

# But I know all that already!

Anne Hazell brings us up-to-date on credit transfer and recognition of prior learning

While the recent letter to the editor (Kirkman *inCite* 5) deals with the specific issue of the status of the Association's Registration qualification, the underlying issue is the need for practising librarians and library technicians to keep up to date in a rapidly changing industry. (As an aside—January 1994 is *not* the cut-off date for those whose only qualification is Registration to join, or, more likely, re-join ALIA as professional members.)

The recognition that education is lifelong and does not end after school or university or college underlies many of the premises upon which the competency movement is based. Most practising library and information services personnel have always ensured that they keep abreast of changes by attending continuing education programs (often provided by professional associations), undertaking in-house training, reading the professional literature etc. Some have undertaken formal study to upgrade their qualifications to Bachelor, Graduate Diploma or Master's level. In many places local arrangements have emerged in the last few years between TAFE and higher education institutions about credit or status gained through previous study. However tertiary institutions have generally been unwilling to accept the learning gained from unstructured professional development as giving status towards more formal qualifications. In general experienced practitioners wishing to obtain or upgrade their qualifications have found that almost every Australian tertiary institution has different policies and practices, many of which involve starting from scratch.

## Credit transfer

During 1992 the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee established a Project to undertake a broad examination of the sources of prior learning which some applicants for entry to higher education courses bring to their studies. In 1993 the Project turned its attention to Credit Transfer between institutions in relation to library and information services and a Reference Group was set up to examine current policies and practices, with Professor John Levett as Chairperson and other members Dr Maxine Rochester,

Dr Peter Clayton, Donna Reid, Chris Carstens, Anne Hazell and Assoc Prof Joyce Kirk. Dr Anthony Haydon, AV-CC, is the Project Director.

A survey of all Australian higher education institutions which teach in the area of library and information studies was undertaken at the beginning of the Project. This revealed a wide range of policies and practices. Enough activity is occurring in two areas to justify the effort to make practice across the country more equitable and consistent. These areas are the moves between Associate Diploma and Bachelor Degree, and between Degrees in higher education institutions when students move from one institution to another. The Reference Group will make its recommendations to the AV-CC in late July and it is hoped that the new Credit Transfer arrangements will take effect in the 1994 academic year. The national guidelines are not meant to override any existing local arrangements. While there is no compulsion for universities to accept the AV-CC's recommendations, past experience indicates that most will.

## Recognition of prior learning

The second aspect of the Project, the Recognition of Prior Learning, is far more complex than the relatively straightforward issue of Credit Transfer. RPL has been defined by the AV-CC as 'a systematic process to accredit learning gained outside formal educational institutions, by assessing relevant learning against the standards required by a [university] subject or course'.

Proposed guidelines about RPL for credit distinguish between:

- learning acquired in a 'credentialled'

context, other than a university or TAFE, such as a course offered by a professional body, enterprise, private educational institution, or by any other provider recognised by a university; and

- learning acquired in an 'uncredentialled' context, such as through work experience, e.g., on-the-job training, participation in R&D, or through life experience, e.g., self-instruction as in hobbies, volunteer and community work.

While TAFE has already accepted many of these means as leading to a demonstrable level of prior learning appropriate for entry to courses and credit within courses, the jury is still out as far as higher education institutions are concerned.

Under the new arrangements, Registration could be considered in the category of what is now described as 'Credentialled Professional Courses' and could thus be eligible for consideration. In fact many higher education institutions in the past gave credit to people with Registration seeking to update and upgrade their qualifications. However most of the institutions surveyed impose a time limit on eligible previous study of around 10 years, with shorter limits for subjects such as automation. Since the last Registration exams were held in 1980, the 'use-by date' has now passed.

Nonetheless, through Credit Transfer and RPL many more opportunities now exist for library and information workers at all levels to receive recognition for the learning which they have gained through means other than formal education. In the new world of enterprise bargaining, this acknowledgment may prove to be a valuable asset. ■

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