

LETTERS

Professional membership

I have just seen the President's statement on *InCite* for 6 June 1986, and I am astonished at the claim that Professional Membership now and henceforth includes both librarians and library technicians. I admit that I may have missed a vital document from headquarters, but I find it hard to believe that this suggestion is serious.

Are we to lose fifty years of struggle to establish librarianship as a graduate profession just because our current president has a philosopher's love of debating the meaning of words?

To define a professional member as one holding certain specified, certified and accredited educational qualifications is quite different from debating the meaning of professionalism.

As we found out when we tried to bring in a membership category of licentiate, it is not possible, under the Royal Charter, to make distinctions between Professional Members. Nor do I think that it would be at all advisable to do so. The Professional Members are Associates, and those holding technicians qualifications are neither Associates nor Professional Members.

This has nothing to do with whether an individual member, of any category, behaves professionally or not. Nor is it a downgrading of technicians any more than it would be a downgrading of nurses to say that they are not doctors.

Professor Jean P. Whyte

For some months readers of the President's column in *InCite* have been lectured on the definition of professionalism and on the primacy of serving our 'customers', to the exclusion of all other criteria in determining professional membership of the LAA.

This notion totally obscures the crux of the matter. Many shop assistants for instance, give excellent service to their customers; however, does it therefore mean that, say, an assistant chief at a MacDonalds restaurant should automatically be able to assume a policy making position in that organisation's financial management division?

I for one strongly contest the President's repeated assertion that our clients are disinterested in our educational attainments. I am frequently asked by clients as to 'what are my

qualifications' and undoubtedly our acceptance as equals by the other professional groups with whom we often work is, in part, connected to possessing tertiary level qualifications.

Is the President seriously suggesting that the opinion of the man in the street, as to whether he was satisfied with the service he received should be the dominating principle in determining the training and standards expected of doctors, lawyers, surveyors, engineers etc? After all, they are as much 'service' occupations as are librarians.

The issue of professional competence and membership ought to be the province of the practitioners who possess appropriate knowledge and skills, not of the worthy, yet often uninformed, layman.

For the LAA to now abandon its current definition of professional membership, in favour of an all-embracing library worker category would flatly contradict the entire policy of the Association, in advancing librarianship as an acknowledged profession and undermine the whole rationale for the erection of Library Schools and the development of degree courses at institutions of tertiary education which the Association has so vigorously sponsored in the past.

Furthermore, in watering down the present distinction between professional and technician membership categories, the LAA is inviting employers to downgrade salary levels to the lowest common denominator and so depressing future emoluments for both librarians and library technicians. I fail signally to see how this would be to the advantage of either group of members.

To my knowledge no other class of professionals, eg architects, doctors, surveyors or lawyers etc, permit or accept technicians as full professional members of their organisations.

Is the LAA to be deemed a professional association or not? This question is central to the direction of the LAA, as it will allow members to decide if the Association is deserving of membership and support.

Lindsay Harris

Librarian Lyell McEwin Health Service

I regret that the President is in error (*InCite*, 6 June, page 2) in stating that the Corporate Plan and Review Committee has recommended that both technicians and librarians be professional members of the Association.

We made no such recommendation. We did (page 54 of the report) suggest four broad membership categories for payment of fees. We meant technicians to be in the second of these fee categories, which is 'personal members other than professional members', but after discussion at the February General Council meeting have since, in our supplementary report, suggested that there be a fifth fee category for technicians. This would be at the same fee scale as for the 'personal member' category rather than the fee scale for professional members.

In making these recommendations we are not, of course, commenting on the 'professionalism' of technicians, which we accept as demonstrably equal to that of professional and other members.

Warren Horton

Convenor

Corporate Plan and Review Committee

It has been a shock to me to discover that our President is ignorant of the nature of professionalism in librarianship. In his column in *InCite* (6 June) he has in effect publicly repudiated the Association's policies on this fundamental matter.

Since its foundation the Association has struggled to improve the professionalism and the professional status of librarians. In recent years it has struggled, too, to ensure the proper training of para-professional library workers (now called library technicians) and to ensure for this group a secure and respected place in the library workforce.

There is no question of library technicians being 'economy class passengers'. They are a discrete group of staff with their own career grades and with their own roles to play in the provision of library service. But they are not librarians and surely the LAA above all others, must make this distinction.

