



## Submission in response to the Australian Government Driving Innovation, Fairness and Excellence in Australian Higher Education

25 July 2016

### ALIA contact:

Judy Brooker, Director of Learning, Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA),  
9-11 Napier Close, Deakin ACT 2600

t 02 6215 8216 f 02 6282 2249

w [www.alia.org.au](http://www.alia.org.au) e [judy.brooker@alia.org.au](mailto:judy.brooker@alia.org.au)

### 1. About us

The Australian Library and Information Association is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. On behalf of our 5,000 personal and institutional members, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support.

We accredit 9 universities across Australia providing undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications<sup>1</sup> and we provide support for libraries in higher education institutions<sup>2</sup>.

### 2. Introduction

We welcome this opportunity to respond to the Driving Innovation, Fairness and Excellence in Australian Higher Education discussion. We are particularly interested in the areas of:

- Opportunity and choice (page 9)
- Postgraduate places to support innovation (pages 9-10)
- Supporting the regional presence of universities (page 12)
- Excellence and quality (page 13)
- An affordable loan scheme (page 17).

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.alia.org.au/employment-and-careers/accredited-courses?field\\_area\\_of\\_practice\\_tid=All&page=1](https://www.alia.org.au/employment-and-careers/accredited-courses?field_area_of_practice_tid=All&page=1)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.alia.org.au/node/184/university-and-tafe-libraries>

### 3. Postgraduate places to support innovation

In library and information science (LIS) there is a high demand for Graduate Diploma or Masters qualifications, based on the intellectual rigour required from library and information professionals in the workplace. However, salary scales do not reflect the skill levels of graduates and postgraduates.

In our industry it is a traditional pathway to undertake a postgraduate qualification, often at the Post Graduate Diploma level, and progress to a Masters level. Study is often undertaken part time or associated with distance learning and it may take many years, far more than seven.

**Recommendation 1:** In the event of 'reforms to the allocation of and support for subsidised postgraduate places' to 'better target Commonwealth support to those postgraduate courses identified as delivering significant community benefit where private benefits may be more limited,' ALIA proposes that LIS courses should be included in this definition.

**Recommendation 2:** In the event of 'reforms to the allocation of and support for subsidised postgraduate places' to 'allocate additional places for skills-deepening qualifications consistent with the National Innovation and Science Agenda, for example in science, technology, engineering and mathematics', we would seek to have LIS included, given the important role library and information professionals play in areas as diverse as digital literacy and data management.

**Recommendation 3:** We do not support the introduction of time-limited Commonwealth subsidies as this could create a serious disincentive to many LIS workers improving their skills and it could discourage them from keeping up to date and making a commitment to continuing professional development.

### 4. Supporting the regional presence of universities

Library services are a vital component for all students and these services comprise a number of elements – well designed learning commons, with independent and group study spaces; an appropriate physical and electronic collection of journals, books, databases and other resources; technology access and support; an institutional repository for research; information skills training, copyright advice and reference inquiry assistance.

The physical facilities remain an important component and should receive continued investment. At the same time, digital innovation has led to enhanced opportunities for strengthening services to remote students, although there are issues arising from licensing agreements where content is provided to a distance education cohort.

Some steps have been taken by university libraries to work with public libraries to provide physical study spaces closer to home. In 2012, Open Universities Australia began trialling a strategy of developing partnerships with local libraries to promote them as places where online students can enhance their studies through access to technology, quiet study spaces and potential networking with other students. The OUA Connect pilot in NSW extended to

other parts of Australia and has proved to be an effective method of engagement (example below).

**Recommendation 4:** When assessing 'alternative opportunities from collaboration or use of new technologies to cost effectively enhance access to higher education for students not living near established campuses', the potential of Australia's broader library network should be considered – primarily university and TAFE libraries, but also public, school and special libraries, as well as our National, State and Territory Libraries, with their extensive research collections.



# Open Universities Australia Connect Library



Get to know other OUA students and discover what the library has to offer you.  
Your OUA Connect Librarians are experienced in online learning.

**Welcome and Information session**

Ask your library staff or book online > <http://www.townsville.qld.gov.au/facilities/libraries/programs>  
This session is currently available at CityLibraries Thuringowa Central.  
Students are welcome to visit the libraries at any time but should book for the Welcome and Information session held at the start of their study session.

