



Practice makes perfect

Donna Reid, Canberra Institute of Technology

'Practice (in the workplace) makes perfect' is the slogan that has traditionally accompanied technician level courses offered in the TAFE sector over the last ten years. Under the guise of various names — work experience, library orientation, field work, practical placement, practicum — a substantial period of training time has been available for students to experience a real work situation in a library. For periods ranging from 300 hours to 800 hours over a two year course (or part-time equivalence), many TAFE students around Australia have consolidated their off-the-job theory and practice by undertaking specified tasks in a number of libraries or information agencies under the supervision of a host librarian.

The newly-introduced TAFE Diploma of Library and Information Studies follows this traditional emphasis on the practicum. Industry Placement modules are compulsory at both the Certificate III and Diploma levels (100 hours minimum at each level). The practical nature of competency based training requires a much stronger focus on student demonstration of knowledge and skills and therefore much closer links with industry throughout the whole period of training.

Some of the features of these practicums are:

- participation in a closely supervised and structured work program which addresses the knowledge and skills acquired up until that time;
- demonstration of skills transfer in a minimum of two different placements, usually in different types of libraries, but sometimes different activities in the one library;
- a focus on block placements which are generally arranged by the teaching institution rather than the student;

- considerable support from the hosting library's staff — this may include induction, on-the-job training, advice, reporting and assessment;
- the use of log books or diaries maintained by the student (which may form part of the assessment strategy);
- the opportunity presented to the student for self-assessment, in terms of their level of skill development, their ability to interact effectively with both clients and library personnel, and their ability to acquire an integrated view of library operations. This self-assessment includes individual discussion and counselling with both the teaching staff member and the host librarian;
- concurrent participation in tutorials in order to facilitate student exchange of experiences, develop the student's awareness of workplace expectations, and prepare him/her for job seeking activities; and
- combined assessment processes: the student, host librarian and teaching staff participate in the final outcomes. Such results are usually recorded as pass or fail, rather than graded.

Educators and employers have cooperated to provide, in the main, rewarding and challenging experiences in the workplace that assist the student in identifying the type of work they prefer, and the type of library or information agency in which they might seek employment. In many cases, students are offered part-time or casual work on the basis of their work experience program. The log book or diary used in the placement also can be used as part of the student's portfolio to be demonstrated at interview. ■

New educational opportunities

Jennefer Nicholson and Donna Reid

An important development from the Library Industry Competency Standards is the introduction of new education career pathways in our sector. The library technician course has been redesigned and traineeship and certificate courses now join library technician and librarianship courses as education and career options.

Many TAFE institutions have already introduced the new nationally accredited Diploma of Library and Information Studies. The Diploma replaces the Associate Diploma and Certificate courses as the recognised

qualification for library technicians. However holders of these qualifications will continue to be eligible for library technician membership.

A new Certificate III qualification provides the opportunity for library assistants to obtain formal qualifications. The Certificate III is the first half of the Diploma course and so students may opt to leave with the Certificate, or continue on to the Diploma.

Modules from the Diploma/Certificate III courses may be used as part of other training packages, for example, in developing articulation between the sen-

ior secondary colleges and TAFE colleges, or in traineeships which incorporate a library/information stream. All modules have been based on competency outcomes identified in the Library Industry Competency Standards.

The Competency Standards also provide a benchmark for assessment undertaken by training providers and that undertaken in the workplace. This establishes a process for streamlining the recognition of an individual's learning and experience and allows portability of these in career changes, education and training. ■