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The Secretary,
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
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CANBERRA ACT 2600

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The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector and represents 5 000 individual members, 1 000 institutional members and the interests of 10.7 million library users. Our course recognition program, through which the Association sets and maintains standards for entry level qualifications in VET and higher education to the library and information profession in Australia, provides individuals and employers in the sector with the benchmark for qualifications for the employment of professional librarians and library technicians.

ALIA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's *Inquiry into Overseas skills recognition, upgrading and licensing*. Our response focuses on the communication of processes to users and awareness and acceptance of recognised overseas qualifications by Australian employers, particularly as these relate to the recognition of librarian and library technician qualifications.

ALIA recommends that information about recognition of overseas skills, particularly in relation to professional skills recognition, be consolidated so that, in whatever form it is published, it clearly indicates all the processes that may be involved and also that these may differ according to the profession or occupation for which recognition is sought. This may be achieved by developing a categorised listing of professions and occupations grouped according to the processes that must be worked through in order to achieve recognition. The list can be made available in various published formats to prospective migrants.

ALIA further recommends that, where a particular profession has reciprocal arrangements for the recognition of professional qualifications with one or more countries, this information be provided, in print and/or electronic format, to employers who are seeking skilled employees through the employer nominated migration program.

Communication of processes to users

Applicants wishing to migrate to Australia in the general skilled migration program are not always aware that there may be more than one step in the process of obtaining recognition of overseas professional qualifications. Further, they may not be aware that in some professions, a qualification recognised in their own country at professional level may be assessed as equivalent to an Australian paraprofessional, rather than professional, qualification and that this may impact on their ability to find work at the level they expect.

As a professional association, ALIA is proactive in its efforts to ensure that migrants are aware of the need to gain recognition of their library and information qualifications in order to work in the profession in Australia. Information available through our website outlines the processes an individual will need to work through to gain recognition of overseas qualifications. Where the Association has in place reciprocal recognition arrangements with other library associations, these are also noted. Further the Association also provides this information to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs and to Australian Education International

for inclusion in the documentation each produces to advise migrants how they may gain recognition of professional qualifications.

While the Association can speak only from the perspective of librarian and library technician qualifications, its experience from enquiries which it regularly receives indicates that, in spite of information being available from a number of sources, confusion about the process for recognising qualifications exists amongst migrants. This is especially so when part of the recognition process is conducted subsequent to their acceptance as migrants and their later arrival in Australia.

The library and information profession offers an example of how such confusion may arise. Under the general skilled migration categories for the purposes of migration to Australia as a librarian, Vocational Education and Training Assessment Services (VETASSESS) is the body responsible for assessing overseas qualifications. Documentation available on the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs' website and in its printed publications clearly indicates that this is the process. However, a check of the information about recognition of professional qualifications available from Australian Education International notes that both VETASSESS and ALIA are involved in the process.

For those wishing to work in Australia as librarians, the VETASSESS process seeks to determine the level of an overseas qualification against Australian qualifications. To be considered for work as a librarian in Australia, a prospective migrant must hold, as a minimum, a qualification equivalent to an Australian Bachelor degree. However, in completing its assessment of the level of an overseas qualification, VETASSESS does not take into account the curriculum content of the degree or other qualification.

On the other hand, ALIA has responsibility for assessing the professional library and information studies curriculum content of a course to determine how it compares with that offered in an equivalent Australian course. It is this second assessment which ALIA undertakes once the individual has arrived in the country that determines the readiness of an overseas applicant to work in the Australian library and information environment.

The Association regularly finds that applicants who have completed the VETASSESS step in the recognition process are unaware that it is also necessary to work with ALIA in order to demonstrate the equivalence of their professional skills and knowledge to those gained through an ALIA recognised course offered in Australia. As a result some then go on to seek library and information service positions without reference to ALIA, only to learn through prospective employers they are ineligible until such time as their qualifications are recognised by the Association. This service involves only a moderate cost but in some cases results in ill-will towards the Association which is interpreted as putting obstacles in the way of employment when VETASSESS has previously deemed the qualification suitable for employment as a librarian.

Similar difficulties are also encountered when VETASSESS recognises an overseas degree level qualification at a level equivalent to AQF Level 5 (diploma) qualification yet still indicates that the qualification suits an individual for employment as a librarian. Where VETASSESS recognises a qualification at this level, any ALIA recognition that could follow would be at the paraprofessional or library technician level.

The scope of the term "library technician" as used by the Australian library and information profession is unique to Australia and in many cases is not fully understood by newly arrived migrants who often interpret it as meaning a technical assistant rather than a highly skilled library

and information worker whose work retains an important operational focus rather than great involvement on the policy and managerial aspects of running a library and information service. Since migrants are, in many cases, often not aware of the role of the library technician, this again can lead to feelings of ill-will towards both VETASSESS and the Association.

As noted above the Association can only comment in relation to the library and information profession. However, it is likely that other professions where the same assessment process applies would note similar confusion and problems.

To avoid such confusion and to assist migrants to better understand what processes are involved in gaining recognition of their particular qualifications (the Association recognises that different assessment processes apply across the different professions), the Association recommends that information be consolidated and published in a format, for example a question and answer format, which encourages an applicant to work through and hence understand more fully what is involved in the total process. In a web environment this may be achieved by developing a series of FAQs relating specifically to the recognition process and cross-referenced with links to where further information is available, for example, the particular professional association.

Awareness and acceptance of recognised overseas qualifications by Australian employers.

A number of professional associations in Australia have developed reciprocal arrangements for mutual recognition of qualifications. For example, under reciprocal arrangements with the United Kingdom's Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and the American Library Association (ALA), the Association recognises qualifications accredited at professional librarian level by these two organisations for work in Australia.

Such arrangements, needless to say, expedite the process of recognition which can be very useful for employers seeking to attract skilled migrants through the Employer Nominated Migration program. However, and again this is the Association's experience in handling employer queries on the subject of overseas library and information qualifications, it seems that often employers may not be aware that there are reciprocal recognition arrangements in place for a number of professions.

The Association believes that this issue may be addressed by the development of appropriate material for employers seeking to attract employees through the Employer Nominated program which clearly states that reciprocal recognition arrangements exist for certain professions. Such information can be supplemented by referring employers to the appropriate professional association for more detailed advice.

Yours sincerely

Jennefer Nicholson
Executive Director