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We are delighted to accept Bill's invitation to open this issue of *inCite* with a look at some aspects of training reform. We are all aware of the rapid pace of change in almost every aspect of our lives, and it can be rather exhausting at times!

The need to keep up with change in our working lives is being recognised by changes in federal government policy, in the areas of industrial relations and education and training. We all need to understand the concepts involved in order to assess their impact on our professional lives and identify what action we might need to take.

Until the last year or so education and training has been mainly in the form of formal award courses, such as Certificates, Associate Diplomas and University Degrees. On-the-job training and competencies acquired in life have generally not been recognised for employment purposes.

This has all changed under the federal government's National Training Reform Agenda. This seeks to develop a more efficient education and training sector by recognising competencies acquired in formal and short courses, and through on-the-job training and experience. The Agenda focuses on the development of a nationally consistent, competency-based approach to vocational education and training, looking particularly at workplace training. This involves the development of competencies—which cover knowledge, skills and application in the workplace—for every industry.

The grand plan is that these competencies will form the basis of processes such as selection, promotion and transfer across industries. Fifty percent of industries had developed their competency standards at the end of 1993 and ours is due for completion by the end of this year. The draft standards will go through

a validation process in August and we encourage you to contact your State Branch, to provide input to your State Arts Training Taskforce.

Competency standards will complement and support other micro-economic reform initiatives, especially labour market reform which is occurring through enterprise bargaining and workplace rearrangement. They will also be a common reference point for teachers and trainers for curriculum development, and for the development of clearer pathways between education, training and the work place. In the TAFE sector we see the effect of this in the development of a national curriculum for Library Technician courses.

The use of competencies in the National Training Reform Agenda aims:

- to introduce flexible training pathways to meet individual and industry needs; that is, recognise competencies acquired through formal courses, short courses and on-the-job-training. Courses will be offered in various ways, including television, video and distance education. Many more courses—at the entry level and post award levels—will be offered in these ways;
- to open up transferability and portability of competencies within and across industries, so enhancing career path options;
- to establish nationally recognised qualifications and course accreditation procedures, which has hitherto been done on a state basis. A national qualifications system will obviously help with portability. The states have co-operated to develop a National Framework for the Recognition of Training (NFROT), which identifies agreed principles for course development;
- to develop articulated pathways between courses and institutions to assist individuals to claim credit in one course for competencies

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acquired in other courses. This is outlined in the AVCC pamphlet *Library and Information Studies: credit transfer in degree courses at Australian Universities*.

The overall objectives of these changes include:

- a multi-skilled workforce with increased productivity, producing quality goods and exploiting new technologies and market opportunities effectively;
- improved career paths—the development of competency standards for the workplace is designed to increase opportunities for moving across industries;
- the development of closer links between industry and training and education providers;
- a focus on life-long learning and the recognition of prior learning (RPL).

The development of competency standards for each industry will underpin this process.

What this means for us all is that we must embrace the concept of learning as a lifelong process. We need to develop our goals and career plans, identify our competencies and how we might best fill any gaps in them—through a formal course or by on-the-job training.

ALIA has taken a proactive role in the development of competency standards for our industry, through Arne Hazell's representing us on the National Taskforce. In the light of all these developments, ALIA's Board of Education is reviewing education policy and standards for entry level qualifications and training and development courses. The Association is also developing products and guidelines to help members plan their careers in these new industrial and educational environments. ■

This Front Line is an abridged version of a paper prepared for the Board of Education and General Council. If you would like a copy of the full paper, please ask your local Branch or National Office for one.