

A new Branch for the Association? The North Queensland Regional Group

Following the article 'A new Division for ALIA' in *inCite* No. 18 1990 Jean Dartnall has written:

I am disappointed that there has not been more public debate about the request of the North Queensland Regional Group to be recognised as a Branch. Perhaps the issue has been perceived — quite wrongly I believe — as some sort of internal Queensland power struggle. Our present and past Presidents have both recently exhorted us to take more seriously our responsibilities to our profession and our Association. They have not dwelt on the practical difficulties facing those who would like to deepen their involvement but who live thousands of kilometres from the centres of power. The willingness of the Association's central bodies to allow autonomy and influence to geographically remote members will be a signal of their true feelings about full participation by all members of the professional community. This is a decision that should be watched with interest not only by those directly concerned, or by other librarians living outside capital cities, but also by all those interested in the future of our Association and its potential to fulfil its aims.

The issues Jean raises are important to all of us, for a variety of reasons, not all obvious. Averill Edwards, who has kept a close eye on constitutional matters for many years, has written some notes for *inCite* on these issues. Her comments follow:

The proposal from the North Queensland Branch raises a number of quite serious issues for the Association, issues relating to the Constitution, to the role and function of Regional Groups, to financial matters and to communication within ALIA.

Constitution

- implicit in the ALIA Constitution is that the basis of the representation on General Council is geographic and that one representative is to be elected from each geographic/political State or Territory. (§28.1). This proposal will alter the composition and the balance of representation on the Council.
- that this underlying assumption can and should be challenged is unquestioned: ALIA must constantly be changing to remain alive.
- ALIA must be clear that it wants to change the basis of representation on General Council and that this is why it is agreeing to the North Queensland Regional Group Proposal. This needs a

firm statement of intent — the composition of General Council should be changed from one representative from each State and Territory to multiple representation. That is, ALIA has to be clear that it wants to change the present basis of the composition of General Council and be equally clear on the basis of the new structure to replace it.

Finance

- General Council will hold three meetings in 1991. The cost to the Association for each member will average around \$2500 for the year. Should this proposal be agreed the cost of GC will increment by about this amount, and so on for every other RG which becomes a branch.
- ALIA should be clear that it is prepared to fund the increased cost of additional members of General Council. Changes in circumstances will always require ALIA to adapt to change and to alter its rules but the reasons and full implications for the change have to be understood and agreed in advance.

Role and Function of Regional Groups

- ALIA has real problems with the provision of adequate funding for RGs and must accept that for these remote RGs the present amounts are inadequate. Would this proposal have arisen if adequate



funding and support had been provided to this Regional Group (and any other RG) in the past?

- more imaginative and practical solutions to the provision of professional development are needed for members who live in distant areas. The Board of Education has been working on this, but the examination should be expedited as it is a real issue not only for this RG but for others and for members in remote areas not part of a RG. How do they attend CE courses and how can they pay for them within reasonable limits?

Communication

- more serious attention should be paid to how ALIA keeps members in remote areas informed and involved. General Council and Head Office and the RGs and Branches need to examine the question of how to get comment on issues to be discussed at Council meetings, how to encourage that comment, look at alternatives such as teleconferencing, setting aside money to fund one member of a RG per year to attend GC, greater use of 008 telephone numbers and a variety of other means to make remotely located members feel less distant.
- members in remote areas already have

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academy. Many of its members have expounded on the need to instil an understanding (as distinct from a mere awareness) of the concept of professional competence as the essential corollary to the acquisition of the equally significant body of knowledge.

Some have carried the argument beyond the students to the library educators themselves, and in a celebrated exchange at the Australian Libraries Summit in 1988, Geoff Allen thought that a periodic return to the coalface to 'get their hands dirty' would be salutary for library educators. And so it would, but this perhaps is a side issue; our central and primary concern is with the students.

