



Manpower situation

Recent discussion of manpower studies may be given some focus by the following analysis of applicants for a sub-professional position of library assistant in a small branch library of the University of Sydney. The position was advertised only once in the classified columns of the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

A total of 141 applications was received. Of those 114 were unemployed. Forty-three applicants were qualified librarians unable to find professional work. Twenty-five applicants had partial qualifications in librarianship, most being students in external or other part-time professional courses. The remainder were graduates or students in non-library subjects, library technicians, or 'other'.

There is something gravely wrong when 43 librarians apply for a beginning-level library assistant position. An important reason, of course, is the inadequate and diminishing government funding for libraries and education generally, which has reduced employment opportunities markedly. I suggest that it is also relevant to place blame with the schools of librarianship. They have largely failed to reduce their intake in line with reductions in job opportunities, and are graduating each year a significant number of people who have no realistic expectation of securing professional work.

This is a poor reflection on the responsibility of the library schools and their parent institutions. It is also a disservice to the students concerned and to the profession generally. What is the Association doing to persuade library schools to play their part in bringing supply and demand into balance?

Neil A. Radford
University Librarian

Professional priorities

I think that it is about time that library educators and administrators (especially the latter) began to look carefully at their priorities regarding the future of the 'profession'. With the current prevailing attitude, I feel loathed (sic) to use the word profession to express their attitude.

As a recent graduate of a Sydney library school, many of my fellow ex-students and myself are becoming extremely disillusioned with many senior members of the 'profession' in their attitudes towards the future of librarianship. Although I've no doubt I'll be accused of generalisation, many seem to have little regard for professional standards in the way in which they recruit staff. Most seem to have no concern as to recruiting new graduates who leave library school committed to librarianship, but within a very short period of time become disillusioned and annoyed with the attitudes of practising librarians.

Many administrators will not consider people without, say three years experience for junior positions, despite the applicants' abilities and speed at which they learn. In one particular instance, a prominent [sic]

member of the profession selects his staff from an alphabetical list; hence selection is based on whether your surname begins with 'A' or 'Z'. This is surely not fair on the library's users nor funding body, as well as other members of the profession.

In other cases, qualified librarians are being offered salaries at around \$12,000 a year. We are either under or over qualified, and certainly regarded as unwanted by librarianship generally.

I believe much of this situation is due to the fact that in past years, librarians have had it comparatively easy in the job market, with positions in the past easily available to qualified people. These same people seem to disregard today's young graduates.

I am now so disillusioned with these attitudes that I have decided to leave librarianship while it offers such dubious professional standards and return to do further studies in a field which may recognise commitment (sic). Several fellow ex-students who would make excellent librarians are also considering doing the same.

I sincerely hope this letter provokes some thought about practising some standards, rather than just talking about them.

Catherine Gilbert
Roseville

Quality of Librarianship

I am sorry to have offended John Cook's sensitivities when commenting on my impressions of a month spent in libraries in Victoria. I visited 11 public libraries and 10 school libraries.

I found public libraries were providing a high level of service, despite having far fewer professional staff than English public libraries. In my authority there are 150 schools, only three of which have qualified librarians, the rest have a teacher who has responsibility for the library alongside a full subject teaching time-table. Can you wonder, therefore, why I was envious of the number of teacher-librarians I found in schools in Victoria?

Teacher-librarians I talked to considered themselves primarily as teachers and in some cases this was apparent in the quality of librarianship. I think integration of study skills into subject teaching (formal and informal) is preferable to teaching them in isolation (alas what happens in GB because of lack of qualified teacher-librarians) and this is something which my trip brought home to me. So if John Cook understood this observation as a criticism then this is as a result of my inadequacies in communication. In my final defence may I say that no libraries or librarians are perfect — there is always room for improvement and outsiders are likely to perceive strengths and weaknesses simplistically.

Best wishes to all librarians in Australia, particularly to those whose libraries have been damaged by fire or flood.

Barbara Jones



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