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What does an accredited CPD program have to do with image?

Jennefer Nicholson, ALIA deputy executive director

Continuing professional development (CPD) is consistently identified by members as a priority for the Association. It has been embedded in our Objects since 1937; and, as recently as the work done by Lunn and McCallum for their report *Renewing services and spirit*, CPD was ranked as a major priority.

In 1997 the Association offered more than 250 CPD activities and the comparative rate is as high for this year. These activities are supported by a policy statement, and guiding products, such as the *ALIA framework for continuing professional development*.

This year the ALIA Board of Education is working to move the Association's CPD services in new directions. The most significant of these is an accredited CPD program for Associate and Technician members which will be implemented in 1999, and is expected to be fully-operating in 2000. Entry to the program will be voluntary, although there will be mandatory compliance requirements to be met to remain in the program. The program is being developed in consultation with ALIA general councillors, National Office staff, members and after extensive consultations over the past two years with other professional and industry bodies. A new category of membership, with post-nominal letters, will identify those who elect to participate and comply.

The program is based on members taking responsibility for their CPD, and allows them to weigh their activities against a points system for accreditation. Validation of compliance will be done through a signed statement on the membership renewal form. A member may be asked to submit documented evidence of compliance through a periodic audit.

A number of products are being produced to assist members with planning and undertaking CPD, and have application for both personal and institutional members. The *Career planning kit* will be launched at the ALIA Biennial Conference. The *Kit* replaces the more complex *ALIA framework for continuing professional development*, and aims to assist members to:

- analyse their CPD needs and encourage objective setting for their achievement;
- gain input to professional development from line managers, colleagues, men-

tors and training professionals; and

- build and maintain a comprehensive record of past and present knowledge, skills and experience.

The *Kit* will also serve as a record of CPD activity for those members participating in the CPD accredited program.

Other products include a revised policy statement to be endorsed by ALIA General Council at the November meeting, and guidelines to assist members in the selection and evaluation of CPD activities or providers.

What does an accredited CPD program have to do with image? Everything, according to all those professional and industry bodies the Association has consulted with. For registered professions there is often a legal requirement for practitioners to undertake either a prescribed program, or a points/number of hours system. For some, such as accountants and many of the health professions, it carries weight for professional practice insurance and in malpractice cases. For most, it is a way of generating income through CPD activities. For all, it is seen as a way of gaining the confidence of the general public by reassuring them that mechanisms are in place to enable their members to be committed and up-to-date practitioners.

ALIA's program will be of particular benefit to those ALIA members who work with colleagues from other professions with such programs. However, the program cannot ensure quality, or currency, of practice. Only the individual can take responsibility for these. It is an enabling mechanism, based on quantitative assessment, not performance assessment. Controlled tests conducted by some other professions, for example general practitioners, have been unable to isolate and measure the contribution of particular CPD activities to change or improvement in an individual's practice. What is evident though is that new knowledge gained through CPD is best applied when it is of immediate relevance to practice — the phrase 'use it or lose it' fits well.

It is not an accredited CPD program that makes the better practitioner — that is achieved through the commitment of the individual. It is though the responsibility of the professional body to support its members through services such as those being developed and implemented by ALIA. ■