

Letters

Even if we tell you it can be done, that doesn't mean we'll do it.

In his letter in *inCite* 7, Hans Lofgren raised questions which concern many members of ALIA, and which go beyond the role or salary of an executive director. What troubles us is the growing conviction that ALIA is so far out of touch with its members that it no longer represents us adequately. Bev Kirby recently expressed concern at the loss of members (*inCite*, 29 June, p.4). I would suggest that many are leaving because ALIA has failed to meet our legitimate expectations.

Also, several matters raised in *inCite* 6 seem to demand some response. While they appear unrelated, I think that they demonstrate a major problem: the confusion of what is technically feasible with what we actually do.

- A letter from Stephen Legge (p.23) demonstrates the problem as it applies to inter-library loans. When we offer catalogues of the nation's

resources, we should offer quick and affordable access to them. We talk of the possibility of full-text transfer, we promise inter-library loans—and then we fall down on the job. ILLs are either too slow or too expensive (or both) for the needs of most users. We repeatedly raise false hopes, and when we fail to deliver, our users learn not to trust us.

- In the same issue (p.11), Peter Judge suggests that technology has been oversold. It is not an end in itself, but it seems sometimes to have been inflated to become that. All libraries must try to balance the resources spent on materials with those spent on the technology which makes them accessible, but unless we have effective document delivery, we are again offering false promises. Some librarians have directed resources into multiple indexes (both on-line and CD-ROM) at the expense of their own holdings. They offer citations, but access to the texts is limited, and yet they do not provide resources adequate to meet the ILL requests which result from their own choice of priorities. Even if our intentions are good, we are deceiving both ourselves and our readers if we continually offer services and then

do not deliver them.

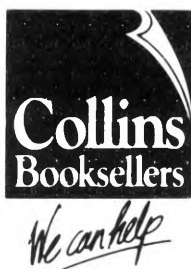
- ALIA itself has also been guilty of this. Bev Kirby, in her 'Front Line' (p.4), is concerned that librarianship is losing members. I would suggest that many are drifting away because of ALIA's own failure to meet the legitimate expectations of its members. The recent meeting on award restructuring held in Melbourne (reported on P. 15) was both interesting and revealing. ALIA itself was under strong attack for failing to help or advise members who were facing urgent problems. ALIA contends that it is not a trade union. Neither is the Institute of Engineers, or the Australian Medical Association, but they offer advice and, where necessary, resource kits to help their members when crises arise. Where was ALIA when award restructuring hit librarians? As Susan Ainsworth was told that night, ALIA has done very little and much too late. ALIA should not be surprised that it is losing members. We have learned the hard way that our membership fees do not guarantee us help when we need it.

ALIA's role is under serious question from its members. We have learned our membership fees carry no guarantee of

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► help when we need it. We are very well aware that we need to be effectively represented (as John Levett points out in his defence of the appointment of the executive director), but we are no longer confident that ALIA has either the desire or the ability to do this. Rhetoric is not enough. It is hypocritical to offer services we cannot deliver. ALIA may need to reconsider its attitude, or it may find more members joining other associations which actually do something to help them.

Frances Clancy
Camberwell City Libraries

Susan Ainsworth, ALIA Industrial Officer,
comments on the last point:

Firstly ALIA is not a trade union—there is no 'contention' about it—because of the simple fact that we, like the Institution of Engineers, have both employer and employee members. This means that we can not represent our members industrially through negotiation with employers, and advocacy services in industrial tribunals. Although the Australian Medical Association would not call itself a 'trade union', its membership structure does permit it to perform industrial services for its members akin to those provided by unions.

Secondly, award restructuring 'hit' most organisations since 1988-1989. During this period my predecessor, Tom McKeon, offered

as much assistance and advice as the resources of our Industrial Information Program permitted. Remember that ALIA is not just the National Office. ALIA is its members. As a member, your fees entitle you to information, advice and assistance but not the interpretation of awards and agreements, or the solving of individual industrial problems. ALIA has always recommended that its employee members join appropriate unions and staff associations to obtain the benefits of industrial representation.

I hope that you are sending a similar letter of grievance about lack of support and advice on award restructuring to your union.

High-priced ILL?

Public Librarian Stephen Legge (*inCite* 29 June 1992) says, of an \$18 interlibrary loan charge from a University Library for a single faxed page, 'this makes a mockery of interlibrary cooperation'.

Agreed. Next time try the University of South Australian Library, Stephen. We do not apply any charge to interlibrary loans supplied to public libraries, faxed or otherwise. Why? Because we recognise that 30% of users of public libraries are tertiary students, and although we offer a quality postal service, that percentage may well include our own distance education students

around Australia. We also recognise that public libraries often endeavour to obtain interlibrary loans for undergraduate students because the institutions in which they are enrolled refuse to do so.

Alan Bundy, University Librarian
University of South Australia

I read with interest Stephen Legge's letter (*inCite* June 1992) regarding excessive fees charged for inter library loans. We are members of Vic Gratis in Victoria, but even so have to ask academic libraries quite often for books. Most charge us the rate of \$9 per item, but we have been asked for \$12 and more from some libraries. Naturally, we never request material, books or otherwise, from these libraries unless in direct need. Perhaps this is their cunning plan.

On the subject of inter library loans, I fail to see why I cannot purchase vouchers from our ALIA office in Victoria. It is embarrassing to have to apologise to other libraries for having to 'borrow' vouchers for urgently required material while we wait for the Canberra mail. The service to users would be better for being quicker.

Joy Casey,
Medical Librarian ■

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