

Rethinking education and training



Colette McCool

Chair, ALIA
board of education

There is still an urgency for us as a profession to stimulate thinking and further discussion about the role of library and information service professionals, and the role of libraries in the management of knowledge.

Changing work practices, rapid developments in information technology, an increasingly skilled and demanding client group, and a changing economic environment mean that the role of the library and the information professional must change. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is already occurring incrementally — which is to be expected from a profession that is widely acknowledged as being responsive to its clients.

There is still an urgency for us as a profession to stimulate thinking and further discussion about the role of library and information service professionals, and the role of libraries in the management of knowledge. Throughout this debate, consideration must be given to defining the skills, knowledge and attributes which must underpin professional practice.

Currently the standard of professional practice is assured through policy statements on education and training issues (frequently reviewed to ensure currency and relevance), course recognition for entry level courses, and widened eligibility assessment. This work is undertaken on behalf of the Association by the ALIA Board of Education. The Board makes recommendations to members of General Council for their consideration, endorsement and implementation.

This issue of *inCite* initiates the formal debate about education and training needs for the information professional in the foreseeable future. Several of our colleagues have presented opinions on a range of associated issues to stimulate thought and begin the discussion.

Michael Middleton in his contribution 'Convergence or chimera?' suggests the future of information services may lie in the union of professions that manage the information supported by the converging technologies. He uses the image of the convergence concept as applied to technology to illustrate his point. Helen Martyn examines the needs of paraprofessionals who work in reference areas and argues that reference skills are more often 'picked up' on the job, than learned in formal study.

An extract from Marianne Broadbent's article 'The emerging phenomenon of knowledge management' is included in this issue (the article originally appeared in the February issue of the *Australian Library Journal*). The notion of knowledge management is discussed, steps in managing knowledge outlined and the relationship between knowledge work, libraries and librarians explored.

In 'On-line, on-disk or on paper?' Julie Dow considers how advances in technology

have contributed to improved modes of delivery for education and training courses. The major benefits of computer delivered education have been improved access and greater educational flexibility. She suggests that specialist continuing education may become available on a global scale. Students may be able to choose courses offered by international authorities in the field of their choice.

Three recent graduates Sharan Davison, Rebecca Lowe, and Jennifer Vaughan reflect on the relevance of their theoretical training to practice, and outline how they have acquired additional skills since completing their initial qualification. Felicity McGregor, University of Wollongong, shares with us the learning and staff development that occurred with the implementation of a Total Quality Management Program in the university library. Donna Reid emphasises the extent to which learning occurs outside educational institutions in her article, 'Assessing workplace training'. She alludes to the value of experiential learning and action learning. The challenge, Donna contends, is to recognise the role of such workplace learning experiences in an education curriculum.

The individual professional's responsibility in managing a program of continuing professional development so that learning, renewal and career development occur is stressed by Marion Nicolson in 'CPD as a career strategy or What does our profession need to learn?' Marion refers to experience in the United States where degrees and diplomas are considered to have a shelf-life of two years and it is estimated the average graduate will move jobs eight times in his or her working life — half the moves will be involuntary.

I am confident you will find the opinions expressed in this issue of *inCite* interesting. I hope you will be encouraged to take the opportunity to participate in debate about the future role of the library professional and the education and training requirements for the future. You can do this through letters to 'Your voice', through attending and participating in discussion at the Branch and Division level, and at conferences and workshops.

The formal debate will continue. You will be interested to know that the Board of Education, on behalf of the Association, is arranging a Forum for the strategic review of education and training for library and information service professionals in Canberra in October. Sixty participants will be invited to participate in the two-day event. You will be advised of outcomes in the November issue of *inCite*, and be invited to comment on them.

Do give these matters some thought and share your ideas with us. ■