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Our Space: Professional development for new graduates and professionals in Australia

Abstract

This paper explores the changing work environment in libraries and information management and the impact on new professionals and new graduates. New graduates need to have their own support networks and targeted professional development to successfully navigate job and sector changes and to gain transferable skills. The development and structure of a targeted professional development event, the New Librarians' Symposium, is discussed. This successful event, held in Australia biennially, could be considered a model of targeted professional development for other professional associations and groups.

1. Support for new graduates and professionals

Australia has one of the strongest support networks for new library and information science (LIS) professionals in the world (Garcia-Febo, 2008; Saw & Todd, 2007). Much of this is the result of initiatives of the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). New graduates have strong representation in the association with an advisory committee to the Board of Directors (New Generation Advisory Committee), a grass-roots activity group (New Graduates Group - national, with representatives from states and major regional areas), and the New Librarians' Symposium, a biennial conference. These successful initiatives began earlier this decade (Blanchard, 2003).

Associations in other countries are also expanding their services and support networks for new professionals. These include the New Members Round Table of the American Library Association (ALA), the Canadian Library Association, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) in the United Kingdom, and the New Professionals Discussion Group of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA).

2. The ALIA New Librarians' Symposium

The New Librarians' Symposium (NLS) is an event aimed at students and those who have been in the LIS profession for up to 10 years (including librarians and library technicians). The purpose of NLS is, "to encourage the participation of new graduates; to start networking processes among new graduates and experienced industry professionals; and an opportunity to exchange ideas and knowledge" (Blanchard, 2003).

The event is inclusive of all library workers, though most delegates are professionally-qualified librarians. Those who attend NLS are a diverse group including those embarking on their first career, second career, and those who have returned to the profession after career breaks. Ages and interests vary widely, and delegates come from all areas of Australia including major cities and regional areas. There is no typical delegate profile. In addition to these delegates, the event is also attended by senior professionals who participate as speakers or who attend to support the aims of the event.

The total number of attendees is smaller than other Australian library conferences (including ALIA Biennial, Information Online and VALA), but at around 280 delegates it reaches a good number of new graduates. There is significant turnover of delegates between each event as most delegates attend only one NLS.

This paper will focus on the arrangements for the third NLS, which was held in Sydney in December 2006 (NLS2006). Groups who are interested in hosting NLS submit bids for the opportunity to host the event, so it is not always held in the same city. The authors were all members of the NLS2006 organising committee.

3. Event design

NLS is held biennially over two full days on a Friday and Saturday in December. This minimises the amount of workplace leave delegates may need to take, an important consideration for many in the early stages of their career. NLS has been timed to fall within Australian university holidays allowing those still studying to attend. The academic school year ends in November, and so NLS is well timed for students who complete their course at the end of the year and are transitioning to the workplace.

NLS aims to build networks amongst new professionals, particularly those from regional areas or working in solo and special library environments. Librarians need both learning and networking to continue their development and form communities within the profession, as Lachance (2006, p. 10) notes,

"As library and information associations focus on learning and career development, individual practitioners in the profession begin to generate a sense of community through interaction with peers and other learners. [...] In the modern age, however networking alone is not enough. The context for networking cannot simply be about making connections with people who do the same kinds of work we do. It must occur in the course of changing one's future through learning and practical experience or the connection cannot be sustained for very long."

At NLS, delegates meet professionals from every library department, from assistants to managers, from every sector and from every part of Australia. This is an opportunity to network that many may not usually have time or opportunity for in their workplace.

Social events are provided in the evening for delegates to network with each other. There has been debate over whether the price of social events should be included in the registration fee. Registering to attend them as separate, optional events reduces the registration fee and potentially makes the event more accessible to those on tighter budgets. However, networking is an essential career development activity which many delegates don't realise the value of until they experience it. It has often been said that the real value of conferences is in the hallways (Dixon, 1997). For NLS2006, we chose to include the social events in the registration price to encourage high attendance, and the majority of delegates did attend both events (a cocktail party and dinner). Meals were also included in the registration fee, encouraging delegates to stay on-site and network.