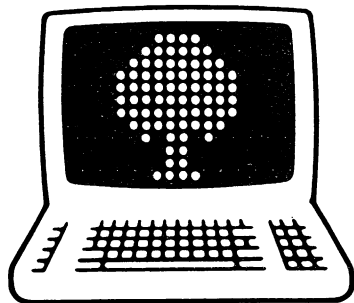
As one who has worked very hard to improve education for both librarians and library technicians, and also to ensure proper recognition for technicians as part of the library workforce, I feel betrayed by the President's declaration that the distinction is no longer valid.

If this is a one-class airline I want to get off.

Neil A Radford

University Librarian University of Sydney

At present there are approximately three hundred members of the Library Technicians Section of the LAA.



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BOOKNET

MORE LETTERS

State Librarian Tasmania Advertisement

The letters published in *InCite* number 9 written by Neil Radford and Alan Bundy relating to the advertisement for State Librarian of Tasmania raise two separate issues of great importance to all professional librarians.

The first relates to employing authorities advertising positions (such as that of State Librarian) without requiring librarianship qualifications. The second relates to whether LAA publications should carry such advertisements.

1. Librarianship training for librarian jobs:

The Tasmanian Branch has expressed its strong opposition and disapproval to the Tasmanian Minister for Education and the Arts about a number of aspects relating to the advertisement for the State Librarian. The most important of these being the lack of a Requirement that applicants be professional librarians. We stated:

The Tasmanian Branch of the LAA is deeply concerned that the position of State Librarian of Tasmania has been advertised without the requirement that the appointee be a professional librarian. The advertisement does not even state that professional qualifications as librarian are desirable let alone essential; it instead expresses (rather weakly) a preference for knowledge and experience gained in library environment.

A letter was also sent by Jenny Adams, which was not as direct as it might have been, and the Minister (formerly Senator) Peter Rae

twisted it into seeming to support the possibility that a non-librarian may be more suitable for the job. Jenny's second letter (copy published on page 14) very clearly stated The Association's policy.

2. LAA Advertising Policy

An alternative view is that to refuse to publish advertisements that don't include professional qualification requirements may have a number of consequences. Firstly, it limits the dissemination of information about jobs that our members should fill. This could counter-productively result in such jobs being filled by unqualified personnel.

Finally the LAA may be seen to be practising a form of censorship — perhaps in the mistaken belief that this imposes a useful sanction (see Statement on Professional Qualifications). In fact, it appears that these two areas have been linked with the result that the Qualifications policy has not been strongly defended.

In my opinion policies relating to these two issues should be kept separate. There is no necessary link between strongly projecting the policy to professional appointments by writing to employing authorities, publishing criticism of such practices in our publications, etc; while ensuring that librarians are made aware of vacancies by publishing advertisements.

The Tasmanian Branch hopes that as a result of this issue being publicly aired, policies and strategies relating to professional employment will be reviewed and the LAA will strongly and unequivocally fight to maintain professional standards.

Peter Cohen
President, Tasmanian Branch

Shorelink

An article appeared in the 9 May, 1986 issue of *InCite* announcing the appointment of Dr Chris Henderson to the position of Manager Public Libraries in South Australia.

I would like to point out an error in the article, which stated that Dr Henderson had formerly held the position of Chairperson of Shorelink. The Shorelink Library Network comprising the five public libraries of Lane Cove, Manly, Mosman, North Sydney (Stantor Library) and Willoughby is managed by a Committee consisting of an elected representative of each of the five Councils and the Chief Librarian of each of the libraries. Until 1986, the Chairman was Alderman B.S.J. O'Keefe, Q.C., Mayor of Mosman. The current Chairman is Alderman Eric Kaye of Willoughby. From the inception of Shorelink to date, the Secretary has been John Flint, Manager of Library and Community Services, and the day to day operations are managed by Barbara Bessant, the Network Co-ordinator who is experienced in data base management.

Shorelink is a very successful computerized network. The central processor, NCR 9400, is located at Lane Cove and has a main memory of 4 megabytes and disk capacity of 832 megabytes plus 800 megabytes backup, shortly to be upgraded by a further 200 megabytes. 72 terminals and 6 printers are attached to the system. The software system, known as BOOK is a product of Stowe Computing Australia, which is widely used in public libraries throughout Australia.

The combined data base at the end of 1985 contained 108,693 borrowers and 576,765 items. Loans in 1985 were 2,373,863.

Nora Hitchen Director

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Information Centres and Librarians

I am sure I'm not the only librarian who reads *Business Review Weekly*, which now contains 'Today's Computers' supplement. In the issue dated 23 May 1986, there featured an article titled 'Information centres — placebo or placebo?' The article saw information centres as companies filling the gap between the users and the data processing department. It dwelt on the problem of consistency of computer software and hardware in organisations. A spokesman for the prominent management consultancy company also saw the information centre (IC) as 'handling both computing policy and the distribution of resource material information.'

