

# From the lucky country to the capable clever country

**Anne Hazell, Board of Education Chair, explains the policy developments that may revolutionise our profession**

**O**VER THE LAST few years the Federal Government has introduced significant changes in policy direction in employment, education and training. A new vocabulary has emerged, with the terms structural efficiency, award restructuring, job redesign, skills audit, credit transfer and competency standards, now heard from governments, employers, unions, educators, workers and students throughout the country.

We are urged by government to implement these policies to become a capable and clever country. The directions ALIA has taken in the past now place us in a strategic position to participate in the implementation of the Government's new policies for the benefit of our members and our profession. Through our own prior initiatives, such as Worklevel Guidelines, Standards, course accreditation, training and development, we are better positioned than many professions to be players in the new game.

## Occupational analysis

At the beginning of the process is the occupational analysis, or analysis of workplace needs, which is about to be undertaken by the Association in conjunction with the Department of Employment, Education and Training.

By taking a proactive role in this area, ALIA has ensured that the workplace needs of its members will be fully taken into account. The outcome will be competency standards for the library and information science industry. These will take the place of the Association's existing *Work level guidelines*, which are based on tasks rather than the competencies required to complete the tasks. A database of competencies will be developed in the process of the analysis.

## Competency standards

Competency standards will include a statement of criteria for judging achievement of the competency for core, as well as professional, organisational and job specific competencies. At the February 1992 meeting, the Board of Education accepted guidance from its subcommittees, which cover between them formal and continuing education, that the Association should seek recognition as the competency standards body for the library and information industry. To be formally recognised by the National Training Board, the Association will be required to:

- have expertise, or have access to expertise recognised by the NTB, in competency standards development
- be identified and accepted within the industry as being representative of an occupation, industry or industry subsector
- have the clear support of the industrial parties within an occupation, industry or industry subsector.

## Training and development programs

Once competency standards for the industry are defined,

individuals will be assessed against these standards and receive certification indicating their competence. Accredited training and development (T & D) programs will be provided to assist employees to reach an appropriate standard of competence. Under the terms of the Training Guarantee Act, most employers must devote 1% of their payroll to such training programs (to be increased to 1.5% from July 1, 1992) or pay the equivalent in taxation to the government.

The Board of Education began with its T & D package development more than two years ago. In March 1992 the first package, *Automating a small library*, will be launched, along with the assessment module for *Stopping the rot* and *Preserving our heritage*, the Association's publications on conservation. Each package is accompanied by an assessment module to be completed by anyone wishing to demonstrate that they have reached a certain level of skill in that subject. To facilitate the spread of information around Australia about T & D in library and information services topics, the T & D Subcommittee of the Board has developed a database of activities and providers which will also be launched in March. More information on these new services is given in Carol Kenchington's *Train Line* in this issue.

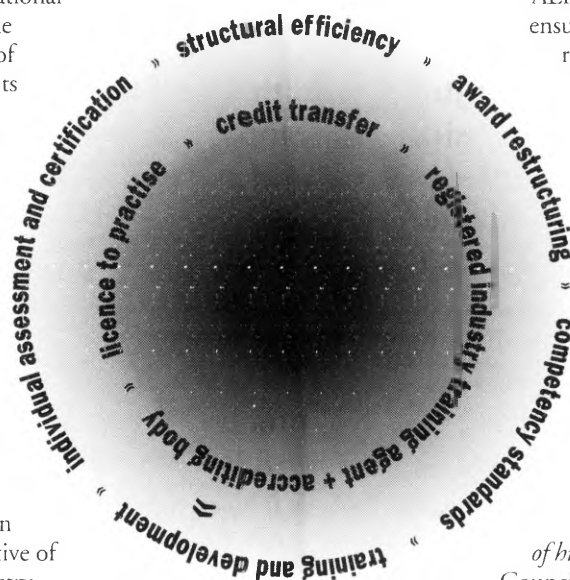
## Credit transfer

Recognition of prior learning which may have occurred in a variety of situations is an essential element of the assessment of skills development. During 1991 a pilot credit transfer project was carried out in Adelaide as a precursor to the national project based in Canberra in 1992. The Chair of the Board of Education, who was a member of the South Australian library reference group, has explored this issue with each of the schools of library and information studies that she has visited.

