

Dear Editor,

Library technicians and ALIA

As a library technician since 1981, and now with a BA in Library and Information Science, I have been President, for 2 years, of ALIA's Tasmanian Branch, Northern Areas Regional Group.

I am currently teaching two classes in the Associate Diploma Library Technician Course, at Launceston TAFE, so I maintain close contact with current students and graduates. I find so many of them with negative feelings toward ALIA and their own situation as well. Graduates from the course, both current and those of many years standing, are also expressing doubt in ALIA's ability to listen to library technician concerns and problems.

This situation has been developing over many years. In 1983-84, what was then LAA strongly argued that technicians in the State would never be recognised by the major employers, such as the Education Department and the Government if they did not come under the umbrella of a national body such as the Library Association. This was put to the vote and library technicians chose to work in and with the Library Association.

In truth, however, LAA/ALIA has not been able to advance the technician's plight to any great extent at all. For all

intents and purposes technicians are still not recognised in this state, and LAA promises now may seem very hollow and ineffectual to those technicians persuaded to join the association 5-6 years ago.

I am sure that the Association, operating in this case from the position of strength, could breach this negativity by displaying a more active concern toward the situation by restructuring meetings and establishing contact with library technicians both in their years of training and after graduation.

My prime concern is that it requires more than one or one dozen committed people to overcome the crisis that all library technicians groups appear to be confronted with at the moment. It is also time for ALIA to offer substantial support to technicians who are still awaiting recognition, after many years on the sidelines, for the few crumbs that may be cast their way. Polarisation within ALIA will not solve our problems and all of us who work in libraries need to support one another in our endeavours to maintain what is an industry set up to serve the public.

In the meantime, I can only hope my letter can be seen as both a measure of support and a sounding-board to get technicians talking and working toward their common aims, and what I hope will be a sustained and viable future.

Robyn McKenzie

Once a library technician - always a library technician?

Not at all! Your skills *can* be used in other fields — let me share my experience.

After working happily for some years as a clerical assistant in school libraries, I enrolled in the Library Technician Certificate Course, to broaden my possibilities. When I completed my course I joined the NSW Parliamentary Library, as an Assistant Library Technician (ALT) in the Reference and Information Section, using traditional material and in-house files. Later, I became an LT and acquired additional responsibilities, including preparing verbal and written answers to reference enquiries using traditional and on-line sources, and indexing Hansard.

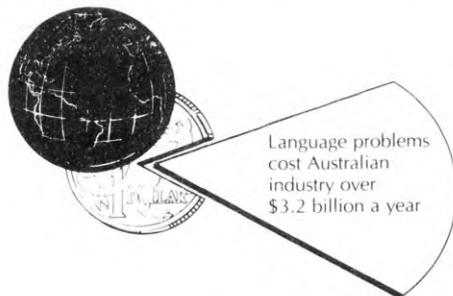
Later, as a Senior LT, I supervised para-professional and clerical staff, updating reference files and preparing bibliographies. I thanked our college training — those hours of exercises in Reader Services! — and my supervisor, who encouraged me to develop my skills.

By 1988 I realised that lack of qualifications blocked further promotion within the library, so I began looking for jobs outside which suited my skills. I saw an advertisement in the Public Service notices for a Parliamentary Liaison Officer, and felt that with a little more experience I could do it. I did not apply, but it made me aware of another possible opening for me.

The change of State Government in 1988 brought the chance to become Parliamentary Liaison Officer to the Minister of Education. There was a lot to learn, but my information skills served me well, and I already knew many of the MPs and the parliamentary procedures.

So — if you don't think that there is a very bright future for you, do as I did. Look around, read advertisements, seek out a position that looks interesting, and transfer your skills to another area. I only hope that it works as well for you as it did for me.

Marlene Knowles.



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- Keep it under 250 words.
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- Give a contact address and telephone number.
- Send it to: The Editor, *inCite*, Australian Library and Information Association, PO Box E441, Queen Victoria Terrace, ACT 2600.

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