



# Guidelines for Australian VET Libraries

**Endorsed by the ALIA Board 23 June 2016**

## **Where we are now**

Vocational education and training (VET) libraries provide essential support for educators and students. They provide print materials and electronic resources; individual and group study spaces; computers and fast internet connection; information and digital literacy support, and expert assistance from qualified library and information professionals. VET libraries make a significant contribution to learning outcomes and to the employability of students.

## **Where we are headed**

VET libraries are embracing new technologies, new resources, new services and new programs, to deliver the very best student experience, whether on campus or online.

Webinars, MOOCs, pop-up libraries and maker spaces are just a few of the exciting possibilities that VET libraries are already exploring.

Libraries across Australia are at the forefront of access to collections and resources. VET libraries are part of an innovation-rich environment, connecting learning communities and driving strong student outcomes.

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**These guidelines were developed by ALIA in 2015, with the assistance of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) Libraries Advisory Committee.**

**They were published as draft guidelines for comment in February 2016. After extensive feedback from the sector, they were endorsed by the VET Libraries Advisory Committee on 21 June 2016 and by the ALIA Board on 23 June 2016.**

**They will be reviewed by the VET Libraries Advisory Committee every two years.**

## 1 Introduction

In a global knowledge economy, information skills have never been more important. The role of library and information professionals is to find, share and connect: to connect people with ideas, books, information, knowledge, resources and the broader community. Library staff are also teachers, helping students build their digital and information literacy skills. Library services enable discovery and innovative thinking, and information professionals are trusted guides.

Quoting from *Focus on Learning, A framework for the provision of learning resources, library and information services in vocation education and training* (1995)<sup>i</sup> the role of VET libraries is to:

- Support and respond to changes in the educational programs and delivery methods of the institution
- Actively encourage, guide and empower students and staff to acquire lifelong learning skills through the provision of information literacy and learning skills programs
- Guide, encourage and facilitate intellectual and physical access to information and learning resources, including electronic resources
- Promote and implement the principles of equal opportunity, including issues of social justice, equity and access.

While these statements remain relevant, in the last 20 years there has been a significant shift to electronic resources and online delivery of library services; library staff are even more closely involved in developing and resourcing the curriculum, and they provide invaluable support to students who are at risk of digital exclusion as well as to those who are confident learners in the digital environment.

VET libraries ensure their institutions comply with the Australian Skills Quality Authority Standards for Registered Training Organisations 2015<sup>1</sup>.

*ASQA RTO Standards 2015, clause 1.3*

*The RTO has, for all of its scope of registration, and consistent with its training and assessment strategies, sufficient:*

- *trainers and assessors to deliver the training and assessment;*
- *educational and support services to meet the needs of the learner cohort/s undertaking the training and assessment;*
- *learning resources to enable learners to meet the requirements for each unit of competency, and which are accessible to the learner regardless of location or mode of delivery; and*
- *facilities, whether physical or virtual, and equipment to accommodate and support the number of learners undertaking the training and assessment.*

ASQA standards indicate that every VET institution should offer its students a library and information service that is appropriate for their course of study.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.asqa.gov.au/users-guide-to-the-standards-for-registered-training-organisations-2015/users-guide-to-the-standards-for-registered-training-organisations-2015.html>

### **1.1 Working with staff**

VET library teams work closely with course teachers. They help staff keep up-to-date with the latest advances in their field and help them identify and source the information and materials they need to deliver current, relevant courses. Library and information professionals also work alongside ICT, administrators of the learning management systems, learning support officers, disability support officers, social workers and counsellors, to give every VET student – school leavers and mature students, from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds – the best chance of success.

### **1.2 Working with students**

VET libraries enable both supported and self-paced, self-directed learning. Students have access to qualified librarians and library technicians and are surrounded by the resource materials they require. They have access to electronic resources and to the internet, through library PCs and via wifi. Often, students find it difficult to study at home – they may not have a dedicated study space; they may not have the devices nor the internet connection to study online, or there may not be sufficient devices and bandwidth at home. In the library, they have the space to work independently or in collaborative groups and access to the technology that is essential to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. Library teams help students develop information discovery skills. These will not only help them with their studies, but will also be of value as an employability skill and in their working and home lives.

