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Mind the gap: cataloguing training needs in Australia

Philip Hider

Charles Sturt University

Abstract

Reports on a questionnaire survey of Australian libraries' cataloguing training needs and the extent to which a gap between demand for and supply of external cataloguing training exists. Results show that there is still a significant demand for training in many of the traditional cataloguing and classification areas, and that the current level of provision does not quite meet this demand. About half of responding libraries did not provide in-house training, and three-quarters were interested in sending staff to external short courses. However, the data also suggests that many library managers are unwilling to commit a large amount of funds or staff time to cataloguing training. There would thus appear to be more demand for basic courses, but fuller professional development programs might be developed if more library managers were to recognise their value, and if such programs offered flexible modes of learning.

Introduction

It has been observed by Harvey and Reynolds (2006) that coverage of cataloguing and classification in the curricula of professional librarianship courses in Australia has been reduced in recent years, or at least transformed into a broader treatment of metadata creation and management. Most of the university-level library schools in Australia are thus now teaching the application of conventional library cataloguing standards in elective rather than compulsory subjects, if at all. This trend is similar to that observed in other countries, such as the United States and Canada (see for example Hsieh-Lee 2004; Hill 2002).

In contrast, Australian libraries show few signs of switching to new metadata standards, and continue to make heavy use of conventional cataloguing in their library management systems. Over the past four years, use of the National Library of Australia's National Bibliographic Database (based on MARC, AACR2, etc.) has increased by just about any measure – for instance, in terms of holdings (which would approximate to downloading activity) from 33 million to 39 million (National Library of Australia 2005).

The continued utilisation of conventional catalogue records in Australia (as elsewhere) suggests that demand for cataloguing knowledge and skills on the part of Australian libraries has not necessarily lessened; indeed, it is quite possible that it has increased. The question arises, therefore, as to whether the reduction in coverage of traditional 'cat & class' in university-level LIS curricula, as identified by Harvey and Reynolds (2006), has left a gap between demand and supply, or whether any gap that might have opened up has been effectively plugged by alternative training provision.

There are several forms of alternative training provision which might have come to the rescue. First, the amount of in-house training might have increased, though there seems little reason for this to be the case. Second, library technician courses in TAFE,

which do still emphasise basic library cataloguing, may have plugged the gap as libraries have devolved more of their cataloguing activities to paraprofessional staff. Third, both professionals and paraprofessionals may also have been developing their cataloguing skills through attendance of short courses offered by external parties.

The survey summarised in this paper sets out to identify the nature of Australian libraries' cataloguing training needs, in so far as they were not being met by TAFE or university-level courses of formal education, and to determine the extent to which a gap between demand for and supply of external cataloguing training exists.

Method

An online questionnaire survey was constructed, containing twenty, mostly closed, questions – see Appendix. Postings were placed on eleven Australia-based e-lists in November 2005, inviting list members to complete the questionnaire on behalf of their library, or forward the invitation to the relevant colleague. All but one of the e-lists are managed by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). General as well as specifically cataloguing e-lists were targeted, as the most appropriate respondents, answering on behalf of their libraries, would not necessarily be cataloguers – but rather the manager who controlled the training budget, or that part which covered cataloguing (if any). The e-lists were: aliaACTive, aliaCATLIBS, aliaCPD, aliaNATSPEC, aliaNSW, aliaQLD, aliaRIVERINA, aliaSA, aliaVIC, aliaWEST, and catlibs.

A total of 165 responses were recorded during the period 15 November to 1 December 2005, forming the basis of the following analysis.

Results

Nature of the sample

Seventy-five of the 165 questionnaire responses provided the library's name. The libraries represented ranged from large state and university libraries, to small special and school libraries. The special libraries also represented a wide range of sectors, including medical, government, legal, voluntary, scientific, theological, etc. It appeared (from the list of names provided) that most of the libraries are publicly funded, with a small number funded through donations, and an even smaller number operating as part of a commercial enterprise.

The responses to the second and fourth questions also confirmed that a broad range of libraries was represented in the sample, both in terms of sector and size. Table 1 below shows the types of library; Table 2 the number of staff in each library involved in cataloguing (of any form). Special, academic and public libraries are all reasonably well represented in the sample; there are also some school libraries, though these are probably under-represented in relation to the total population. It could well be that school libraries are under-represented on the e-lists themselves, so we should not necessarily draw any conclusion that the smaller number of school libraries indicates any lack of interest in cataloguing training on their part. The mean number of staff involved in cataloguing is 4.7, and the median is 3.

