

# Letters

## Don't drown the President

Dear Editor,

General Council must make some real decisions on the powers and role of the President and the Executive Director.

I was extremely disappointed to read Lynn Allen's Frontline column (*inCite* 15, 24 September 1990) regarding the taxing role of being ALIA President. To be fair, Lynn stressed that she was thoroughly enjoying her year as President and I'm sure most past Presidents would agree with that sentiment, but it is simply not reasonable that we elect willing victims and then nearly drown them in the Association and its affairs.

The role of the President was addressed by the Corporate Plan and Review Committee in 1985 and many of the issues raised by Lynn were considered. It was recognised that the role of President was far too demanding for most librarians to consider and that only someone from a large institution could expect the support necessary to carry out the task. It was noted that there were often conflicting views on whether some duties should be carried out by the President or the Executive Director.

It was also recognised that the role of President was ill-defined and that all incumbents would have their own pet projects which they would wish to pursue. This was not seen as a bad thing as it means that, as long as the Association has a stable management structure through its employed staff, it would introduce new issues into the Association which may otherwise not be considered.

The recommendations of the Corporate Plan and Review Report were that the Executive Director should be given more power to run the Association allowing Presidents to perform a more prestigious role and to follow their own interests while in the position.

This has clearly not happened. Not only is Lynn highlighting the very same problems but she is also listing a number of other tasks which seem to have been added to the President's role over the last few years.

It is pointless to say that many of these tasks should be done by the Executive Director but that the position is already overloaded. The Association must recognise that if it truly wants to make these very necessary changes, then it must give the Executive Director the powers required to do so. Given that power it is

then the Executive Director's job to focus on the Association's priorities.

General Council is the decision making body of the Association so let us see it make some real decisions that will allow it in the future to direct its attention to the real issues in the library and information world.

Let's keep on reviewing our operations but let's make some decisions and get on with the real issues.

Jenny Adams (Hole)

LAA/ALIA Executive Director 1984-1987

## Tribute to Wes Young

Dear Editor,

February 1991 is the 20th anniversary of the first course for library technicians held at Box Hill Girls' Technical School (Victoria). Wes Young had commenced a library clerks' course the previous year, but 1971 saw the full course for technicians offered for the first time in Australia. The Technical School went on to become firstly Whitehorse Technical College, Whitehorse College of TAFE and, lastly, merged with the Box Hill College of TAFE, where the course is still flourishing.

I was one of the students in those first classes and look back with real pleasure and gratitude to those days and the opportunity offered me. I understand Wes is still with Catholic Education in Canberra and there continues to make his contribution to librarianship. Wes taught those first classes practically unassisted. He was always enthusiastic, gave constant encouragement and provided a great example, especially to those of us coming back to study and just beginning library careers. I am sure I am one of many who happily recall the friendships, the work, the pride in completing the course. Through *inCite* I would like to note this anniversary and also to say, 'Thank you, Wes — it was a great course and I personally have had a great 20 years since.'

StClair Oldfield

## Conspectus — a white elephant?

Dear Editor,

The recommendations of the Review of Library Provision in Higher Education Institutions include specific proposals for a 'program of investigation and library infrastructure developments', with dollar costs identified. A number of the proposals relate to the need to improve the national database by providing assistance to the National Library to enable it to speed up the addition of data, an objective no doubt worthy of general support.

However, there is a further proposal, for 1991, to support 'the implementation of the Conspectus database' with up to 0.75 per cent of institutional library acquisitions budgets. The estimated cost of

this exercise, if fully subscribed, is given as \$750 000. In view of the fact that Eric Wainwright was a member of the Review Committee it may not be surprising that the National Library figures so prominently in the proposals, or that Conspectus in particular is given a guernsey. However the proposed expenditure contrasts strangely with the costs of Conspectus previously estimated by Mr Wainwright, and by the ACLIS National Task Force on Conspectus. My assertion that Conspectus would be a costly exercise was denied, and indeed I have heard Mr Wainwright put a figure of around \$150 000 as the reasonable limit. The Final Report of the National Task Force on Conspectus includes a budget for the 2 and a bit years 1989-92 totalling \$164 000 for 'establishment costs'. The escalation to \$750 000 is more than just significant, but of course neither of the abovenamed 'authorities' admitted, let alone estimated, the costs that would be borne by individual libraries, in either the short or long term.

I believe that this latest Conspectus cost estimate allows me to say 'I told you so', and to repeat my warning that Conspectus will be, both initially and for its future maintenance, a costly white elephant. It should also be noted that the recent meeting of CAUL, at which the Review recommendations were discussed, was divided fairly evenly on the merits of the proposed support for Conspectus. I am not the one voice crying in the wilderness, and it should be recognised by those now driving blindly into the confusion of Conspectus, even if it really was relevant and effective methodology. But fortunately others, besides myself, have recognised that the Conspectus project is truly a case of the emperor's new clothes, and with an imperial appetite for funds that could and should be more effectively spent elsewhere.

