

## Applying library skills to research

As a temporary research officer working with a government statutory authority, I was recently asked for comment on copyright issues in the digital age. Fortunately, I had recently read the commentary on 'Digital agenda reforms' by ALIA's new executive director, Jennefer Nicholson (*inCite*, Nov 1999).

The information I was able to provide was very much appreciated, particularly its references to the *Copyright Amendment (Digital Agenda) Bill* currently being considered by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. The full details of the Bill's history, progress and parliamentary contacts were found on the Australian government website.

This was a great example of finding the right information at the right time, in the right format. Thanks to *inCite* for your timely commentary!

*Sheelagh Noonan, Sydney*

## Don't be seduced by change

Lee Welch (*inCite* Nov 1999) is right in her observation that changing names to keep up with the times 'is undeniably seductive, but also undeniably dangerous'.

Too many library schools have been thus seduced with a consequence that an aspirant librarian or library technician could have difficulty in recognising them — from nomenclature and programs — as venues for their education. American library schools, such as Berkeley, which have gone down this IT dominated dead-end are now paying a reduced enrolment price.

Special librarians have tried all kinds of variations over the years, the latest being 'knowledge manager'. Teacher librarians and TAFE librarians attempted years ago to convert 'library' in the educational mind to 'learning resource centre', but with little enduring success. The literature is now suggesting that in a global context a physical 'centre' thus described is limiting and anachronistic in a way that 'library' is not.

Rather than continually seeking avant garde and often short-lived

alternatives to 'library', 'library technician' and 'librarian' it would be more productive to capitalise on, and enhance, the generally well regarded understanding of all three.

Every profession has its stereotypes with which the shallow media irritatingly likes to play from time to time. Librarianship has a few, but it is foolish to waste time worrying about them. It is also fruitless to adopt nomenclature which most of the population will never recognise as other than professional affectation.

Much better to focus on, and promote, the real substance and contribution of a profession which is proud to be known as 'librarianship' and which is inalienable from that wonderful, ever evolving eclectic agency best simply called 'the library'.

*Alan Bundy, Blackwood*

## The end of library technician training as we know it?

To date there have been only a few, generally approving, comments in *inCite* about the library and information services training package scheduled to replace the current, national, competency-based Diploma of Library and Information Studies from 30 June 2000. I wonder how many ALIA members have a clear idea of just what this will mean for the training of library technicians. I have not as yet seen the finished training package — my comments are based on a draft version.

The name 'training package' is a rather misleading one. The endorsed components of the package consist, not of training materials, but rather of competency standards, qualifications and assessment guidelines. Non-endorsed components include learning strategies, assessment materials and professional development materials.

There is nothing in the package which equates to the traditional curriculum: that is, a concise statement of the content to be covered. This is because the aim of training packages is to do away with courses of study altogether and to replace them with assessment of skills acquired on the job, with gap training provided by registered training organisations.

The package has supposedly been developed in response to the demands of industry. I do not know what evidence there is that there was dissatisfaction with the current curriculum, and I would suggest that any criticisms could be met by adjustments to the present course. I am also not convinced that the majority of libraries would prefer to employ untrained staff, have them learn on the job, and have workplace assessors coming into the workplace repeatedly to assess their competency.

The training package has been written by CREATE Australia. The only industry consultation I am aware of taking place in Victoria involved a small and unrepresentative sample of large academic and research libraries. No information about their input has been made available to other interested parties. To my knowledge no school, public or special libraries participated in consultations although they represent a considerable number of potential employers, and may well be less enthusiastic about having their staff learning and being assessed on the job.

TAFE educators have been almost totally excluded from any involvement in the development of the training package, except for a mapping exercise designed to facilitate the transition from the current course to the training package.

However at a recent meeting at Arts Training Victoria, the state industry training advisory board, two teachers, who attended almost by chance and not in response to any invitation, suddenly found themselves being asked to advise on important decisions about the qualifications. This raises some serious questions about the integrity of the decision-making process associated with this very major change to our training system.

The article 'New training packages on the horizon' by Jennefer Nicholson (*inCite*, July 1999, p6) claimed that a number of gaps have been identified in the current course. One gap cited was information technology. The current course has a strong emphasis on information technology — there are compulsory modules in computer system basics, word processing, spreadsheet,

multi-media equipment usage and data communications, as well as many others which incorporate instruction in a range of software packages, database and internet searching, downloading of catalogue records, and so on. In contrast the training package makes few references to specific computer skills and seems to assume that these will be pre-requisites for the course.

Another significant difference between the current course and the training package is the latter's de-emphasis of technical services, traditionally the core of the library technician's training. Most acquisitions and cataloguing competencies appear only as electives. Core competencies are weighted towards customer service, communication, and management and marketing skills. While these reflect current requirements in the workplace, understanding of bibliographic elements and standards like AACR2, DDC, and USMARC should be mandatory.

One of the advantages of the current national Diploma is that it is possible for students who move interstate to continue their studies with the minimum of disruption. The fact that the training package is framed in terms of competencies to be demonstrated rather than specific skills and knowledge to be taught, and the fact that customisation by individual providers is encouraged, mean that this advantage will almost certainly be lost.

I hope that I have prompted you to examine the package closely when it is published, with a view to checking whether it reflects your idea of how library technicians should be trained.

*Julia Blunden*

## Your voice

**Your letters on any issue of relevance to the library and information sector are welcomed.**

All letters should be addressed to the *inCite* editor and may be e-mailed to [incite@alia.org.au](mailto:incite@alia.org.au), or faxed to 02 6282 2249, or posted to: Your voice, ALIA, PO Box E441, Kingston ACT 2604. Please include your name and postal address with your letter or e-mail.

Letters will be accepted for publication until the 18th of the month.