

Front Line



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President

Professional development and competency standards; an opportunity?

'Competency standards' the latest slogan to come from our national buzz-phrase factory, has arrived on the Association's doorstep. It is not yet clear whether the focus is to be on narrowly defined, task-based competency (and efficiency) or on

wider, more fundamental professional issues.

Whichever, it provides a useful stimulus for us to do some soul-searching about the nature of competency in our discipline: how to define, inculcate and maintain it and (much more painful) what to do when it is absent. It also raises the possibility of a reconsideration of many of the principles which, for the 30 years since 1961, have coloured our attitudes to education for entry to the profession, and (a separate issue) for the right to practise within it.

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The acceptance of group responsibility (and liability) for the competence of individual practitioners has always been one of the cornerstones of the concept of a right to practise, and although governments sometimes intervene by way

of a complementary licensing and regulatory framework, the relevant association is usually and properly instrumental in the process, especially that part of it which relates to the prescription of acceptable standards of performance.

Our own Association has gone some little way towards defining competency; in its *Handbook*, there are prescriptions, generally task-centred, as to what it is that librarians should do, but we stop short of defining how well they should be done, or what remedies exist when they are not.

This is understandable, for much of our work up until now has been concerned with the broad and generalised provision of services and collections, has tended not to focus on the precise needs of individual clients, and has been sheltered somewhat from the issues which normally attach to the professional-client relationship as experienced by the more autonomous and exposed occupations.

Our de facto assumption that academic preparation is the sufficient and necessary condition for the inculcation of professional competency and admission to, and continued membership of the body of competent practitioners has blurred the issues further. We have assumed that the recognition of courses leading to 'a first professional qualification' by our Board of Education is a sufficient safeguard in the inculcation of professional competency, but this may be a dangerous delusion.



Wishing all Readers Merry Christmas and a Safe Holiday

From all Staff at

