

CSIRO: Questions and Answers

Funding

1. *What efforts has CSIRO made in recent years to attempt to persuade the government to provide adequate funding which would allow the CSIRO library network to continue adequately to support the scientific information needs of the Australian research community?*

I imagine that CSIRO's efforts to improve the funding of science and technology are reasonably well-known to *Incite* readers. However, the problem is not simply one of seeking a level of funding that might allow 'adequate support' (whatever that means) to be given to library and information services. Nor is CSIRO alone in facing it. The last five years have seen an important change in the attitude of governments to public assistance for research, development and allied services. An increasing proportion of the funds devoted to these areas is now targeted to specific industries or economic or social goals. Examples include the tax incentives scheme for private R&D, the rural industries and energy research funds, and changes in the way research funds are being allocated within the tertiary education sector.

Funds allocated through these arrangements may or may not provide for indirect research costs, such as library and information services. Depending on whether they do, the impact of these services on institutions being forced to compete for higher levels of external funds varies from difficult to catastrophic.

None of which is intended as criticism of the underlying philosophy guiding such changes. What those of us concerned with the health of the whole science and technology system, which in my view includes library and information services, must do is evolve an adequate response to the new environment in which we find ourselves. It is an environment dominated by two concepts: accountability and devolution — that pose peculiarly difficult

challenges to the managers of traditional information services such as libraries.

The recent Libraries Summit was a very important beginning for the library community in rising to meet these challenges. But we have a long way to go. For example, legitimising the constructive role that user pays policies may play in encouraging the development and extension of innovative services was in my view simply bowing to the inevitable. Such policies are, however, threatening for many of the institutions represented by *Incite*'s readers.

The library community and its associated institutions must now resist being trapped in sterile exchanges about cost recovery and develop appropriate concepts and methods for describing and measuring the contribution of library and information services to the missions of their parent bodies. In the past, success in attracting funds has largely been a question of lobbying ability. The present situation requires an altogether more sophisticated approach. I would like to think that CSIRO will bear its share of the burden in this endeavour.

Achieving innovation

2. *How will downgrading CSIRO's library collections and access to them facilitate achievement of the government's stated aim of increasing innovation in Australian science/technology?*

CSIRO is not downgrading either its research collections or access to them. Central services are becoming more accountable, leaner and more closely focused on the needs of the research Divisions and their library and information services. The process is aimed at swinging a higher proportion of total funds into the Divisions. With other changes going on in CSIRO, this should have a significant positive impact on innovation in Australian science and technology. The task that we should not overlook is to ensure that within the Divisions an optimum balance is struck between research and information activities.

National role

3. *Traditionally, the CSIRO library network has welcomed its de facto role as the premier national science and technology library. Does it now see itself as having any kind of national role and, if so, what is it?*

I have never been comfortable with the notion of a 'recognised *de facto* national role'. The phrase is an oxymoron: once such a role is recognised it ceases to be *de facto*. Much better to state clearly and unselfconsciously what CSIRO's role really is. Its collections are clearly a national resource. One of their great strengths is that they are being constantly scrutinised and revised to ensure that they reflect the national priorities guiding working scientists. Another strength is that they make up a co-operative network. This allows the most efficient use of resources by reducing duplication and encouraging specialisation.

I believe that CSIRO should accept a responsibility for co-operating widely in developing the concept of a distributed national collection. What is lacking is a mechanism to link adequately the major research libraries in Australia. The Summit recommendations relating to an Australian conspectus seem to me to almost demand the formation of an Australian Research Libraries group for successful implementation.

An allied area in which CSIRO has a national role is in providing access to its collections. At present, the Divisions are providing, by and large, a first rate service with increasingly strained resources. A more realistic agreement on ILL charges would allow them to continue in this function without continually being challenged to justify any resources that ILL may take away from research. The central collection has already fallen some weeks behind in meeting ILL requests. Given that I would have problems justifying to myself, let alone to CSIRO top management, taking extra funds from Divisions and their over stretched libraries, this situation will continue until the

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THREE INTO ONE

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— ANN STOCKFORD
— WILMA LAVERACK
— ANGELA SMITH

Library Services Advisor
Customer Services Officer
Library Services Officers

2. PUBLIC LIBRARY SUPPLY

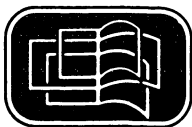
— SALLY BARTLEY
— BOBBIE FELTON
— VICKI CASTORINA
— JUNE YARRINGTON

Library Services Advisors
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3. SPECIAL LIBRARY SUPPLY

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charges for loans cover the cost of servicing them. On a more positive note, we are currently investigating making the CSIRO OPAC searchable online via AUSTRALIS.

Views

4. Does the CSIRO library network have any current views on major issues such as the totality of national library resource (the national collection), interlibrary co-operation or resource sharing?

I think that there is a fair degree of consensus within the network on these issues. Of course, each library faces its own unique circumstances. As a result, precise arrangements for interlending, resource sharing and so forth vary considerably. Nobody to my knowledge, however, would deny the value of working towards a practical expression of the concept of a distributed national collection, although many would query the likelihood of this occurring in the near future. We have various cooperative arrangements already, such as the SESTICON group which links Monash University and our Clayton Divisions.

Policies

5. Statements from CSIRO imply a re-definition of its role, but are expressed in negative terms. What principles or policies are guiding discussions of change? Specifically:

(a) Does the CSIRO library network have a collection development/collection weeding policy? If so, is it to be published?

(b) Does the CSIRO library network have a service policy? If so, what is it?

