

**Staff Development & Continuing Professional Education  
Policy and Practice in Australian Academic & Research Libraries**

Ian W. Smith  
Senior Librarian (Personnel)  
La Trobe University Library  
Australia

**Abstract**

This paper presents the results of a research project undertaken in 2001.<sup>i</sup> The study examined the pattern of staff development activity in Australian university libraries, State Libraries, the National Library and the Commonwealth Scientific & Industrial Research Organisation Library Network. Data for the study was collected *via* a questionnaire that was distributed to all libraries in the academic and research library sector. The survey, which achieved a 92% response rate, showed staff development in Australian academic and research libraries to be in a strong and healthy state. The libraries in this sector demonstrate a commitment to staff development that is strategically focused and has a strong emphasis on linking individual and organisational goals. Many of the libraries in the sector, both small and large, have allocated a strategic priority to staff development, have formally stated staff development policies and organised staff development programs. The commitment to staff development in the academic and research library sector has endured despite the pressure of contracting budgets in many parts of that sector. The evidence of this survey is that staff development has established a strong and enduring place in the future of Australian academic and research libraries.

*(Note: For the purposes of this research study the term "staff development" has been used to cover the broad areas of staff training, staff development and continuing professional education. This distinction was made apparent to the recipients of the research questionnaire. "Staff development" is used in this sense throughout this paper.)*

**Staff Development – Some Broad Australian Context**

Since the early 1990's in Australia there has been an increasing emphasis on the importance of staff development, training and continuing education in both private and

public sector organisations. Successive Australian federal governments have placed particular emphasis on increasing the skill and knowledge base of the country's workforce and achieving greater workplace and workforce efficiency as part of a wider objective of making Australia more competitive in the world economy. This has been done using a range of initiatives that include:

- the National Training Reform Agenda,
- the Training Guarantee Act,
- the National Framework for the Recognition of Training,
- nationally endorsed industry competency standards (including a set of standards for the Library and information sector)
- a National Library/Information Industry Training package.

The intention at the base of all of these initiatives was to ensure that the federal government reform programs for education, training and skilling of the Australian workforce was effective. While the success of these various initiatives has been mixed, one of their effects has been a considerably enhanced awareness of the importance of staff development as a means of enhancing organisational functioning.

Within the library and information services sector the peak professional body, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), has long been an enthusiastic advocate for staff development and has an active program of encouraging and facilitating continuing professional education for its members. In its policy statement on Continuing Professional Development the Association encourages its members to maintain a commitment to lifelong learning in order to extend and develop their knowledge skills and competencies as information services practitioners.<sup>ii</sup> Between 1985 and 2001 the staff development needs of the Australian library and information services sector were served by a not-for-profit organisation – the Australian Information Management Association (AIMA) – that was dedicated to the provision of training and consultancy services to the sector. AIMA was, until its recent demise, a major force in both raising the profile of staff development and providing a range of consultancy and training and development services to the sector. Although AIMA has recently been wound up, its work is to some degree being carried on up by successor organisations,

such as the Aurora Foundation, that are committed to providing education, development and training opportunities for the library profession in Australia<sup>iii</sup>.

### **The Objectives of this Study**

Within this national context this study set out to survey staff development practice in the Australian academic and research library sector. The sector is taken to include all members of the Council of Australian University Librarians, the Council of Australian State Libraries (which includes the National Library of Australia) and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) Library Network. In providing this “snapshot” of current policy and practice in these libraries the study also provides a base for possible further exploration and analysis of particular aspects of this topic.

