



WHAT GETS YOUR GOAT?

This month our feature theme is something of an 'open mic' on our profession and our industry. We asked the question, "what gets your goat?". We wanted to know what members think are the big issues we face professionally and what we might do about them. Unfortunately we asked this question with an accidental feral apostrophe and quickly learnt that punctuation mistakes get on a lot of LIS goats. (And rightly so.) But along the way we also found that technology was the most commonly voiced concern. All IT, no IT, the oft-reported death of the book, the potential for an illiterate underclass – many members are thinking around the ramifications of this issue.

Library standards, professional practice, mentoring



the new generation and smartening ourselves up on the fundraising front also popped up on the radar, along with giving priority to allowing time for kids to choose their books and read during library-based lessons.

A range of sectors and specialisations are represented here. You may not agree with some of the sentiments expressed. You may think we've missed the most important issue of all, or you may have some ideas about what we should do to change things. If you do, or if you'd like to agree or disagree, you can. Send a letter to the editor or submit an article for inCite. Talk to your colleagues over a cuppa. If you don't want to have a public say then have a private opinion.

And now, we invite to the stage...you.

A STANDARD FOR LIS

A standard is a respected document that outlines expectations of a service or product and is used in many industries, records management (RM) being one of them. Australia was the first country in the world to create a records management standard (ISO 15489) that defined the best practice work processes involved in organising, storing and finding records. This standard, with some alterations, is now used throughout the world. As a result, records management is taken more seriously as a profession in organisations, which begs the question: should the library and information sector (LIS) create a standard of our own?

Consider the benefits of having a standard: a formal document such as this could help the community at large consider the rich complexity of the LIS world by outlining the many aspects of library work. As has happened in records management, a standard for LIS would add credibility to the notion that our work is essential, both to businesses and the broader community at large, and a document written in jargon-free language (within reason) would also increase the chance of maintaining a functional library environment when that library is managed by those with little to no library experience. This would be the ultimate advocacy tool, clearing up common misconceptions about what we do and why we do it.

What would the LIS standard contain? Like ISO 15489, it would need to be a voluntary, best practice-oriented document and in two parts. The first section would offer basic definitions of terms often found in LIS work practices, followed by descriptions of the basic functions and benefits of LIS in relation to an organisation and as a stand alone entity, creating a useful tool for managers. Customer service expectations would need to be covered so that proper measures are implemented to keep the clients coming back. Facets of technology, and decisions about the organisational positions and levels of authority recommended for their management should also be addressed. This section should ensure that, like its records management counterpart, it aims to provide what Julie McLeod calls a "standardised yet non-prescriptive approach to successfully managing records" (Assessing the Impact

of ISO 15489 – A Preliminary Investigation in *Records Management Journal* 13.2, 2003), no matter the format.

The second part of the LIS standard would be a more complex document, including guidelines and providing an implementation guide to the first part, with the view of being used by LIS professionals, or those charged with managing library records in their organisations. The added benefit of this section is that it would provide guidance on assessing an organisation's needs and could be used as a tool for auditing existing systems and evaluating the requirements for a new one. A variation of the Designing and Implementing Recordkeeping Systems (DIRKS) methodology, produced by the National Archives of Australia (NAA), would be a useful model for the LIS standard, as it comprehensively describes a methodical process in jargon-free language. This methodology involves thoroughly examining every facet of a business and determining its recordkeeping requirements. It provides a template for a similar assessment of LIS requirements, making the standard useful to community organisations eager to formalise their collections and identify areas for improvement or to institutions wishing to audit their practices and procedures.

A useful addition to any standard in this field should also contain an overview of the fields of records management, archives and knowledge management. A basic understanding of the theory behind why and how these fields do what they do extends both the usefulness of the employee and helps the versatility of an organisation to survive by adapting its systems if money becomes tight.

This is especially important when the legal ramifications of some practices are considered.

Most importantly, any standard or guideline would need to be endorsed by the relevant peak bodies, such as ALIA, and actively supported by major employers in the sector, as this endorsement and support will be crucial to the success and validity of the standard.

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