



Library and Information Association of New Zealand
Te Rau Herenga O Aotearoa

New Zealand-based cataloguing paper: a summary of thoughts from the New Zealand Cataloguing Community

October 2025

Background

In 2023, on learning that Open Polytechnic was no longer offering a cataloguing paper as part of its Library and Information Studies courses, LIANZA President at the time Richard Misilei, wrote expressing concern about this omission.

LIANZA Cataloguing Special Interest Group (CatSIG) also expressed concern about the impact this would have on the cataloguing community in New Zealand.

In 2025 CatSIG held a series of discussions covering issues in the New Zealand cataloguing community. A major topic of concern for CatSIG members was professional development and study opportunities in New Zealand. The CatSIG committee organised a survey on this topic, which ran over September/October 2025 and yielded 208 responses.

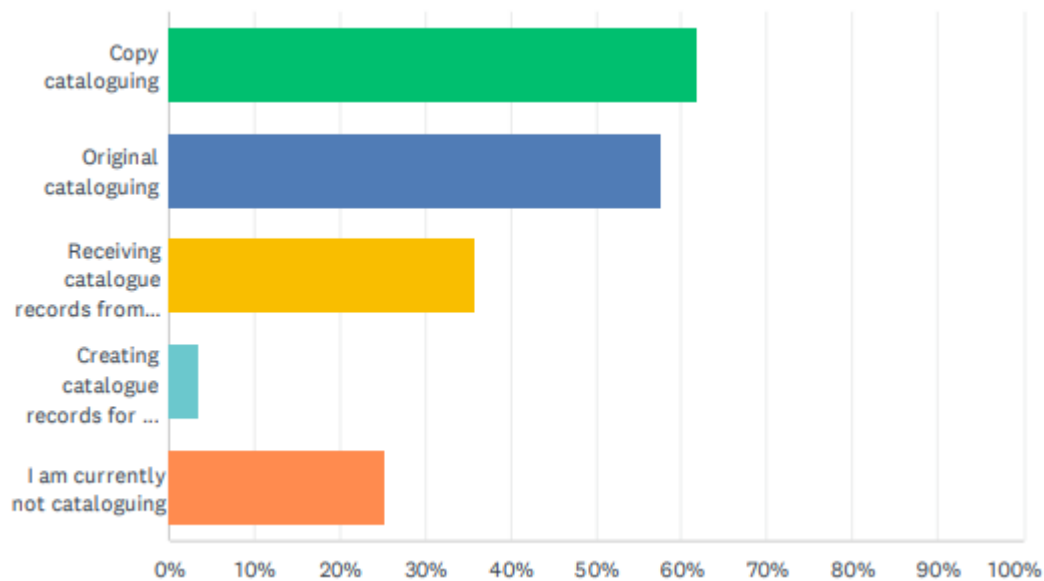
The compiled survey results and discussion themes indicate a strong desire for the reinstatement of a New Zealand based academic cataloguing paper.

Survey respondents

Respondents were from a range of institution types, including public, school, academic and special libraries, cataloguers working in teams as well as sole practitioners. We also had responses from other GLAMR sub-sectors, and from people involved in other types of metadata work.

Of the 208 survey respondents, 22% identified themselves as managers, while 21% stated that most of their job is cataloguing and 37% reported that a portion of their job is cataloguing, the remainder recording an interest in cataloguing.

With regard to metadata creation, 57% of respondents indicated they created original catalogue records, and 62% of respondents said they did copy cataloguing. 36% received catalogue records from an external vendor and 3% created catalogue records for a vendor.



Community discussion and survey themes

CatSIG discussions in 2025 and the survey both highlighted several issues that are concerning the cataloguing community in New Zealand. These include the impact the removal of the Open Polytech cataloguing paper has had on professional development and training; the need to “future proof” the profession by offering study opportunities for younger cataloguers; the need for course content that focuses on the New Zealand context and Te ao Māori; and library staff in cataloguing-adjacent roles benefitting from learning more about cataloguing and metadata.

