

Obtaining library qualifications via workplace certification: an innovative professional development program to inform and inspire library staff.

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Presentation Summary

I began working at the University of Wollongong Library 12 years ago in Lending Services. Casual employment soon progressed to a limited term position and after a couple of years I was working full time in Special Collections.

Our library has a strong commitment to job enrichment and when the opportunity arose a few years later to undertake a 12 month placement as a Copy Processing Officer my application was successful. Although I had no formal library qualifications, I obtained extensive on-the-job-training and support, gaining skills in copy cataloguing and end processing. A permanent position soon became available and, after a restructure, acquisitions and cataloguing were combined. After a period of training, my range of duties grew to include ordering and processing invoices for monograph titles.

As part of the Business Excellence Framework used by the UOW Library the organisation aspires to develop its people to their full potential. Learning is valued and the Library prides itself on its commitment to staff and has established a comprehensive staff training and development program.

This program encompasses such activities as workshops, attendance at short courses, formal education opportunities as well as cadetships and job enhancement programs. I had benefited from job development opportunities, allowing me to increase my skills and knowledge but realised that formal qualifications to underpin this knowledge and skills base would be useful.

I was however reluctant to undertake a formal study program through TAFE, unsure as to whether this would suit my learning style.

In an organisation which supports a culture of employing staff with relevant experience and not qualifications alone, it was an obvious transition for library management to offer a workplace certification program through a staff development initiative.

In 2004, the Library investigated providing such a program to interested staff with no formal library qualifications.

The program, conducted by DocMatrix, a Registered Training Organisation certified in the ACT and NSW, provides training and assessment of workplace competencies. Upon successful completion DocMatrix issues qualifications in Library/Information Services.

In 2005 this innovative pilot program was formally introduced and I was excited to apply. Given that my knowledge and experience was strong, I elected to undertake Certificate IV in Library/Information Services. As I had no formal post-secondary qualifications, the Library was eligible to apply for apprenticeship training financial incentives.

To complete the process I undertook 16 units, 10 of these were compulsory and I chose 6 elective units that complemented my work requirements. The Library allowed me 2 hours per week for study. My DocMatrix trainer would visit every few months and assess selected units. This assessment was varied and could include, providing examples of related work samples, observing work performance or Q & A type discussions.

In some instances written or oral references were provided by my team coordinator or managers outlining various tasks or knowledge that I possessed. These were also used as supporting evidence.

Some units were relatively easy to complete. My trainer would observe my work and by using the related competencies, existing skills were assessed against national qualifications. For a number of other units, training was undertaken to achieve the skills needed to attain competencies. I attended related Library database training workshops, spent time on the Research desk and completed set tasks using various reference tools and resources.

Where appropriate, participants are strongly encouraged to undertake a work placement as part of the program and I chose to spend time with our Document Delivery team as this was an area I had little experience in.

It is recommended that the process generally takes a period of 2 years, however, I was able to obtain my qualifications in less than 18 months. I was the first in NSW to obtain a Certificate IV in Library/Information Services through the DocMatrix organisation and, inspired by my success, two more library staff members are currently working towards gaining their qualifications.

Conclusion

The workplace certification program was a very positive experience for me. It encouraged me to recognise my own skills and abilities, boosting my self-esteem and confidence. It was an excellent opportunity to learn new skills, resulting in a nationally recognised certification of competence.

An innovative program such as this not only benefits staff but also the Library as an organisation. It provides an opportunity to formally recognise in-house training and improves motivation and morale of staff. It informs management of the skills base of the organisation and matches the needs of the individual with those of the Library.