certification pathways, contributing to a level of confusion within the sector about the difference between education and vocational training. One participant, who has worked in both public and academic libraries, remarked:

we have obviously paid a lot to get an LIS degree from a university because we are passionate about the profession and it is very relevant to our contemporary world, so

why are we being undermined with feel-good campaigns like 'hug a librarian day' which has nothing to do with the core principles of my job. I don't want the patrons to thank me (or touch me), I'm getting a wage for the job I do. I just need recognition and respect from the system, and from my professional association.

LIS research

Participants expressed some familiar challenges in the research space: issues related to time, funding, institutional performance criteria and quality. Specific concerns in the LIS field included insufficient research activity, challenges translating research into practice and lack of research-practitioner collaboration. A selection of themes and audience responses are included in Table 3.

Emergent themes	Input from audience
Not enough research being done	Not enough being undertaken
	Lack of universities undertaking LIS research
	Not enough doing it in our region
	Critical mass
	Decline in number of researchers and areas they cover
	Not enough research into public libraries
	Fewer programmes emphasise actual LIS research and reward information research
	Gaps in research (topics not covered)
	Shrinking in size
	Lack of domestic PhD students
	Not enough number of PhD students, this matters sustaining future
Real-world impact	The impact on the real world
	Gap between research and implementation in practice
	Communication of findings to practitioners – impact
	Inability of research being translated to practice
	Relevance to practitioners
	Connection with practice
	Impractical. More needed in the communities
Practice-led research	Lack of recognition of practitioner research
	Practitioner research not being recognised as academic research
	Not official part of our role so need permission from leadership
	Lack of practitioner-led research
	Not enough support and incentive for practitioners to do research
	Australian LIS practitioners are expected to produce research to the same standard as tenured faculty in US contexts. This is not practical and means people just give up on publishing altogether.
	Practitioners largely do not want to do research, or are not interested in learning how to do it properly
	Research is not part of the job desc and KPI
	Many obstacles to do research while a practitioner
Research culture	Australia is not learning from the research of other countries
	Some of the most original research are conceptualised and done by individuals!
	LIS research is geared towards non-LIS issues.
	US domination
	The self serving nature that focus on sub cohorts of the sector
	Individual interests driving research agenda instead of a broader view
	Need a wider variety of researchers - very keen on research practitioners, but no one has time
	lack of connection between students while they are researching
	Lack of collaboration between library sectors
	Attracting new people with the same passion

Table 3. Selection of audience responses to Q6. What concerns you most about LIS research?

A key issue, from which many subsequent challenges followed, was that there simply was not enough LIS research being conducted in ANZ. This shortage was linked to the declining number of universities delivering LIS programmes, which in turn resulted in fewer people with research as a formal part of their employment and fewer areas of specialisation available. There was a sense that LIS research was shrinking in scope, with fewer opportunities for research, not enough work emphasising the local context and, overall, a lack of diverse voices and perspectives in research. Participants also expressed concerns about the research pipeline and succession planning, and hence the sustainability of LIS research, with fewer and fewer PhD students entering the field.

One participant noted that they rarely saw LIS research presented in the general media, while another felt that library leaders were not engaging with LIS research. Much of the media coverage on misinformation and disinformation often features scholars from cultural studies and media studies rather than information studies. This leaves LIS practitioners feeling alienated, as the crucial role of librarians in combating this phenomenon is seldom mentioned. Instead, librarians are mentioned mainly in the context of Library Lovers' Day and other feel-good campaigns, and participants felt this type of focus diminished the importance of their work.

In most cases, practitioner research is not part of job descriptions or listed as a key performance indicator, and there may be challenges in seeking approval from library leadership to undertake research. In fact, the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA) code of ethics is the only one that mentions research, that *'Librarians ... participate in research and publication on professional matters'* (CFLA-FCAB, 2018). Many who worked outside of academic libraries also had issues getting institutional ethical clearance. Additionally, there are limited incentives for undertaking research. Unlike many academic libraries in the US, academic librarians in ANZ do not hold faculty status, and there is no expectation of research productivity (Kingsley et al., 2022). One participant felt that *'Australian LIS practitioners are expected to produce research to the same standard as tenured faculty in US contexts. This is not practical and means people just give up on publishing altogether'*. Many also mentioned they did not have much research training as part of their LIS degree and hence needed some academic mentors to initiate them into research; with the dwindling number of LIS programmes and LIS academics, mentors were hard to find.

