

What is a State Librarian?



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The appointment of non-librarians to senior library positions has a long history in Australia. In 1923 there was animated discussion of the appointment of JDA Collier as the Head of the Public Library in Hobart. Not all such appointments have been totally successful, but very significant contributions to our profession have been made by non-librarian CEOs including HCL Anderson (Principal Librarian, NSW Public Library), Betty Doubleday (CSIRO) and Alan Fleming (National Librarian and Parliamentary Librarian).

At the heart of this debate is a fundamental question of librarianship as a profession. We are a relatively young profession and in the 21st century we find ourselves defending our jurisdiction and, in some cases, our very reason for existence. I hope that this issue will encourage us to look to our key thinkers and writers, nationally and internationally, and to discuss and develop a position from which the profession can move forward.

Fifteen years ago ALIA developed the *Statement on senior library and information services appointments* (adopted 1991, amended in 2002): the Board at its last meeting reviewed this statement and agreed that it was still appropriate and in line with ALIA's objects and values. It is obviously not appropriate for the Board to comment on individual

appointments and it will not do so in this instance.

Much of the discussion of library appointments where professional qualifications are not required could be said to centre on the tension between generalist and technical professional skills and knowledge. In the workplace this manifests itself into a 'confrontation' over jurisdiction, that is a claim for the sole right to undertake certain types of work. Rather than pursue a 'closed shop' approach to the future of our profession we need to work out how we should work with the very wide range of related professions who are working in the information services area and who are also laying claim to the jurisdiction. It is time we came to grips with the 'I' in ALIA, and define what we mean by 'Information' and truly open up our membership to embrace the world we serve.

ALIA is committed to encouraging the development of excellence in our profession. In particular the Board would like to encourage members to undertake research and participate in further education, including at the doctorate level, as this is one of the defining characteristics of a profession. In addition ALIA and Aurora will continue to develop and promote leadership programs for the profession that I hope will generate a resurgence in interest in debating the contribution our profession makes to an informed society.

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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Ready, set, go!

ALIA members and getting ready for Board participation

I am delighted to be able to communicate to ALIA members through *inCite*. Being a Board member is a great privilege, and I am keen to talk to you about both what ALIA can do for you and what you can do for ALIA (to steal a notion from Kennedy).

Participating as an ALIA Board member is a very important role. Our association provides a voice for libraries and those working in libraries on a wide range of issues. It also requires considerable management, as it is a significant organisation in its own right, with staff, assets and a regulatory environment.

You may think it is very early in the ALIA year to talk about getting ready to stand for the Board, with the new members having just taken up their positions in May. From the viewpoint of the Board, however, it's never too early.

One of the challenges for ALIA is to have ready to stand for election a group of members who are well prepared and can confidently fill Board positions if elected. For much for this year the Standing Committee on Governance, which comprises Michelle Brennan, Sue Hutley and me,

has been discussing with the Board how to ensure that there is a group of members who are Board ready. It is a key issue for the Standing Committee and we are developing activities to prepare new Board candidates.

You might ask what it is about being an ALIA Board member that requires different skills than those you use at work and in your ALIA activities. The duties of Directors on the ALIA Board are:

- to act within the powers under Corporations Law and ALIA's constitution, consistently with the purposes for which the powers were conferred;
- to act honestly;
- to provide members with accurate and sufficient information when seeking their support for decisions;
- to give members honest opinion and advice; and



Roxanne Missingham,
ALIA Vice-president

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Your voice

What is a State Librarian?

Yes, I support the value of professional training and qualifications. Do you need them to run a large library? Maybe, but not as much as a range of other skills and attributes.

Some of the best library administrators do not have professional qualifications but enhance the title of librarian. Some of the worst are professionally qualified but defile the name.

Increasingly, appointment to head a state, university or other large library requires political, business and visionary skills more than professional knowledge. Appointees without an understanding of, and empathy for, libraries will not succeed but they are attributes that can be learned.

The State Library of NSW has made a courageous decision to appoint Regina Sutton. She brings skills and attributes which are necessary for the fulfilment of the Library's aspirations. They are also skills that will enrich the profession. Isn't it better that she be known as the State Librarian than as the chief operating officer?

Perhaps we should be turning our attention to the dearth of suitably qualified applicants, especially for senior positions. The future will see more appointments at all levels of the 'professionally unqualified'. This will reflect the rapidity of change in the knowledge environment and the shortcomings of library education.

**John Shipp, University of Sydney Librarian;
ALiA President 1998; CAUL President
1992-1996; Unqualified librarian**

Ready, set, go! [cont...]

- ▶ to act in the best interests of the association as a whole.

The Board has two major tasks: to ensure that ALIA delivers services to support members in accordance with the strategic plan and that the business and financial aspects of the association are well managed.

To achieve a skill set for good Board participation, members need knowledge of, and some experience in:

- complex financial management;
- the legal responsibilities of boards and corporations;
- policy development and strategic planning;
- monitoring business activities and decision-making; and
- communication skills.

What's in a name?

Writers to Your Voice [*inCite* August 2006] posed the question "What is a State Librarian"? Obviously the lawmakers of the past thought it was of great importance as when they drafted the *NSW Library Act 1939* that they specified the person holding the executive job be referred to as State Librarian.

What these august persons would not have foreseen was that the profession would have evolved to encompass such a diverse range of services and issues and that a narrow professional education would not necessarily equip librarians for the challenges of the 21st century.

The library and information profession actively embraces the ideas of other industries and promotes itself as being uniquely able to integrate this knowledge into practice. Despite this some seem unwilling to extend this philosophy to a non-librarian in an executive position.

Each successive State Librarian has bought a unique flavour to their role to the ultimate benefit of the people of NSW. The previous State Librarian, Dagmar Schmidmaier, provided a new strategic direction for the State Library of NSW and set in place a number of initiatives to assist public libraries in the delivery of high quality services to their local communities. She continues her high-level leadership as President of ALIA.

Regina Sutton, the newly appointed NSW State Librarian and Chief Executive brings tremendous business acumen and qualifications to this role, coupled

ALIA is committed to assisting members to develop these skills and we will be discussing Board preparedness at regional National Advisory Congress meetings. We hope that a one-day event can be organised by ALIA in 2006 to enable members to increase their skills. We also encourage ALIA members to attend events and courses such as the Australian Institute of Company Directors courses (see <http://www.companydirectors.com.au>) and Getting on Board seminars (<http://www.womenonboards.org.au>). I encourage all members who are interested in running for the Board to think about preparing themselves through courses or local events. ALIA's continuing success depends in no small way on having a strong and effective Board. By preparing candidates we will benefit ALIA and the general business knowledge of the profession.



with a diverse and successful leadership portfolio. Her support team includes over 100 librarians, 70 library technicians as well as highly skilled administrative and curatorial staff.

The members of Public Libraries NSW – Country welcome Regina to this senior executive position. We were delighted that she was able to attend our recent conference in Coonabarabran only days after taking up this role and we look forward to working with her in the future.

**Ewan Tolhurst, Chairman; Jan Richards,
Secretary; Public Libraries NSW – Country**

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