### **Previous Studies**

Two previous studies provide an interesting and useful point of comparison for this current survey.<sup>iv</sup> In 1981 Margaret Trask, then Head of the School of Library & Information Studies at the Kuringai College of Advanced Education, conducted a survey of staff development activity in the Australian Academic & Research Library Sector. Trask’s study found that there were at that time only a small number of libraries within the sector that had well developed and coordinated staff development programmes and few libraries had a formally stated staff development policy. Trask found that staff development activity at that time was “...sporadic, with limited annual planning, co-ordination and evaluation”. Balancing this somewhat gloomy picture of staff development at that time Trask also noted “a high degree of interest in further developing staff development programmes” with more than half of her survey group indicating that they had plans for major expansion of their staff development programs.<sup>v</sup> Several years later, Gray carried out a follow-up survey of a similar group<sup>vi</sup>. He found some limited improvement in the picture, and while there were still only a small number of libraries with either written statements of staff development policy and/or organized staff development programs, there was an increased level of interest in the concept of staff development and many libraries had some form of staff development activities in place. The general support for the concept of staff development that Gray found in his survey led him to describe staff development as “... an idea whose time has come”

### **The Methodology of this Research Study**

A survey questionnaire<sup>vii</sup> was sent by email to the forty-nine libraries in the Australian academic and research library sector.<sup>viii</sup> Forty-five libraries responded including the CSIRO Library Network, the National Library of Australia, the eight State and Territory libraries, and thirty-five of the thirty-nine members of the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL).<sup>ix</sup> Tabulation and analysis of the survey results was undertaken using MS Excel.

#### The People Answering the Survey Questionnaire.

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>No. of replies</b>	<b>% of total</b>
The Director or equivalent of their library	19	42%
A senior manager whose responsibilities include staff development in the Library as a whole	14	31%
Middle managers whose responsibilities include staff development in the Library either as a whole or for parts of their library	9	20%
Other designations	3	7%
Total	45	100%

#### A Comment on the Response/Non-response Rate in this Study.

Of the forty-nine libraries in the sector surveyed forty-five replied (92%) replied to the survey. (Two libraries replied in narrative form rather than by completing the survey.) The high level of response allows a strong degree of confidence in the conclusions drawn as to the pattern of staff development activity in the respondent libraries.

It is not possible to draw inferences from the non-response of some libraries to this questionnaire. One library indicated that they had intended to reply but missed the deadline. Possible reasons for non-response by the other three libraries include lack of interest in the topic under examination, unwillingness to take the time to complete the survey, unwillingness to share information or simply the fact that some libraries may

not have a commitment to staff development and/or do not have an organized approach to staff development and so saw the survey as not being relevant to them.

## **The Survey Findings**

### Policy

Survey respondents were asked if their library has a formally stated policy on staff development.

<b>Responses</b>	<b>No. of replies</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Library has a staff development policy or is included in a policy that applies to a wider organisational grouping within which the library is located.	28	62%
Library does not have staff development policy	17	38%
Total	45	100%

Almost all (91%) of the larger libraries, (that is those with a staff of 130 or more), reported having a formally stated policy, and 34% of the smaller libraries reported doing so. Samples of policy documents from respondents' institutions were reviewed and some common themes identified:

- strategic focus with an emphasis on the alignment of staff development with organisational objectives and priorities;
- commitment to the importance of staff development in enabling both individuals and organisations to achieve their goals;
- emphasis on both individual and organisational learning and development;
- emphasis on both individual and organisational responsibilities for staff development;
- recognition of the importance of staff development in the provision of quality service to clients; and
- emphasis on evaluating the effectiveness of staff development activities and using the knowledge gained in future program planning.

### The Way in Which Staff Development Activity is Organised

Respondents were asked several questions about the way in which staff development activity is organized in their library.

<b>Responses</b>	<b>No. of replies</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Library has a planned staff development program.	36	80%
Library has an informal approach to staff development	9	20%
Library regards staff development as individual's responsibility	0	
Total	45	100%

Of those reporting an informal approach to the organisation of staff development, the majority are smaller libraries (<130 staff members) while only two of the larger libraries (>130 staff members) reported an informal mode of organisation.

Respondents were asked to describe the pattern of coordination of staff development.

<b>Responses</b>	<b>No. of replies</b>	<b>% of total</b>
There is no overall co-ordination of staff development in the library, staff development is the responsibility of managers in each area of the library	5	11%
Overall co-ordination of staff development is the responsibility of a designated library staff member	12	27%
Responsibility for staff development is shared between area managers and a staff member with designated authority for staff development	14	32%
Staff development is the responsibility of a library staff development committee	8	18%
No overall coordination of staff development, staff development is the responsibility of managers in each area of the library often in coordination with either a staff development committee and/or the senior manager of the library.	3	7%
Some or all of the major Divisions within the Library have a designated training officer/unit.	2	3%

No response	1	2%
Total	45	100%

All of the libraries reporting that they have no overall co-ordination of staff development in their organisation are smaller libraries in the survey group.

