

Future framework for vocational education



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In April ALIA hosted a very successful education forum with representatives from the vocational and higher education sectors, training providers, recruitment consultants, employers and practitioners within our sector, and representatives from the Australian Society of Archivists and the Records Management Association of Australia. ALIA members place a high value on the recognition of qualifications — particularly first-award qualifications in library and information studies — and ongoing training and professional development. (See separate report on the forum on page 19.)

One area where there has been considerable change over the last few years is in the vocational education and training (VET) system. ALIA has been actively involved in VET bodies from the early 1990s when federal and state/territory ministers (MCEETYA) adopted a competency-based VET system. A new body, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), was established as the policy and administrative arm of these governments. A national curriculum system based on competencies was implemented and industry training advisory bodies set up to provide advice to ANTA and develop the curricula.

This meant a shift for those TAFEs providing courses for library technicians and for ALIA where previously courses were reviewed individually against the ALIA education statements criteria through the course recognition process. The library and information services sector came under the cultural industry advisory body — Arts Training Australia (ATA) and then, following an ANTA restructure, CREATE. ALIA's participation in ATA and CREATE assisted in the sector being among the first to receive funding for the development and implementation of a national curriculum and the more recent training package system in the revised VET agenda.

With yet further changes ANTA will cease operation on 30 June 2005, and responsibility for VET policy and administration will move to the federal Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). A summary of consultations on the DEST directions paper *Skilling Australia: new directions for vocational education and training* is available at http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/policy_issues_reviews/key_issues/anta/information.html.

The structure of industry training and advisory bodies changed in mid-2004 and the sector is now covered by Innovation and Business Skills (Council) Australia (IBSA). This brings it in, along with the other cultural industries previously covered by CREATE, with the finance, printing, IT and business industries.

IBSA is currently doing a scoping project on synergies between the cultural industries

training packages. Consultations have brought out some interesting new models for packaging universal/common and industry-specific skills. The final report is expected in July. IBSA is also working on a broader project, the Integrated Skills and Qualifications Framework, to identify duplication and overlaps in units of competency and qualifications across the 11 training packages in its industry coverage. The 2273 units of competency have been grouped under topics and will now be tested with industry specialists to ensure that these are appropriate. The initial work found that 39 per cent of the units are generic in nature; the remaining 61 per cent are technical in nature and a significant proportion of these are duplicated across the 11 training packages; on average, 29 per cent of units of competency within an IBSA training package are imported from another IBSA training package. Overall there is significant duplication of units and room for rationalisation. These two projects could provide the basis for a more flexible and innovative approach to skills portability, packaging and qualifications.

An advantage of competency-based training linked to qualifications is that skills and experience attained in the workplace or elsewhere can be assessed towards a qualification. It is also possible for training and assessment to happen in the workplace. Some organisations are participating in traineeship schemes for current staff to have their skills assessed against qualifications and further training delivered either in the workplace or through training providers.

Another development this year is MCEETYA's introduction into the Australian Qualifications Framework (<http://www.aqf.edu.au>) of a Vocational Graduate Diploma and Vocational Graduate Certificate under the Vocational Education and Training Sector Accreditation. These qualifications can be added to an existing training package or included in a new training package. They are positioned at the same level as the higher education Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma, and require a similar volume of learning. They provide expanded learning pathways to study at this graduate level with entry expanded to include relevant vocational qualifications together with significant relevant vocational practice, and relevant extensive vocational practice without formal qualifications. However, the AQF does state that, in considering whether holders of the vocational and higher education graduate certificate and graduate diploma are 'deemed' to have a bachelor degree, 'it is important to note that these qualifications do not have the comprehensive coverage of the academic discipline base characteristic of the bachelor degree'. These qualifications are yet to be introduced in our sector but raise some interesting issues for future consideration within ALIA's Education Framework. ■