

LETTERS

Dear Editor,

For two decades I have found the Association's Biennial Conferences to be a welcome diversion from the daily grind. They provide a degree of professional development, some useful contact with inter-state colleagues and social enjoyment. Of course, choosing which sessions to attend is something of a lottery, but with the benefit of experience one usually manages to score at least a majority of sessions that are useful and/or interesting. It is on the occasions that the choice is not so lucky that misgivings begin to surface (surely never before have so many travelled so far at such expense to learn so little) and the thought arises that there must be some more efficient means of information transfer.

On the whole, however, the memory of conferences past occupies a position on the positive side of my consciousness — that is, as long as I avoid thinking too deeply about the cost/benefit ratio of the exercise. This kind of thinking is prompted, however, by the 1990 Conference information. For a start there is the astonishingly high registration fee of \$450 (plus an additional impost of \$50 should registration be less than 6 months in advance, and a further \$40 for 'late' registration. I wonder how many other service providers could get away with late fees charged 3 months before the service is provided?). The benefits of conference-going are real enough, but intangible, variable and unpredictable. They have to be weighed against the costs which, for the typical delegate to Perth in 1990 might look something like this:

Registration	495
(450 + 6 months interest)	
Travel	800
Accommodation/Living	700
Social Program	100
Time away from work	600
Total cost	\$2695

Whether or not these costs are met or shared by employers they are the largely inescapable costs of conference-going. If there are one thousand delegates, and my estimates are anywhere near the mark, the cost to the community will be in the order of \$2.5-\$3 million not counting the costs of organising the conference, nor the costs of the exhibitors.

Unless I have missed something, there are no strong indications that the library and information profession is

rapidly headed towards the top of the remuneration table in this country. Nor do I see any signs of widespread surpluses in the current budgets of most library employers.

Perhaps it is time to reconsider the costs and benefits of the large conference as a vehicle for professional development. Certainly, the appropriateness of such an expensive conference at a time of severe financial stringency, must be questioned.

The Perth Conference is to be held in mid-city venues. The traditional option of cheap university college accommodation is not offered. The Conference Dinner costs \$65. For most delegates Perth is one of the most expensive destinations in Australia. The registration fee is the highest ever. (Registration for the ANZAAS Congress in Hobart last February was \$100, with a surcharge of \$20 for registration less than 6 weeks before the meeting. Registration for the ALA Conference in Chicago next June is US\$75.)

What are we trying to achieve by running this expensive conference in a time of general stringency for libraries? Are we so nervous of our professional status that not merely must we be seen to keep up with the Jones' but rather to keep well ahead of them?

David Waters

Head of Department

University of Tasmania

see article page 5 — Ed

Dear Editor,

In Frontline of *inCite* [11(2)]5 March, Averill Edwards reinforces our duties as librarians on the issue of censorship. As Averill stated, our duty to protect the freedom of circulation of ideas is vital.

Freedom of ideas is one thing. Our constant work towards the improvement of our information sources has landed us with a new dilemma. Where do we stand when the legal eagles become involved? The question of course, relates to suppression orders and media databases, clearly illustrated by the current Von Einem case in South Australia.

South Australia has been in something of a turmoil in recent times over suppression orders generally. Media pressure on the legal system has resulted in changes for the better following a series of challenges over all-encompassing orders in various cases.

However the recent Von Einem committal hearings throw the issue of suppression orders and libraries into stark relief. The case has, and continues to attract enormous interest. Suppression orders were initially placed on all evidence. Interstate newspapers were

withdrawn from sale on instructions from the Attorney-General to avoid circulation of what can only be described as startling evidence relating this case to some of SA's most notorious unsolved crimes.

It was, of course, simple to find out what we weren't supposed to know. All it took was a 2 minute search on a full text newspaper database.

This example alarms for two quite different reasons. Like Averill, I am horrified by the ease with which publications were quietly and quickly restricted from circulation. If it can happen with a publicity drenched issue like the Von Einem hearings, what else is, or could, happen with less public material?

And where, exactly, does it leave us in the course of our work as providers of information on request? Aware or unaware of suppression orders, are we breaking the law? Ethics and handcuffs have met before — do I feel a pinch coming on?

Lee Welch

Manager

Business Information

Dear Editor,

In the 19 March issue of *inCite* (p. 9) there was a brief article on the Monash school of librarianship, including the new title by which the school was to be described — 'Graduate School of Librarianship, Records, and Information Management'.

However, a careful analysis of this title, in view of the amalgamation of Monash University with the Chisholm Institute of Technology, by a committee of legally concerned academics has brought the recommendation that the word 'information' be not used as it is a term now appearing in such diverse places as to have little precise meaning.

Since this was a view held by at least some of the staff, the verdict was received with some delight, not to say amusement, since it had been included quite cynically as a 'pop' word, appealing to those who thought it would express the cutting edge of the profession. Thankfully, academic analysis seems to have suggested indeterminate meaning rather than cutting edge.