4. Programme and Themes

The NLS programme focuses on issues of interest to new professionals and students. NLS2006 was the first NLS to include two streams in the programme - "Pathways" and "Possibilities". Pathways included practical topics aimed at very recently graduated new professionals and students such as working in different library sectors, working overseas, and reports on projects undertaken at various organisations. The aim was to give delegates ideas about the career paths they can explore within the profession, and some practical skills and tools to use in the workplace. Topics in the Possibilities stream had a big picture focus, and looked at issues facing the profession as a whole and topics that would be of interest to those who had been in the profession for a few years. Topics included leadership, management, generational differences between staff, and contributing back to the profession.

Space was made available for 25 papers to be presented by new professionals themselves (although the call for papers was open to all LIS workers), in what we called the peer paper programme. NLS2006 was the first NLS to offer optional peer review to authors. Peer review was popular amongst librarians working in academic libraries, who perceive peer review to give their paper additional backing and an opportunity to be improved (Bradley, 2008). A popular resume review service was also provided, modelled on that developed by the New Members Round Table of ALA.

NLS aims to be a significant professional development event for new graduates. It provides an opportunity for new graduates to take a day or two out of their work schedule to think about their

career, goals and values in a non-threatening environment. Surrounded by their peers, delegates are able to gain exposure to ideas, practices and perspectives that are outside their normal frame of reference, but still within their grasp.

The aim of providing professional development that is both practical and “big picture” focused can make selling the value of an event like NLS difficult. While our feedback from delegates is overwhelmingly positive, some delegates have sometimes criticised the career and leadership content of the programme. As organisers of NLS, we are aware that not all delegates have the career goal of becoming a university/state/national librarian, or taking on a leadership role in the profession. However leadership is a topic not taught in the majority of LIS courses, despite being a quality desired by employers (Fisher, Hallam, & Partridge, 2005; Mason & Wetherbee, 2004). Many professionals are looking for a way to develop these skills, and the number of leadership courses available post-library school is relatively small (Mason & Wetherbee, 2004). Does the (supposed) looming retirement of a large proportion of librarians, many of whom hold leadership positions, justify a focus on leadership and career skills at events such as NLS? We believe it does – NLS provides an affordable and accessible starting point for learning about leadership, something that is not always easily available. It is also non-selective, allowing delegates to be exposed to leadership ideas without having to commit to a specialised leadership course. This focus also reinforces the idea that leadership is important, by exposing new graduates to it early in their career.

5. Promotion

The promotional techniques used for NLS are similar to those used for most ALIA conferences. These include published publicity material, promotional handouts such as postcards, and inclusion in event listing directories. However delegates usually only attend one or two events before considering themselves to have grown beyond the scope of the NLS, leading to high delegate turnover. NLS delegates are also likely to have a higher awareness of social networking and technology than some other conference audiences. These two factors led us to use more dynamic, inclusive, faster and cheaper methods of promotion. Electronic methods of promotion were adopted including discussions on electronic bulletin boards of library schools, blog posts and competitions that were designed to make the event accessible. For example, we held a competition online asking for suggestions on how to convince your boss to fund your conference attendance, with the hope that the ideas generated by the competition would in turn generate increased delegate numbers. The competition winner themselves received free registration as a prize.

6. The creation of a conference for new professionals

NLS wasn't the first conference focused on new graduates that ALIA had organised. ALIA Fringe was held at the ALIA Biennial conferences in 1998 and 2000 (ALIA, 1998, 2000). The Fringe brought together experienced and newer members of the profession to hear presentations on leadership, career planning, and current issues in the profession (Cumming, 2000). They were organised on an ad-hoc basis to fill a gap in the conference programme. Yet it was this ad hoc nature of the event that led to its demise – at the time it was difficult to manage the finances and organisation of an event organised in this way. In the years since the Fringe, alternative modes of conferencing such as unconferences have created a successful way of providing loosely structured, participatory events (“Unconference”).

