

## Drug and alcohol libraries get 'hooked'

It may not be the 'information super highway', but a 'super collection' of specialist alcohol and drug information is being created by electronically linking the best alcohol and drug libraries around Australia. This pilot scheme is funded under the National Drug Strategy by the Commonwealth Department of Human Resources and Health.

Using ILANET, a communications system run by the State Library of New South Wales, eleven specialist alcohol and drug libraries will be able to 'talk' electronically with each other. They will use the new system to carry out inter-library loans, search for and order books and serials, share mailing lists, transfer catalogue and database files, hold electronic conferences, set up bulletin boards and get into other networks and services that are part of the information 'highway'.

Peter McCormack, Chief Librarian at the Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia (ADCA) library is supervising the project. He sees this initiative as one more example of how libraries and other information based services can use new information technology to provide better services to all their clients.

The Chief Executive Officer of ADCA, David Crosbie, said that the project is a very significant step forward for the alcohol and drug field. Linking all these libraries together removes the geographical boundaries to information stored throughout Australia. ■

## Handing on the knowledge

A report by *Patricia McQueen* on the ALIA SIG Preservation of Library Materials meeting *In their hands: models of preservation education and training*

The Conservation of Cultural Materials Program at the University of Canberra has been in existence for sixteen years. It is the only tertiary course in conservation in Australia.

Dr Colin Pearson, Director of the Program, asked the audience at this meeting in February of the State Library of NSW: 'Are you getting what you want from the training institutions? Are we providing the people the industry needs?' When most of the preservation work in libraries is at the paraprofessional level, should we train technicians instead of conservators? If yes, then who will do it?

Training in conservation is intensive, usually requiring 1:1 staff:student contact. Recent severe reductions in university funding have adversely affected Canberra's ability to maintain this ratio. The course is having to take in more students to make it financially viable.

Importantly, there is little concern about the employment prospects of graduates. Until recently, only twelve students were accepted in each year. Most of these were automatically employed. Since 1993, the intake has increased to 32 students per year. Can they all find jobs? Are they being trained to cope with changing employment needs?

Colin also discussed the areas of conservation not being taught. These include conservation of books, photographs, film, sound and video. To many librarians these are the major components of their collections! Modern materials are being overlooked. A couple of years ago a Cooperative Research Centre, with an emphasis on the preservation of modern materials, was mooted but has not come about.



Dr Colin Pearson

These issues are still not being addressed, but will be the preservation issues libraries will face in the next decade or so.

In the second half of the meeting, Dr Paul Wilson from the School of Information, Library and Archive Studies of the University of NSW spoke about the preservation and conservation studies for libraries and archives at the University of Texas, Austin. He asked the question 'does it live up to its reputation?'

This and many more questions challenged and provoked the audience at the Group's February meeting. Perhaps it was asking too much to also come up with the answers.

The next ALIA SIG Meetings will be two one-day seminars. On 29 April, Ralph Manning from the National Library of Canada, will speak on preservation microfilming and mass deacidification. On 3 May, Anne Kenney from Cornell University, will be the keynote speaker in a meeting about digitisation.

For further details contact Alan Howell on (02) 230 1679 during business hours or Patricia McQueen on (02) 908 3087. ■



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