

# Letters

## To mentor or not to mentor, is that the question?

### Dear Editor,

There has been interest in my letter about the plight of the unemployed graduate and Tom McKeon's response (in *inCite* Vol 12, No 1). Many of us are *still* unemployed before our first job.

Later letters have linked the issue of unemployed graduates to the idea of a mentor scheme for neophytes in the profession. Although my thunder has been well and truly stolen, I would like to pursue the debate on a concept that offers some light in an employment market

worthy of the dark ages.

As one who is affected by this situation, my initial reaction to the concept was mixed; a noble gesture, but to whom would the mentors deliver their guidance? The notion of a neophyte assumes that a 'permanent' vacancy arises and that a new graduate is appointed.

But as Glenda Browne pointed out (*inCite* Vol 12, No 7), confirming my own experience, when jobs are scarce employers pick the most experienced applicants. Where does that leave the new graduate? Answer — displaced and stagnant at the bottom of the barrel. Conversely, one could argue that it places the graduate in greater need of a mentor, to counteract the effects of chronic displacement and offer something positive in the way of future prospects.

Looking at the scheme through this window raises another question: is it feasible to stretch the structure of the scheme to include the 'pre-neophyte'? Unless these are brought in, any potential mentors will probably have no one to practice on in today's economic environment.

On a wider canvas, the mentor scheme

cannot be seen as a panacea. New graduates remain horribly vulnerable, forced to stand idly by as they see the shelf life of their qualifications dwindle and expire.

Despite her pessimism, Glenda Browne provides an insight into how ALIA can help new graduates through an advocacy role. If employers possess a restricted view of the value and skills of a library/information graduate, then perhaps this view can be changed by the Association, in a way that no single individuals could manage.

The Board of Education's activities related to employment ethics and its surveys represent a tangible effort aimed at helping new graduates. Good to see. We new graduates chose this course in order to pursue a vocation and consequently provide for ourselves and, for some, our families. But some of us are going to have a long wait.

To those actively employed ALIA members who could institute a mentor pilot project (suggested by Malcolm Trill *inCite* Vol 12, No 7), this is one member

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## Megan Sassi (1933-1991)

Born on 28 April 1933, in North Wales, Megan qualified as a librarian at the Loughborough College School of Librarianship in 1955, and worked in libraries in Leicester, UK, Cincinnati, USA and Auckland, NZ before arriving in Perth in March 1961 to take up an appointment with the Library Board of Western Australia, under FA (Ali) Sharr. Megan had just achieved 30 years as a librarian with LISWA at the time of her death, and in that time had made a profound impact on the lives of all who worked with her.

Megan dedicated her professional life to the development and promotion of the Science, Technology and Commerce Branch of LISWA and in doing so developed an expertise in these areas. She will be remembered as an outstanding reference librarian, not only because of her knowledge of information sources, but in very great part because of her instinctive empathy with people and her ability to communicate. Megan was the consummate information provider, always alert to the opportunities of linking people with the information they needed.

She was in charge of the (then) Commerce and Technology Division of the Library Board from 1969 to 1988, where her skills as a manager, and her leadership qualities were evident in many ways, not least in the mentoring and training of a number of Library Board



cadets who have subsequently gone on to make their own impact on the profession. These staff acknowledge the great debt which they owe to Megan's wise guidance and help.

In 1984 Megan became the first elected representative of the staff to The Library Board of Western Australia, and throughout her 4-year term proved an extremely effective advocate for staff on a range of issues. She was also actively involved in a variety of professional groups and committees, particularly the Information Science Section of the LAA as National President and WA Committee Member, and had an ongoing interest in IT matters. Her contribution to the recent ALIA Conference in Perth, the restaurant guide entitled *Eating Out in Perth: Sassi's Selections*, involved a substantial amount of

her personal time and remains a valuable guide to dining out in Perth.

Megan's professional influence extended beyond Western Australia. As well as her attendance at LAA conferences over the years, she attended IFLA conferences in Brighton, UK in 1987, in Paris in 1989, and the FID Congress in Hong Kong in 1982. She visited a number of public libraries in the USA in 1986 which included gaining an audience with Vartan Gregorian at the New York Public Library. Between 1982 and 1984 Megan was a member (representing AACOBs) of the Advisory Committee on Science and Technology, National Library of Australia.

Megan was also deeply involved with a variety of organisations relating to the advancement of women's interests, and worked tirelessly for social justice issues.

The Library Board, LISWA, the library profession in Western Australia, and the wider community, have all benefited from Megan's work as an information provider over 30 years, and all who have worked with her in that time have been richly rewarded by the experience.

Megan will be missed by friends and colleagues throughout the world, and to her husband Frank, deepest sympathy is extended.

*Lynn Allen, State Librarian, and Staff of  
The Library and Information Service of  
Western Australia*