Despite the end of the Fringe model, the interest in an event for new professionals continued. The first New Librarians' Symposium held in 2002 aimed to speak to new librarians, rather than about them. The organisers of the Symposium observed that while presenters at the ALIA Biennial Conferences were talking about new graduates, the new graduates themselves weren't there to hear – the event was speaking only to the more senior, more experienced librarians. An event accessible and relevant to new graduates was needed. NLS1 was organised differently to larger ALIA conferences - promotion activities utilised electronic methods of communication, rather than the traditional printed conference brochure; and the programme was developed by “tapping speakers on the shoulder”, rather than an open call for papers; and the programme had only one stream. All of the knowledge of organising and developing the event was created from scratch. Although ALIA provides some guidance, conference committees are largely left to their own devices to establish, organise, budget, and run their event.

NLS1 in Brisbane was organised by ALIA Quorum, a Queensland-based group of ALIA, and was initially expected to only attract delegates from that state. More than 150 delegates from all over Australia ended up attending. Subsequent events have grown the NLS format and it has taken on some traditional conference characteristics. This brings its own challenges that will be discussed later in this paper.

By the time NLS2 was held in Adelaide in 2004, NLS had a strong identity, and attracted 245 delegates. NLS2 built on the organising procedures and practices developed by NLS1, and created many of their own. Although none of the NLS2006 committee had experience running an event on this scale, we were helped considerably by the templates, tools and processes documented by the NLS2 committee. We built on this again with NLS2006, which meant that by the end of the event we were able to hand the next organisers just as much information, if not more, than what we were provided with by our predecessors. We were also asked by other conference committees for copies of the guidelines we drew up for reviewing and selecting articles including the 2007 Top End Symposium and ALIA Library Technicians Conference 2007. This kind of knowledge sharing is vital to the success of an event run by (often inexperienced) committee volunteers.

7. An event by new professionals, for new professionals

When NLS2006 was held, the event design was like many other medium-sized conferences. Multiple streams, a professional conference venue and trade exhibition, an open call for papers, sponsorship and marketing were all organised along traditional models. What remained different about NLS were the values and ideas underpinning the event. It was important to us that NLS remained an event created by new professionals, for new professionals - it was an event for our peers, not our juniors.

We were eager to avoid a situation whereby our seniors were telling us what they felt we needed to hear - something we have ample opportunity for in other situations. We believed that new graduates would know what they and their peers wanted to hear. We wanted NLS to essentially be a conference version of an e-list discussion – with debate, ideas, and shared knowledge. We believed that new grads could learn how to run an event at the same time as running the event. Most of us had stories of learning our jobs hands-on, so this was no different. We wanted to show that new graduates can be trusted to organise events. The example of the BOBCATSSS conference in Europe, organised successfully by different groups of students every year, showed that it can be done (“BOBCATSSS: A Unique Series of Conferences,” n.d.).

The members of the NLS2006 organising committee had a wide range of experience, although all of us considered ourselves new graduates at the time we organised the event. Some had event management experience, some had almost ten years library experience, and some had committee management experience. But rarely did all of those elements combine in the one person, and some of us had none of them at all. Ensuring that there was a mix of expertise on the committee allowed us to develop together, through informal and constant mentoring, and we consulted external figures for advice on particular elements of designing and organising the event. Most committee members had some involvement with ALIA committees previously, which not only gave them a good understanding of the association but also some experience in working with each other on other groups and projects, despite day jobs being in many different library sectors and locations.

Committee members need strong support from mentors, employers and the sponsoring association to ensure that they have the skills, planning, and problem solving ability required to make the event a success. Committee members gained skills in project management, team work, communication, public speaking, budgeting, and strengthened their networks in the profession. New graduates can take on responsible roles within associations and organise successful events. As with any event, it is inevitable that there will be some changes in committee membership and varying levels of commitment. Support from employers also varied amongst the group. For many, creating an experience that would develop skills and benefit peers was a strong enough motivator to compensate.

When the organising committee was formed, roles were open to all for the most part. There were people we tapped on the shoulder to be involved, and there were certainly people that we felt were necessary for the committee and we did guide people into some positions. A call for committee

members was sent out to ALIA's email lists, though the core group of members (four or five people) was in place by the time NLS was awarded to Sydney for 2006. In the spirit of NLS2006 being a collaborative event, there was a point at which it became more important to have someone assigned to each area rather than being overly concerned with official responsibilities. This did lead to some committee members taking on a larger workload than others. We actively encouraged new graduates to join the committee. In one instance, we had a vacant position with two applicants. One was an experienced librarian and administrator who knew ALIA and its inner workings well. The other was a new graduate that none of us had met before. It was difficult for us to take the risk, but we chose the new graduate. We felt it was important that NLS was as much a learning experience for the committee as for the delegates.