## Licence to practise

ALIA's course recognition procedures ensure that individuals graduating from recognised courses are granted eligibility for professional or library technician membership of the Association. Designing curriculum and assessment to meet competency standards is fully accepted in most TAFE colleges where library technician educators, along with other TAFE teachers, have been trained to meet this requirement. In relation to professional courses this issue is still exercising the minds of educators and of the Board of Education.

The recent document *The quality of higher education*, (Higher Education Council February 1992) includes various opinions on this issue. On one hand, the Higher Education Council (HEC) and the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) believe it is inappropriate to relate competencies to curriculum and outcomes in higher education. On the other hand, the Federated Australian University Staff Association (FAUSA) and the Union of



► Australian College Academics (UACA) agree that 'the concept of competency is central to the education and training reform process which is under way in Australia.' However we should note that the conflict between the HEC/AVCC view and the view of the UACA/FAUSA is that the unions believe the HEC has a basic misunderstanding of the 'Finn Report/Mayer Report' meaning of competency.

Whether or not the individual chooses to become a member of ALIA, most Australian employers accept eligibility for membership as evidence that the individual is able to function effectively in the library and information services industry. Once obtained, this 'licence to practise' does not require renewal through any demonstration of upgraded skills throughout the holder's working life. Clearly this situation is unacceptable under structural efficiency principles, of which demonstrated ongoing skills development is an integral part.

The Board of Education is investigating the issue of ongoing 'licence to practise'. The first phase of the project is being undertaken by the Education for Library and Information Services National Section who plan to put a proposal to the Board meeting in June 1992.

## Accrediting training

(a) For employers seeking to demonstrate that programs undertaken by their employees are eligible under the terms of the Training Guarantee Act, in 1991 ALIA has been accepted as a *Registered Industry Training Agent*. A brochure outlining the necessary procedures to be followed by employers is available from the National Office.

(b) An accreditation body is still required to accredit and provide industry input in course design. These bodies will be empowered by the Federal and State Governments.

Thus the complete process consists of the following elements:

- skills audit
- competency standards
- training and curriculum development
- accreditation (of training programs)
- training delivery
- assessment (of individuals in relation to competency standards)
- certification (formal recognition of the individual's competence)
- monitoring (or process)
- review

Structural efficiency principles are already altering the content of Australian industrial awards by linking skill development,

classification levels and rates of pay. The direct links between improved competency standards (and the infrastructure being developed to oversee this improvement) and the increased productivity on which 'the ability of Australia's economic structure to be internationally competitive is critically dependent' have yet to be proved. But no one can doubt that the governments on whom most library and information services personnel depend for our existence certainly believe those links exist.

National Training Board (NTB), Employment and Skills Formation Council (ESFC), 'Mayer' and 'Finn' may not have been part of our vocabulary in 1990, but no member of the library and information industry can fail to recognise the far-reaching educational changes which these initials and names now represent. The implications for the services we offer and the clients we serve are enormous. The ALIA believes that an efficient and effective library and information industry is an essential element if the lucky country is to become the capable and clever country. We have the opportunity to be major players in the game—we ignore it at our peril.

## Further reading

- *Employment-related key competencies for post compulsory education and training*. Discussion paper by the Mayer Committee. Australian Education Council and Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training. 1991.
- *National competency standards: policy and guidelines*. National Training Board. 1991.
- *National framework for the recognition of training*. Vocational Education Employment and Training Advisory Committee. November 1991.
- *Progress and prospects in improved skills recognition*. Commissioned Report No 10. National Board of Employment, Education and Training. AGPS 1991.
- *Skills training for the 21st century: a report on skills training, apprenticeships and traineeships*. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training. AGPS. December 1991.
- *TAFE in the 1990s: developing Australia's skills*. Discussion paper by the Employment and Skills Formation Council. AGPS. November 1991.
- *Young people's participation in post-compulsory education and training* ('Finn Report'). Report of the Australian Education Council Review Committee. AGPS. July 1991.

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