Regarding the scholarly publishing landscape in ANZ, participants expressed concern about the declining number of LIS journals and the dilution of LIS content into non-LIS journals. Participants reported a lack of local venues to publish in, and that the Read and Publish / transformative agreements negotiated by the Council of Australasian University Librarians (Cook, 2024) did not include some key library journals.

The *Journal of the Australian Library and Information Association* (JALIA), Australia's major LIS research journal, was noted as being behind a paywall and thus not accessible to many librarians outside academic libraries. Although the journal is owned by the ALIA, ALIA personal membership does not include access to its journal. Some participants mentioned that the JALIA offers several article types beyond full research papers, including shorter papers that might be more accessible to practitioners (JALIA, 2024). However, for many researchers, institutional performance criteria for publishing mean that, all else being the same, they may prefer a higher-ranked journal based outside Australia for publishing research outcomes.

Finally, several participants commented on the role of professional associations, and what they considered a lack of support from the professional body for research. One participant asked: *'if [they] don't seem to think it's important, who does?'*

LIS practice

Participants discussed a range of overlapping issues in practice, with key issues including the recognition of LIS skills and qualifications, the changing nature of LIS roles and the need for innovation. A selection of themes and audience responses are included in Table 4.

Emergent themes	Input from audience
Library qualifications	Very willing to accept people for 'qualified' positions without qualifications
	Many roles filled by other qualifications – is a LIS qualification even relevant any more?
	Qualifications are not always considered as important by employers
	Qualifications are not valued
	Lack of understanding between what you learn in qualifications and practical work experience
	Workplaces misunderstanding what LIS practitioners do and thus not making roles specified calling positions for qualified librarians
	Employers have unrealistic expectations about qualifications
	LIS Qualifications not always required, sometimes avoided
	Unqualified staff / staff who work in libraries but have no interest in learning
	Lack of recognition of LIS qualifications and their value. Lack of support for training
	Employment of those that don't have library qualifications. How can a social worker use librarian in their title?
	Credentials shifting markets where some areas (urban) have an over supply of practitioners, and some regional areas have an under supply and funding to get practitioners in
Library work becoming less specialised	Movement towards generic roles and away from specialist knowledge
	Becoming more general purpose
	Non library work imposed on professionals
	Many practitioners are doing jobs that could be done by trained monkeys and they don't see the bigger picture
	Lack of support to develop staff with adjacent skills
	Library staff that don't know anything about core library duties
	It's done people with little or no LIS training
Role of librarianship	What is a librarian has become subjective
	What is LIS any more?
	Lack of appreciation and understanding of our knowledge
	Diminished professionalism
Relevance and innovation	'But this is how we've always done it ...'
	Sometimes short sighted, but sometimes very innovative
	Not looking long term
	Not seeing much inspiring or innovative practice or collaboration in public or education sector
	Isn't embracing new opportunity fast enough
	Staying important
	Staying relevant
	Stuck in the past
	The we've always done it this way mentality
	Innovation is isolated. Not consistent across the sectors. Also our old fashioned profile we have never dealt with this
	Holding on to old practices + fear of the future = a profession that is not future proofed and doesn't invest in itself
	Getting workplaces on board with the transition from older 'book warehouse' styles of LIS work to being digital literacy, research, and information education/knowledge workers

Table 4. Selection of audience responses to Q7. What concerns you most about LIS practice?

Several participants raised the 'marketing problem' of the profession. However, the key concern appeared to be around LIS qualifications. Participants observed that increasingly, libraries are hiring individuals without ALIA-accredited qualifications for jobs that previously required them.

This led to a perspective that LIS qualifications were no longer considered important or valued. As one participant asked, *'how can a social worker use librarian in their title?'* Some believed this issue was a result of the short-sightedness of employers and hiring managers, who misunderstand what LIS practitioners do, and therefore do not distinguish between qualified librarians who are educated in the principles of LIS and applicants who may seemingly *'get the job done'*. Managers who were unaware of LIS values were at risk of making hiring and other strategic decisions without sufficient foresight.