While the majority of vocational education and training courses are run through the public TAFE system, they are also delivered by private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and, to a lesser extent, by universities. At the same time, some TAFE institutes have also moved into providing degree courses and higher qualifications.

These ALIA guidelines for Australian VET libraries are appropriate for TAFE institutes and private RTOs, but where higher education courses are being taught, university library guidelines and benchmarks (currently under development by the Council for Australian University Librarians) should be referred to.

## **2 The important services offered by VET libraries**

VET libraries offer a range of quality, relevant services aligned with the needs of educators and students. Library and information professionals share their research abilities and encourage students to develop their own digital and information literacy skills. They work with other support officers to provide additional help to vulnerable students and those with special needs. They are also a vital point of connection for international students.

### **2.1 Educational services**

The philosophy and practices of the library team reinforce the objectives and educational processes of the institution. The library provides educational services and programs which facilitate people's ability to find, evaluate and use information effectively. The library also supports students broader information requirements around health and wellbeing, job-seeking and other life and career issues.

### **Guideline 1: Curriculum**

The library team is formally involved in curriculum planning and development to ensure the provision of appropriate information resources. There is a close partnership between the library and the institution's teaching program, which involves the integration of information literacy skills into course delivery.

### **Guideline 2: Information literacy**

The library team is responsible for evaluating, assessing and providing the most appropriate assistance to students, to ensure they have the information resources and information skills they need to meet the requirements of their course. Programs to enhance students' skills in accessing and using information:

- Form part of a comprehensive learning support program
- Are integrated with the institution's courses and programs
- Are designed and developed in partnership with teaching staff
- Are not restricted to formal class settings
- Are interactive and model flexible delivery and adult learning principles.

Library users are also informed of their obligations to comply with freedom of information, privacy and copyright legislation in the various Australian jurisdictions.

### **Guideline 3: Partnerships and outreach**

The library manager identifies opportunities to partner with other parts of the organisation and with external stakeholders to enhance the services offered by the library. Library services support national recognition of units of competency and qualifications.

## **2.2 Access to information**

The organisation, management of and access to learning resources and information services supports learners in flexible approaches to course delivery.

### **Guideline 4: Resource access**

To facilitate efficient access to information, resources are selected, catalogued and/or indexed, classified and arranged according to recognised standards and provided in a format that best meets the information needs of the educators and students.

Students studying remotely have easy access to the resources they need online. Where arrangements have been made to use the services of another library eg an RTO negotiating access to a university library service, or a TAFE requesting support for distance students through local public libraries, students have access to the full range of materials they need. This includes high value databases, where licensing arrangements have been negotiated to take account of the off-campus use.

### **Guideline 5: Opening hours**

Opening hours are consistent with the needs of the learning and teaching community, including part time and flexible learning students.

### **Guideline 6: Library management systems**

Budget is allocated to upgrading the library management system (LMS) and other technology platforms on a regular basis. The performance of the LMS is reviewed every five years to ensure its continued suitability for the purpose, in the context of advances in technology.

### **Guideline 7: Electronic resources**

Many resources are available 24/7 online. Access to online learning sources is available through a federated search, allowing library users to search all the library's electronic resources through one enquiry. Support is given to BYOD students as well as to those using the library's terminals.

## **2.3 Learning resources and information services**

Adequate numbers, range and quality of learning resources and information services are available to meet the educational needs of learners and teachers and they are chosen by library staff in cooperation with teaching staff.

Collection range and size should be related to the number of students and teachers and to the breadth and depth of the institution's training profile. Flexible delivery methods create a greater need for students to access resources through the library and smaller institutions require more resources per student.