Organising a conference builds essential transferable skills which can be hard to gain in the workplace in the early career stage, especially project and budget management. These skills are highly valued by employers, especially as new graduates move out of their first positions and aspire to management or project management roles. Leadership potential and managerial skills are amongst the most difficult to fulfil and recruit for (Ingles et al., 2005, p. 58). The outcomes of being on a conference committee are what you make of them but at the time they can sometimes seem abstract or irrelevant. However, several committee members have gained new positions or opportunities as a result of their involvement with NLS2006, and three committee members presented at the American Library Association's Annual Conference in 2008 about their experiences.

While most of us have retained some level of involvement with ALIA since NLS2006, this was in all cases significantly reduced in the year following the event. We gave a substantial amount of our time and energy to the Association over two years. We became familiar with the inner workings, the roles of different committees, and the overall aims and vision of the association. These new skills and experience have led to committee members being called on for expertise, for example, some were called on for their input into discussions on the future of ALIA conferences.

8. The value of NLS and professional development

In order to build their own sense of professional value, new professionals need to see their peers being treated with professional respect - presenting at conferences, writing papers, speaking about issues that they can relate to. They need an audience for their ideas. In encouraging professional involvement, we also have a responsibility to provide forums for new ideas and voices.

There is value in new professionals having and running their own professional development. Of course this shouldn't be an exclusive arrangement - new professionals and experienced librarians should interact at each other's targeted events - but if the transmission of ideas only goes one way, from experienced to new, then the industry is unlikely to see the change it needs to keep up with its own users.

Why do librarians, library technicians and students attend conferences? What are the perceived and actual benefits to spending up to a thousand dollars or more to attend an event and taking time off work? Some benefits are more obvious and measurable than others. For authors, the visibility that comes from speaking at an event can help not just with your portfolio post-event, but during the conference it can break down barriers and give other delegates a reason to approach you. Delegates find conferences to be a good networking and learning opportunity. But other benefits are more abstract, as Jennifer England said about ALA Annual (England as cited in Vega & Connell, 2007),

"Here there was kinship. This act of attending, listening, and ultimately becoming part of something bigger is the whole reason for the Conference."

However, attending conferences can be difficult for new graduates (England as cited in Vega & Connell, 2007). Some may not know any other attendees and find this confronting. NLS can assist in this as most delegates are peers, but the experienced members of the profession who take part also engage with delegates and put them at ease.

Why else do librarians attend conferences? Other reasons to attend conferences include professional rejuvenation, content of the papers, committee meetings, exhibits, opportunity to speak (more

important to newer/younger librarians), and user group meetings, in addition to networking. Reasons are many and varied, but the opportunity to connect with peers working in similar areas and networking is consistently highly valued (Vega & Connell, 2007).

New graduates need support to find their way in the profession and to navigate early job and sector changes. Professional development, including opportunities to network, can play a role in building a support structure. The first five years are crucial to retention. Nexus surveyed those working in the LIS sector and found that (Hallam, 2008),

"43.9% of new entrant professionals planned to remain with their current employer for only the next two years. Relatively few (14.5%) considered the possibility of a long relationship with the current employer (ie 6 years and beyond. The figure was even higher for those new entrant professionals aged 30 years or under: 53.6% planned to change employer within the next 2 years"

New entrants were defined as those working in the sector for five years or less, the classic new graduate. They are very likely to change jobs, sectors, and specialities to find a position that suits them. The Nexus survey also found that 68% of new graduates aged under 30 had been in their job for less than two years, and 41% had been in their job for less than a year (Hallam, 2008). These figures are high. How do new graduates develop their skills and networks to effectively make these transitions? How much support are they receiving for professional development?

New graduate events and professional development can provide support not only for the roles that they are moving in and out of, but also a support structure to make those transitions easier. New graduates are likely to shift job roles, but also library sectors and specialisations as they find their right fit in the profession (Markgren, Dickinson, Leonard, & Vassiliadis, 2007). This is also a time that many decide to leave the profession. A strong support network that assists this is important.

