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# Library qualifications – the work-based learner approach



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The foundation degree in cultural services is a three-year course developed by Anglia Ruskin University in partnership with MLA (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council) East of England for people working in the museums, libraries and archives sector. It is a combination of both academic and work-based learning, and aims to develop transferable skills – such as communications, marketing, project management and ICT – that are relevant to practitioners working in all three areas. It is also intended to develop skills in management and leadership, research, collections, learning and audience development.

One of the main attractions for me when I was trying to decide whether to undertake this course was the added advantage of a broader approach across the cultural sector, which would allow me – as a library officer in an academic library setting – to find out about best practice in other areas such as public libraries, museums and archives. I am also able to network with a broader range of information and museum professionals than would have been the case if I had decided on a purely library-skills-focused course.

I have worked in the University of Lincoln's Holbeach campus library since December 2003, first as a library assistant then more recently as library officer. The campus offers part-time and distance learning courses for students working in the food and agriculture industries. Previously I worked for the University of Nottingham as a centre manager at one of its regional adult education centres. So although my background has been in education and customer services, I had no previous library experience. I successfully completed an NVQ 3 in information and library services in 2007, but felt I needed to gain a higher qualifica-

tion in order to progress with my career, should the opportunity arise.

So in January last year I was encouraged by my family and colleagues to enrol on the foundation degree in cultural services. I started the course with some trepidation, not having studied at this level before, and I was also a little concerned about how I would manage the course as a distance learner. However, the distance learner aspect was another reason that attracted me to this course, as I thought that gaining personal experience of this method of study would improve my understanding of the difficulties encountered by some of the students I work with, and that I would then be in a better position to help and support them. I now have an increased respect for these students who work full-time, who may have families and who manage to complete degree courses as well!

I was also very aware of the commitment I would be making and how it would impact on my home life but, with the support of my line-manager (who is also my course mentor), my family and the financial support of the university, I felt it would be worth the hard work if I could achieve my goal of a degree at the end of the course.

Since I started I have made visits to other libraries such as the Norwich Millennium Library and the Sir Isaac Newton Institute, the Betty and Gordon Moore Libraries and the Churchill College Library and Archives Centre in Cambridge. This has allowed me to keep up to date with developments and issues in other areas of the library sector. It has also helped me to see how other institutions work, and has given me a better understanding of how other libraries have introduced new systems and ideas.

My assignments so far have included investigating how changes in staff roles in academic libraries are being driven by developments in technology and learning spaces; the importance of electronic resources to distance learners and the corresponding need for academic library staff to provide additional methods of support; and the implications for academic libraries of factors such as methods of delivery and the impact of IT and e-learning. Throughout my coursework, I have referred to the library policies and procedures used in my institution, and have also analysed and developed my own practice in light of this experience. I have been able to find a great deal of useful information for these assignments by reading *SCONUL Focus*!

My course is a challenging work-related degree that has allowed me to explore my role and the changing roles of staff who work in both public and academic libraries, as well as those of colleagues in museums and archives. I have so far thoroughly enjoyed it and feel I have gained a great deal that I can apply in my work setting. I am now just starting my second year of study, enjoying the new confidence it has given me and looking forward to the challenges to come.