

Your voice

Leaving the profession

I've just read Phil Teece's 'Work watch' column regarding the library job market (*inCite* December 2005, p36) and I think he's right on the money. As a 35-year-old librarian whose first year out was 1992, I have struggled, and watched my peers struggle (I graduated with six others), to establish and maintain a meaningful career. I believe the current shortage to be a combination of unrealistic employer requirements and a lack of graduates. In my group of graduates, one never found work as a librarian and one suffered 8 years between jobs. One other only ever got part-time work. Pickings are also slim for those who are experienced.

I spent 6 months this year looking for work, despite my nearly 13 years in libraries. I signed with agencies and soon learned, to my horror, that I was virtually unemployable. The only positions available were for tech services jobs that I've not had the chance to do or very senior positions for which I've not enough experience. My years in academic libraries were instantly disregarded by employers at special or business libraries.

I also agreed with Phil about the lack of mentoring, coaching, nurturing and general support of new graduates and younger professionals. This just doesn't happen any more and I know I'm not the only librarian to have had the experience of being 'thrown in at the deep end'. No surprise I've decided to leave the profession.

The library industry is in deep crisis and I will grieve for a long time after I leave it, both for myself and for the industry. There very much needs to be a culture of 'maintaining the survival of the profession', however, in these budget-strapped times (the dollar rules), this won't happen in a hurry.

Keely Chapman, Wodonga, Vic

Phil Teece's 'Work watch' column is usually the first part of *inCite* that I read and I want to commend him for a consistently interesting and perceptive column. 'Hear, hear', to his comments in the December 2005 issue on the difficulties that new graduates have in getting jobs. I have come to the conclusion that in the library world, and probably in many other professions, employers don't want new graduates at all. What employers want is graduates with at least five years experience gained from another organisation so they can reap what they did not sow. That experience, judging by some of the job advertisements I have seen, needs to be in the same library sector and preferably in exactly the same type of job. This unwillingness to consider new graduates also extends to those librarians who are unemployed, seeking to change sectors, or who don't fit neatly into the employer's expectations of the ideal candidate.

In addition to not giving new graduates a chance, many employers are reluctant to provide training, mentoring, and career development

opportunities to those they do employ. The development of ALIA's professional development and mentoring programs in recent years seems to have occurred at a time when many employers have abdicated any responsibility for developing employees.

If there is a shortage of experienced librarians as the 'baby boomers' retire, it will be because new graduates can't get work and more mature librarians don't have sufficient work or incentive to stay in the profession. This won't be of benefit to individual librarians, employers, library users, or to librarianship. Surely an employer who offers mentoring, practical support and encouragement to do continuing professional development, and opportunities for secondments or acting in higher level positions is going to have more loyal, multi-skilled and productive employees than one who doesn't invest any money or time in the hired help? Employers can choose a 'cold cash nexus' relationship with employees or a symbiotic relationship; whatever you choose, you will get what you deserve.

Camille Peters, Gosnells WA

Editor's note: see *inCite*, October 2005, p 22 for an earlier article on workplace expectations.

Football and libraries

I am sure that many older people will remember when we South Australians were the easybeats of Australian football, and when indeed we so often had to eat crow. Regular

humiliations were part of my childhood memories. But no longer! Just look at us now! Three recent AFL premierships, while both of our SA sides have been in the final eight for the past 5 years in a row.

What has happened? I have a theory about this. Regardless of the code, any football coach will tell you that the most important part of his/her game takes place between the ears. And 30 years ago, SA only had a pitiful 13 per cent coverage with public library resources. While WA and Victoria each had 100 per cent coverage for their communities. The result was reflected in the scoreboard: South Australians were too stupid to play football properly!

But now SA is really matching things as we have 100 per cent coverage of our state with public libraries. And South Australians are now acknowledged as the nation's most consistent library users. I would go further and say that if we Australians can only make our public library resources into the world's best, we will stand a much better chance in the soccer finals in 2006!

Arthur Mortimer, Exeter, SA

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

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