

ALIA's international roles

Bill Linklater's *Front Line* in *inCite* 4 focused on ALIA's international relations policy and wondered how individual members of ALIA could have input into international activities. May I suggest that APSIG, mentioned by Bill, is the most appropriate channel for their input? The national committee and the state chapters of APSIG always welcome suggestions, support, participation and news from individual members of ALIA (or indeed, from librarians not members of ALIA) and will endeavour to keep them informed of activities through the quarterly APSIG Newsletter.

The inter-relationship of institutions and professional groupings involved in international relations is a most complex issue. We hear that Asian librarians are bemused about who is representing what in Australian librarianship. On the one hand, individual libraries have their bilateral relations with counterparts overseas. With aid and marketing operations which are not library specific there obviously needs to be better cooperation and communication. This is what ALIIS was designed for.

As long as people bear in mind that there is more than enough to do for every institution and every individual who wishes to participate, the demarcation lines should be capable of clear delineation, with little room for petty rivalries. And if an institution is into the business of making money out of the booming Asian economies, if what we hear about those countries' economic growth is even only partly true, there should be a slice of the pie big enough for all those who want to have a bite.

Bill's article did not touch on the problem of obtaining information from the region, particularly from Asian countries. By cooperating with our professional colleagues we can learn a great deal about the information that is available, which we in turn are able to provide to users in our own libraries. There is something of benefit to all libraries from improved international relations by the profession.

The need for information on the region is certainly there, of which one example might suffice. *Changing tack: Australian Investment in South-East Asia*, (Canberra, 1994), the most recent of the publications of the East Asia Analytical Unit of DFAT concluded that, while the situation was complex, the major reason for poor

Australian investment performance in South-East Asia in the 1980s was a lack of information about the region. It said quite emphatically, indeed in bold type, that to improve the performance, 'The first part of Australia's strategy must be better information' (p 85). Here it seems, is a emphatic plea for our Association, so responsible for the provision of information, to place greater emphasis in the area of international relations.

George Miller, ACT

Unfair salaries

Your latest article on librarians' salaries (*Picket Line* 29 April 1994) prompts me to write on what I see as one of the greatest barriers to librarians achieving fair salaries.

This barrier is raised by librarians themselves, or more specifically, by senior university librarians who are involved in job reclassification exercises with their staff.

These senior staff are under pressure from university administrations to contain costs, and are discouraging their more junior library staff from applying for the appropriate classification level to match their duties.

When junior and middle level library staff outline their actual range of tasks and responsibilities for purposes of job reclassification, their supervisors in some cases try to persuade them to change their job descriptions to match lower HEW classifications.

One only has to scan some of the advertisements for university library staff and compare the range of responsibilities and experience required with the low level salary being offered to see that the HEW descriptions are being ignored.

This practice devalues the profession as a whole and these senior librarians are doing themselves and all librarians a disservice.

Pat Brosnan, Qld

'Professional' or not?

I find the level of outrage regarding the appointment of 'non-professional' librarians rather amusing and another example of librarianship's paranoia with respect to the profession, dare I say 'job'.

Having graduated with a Graduate Diploma in Library Science from Kuring-gai College, which then renamed the course Information Science, and now has applied science courses, librarianship has sought to

raise its profile with grander and grander names. The requirement that one is eligible for ALIA membership in order to merely be considered for a library position institutionalises the idea the librarianship is a 'real profession', and that somehow this means we are to be taken seriously in the game of professional one-upmanship [sic].

The fact that one can actually do the job or learn new skills without professional qualifications seems to be beside the point. Moreover, the fact that some graduates have trouble reading a bibliographic citation let alone undertaking other tasks is swept under the table by those in the industry who have such a grandiose view of librarianship. The despair over expertise and qualifications looks rather thin if someone else can do a better job.

Are librarians (professional seems to be a redundancy) protecting their own vested interests with this exclusive professional club attitude? Are librarians' frail egos at risk? Or is it simply a feeling of inadequacy by those who didn't make it into law or medical school?

Surely the important point is that the job is performed at the best possible level whether someone has so-called qualifications or not. The value of the work would then speak for itself.

