

Your voice

In defence of CPD

As one of the early players in ALIA's long journey to recognise currency in qualification amongst its members, I feel that I must comment on the letter in the October 1999 *inCite* from Kate Burnham. She raises a number of issues regarding continuing professional development (CPD):

Who pays? The workplace cannot always be putting its hand in its pocket to pay for our CPD. We must at times expect to do this for ourselves. Before I get slammed for being an ivory tower academic, I can advise that I personally pay out considerable sums for conference and seminar attendance in order to stay abreast of developments in areas of my particular interest.

Time off: It is interesting how there are always some employers who will not give us the time off to undertake CPD, even if we are prepared to pay our own way for these activities. This is sometimes the case for me and it is the case for a number of our students who must, as a course requirement, undertake practicum placements. So they arrange to take leave. Many of them do this unwillingly, but they understand the need. It would be helpful if some of our members saw this necessity from time to time too.

Long-time professional: How many applications for Associate membership of the Association have I seen where the library or relevant qualification was over ten years old? Far too many. Where was the evidence of currency? There was none available. Now it is, and it is my belief that if we regard ourselves as serious players in today's information environment, then this is the least we can expect.

Earning more money: To say that evidence of being a current professional will not increase employment options is surely a nonsense. I do agree that one

does not have to have a Masters or PhD to be eligible to apply for most jobs in libraries. As well, one can achieve an enormous amount of experience and learning 'on the job', and the evidence of this would be reflected in the person's curriculum vitae and references. For those who do wish to demonstrate their willingness to stretch the envelope and to move outside the norms of workplace learning, ALIA has given an added category. It is an option, not a requirement.

Only those Associate or Library Technician members who want to join the CPD compliance category of membership will be required to undertake CPD. As I understand it, ALIA has not changed the requirements for becoming an Associate or Library Technician member of the Association.

Kerry Smith, Department of Information Studies, Curtin University of Technology (ALIA president 1997)

Don't blame the victim

Kate Burnham ('CPD woes', *inCite*, October 1999, p4) is right to raise concerns about the inclusion of the CPD category of membership. It enhances our standing as library workers not one jot — and is there probably only because it is a pet project of one or more of the elite clique which purport to represent the rest of us. It is time that that elite took a good look at what is the reality for most librarians — reducing membership costs would be a far more productive strategy for most, than creating another unnecessary (and probably elitist) category.

Oh, I know, there will be howls of outrage at my making such a statement but it is time that ALIA took a good hard look at itself and its practices. There were many who feared what might be the result of the move of the

Association from Ultimo to Canberra and I'm sure that some of them now feel that their concerns were justified.

I have not been engaged in librarianship as long as Kate — in my case it is only since 1977 — but during those twenty or so years, I too have learned much on the job. Over the same period, I have invested substantial amounts of my time and money into updating and upgrading my formal qualifications — last year achieving a long-term goal of a masters degree.

However, for the years of working long after my colleagues had gone home; of using what little spare time I had to develop new skills which would benefit my work; of investing time and scarce income into formal study, I have never once received any additional salary or promotion. On the contrary, I have often been abused and criticised by many who were less willing to contribute and yet I have met many 'high flyers' who have gained their positions more by default than because of any real merit or effort.

During that whole twenty years I have been able to afford attendance at only one ALIA conference, and have been berated for not attending others. Because most of my work has been away from capital cities or even major regional centres, I have been unable to become an active branch member or attend workshops or be involved in major activities. And it is those sort of activities and the conference attendance through which the networking takes place which makes the names — which brings the success — which brings the promotions and the rewards.

Let's forget this nonsense about a CPD category of membership. There will always be those who choose to learn and develop their skills both on the job and through formal qualifications. Equally, there will always be those who do no more than the

minimum and who are incompetent regardless of qualifications. But with the best will in the world, those who are remote and isolated, those who are poorly paid, and those who have commitments which preclude involvement in the library social whirl, will remain overlooked and undervalued unless this organisation finds a way to help them achieve and to acknowledge and promote those who are achieving.

If the Association is serious about improving the lot of members then it needs to tackle some of the difficult issues such as facilitating real professional development for remote librarians; providing conferences at a cost which is affordable for those on moderate wages and without employer funding; and by actively campaigning for better wages for all library staff.

And on a final note, before everyone starts hurling rocks, I am aware that some of the more privileged of us have earned their positions and do work hard for all. I am also aware that there are many well-meaning and hard-working individuals amongst staff and volunteers within ALIA. The fact remains, however, that there is a whole library under-class who, it appears, are about to suffer from that strategy so beloved by Howard, Reith, Abbott and Costello, of 'blame the victim.'

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Your voice

Your letters on any issue of relevance to the library and information sector are welcomed.

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