Table 1 – Responding libraries by type

<i>Type</i>	<i>Number of libraries</i>	<i>% of total</i>
Public	33	20.0
Academic	42	25.5
School	14	8.5
Special	69	41.8
Not a library	7	4.2

Table 2 – Number of staff involved in cataloguing

<i>Number of staff</i>	<i>Number of libraries</i>
1	33
2	34
3	30
4	17
5	11
6	11
7	4
8	2
9	6
10	3
11-20	9
>20	4

The responses hailed from across Australia, with the exception of Tasmania, as indicated in Table 3. The most populous states provided the greatest number of responses. Some of the libraries' names, as well as certain responses to the open questions, indicated that some of the libraries were situated in rural and regional Australia. The sample was thus considered to be reasonably representative of Australian libraries geographically.

In-house training

A little over half of the libraries (56.7%) provided in-house training in cataloguing. Of course, the amount and quality of this in-house training is likely to vary considerably. As might be expected, proportionately more of the public and academic libraries provided in-house training – many of the special and school libraries would likely be too small to provide it.

Table 3 – Responding libraries by state

<i>State</i>	<i>Number of libraries</i>	<i>% of total</i>
ACT	13	7.9
NSW	40	24.2
NT	1	0.6
QLD	34	20.6
SA	25	15.2
TAS	0	0
VIC	34	20.6
WA	18	10.9

Attendance of short courses

About two-thirds (65.5%) of libraries had not sent staff to a short course in cataloguing during the past year. Significantly more academic libraries had sent staff to short courses, in proportion, than had other libraries, despite the fact that more of them also provided in-house training.

Interest in short courses

About three-quarters (76.3%) of libraries expressed an interest in sending staff to short courses in the forthcoming year. This, however, left a significant proportion (23.7%) of libraries apparently not interested in doing so. Their lack of interest might be due to budgetary parameters, or because they do not consider their staff need any external training, or perhaps because they do not consider short courses to be an effective mode of training.

Areas of interest for short courses

Those respondents who indicated that their library would be interested in sending staff to short courses over the coming year, were then asked which areas of cataloguing they would like to see covered. Table 4 shows the responses. Significant numbers of libraries (at least 10%) were interested in each area suggested, though no single area stood out with a large majority of the respondents' vote (the most popular area was 'Internet cataloguing' with 66.4%).

Several additional areas were specified by respondents, including cataloguing of archival material, forthcoming changes to the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, foreign language materials, cataloguing tools available on the Internet, local subject headings, Medical Subject Headings (MeSH), SCIS standards, and, not surprisingly, 'metadata.' (Two other classification schemes were specified: Moys and UDC.)

Preferred length of course

Respondents were then asked to which length of course their libraries would prefer to send staff. Most of the votes (84.8%) were cast for half-day and one-day courses.

Table 4 – Areas of interest

<i>Area</i>	<i>Number of libraries</i>	<i>% of total</i>
Internet cataloguing	85	66.4
Descriptive cataloguing	76	59.4
AACR2	70	54.7
Authority control	68	53.1
Audiovisual cataloguing	60	46.9
MARC	59	46.1
Dewey Decimal Classification	58	45.3
Copy cataloguing	55	43.0
Serials cataloguing	52	40.6
Library of Congress Subject Headings	52	40.6
Subject indexing	48	37.5
Cataloguing of other item types	47	36.7
Library of Congress Classification	23	18.0
Other classification scheme	15	11.7

Online courses

Over two-thirds (68.7%) of respondents indicated that their library would be interested in subscribing to online courses. One respondent commented at the end of the survey that their library's regional location made online courses an attractive proposition; on the other hand, another respondent commented that 'live classes' was what were needed, rather than 'distance education.'

It may be worth noting that those libraries which were prepared to release some (or at least one) of their staff for more than a day a year to attend short courses, and those prepared to spend over \$300 for a staff member's original cataloguing courses, were also particularly interested in online courses.

Time allocation for short courses

The following four questions were designed to gauge the amount of time a library might allocate to a single member of staff to attend short courses, provided externally, on copy cataloguing and original cataloguing. The responses are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5 – Time release allocations

Days	<i>Current allocation</i>		<i>Possible allocation</i>	
	Copy	Original	Copy	Original
0-1	110	103	92	65
2-5	12	20	30	57
6-10	2	1	0	3
11-15	0	1	0	0
>15	2	1	1	3

From the table, we note that few libraries are willing or able to allocate large amounts of staff time for short courses in cataloguing. This, of course, may be for various reasons, such as a lack of perceived need for extensive training in this area, or competing training needs, or simply a lack of time that can be devoted to training of any kind, in the face of heavy workloads.

