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This month's issue of *inCite* explores some of the issues associated with education for the library and information profession. I currently chair the Association's Education Reference Group (ERG), which has been primarily responsible for the review of the education policy statements and the management of the course recognition process.

Each year, all ALIA-recognised courses prepare an annual course return (ACR). These provide valuable information on developments in education programs and student numbers, as well as the changes to and achievements of academic staff. There is an opportunity to comment on issues affecting LIS education. The ACRs have been a good source of information on the changes affecting the education of new information professionals.

While library education covers both higher education (librarians) and vocational education (library technicians), the paper I am presenting at A-LIEP in Singapore in April focuses on the issues and challenges facing university-level LIS education. LIS programs are offered at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The data collected in the 2005 ACR indicate that there are about 1550 students enrolled in the graduate and 950 in the undergraduate programs. The number of students enrolling in graduate courses peaked in 1997 (1917 students), reflecting the fact that students were 'getting in fast' before the introduction of full fees for graduate courses. Enrolment figures inevitably dropped for the following couple of years, but have stabilised since about 2000, around the 1500 mark. The distribution of full-time and part-time students means that there are about 500 new graduates each year.

Numbers of enrolled undergraduate students dropped almost 54 per cent from the 1997 high of 1745 students to the 2005 figure of 811, with a significant drop in the past 3 years. The number of graduates is now about 25 per cent of enrolments, reflecting the longer period of an undergraduate course (3 years full-time, 6 years part-time) as well as the higher drop-out rate from undergraduate programs. In the past year, therefore, there were about 700 newly qualified LIS professionals, some of whom (especially the part-time undergraduate cohort) may already be employed in the sector.

These figures indicate that proportionally fewer students are interested in undergraduate qualifications, (47 per cent in 1997, 34 per cent in 2005). Several un-

dergraduate programs have closed during this period. There is evidence of 'credential creep', with increasing interest in a coursework Masters, rather than a Graduate Diploma. Students and employers are beginning to expect a Masters degree as the standard entry level. There are sound reasons for this, with on-going concerns about the preparation of graduates for the workplace in a 12-month course.

Student fees are a critical issue. Undergraduate programs are subsidised by the federal government, but the full-fee arrangements for graduate programs means that students pay between \$12 000 and \$24 000 for their LIS qualification. It is important to monitor student enrolment patterns. As the current LIS workforce moves towards retirement, and demographic predictions signal far fewer young people entering the employment market, will the LIS sector attract the brightest and best candidates to its ranks?

The number of academic staff members in the LIS discipline has declined with student numbers. Over the period 1996–2005, the number of educators has decreased by 50 per cent, from 130 people to 64. The educators who remain are 'greying', which raises serious issues in terms of the currency and relevance of the curriculum in a field as dynamic as LIS. There is anecdotal evidence that LIS departments are finding it very difficult to attract new staff. Credential creep is an issue: a PhD is now one of the essential criteria for an academic career. In 2002–2003, only 1.3 per cent of the personal membership of ALIA held the title 'Dr'.

There are few incentives now to become an educator. Twenty years ago, talented and motivated library professionals were able to move comfortably between academia and industry, which served to invigorate practice and to enrich the learning environment. However, there have been significant changes in the field of tertiary education that limit exchange opportunities. Without succession planning, LIS departments will be increasingly vulnerable.

LIS education should be viewed as a collaborative, career-long learning process that involves the individual, universities and training providers, employers and the professional association. Personally and professionally, I do not believe that it should be the sole responsibility of the LIS educator. The greatest challenge for the future is how all stakeholders can work together to encourage and facilitate the development of a well-skilled workforce that can respond to the rapidly changing LIS sector. Paul Genoni's words need to be restated: 'Without education, we don't have a profession. Without the profession, there is no need for educators.' ■

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