Diminishing emphasis on LIS qualifications appeared to contribute to some interesting shifts in the profession. One participant stated that *'what a librarian is, has become subjective'*, leading to diminished professionalism and a lack of appreciation or understanding of LIS knowledge. Concerns were raised about staff who *'don't know anything about core library duties'*, and the lack of support and training to develop staff who may be coming to library work from another discipline. There was an overall perspective that professional development in general was not a priority for many institutions. Several participants shared that library work was becoming more general purpose, through a shift away from specialist knowledge, and library workers were increasingly taking up non-library work – one example being a shift towards more community and social services in public libraries.

Many participants said that LIS was not appealing to future generations, while some of the younger people who were interested in pursuing a career in LIS faced barriers gaining experience and entering the profession. Participants were significantly concerned about diversity, particularly that workforce diversity is not improving rapidly enough, especially at senior levels. Several public librarians noted the need for multilingual and multicultural staff, yet there were no clear pathways to train and employ existing volunteers from diverse communities within the library system.

Finally, capacity for innovation was seen as essential for maintaining a long-term future for LIS. While there were certainly pockets of innovation, these innovations often stayed local and hidden due to a lack of dissemination through publications.

Discussion

Our findings reaffirm the importance of retaining a nexus between LIS education, research and practice. Many of the key challenges identified by our participants are underpinned by the need for each of these areas to work together towards ensuring a sustainable future for LIS. However, our findings suggest that this nexus has been undermined in the current context, risking the sustainability of the LIS discipline and profession in the ANZ region.

In terms of answering our research questions, we found that our findings point to the following recommendations:

- RQ1: How might we ensure that university LIS education in Australia and New Zealand remains supported, understood and sustainable?
 - LIS education should be informed by both LIS research and LIS practice.
 - In addition, LIS students face high university fees and are scrutinising their return on investment for their degrees (ALIA, 2019). In these times libraries need to engage LIS students and graduates, while professional associations must continue to support and champion the profession and university-level education.
- RQ2: How might we maintain integrity, trust and identity in the LIS professions in a rapidly changing world?
 - LIS professionals should be involved in practice-led research, and observably be engaged with evidence-based practice.

- Researchers, practitioners (including employers), educators and the professional association need to work towards better understanding each other's critical roles in the LIS professions, and communicate this more broadly in society.
- RQ3: How might we ensure that LIS research in ANZ stays relevant to LIS practice and to LIS education despite the decreasing number of LIS academics?
 - LIS academics should be cognisant of evolving practice, and engage in practice- and research-informed teaching.
 - More proactive engagement is needed between LIS practitioners, educators and researchers and the LIS professional associations.
 - LIS researchers could partner closely with researchers in the field of communication and cultural studies in work on information and misinformation.

In Figure 1, we adapt the model by Schneider and colleagues (2018) for LIS based on our research. The arrows reflect the connections between education, research and practice, and the feedback loop that ideally exists between them.