### Staff Development Committees

Respondents were asked if their library has a staff development committee.

<b>Responses</b>	<b>No. of replies</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Library has a staff development committee	22	49%
Library does not have a staff development committee	23	51%
Total	45	100%

All but one of the libraries reporting that they have a staff development committee have specified terms of reference for that committee. Staff development committees in the respondents' libraries have one of two reporting lines. More than half of the Committees report to the Director, University Librarian or another Senior Manager, the remainder report to a library executive or management committee. Several libraries reported that they have some form of senior advisory committee that deals with a wide range of matters including staff development.

### **The Characteristics of Staff Development Programs**

Respondents were asked about the ways in which staff development is delivered in their organisations.

<b>Responses</b>	<b>No. of replies</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Externally conducted programs	42	93%
On the job staff development	41	91%
In-house training using internal trainers	40	90%
In-house training using external trainers	41	91%

A number of libraries reported utilising programmes run or coordinated by their parent body. Several libraries reported regular use of online training programmes.

Respondents were asked a further range of questions regarding the pattern and type of their staff development activities.

<b>Responses</b>	<b>No. of replies</b>	<b>% of replies</b>
Support for attendance at conferences, pre/post conference workshops and seminars.	42	93%
Orientation/induction programs.	40	90%
Attendance at external short-course training and development programs.	40	90%
Visits to other libraries	40	89%
Attendance at CPE programs	39	87%
In-house short-courses.	37	82%
In-service training programs.	35	78%
Job exchanges within the library .	34	75%
Guest speakers on topics of professional interest.	31	69%
Staff exchanges with other organisations.	27	60%
Support for publication.	20	44%
Support for research.	17	38%
Reports of research in progress and/or completed.	7	15%

The libraries supporting research work by their staff included the CSIRO, one of the State libraries and six of the university libraries. In commenting on the characteristics of their staff development activities, several of the respondents noted that they seek to make their staff development budgets go further by adopting a preference for the more cost effective option of internal and/or online programs.

#### **Staff Development Activity: Increasing, Decreasing or Staying the Same?**

The respondent libraries were asked whether staff development activity had increased, stayed the same or decreased over the past five years.

<b>Responses</b>	<b>No. of</b>	<b>% of</b>
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	<b>replies</b>	<b>total</b>
Staff development activity increased.	28	62%
Staff development activity stayed the same.	15	33%
Staff development activity decreased.	2	4%
Total	45	100%

Of the two libraries reporting a decrease, one cited several reasons for this including a change of focus following a change in senior management and the impact of organisational downsizing and restructuring in reducing the scope for staff development. This same organisation reported that the decrease in staff development is cyclical rather than a permanent change and that following the completion of a major redevelopment program there will be an increased emphasis on staff development especially in areas of customer service.

### **Factors Influencing Staff Development**

#### The Influence of Information Technology

Respondents were asked if the increased use of information technology in information services delivery had affected their staff development program. Over 90% reported that Information Technology has had such an effect. These libraries were asked about the nature of that influence.

<b>Responses</b>	<b>No. of replies</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Information technology has affected the staff development program.	41	91%
Increased information technology applications have led to a greater need to train staff in IT applications.	41	91%
Increased information technology applications have had an impact on the focus and content of our staff development program.	35	78%
Increased use of information technology in staff development programs (e.g. computer aided instruction).	25	55%

#### Strategic Plans

Respondents were asked if their Libraries have a strategic plan and if so whether staff development is allocated a high medium or low priority within that plan.

