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Developing the profession

It is a happy coincidence that the formal launch of Professor Boyd Rayward's book *Developing a profession of librarianship: travel diaries and other papers of John Wallace Metcalfe* has taken place at the time this edition of *inCite*, with the theme of education, goes to press. Developing a system of education for Australian librarians was Metcalfe's passion. In 1939 he established the library school at the Public Library of New South Wales — the first of its kind in Australia. In 1937 he was instrumental in the establishment of the Australian Institute of Librarians and worked with great enthusiasm towards the introduction of a national system of examinations which, in 1944, was introduced and managed by the Institute (later known as the Library Association of Australia and then the Australian Library and Information Association). In 1960 Metcalfe became the first director of the school of librarianship at the University of New South Wales — the first course for professional library education in an Australian university.

Since the establishment of the course at the University of New South Wales, the evolution of education for librarians has survived many iterations. The Library Association of Australia became bound up in the debate about the place of library education in Colleges of Advanced Education and Institutes of Technology. The emergence of specialist courses for teacher-librarians and archivists and the establishment of the library technician course at Box Hill Girls Technical School in 1970 further complicated the debate. The more recent reforms of the tertiary education sector helped to re-focus the debate and we now have a clearer position, but it was only in 1994 that eligibility for professional membership of our Association became available only to members with degrees. Library technicians and library assistants are trained through TAFE.

There are a number of interesting features about the development of library education and its current status. The character of the profession has changed remarkably during the last century. In 1896 at the first library conference held in Australia, HCL Anderson, while delivering an address on cataloguing, said that he had found it 'advisable to hold classes in library economy for my juniors, and I hope this conference will consider the desirability of instituting some system of examination for the whole of Australia, with the object of conferring diplomas on successful students. Such a diploma, awarded by the intercolonial board of examiners should be as useful as those given in the useful library schools in the United States.' Early courses provided by large library institutions principally dealt with cataloguing. A bundle of skills is now required which incorporates many of the traditional library skills but which has been extended to embrace management and operational skills. Importantly librarians are required to think strategically about the role of libraries in the world of new information technologies.

While formal courses offered by higher education and vocational training organisations provide fundamental skills to library and information workers, there is much talk these days of the importance of continuing professional development and the role of life-long learning. Experience in the workplace, short courses, seminars and conferences all play a role in keeping abreast of new developments. As we approach the 1996 ALIA Biennial Conference to be held in Melbourne from 6 to 10 October we also celebrate the centenary of the conference at which HCL Anderson made his observations about the need for formal library education. It is interesting to reflect on the changes that have occurred in professional development over the last 100 years and to note the important role that conferences can play in the development of the profession.

While education and training will be the subject of discussion and debate at our 1996 conference, our conference will also be a professional development experience. When we reflect on the opportunities provided through conferences we often note the value of the exhibits of new technologies. We also benefit from the presentations of speakers. But importantly, one aspect of professional development we often treasure is the chance to exchange views with old and new friends about the work we do. Frequently it is this feature of personal interaction which provides the stimulus we need to return to our workplaces with renewed energy and enthusiasm for the tasks we undertake. In part the success of any conference relies on the professional program and the trade exhibition but success relies on the spirit and goodwill of the delegates.

With over 600 delegates already booked by early August we are expecting a large turn-out for our upcoming event. If you are still thinking about participating, register now. We need your participation to make this event the success it deserves to be. Collectively we need to prepare ourselves for the changes ahead. Knowledge and understanding of the issues facing the library community today are essential components in developing strategies for the future. Your presence will also ensure that your elected ALIA representatives will have a better understanding of your views and can address these through policies and programs. We look forward to meeting you in Melbourne and invite you to visit the ALIA stand in the Exhibition Hall and to talk to me and other staff from the National Office.

For conference bookings please contact Convention Network, telephone (03) 9646 4122, fax (03) 9646 7737, or post in the registration form on the back of this issue's cover sheet.

To purchase Professor Rayward's book contact ALIA National Office, PO Box E441, Kingston ACT 2604, telephone (06) 285 1877, fax (06) 282 2249, or e-mail enquiry@alia.org.au.