



## **ALIA'S RESPONSE TO THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT REFORM TO DEDUCTIONS FOR EDUCATION EXPENSES DISCUSSION PAPER**

The Manager  
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The Treasury  
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### **1. About us**

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. With 5,500 members across Australia, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support.

### **2. Purpose of our submission**

Our purpose in submitting this paper is to join colleagues from other professional associations in opposing the Australian Government's proposal to cap self education expenses at \$2,000, as planned in the 2013-14 Budget.

### **3. Key points from Australian library and information professionals**

- Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is a necessity in the library and information science (LIS) sector, not a luxury. Organising and accessing information in the digital age requires a constant upgrading of skills by library and information professionals.
- We have introduced Certified Professional status from 1 July 2013. This is based on our MyPD Scheme, which provides audited ongoing learning for library and information professionals, and will help employers identify professionals with special skills. More than ever, participants will need to engage in CPD activities.
- LIS course fees are generally in the region of \$500-\$750 per day, and attendance at one of the annual industry conferences costs \$1200. The figure of \$2000 is swiftly reached.
- This is not a highly paid profession and earnings are below the average for similar occupations. This reflects our strong involvement and supporting role in the community, education and not for profit sectors.

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- CPD is often paid for by individuals, as a significant number of workplaces offer time but not payment for courses, workshops and conferences.
- Library and information professionals find they have to travel to the main centres of Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne for most PD events, which adds to the cost burden.
- For these reasons, tax breaks are particularly important for library and information professionals, and a \$2000 cap on self-education expenses would be a serious disincentive to essential ongoing learning.
- Well-informed, highly skilled library and information professionals are vital for ensuring that equitable, efficient, and accurate access to information is available to all sectors of the community.

#### **4. What our members have to say**

'Some concerns for me are the discriminatory treatment of people in states like Western Australia as most conferences are held on the Eastern seaboard, which means higher expenses for airfares, accommodation and incidental expenses, and the discriminatory treatment of people who live in rural areas – not only do they have longer travel times and higher expenses to get to conferences or other professional development, now they won't even get a decent tax deduction on their costs.'

'This fails to recognise that many employers (including the Commonwealth Government) do not, or cannot, pay for professional development for their employees, so some employees pay for their own professional development to stay employable and keep up with developments in their field.'

'I struggle (with four kids, mortgage etc) to afford to do any PD that costs money – in fact for the year just finished I didn't do any. It is bad enough that you have to pay the costs up front but can't claim them back for up to 12 months. I would never be signing up for courses once I reached the threshold of \$2K. I find it ludicrous that almost every day we hear that there is a skills shortage in Australia but people who are proactive and get out there and try and improve themselves are going to be penalised.'

'Health library members rarely have access to organisational support to maintain and develop knowledge and skills. Professional development is largely achieved by personal funding. Due to the highly specialised nature of practice and the relatively small numbers of practitioners, the most valuable opportunities for professional development are conference and other event attendance, and courses at university. Peer contact and support are critical.'

'Health librarianship has experienced extensive change, both in terms of needing to respond to changes in demand from clients to have resources delivered largely online, but also in meeting demands for information support services that are new (clinical librarianship, systematic review support, research repository development and maintenance, research

impact analysis, etc). Health librarians will find it increasingly difficult to contribute effectively to their organisations without access to some recognition of the personal contributions they make to their own development, development that directly supports their largely publicly funded organisations.

'This tax issue should be examined in the light also of the Mason Review of Australian Government Health Workforce Programs, April 2013. It should be noted that there is already inequity in access to support for health professionals, and health librarians are considerably worse off than some others eg "Ongoing educational support for GPs is available through the General Practice Procedural Training Support Program (GPPTSP) which provides funding and locum access to allow medical practitioners to attend further training and upskilling while not disrupting the provision of medical services in the area where they are posted." No such support is available to health librarians.'

## **Summary**

We believe the Treasury's proposal to introduce a \$2000 cap on self-education expenses would seriously disadvantage our members. It would deter library and information professionals from engaging in essential training to keep their skills up-to-date. This would have an adverse impact on the services delivered to communities, students, researchers, policymakers and professionals in health, law, banking and other sectors, and it would ultimately impact on Australia's ability to compete successfully in the global knowledge economy.

## **5. Contact**

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