

Frontline



Graham Black

ALIA President
graham.black@alia.org.au

Feedback to your Board of Directors

Board members welcome your comments and feedback. Please feel free to contact a Board member at any time.

Email: feedback@alia.org.au with your comments.

Graham Black
President
07 4930 9435
graham.black@alia.org.au

Margaret Allen
Vice-President
08 9427 3328
margaret.allen@alia.org.au

John Bayliss
Director
02 6801 4501
john.bayliss@alia.org.au

Gillian Hallam
Director
0401 678 950
gillian.hallam@alia.org.au

Andrew Hocken
Director
08 89364 1964
andrew.hocken@alia.org.au

Julie Rae
Director
03 9864 9601
julie.rae@alia.org.au

Kate Sinclair
Director
08 8201 3290
kate.sinclair@alia.org.au

Well the ALIA Access 2010 Conference is done and dusted, and those of us involved in its organisation have, I hope, had a bex and a lie down. On pretty much all accounts it was a success. Its success was due to a whole range of factors and a whole lot of people – our small but enthusiastic organising committee, the stream convenors, speakers, 'in person' and 'net' delegates, ALIA National Office staff, our conference organisers ICE, and of course the support we received from our exhibitors and sponsors. I'd like to thank one and all for their contribution.

In reflection, it was quite a week. We held a rather lengthy Board of Directors meeting on Monday over at QUT (Jan and Philip: the walk across the Goodwill Bridge was under a clear blue sunny sky!) For those of us able to stay on, Tuesday and Wednesday were filled with various ALIA and work related meetings, appointments, and obligations. Thursday and Friday were, of course, the conference.

At the Board meeting, and at dinner the night before, we discussed a range of topics that go to the core of the Association – membership, accreditation, conference models, ALIA awards, budget, Inter-Library Loans, and the future of the the profession and the Association. It was interesting to see that some of the discussions I was involved in, or overheard, at the conference were on similar topics.

One theme that bobbed up a few times at the conference and one which the Board mulled over at dinner was strengthening the profession. By far the most agreed approach was to adopt the chartered or registration model adopted by our cousins in New Zealand (LIANZA) and the UK (CILIP). A strong profession can only be one where its members are required to keep up-to-date and continually develop. It's not a foreign model here in Australia as other professions require formal registration and certification in order to practice and/or increase their earning capacity – think of doctors, lawyers, and accountants.

The big question is how to get there – should the association change its membership structure (à la LIANZA) or should it be a requirement of industry (à la medicine and allied health), a combination of both, or will there be another driver? It's obviously a complex matter and involves an array of associated issues such as industrial relations, employment practices, and requirements of major employers, and LIS training and education.

I've written previously that a strong profession and a strong association go hand in glove. I'm still of that opinion: by strengthening our profession through the registered or chartered practitioner model, we strengthen our association by placing it in a position of being the registration/chartering body. If an industry sector makes it an employment requirement, and we're not in a position to meet their requirements, some other organisation will take our place and ALIA will be left to wither on the vine. There are a string of other potential benefits to individuals, the profession, and ALIA, such as enhanced

earning capacity of individuals, recognition of the skills and expertise of LIS professionals, increased membership and financial stability of ALIA, and perhaps even the consolidation of groups representing libraries. The planets certainly need to align either by design or chance. Regardless, it's a debate we in ALIA need to have sooner rather than later.

Back to the conference. One of the questions I was asked numerous times last week, and one I asked others was, "Why do you think it was so successful?" Obviously modesty prevents me from saying that it was all in the tremendous leadership demonstrated by the conference organising committee chair. (Believe me, it wasn't – it was very much a real team effort!)

On a more serious note, my view is that it was a grassroots conference. By that I mean it was a conference essentially organised by and for different sectors and interest groups. The organising committee essentially provided a shell and the sector and interest groups through the tremendous work of the stream convenors filled the shell with quality content. I spoke to numerous people from different sectors who said they primarily came to attend a specific stream, but equally enjoyed and benefited from attending sessions in other streams. A strong association is one that builds strength on its diversity and conferences like this are but one way to achieve strength.

This was the first time an ALIA conference provided live video streaming of sessions. I was lucky enough to chair one of these sessions, and I think this session, along with an email I received from one of our library staff, demonstrated to me the benefit and impact of taking the risk of offering video streaming. I received a question from a 'net' delegate in Tasmania. I was unsure who the question was for so I asked them to clarify which speaker they wanted to answer the question. Lo and behold, a few seconds later the clarification arrived! What a way to engage with our remote members and what a hoot for the session chair! I'll leave the last say on the conference and video streaming to Alison from my university's Brisbane campus library; "It is good to be a 'virtual' part of the conference and it makes me wish that I was there in person! It is such a wonderful way to include remote librarians too."

While we may celebrate and reflect on the conference – some of us may even have celebrated finally getting a government! – I'm sure many of you spared a thought for our colleagues in Christchurch who are recovering and/or rebuilding their libraries and personal lives as a result of the earthquake.

Graham Black ALIA President

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