

# The Existing Employee Program: an incentive scheme for skill recognition, staff development and qualifications.

## **Scope:**

The purpose of this paper is to inspire.

Inspire those who are or have been at work in the library and information service industry for some time and as yet do not have nationally recognised qualifications.

This paper is written in two parts. The first is written by Julian Witek, a University of Tasmania (UTas) Library Officer. It is designed to be a synthesis of the process of how to become involved in the scheme, its benefits as well as an outline of what the course covers. The second part is a personal account written by Debbie Ploughman also an UTas employee involved in Client Services as an Assistant. Debbie brings a unique perspective based on thirty years of service to the industry.

## **What is the Existing Employee Program?**

The EEP is a federally funded scheme which seeks to help experienced employees gain nationally recognised qualifications. This is achieved through a cooperative system involving a new apprenticeships centre e.g. JobNet who work together with a training authority such as e.g. TAFE and your employer.

This training is a great opportunity to get up to date with the latest advances in library methods and technologies. You also have the freedom to choose electives of your own if there are areas you would like to explore as a technician. If you are an employee of a large library, chances are that you will be in a specialised field such as Acquisitions, Loans or even Document Delivery. This training program is designed to cover all the major aspects of library technician work. This will help you to stretch your boundaries and increase your mobility in the job market.

Your current employer will also benefit because they will have a more skilled and versatile employee. They will have the incentive of turning a small profit, thanks to the federal government's offer. Should you complete the contract earlier than 3 years as most do, your employer may choose to sponsor you to complete a full diploma. This is the model currently adopted by the University of Tasmania.

## **How do you go about becoming an apprentice?**

The first step is to register through your employer with your local apprenticeship centre. The apprenticeship centre then assesses your eligibility to qualify based on defined criteria. They then arrange for Commonwealth money (around \$4,400 per person). Most of this money is allocated to the training authority with any balance going to your employer.

The second step is to formalise a contract with the participating apprenticeship provider for the program which has to be finished within two years, if working full

time. Most experienced library workers will have enough current competency and recognition of prior learning to achieve this in half that time.

The third step involves an assessment of your current competencies by the training provider. Your trainer comes into your workplace to work through the evidence kit identifying the areas that need to be covered. Evidence of prior learning such as courses, staff development and performance management reviews are all taken into consideration. This information gives your assessor / trainer some idea of how much class time you will require to complete the program. If you have already covered some of the subjects you will need only to provide evidence of your understanding of these competencies. This is a guided process and does not take very long to complete. Some classes may be required if you have no experience in the area, for example, in Tasmania it is very difficult to get cataloguing experience so you would need to attend the cataloguing classes.

### What does the course cover?

The following table page contains a check list which covers the subject areas that will need to be completed (CP) for Certificate IV. These are the core units but eight electives are also required and these can be taken from Library /Information Services courses that meet the Certificate IV standard. Two electives may be taken from another training package in a related discipline. The trainee negotiates which electives they wish to do based on their experience.

National code	Unit name	Nominal hours	Completed
<b>Core units</b>	<b>All core units must be completed</b>		
CUEOHS01B	Implement workplace health, safety & security procedures	40	CP
CULLB002A	Obtain information from external and networked sources to meet customer needs	40	CP
CULLB003A	Research and analyse information to meet customer needs	80	CP
CULLB412B	Undertake cataloguing activities	100	CP
CULLB602B	Use, evaluate and extend own information literacy skills	50	CP

### Structure of the individual training plan:

The training plan is worked out with the help of your trainer. It is based on the findings of the earlier assessment and your experience to date. The delivery method and how you will be assessed will also be arranged at this time. You will have some input as to what is a reasonable time for the completion of the various units. You can choose some of your deadlines so that assessments do not impinge on busy periods of your work calendar. Classes do not have as much freedom, but you can put off some of these formal classes until the next year if you wish, after all you do have two years which can be extended if necessary.

### **The argument for and against:**

There is the argument which says: “I am already doing the job and being paid for it, why should I do extra study, I am busy enough.” This is the first question I asked myself when I was first approached by the University of Tasmania to do this course of study.

I think the main reason for putting in the extra work was inspired by a restructuring program which was occurring at the library where I worked. I had the opportunity to gain recognition of thirteen years experience where my role of Circulation Assistant had evolved to that of Library Officer. The only drawback preventing me from moving to a higher educational officer level four was that I had no official qualifications.

A secondary reason for doing the extra hard yards was that I was only seeing my job and the library through a very small lens, that of someone who had received on the job training in very specific areas on a need to know basis. I felt that if I received a better rounded education about libraries and other related activities, then I would be in a position to broaden my opportunities. I am also interested in becoming a library officer in other UTas libraries. This can only be possible if I have a diploma in library information services.