So we are now free to call ourselves by terms with clear and lasting meaning. We are now the 'Graduate Department of Librarianship, Archives and Records' — the word 'School' having been dropped for amalgamation reasons, as we prepare to be moved from



From 4

Arts (where we are comfortable) to the new Faculty of Professional Studies, scheduled for birth on 1 July 1990.

One or two frivolous members of staff have idly proposed the inclusion of Information after Librarianship to give an easily remembered abbreviation. But we are not sure that that kind of humour would be professionally acceptable. What do you think?

Acting Professor Mary A Ronnie
Chairman, Graduate Department
of Librarianship,
Archives and Records

Dear Editor,

The 30 April 1990 cover date of the latest *inCite*, received by me on 17 April 1990, took me by surprise. I appreciate the zeal with which issue No. 5 has been put together and despatched. However, the disparity of dates raises questions about the lead times imposed by you for items to be included in *inCite* e.g. how many divisions, members, advertisers missed the deadline for issue No. 5, with the arrival date of it almost a fortnight before its cover date? After all *inCite* is not *Vogue*, *Cleo* etc!

The patience and continued support to which you referred in your response to Vicki Williamson's letter, in issue No. 5, are certainly being tried. Can we expect a better match between copy deadlines, cover date and receipt date?

Julie Young
President
NSW Branch

Dear Editor,

Congratulations on your speedy delivery of *inCite* Vol. 11 No. 5 to those of us in the West who have fought an ongoing battle to receive our professional newsletter in time to act on the information it bears.

Congratulations also on featuring some Western Australian Branch activity news. We are active in the West, but have, until recently, had problems in gaining editorial space.

Keep up the good work.

Kay Poustie
President
WA Branch

Editor's reply.

Australia Post require a minimum of 6 working days to deliver *inCite* to WA, NT and Tasmania. With Easter approaching *inCite* 5 was processed on 12 April to avoid any delay that might occur due to the holidays. If it had been left until after the break the above-mentioned states would possibly have received *inCite* late.

First ALIA Conference 1990 What a choice!

The third circular and registration form for the first ALIA Conference was previously included with *inCite*, and all members have now had a chance to peruse the program. It is a professionally exciting program with some fascinating papers from both Australian and overseas speakers ranging from the practical to the theoretical. Who could resist 'Distant, diverse and delightful' or 'Every time an old person dies a library burns to the ground', or 'Access to information — technological and economic issues' or 'How others see us — the power of the pen, or publish or perish' or the opportunity to hear the papers on national collection development and Warren Horton on 'Information policy — the next agenda' or James Billington on 'Effective management of library and information services'. What a choice!

There is an exciting list of pre and post conference seminars and meetings which will be well worth attending. The early bird registration has been extended to 30 April in view of the later than usual date for the Biennial Conference.

The Registration fee is \$450 for early birds, \$500 for later registrants. Before bursting into loud wails, members should consider what they are getting for \$450:

- attendance at all sessions
- entrance to Trade Exhibition
- opening reception (including a meal)
- closing reception (including a meal)
- special Art Gallery Exhibition preview
- symphony concert in the Perth Concert Hall
- library tours covering a wide range of interests
- morning and afternoon tea each day.

Some of these are activities which have been additional costs to the registration fee in other Biennial Conferences. This is a bargain. In comparison with other professional conferences, it is at least \$200 cheaper — most management conferences cost between \$600-\$1000 for 1-3 days. The total fee for a 6-day conference works out at \$75 a day — not bad for this array of speak-

ers and papers. This compares very favourably with other ALIA 1-day professional development courses.

The registration fee and costs of attending the conference are tax deductible as it is a professional development exercise. Full receipts need to be kept but it is an allowable deduction.

The costs of travelling to the more distant parts of this country are high — but there are some very good value packages available. The members who live in WA, NT, Tasmania and north Queensland all have these high travelling costs every time they come to the south-east corner of Australia for conferences and meetings. This is a democratic Association and as such, members have resolved to have the Biennial Conferences in all the States and Territories in which members live, and this means that in some years the travelling costs will be higher than in other years. The 1992 Conferences will be held in Albury/Wodonga and will be easier for access and have cheaper accommodation.

Revenue for the Association comes from a variety of sources, including membership fees, advertising, interest, publications, donations and conference income. Each biennial conference must budget to return to the Association the seeding money which was advanced to it during the planning stages, together with a 20 per cent loading for having tied the money up for that period of time. This is often for a 3 to 4 year time period.

The Biennial Conference is therefore not only a major ALIA sponsored professional development activity, but it also must pay for itself so that it does not become a financial drain on the Association and its other programs.

The Biennial Conference is a valuable professional activity for members. It provides an opportunity to hear about and to discuss professional matters with your colleagues, and of course, to have an enjoyable social occasion as well.

Averill M B Edwards
Immediate Past President