

Library Technician Education in Australia – State of the Nation report

ALIA is the body that establishes and maintains standards for entry into the library and information profession in Australia. The survey of ALIA members in 2008 indicated that the recognition of qualifications and courses was ranked as one of the most important activity undertaken by ALIA and that it performed well in this area. The ALIA course recognition process is directly aligned with the Association's membership categories, with graduates from ALIA-recognised courses eligible to become, respectively, an Associate member or a Library Technician member.

The Association has a keen interest in the quality of the education programs offered at both the librarian and library technician levels. Traditionally, ALIA has worked with education providers and consulted with stakeholders to ensure that courses equip graduates with up to date and relevant skills to provide their clients with the best possible information services. The process of course recognition is undertaken at the invitation of an institution delivering a course; ALIA works closely with the institution to review the ways in which students achieve the core knowledge, skills, and attributes required for professional practice.

In 1999, the Museum and Library/Information Services Training Package was introduced as a national approach to education and training in the library sector, with the Diploma signifying the qualification needed to become a library technician, and library assistants attaining Certificates II, III, and IV. As there was considerable input into the development of the Training Package from the professional association and industry representatives, it was felt that the training package was appropriately aligned with the workforce needs of the LIS sector. The high level of industry input meant that the new library technician courses established under the national training package were recognised by ALIA for a period of seven years. In 2007, the Education and Professional Development Standing Committee determined that, given the national approach to vocational education, it would be valuable to adopt a comprehensive review of all programs to gain insights into the quality of paraprofessional education across the country.

For several years, members of ALIA's Education and Professional Development Standing Committee have worked with library technician educators offering

courses through colleges of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to plan and prepare for a national program of course recognition. At the Library Technician Educator's Professional Development Day hosted by ALIA in October 2008, the participants worked to collaboratively refine the course recognition questionnaire. From February to June 2009, following the submission of the required documentation, an ALIA course recognition panel conducted site visits to all 17 institutions offering the Diploma of Library/Information Services. Each panel comprised Dr Gillian Hallam, as Chair of the Education and Professional Development Standing Committee, Dianne Walton-Sonda as ALIA Education Manager, and an experienced library technician who provided input to the process through their industry role and their understanding of the local market for paraprofessional staff. The local panel members were drawn from academic libraries, National/State Libraries, public libraries, or school libraries. Each institution visited by the panel received a report documenting the findings, highlighting areas of good practice, and providing a series of recommendations for enhancements to the course.

This national approach to ALIA course recognition process for the library technician courses was a valuable learning process for all involved: library technician educators and institutional managers, panel members, employers, students and graduates, and the staff of ALIA. As the national program of course recognition was a new model, a process of quality assurance was undertaken to evaluate the program of activities, with a focus on the effectiveness and relevancy of the course recognition process.

This course recognition process provided all key stakeholders a 'state of the nation' picture of library technician education. The course coordinators, together with representatives from Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA) which is the Industry Skills Council responsible for the Museums and Library/Information Services training package, came together for the 2009 Library Technician Educators Forum to consider the outcomes from the program and to determine how to address the challenges that had been identified, to ensure that there is a strong future for library technician education in Australia.

The State of the Nation report considers the key criteria for course recognition from the perspectives of both ALIA policy and current educational practice, highlighting the findings that, while there is a national training package, there is a diversity of practice across the 17 different library technician courses in this country. The outcomes from the extensive course recognition process will contribute to a

wider understanding of the importance of professional standards in the LIS sector. The Library Technician Education in Australia: State of the Nation Report will be available on the ALIA website soon.

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