### **Who qualifies for the EEP?**

- People who work in the library industry and may not have the formal training and qualifications (Trained on the job)
- Those who work at least fifteen hour per week
- People who have qualifications at Certificate II level or no qualifications at all
- Individuals whose qualifications are lower than that of a diploma and which were attained more than 7 years ago
- People with a university degree wishing to work in the library industry can also qualify if their degree is older than seven years.
- Even if you don't meet all the criteria you may be eligible for limited assistance (So check with your local Apprenticeships provider)

### **The benefits for your organisation:**

- On the job assessment
- Incentives up to \$4,400
- Flexible training options
- Improved quality of service
- Help improve employee morale
- Workers' motivation / engagement
- Reduce recruitment and training costs
- Increase your value to the organisation
- Help improve staff retention and acquisition
- Contributes to a learning culture in the organisation
- Increasing your organisation's or workgroups skills
- National Library qualifications developed by industry

### **The benefit to the employee:**

- Gain confidence in yourself
- Recognition of existing skills
- Personalised training and mentoring
- Personal development / developing potential
- National Library qualifications developed by industry
- Allows one to move into different types of library work
- You get training, experience, career opportunities and you get paid
- Existing skills and prior experience are recognised and course credit granted, potentially reducing formal training time.

### **More information can be found at:**

[Australian Apprenticeships Homepage](#)

[Australian Apprenticeships helpful links](#)

[Australian Apprenticeships Incentives](#)

### **A personal account:**

Over the years there has been a significant change in the requirements and expectations of Library Technicians both from the individual and from the employer point of view. In this paper I will attempt to show how I have had to work through a process of identifying my expectations as a Library Technician and the expectations of my employer and how I can then work through those expectations. This process brings many challenges and you can see that our work environment and our learning experience is not a static thing after all but it is dynamic and ever changing.

### **Background:**

I started working at the University of Tasmania Library in 1977 as a Library Assistant in the Technical Services section with the main aspect of my job being the ordering and processing of books.

Since then I have worked as a member of the User services team providing circulation services in Morris Miller Library (1979-1982), Law Library (1982-1984), Art and Music Library (1985), Biomedical Library (1986-1998) and currently I have been employed in the Science Library since 1999.

My role as a Library Assistant has changed a great deal over the years, with the major changes coming in the shape of technological changes. I started out using a manual circulation system and card catalogue (Bliss and Library of Congress).

Many who have worked in the Library scene over the years will remember having to type up cards for the catalogue and having to follow all the procedures and guidelines in preparing these cards.

I also had to prepare manual fines and post these out to clients.

I also had to learn how to use all of the manual equipment and fix these machines when they decide to go on holidays and pack it in when needed most.

This involved me having to replace bulbs in microfiche readers and catalogue machines when these were in use in the Library and also fixing overhead machines and coin machines for the photocopiers. We also had temperamental card machines that would not stamp the manual loan slips properly and often had to be cleaned (and threatened) so that the details of the borrowers can be clearly visible on the manual loan systems.

Much as it is fun to reminisce and miss these technologies (just joking!!), I have talked about them to demonstrate that my training as a Library Technician had enabled me at that time to be able to use this equipment and fix it when necessary.

### **Expectations and Exposure:**

I gained my Library Technician certificate in 1980, having started in 1977 and finished the course in 1979. I had just started the course at the Hobart Technical College (now known as TAFE) in February 1977 and gained my job at the University of Tasmania in March 1977. The fact that I had already started the course was helpful in me gaining the position as the University of Tasmania Library was requiring Library staff to undertake the Library Technician course.

I studied many different subjects in this course, including General Science and typing and we also had to have Level 3 English from Year 12 or we had to do a year of English studies as part of the Library Technician course.

My subjects covered things such as Library Procedures which involved general things like having to know how to shelve books and file alphabetically and read and prepare call numbers for the spines of books.

I also had to do a unit in the binding and repairing of library books and how to restore and maintain archival material.

Another unit was Children's literature and how to write and prepare and tell stories to children.

We also had to do a unit on Library displays and prepare a major display on a topic that would be displayed in various libraries around Hobart.

Our course was comprehensive and covered the requirements of employees at the time and I was well equipped to work in the circulation services in the Library.

Having worked in the Library environment for 30 years, since I gained my Library Technician certificate I have found that there has been many chances to learn and participate in Staff development initiatives offered by the University of Tasmania over the years.

Technology has changed a great deal over the years, especially since the introduction of automated circulation systems and the internet and using technology to search for information. I have learnt how to use these different technologies on the job and so my expectations as an employee in being able to fulfil the requirements of my job were being met. The expectations of my employer were also being met because they were training me in the technology that they required me to be able to use in order to supply a service to the University staff and students and other Library clients.

Because my training needs and expectations were being met by my employer I did not over the years feel the need to undertake further upgrading of my Library Technician qualifications and did not even consider it until five to six years ago. I started to think that it might be good to redo my Library Technician certificate because the course had by then significantly changed and it was obvious to me that many new staff members had a much more current qualification than I did but when I looked into the costs and the thought of studying again I quickly said an emphatic “NO!!!.”

