

# Into the 21st Century...

## The future for ALIA

General Council is under no illusion about the enormity of the task ahead of the Association in defining a new basis of operation and re-positioning us in the new Information Society. If we do not respond to the changes around us, we will rapidly lose our effectiveness and credibility as other sub-groups in the information services industry seek to occupy the high ground that has been ours, unchallenged, for so long. Change will be hard but if we do not seize the opportunities open to us the decline of the Association will be even harder to handle.

To become the key organisation for the information profession and information services industry, a pre-requisite will, of course, be the support of the members of the Association.

There are several major tasks to be completed including:

- a re-definition of the basis of membership to include people over and above those who come to the Association through courses recognised by ALIA. The defining characteristics of an individual member would be that the person possesses a specified set of knowledge and skills necessary for providing information for use by others. Eligibility for membership would be determined on evidence submitted by an individual including details on work experience, current position, education and their support of ALIA goals. It is envisaged that there would be several levels and categories of membership as currently in ALIA.
- identification of the categories of institutions which would qualify for membership (for example, providers such as archives, document supply companies, internet companies).

Alternatively, ALIA might simply define its scope as the 'information services industry' and let institutions decide whether to join or not.

The advantages to the new Association will include:

- the Association would represent the individual member constituency it said it wanted to represent when the name was changed from LAA to ALIA;
- there would be huge potential for growth in membership and, consequently, extension of the Association's influence; and
- the Association would be a focus for a genuine, broadly-based, information profession and would provide an avenue to help the new breed of information workers develop their professional identity.

The challenge for the new Association will be to maintain the balance between the needs of existing members and those who belong to the wider information profession. 'Traditional' members may feel that they have lost control of the agenda as the interests of the Association move away from libraries to the wider concerns of the information profession and information providers in general. We will also need to establish our credibility as an Association which is not a closed shop but has the capacity to accommodate broader interests. The integration of priorities and perspectives of sub-groups of professionals could make policy development difficult.

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# Objects for the new Association

When the scope of the new ALIA is agreed, it will be possible to revise its Objects to reflect our orientation. The current Objects read:

- a) to promote and improve the services of libraries and other information agencies;
- b) to improve the standard of library and information personnel and foster their professional interests and aspirations;
- c) to represent the interests of members to governments, other organisations and the community;
- d) to encourage people to contribute to the improvement of library and information services by supporting the Association.

At the risk of putting Les Murray out of a job, the Renewal Working Group suggests that the current statement of Objects is a good starting point. The key need is to make the Objects more generic to accommodate the broader scope of the Association.

The following draft statement of Objects is proposed for discussion:

*The Australian Library and Information Association as an association founded in 1937 for the advancement of libraries and librarianship in Australia defines its role for the 21st century and the changed information environment as follows:*

- a) to promote and improve the services provided by all kinds of information agencies;
- b) to improve the standard of personnel engaged in information provision and foster their professional interests and aspirations;
- c) to represent the interests of members to governments, other organisations and the community;
- d) to encourage people to contribute to the improvement of information services by supporting the Association.

The drafting of new Objects will be a relatively easy task for one of our word-smiths. But confirmation of the revision will be possible only when the more difficult task of deciding on ALIA's future shape and orientation is decided.

## Governance

Currently the Association has an executive director who heads a national office. The executive director reports to the president and the governing body, General Council. General Council consists of a councillor from each state or territory, the president, immediate past-president, vice-president (president elect) and the chair of the Board of Education. In accordance with Principle 1 of the *Charter of Renewal* the size of Council will be increased in July by the election of two personal and two institutional representatives, bringing the total membership of Council to sixteen.

For the purposes of incorporation under *Corporations Law* the Association is required to set out in its Articles the structure, responsibilities, and appointment process for its board of directors. At the April 1999 meeting General Coun-

cil agreed to move to a model whereby the board functions in a way similar to that of a listed company, with directors appointed or elected by the membership at large. The Association is not required to be specific about further committees but it is proposed to include a provision for the right of the board to establish these as needed.

The proposed model offers flexibility and the opportunity to incorporate particular expertise. It caters for direct member involvement and representation from the diversity of member and interest constituencies which make up the Association, all within an efficient, nimble structure. In summary, the model has three main components:

- a managing board of directors;
- a national advisory council drawn from the geographic and sectional/special interest structure; and
- expert committees/special purpose working groups;

Each component will be supported through the national office.

## Board of directors

It is proposed that a Board of directors be established, with a membership of seven:

- a president (elected directly by members);
- a vice-president/president elect (elected by the members);
- two directors elected by membership at large;
- one director elected by institutional members; and
- two directors appointed by the National Advisory Council.

All directors should be personal members of the Association and would represent the interests of the organisation as a whole rather than those of a particular constituency. In the event that the Board requires expertise not available within the membership, there will be a provision that a non-member can be invited to join the Board.

The executive director would be a non-voting member of the Board.

To provide for the carry over of corporate knowledge on the Board it is proposed that the terms of office would be overlapping, for a period of two years each. In the case of the vice-president, the second year of the term would be the presidential year. A director could only hold office for a maximum of two consecutive terms.

Except for the special arrangements for the initial establishment of the Board, each year would see the following positions put to a general membership vote:

- vice-president/president elect;
- one of the two directors elected at large;
- the position elected by institutional members would be elected in alternate years.

The NAC would appoint one director each year.

The Board would meet approximately six times per year, although this will not be specified in the Articles, and will be varied as required.

Expert and specific working groups or committees may be established as needed by the Board. These may be of limited duration and intention — for instance in response to current legislation or a parliamentary inquiry, or they may be

of a more permanent nature such as an Education and Practice Standards Committee, which could take up many of the roles of the current ALIA Board of Education.

