

Changes at AGPS

Briefings on the latest developments at the Australian Government Publishing Service (AGPS) were the subject of the most recent meeting of the AGPS-ACLS Liaison Committee (AALC).

AGPS has placed increasing emphasis on cost recovery and commercial viability over the past couple of years. Almost no government appropriation is now made to support the government publishing program. AGPS is operating under a new Business Charter, which effectively supersedes the old Charter. (Copies of AGPS Circular No. 49 detailing the changes are available from me. C/- Canberra CAE, PO Box Belconnen ACT 2616, telephone (062) 522 246.)

The changes are to be reviewed by July 1991, from which time Commonwealth departments and authorities may be permitted to make their own publishing arrangements if they wish. Should this happen, the role of AGPS in central bibliographic control and distribution would be affected. Concern was expressed at the AALC meeting that Commonwealth government publications could revert to the chaotic state they were in before the Erwin Report (1964) recommended the establishment of a central government office.

Electronic publishing

A variety of developments were outlined. DISKROM Australia has been set up as a joint venture between AGPS and Computer Law Services Pty Ltd. In the near future DISKROM will be making Commonwealth legislation available on CD-ROM with sophisticated search software.

Under an agreement with Telecom, AGPS has mounted AEGIS (Australian Electronic Government Information Services) on Viatel, which includes the *Commonwealth government directory* and Bookshop catalogue among other services.

AGPS is entering demand publishing, with a network of laser printers in the AGPS Bookshops linked to a central database in Canberra. This will enable a copy of an Act, for example, to be printed locally overnight following a request. Also included is a facility to provide out-of-print material using an OCR scanner.

It seems possible that, in areas without an AGPS Bookshop, libraries could serve as local outlets for this system. (The earlier trial scheme using public libraries to sell AGPS publications —

the AGPS Library Sales Scheme Pilot [see *InCite* 20 February 1987] — was unsuccessful.)

New publications

The *Commonwealth government directory* update now has more than 600 subscriptions. It includes history notes, and information gathered from sources such as the Ministerial document service. The *Commonwealth digest* will provide a fortnightly digest of ministerial statements, press releases etc; publication is expected to begin in September. A *guide to legislation* will be distributed free to school, public and tertiary libraries as well as to lawyers. Other proposed publications include a dictionary of government acronyms and abbreviations, and an A-Z guide to government information and services.

Parliamentary papers

The stamps inside documents indicating they belong to the *Parliamentary papers series* are unsatisfactory to all libraries. AGPS indicated that this was a matter for Parliament to consider; it has been approached with a suggestion that adhesive labels be placed on the outside covers. Distribution of the 1983 collated sets of papers is awaiting the supply of the index by Parliament.

Deposit and free-issue scheme

The scheme was reported to be working well, though with the usual small problems. Free-issue libraries are to be reminded they should make an annual report on their use of the scheme. Consideration is currently being given to the extension of the scheme to new universities, created as part of the changes occurring in tertiary education. There would be substantial costs involved in this.

AGPS has recently been appointed official printer and publisher for the new ACT Government. This means that deposit and free-issue libraries will receive ACT government publications through the scheme.

Permanent paper

Jackie Millard, Conservator at the State Library of Victoria, has tested the paper used in several Commonwealth and Victorian government publications of enduring value, and found that most of it was not of good quality. (A copy of her

brief report is also available from me.)

AGPS responded that they do not use permanent paper because it is expensive and may not be satisfactory for half tones or colour, and because many publications are not viewed as archival by the author departments.

The introduction of permanent paper would need to be at the request of the author department — for example, Parliament in the case of Hansard.

Peter Clayton

Canberra College of Advanced Education Chairman and ALIA representative, AALC

NSW

VIDEO

PURCHASING

CO-OP.

The NSW Video Purchasing Co-operative is now entering its third year of successful operation. Twenty-seven libraries are now members, thirteen of these in the country. At the annual meeting on 27 January 1989, members discussed the previous years' progress, and set policies for the present year.

The Co-operative began in 1987 following approaches by a number of public libraries to the Public Libraries Department for a cooperative venture to purchase high-quality educational VHS videos more cheaply. Special Grant funds were made available, and each participating library contributed \$2000. Titles were then selected and, with the assistance of the NSW State Film and Video Service, multiple copies of these videos were purchased, achieving a discount of more than 70 per cent.

In 1988, the Co-operative joined with the South Australian State Library and the State Film Centre of Victoria to choose videos from a list of some 100 titles preselected by the State Film Centre of Victoria. Emphasis was on Australian-produced material and covered subject areas such as 'social issues', 'health and sexuality', 'politics and history' and 'children's stories'. Each library could choose thirty-five titles, and extra titles were selected by the Co-operative's committee with the Special

Continued 17...