In 2005, my work colleague Pam, a Science Library staff member who did not have any formal Library qualification decided to investigate doing the Library Technician certificate. She had been informed that there was a way for employees who are currently employed for more than fourteen hours per week or people with a level IV certificate older than 7 years in Information Technology then they are eligible to receive a grant of \$4,400 that goes to their employer to enable an employee to upgrade their qualifications or undertake study to gain their qualifications in their particular field of employment.

This program is called the EEP or Existing Employees Program. I decided to investigate and contacted the TAFE College in Hobart. I was given the contact details for Leonie Atkins, who heads up the training of Library Technicians in Southern Tasmania. It turned out that I fitted the bill perfectly in that my qualification was definitely more than 7 years old and I had been continuously in employment in the same industry for 30 years.

### **Flexibility:**

So began the next stage in my journey as a Library Technician. I thought that the biggest hurdle for me would be to return to studying and spending heaps of time in class again.

One of the greatest advantages in undertaking study through the EEP is the flexibility of study methods and how you are assessed for each unit.

When I first investigated undertaking the Library Technician course again I found that there was a rigorous process for investigating current competencies in each unit and that there was a cost involved in proving your competency in that area. It was a difficult and costly process.

When I decided to pursue the EEP process and undertake the Certificate IV in Library and Information Services through TAFE Tasmania, I found the process so much easier. In one meeting with the TAFE training provider, the Human Resources representative from the University of Tasmania and myself I was enrolled and all my questions about the course were covered. You are given two years to complete your certificate training, if you are working full time, longer if you are working part time which is an achievable target.

Proving your competency in a unit is now so much easier. You have strict guidelines as to the elements of competency that you need to have, however, when you have worked in an industry for a long time you find that you have more skills than you realize. Any staff development training that you have received and your day to day work activities can be used as evidence in proving your competency.

One of the greatest benefits to me as an employee and to my employer is the flexibility of study arrangements offered by this program. I am able to do the work for each unit by myself at my own pace and the TAFE training provider would come to my workplace and would go through every piece of evidence I had gathered to prove my current competency in all of the requirements for each unit.

This flexibility of study allows me to choose when I study and what pieces of evidence I could use to prove my competency levels in each unit. Each unit was tailored to suit me and how I learned.

The EEP program allows flexibility in learning methods as well. In some units you attend classes, such as the cataloguing and Document Delivery units. This gave me the opportunity to meet with other students and to interact and learn from them and their experiences and exposed me to new learning techniques and technologies.

Most of my units were online via e-Learning online at TAFE and so I could work my way through the various units and submit my assessments online.

You could discuss ideas with other students and your teacher via the web mail that was set up for each student. This added to the flexible arrangements that you have in being able to interact with your teacher and other classmates.

When you work in a large organisation such as the University of Tasmania Library although you may work in many different areas your exposure to new technologies and ideas is still in accordance to the requirements of your library and employer. Even though you attend conferences and interact with other Library colleagues and maintain your skills and knowledge this way, studying exposes you to new ideas.

### **Catalyst of Change:**

One of the greatest benefits for me in upgrading my qualification through the EEP has been as a catalyst of change.

Since 2005 I have been given the opportunity to work as a Library Officer in the Science Library and to learn new skills that were appropriate for that position. Employees at the University of Tasmania Library who want to work at a Library Officer level need to have the Diploma in Library and Information Services. By undertaking the EEP I was able to complete my Certificate IV in Library and Information Services within the required two years.

The University of Tasmania has an active policy in allowing staff to pursue all avenues for staff development and the University of Tasmania Library has in the past two years undergone a major reclassification process for all staff. This has been achievable in the most part because of the financial assistance provided via the EEP.

It has meant that the resources and training experience offered through TAFE is able to be used by the University of Tasmania Library and thus adds allows a resource that is already available to be used effectively.

The Certificate IV in Library and Information Services is now the recommended qualification for all new Library Assistants and for all existing staff who do not have this qualification they have been given an opportunity to undertake this course through the EEP.

The financial benefits to the employer through the EEP have also meant that the University of Tasmania Librarian has enabled all staff who have undertaken the Certificate IV to go on and complete the Diploma in Library and Information Services. This has been covered financially by the Library and at no expense to the employee. I am now in the process of completing my Diploma in Library and Information Services.

The TAFE trainers have also benefited from the EEP in that it has also been a catalyst of change for them in allowing them to employ more trainers and offer greater flexibility in teaching methods. It has also allowed them access to a greater range of possible students to undertake the course and also gives a sense of assurance in the continuity prospects of the course.

As can be seen the EEP has been extremely beneficial to me as an employee and I would highly recommend that if you are considering upgrading your Library Technician qualification then investigate this program because I know you will not be disappointed. Remember Expectations, Exposure, Flexibility and Catalyst of Change.