

It's about value...

Sustainability is one of those words that are now a standard part of our vocabulary, our business cases and our working life. In the context of ALIA it raises two issues – the sustainability of ALIA itself and the sustainability of our profession.

The question of sustainability of the profession is challenging, the answer uncertain, and from the discussion at the 2011 National Advisory Congress (NAC), ALIA members do not have a strong cohesive sense of the longer term

future for the profession.

At last year's NAC there was a strong view expressed

that society does not always consider librarianship to be a profession. This is in contrast to the situation where, for example, accountants and engineers – often in the same organisation as the library or information staff – are viewed as members of a profession, with the result being that their professional development is strongly supported by the organisation. While there was support at the Congress for this view and, therefore, for compulsory

professional development as a way to boost our professional credentials, there was disagreement too.

I do believe that our profession will survive but also that it will be significantly reshaped and more aligned to the information technology, information management and community engagement professions. Our collections and our delivery methods will continue on the digital path, so we must modify our skills and knowledge to match finding new ways in this environment to connect our users with the information they need.

I am also of the view that ALIA members will adopt compulsory professional development as a way to lift the credibility, capacity and visibility of our profession. It's my personal view that we have no choice in the matter of whether we move to a compulsory professional development scheme if we wish to be considered in the future as a valued profession. To be a valued profession is fundamental for long term sustainability. Why would we not embrace this? What have we to be afraid of – that we might continue to learn throughout our professional lives and have skills that meet the needs of our employers and our communities? It's my hope that we will do this sooner rather than later.

If we look at professions, such as accountants, doctors and engineers, they have strong and vibrant

professional associations working alongside them, advocating and supporting their standing as a profession. ALIA has been doing that for many years, but our longer term capacity to do this has certainly been challenged in recent times.

Over the last couple of years, the Board has been focusing on the longer term sustainability of ALIA itself. The financial situation has been uppermost in our minds and I know that some members are heartily sick of our focus on this. Financial sustainability doesn't just happen, it takes work, difficult decisions

and planning and for this, as President, I make no apology. ALIA is at a point where member contributions alone no longer cover all of the operational costs of the Association. There is continued pressure on the level of membership fees but demand for the same or increased

levels of service provision and this is not a formula for sustainability. To sustain the Association we have to look past membership fees and therefore conference revenue, ALIA House and other projects are essential.

I don't want you to think that I'm negative about the long term sustainability of our profession because I'm optimistic. Perhaps the real issue is how we ourselves value our own standing as a profession and as part of that how we value ALIA as our professional organisation. If we ourselves are not prepared to uphold and support the cornerstones of our professionalism, then why should the community? I think the sustainability of our profession is in our own hands – the question is whether we are willing and ready to act.

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"TO BE A VALUED PROFESSION IS
FUNDAMENTAL FOR LONG
TERM SUSTAINABILITY. WHY WOULD
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INDUSTRY SNAPSHOT

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James Patterson has taken out an astonishing five spots in the top ten most borrowed titles in the UK. He's also among the hottest authors in Australia's local libraries.

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