At CityLibraries, you can >

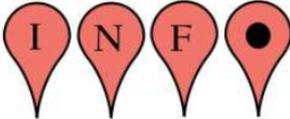
- Access free wifi, internet and computers
- Access study and meeting spaces
- Drop in to Cafe Isabella
- Access photocopiers and digital scanners
- Join the library and enjoy the benefits of membership
- Access and borrow library resources
- Develop your research skills with assistance from library staff.

Discover more about OUA:

eHandbook for information about <http://www.open.edu.au/courses/OUA-e handbook>  
courses and units

OUA on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/user/OpenUniversitiesAu/videos>

Students can also book online for an Ask Us: Info – Finding Information session.  
This is a 30-60 minute session for one or two people in the library.  
For further information, please ask your friendly library staff.



 [library@townsville.qld.gov.au](mailto:library@townsville.qld.gov.au)  
 [www.townsville.qld.gov.au/facilities/libraries](http://www.townsville.qld.gov.au/facilities/libraries)  
 CityLibraries Townsville  
 @TownsvilleLib

TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL

## 5. Excellence and quality

With the gap between university offerings in different countries narrowing, as nations compete for overseas students, the value of quality campus libraries and library services for remote users has been underestimated as an attraction and a potential element of the decision-making process. International students are some of the biggest users of library study spaces. Physical libraries also increasingly act as a hub for learner-centred services. Showcase libraries are a highly visible symbol, clearly demonstrating the investment institutions are making in learning outcomes for students.

While supporting innovation, we are concerned about the concept of “flagship courses”. Creating a two tier system of higher education course development could, over time, reduce fairness in the higher education system and erode the pursuit of excellence. The attraction of higher fees for institutions could lead to the development of flagship courses over and above those needed for social and economic good, by creating a distorting lever in the development of future areas of teaching and research. This would also further disadvantage regional universities that would not have the capability to match urban university flagship fees.

The introduction of a household income test for HELP repayments may, at first glance, seem to support equity yet it actually has a strong likelihood of entrenching disadvantage. For example, this process could seriously affect the LIS workforce that relies on older and second career entrants. Potential LIS workers could have their ability to choose a higher education pathway and become financially independent restricted by the higher earning capacity of their partner. This change could have much wider social implications and would need an evidence based assessment of the repercussions for female students in particular.

We believe it would be very short sighted and contrary to the goal of innovation, to restrict access by the best and brightest to a course because of an inability to pay a fee.

**Recommendation 5:** We propose that the Australian Government actively encourage institutions to use flagship library premises and library resources as part of their national and international competitive edge.

**Recommendation 6:** We do not support the introduction of a new class of “Flagship Courses” with a different fee structure. Educational opportunity and attainment should always be based on intelligence and capability and not on ability to pay fees.

**Recommendation 7:** We do not support the introduction of a household income test for HELP repayments without an evidence based assessment of the impact on all student cohorts.

## 6. Summary of recommendations

ALIA makes seven recommendations in response to the Australian Government Driving Innovation, Fairness and Excellence in Australian Higher Education paper:

**Recommendation 1:** In the event of 'reforms to the allocation of and support for subsidised postgraduate places' to 'better target Commonwealth support to those postgraduate courses identified as delivering significant community benefit where private benefits may be more limited,' ALIA proposes that LIS courses should be included in this definition.

**Recommendation 2:** In the event of 'reforms to the allocation of and support for subsidised postgraduate places' to 'allocate additional places for skills-deepening qualifications consistent with the National Innovation and Science Agenda, for example in science, technology, engineering and mathematics', we would seek to have LIS included, given the important role library and information professionals play in areas as diverse as digital literacy and data management.

**Recommendation 3:** We do not support the introduction of time-limited Commonwealth subsidies as this could create a serious disincentive to many LIS workers improving their skills and it could discourage them from keeping up to date and making a commitment to continuing professional development.

**Recommendation 4:** When assessing 'alternative opportunities from collaboration or use of new technologies to cost effectively enhance access to higher education for students not living near established campuses', the potential of Australia's broader library network should be considered – primarily university and TAFE libraries, but also public, school and special libraries, as well as our National, State and Territory Libraries, with their extensive research collections.

**Recommendation 5:** We propose that the Australian Government actively encourage institutions to use flagship library premises and library resources as part of their national and international competitive edge.

**Recommendation 6:** We do not support the introduction of a new class of "Flagship Courses" with a different fee structure. Educational opportunity and attainment should always be based on intelligence and capability and not on ability to pay fees.

**Recommendation 7:** We do not support the introduction of a household income test for HELP repayments without an evidence based assessment of the impact on all student cohorts.