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**VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY**

**A NEW
SCHOOL OF
THOUGHT**

ALIA EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE SUMMIT 2008 Submission from library technician educators, Victoria

The Library and Cultural Studies Unit at Victoria University in consultation with other Victorian library technician educators welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the ALIA Education and Workforce Summit. We would like to address the issue of articulation between VET and Higher Education in particular.

Background

We believe VET education for library technicians has contributed greatly the LIS industry in Australia over the last four decades and continues to do so. The demand for LIS education in this sector has been high and continues to be so. In 2006, according to NCVER statistics nearly 1600 students undertook the Diploma in Library and Information Services with others undertaking qualifications at Certificate III and Advanced Diploma level. The focus of VET LIS has been on the needs of the industry and to create an educated and well-trained 'job ready' workforce while enhancing the opportunities for continuing professional development including further professional studies in the field. The continuing evolution of training for library technicians has seen a growth in employment of this group and continuing success amongst those who seek to undertake further study. Accordingly, many VET graduates aspire to, and then undertake, undergraduate professional qualifications at some point after the completion of their library technician qualifications.

VET Pathways

The movement between VET and Higher Education has been embedded in LIS education since the inception of the first undergraduate course at RMIT in 1970 and has made a valuable contribution to the professional level of the industry. While VET educators prime concern has always been the training of library technicians this area of opportunity for our graduates also needs to be considered. Little research has been conducted into the movement between sectors in the LIS arena and the success or otherwise of those who attempt it, however what limited research has been conducted indicates this is rich source of experienced, high quality professionals with an intense interest in the field, who undertake professional qualifications successfully and contribute to the overall industry. Further research into these articulators is suggested to provide an empirical foundation for decisions being made about access to professional qualification and what appears to be an implied belief by some that access to undergraduate programmes by this group is partially responsible for a perceived decline in the quality of graduates.

Age has also been of concern for the industry but as ALIA and NCVER statistics indicate the VET cohort of students provide a younger student and workforce body and suggest that many may find work in the industry upon completing schooling and/or other training. After being exposed to the industry they then choose to undertake formal qualifications in the field. This is also another area for further investigation as it will provide insight into what motivates and attracts people to the industry.

Access and Equity

The LIS industry has been a leading example over four decades of the success of providing access to education for those who would not otherwise been able to undertake it. This has included access to those from lower socio-economic groups, early school leavers, newly arrived migrants and women, particularly those returning to the workforce. VET education has also focussed on training those for whom the traditional pathways between secondary education and Higher Education have been unavailable. In providing these opportunities VET LIS courses have enabled many valuable members of the work force to enter it and others to access university education. Changes to post-TAFE entry to the profession may have long-term and perhaps serious implication for this tradition which may result in a decrease in access for groups less able to enter education. Access and equity has been strength of the LIS industry. All changes to post-VET entry to the profession should take into consideration the implications of such moves to these groups and the impact upon those who undertake VET education in attempt to reduce HECS debts, re-acquaint themselves with study and work and those who require a first point of entry to education.

Suggestions

We suggest that research needs to be conducted into education for the LIS industry in a number of areas before a true picture emerges of education. Areas for further investigations are:

- The nature and degree of articulation between VET and University programmes in the sector
- A profile of those who undertake VET programmes and their motivations
- The success/failure of those VET graduates who articulate into undergraduate degree programmes
- The long-term implications of moves away from undergraduate programmes for library technicians and library technician programmes

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