The impact of the removal of the Open Polytechnic cataloguing paper

There were positive comments about the Open Polytechnic cataloguing paper, with respondents praising the practical nature of the course and the New Zealand focus. “The people I know that completed the Open Polytech paper have a depth and breadth of understanding that inform their work,” was one response. “It is by far the most practical and useful library paper I have ever done,” said another.

The removal of the Open Polytechnic paper in 2023 has caused frustration for many survey respondents. Additionally, several qualified cataloguers commented that they would have suggested the course to less experienced colleagues if that were an option. A couple of respondents commented that they had intended to take the paper as part of their qualification but had not reached that stage of their studies in time. “I was extremely disappointed when the cataloguing paper was removed as that was part of my chosen career path once I had completed my Diploma,” wrote one.

There were comments about the difficulty in finding alternative options in New Zealand and overseas. Respondents who had taken overseas-based papers acknowledged the lack of local relevance. “This course, while helpful, excludes current practices in NZ as a whole, particularly around Te Reo subject headings,” one respondent commented.

A New Zealand based cataloguing paper

Survey respondents were almost overwhelmingly emphatic that New Zealand needs a New Zealand-based cataloguing paper. Respondents who had completed overseas courses commented on the lack of Ngā Upoko Tukutuku training as being the most obvious gap in their study. While Ngā Upoko Tukutuku was raised in many responses, there were more things to consider.

“I think an Aotearoa-based cataloguing paper would be a wonderful chance for promoting Ngā Upoko Tukutuku to cataloguers and could give focus to mātauranga Māori and the significance of data sovereignty and could discuss any issues surrounding international systems and their oversight of Māori classifications etc.,” was one comment that summarises the importance of understanding the cultural context in which you are cataloguing.

Future-proofing cataloguing in New Zealand and concern about the standard of metadata

“We are at risk of not having cataloguers for the future...” one survey respondent wrote, a sentiment echoed by many. CatSIG discussions and survey comments focused on the perfect storm of many cataloguers nearing the end of their career while technological advances have led to increasing use of automation in generating bibliographic metadata, with mixed results.

Many survey respondents stressed that good quality metadata is needed to get good quality results. As one put it, “You can't retrieve on slop.” Quality training opportunities and professional development pathways are still needed for people new to the profession to ensure there are cataloguers in the future who have the skills and knowledge to manipulate metadata in an increasing variety of ways. “We will lose a lot of

knowledge capital if we do not continue with cataloguing expertise,” wrote one respondent.

Vendor relationships and maintaining good quality metadata

Cataloguers in New Zealand report that an increasing amount of cataloguing is being outsourced, as cataloguing teams shrink in size in-house. While this creates efficiencies and can be a solution particularly for small institutions, the concern is that this can limit opportunities for new cataloguers to learn their craft and gain experience. This combined with the lack of professional development opportunities in New Zealand is a concern for the cataloguing community.

While outsourcing reduces the quantity of cataloguing done in-house it does not reduce the need for cataloguing expertise to be retained in-house. Vendors rely on libraries to communicate their cataloguing requirements. Content standard requirements are provided by the library to the vendor, so libraries still need to retain a good level of cataloguing knowledge for this relationship to work well. For example, this dynamic will be tested in the next couple of years when Official RDA is implemented internationally. As libraries adopt Official RDA, description decisions will need to be communicated with vendors.

Library staff who receive catalogue records from vendors report there is still the need to perform quality checks and to control headings, for example: “Blindly loading purchased records is not producing effective tools for our users.”

Through staffing ebbs and flows, vendor cataloguers benefit from academic study in the same way that library-based cataloguers do: it is one pool of knowledge and experience.

Cataloguing study enhances knowledge in other areas of library work

The survey respondents not currently employed as cataloguers reported that study had enhanced their understanding of the information universe: “...having a sound theoretical knowledge of cataloguing benefits all information professionals even those not actively cataloguing as part of their roles.” There was some agreement that people in managerial, decision-making positions could benefit from study, as this would, “ensure managers can make decisions that do not have unseen negative impacts down the road.”

