

# Front Line



**Anne Hazell**  
ALIA Board of Education

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**Should successful completion of an ALIA recognised course...  
...be sufficient to endow the graduate with a lifetime's right to practise in our profession?**

**S**HOULD successful completion of an ALIA recognised course in library and information studies, either at professional or technician level, be sufficient to endow the graduate with a lifetime's right to practise in our profession? Should there be a mandatory intern year and a mandatory requirement to demonstrate that the knowledge, skills and attitudes gained during formal study are being constantly updated?

The Board of Education has received the first report of the Working Party on 'licence to practise' established earlier this year, at the Board's request, by the National Education for Library and Information Services Section. The ELISS Working Party points out that, under the present process of Course Recognition and hence eligibility for professional/technician membership of ALIA, there are several categories of people of overtly equal status. They are:

- new graduates without relevant experience;
- new graduates with relevant experience;
- practising librarians/library technicians whose practice is of high quality;
- practising librarians/library technicians whose practice is of low quality;
- long-time graduates who have never practised;
- graduates re-entering the workforce or the profession after a significant gap;
- graduates in all the above categories who are eligible for professional/technician membership but have never joined ALIA.

Because the Association is concerned with courses of study rather than individual people, and because there is no accredited set of competency standards by which we can assess individual performance, we have at the moment no measurable way of differentiating between the knowledge and skill levels of the people in the above categories.

Initially, the Working Party has suggested overcoming some of the present anomalies by having two categories of membership: one for those who have only formal qualifications, i.e., 'Graduate Members', and an advanced or 'Professional Member' category for those with practical experience (for new graduates) and with demonstrably updated knowledge and skills (for those already in practice).

For new graduates, the Working Party asks whether academic courses can (or can be expected) to provide training as well as education for librarianship. Many practitioners agree that new graduates need additional skills training. However, this could lead to a Catch-22 situation of *no experience = no work* and *no work = no experience*. (This issue is less significant for library technicians, whose courses emphasise practical experience.)

The Working Party identified categories who may be affected by the introduction of a mandatory 'licence to practise' scheme for those either currently in practice or without recent experience.

People returning to the workforce are often at great disadvantage in competing for jobs because their knowledge and skills may be out of date in particular areas, e.g., technology. Members of this group seeking to update their skills could benefit greatly from some formal structure which recognised and accredited their efforts.

Other people who could benefit from such a formal structure are those with overseas qualifications, some of whom at present seek professional/technician membership via the Association's widened eligibility process.

People with restricted work experience, e.g., having worked for many years in the same library, especially in a one-person library; or have one type of work experience only; or who have undertaken no continuing education courses; nor kept up with professional reading; do not belong to ALIA; have not gone to conferences, professional meetings; do not publish or contribute to the professional debate may find the introduction of mandatory continuing professional education threatening. A structure which enables these people to upgrade their qualifications may appeal to some in this group.

Having a 'Professional' category of membership available only to those who have been 'Graduate' members, will overcome some of the concerns by members about people who choose not to join ALIA, but still trade on their eligibility to do so. This approach, if it is to be effective, will require education of employers, personnel managers and library workers, especially non-ALIA members. Other groups, such as the Australian Society of Certified Practising Accountants, have succeeded in raising community awareness of their members' standing.

The Working Party rejects the term 'licence to practise', because there is no legal requirement for librarians to be licenced, as medical practitioners and lawyers are. 'Mandatory continuing professional education' or, in terms of the Training Guarantee Act, 'mandatory training and development' may be more appropriate.

The topic of 'mandatory continuing professional education' will be discussed at the meeting between the Board of Education and educators and practitioners at the Albury Wodonga Conference. Meanwhile the ELISS Working Party will continue to work on their report for consideration by the Board at its October meeting. Anyone wishing to make input to the Working Party's deliberations should contact Ms J Evans, President ELISS, Freelance Library and Information Services, 27 Kasouka Road, Camberwell VIC 3124. Fax: (03) 882 4274; Tel: (03) 8131925 before September 1. ■