Print collections are increasingly giving way to electronic resources – journals, databases, ebooks and streamed video – and these are often secured from vendors who operate on a global scale. This requires highly developed negotiating skills to navigate the licenses, subscriptions and payment terms offered by publishers, with movements in currency exchange rates providing an additional dynamic to the purchasing process.

### **Guideline 8: Resource management policy**

The library manager reviews the resource management policy annually, in consultation with key stakeholders, to identify core information resources, both physical and electronic, and technology platforms to be acquired and managed for the organisation. The library manager provides guidelines for the selection, acquisition and disposal of information resources, noting that a high proportion of resources in the collection should have been published within the last five years.

### **Guideline 9: Resource sharing**

The library manager helps develop and participates in co-operative networks to provide document delivery and facilitate resource sharing. Wherever possible, consortia arrangements that provide benefits to the organisation are negotiated.

### **Guideline 10: Website**

The library team has direct control over the content of the library web pages and these are used to create an online experience that is as engaging as the real world library visit.

### **Guideline 11: Marketing**

There is a library marketing strategy and its implementation informs the college community of the resources and services offered by the library as well as increasing awareness of the value of the library to the community.

## **3 Physical environment**

The move from print to electronic resources, the ubiquitous nature of handheld mobile devices, increases in housing density in the inner city, the emergence of group study – these are all factors that affect library spaces. Some reduce the need for physical space, others increase it. VET libraries simply have to be flexible to accommodate the needs of students in an ever changing landscape. Space, facilities and equipment must be appropriate to support on site and remote learners in flexible approaches to delivery, in a variety of educational settings and for purposeful learning.

### **Guideline 12: Space requirements**

Space allowance considers the library's requirements and complies with relevant Australian Standards. Initial choice of the site for the library allows for ease of access and reasonable expansion. Floor space allocation creates a safe, pleasant and attractive environment, and allows for the following library functions:

- Collection shelving and storage for a wide range of resource formats
- Student individual and group study areas
- Seminar rooms
- Workstations
- PCs and BYOD support infrastructure
- Informal seating areas
- Staff work-space.

### **Guideline 13: Accessibility**

Not only should the physical library space accommodate the needs of people living with a disability, adaptive technologies should also be available. Websites should conform with international Web Content Accessibility Guidelines<sup>ii</sup>.

### **Guideline 14: Safety and wellbeing**

The library manager is responsible for the planning and maintenance of library facilities in compliance with the appropriate Australian Standards. The library's location offers convenient access for library staff and users. Entrance and exit points are not blocked by equipment or furniture which may impede emergency access. Due consideration is given to the security of both personnel and resources. Regular lockdown and fire drills are conducted, with the agreement of the parent institution.

### **Guideline 15: Work health and safety**

The library environment should comply with work health and safety legislation and relevant Australian Standards. For example some environmental factors to be considered are:

- Acoustics - the library should be free from excessive noise and vibration

- Floor loading complies with Australian Standards. Attention is paid to the building's structural allowances with regard to placement and loading of stacks. Storage and shelving are conveniently located.
- Lighting - adequate lighting levels should be provided in accordance with Australian Standards
- Power - special attention should be paid to the appropriate placement of outlets for technology
- Other conditions – adequate ventilation, temperature and humidity control, dust and pest control should be provided for the preservation of library resources, maintenance of technology and comfort of staff and library users.

## 4 Human resources

Investment in collections and resources is important, but the real value is when organisations employ professionals with the skills to connect students and teaching staff with the materials they need for their studies. The library must be staffed by the level and mix of professionals necessary to enable the service to contribute positively to the educational objectives of the institution.

There must be sufficient staff to cover opening hours and online services and the smaller the size of the library team, the higher the proportion of qualified professionals.

### **Guideline 16: Duties and qualifications**

All library staff, including the library manager have job descriptions and classifications in accordance with ALIA guidelines.