Brad Hilton,

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(P.S. the name *Information Centre* is company policy)

Libraries and technology

The message should be technology in the library — not technology *instead of* the library. Colin Steele, in his article on libraries in the age of technology, manages to be remarkably insulting to librarians, and remarkably misguided as to the likely future of the profession, in view of his exalted status. To say, for example, that librarians have 'ghettoised' themselves is really just a gratuitous insult to the profession, with no foundation in fact at all. To appeal to pop culture—as Steele does at the beginning, at the end, and in the middle of his article—in support of a very questionable approach to important issues is not an impressive tactic. I must say that I couldn't care less what Bruce Sterling ('the science fiction writer') or Gloria Steinem (whoever she is) think about libraries. Why join the ever-growing

throng of the semi-literate who, having become aware of text on computers, have made the giant intellectual leap to the conclusion that maybe libraries will become redundant? We librarians all know this is wrong—why not say so?

In fact, libraries have always been at the forefront in exploiting computer power. Text on computer is no big deal. Neither is communication between computers. It's new. It has a place. So what? To say 'we need a new sort of librarian as an interface on the network' is thoughtless. We might need a librarian with knowledge of the network—another matter altogether—but to imply that the rest of us are going to be as dead as the Dodo in no time flat is just a cheap ploy. The incorrect assumption that computerisation is going to render libraries-as-we-know-them obsolete is doing both libraries and the profession a lot of damage, both by rendering libraries obsolescent in the minds of those who fund them, and by demoralising those who work in them.

A senior university librarian—of all people—should adopt a more responsible attitude. By all means look at the new technology, and find ways of exploiting it. But *please* don't be a party to the library-bashing indulged in by the apologists for the computer who abound in the pop culture. As one who has been working in a technologically-advanced library environment for some time, I am quite confident that libraries will only be improved by, and not replaced by, the new technology. The various media, including the printed word, will continue to coexist. Neither can I find any fault with library education: we recently employed a new graduate, and she is as computer-

literate as one could hope or reasonable expect, in addition to being extremely well trained in all other aspects of her work. What the profession needs is people who will champion its very extensive and entirely adequate virtues and capabilities—not 'knockers' from within its own ranks.

Stephen Due
Librarian, Geelong Hospital

Internet for all

Following Bill Linklater's call (*Front Line, inCite*, 1 April 1994) for 'promotion and development of public network access', I believe it is necessary to outline one of the recent developments for libraries throughout Australia.

In January 1994 the State Library of NSW's ILANET service began to offer online access to the Internet to more than 700 subscribers throughout Australia, New Zealand and Asia.

This provision of access to the Internet for all subscribers to ILANET, including all public libraries in NSW, is unprecedented world-wide.

Since January 1994, 55 public librarians and 222 others have been trained in the use of ILANET services and 36 public librarians have received training to access the Internet. In the same period subscribers have increased to number 805.

Following a successful seminar on the Internet organised for public librarians in November 1993, the Public Libraries Branch of the State Library of NSW has established a pilot project with a group of public libraries in NSW to assess the application of Internet resources to the information needs of the public. The pilot group will explore the range of Internet resources from email, file transfer, bulletin boards, conferences as well as online catalogues and commercial database services for members of the public.

Several of the libraries in the pilot group are planning to offer direct access for their clients to the full range of Internet resources.

Anyone interested in further details can contact Howard Amos, manager of ILANET, howard@slim.slnsw.gov.au or Wendy Chester of the Public Libraries Branch of the State Library of NSW (wchester@slim.slnsw.gov.au).

Janette Wright
Director, Public Libraries and Network Services, State Library of NSW

The inCite 4 cover

A number of readers saw that the photo on the cover of inCite 4 was reversed left to right—the keyboards of the computers 'looked wrong', everyone in the room was left-handed and the person in front had his T-shirt on inside-out (well, with mirror writing). This reversal, believe it or not, was a deliberate act on the part of the designer to clear some useable space for overprinting his text. We are pleased to report that one observant reader also spotted that the same picture, the right way round, had already been on an inCite cover back in May 1992. However, nobody has yet come forward to say they noticed the two bits of foolery on the contents page of the 1 April issue... (Ed.) ■

UPDATE DRAFT COMPETENCIES FOR THE LIBRARY SECTOR

The draft competencies will be released for discussion in August 1994. The document is currently being reviewed by the Taskforce prior to their July meeting. The draft competencies and a briefing paper will be forwarded to all Branch working parties and interested members in August for consideration and feedback through our Taskforce member. Please contact Jennefer Nicholson or Phil Teece at the National Office if you have any queries.

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