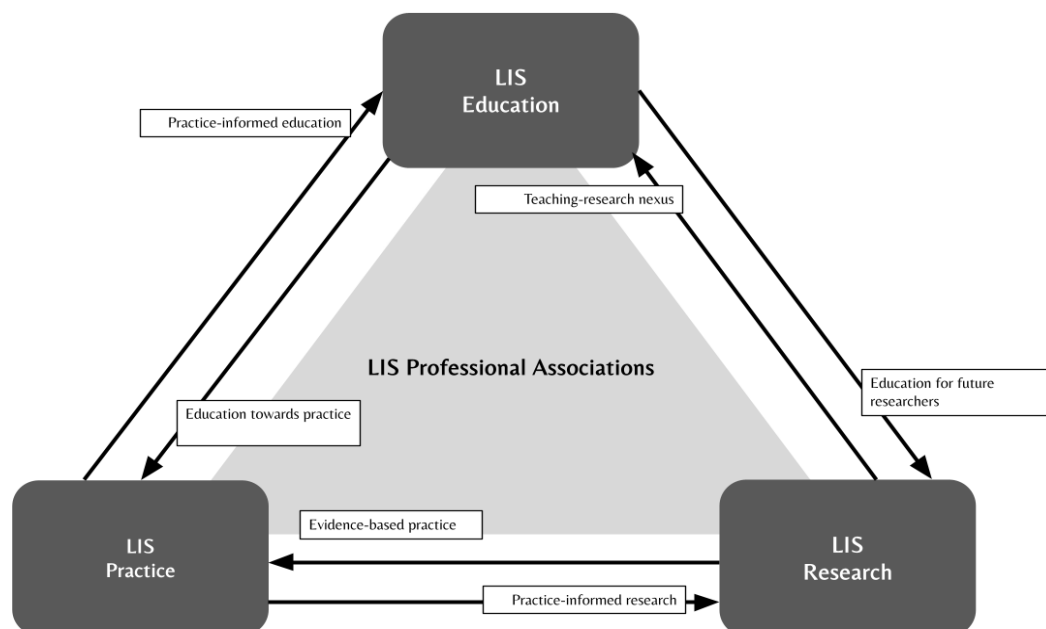


Figure 1. The LIS education-research-practice nexus, supported by LIS professional associations (adapted from Schneider et al., 2018).

Based on our findings, we have added a fourth component to Schneider et al.'s 2018 model, which is LIS professional associations. Although not part of our original research questions, our findings emphasise the need for LIS professional organisations to advocate for all three aspects of LIS and enable and facilitate connections between them in a proactive manner.

A path forward – rethinking the LIS nexus

As authors who are researchers, educators and practitioners, we are invested in LIS as a discipline and a profession. Over the course of a year, through three workshops designed to explore our research questions and through our reflections on these discussions, we identified several recurring themes across LIS education, research and practice. These themes reflect the shared challenges and opportunities within the profession, including the need to reinforce relevance, foreground values, promote recognition and advocate for diversity.

Reinforce LIS relevance to our contemporary digital society

Some participants described the profession as being old fashioned, ‘stuck in the past’, with a mentality of ‘but we’ve always done it this way’. In the context of education, relevance was often discussed in terms of how well LIS degree programmes aligned with industry needs. Some participants said that the programmes were too theoretical, not sufficiently applicable to practice or unable to adapt quickly enough. These comments and others in this research highlight the commonly held conflation of education and training. An education fulfils a general and developmental purpose and provides students with the ability to acquire new skills and be flexible in times of change, and strives to induce a commitment to lifelong learning. It introduces the theory of a profession, and as students become new professionals, they also need specific skill sets for their employment (Kennan et al, 2014). This is where training comes in, as it prepares the learner for a specific task or job (Wallace, 2015, p. 311; Manuell, 2023). In other words, education equips students with a broad conceptual understanding of principles, concepts, philosophies and ethics that underpin the discipline, whereas training equips students with practical, hands-on skills to use particular systems or technologies. It is our view that it is incumbent upon educators to find the correct mix of education and training, and for employers and professional associations to understand that there is a role for both a discipline-specific higher education and ongoing employment-related training.

Other participants felt that research, too, was not keeping pace with changes in practice, and often lacked clear connections to real-world applications, and its value and benefits were unclear. In practice, relevance was described in terms of a lack of innovation and an inability to embrace new opportunities. Some of the solutions identified were, to:

- Embed flexible and adaptive curriculum design in LIS programmes to ensure alignment with contemporary practice and emerging trends.
- Develop stronger connections between LIS researchers and practitioners through collaborative, practice-informed research projects.
- Prioritise innovation and experimentation within LIS practice to better respond to technological and societal changes.

LIS is both a profession and an academic discipline and must operate with an awareness of the requirements of both.

If we consider the five attributes of a profession (Greenwood, 1957): systematic theory, authority, community sanction, ethical codes, and a culture, and what Abbott (1988, 1998) terms a profession’s ‘jurisdiction,’ then we acknowledge that these are conferred within the structure of an education, most commonly at the university level and providing some kind of certification. (Kennan et al., 2014 p. 669)

This research highlights the tensions of working within these dual identities.

Foreground LIS values and promote the value of LIS to society

The core values of the LIS discipline, librarians, library qualifications and library work were key themes across all categories. However, defining these values is not straightforward. Table 5 provides examples of how different professional associations define the core values and responsibilities of the profession.

