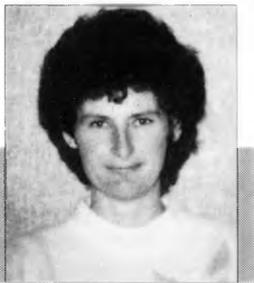# Front Line

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As the 6th National Library Technicians Conference in Sydney is drawing near it is worth remembering that library technicians in Australia have reached their majority. We are 21 in 1991.

When the Whitehorse Technical College began the first course for the training of technicians back in 1970 the world was a different place. A lot has changed in two decades. Librarianship has certainly changed. Technicians have cemented their place in the library workforce and technology has revolutionised information storage and retrieval. What does the future hold for us all?

I have no more chance of guessing what 2012 will look like than anyone who guessed at the shape of the present back in 1970. We are all slaves of change. Change is not such a bad thing. It is in the nature of challenge and response. We are all challenged by change and, in whatever way, we respond to it. Technicians brought about change in the library workforce. Librarians have had to come to terms with para-professionals and — by and large — they have done a creditable job. After all, it was librarians who set up training courses for technicians in the first place.

There still persists, however, an unsettling current of disunity in the library community. Make no mistake, we are one workforce — not a librarian workforce or a technician one — we cannot exist in exclusive groups. If the past 21 years have taught technicians nothing else it has taught us that unity is vital. As economic times get tougher we will all need to work better, and smarter, together.

The theme of the 6th National Library Technicians Conference is 'Bringing the pieces together'. I think this theme could apply across the entire library community. We should not be indulging in fruitless heartache in the letters column of *inCite* about where the lines should be drawn between technicians and librarians. We should rather direct our energy to creating collective goals for our common future. The National Conference will be attempting to consolidate the past, evaluate the present and provide ideas for the future of library technicians. We will begin the process of setting our goals.

What sort of goals am I talking about? One example is achieving reasonable levels of staffing for libraries in the next few years. We must ensure that the commitment to libraries in the public and private sectors is maintained and convince managers that reasonable levels of staffing equate directly with reasonable service to users. Once libraries begin to suffer the public also suffers. The search for the 'Clever Country' will be in danger of becoming like 40 years in the wilderness. This sort of goal — the maintenance of staffing levels and service to users — is a goal we can all share. Librarians and technicians have supported each other for 21 years, but we can do it better.

Our goals for the long term future need to be set now. There are already challenges — like Award Restructuring — that need a unified response. Library technicians will meet the future and respond to challenges as they have always done, with initiative, tenacity and dedication. We invite librarians to share in our goals, so that libraries in this country will benefit from our joint endeavours.