How academic study complements on-the-job training

All cataloguers reported an element of “on the job” training in their learning: this is necessary as all institutions have local practices, for example.

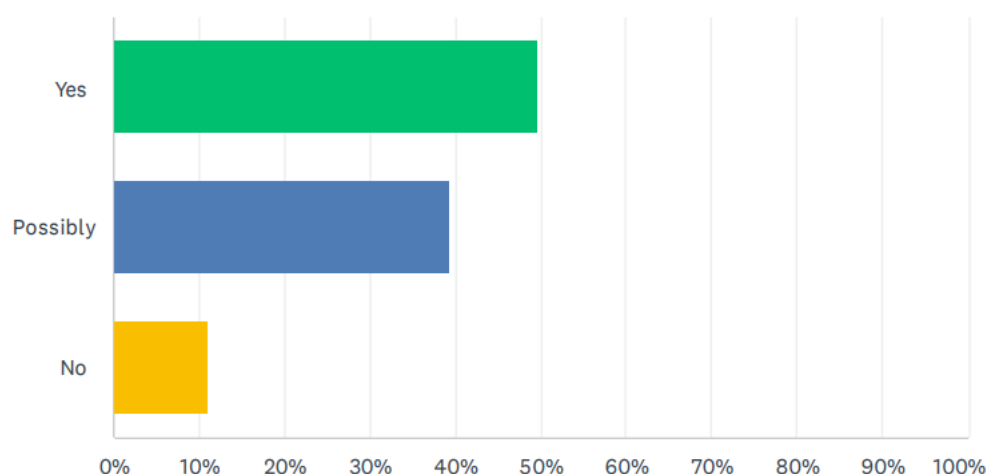
It is important not to rely exclusively on this method of training. For example, a learner may struggle to recognise what is local practice versus what is universal / internationally orthodox. An academic paper teaches universal practice rather than institution-based practice. This grounding gives a cataloguer the opportunity to reflect on and analyse local practice, and adjust this as and when necessary, rather than continuing to do things the local way because this is “how it’s done here”.

There is a symbiotic relationship between academic study and on-the-job training: both are required to produce a good cataloguer. As one person noted, “As well as the ‘how’ of cataloguing, academic study helps students understand the ‘why’ - this is the only way we will be able to adapt and innovate.”

Some respondents noted that increasing reliance on on-the-job training in the absence of academic opportunities puts extra pressure on experienced cataloguers in teams. This puts sole-practitioner institutions in a precarious position as well: training a cataloguer from scratch to replace someone moving on takes a lot of time and risks a dip in metadata quality which ultimately affects the experience of the catalogue users.

What is the appetite for a New Zealand-based cataloguing paper, and what are the barriers?

As our survey indicates, there is a need and demand for a cataloguing paper in New Zealand. In answer to the question, “Would you or your staff like to undertake a New Zealand-based cataloguing paper if there was one?”, 89% of respondents chose “yes” or “possibly”.



Survey respondents who said they would not be interested tended to be people who had already completed qualifications, although some with cataloguing qualifications suggested they were interested in “refreshing” their knowledge and skills, for example in

understanding Official RDA and other developments. Emphasis was placed on “practicality” while providing a good theoretical foundation was also important.

Time, cost and support from employers were important considerations, with many suggesting the course would need to be at a suitable time of year: a course being offered over summer appears to be a potential barrier.

Some suggested that having a cataloguing paper as a standalone “micro credential” would be ideal, with too many prerequisites also being a potential barrier. One respondent also commented on the question of whether they would be interested, “Depends on what level the paper is offered at – when it was last available it was Level 6 – could it be dropped to Level 5?”

Conclusion

The New Zealand cataloguing community has felt the effect of the lack of a practical New Zealand-based cataloguing paper over the last couple of years. There is concern about succession planning, and the need for experienced cataloguers into the future with the knowledge and expertise to navigate the world of bibliographic metadata and provide a quality experience for end-users.