I was somewhat disappointed, but not really surprised, to note that the library profession didn't rate a single mention in the entire article. Whilst I appreciate the thrust of the article as more 'computer data' than 'information' orientated, I can't help feeling that we as a profession should be adopting a more positive and aggressive stance in the marketing of our services in this area. I also appreciate that this industry sector does not always appeal to the 'average' librarian, who sees little relevance in his area for his or her skills, but I believe an increasing number of librarians see information management including 'quasi-computer' services as being a potential growth area for our profession.

Some time ago I recall the LAA agreeing at General Council to adopt a more vigorous lobbying policy in order to, inter alia, raise the profile of the profession. This was, I understood, to assist in promoting contemporary librarianship skills in the labour market with a view to increase our penetration of that market. With our traditional employment areas in the public sector experiencing little or no growth it was appropriate that the profession looked to 'non-traditional' areas of the labour market.

Yet we still see in the computer supplement of *The Australian* newspaper, or the occasional computer journal, the gee-whiz approach to librarians with their new computer systems for assisting in circulation management, embracing the outside world of data bases.

Our efforts in selling ourselves and our professional skills to the labour market are still falling short of the mark. Being represented on the occasional inter-disciplinary commit-

tee looking at high-tech implications for the community is one thing, but as an example it doesn't mean very much to the emerging professional librarian who is facing traditional industry conceptual barriers to employment.

I believe the Library Association of Australia is the best vehicle for promoting the cause of librarians in information management. Individuals do not have the same clout as a professional association acting on behalf of its 7000+ members. Perhaps a group of us should form a watchdog committee to coordinate scanning of, say popular or professional journals (including *BRW* and *Australian Business*) in order to identify target areas for positive action. I am willing to participate in such a group.

The LAA should not only be lobbying but it should be seen to be lobbying. And not just in library journals! In the words of a Pink Floyd song, 'Is there anybody out there?'

Roy Stall
Scotch College

One class airline

I have been truly interested to read two recent letters on 'isolation' particularly when read in the context of our new President exhorting us to greater endeavours to be professional and positive members of our Association.

I too may not seem 'isolated' since Taree is in the centre of a well settled area which is very popular at holiday time. However, none of the settlements are very large and most are separated by driving distances of at least an hour. Furthermore, the now virtually defunct Mid North Coast Group could (if we were prepared to drive from Coffs Harbour to Taree) command approximately 25 financial members.

There is not enough being done for members outside Sydney; it is just not possible for people to travel for hours and hours at the end of a working day, or to spend one day of a weekend on a professional meeting when the cost of getting visiting speakers are prohibitive for small groups.

Do you have a problem that can easily be solved by a phone call? The LAA has a toll free no. now to make things easy for you. Ring us now on 008 22 1481 and let us help you.

The LAA cannot continue ignoring outsiders like me — and I am doubly so being both a country member and a state school librarian. It is time that thinking about members outside the universities, CAEs and city public library systems became part of LAA policy and not just an irksome burden.

If ours is a one-class airline, I would like to see a similar service for all passengers — and a one-class fare!

Lynne Groves
Taree

OPEN LETTER TO ALL LIBRARIANS

13th June, 1986

Dear Librarian,

RE: R.R. BOWKER

As you may be aware Butterworths have become the agents of R.R. Bowker as from 1 June, 1986. They have informed us of the following:

There will be no discounts offered and the price for R.R. Bowker products throughout Australia will be our (Butterworths) selling price.

It should be noted that Bowkers (USA) will not supply direct to Australia, or supply to North American vendors (library suppliers) so we, or you, cannot obtain Bowker titles overseas.

We believe this to be a restraint of legitimate trade, an unacceptable reduction in respect of a librarian's choice of supply, and therefore not in the interest of the book/library trade. We wonder what will 'Big Brother' Bowkers do next with their information.

As a matter of principal *we will continue to obtain Bowker titles for yourselves and other libraries, if required, however it will be approximately 15% more expensive* than the price you could get them from Butterworths.

If we can assist in any way please do not hesitate to contact myself or any member of Bennets staff.

Yours Sincerely,
Andy Dakers.
Managing Director
James Bennett Library Services

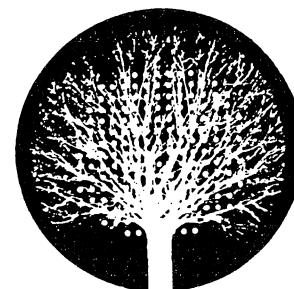
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