

A CAREER AS A LIBRARIAN AND INFORMATION PROFESSIONAL

By the Library and Information Association of South Africa

What is librarianship?

It is a challenging and dynamic career, which is concerned with information and the management thereof. It includes the collection, organisation and distribution of all kinds of materials and in different formats for education, information, cultural development and recreation. It is also the provision of specific information services to different communities and/or specialist groups. It offers an exciting diversity of career opportunities ranging from the applications of sophisticated computers and telecommunications to using traditional methods of research and the gathering of information to advance the social and economic development of society.

What does a library and information professional do?

Within the library and information service three major functions are carried out:

- Selection and acquisition of information sources relevant to the needs of the user community.
- Organisation and management of the information sources and facilities so that the collections are accessible to the users.
- Distribution of information to the users.

Where do the opportunities lie?

- In public libraries, which aim to meet the educational, recreational and information needs of local communities.
- In school media centres, which provide for the pupils' information needs as well as materials for the teachers.
- In university, university of technology and college libraries, which meet the study needs of students as well as the teaching and research needs of the academic staff.
- In special libraries and information services, which provide an in-depth and personal service to specialist groups of users within research or financial institutions, industry, professional practices or cultural bodies
- In national libraries, which are responsible for building, preserving and making accessible a complete collection of material published in and relating to a specific country
- In allied fields where library training and skills are relevant, such as freelancing and lecturing.

What sort of personal qualities are required?

Prospective librarians and information workers should want to render a service and must believe that people are important and interesting, and recognise the importance of information retrieval and dissemination. Wide-ranging interests and a good general knowledge are desirable. In certain aspects of library and information work, specific aptitudes are beneficial, like an inquiring frame of mind, close attention to detail or organisational ability.

Training

Professional training requires a four year university degree in Librarianship and Information Science (B Bibl; B Inf.); or a three-year general university degree followed by a one-year post-graduate diploma in Librarianship and Information Science (AUDIS). Alternatively a four-year technikon degree in Library and Information Studies (B Tech), consisting of the three year National Diploma in Library and Information Studies plus one additional year of study, may be followed.

The B Bibl, B Inf. and AUDIS allow further study towards honours, masters and doctorate degrees in Librarianship and Information Science. With a B Tech degree, a student can at present study further towards masters and doctoral degrees in Library and Information Studies. Entrance requirements to university studies are determined by the university concerned.

Paraprofessional training is an alternative choice to the more academically orientated university course, i.e. a three-year National Diploma in Library and Information Studies at a university of technology. The entrance requirement is a senior certificate or equivalent qualification. Paraprofessionals are responsible for carrying out tasks of a technical nature in large libraries or even running smaller libraries.

Support staff or library assistants without formal training fill non-professional positions. They perform important routine and support tasks in library and information services. The educational requirement is generally a senior certificate. In-house training is provided by the library.

Professional and paraprofessional qualifications can be obtained through part-time or distance education.

Membership to the professional association, LIASA, is advised for updating skills, upholding professionalism and maintaining professional contacts.

For further information contact:

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