

# REFERENCE

Natalie Cuffe

Column Co-ordinator

QUT Law Library

Phone (07) 3864 5046 Fax (07) 3864 5041

Email: n.cuffe@qut.edu.au

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## *From library skills to information literacy*

The Fourth National Information Literacy Conference *Concept, Challenge, Conundrum: From Library Skills to Information Literacy* was held in Adelaide from 3 – 5 December 1999, at the University of South Australia. I was fortunate enough to be able to attend. My overwhelming impression was of the plethora of experience in, and enthusiasm for, information literacy in this country both as an educational and societal goal. Whilst information literacy has, in the past, been viewed as the domain of teacher librarians and higher education librarians, conference participants (who were primarily teacher librarians and higher education librarians) acknowledge the place of information literacy in the corporate workplace and some conference participants from the corporate sector presented papers on information literacy in the workplace. The theme that information literacy is a continuum, through formal education at primary and secondary schools, higher education and the workplace, and by virtue of our citizenry was prevalent at the conference. The need for collaboration between librarians at the various levels of this continuum was acknowledged and the conference facilitated the beginnings and expansion of this collaboration. Promoting information literacy, both formally and informally, has to be a pervasive concern of educational, special, corporate and public librarians alike in the 21<sup>st</sup> century information society to address the world's educational, economic and societal needs.

The conference paper topics were diverse. The content covered issues such as the theoretical, abstract perspective of information literacy to the practical "sets of skills" approach; approaches for integrating information literacy into curriculum from a range of

disciplines (or as Christine Bruce suggested at the conference, "curriculum design for information literacy education" as "curriculum integration" emphasises bringing "additional objectives" into curriculum that are concerned with something other than core content, rather than encouraging students to learn content through the process of effective information use); the role of teacher librarians, higher education and corporate librarians and other educators; the linear and recursive nature of information literacy and learning; the academic and workplace and societal environments; the marketing and presenting skills of librarians; the education of librarians to be educators; the "ownership" of information literacy and the politics

For those who are sceptical and asking what does this have to do with the business of being a law librarian, here is a taste of the relevance of the issue to law firm librarians, university law librarians and government department law librarians.

**Carmel O'Sullivan** from Blake Dawson Waldron presented a paper entitled *Profiling an Information Literate Law Firm*. At the outset she acknowledged that lawyers work in an information rich profession, which means that information literacy is crucial to the successful practice of law. The profile of an information literate law firm was explored from an organisational viewpoint and from the viewpoint of an individual lawyer.

For a firm to become and remain information literate, a number of prerequisites exist according to Carmel:

1. Information produced by the firm and knowledge held by individuals is captured and reused.
2. The firm knows how it makes a profit and uses its structures and procedures to maximise profit for the future.
3. Staff understand what information and knowledge mean to the firm
4. The firm encourages and enables staff to do their jobs efficiently
5. The firm has information literate staff

Carmel developed each of these characteristics and in the conclusion to her paper discussed the relationship between knowledge management and information literacy and how organisational information literacy turns knowledge and know-how into corporate assets. Carmel was the leading representative of workplace information literacy at the conference and I would commend her paper to all law firm librarians.

**Judith Peacock** from Queensland University of Technology presented an inspirational paper entitled *From Trainers to Educators: Librarians and the Challenge of Change*. Judith suggested that librarians in higher education must develop their teaching expertise and foster educational partnerships with academics. This would enable the development of lifelong learners through the integration of information literacy principles and skills in course curriculum. She argued that it is essential for courses in librarianship at university and library staff development programs to provide opportunities for the development of teaching skills, knowledge and abilities. Her paper examined the benefits of such a philosophy for library teaching staff and information literacy in higher education and outlines strategies for such a philosophy to be adopted in librarianship courses and library staff development programs. The issue of the role of librarians as educators and preparation and education for the role is relevant to all law librarians, whether in a law firm library, university law library or government library, as our educational role in all environments continues to expand.

**Diana Kingston** from University of Sydney proposed, in her presentation, a *Cooperation and Information Skills Resources*, the establishment of an Australian Information Literacy site and Institute which was discussed and endorsed for further investigation at the conference, and is being discussed collaboratively by CAUL and other agencies such as ALIA. The purpose of the Institute and Site would be to promote and foster the development of information literacy throughout the Australian community (corporate, education and society in general), foster collaborations and resource sharing.

**Patricia Iannuzzi** from Florida International University presented a paper entitled *Information*

*Literacy Competency Standards in the United States* and facilitated a workshop on the draft ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*. Patricia provided a background and overview of standards initiatives in the United States and outlined future ALA initiatives. The information literacy competency standards comprise five standards and a range of performance indicators and measurable outcomes. The standards are that the information literate individual:

1. Determines the extent of the information needed;
2. Accesses needed information effectively and efficiently;
3. Evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system;
4. Uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose; and
5. Understands many of the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.

Although directed at higher education, the standards would certainly be of relevance to law firms and government departments in designing and evaluating their information literacy programs. After all, information literacy is a continuum and comments on the standards from the workplace portion of the continuum would be valuable. The draft *ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* can be found at: [www.ala.org/acrl/ilcomstan.html](http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilcomstan.html)

I understand that the proceedings will be available around March 2000 and are being published by the University of South Australia Library. In the meantime, *Information Literacy, the Professional Issue: proceedings of the Third National Information Literacy Conference* conducted by the University of South Australia Library and the Australian Library and Information Association Information Literacy Taskforce, 8 and 9 December 1997, edited by Di Booker, may be of interest.

**Natalie Cuffe**  
QUT Law Library