<b>Responses</b>	<b>No. of replies</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Library has a strategic plan.	38	84%
Library does not have a strategic plan.	4	9%
Staff development a high priority within the strategic plan	30	67%
Staff development a medium priority within the strategic plan	9	20%
Staff development a low priority within the strategic plan	0	

### Other Factors

The survey asked if any other factors had had a significant influence on the staff development program. Slightly over half (24 responses or 53%) of those answering indicated that this was the case. Several broad themes emerged from these comments. Chief amongst these was the impact, particularly in the higher education sector, of shifts in the funding climate and resultant contracting budgets. The decrease in library budgets has reduced staff numbers, constricted the opportunities for staff mobility and put pressure on the budget available for staff development.

The need for multi-skilling/reskilling of the workforce was mentioned by several respondents – with a particular emphasis on the increasing role of librarians in teaching information literacy and knowledge management. For many libraries organisational review and restructuring – either within the library or as part of a broader organisational restructure has placed an increased emphasis on staff development as a component of effecting such change. A number of organisations noted an increased emphasis on regular work review/appraisal processes and the important role that such programs play in identifying individual staff development needs.

The impact of several of these factors was summarised by one respondent as follows:

*“The external pressures resulting from the university sector funding situation as a whole is instrumental in limiting the library in most areas as regards implementing our vision. Low staff turnover for many years and the ageing of the workforce is a real*

*factor. The challenge is to keep staff up to date, motivated and effective. An unresolved challenge is skilling for the medium term future with minimal young staff to develop and those we do get tending to move on to more financially rewarding areas.”*

## **Incentives and Recognition**

### Incentives

Respondents were asked to indicate what forms of incentive they have in place to encourage their employees’ participation in staff development programs.

<b>Responses</b>	<b>No. of replies</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Paid time granted to attend staff development programs.	40	89%
Payment of course fees for approved study programs and the like.	36	80%
Provision of <i>per diem</i> payments and/or travel allowances.	35	78%
Staff development provides enhanced opportunities for promotion.	11	24%

Commenting on the last of these, one respondent said: *“The issue of providing enhanced opportunities for promotion by way of staff development incentive is difficult to balance at times. It is the case that participation in staff development programs can enhance people's promotability. However, promotion is not an automatic outcome of such activity. There can sometimes be dissatisfaction resulting if people who participate in staff development do not get promotions that they may be seeking. However, that is not a reason to stop undertaking staff development!”*

Several respondents commented that in their experience little incentive was needed to encourage participation in staff development. One said: *“These “incentives” are in place but we find that staff need very little encouragement or “incentives” to participate in most staff development activities. The majority of Library staff are interested in developing their skills and participating in professional development activities.”*

### Recognition of staff development

Respondents were asked about the forms of recognition that they have in place for staff members who have participated in staff development activities.

<b>Responses</b>	<b>No. of replies</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Documentation of participation on staff member's personal file.	25	55%
In-house certification.	20	44%
Formal accreditation (for example Library supported diploma degree or accredited short course programs).	9	20%
Other means of recognition.	17	38%

Other methods of recognition cited included: recognition through the Library's performance management system; placing staff conference reports on a staff Intranet and listing of participants in staff development activities in some form of library staff development newsletter or Intranet listing.

### Evaluation

The surveyed libraries were asked whether they have mechanisms in place for evaluating the effectiveness of staff development in their libraries and if so what these are.

<b>Responses</b>	<b>No. of replies</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Mechanisms in place for evaluating staff development	40	89%
No mechanisms in place for evaluating staff development	5	11%
Staff development program participants complete evaluation forms at the completion of a training/development program	28	62%
Completion of evaluation forms at some time after the completion of a training/development program	15	33%
Review of evaluation forms by the person/s with primary responsibility for staff development	20	44%
Review of evaluation forms by the staff development committee	11	24%
Periodic review of the whole staff development program.	23	51
Periodic review of the staff development program focussing on	16	35%

specific parts of the program		
Other methods of review and evaluation	9	20%

A range of methods was reported under the last category above. These included:

- evaluation of activities concentrating on what the learning outcomes have been for participants, what they have learnt from the course and how it can be improved;
- annual review of the staff development program by the Staff Development Committee as part of the Library planning process;
- pre and post testing,
- use of specific performance indicators identified for each training and development program;
- formal reporting back to colleagues by participants in external courses and conferences;
- supervisors and staff members sharing the outcomes of staff development programs in workplace applications;
- evaluation, several months after attendance, to determine whether skills, knowledge and attitudes from the training have been implemented in the workplace.

