Train Line

Jennefer Nicholson
*Deputy Executive
Director*

At work and at home we are marinating in infor-mation technology. A recent article in the *Can-berra Times* by Crispin Hull provided some statistical evidence that the take-up for new communi-cations 'toys' is faster in Australia than in most other countries. 'In the 12 years to 1993, VCR penetration went from virtually nothing to 80 per cent. Colour TV has gone from 3 percent in 1975 to 98 percent in 1993. In seven years the number of mobile phones has in-creased from nothing to 600 000 (one person in 30 has one)…PCs have gone from 400 000 to 3.5 million in 10 years (23 percent of them in the home).' And of course the number of users on the Internet is virtually doubling in size every year. If it is easily available, cost-effective and useful, IT is embraced enthusiastically.

In the last few months the Commonwealth Govern-ment has shown similar enthusiasm for IT in the many inquiries to which the Association has responded, or is responding. These include the introduction of broadband services, new communication services, the regulation of computer bulletin boards, research data networks and the impact of telecommunications devel-opments on industry, employment and the community, and open learning in education and training.

A consistent point made by the Association is the knowledge and skills of qualified library and informa-tion services staff in information management and the use of technology for service delivery. If introduced and managed well these IT developments have the potential to be taken up as readily as existing IT. They open up opportunities for new services, and new modes of deliv-ery for information services, education and training.

As major providers and users of information and communications technology ongoing training and de-velopment activities to keep up to date should be a high priority for library and information services staff in their lifelong learning. The development of new tech-nologies and services brings changing skill require-ments. In the near future, when the competency standards for the library sector are introduced, your competence in these skills will be assessed in your work-place. They will be incorporated as assessed outcomes in any accredited vocational education and training you undertake as either part of your own continuing profes-sional development or your work requirements. With the current Government vocational education, training and employment reform agendas it is certain that com-petence in these skills will be included in your job clas-sification and your performance assessment. These competencies may be included in more broad terms in the enterprise agreement which you are a party to.

The need for ongoing access to training to develop skills in new and changing technologies has been iden-tified as a key training direction in the Libraries sector of the National Vocational Education and Training Plan for the Arts and Cultural Industries.

The need to keep up to date with advances in IT is a good example of the role training and development plays in lifelong learning for professional practice. The initial formal education in library and information sci-ences prepares the individual for entry to the profession and for lifelong learning, but it is just the beginning. The ongoing challenge is to actually be a lifelong learner and put it into professional practice.

How do you rate as a lifelong learner?
A recent discussion paper from the Higher Education Council and Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee on *The Enabling characteristics of undergraduate educa-tion* suggests that a lifelong learner would exhibit the following characteristics to some degree:
An inquiring mind
• a sense of curiosity and question asking;
• a critical spirit;
• comprehension-monitoring and self-evaluation.
Helicopter vision
• a sense of the interconnectedness of fields;
• an awareness of how knowledge is created in at least one field of study, and an understanding of the;
• methodological and substantive limitations of that field;
• breadth of vision.
Information literacy
• knowledge of major current resources available in at least one field of study;
• ability to frame researchable questions in at least one field of study;
• skill at information retrieval in a variety of media;
• ability to decode information in a variety of forms: written, statistical, graphs, charts and tables.
A sense of personal agency
• a positive concept of one's self as capable and autono-mous;
• self-organisation skills (time management, goal-set-ting, etc).
A repertoire of learning skills
• knowledge of one's own strengths, weaknesses and preferred learning style;
• a range of strategies for learning in whatever context one finds oneself, and an ability to select the appro-priate one;
• an understanding of the differences between surface and deep level learning.

What an incentive—helicopter vision while you travel the information superhighway on your Learner's plates. ∎