

Establishing a culture of professional excellence



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This month's issue of *inCite* focuses on employment in the library and information sector, offering a number of different perspectives on the employment market, recruitment and the relationship between employers and employees. The topics presented are timely and relevant, with an increasing level of interest both in the current and prospective job markets for information professionals and in the skill set that will be required by future information professionals. The issues that are raised in the different articles published in this issue can be considered at the broader level of workforce planning for the sector, as well as at the individual level of personal career development.

Phil Teece provides a snapshot of the demographics of the LIS workforce. Most LIS professionals would be generally aware of the age profile of workers in the sector: 60 per cent are over 45 years old. The picture is pretty similar in other countries. The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) in the United Kingdom, a government agency which seeks to support and foster the development of the cultural sector in that country, announced in late August that by 2010 there would be an anticipated shortage of 10 800 workers in public libraries in the UK. The implications of this are causing considerable consternation, with a major recruitment drive now planned. Current symptoms include the number of staff entering retirement, the present level of vacancies, and the problems recruiting the 'right' staff, especially as senior managers. MLA embarked on their research because 'no-one had pinned down what was happening about library recruitment at the local level. It is clear there is going to be a huge problem if local authorities do not act now.'

Nevertheless, the challenges for the sector are significant: the (sadly) inevitable question of the image of the library profession is critical if young people are to be convinced that LIS work is a worthwhile career. Workforce planners do not underestimate the fierce competition that is likely amongst the different professions for the target market of new workers, so that levels of pay and future prospects are key issues to be resolved. There are further concerns that the LIS workforce does not adequately reflect the diversity and ethnicity in the wider community it serves: there are certainly gender and equity imbalances that need to be corrected.

Late last year, here in Australia, the Libraries of the Australian Technology Net-

work (LATN)—the libraries at University of Technology Sydney, Queensland University of Technology, University of South Australia, RMIT and Curtin University — commissioned Vicki Whitmell to conduct an exploratory investigation into workforce and succession planning requirements within their institutions. The Whitmell Report stressed the importance of workforce planning in every aspect of the recruitment, retention, training and career planning of all staff in libraries, so that workforce development is integrated into both the strategic and operational planning processes. The individuality of each institution — whether academic, public or special library — means that there can be no 'one size fits all' approach. With this in mind, the Board of Directors of ALIA is currently working with the LATN committee to host a forum in early 2006 that will increase industry awareness of these issues and encourage a collaborative approach to workforce planning for the future.

With these issues as a backdrop, I found it stimulating to participate in the recent ALIA neXt conference for library and information technicians, held in Sydney on 6–9 September. The library technicians' conference is always a fun event, as well as being a productive forum for the discussion of ideas. This year's conference was highly successful, with more than 600 registrations and a sold-out trade exhibition — congratulations to Meredith Martinelli and her committed conference-organising team for their work over the past 2–3 years.

The central themes of the neXt conference were 'eXpectations, eXperiences and eXcellence' and participants were not disappointed by the quality of the presentations — eXcellence flowed through the whole program. A review of the papers shows a strong focus on career development and career planning, so the higher-level issues of workforce planning are resonating at the individual level. Topics included career paths, lifelong learning, future directions and leadership, with diverse avenues for career development discussed, including secondments, shadowing, job exchanges and traineeships. The attributes of library technicians were highlighted: creative, enthusiastic, dynamic, multi-skilled, ambitious and innovative.

Nevertheless, some of the constraints on workforce development have been identified: time, money, lack of planning, lack of reward, fragmented demand and fragmented supply. Any strategies to overcome these barriers are destined to fail unless all stakeholders — individuals, educators ▶

Feedback to your Board of Directors

Do you have an idea, compliment or concern about your Association? Contact any director and ideas will be reviewed at each Board meeting.

E-mail to feedback@alia.org.au will be automatically forwarded to all Board members.

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ALIA Symposium

New directions in special librarianship: the role, the virtual and being indispensable, 3–4 November, the RACV Club, Melbourne

► and training providers, employers and recruitment agencies, and your professional association — all work together to establish a culture of professional excellence across the whole LIS sector.

I believe that individuals have a role to play to ensure that they acquire and maintain the knowledge and skills necessary for professional excellence; educators have the responsibility to provide and promote the courses necessary for developing professional excellence; employers need to acknowledge the ongoing learning needs which are needed to maintain professional excellence; and the professional association must provide cohesion by encouraging, enabling and rewarding professional development with the goal of professional excellence. Importantly, as you read the articles in this issue of *inCite*, I invite you to think about the diverse perspectives of these stakeholders and to consider the importance of working together for the benefit of the LIS sector as a whole. ■

Over a decade, as new technology moved more and more into mainstream activities, new roles have emerged for many people working in Special Libraries throughout the world. Internal consultant, trainer, corporate intranet manager, web researcher or web manager, and knowledge manager are just some that have been discussed in the literature. This symposium focuses on the new opportunities and challenges in the Special Libraries of Australia.

This new 'virtual' environment is huge, complex, fast-moving and requires some new skills. Special Library staff are often part of global teams providing information services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Some no longer have physical collections, which has its pluses and minuses. The bottom line: there is an exciting and important role for information professionals working in the special library sector — in the government and private sectors, in law and health, in business and the humanities.

What is it like to carry your library in a laptop and work from your kitchen

table? What is it like to work with virtual teams in different countries? What are the traps when negotiating licences? Why is information security so important? How can we become effective trainers of end-users? We can position ourselves so our skills are respected, we certainly need to develop strong marketing skills, and we have to ensure our organisations are aware we are indispensable.

This symposium is designed for everyone who works in a Special Library and wants to maximise their opportunities to secure an exciting and respected future. The symposium program includes invited speakers, panel sessions, group discussions and workshops. Book now to reserve a place at this unique event.

You can register for this symposium online via the ALIA shop <http://shop.alia.org.au/StoreFront.aspx>, or download a registration form to fax or post to ALIA at <http://alia.org.au/events/>. For further information go to <http://alia.org.au/conferences/2004-2005.html> or contact Georgina Dale, ph 02 6215 8229 or e-mail georgina.dale@alia.org.au. ■



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The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. It seeks to empower the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support. The Association currently has in excess of 6000 members throughout Australia.

We are seeking to appoint an executive director. As the successful candidate, you will be responsible for the day-to-day operational management of the Association and lead a team delivering services to members. Reporting to and working closely with the Board of the Association, you will have carriage of a range of key initiatives.

You will possess a mixture of skills and experience, including an understanding of libraries and their role. You will have a proven capacity in developing relationships at a political level, in both federal and state jurisdictions. You will also possess a demonstrated capacity to develop broad-based collaborative networks with a wide range of related industries and organisations. You will be a leader with outstanding communication, negotiation and interpersonal skills; with the energy, vision and desire to make a real contribution in representing the interests of members to the community, governments and other bodies.

Interested? Then telephone Alison Maley in complete confidence on 02 9252 2393; or send your résumé to fax 02 9252 2606; PO Box R247, Royal Exchange NSW 1225; or e-mail alison@profileraib Berndtson.com.au, quoting reference number **092AM** by **28 October 2005**.