### **Guideline 17: Appropriate skills and qualifications**

Staff employed in the library have appropriate library and information science skills, and, where needed, educational qualifications and/or skills gained as a result of professional development programs. It is recommended that at 80% of library staff are qualified librarians and library technicians, and where only one member of staff is employed they are eligible for Associate membership of ALIA.

### **Guideline 18: Professional development**

Continuing professional development is essential for library staff to ensure the provision and management of an effective information service. The library manager and all eligible library staff are encouraged to participate in the ALIA Professional Development Scheme and are provided with support (time during working hours) to maintain a high level of competency in their education and skills. The institution supports funding for library staff's professional development.

### **Guideline 19: Pay, terms and conditions**

Appropriate salaries for library positions are determined using the ALIA salary scales<sup>2</sup> as a minimum.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.alia.org.au> (member area)



## 5 Accountability

For libraries to be effective, they have to be well run and well resourced. Employing qualified library and information professionals ensures that management and staff have the knowledge, skills and experience to provide a high level of service. Ensuring that the library manager is part of the senior team in the organisation enables them to be part of the decision making, to demonstrate the value and impact of library services, and to make the case for continued investment in the service.

### 5.1 Management

Quality management strategies are such that they will achieve the library's goals and objectives as an integral part of the institution's educational structure.

#### **Guideline 20: Position within the structure of the organisation**

The library is regarded as a management unit within the organisation. The library manager reports direct to the CEO or through a Director who is part of the top management team. There is a business plan or performance agreement developed in the context of the institution's goals. Policies are consistent with those of the wider organisation.

#### **Guideline 21: Library manager**

Management of the library is the responsibility of a qualified librarian, including those related to finance, HR, marketing, operations and facilities. The library manager is consulted on all decisions which have an impact on the library and information service. The management of a library includes the development, implementation and maintenance of policies and procedures achieved through:

- Standardised procedures
- Staff training, development and performance management
- Communication and teamwork
- Management of financial, human, information and communication technology resources
- Resource management
- Strategic planning
- Marketing.

#### **Guideline 22: Communication**

The library manager is able to actively liaise with senior management, key stakeholders, educators and students throughout the organisation to ensure the library understands client needs and provides a relevant library service.

### 5.2 Financial resources

There is intense pressure on education providers to keep a tight control on costs, whether the goal is to generate profit for commercial RTOs or to operate within reduced government funding for TAFEs. VET libraries have tightened their belts to accommodate leaner budgets but there is a sense that cuts are now affecting the quality of service to students and there is a danger that organisations may fall below the standards set by government agencies for

library provision in further education institutions. Adequate funding of the library is essential to ensure its current future role and associated functions within the organisation.

#### **Guideline 23: Budget allocation**

With the guidance of the library manager, the institution allocates sufficient funding to enable the library to meet the standards expected by government agencies (Australian Skills Quality Authority and Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency) and to support new initiatives.

#### **Guideline 24: Financial management**

The library manager is responsible for the financial management of the library, including:

- preparation of budget estimates for the fiscal year – salaries, operating costs, subscriptions, acquisitions, staff training and professional development, capital items
- approval of the budget by the organisation
- management of expenditure.

### **5.3 Performance measures**

Performance measures are agreed with the senior management team of the organisation, relating closely to the achievement of the overall educational outcomes. Performance indicators may include statistical outputs eg items borrowed, items downloaded, number of visits, number of enquiries as well as outcomes eg impact on student pass rates and achievements, the number and usage of programs for students with special needs. Measurement can be based on data collection, surveys, interviews or focus groups.

#### **Guideline 25: Performance measurement**

Performance indicators are developed, evaluated, reported and revised annually to measure success and identify opportunities to improve the quality of the service provided.

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<sup>i</sup> Booker D, Murphy C, Watson M, 1995, *Focus on Learning, A framework for the provision of learning resources, library and information services in vocational education and training*, National TAFE Chief Executives' Committee

<sup>ii</sup> W3C website, <https://www.w3.org/standards/webdesign/accessibility>, accessed January 2016