

# Our staff development committee — we're still learning

Helen Reid, Box Hill Institute Library

At Box Hill Institute Library, we have set up a staff development committee. What's so exciting about that, you may ask? After all, most university, public libraries and other TAFE libraries have a similar committee in some form. Our committee has discussed many concerns and issues over the past year. Now, we would like to hear from others about their experiences; what you do; is anyone else working within departments that include areas other than libraries; what strategies do you use to provide fairness in allocating limited resources; and is getting staff to attend development an issue for your library?

Two years ago, the Library and Bookshop Centre was amalgamated with the Student Support Centre to form a new Centre. Initially staff saw themselves as three individual areas with little in common. One of the ways to reinforce commonality was to initiate cross-centre project teams. The staff development committee was proposed as the first team.

Representation was requested from

across the centre. This was not easy with the Centre covering diverse areas of the library, bookshop, counselling, careers, welfare, disability support, learning support and student activities. The committee is still lacking a representative from one major area of the Centre, as they felt that being part of this team was not relevant or important to them.

Last year, a system was introduced by which all staff development applications are submitted to the committee for approval. Requests are received on a standard form, requiring information on how the development relates to the staff member's position, the Centre's plan, the Institute strategic direction and what will be gained from the session. Requests are then judged on information given on the application, as well as how much development the staff member has already undertaken during the year, the current staff development budget, the amount of time required away from normal duties and how services will be covered in the staff member's absence.

Several issues have challenged the committee — not the least being issues of privacy, fairness, what activities are classed as staff development and how to encourage all staff members to undertake development.

Privacy is a vitally important issue. A member of the centre's management team expressed the concern that a group of their peers and subordinates was discussing and judging what staff development they required. This person queried how the committee could decide what was appropriate for them, especially in an area that they knew nothing about? It was acknowledged that there might be staff members undertaking personal development who would prefer that this was not publicly known or discussed. It was decided that such applications could be made directly to the centre manager for approval.

Issues of fairness related to the amount of money spent, the time taken and how much staff development each person undertook across a year. Clarification of these issues is a goal for the committee this year. In some areas, development is expensive. For example, a day session can often cost several hundred dollars for counsellors, whereas library staff can attend a session for as little as \$40. Both sessions represent relevant development appropriate to the staff members. Allocating staff members a nominated dollar figure for their development was not considered feasible or fair. Allocating only a certain number of sessions each was another possibility, but is it fair to support the one career counsellor to attend six events a year, whilst the same number of library events would need to be spread across the six reference staff? It would be interesting to hear from other libraries on how they reconcile these issues.

Another ongoing discussion topic is what activities are considered staff development? As support staff, we are often asked to be first-aid officers and fire wardens. These roles require constant updating of skills and time away from normal duties. Do these updates constitute staff development? Does attending the bi-monthly or semester meetings of such groups as Victorian Association of TAFE Libraries or the TAFE Disability network count as development? Do other committees have policies or guidelines about this type of thing?

With the introduction of individual workplans into our Institute this year, the challenge for staff and their managers is to identify relevant and interesting development. In an effort to assist staff, the committee plans to again offer centre-wide development in areas that affect all staff. Last year, team-building sessions were available, this year the topics are yet to be decided. The question of whether to make these 'non-professional' sessions compulsory for all staff also exists; can staff be forced to attend staff development?

Staff development is hugely important but often raises personal concerns and issues for staff. As we continue to explore these diverse issues any input on others' experiences would be greatly appreciated.

*If you would like to contact Helen to talk about the issues raised in this article, please e-mail [h.reid@bhtafe.edu.au](mailto:h.reid@bhtafe.edu.au).*

## News in brief

### Release date extended

#### Role of libraries in the online environment

The report date for the inquiry into libraries in the online environment has been extended to 24 June 2003.

**New Information Economy Advisory Board**  
A new board will advise the South Australian Minister for Science and Information Economy, Jane Lomax-Smith, on how South Australia can best harness the information economy to benefit people and business.

It will take into account economic development, innovation, the use of ICT to enhance government service delivery, infrastructure development, social inclusion, confidence and security issues, skills development and promotion of awareness among South Australians.

The board will be chaired by Professor Chris Marlin, pro-vice-chancellor (Research) for Flinders University.

Board members are: Cheryl Bart, lawyer and Economic Development Board member; Simon Hackett, Agile Communications; Tania Paull, PLAIN (Public Library Automated Information Network); Margaret Price, Playford Capital Board and Aspect Computing; Geoff Thomas, Playford Capital; Madeleine Woolley, Social Inclusion Unit. Ex officio members are Phil Ingerson, IT Council of SA; Greg Black, Department for Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology; Roger Hartley, Department for Business, Manufacturing and Trade; and Graham Foreman, Department for Administrative and Information Services. ■