How might the problem be moved along? Anyone wishing to acquire an overview and a framework for further discussion could do no better than resort to Margaret Trask's exemplary review of the context of mentoring in a paper 'Professional practice — whose responsibility?' published in the Australian Library Journal in February 1983. Careful perusal of this paper will be a sine qua non for further consideration of the problem. It, together with the considerations sketched in this brief note, will form the substance for extended discussion by the profession at large, and the Board of Education. Margaret's paper ended with the exhortation:

- I seek discussion and challenge on:
- the responsibility of librarians for their continued professional development;
 - the responsibility of the LAA for the guarantee of competence in the practice of librarianship;
 - the responsibility of library managers for the development of their staff;
 - the responsibility of senior members of the profession for mentoring;
 - the responsibility of library schools for supporting services of further education and training opportunities, career assessment and

development, consultancy and research.'

Her paper embeds the question of mentoring firmly in the context of professional competence and development, and allocates the responsibility for it to 'senior members of the profession'. The record does not show what discussions and challenges followed as a consequence of that paper, but whatever else happened, the LAA did not move, apparently, formally to adopt any policy on mentoring, or if it did, that policy has since lapsed, and the question of what might comprise a policy and guidelines on the topic remains open. Hence the concern of the WA students.

How might a program of mentoring be put together?

How might a program of mentoring be put together? What benefits might ensue for the mentor, the neophyte and the profession? What follows are the ideas of this individual; they reflect no official stance, but are offered merely as a step along the way to formulation, adoption and implementation of a policy.

In outline, the steps are simple:

1. An evaluation of the possible advantages of a mentoring program;
2. Agreement in principle to proceed with the development of the program;
3. Preparation of a draft program;
4. Adoption of the program by General Council, which would also identify and allocate the support needed;
5. Recruitment and 'training' of a pilot group of mentors;

6. Enlistment of a pilot group of neophytes;
7. Run the pilot program, seek feedback, adjust;
8. Launch the main program;
9. Evaluate, fine-tune.

How would it work? Broadly, the Association would determine the objectives, establish outcomes and recruit and educate the mentors; it would make the connection between mentor and neophyte, and set up waypoints at which both would comment on the effectiveness of the relationship and the process. The Association would provide the necessary back-up and support for the program (mentors would not be paid any form of fee), and evaluate its effectiveness. Mentor and neophyte might work face-to-face, or at a remove. The relationship might be established while the neophyte was still a student, or after formal completion of the first professional award. Completion of the program by the neophyte would need to be suitably marked in a format which would reflect his or her input and growth, and which would provide a further indication to a potential employer of the neophyte's grasp of the ethos of the profession.

What would be the advantages? To the neophyte, an introduction to a potential colleague who would, in an entirely neutral way, provide structured insights into the practice of the profession, would offer a point of counsel and advice to the student on issues of both a theoretical and practical kind. To the mentor, one of the richest experiences any profession offers: the opportunity to assist in the formulation of professional ideals, competencies, philosophies. To the profession, a generation of neophytes who would have had the benefit of working in an extended fashion with an experienced and committed individual.

Difficult? Undoubtedly! Worth trying? I think so, and more importantly, so do the students. Comments welcome, as ever. □

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to make adjustments because they live in these regions — consultations on how greater involvement within ALIA might be achieved may be part of that continuing adjustment.

Conclusion

- The North Queensland Regional Group has mounted a strong case — equally strong

cases could be made for the Port Hedland, Green Triangle, Central NSW Regional Groups. However, it is important that each case not be considered in the broader context of the structure of the Association. If ALIA wishes to have each of these groups represented on General Council, the rationale for changing the established balance of

membership and the cost has to be clear and accepted beforehand.

Averill M B Edwards
Past President and member of the By-laws and Regs Committee

Jean is calling for public debate. Do any members have views that they would like to share with us? □

Are you a member?

Lots of non-members read *inCite*.

We're glad they do.

But if you're a non-member and reading *inCite*, you're probably interested in these professional matters.

You may once have been a member of LAA/ALIA.

Why don't you join us (again)?

ALIA may have some solid benefits for you.

You may have a contribution to make to our Association.

Call us on 008 020071 to talk about it.