G G Allen

University Librarian  
Curtin University of Technology

Dear Editor,

It is unfortunate that Geoff Allen has seen fit to comment on one recommendation of the Review of Library Provision in Higher Education Institutions before the report itself has been released, when he would be able to make a judgement on the recommendations in the context of the full discussions in the report.

The text of the report states 'in the view of the Working Party, participation in the system by higher education libraries in the short term may be limited because few libraries at present have detailed collection development policies, and because many libraries are at present diverted by the immediate problems of effective integration and multi-campus services.

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However, as stated above, the Working Party considers there is advantage to all institutions in developing collection development policies in line with institutions' teaching and research profiles, as a clear guide to priorities. If such policies are developed simultaneously with the ACLIS/National Library implementation of the Conspectus, the Working Party is of the view that the extra costs of translating the policy details into the Conspectus format are relatively low, and will be significantly outweighed by a range of resource-sharing benefits in the future. However, we appreciate that with the many other pressures on staff time, some librarians will be reluctant at present to undertake any discretionary tasks without some incentive.'

The funds recommended are clearly meant to be an incentive to libraries to participate in Conspectus, and include the higher costs for those libraries which do not have collection development policies developed at present. It is unfortunate that Geoff should think fit to attack this recommendation in a way that might prevent his many colleagues from receiving assistance with their collection policy development. If funds for Conspectus are

made available by DEET, no doubt the Department will be delighted not to receive an application from Curtin University, so that the funds may be more profitably used elsewhere.

*Eric Wainwright*  
Deputy Director-General  
National Library of Australia

## *inCite* and our region

### Dear Editor,

Congratulations on your leading article 'Libraries in distress', (*inCite*, 26 November) which outlined the activities being undertaken to restore the National Library of Cambodia. It is most important that ALIA keep its members informed of the situation of the profession in other countries of our region in this way.

The opening of the ALIA headquarters building symbolises the firm and permanent position our professional association now enjoys. It is surely the most senior and most affluent of the regional professional associations. Just as individual librarians such as Gail Morrison are contributing at a personal level and as libraries, such as the National Library of Australia, are making their own institutional contribution, so ALIA has a

responsibility to be supportive of other library associations of the Asia/Pacific region. We look forward to reading articles with a regional focus which you promise will appear in future issues.

Specifically on Cambodia, you will be pleased to know that Dr Helen Jarvis has been awarded an ARC grant of \$105 000 to be spent over 3 years investigating the information infrastructure needs of that devastated country.

*George Miller*

## Lynn's last Front Line

A comment referring to Lynn Allen's Front Line in *inCite* 20:

'Lynn's suggestion that the President's term be extended to 2 years has drawbacks. It would make the position extremely elitist, as there are very few members who could service such a commitment.

Also, her paraphrasing of the Kennedy quote ('seek not to ask what ALIA can do for you ...') was, to my mind, inappropriate: we *are* ALIA. At the grassroots level we are very much gaining the attention of decision makers and enjoying the respect of the general community.'

*Jan Gaebler*

### ALIA Australian Serials Special Interest Group (ASSIG)

### ASSIG Inaugural Research Awards

These awards are intended to promote ASSIG within its objectives and goals:

- To promote professional awareness among all those concerned with serials;
- To provide a forum for the interchange of information and ideas;
- To encourage and assist library educators;
- To discuss further directions in serials.

The awards will interest postgraduate students in library and/or information studies, professional librarians and/or library technicians.

Preference will be given to research proposals of a practical nature and must relate to serials librarianship in Australasia and the South Pacific.

Two awards will be made of \$1000 each. Further information, including the rules of the awards and guidelines for submissions, can be obtained from David Sinfeld, Secretary, ASSIG, phone (047) 36 0338, fax (047) 36 0480.

Australian Library and Information Association

### LIBRARY TECHNICIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD

Nominations are now being called for the award for 1991/1992

#### Aim

- To promote the role of library technicians in library and information services.
- To promote the role and image of library technicians in the library and information workforce and the wider community.
- To encourage library technicians to join and support the Association.

#### Eligibility

The award of Library Technician of the Year is open to any member of the Australian Library and Information Association, Library Technician Section, and who holds a library technician qualification recognised by ALIA.

#### Nominations

Nominations on the ALIA nomination forms may be made by members of the Association, Divisions of ALIA, or employers.

#### Selection criteria

1. The nominee has made an outstanding contribution to the advancement of library technicians.
2. The nominee has written a paper or papers on some aspect of library technicians' work or activity and presented at a conference or published a journal or monograph of library science or any appropriate publication.
3. Personal achievement in the development of library and information services or for development within the Australian Library and Information Association.

Nomination forms are available from the Australian Library and Information Association, PO Box E441, Queen Victoria Terrace, ACT 2600. Telephone (06) 285 1877 or (008) 02 0071.

**Nominations close 3 May 1991**