## National Advisory Council

The National Advisory Council (NAC) would act as an advisory group to the Board and its deliberations and decisions would be forwarded to the Board for consideration. The Board would not be bound by these decisions, but it would be expected that most would be ratified by the Board. One of the key roles of this Council would be in alerting the Board to, and keeping the Board focused on, the major issues affecting the industry. It would also advise the Board on policy, strategic planning, and the setting of direction and vision for the Association.

The NAC would comprise 15–20 members with representation drawn from institutions, geographic, section and interest groups. The president, and vice-president would be members, with the executive director as a non-voting member. The chair of the Council would be elected by the NAC.

The NAC would meet once a year, for example in conjunction with the biennial conference, and in a capital city the other year. Between meetings, if necessary, it could utilise electronic communications and tele-conferences to attend to business. The NAC may form sub-committees and working groups from time-to-time.

The following are examples of committees which could be established by the Board or the NAC.

### Education and practice standards committee

This will be a permanent sub-committee of the Board of Directors and its role could include promoting and encouraging best practice and excellence within the sector through:

- setting directions for the maintenance of high standards of professional practice;
- guaranteeing high standards of knowledge, skills and attitudes for entry to the profession and fostering the commitment of individuals and organisations to maintaining high standards of practice;
- co-ordinating and promoting research to inform practice; and
- monitoring of education and training issues in order to represent the interests of members of the profession generally to governments and other organisations.

Members could be elected for two-year terms, with the chair selected by the committee. The committee may meet at least twice a year and conduct further business electronically.

### Candidature committee

The main tasks of this committee would include:

- ensuring that the widest range of applicants (such as age, expertise) are nominated for election to the Board, and for vice-president/president elect;
- encouraging award nominations through the wide promotion of awards.

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### Ensuring institutional participation

ALIA has always consisted of personal and institutional members. Institutional members make use of member rates for continuing professional development activities, purchasing interlibrary loan vouchers, gaining industrial advice and benefit from the lobbying which ALIA carries out at the national level with governments and other organisations. Institutional members also enjoy free subscriptions to *inCite* and the *Australian Library Journal* as well as discounted rates on other ALIA publications.

Libraries support ALIA through their membership. Until now participation of institutional members has been limited as only the named representative has had voting rights. However, institutional representatives are eligible to participate in ALIA as office bearers, an opportunity that is rarely taken up.

In examining the former ACLIS program, which catered for institutional concerns, the major benefits identified by Lunn and McCallum were the commissioned research capability, lobbying, and the involvement in copyright. Other areas in which institutional members may wish to be involved include policy development, workplace issues and education for the profession. ALIA has since adopted or expanded its involvement in these areas.

To ensure that issues of concern to institutions are adequately addressed by the new organisation it is now necessary to address Principle 4 of the *Charter of Renewal* that requires that 'greater opportunities for institutional members to participate in the affairs of the association are identified'. If the renewed ALIA wishes to be the peak body, it is appropriate to examine ways in which we can generate the greatest participation from both individual and institutional members.

Some of the areas that need to be addressed in looking at engendering institutional participation are:

- eligibility for voting;
- ability to hold office;
- ability to contribute to debate;
- benefits; and
- communication.

It may also be useful to envisage the attributes of an actively participating institutional member:

1. Involved in appropriate sectoral body such as CAUL, CASL; but views ALIA as the peak industry body.
2. Looks to ALIA for development of policy and/or guidelines on cross-sectoral issues.
3. Contributes to discussions on policy via submissions from staff members.
4. Supports staff involvement in ALIA activities.
5. Sends staff to participate in discussions of institutional concern.
6. Is prepared to nominate staff as representatives on Division committees.

#### Future institutional membership

A new view of institutional membership may appear as follows:

- a) Institutional membership contains all the current benefits

with a strengthened research, publication and policy development program concentrating on major cross-sectoral issues. Updates on and outcomes of policy and research are prominently reported via *inCite*, the aliaNEWS e-list and the ALIA website.

- b) Institutional members encourage and support their staff who have the required expertise/experience to participate in short-term project teams to develop policy and guidelines.
- c) Institutional members will have one named representative as a contact for the Association and who will be eligible to vote on behalf of the institution.
- d) Benefits such as member rates at events or activities are extended dependent on the level of membership. For example, institutions paying the lowest two levels of membership fees would have advantage of member rates for one person, those paying at the middle two levels would have member rates for two people, those paying at the highest two levels would have member rates for three people.
- e) Institutional representatives could be appointed to committees, however those standing for election to national Board or Advisory Council must also be personal members.

The advantages of this model are:

- ALIA can develop policy and positions with input from a much larger group;
- ALIA delivers on issues of institutional concern;
- ALIA has the ability to identify and build structures which allow for greater participation of institutional members over short and longer terms;
- the number of representatives is aligned to the level of fees paid;
- the pool of people eligible to hold office in divisions or on committees is enlarged;
- the ability to vote remains limited to one vote per member;
- institutional members will have tangible additional benefits; and
- persons becoming involved as the institutional representative or attendee may feel inclined to join as a personal member

Disadvantages include:

- personal members may feel threatened by a larger number of institutional representatives participating in the organisation;
- personal members may give up their membership and participate under their institutional membership

In any vision of ALIA's future, the ability of institutions and individuals within the industry to work together will be critical.

### Have your say

ALIA members are encouraged to comment on all the issues raised here. Responses may be forwarded by fax or mail to ALIA National Office or through the response form on ALIANet [<http://www.alia.org.au/review/renewal/option.response.html>]. Specific questions can be directed to the Group at [rwg@alia.org.au](mailto:rwg@alia.org.au). Your responses are requested by 31 July 1999.