LETTERS

Public libraries and information services

Dear Editor,

John Levett [*InCite* 10 July], one of our best stirrers over the past two decades, in commenting on Alan Bundy's and my comments on information service in public libraries [*InCite* 3 April and 8 May], rightly points out the variability of the degree to which many public libraries are coping with basic information enquiries. This is often because of inadequate resources — both in trained staff and in reference sources.

I did not deny, in my reply to Alan Bundy's sweeping statements, that the service needs a great deal of improvement. What I was trying to stress is that colleagues could assist the public library to be an adequate 'first point of access for information for the general public and for the public's access to the national system of library and information services'. (Summit resolution.)

Constructive help is wanted. How many librarians contacted their local public librarians during the recent 'Public library funding campaign' in New South Wales initiated by the local government and shires associations and outlined in Faye Lawrence's summary [*InCite* 19 June]? This awareness campaign was aimed at State funding (15 per cent from State, 85 per cent from local government).

Now to John's reference questions. There would be no problem answering them in most Sydney public libraries, but some would have to be taken as queries and checked further than is possible on busy, and often inadequately staffed, enquiry desks.

The adequacy of the answers is John's point. There have been, thankfully, considerable improvements in many public libraries' reference services since John did his survey, over which there was much consternation.

Sutherland statistics will illustrate the volume of enquiries that public libraries are trying to cope with. The reference service recorded 73 335 in 1988 — 40 294 at the Central Library. Many hundreds were not recorded, as queues, especially at weekends, mean the staff

on reference and reader advisory duties are often too busy to record accurately.

There have been improvements in public library information services in New South Wales through the initiatives of the State Library — use of Ilanet, online access to the catalogue by the end of this year, etc. The excellent support given by the Public Libraries Department in training sessions, workshops and meetings has helped to raise the standard of reference staffing.

The reference staff in some public libraries in Sydney could certainly perform more efficiently for those who do not have access to other library services if the hordes of TAFE, University, and other students could be encouraged to satisfy their needs at their own institutions' libraries.

There are other reasons for the variability of information service other than inadequate staffing and excessive student use in some local government areas. The salaries are poor and need urgent attention.

The pay for performance system currently being adopted by some councils will help to some extent to retain trained staff. Many services have not utilised available technology to improve information services to the public and their councils.

All who are concerned about the future of public libraries, not only their information services, should get behind the current campaigns — IFTN and the ACLIS lobbying program — as well as talking to their local MPs and anyone else who may influence funding of local government libraries.

D. Oliver

Director, Library & Community Services, Sutherland Shire Council

Library levity

Dear Editor,

For some years I have been assiduously collecting Australian and overseas library cartoons with a view to, one day, making them available in a published volume to bring some lightness, levity and even a touch of lewdness to our workaday concerns.

Thanks in part to contributions from colleagues, the collection is now large enough to be published. However, are there any other cartoon collectors out there in library land? Show me yours and I'll ... Telephone (08) 354 6260; facsimile (08) 354 6699; or write to me at SACAE Library, Holbrooks Road, Underdale, SA 5032.

Alan Bundy

From 14 ...

NSW Video purchasing Co-op.

Grant funds provided. The average cost of each title was \$62.

This year, members will select video titles from two lists of preselected titles, one provided by the State Film Centre of Victoria and the other by the State Library of South Australia. If the Co-operative's submission for Special Grant funds is successful again this year, these funds will be used to purchase additional titles selected by the Co-operative's committee members.

Selection guidelines were also discussed. It was agreed that only titles priced at more than \$100 before discount would be considered for purchase, and that the minimum discount would be 40 per cent. There would be a continuing preference for Australian-produced material. Captioned videos and children's titles would be considered on merit. It was generally agreed that children's titles had been particularly popular. Members wanted more information to be provided on the labels of some videos. The committee will emphasise this to producers.

Despite such irritations, the scheme has enabled public libraries to acquire videos normally too expensive for them. Their collections are more balanced and users can view quality educational material when they wish to do so.

Bill Stinson

ALIA Audiovisual Services
Sub-committee

Now Available . . .

DIRECTORY OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS IN AUSTRALIA

Compiled by

Jennifer Alison, Margaret Medcalf and Catherine Santamaria

- lists individual collections in libraries and institutions in Australia.
- provides comprehensive descriptions of Australian collections in the State Libraries and the National Library of Australia.

150p. 0 86804 0541

Published by the Acquisitions Section, NSW Group

Available: ALIA, Queen Victoria Terrace ACT 2600.

Price: \$18 (members): \$25 (non-Members)