Strategic thinking

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Two steps forward, one step back?

This issue of *inCite* has extensive coverage of the recent 'Strategic review of library co-ordination and representation' (in Australia). In this column, I do not intend to re-hash the process or the results we have available, but it would be remiss of me not to offer some comment on the event. It may surprise some of you that I was not wholly in favour of this process. Not that I was unaware of the pressure from members of both our association, and another, namely AC-LIS, that some sort of review ought to take place (to seek some form of amalgamation was the message I mostly received). Did I think this was a good idea? Yes. But did we need a strategic review to enable it? No. Having said that, the fact that the review was undertaken did not concern me as long it was not seen as a review of ALIA and indeed was wider than a review of the roles that ALIA and ACLIS are playing in the information game.

Your Association has a number of mechanisms in place to conduct its own internal reviews; many of the papers submitted to your General Council testify to this and at our meeting in March this year we endorsed the Association's *Strategic plan* for the next five years. Even a document like this is not cast in stone and I expect that General Council will revisit it at least annually to test its relevance and currency. General Council also reviews other wider ranging issues and it was in this context that I was content that the review of library co-ordination take place.

When I think strategically with my Association hat on, I often consider ALIA's core: its membership — its size, its passion, its dedication and its willingness to help us confirm our presence in the information industries.

If we look at the membership demography, the age range is one aspect that immediately comes to mind. In re-

cent years it was argued strongly at General Council that the Association should pay more attention to 'its younger members'. The discussion in General Council on ways we might go about achieving this reminded me of similar discussions we had held at Western Australian Branch meetings in years gone by. General Council decided that rather than pass an edict from on high, Branches and Divisions ought to be encouraged to use their best endeavours to bring into the fold our keen, albeit shy, younger members. This is why such initiatives as the mentoring schemes are gaining success. I recently had much pleasure in sharing a few of my home truths regarding my long experiences with our Association with the Western Australia group. I came away thinking that most of them were aspiring national Presidents and that very few of them were 'young'!

So it was with more than a passing interest that I quizzed my colleague at Curtin, Chris Richardson, when she shared with me some of the results from her ongoing Masters work. In the last few years, our intake of school leavers in the Department of Information Studies (my 'real' job) has fallen dramatically. Most of our intake is mature aged. How does this reflect on the age groupings of the ALIA membership? An interesting topic to pursue I think. And why so few school leavers? Fellow colleagues Paul Genoni and Neil Greeve are working on that topic and preparing some of their work for publication.

Such evidence certainly indicates that ALIA ought to undertake and take advantage of more seriously researched approaches to what is often anecdotal evidence. On such work sound decisions are based. And strategic reviews? They too have their place, when we focus on the strategies we want to review.

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