### **Commentary on the Study Findings**

#### Policy

A formal statement of staff development policy is important because it formalises and actively states organisational commitment to staff development, gives clear guidelines to staff members on the terms and conditions of the library's support for staff development and sets out the obligations on the part of staff members who are recipients of support for staff development.

A significant number of libraries reported they do have such a commitment stated through a staff development policy. Several clear themes were evident in the policies examined in this study:

- strategic focus
- alignment of staff development activity and organisational objectives

- emphasis on both individual and organisational development
- recognition of the importance of staff development in the provision of quality service to clients
- emphasis on evaluating the effectiveness of staff development.

### Staff Development Committees

A staff development committee provides an important focus for staff development activity and also provides opportunities for staff members, from a range of areas and levels of the organisation, to participate in the promotion and organisation of staff development activities in their library. Half of the libraries that responded to the survey have such a committee, all but one having defined terms of reference. All of these committees have a senior reporting line in their organisation. This senior level of reporting of the staff development committees indicates that there is a high level of importance accorded to the work of these committees and it give these committees the potential to be influential in shaping and directing staff development in their organisations.

### The Types of Staff Development Activity

This study has shown that staff development is being undertaken in a wide range of modes. There is evidence of a good balance between training in specific knowledge and job skills and broader professional developmental programs and activities. In many instances the libraries surveyed reported that they have a preference for staff development that can be undertaken in-house. This, in part at least, appears to be due to a need to achieve economies and to make staff development budgets go further. However, such in-house training can have strong benefits in its own right. By involving staff members in a process of actively passing on their skills to others the trainers themselves gain a benefit - extending their skills and ability through the process of training and developing the skills of others.

### The Level of Staff Development Activity

The survey responses indicate a strong and growing body of staff development activity in the Australian academic and research libraries sector. All but two of the libraries in the study reported that the level of staff development activity had, over the past five

years, either increased or been maintained at the same level. Of the two libraries reporting a decrease, one noted that this was not due to any lack of commitment to staff development but rather due to current organisational factors.

### The Impact of Information Technology

Advances in both the sophistication of information technology applications and the wide scale use of these applications has had a major impact on libraries. As might be expected, this has in turn led to a significant flow-on for the staff development programs in a large majority of the respondent libraries.

Over 90% of the libraries replying to the survey reported that the increased use of information technology had led to a greater need to train staff in the use of information technology applications and 75% of respondents noted an impact on the focus and content of staff development programs. Many libraries reported that the growing role of libraries in teaching literacy and knowledge management skills has resulted in a need to develop these skill in their staff. This is both necessary in order to apply these skills for these staff members to take on these skills in their own work and to take a prime role in training library clients in information literacy.

### Budget Strictures

Many libraries reported on the impact of budget constraints on their organization and in turn on their staff development programs. Budgetary pressures were reported as impacting directly on staff development programs - reducing the money available and forcing organizations to find ways of maintain their staff development programs while spending less on that activity. Despite the pressures of contracting budgets, the majority of libraries surveyed have continued to maintain their commitment to staff development and to allocate a high priority to these programs within their budgets. Many libraries reported that they are actively seeking ways in which to make those budgets go further, for example by increased use of internal training resources and the use of online training packages. Contracting budgets have also impacted on staff development programs by reducing the overall number of staff positions available with a resulting flow on restriction of opportunities for movement between jobs. This has the potential to produce stagnation at both individual and organizational levels. A number of respondents noted this as both a potential problem – staff members sometimes lacking

interest in, or commitment to, undertaking staff development – and as a need and an opportunity for creative organisational growth through staff development programs.

### Evaluation

Evaluation of staff development activity is important in assessing the effectiveness of staff development undertaken (for the individual, the team and the library as a whole and for and informing future planning. Bridgland observed “*Without evaluation staff development runs the risk of being ad hoc, lacking direction and occurring in isolation without having any relevance to either the recipient or the library.*”<sup>x</sup> This current study has revealed a strong and active commitment to carrying out evaluation by a variety of means, and to improving their staff development programs through those means.

