Fear and loathing of answering selection criteria

Helen Pickers, Queensland Library Technician section

In June this year I was invited to make a presentation at the Queensland TAFE Section's professional development activity *Leaping the levels*. Other presenters included Tracey Bath, Ian Trail and Jill Duff.

My presentation was an overview of my personal experience in applying for progression from Technical Officer 2 (TO2) to Technical Officer 3 (TO3) in the Queensland State Public Service.

'I wish to present my application for advancement from Library Technician TO2 to Library Technician TO3. I believe I am able to comply with the prescribed criteria and I have served more than twelve months on the maximum salary for a Level 2 Technical Officer of the Department of Mines and Energy.'

In this opening paragraph to my application I used the personal pronoun four times. This was a difficult step for a person of my 'mature' years, brought up in an era where telling another person or group of people how successful you thought you were was considered bragging and bad manners. This may seem a trivial difficulty in a time when confidence in ones ability is actively encouraged and being shy and retiring is a joke, but when I first read the guidelines for profession and the selection criteria, written as it was in 'public service speak', I was unable to see how I could possibly put into words a convincing description of what I did, and how successfully I did it. This worrying started two years before I finally submitted my application!

At the time I submitted my application I was one of the few library technicians in the Queensland Public Service who had reached the top level of the TO2 stream. One of the problems facing all of us was that while there were generic guidelines in place in the technical officer stream, the human resources staff were not at all certain how these were to be applied to library technicians. Were library technicians the same as laboratory technicians, geological technicians, dental technicians? A further challenge was that some human resource staff had never heard of library technicians!

One friend who applied for progression had her progression approved — but twelve months after her application was submitted due to circumstances beyond everyone's control. Another friend had her application refused, and to me the explanation given for this was not very satisfactory as she appeared to fulfil the selection criteria.

My application was put on hold when I applied for a job in another department. The position was advertised as a TO2, and when I was offered the position I explained to my new manager that I planned to apply for progression to TO3. He was most supportive, and encouraged me to submit my application as soon as possible. Once I started, the process took on a life of its own. I outlined and re-outlined, wrote and rewrote, ploughed through the acres of paperwork I had amassed while recording my progress, and came to terms with saying 'I'.

By the time I actually faced the progression interview panel, I had enough supporting documentation to sink a battleship. I had addressed the selection criteria, and thoroughly. I got my progression to TO3.

My experience has raised a number of issues. Just because there are progression guidelines for library staff in place, it does not follow that human resource sections will know how to apply them or even to whom they apply. Will there ever be real standardisation, considering the variety of titles used to describe library work? Career paths are still not clearly defined — there are some library technicians who hold positions traditionally held by librarians. Will there ever be a workable compromise in this area? ■

Teaching under threat?

Kathy Sharrad, ALIA Library Technicians Section, South Australia

One of the greatest challenges facing library technician students and the section in South Australia is the restructure of the Library Studies Unit of the Adelaide Institute of TAFE. During the past year the unit has lost two of its permanent lecturers, leaving only two permanent lecturers in the unit. Contract staff have been employed to enabled scheduled classes to continue. One of the benefits of this change is that it has opened up greater opportunities for library technicians to become more involved in the teaching program as part-time lecturers.

Students have voiced concerns that teaching staff are under great pressure coping with the demands of the courses. They are reluctant to add to this pressure by addressing course-related queries with the staff. To compound this, the unit will be re-locating within the Institute later this year.

The Library Studies Unit provides courses covering Certificate Level II, Certificate Level III, and the Diploma in Library and Information Studies. The section and students of the unit are seeking assurances from the Institute on the long-term viability of the unit. The staff have done an excellent job of meeting the requirements of the library industry by supplying qualified library technicians and library officers since the unit was established in 1980. The South Australian Library Technicians Section will be closely monitoring these issues as the year 2000 approaches and we will continue to give our full support to the staff and students of the unit in any way we can.

We would like to know if any other states have faced these issues. How have other teaching units survived? What support strategies did you use? We welcome any feedback. ■