One might also account for a low amount of time *currently* allocated to cataloguing because of a low number of (quality) training opportunities on offer, but allocations do not dramatically increase when respondents consider the maximum possible allocation, given optimal training provision. As might be expected, the allocation for copy cataloguers is lower than it is for original cataloguers. Only a quarter (24.4%) of libraries responding were prepared to release any of their copy cataloguers for more than one day a year; about half (49.2%) the libraries were prepared to release a member of staff more than one day a year for courses on original cataloguing. Only a small number of libraries (six) were prepared to release any member of staff for more than five days a year. Special libraries, on the whole, were a little more generous than other libraries with possible time allocation for original cataloguing courses, as were Victorian libraries.

The relatively small amounts of time do not necessarily mean that libraries are not interested in their staff developing, or maintaining, expertise in cataloguing. It may well be that some of the libraries (probably the larger ones) offer extensive in-house training and supervision. In other cases, however, libraries may not perform enough original cataloguing (some may outsource it) for such development to be a priority. In any case, it is quite likely that most libraries would welcome their staff developing cataloguing expertise in their *own* time.

Funding allocation for short courses

Responses to the next two questions are summarised in Table 6 – they indicate the amount of money libraries might spend on sending their staff to cataloguing short courses (this should include incidental costs such as travel, as well as the course fees themselves). For both copy and original cataloguing, the modal allocation was between \$100 and \$300 per year per staff member. However, for original cataloguing, the estimated mean was \$292, whereas for copy cataloguing, it was just \$226. Of course, some respondents might have understated their figures in the hope that this would have a favourable effect on future fee levels, but the responses tied in fairly well with the specified time allocations outlined above.

Table 6 – Funding allocations

<i>Funding (\$)</i>	<i>Copy</i>	<i>Original</i>
<100	33	16
100-300	57	52
300-500	21	38
500-1000	7	10
1000-2000	0	1
2000-3000	0	1
3000-4000	0	0
4000-5000	0	0
>5000	0	0

Public libraries' funding was particularly conservative (probably because they do not have vast sums of money). Not surprisingly, those libraries prepared to send a staff member to more than a day's external training a year, were also prepared to spend more on short courses (at least for a single staff member).

Current level of provision

Over two-thirds (69.4%) of respondents considered the current level of short course provision inadequate to meet their library's needs. This might not be a particularly surprising proportion, given the diverse cataloguing situations the libraries represent, and the likely bias against current provision amongst the sample (responding out of choice to the questionnaire). The fact that 30.7% of the sample (for this question) considered the current level sufficient, would indicate that the short courses presently on offer are filling at least *some* of the gap between demand and supply. Academic libraries were more satisfied with current provision, in proportion, than were other libraries.

Gaps in short course provision

The last two questions asked respondents about the nature of any gap that might exist between provision and need – in what areas of cataloguing would their libraries like to see more short courses. Table 7 summarises responses to suggested areas. Results were similar to those reported above which identified areas of interest (whether or not these areas were well provided for). Again, there were no runaway favourites, but 'Internet cataloguing' was popular with at least half the libraries, and all areas received at least 10% of the vote.

Table 7 – Areas for more courses

<i>Area</i>	<i>Number of libraries</i>	<i>% of total</i>
Internet cataloguing	83	50.3
Descriptive cataloguing	66	40.0
Authority control	62	37.6
AACR2	61	37.0
Dewey Decimal Classification	56	33.9
Audiovisual cataloguing	52	31.5
Library of Congress Subject Headings	51	30.9
Subject indexing	48	29.1
MARC	46	27.9
Serials cataloguing	45	27.3
Copy cataloguing	43	26.1
Cataloguing of other item types	40	24.2
Library of Congress Classification	22	13.3
Other classification scheme	18	10.9

Other areas not fully covered by current provision were noted in responses to the last question of the survey, including content for a 'refresher' course (several votes), access points (as per AACR2), RDA (AACR3), cataloguing archival materials, updates for advanced cataloguers, Kinetica software, MeSH, music, management and performance evaluation of cataloguing, SCIS standards, thesaurus development, and,

the ubiquitous, 'metadata.' (Again, two other classification schemes were specified: Moys and UDC.)