Increasingly, professional development is becoming an individual concern. It is up to each individual to identify their needs within their current role, and throughout their career. They may have a mixture of employer support and expectations to seek out opportunities for themselves. This is a change from the past, with the current attitude being that, "MLIS programs certainly have a place in preparing students to take on leadership roles, but students themselves must demonstrate a willingness to learn and to lead" (Sheardown & Woroniak, 2007).

9. 'Everything is different now': The hype and the reality of changed expectations

It has been said that the current crop of new graduates are different from generations at work before because they expect to, and will be asked to:

- have more variety in their career
- rise to senior positions more quickly than their predecessors
- make sideways moves as often as upwards moves
- be able to balance work and life, but at the same time;
- have fewer lines between hobbies and work
- have their opinions to be heard, and to have a say in their own work

These expectations do not necessarily align with a new graduate's age or work experience prior to library school. It is debateable how much these expectations deviate from those of the past. As Lunau (2007) commented –

"While the library environment is radically different now from the 1960s when I secured my first library job, and from the 1970s when I became a new professional, many of the challenges and opportunities remain the same."

So why then, do new graduates now need targeted professional development events? What has changed?

The library industry is changing. Not everything is changing - we acknowledge that there have always been people who struggled to find work, that the pay has never been outstanding, and that there have been many occasions where the balance between technical and generalist skills has been challenged. A study carried out in Canada (Ingles et al., 2005) identified several ways in which the library industry has changed over the past five years. During this time, there has been a paradoxical increase in demand for both librarians who possess generalist skills and those who can act as specialists in a particular field. This is a change from the historical situation where library staff would remain in the one role for the whole of their careers. There have also been changes in the types of roles undertaken by librarians – mid-career and senior librarians are performing management and leadership roles more often than they were five years ago. This trend is forecast to continue over the next five years. The survey results also indicated that recent library school graduates believed that there should be an increased emphasis on management and leadership skills in the library school curriculum. There may also be a further opportunity for professional development activities targeted at new graduates, as many library professionals believed that there is insufficient training at the organisational level in these skills. The fact that professional librarians have had to change roles has had an impact on other members of the library workforce. Over the past five years there has been an increasing need for paraprofessional staff to carry out duties that were once the domain of professional librarians.

The technology we use to do our job has changed. According to library administrators in Canada, the introduction of new information technology has been the largest contributor to the changing role of librarians (Ingles et al., 2005). Changes in information technology have led to changed information behaviour and expectations of clients. In the past, helping people find information often meant explaining to them how the classification system worked. What hasn't changed is that people still want us to explain the system to them, but the system itself, increasingly Internet-based, has become vastly more complicated, and we didn't create it.

Our clients have changed. The world they live and work in has changed, so their information needs have changed. Put simply, they want information that is good enough, as quickly as possible - it no longer seems attractive to wait a week for information that is a little bit better than that which is readily available. We need to adapt to their needs. What our clients want from us has changed. Our clients turn to us for different reasons now. Clients can access information wherever they are, so they don't have the idea of "I need to go to the library to find that". The library no longer holds the information, but we do hold the expertise. We are now enablers rather than gatekeepers. Our role in the information market has changed (De Rosa, 2005).

The workforce has changed. The Australian library workforce may not be structured to adapt to these changes. Analysing the results of the national population census from 2006, it was found that, "Librarians are markedly older than the average for Australian occupations. 65% are 45 or older, compared to 36% in the total workforce, 88% are 35 or more [58%]. Only 12% are under 35 [42%]." (ALIA, 2008) Additionally, librarians have a high proportion of part-time workers, 33% of employees are part-time (ALIA, 2008). Over the past decade, the number of employees in the sector has remained constant, but the number of Library Technicians has increased, indicating growth at the paraprofessional level, but not the professional level. Will the Australian library workforce have the number of employees it needs, at the right stages of their career, to meet these changing client needs? The skills that the library workforce is required to possess have also changed. Employers are no longer looking for recent graduates who only have knowledge of their academic field – new professionals must also demonstrate their personal skills, for example, communication skills and interpersonal skills (Goulding, Bromham, Hannabuss, & Cramer, 1999).