Professional association	Extract from core values	Reference
Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)	Core values include: 'Excellence, accountability, integrity and responsibility in service to our communities'.	(ALIA, 2024)
Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP)	Vision statement: 'A professional community, dedicated to changing lives through quality information, services and expertise'.	(CILIP, n.d.)
American Library Association (ALA)	Core values of librarianship: access, equity, intellectual freedom and privacy, public good and sustainability.	(ALA, 2024)
Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA)	Core values: respect, equity, partnership and collaboration, empower and grow, trust, guardianship/custodianship.	(LIANZA, 2024)
Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA)	Code of ethics: access to information, responsibilities to individual and society, privacy, secrecy and transparency, open access and intellectual property, neutrality, personal integrity and professional skills, and colleague and employer/employee relationship.	(CFLA-FCAB, 2018)

Table 5. Core values of LIS professional associations

Weissinger is critical of the idea of professional values as guiding principles for decision-making, arguing that '*such functions are not values at all*' (2003, p. 34). They further contend that defining core values based on consensus among librarians can be exclusionary, as it reinforces dominant perspectives and undermines efforts to diversify the profession. Instead, a non-operational, qualitative view of values recognises them as part of broader ethical frameworks that connect experiences, actions, beliefs, theoretical discourse and other value structures.

Regarding LIS education, participants felt there was a lack of understanding from universities about the value of LIS to the broader society, and even to the university. This, they argued, was contributing to a forced decline in course offerings. In research, while discussions about value were less direct, participants expressed concerns about the perceived lack of high-quality research, the absence of a cohesive research agenda and insufficient recognition of research by professional associations. In practice, participants felt that librarian skills were increasingly undervalued by employers, with a growing preference for generic skill sets or alternative credentials, often in emerging digital technologies. Some of the solutions identified in this area were:

- Develop sector-wide initiatives through professional associations that bring together LIS researchers, educators and practitioners to critically engage with and reflect on professional values and ethical frameworks.
- Engage in sector-wide efforts to communicate the unique contributions of LIS professionals to society.
- Strengthen advocacy within universities and professional associations for LIS research and education.

Promote LIS recognition within universities and within research agendas

This theme highlights a key issue for the discipline: a need to clearly define, communicate and advocate for its value in a rapidly changing landscape. A lack of consensus on the value of LIS, even within the profession, has dire implications for its recognition in broader society, and could lead to further watering down of the profession, undermining of its credentials, and ultimately the death of the profession. Some of the solutions identified in this area were:

- Develop a unified narrative that articulates the distinctiveness of LIS as a field and its critical contributions to knowledge and society.

- Engage with interdisciplinary challenges and megatrends to position LIS research as valuable in addressing wicked problems.
- Advocate for increased visibility and representation of LIS in national and institutional research agendas.

Advocate for deliberate and inclusive diversity initiatives across the profession

Recognition of the importance and need for greater diversity was clear from participants. There were some excellent examples of work in this space; however, at a sector level, this is uneven. In terms of the curriculum, participants observed a lack of cultural content and perspectives in degree programmes. In research, participants called for more diverse voices and inclusive perspectives. A broader range of issues were identified in the world of practice – both diversity within the workforce and in equipping professionals with the ability to support diverse client groups. In terms of the workforce, participants discussed the need for greater diversity particularly at the senior leadership level, and the need to provide greater support for neurodivergent staff. In supporting clients, participants identified the need for a stronger focus on equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility, as well as the need for more meaningful commitment to decolonisation and cultural safety. The *National survey on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in Australian libraries* identified significant gaps in both the number of Indigenous employees and support for employment pathways (Thorpe, 2023). In the New Zealand context, Lilley (2024) notes that organisations often do not include cultural competency in the required skills, attributes and expected experience for advertised roles, inhibiting their ability to transform into Indigenised institutions. More work is required by organisations to move beyond intention to meaningful action. Some of the solutions identified were:

- Review and revise LIS curricula to include diverse cultural perspectives and develop students' cultural competency.
- Promote diversity in LIS research by prioritising funding and support for projects led by underrepresented groups.
- Develop sector-wide strategies, through professional associations, to recruit, retain and support a more diverse LIS workforce, with particular focus on leadership pathways.
- Promote training and resources for LIS professionals to better support equity, diversity, inclusion, cultural competency and accessibility in practice.

Conclusion

It is our contention that the world will always need librarians, that librarianship is indeed a profession and that professional education for librarians is necessary to maintain the professional status and the salaries and roles associated with the profession, not to mention the trust, the reliability and the quality of the services.

Our findings emphasise the relationality, the reciprocity and the holistic interconnectedness of our respective knowledge systems within LIS, especially in the areas of research, education and practice. LIS educators, researchers and practitioners must work to actively engage with each other, share knowledge and expertise and work together to bridge gaps and advance the field.

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