

the last word

PROFESSIONAL BENEFITS?

At the University of Melbourne, a library cadet is singled out each year to be awarded as the most outstanding graduate. Their prize is a year's membership of ALIA. University Librarian Philip Kent takes a look at the professional benefits of such a prize.

Recently I was reminded of the importance of engagement with ALIA early in one's career. Kathryn Lindsay, one of our star library cadets at the University of Melbourne, was selected for the honour of the *Most Outstanding Graduating Student in the Graduate Diploma in Information Management* at RMIT. Her prize was a free membership to ALIA for a year. Kathryn was genuinely pleased with her reward.

Schemes like our cadetship program are not new. I remember the concept was alive and kicking way back in many large institutions such as the National and State Libraries.

Many centuries ago, when I was a librarianship student, we had a visit in class from a local senior librarian. He gave us membership forms and encouraged us to join. I think most of us joined. I was working in an academic library already, where membership was widespread and an (unwritten) expectation. The head librarian and all the middle managers that I looked up to were ALIA (then LAA) members.

I was pretty soon active on sectional committees and elected to positions of office or had tasks like arranging the wine and cheese. In those days there were several library meetings in the evenings each month. We networked long before that term was in currency and we had lots of fun along the way. Committee meetings were held at each other's houses and generally included take-away dinner and wine. ALIA became a key part of my lifestyle.

While I personally think that the disappearance of this regular local connection is the profession's loss, I have been

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heartened by new innovations such as the New Librarians Group. Community building and identification with library workers from diverse workplaces was a great part of my professional formation and I am glad that ALIA facilitated that.

Employers play an important role in assisting new members of the profession and professional events and connections are integral to that responsibility. At my library, we preference attendance at conferences for those who are presenting and of course we try to share around these opportunities. I always try to ensure that new librarians get to a major conference early in their career so that they can make contacts and build their own networks. The technicians' conference is also important.

In my youth ALIA members were also preferenced by employers through the expressions of interest process to attend conferences. We were able to obtain reduced registration fees so the staff development budget went

further. There was also an unwritten understanding that we each had responsibility for our own professional development. We often paid our own (reduced) registration fees and our

employers provided time off. Staff development budgets were smaller in those days but most staff managed to get some level of support.

I understand that many new grads wish we had an official 'standard' so that they could point to it when approaching prospective employers. When I was starting out, almost every library position stipulated membership of ALIA or eligibility for membership to be an essential criterion.

Membership does have its benefits and a realisation of those benefits will hopefully assure more members to sustain our Association.

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