The speed at which we progress in our career has changed. The demographics of the library profession have changed – in Canada a recent study found that approximately 50 per cent of the profession have been working in libraries for over 16 years (Ingles et al., 2005). This means that, on average, we as a profession are getting older. It also means that, proportionally, we have fewer young people entering the profession. Assuming that the retirement rates won't change significantly, these younger people entering may just get their wish of a faster rise to senior positions. But if all our training is based around a slow progression to management, and new professionals now are entering management roles much sooner, are they being adequately prepared? Do we need access to different types of education and training?

There is a common thread in all the above - it's change itself, at a pace perhaps more rapid than the past. We know from our workplaces that the ability to deal with change is a vital skill. Does our profession have that ability? Do we have the flexibility, confidence and creativity needed to change? Or are we trying to use old methods to solve new problems? The rate of change in our profession has accelerated.

These changes occurred more rapidly mostly in the last ten years. We expect them to be similar for the next ten. However the rapid rate of change in information communication and use suggests that it would not be wise to guess beyond that. This is characteristic of our times. The conclusion we draw from this is that not only are new professionals themselves different from their predecessors, but the environment in which our profession operates is also different from that of twenty years ago. Cook identifies the skills and qualities required to thrive in the current library context far apart from technical ones - dynamism, an action orientation, people skills, risk taking, political smarts, leadership and tolerance for change (Cook as cited in Lunau, 2007).

10. The future of the New Librarians' Symposium

With the changes occurring to our profession and the workforce, what is the future of the New Librarians' Symposium? The most recent New Librarians' Symposium, NLS4, was held in Melbourne in December 2008. This was the first NLS to be run with a professional conference organiser, and to be run with stated expectations from the Association of a budget surplus. These two factors put pressure on the committee, and the outcomes of the event will be closely studied by future organisers.

Over the next six months the future of NLS will be reviewed. This is due to a number of factors:

- 1) Increased budgetary pressures coming from ALIA
- 2) Administrative pressures coming from ALIA, including considerations of whether integrating NLS into another existing conference will introduce economies of scale
- 3) NLS scheduled for 2010 has been cancelled due to the IFLA conference being held in Brisbane that year.

This last factor has the biggest impact. A four year gap between events would have significant impact on the NLS brand, yet this does allow time and flexibility to question whether NLS is still the best way to be reaching new professionals. With a new cohort of new graduates every year entering the profession, the need to support each of them remains, but there may be alternative models of participation more suited to new graduates with diverse needs, limited time and funds. The next six months are the time to be asking ourselves whether NLS has gotten too big, too formal or too structured, and whether more innovative or unconventional forms of professional development should be explored. This will include ideas around the unconference model of participation ("Unconference"), using technology and social networking to develop professional skills and networks, and asking whether a large, biennial event is really the best way to reach a group whose immediate concerns are shorter-term career commitments.

11. The challenges of designing events for new graduates and new professionals

It is a major challenge to design an event that caters successfully to the diversity of new librarians and information professionals. Each delegate has different motivations and career goals. It is difficult to include all in the structure of the event without creating a programme that is completely chaotic, hopping from topic to topic. Alternately, a programme that is too generic will satisfy no one. Can NLS be all things to all new professionals?

A major consideration is the target audience for NLS. Would a tighter definition of new graduate or new professionals make designing and promoting the event easier? NLS is promoted to graduates who have been in the profession for up to 10 years. In most industries, this is a very long time. In the case of librarianship, this is reasonable given the delegate profile – there are few young librarians (under 35), and many take several years to land their first managerial or supervisory position. But this leads to great variation amongst the population, and we have found in practice that new professionals don't consider themselves new graduates any more after 3-4 years. Would a tighter definition around

the term, and therefore more focused targeting of new graduate activities and services help? According to the Nexus Survey results (Hallam, 2008),

"20% of all professional and paraprofessional respondents identified themselves as new graduates, ie they had gained their qualifications in LIS in the last five years. This figure was consistent across the national and state cohorts, as well as across sectors."