### Differences Between Large and Small Libraries

Differences between larger and smaller libraries in the study group showed up mainly in two areas. Most of the larger libraries have a formally stated staff development policy and they more frequently reported having both a planned staff development program and a designated staff member undertaking co-ordination of that program. This result is not surprising given the differences in size of the libraries within the sector. Smaller libraries may have neither the need nor the organisational capacity to sustain a position that is either fully or partially responsible for staff development. The lack of such a position, or of a stated staff development policy in these smaller libraries does not, however, imply any less a commitment to staff development. Over two thirds of the smaller academic and research libraries have a planned staff development program and offer a wide range of staff development opportunities to their staff.

### Strategic Plans/Priorities

Strategic plans are important in setting broad organizational objectives and priorities. It is significant that over 80% of respondent libraries have a strategic plan and of these close to 80% have allocated staff development a high priority within those Plans. This is a strong indication that staff development is seen as an important factor in the achievement of organisational objectives and priorities. Across the Australian academic and research library sector investment in staff development is seen as a necessary and



valuable investment in the process of developing a skilled and committed workforce and through this means achieving more effective organisations.

### **Conclusion**

This study has shown staff development in Australian academic and research libraries to be in a strong and healthy state. The emerging interest in staff development that was evident in the sector in the early and mid 1980's has been realized to a point where Australian academic and research libraries have overwhelmingly adopted a strong commitment to staff development. This is evidenced by the allocation of strategic priority to staff development, formally stated staff development policies and the allocation of designated staff development responsibility within many libraries. Staff development is seen as a key means of developing a skilled and committed workforce and more effective organisations. Both small and large libraries within the sector have a demonstrable commitment to staff development that is strategically focused and has a strong emphasis on linking individual and organisational goals. The development in Australia of a public policy environment that has placed an emphasis on educating and skilling the workforce has provided an environment in which the growth of staff development programs has been encouraged and assisted. The commitment to staff development in the academic and research library sector has endured despite the pressure of contracting budgets in many parts of that sector.

Staff development - the development of the people resources of our organisations is an important investment in developing the future capability of those organisations. The evidence of this survey is that staff development has established a strong and enduring place in the future of Australian academic and research libraries.

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### **Endnotes.**

<sup>i</sup> This research project was conducted under the auspices of the La Trobe University Library Research Committee and with support from the Library for the project.

<sup>ii</sup> Australian Library & Information Association – Statement on Continuing Professional Development. <http://www.alia.org.au/education/cpd/>

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iii For more information on the Aurora Foundation:

<http://www.alia.org.au/aurora/>

iv A third, and more recent, study should also be noted. Bridgland in the mid 1990's undertook two surveys of Australian academic and state libraries with a specific focus on the impact of the National Training Reform Agenda and federal government policy encouraging workplace rearrangement on staff development in Australian academic and state libraries. Bridgland, Angela, The impact of the National Training Reform Agenda and workplace rearrangement on staff development in Australian academic and state libraries, PhD Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1997.

v Trask, Margaret Staff Development in Libraries; Report of a Study Project September 1981 – June 1982, Lindfield, N.S.W., Kurin-gai College of Advanced Education, 1983 p.7

vi Gray, John L, "Staff Development policies and Practices in Some Australian Libraries", in Lifestyles and Librarians, Proceedings of the 24<sup>th</sup> LAA Conference, Darwin 1986, p444

vii A copy of the survey questionnaire is available on request to the author:  
[i.smith@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:i.smith@latrobe.edu.au)

viii A range of libraries is represented in this sector. Some of the university libraries responding to the survey have a relatively small staff (between 30 and 60). The majority of the libraries in the survey group fall in the range 90 to 270 staff members while the three largest (two state libraries and the national Library of Australia have 358, 401 and 512 staff members respectively.)

ix A response was also received from a New Zealand university library. While that group of libraries is outside the scope of this survey and therefore not included in the data analysis, the response nevertheless provides an interesting comparison – with some similarities and some differences between that and the Australian respondents.

x Bridgland, op cit, p. 91