I think that the general question has already been answered. In answer to the specific questions:

(a) A single rigid policy would be inappropriate given the nature of the network. However, we are working to develop improved guidelines for Divisions in all these areas. This is a very large task: an exercise using the RLG collecting level across the network is estimated to take two years. In general, I feel that we should aim to give the highest priority in collection development to subject areas of long term interest and unique to CSIRO.

(b) The CSIRO libraries are service units: they may have high and low priority users, but their whole reason for being is to provide service.

Central library

6. It is not clear whether there will be a CSIRO Central Library or store in the future. If there will be, what will be their functions?

A collection will be maintained at East Melbourne to meet the needs of site staff: it will include the CSIRO Index collection. The central store will continue to be developed to accommodate less used titles from the Divisions. A document delivery service will continue from East Melbourne. The collection of scientific and technological material whether by gifts and exchange or by other means is the task of the Divisional libraries not the East Melbourne site library. The name Central Library has not been used officially for some years.

Staffing

7. Will the staffing of Division libraries be adequate to assume the additional workload of administering the exchange agreements which are to be devolved to them, and servicing requests for ILL from exchange serials?

Exchange agreements will not be devolved, but

will continue to be administered centrally. Divisions can choose the level of service that they wish to give to ILL, currently this is very high at a significant cost to CSIRO, albeit with many benefits. A realistic ILL voucher rate would remove the former without endangering the latter.

Exchange journals

8. Has CSIRO now established criteria for cancellation of exchange journals based on use of statistics?

A single, CSIRO-wide criterion would not, as explained earlier, be realistic. Divisional criteria would tend to be based on research interest, possibly irrespective of external demand, which can be an embarrassment given competition for staff resources. For the central store collection, zero requests over one year seems a likely criterion. I would be interested in any advice volunteered on this or, for that matter, any other issues from *InCite's* readers.

Unique holdings

9. What is the size of CSIRO's unique holdings and (a) if retained will it be entered in ABN and (b) if not retained, how will these collections be treated?

The information needed to answer the question is not readily available in an up-to-date form, but the figure is very large, perhaps more than forty percent of the serial titles in S&T in Australia. The major part of Divisional holdings is currently recorded on ABN. Material being cancelled is currently notified to a variety of bodies, including the ACLIS Sub-committee on Resources (Victoria), the NLA, CAUL, ALCAE and requesting university libraries. Unwanted backsets are also available to transfer to interested libraries in appropriate circumstances. This year we will also be supplying details to other holding libraries for cancelled titles, although the small number of cancellations makes this a rather uninteresting exercise. What might be of more value is information we shall be supplying to the ACLIS Sub-committee on Resources (Victoria) on new titles. It is encouraging that exchanges of this kind are being canvassed by ACLIS.

Serials

10. CSIRO holdings of serials form a very significant part of the national collection of serials. They have always been reported assiduously to the National Union Catalogue of Serials (NUCOS) and its CSIRO predecessor Scientific Serials in Australian Libraries. Would CSIRO undertake to notify NUCOS of changes of ownership for journals transferred from CSIRO or would entries be in limbo until new owners eventually notified NUCOS?

Notification of cancellations has already been mentioned. Transfers out of the CSIRO collection would be treated in the same way. Notification of the destination raises some interesting issues. Maybe it would be most appropriate for the receiver to provide the record when accession is completed. I am open to advice on this point.

Full cost-recovery

11. Has CSIRO considered the implications for a full cost-recovery document delivery network if other libraries imposed full cost-recovery on CSIRO libraries?

Yes. Very carefully. *InCite's* readers will however be aware of the fact that while CSIRO has done nothing so far, some other libraries are already forging agreements to charge full-costs to ILL recipients, maybe before long, to CSIRO.

So although we may be attracting publicity on the issue, we may end up being laggards. The reason for our caution is, of course, concern about retaliatory action against vulnerable Divisional libraries. The sorts of guidelines being considered for full-cost recovery on ILL are to charge full costs for stores accesses and allow the Divisions to strike individual agreements appropriate to the relationship with the exchange partners, always aiming to achieve a balance that imposes no net cost on CSIRO.

Expert advice

12. Will CSIRO seek the expert advice of librarians (from both within and outside the Organization) before taking action on the consultants' recommendations, so as to ensure that any changes are in the best interests of both CSIRO and those who rely on it for scientific information?

Subsequent to the recent Review of Corporate Centre, submissions were sought from the Australian library community. As a member of the implementation team, I had the task of compiling the 68 submissions received and can assure *InCite's* readers that they had a very significant influence on the final decisions, particularly, but not solely in the area of gifts and exchange. Within CSIRO, a Library Network Committee is being established to provide a formal mechanism for librarians to participate in policy formulation. It is not clear who are the consultants to whom the question refers, however, the current review of site libraries is an entirely participative process, drawing heavily on the expertise and advice of librarians. In addition, every practicable opportunity is being taken to interact with interested external users.

James A Lumbers
Assistant General Manager
Information Services CSIRO



James A Lumbers BSc DipIT DipEd(Adv)LitB, is a CSIRO employee since 1973. Mr Lumbers initial interests lay in the interpretation and dissemination of scientific and technical information. During the 1980s he worked increasingly on public policy issues in the area of science and technology. He has worked in the Office of the Minister (Scientific) at the Australian High Commission, London, at the Australian Science and Technology Council and, until mid-1987, at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Paris where he conducted an analysis of the growing convergence between basic and industrial research for the 1988 OECD Science Policy Outlook. On his return from the OECD, Mr Lumbers worked on a review of Corporate Centre functions in CSIRO and then on the team responsible for implementing the review's recommendations. He was appointed to his present position in April, 1988. Mr Lumbers lives in Melbourne with his wife and son.