Home state as a factor on cataloguing training

Not many differences in responses were identified according to respondents' state (Question 3). Relatively fewer libraries sent staff to short courses in Western Australia, and more libraries were dissatisfied with current provision there – but not by a large margin in either case.

Conclusions and discussion

While the demand for training in new areas of metadata creation and management may well have increased dramatically over the past decade, the results of the survey suggest that demand for training in traditional 'cat & class' has not ceased, and that the current level of training provision in Australia does not quite meet this demand. It is very possible, although not proven by this survey, that the gap between demand and supply has emerged, or at least has widened, as a result of the university library schools reducing their coverage of cataloguing and classification. Whether or not this is the case, the gap, in so far as it exists, still needs to be addressed.

In-house training is provided by about half the libraries in the sample. This leaves a very large number of libraries across Australia unable or unwilling to 'do it themselves.' With increasing numbers of librarians having graduated from library school with minimal cataloguing education, and a lower proportion of the profession involved in cataloguing, the number of libraries reliant in external training providers is likely to increase – assuming that these libraries continue to perform some cataloguing.

Whereas two-thirds of libraries in the sample had not sent staff to a short course over the past year, three-quarters of libraries expressed an interest in doing so over the forthcoming year. Again, we may conclude that not enough short courses are being offered to libraries across the whole of Australia; but when we examine some of the other results of the survey, another possible explanation for this contrast between attendance and interest presents itself. It may well be that many libraries are aware of short courses to which they would be interested in sending their staff, but that they do not wish, or are unable, to meet the expense – in terms of either staff time or money, or both. Of course, libraries located in rural and regional Australia would need to spend additional funds to send their staff to the capital cities, where most of the short courses are held. However, cataloguing courses do not appear even to be a priority for many libraries more favourably situated, if the responses in this survey are anything to go by – Australian libraries' financial and temporal commitment to them is generally low. Some of the free-text responses also indicated that little money was available for training, and that, especially for one-person libraries, there was little time as well.

Even for original cataloguing, the maximum many libraries in the sample would be prepared to spend on a member of staff's development is less than \$300 a year. The going rate for a one-day short course is approaching \$500. For example, CAVAL's full-day cataloguing courses in 2006 are \$473.00 (full fee) or \$354.75 (discount fee). Likewise, the average library would be willing to release a member of staff for only

one or two days a year. It is no wonder, then, that the libraries much preferred half-day and one-day courses over more extensive ones.

The causes of such limited support for the short course mode of cataloguers' professional (and paraprofessional) development need further investigation. It is likely that many libraries' budgets are inadequate in this regard. However, it would appear that even if budgets were adequate, many libraries would still be unwilling to release staff for substantial amounts of training. This may be because they are extraordinarily busy, or because they entertain unrealistic expectations of a one-day course, or because they have low expectations of their cataloguing activities. Alternatively, it may be that library managers consider cataloguing a skill that can be self-taught or acquired through means other than short courses.

Two-thirds of libraries in the sample considered the current level of short course provision inadequate to meet their needs. However, the foregoing would suggest that many of these libraries are not so interested in extensive courses of training, but in some 'basic' courses that will enable them to get by, or else a magical one-day course that will turn the beginner into expert. The fact that the libraries wanted more across the full range of cataloguing areas also suggests a desire for a bit, or a lot, of everything – so long as it does not take too long.

The magical one-day, all-inclusive course may be a non-starter, but training providers can certainly offer more 'basic' half-day and one-day courses for beginners and those feeling in need of a 'refresher.' Perhaps as important as such courses, however, would be greater efforts in the education of librarians about what it takes to train a fully-fledged cataloguer, as well as the need for fully-fledged cataloguers (even in special and public libraries). Such education may encourage more libraries to spend more time and money on cataloguing training. One respondent commented: 'It is an area that is given little consideration because the management does not see a problem, therefore no money spent.'

We speculated that some library managers might not be willing to spend much time and money on short courses because they consider cataloguing a skill that can be self-taught or acquired through other means. Certainly, cataloguing *can* be self-taught, but very few expert cataloguers are totally so. If staff have already graduated from library school, and in-house training is not an option, then what alternatives to external short courses are there? What other ways may there be of plugging the gap?

Hider (2006) lists eight modes of professional development for the cataloguer: professional reading, presentations and papers, work-based research projects, publications, personal study projects, tertiary courses, secondments and short courses. The first four of these build on basic knowledge and skills – they are not likely to plug the gap. A very determined personal study project might produce a self-taught cataloguer, but this is not a realistic outcome in most cases, and secondments are hard to come by. This leaves tertiary courses and short courses.