Other studies provide a profile of three career stages in LIS – recent entrants (five years or less), mid career (6-15 years experience), and senior (16 or more years experience) (Ingles et al., 2005).

In addition to considering when they entered the profession, it is important to remember that new graduates are not always young (Hallam, 2008),

"The situation of a career change means that 'new entrants' into the profession are not necessarily 'young'. In fact, the neXus survey data revealed that around 40% of new graduates (ie those who have qualified in the last 5 years) are making a career change, with a high proportion of respondents being aged over 40 years old."

Putting aside generalisations about generations, individuals have their own expectations for their career trajectory. The motivation of individuals across generations and levels of experience in their career planning may or may not be the same. These demographics also exclude students, who are a small but important part of the NLS delegate profile. It is not necessarily the case that career motivation will be the same amongst these groups, therefore it is difficult to plan for an event that will appeal to these.

12. Financial imperatives and sustainability

Events and professional development for new graduates and professionals need to be sufficiently different to other events to be attractive and distinctive, but at the same time they must be familiar enough to funding bodies (such as employers and corporate sponsors) to be supported financially.

These events can only be viable with the right combination of sponsors, association backing, employer support and the interest of new graduates and professionals themselves. This is a delicate balance, and a change in any of these factors can impact the future of such an event. There are some alternative models of organising events evolving, such as unconferences and library camps (for example, Beyond the Hype 2008: Web 2.0 in Brisbane), but these tend not to be run on a national scale and attract smaller audiences. Often, the events are underwritten by a library system. Is there some way of rethinking the NLS model?

We found with NLS2006 that there were a range of ways in which delegates were funded. Some self-fund entirely, others receive some support from employers, and 47% had all their attendance costs paid by their employer. In Australia, a shared-costs arrangement is more attractive because it can be counted as a deductible work expense at tax time. In other countries however, paying your own way is often dissuaded because such costs cannot be deducted, or negate other benefits. This is the case in the US and the UK. Costs to attend a conference can quickly add up, and this makes it even more imperative for a potential delegate to be able to identify what the benefits of attending will be if they do not have employer support.

There is tension between the twin goals of these events - they should be inclusive to encourage new professionals to become more involved in the association and to pursue further development, however the event can not lose money. Conferences are for most associations a major source of income and subsidise other activities. Can events for new professionals achieve this? Should they?

How big a role should financial imperatives play in determining whether an event will go ahead? While not suggesting that events be run at a loss, whether deliberately or by accident, the role of surpluses for a single event should perhaps be weighed against future conference attendance and membership

retention. NLS has a very high delegate turnover; there is a very small number of delegates who have attended all that have been held so far. Associations are going through change, not just in our industry but in all industries. Members want more than a magazine from their association - they want status, recognition of qualifications, and other services. They want a responsive organisation which is transparent and accountable in its activities. Membership retention is an issue amongst all categories of members, but even greater amongst new graduates who may not have a lot of employer support. They are at high risk for not renewing their membership. It's a cliché, but new members are the future. NLS is one of many ways to support these new members.

Although there are not yet any membership statistics available from associations, we hypothesise that supporting new graduates with professional development events encourages them to join their relevant association, remain members, and contribute to associations in the long term. In turn, these events socialise new graduates into the profession, provide access to leadership and other essential professional development skills, and provide a supportive network to help retention in the profession. In 1998 ALIA commissioned a report which found that (Wakely as cited in Blanchard, 2003),

“While the ageing issue was not a major problem at the time, the Association needed to continue to be active in recruiting and encouraging new and young members to maintain the viability of the Association”

We encourage associations to enable the collecting of statistics that can track involvement and participation over the long term to develop a profile of the outcome of investing in new graduate initiatives.

13. Conclusion

There are many challenges facing new professionals – a changing workforce, changing client needs, and growing expectations as more experienced professionals retire. The New Librarians' Symposium aims to build networks of new professionals in a supportive environment, develop skills and awareness of issues in the profession, and involve them in the association. We hope that this in turn will lead to new ideas and perspectives being disseminated into the wider profession. While the model of targeted new librarian professional development has not yet been demonstrated to be a strong revenue earner for associations there may be other less tangible but no less valuable benefits.

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