We will return to tertiary courses shortly, but first let us consider a ninth mode, namely the online or distance course (not all distance courses are solely or even partially online, but we will use 'online' here as shorthand). Few online courses in cataloguing currently exist (the commercial package, Catskill, is an exception), but

this may well change. In a sense, the online course is a new kind of short course, except that it can often be as long or as short as the trainee wishes. In the sample, over two-thirds of libraries indicated an interest in subscribing to online courses on behalf of their staff. There are obvious benefits for libraries in rural and regional areas; indeed, all libraries may save some staff time (no travel costs, etc.). Online courses can also accommodate varying work schedules; on the other hand, the technical nature of cataloguing makes online and distance learning particularly challenging. These courses would not necessarily be what the library managers had in mind as an alternative to classroom-based short courses, but they are worth considering in some situations and for some needs.

Apart from online courses and classroom-based short courses, it seems there are few options for many libraries wishing to develop in-house cataloguing expertise. It is probably unrealistic to hope that the university library schools can be persuaded to increase the coverage of cataloguing in their professional qualification courses. It may well be more realistic to call for more cataloguing training to supplement what is being taught in the library schools. This can be provided by a wide range of parties. One of the leading providers of library CPD courses in Australia, CAVAL Collaborative Solutions (based in Victoria), already offers several courses in the cataloguing and metadata area, and may be able to offer more. There are also several established providers of cataloguing training based outside of Australia who might be able to export their courses.

One other possible way to plug the gap is for a library school to offer a combination of education and training. That is, while there may not be enough room in the curriculum of the modern, generalist LIS degree to increase the coverage of cataloguing, it may nevertheless be possible to integrate a series of short courses into a course of formal education that represents an advanced LIS qualification, that is, a specialist qualification in bibliographic organisation. Such a course, with a range of subject levels and the possibility of exemptions based on existing expertise, might attract both beginners and more advanced cataloguers. It could be offered in mixed mode – both in the classroom and online. It could also allow for enrolments in individual modules, instead of the whole course. Further, such a course would allow for study in both the employer's and student's time – it would appear from the survey results that some form of compromise would often be needed, such that the library might allocate some work time for professional development, but would also expect the employee, as a professional, to set aside some of their own time.

Given the wide range of needs and expectations indicated in the survey, whatever the mode of training provided, one of the keys to success for cataloguing trainers and educators must surely be to allow for *flexible* learning.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

1. Your library's name (optional)
2. Your library's type
3. Your library's location
4. How many staff in your library are involved in any form of cataloguing?
5. Does your library provide any in-house training in cataloguing to its staff?
6. In the past year, has any of your library's staff attended a short course in cataloguing provided by an external party?
7. Over the next year, would your library be interested in sending any of its staff to short courses in cataloguing? (If No, please go to question 18.)
8. Which of the following areas would your library be keen to see covered in short courses? (You may select one or more.)
9. Please state any other areas, apart from those in the above list, which your library would like to see covered in short courses.
10. What length of course would your library prefer to send staff to? (You may select one or more.)
11. Would your library be interested in subscribing to online cataloguing courses for its staff?
12. For a year, what is the maximum amount of time your library currently allocates to a single employee's attendance of short courses on copy cataloguing?
13. For a year, what is the maximum amount of time your library currently allocates to a single employee's attendance of short courses on original cataloguing?
14. In a year, what would be the maximum amount of time your library would be prepared to allocate to a single employee's attendance of short courses on copy cataloguing?
15. In a year, what would be the maximum amount of time your library would be prepared to allocate to a single employee's attendance of short courses on original cataloguing?
16. In a year, what would be the maximum amount of money your library would be prepared to allocate to a single employee's attendance of short courses on copy cataloguing?
17. In a year, what would be the maximum amount of money your library would be prepared to allocate to a single employee's attendance of short courses on original cataloguing?
18. Does the current level of provision of short courses meet your library's needs?
19. In which of the following areas (if any) would your library like to see more short courses than are currently offered? (You may select one or more.)
20. Please state any other areas, apart from those in the above list, in which your library would like to see more short courses than are currently offered.

The author

Philip Hider is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Information Studies at Charles Sturt University. He holds a Master of Librarianship degree from the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, and a PhD from City University, London. Dr Hider worked at the British Library from 1995-1997, and in Singapore from 1997-2003.

