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Newsletter of the Australian Library & Information Association

TAFE National Section Biennial Conference

Learning futures and learning resource centres: support, service or cynicism?

Adelaide — the city of churches, pubs and fast cars? From 1-3 October the city of information, futures, issues and debate.

Opening the ALIA TAFE National Conference is Ian Lowe, Director of the Science Policy Research Centre at Griffith University. Ian's main research interests cover policy questions influencing technological change, especially in the areas of energy supply and use. He writes a weekly column in *The Weekend Australian* and is well known for his work with the Commission for the Future.

Ian inspired delegates at the ALIA 1990 Conference in Perth. Now he returns again to question and challenge: 'Is training or education the answer?' His main issues will be education and the needs of society, life-long learning, and education for economic recovery.

The passage of only a year has seen significant change for TAFE with increasing pressure on education and training. This has included the implementation of competency-based training, competition from private providers and industry pressures on training provision. But where do the skills to access and use information fit? How can TAFE libraries contribute to an information-literate society? Ian's opening plenary is timely — to remind us of our mission and to set the conference theme.

Fortuitously, the ANZAAS Congress is being held at the same time as our conference, so that Adelaide will host a compatible mix of science, technology and learning supported by Library and Information Services. All this in a context of changing approaches to learning delivery, and of public and industry



Adelaide College of TAFE

perceptions of vocational education and training.

The ANZAAS Congress impinges on our conference at several points. A reward for those who arrive early will be to hear Sir Richard Attenborough speak (Monday, 30 September, 8.30 pm). On the third day of our conference (Thursday, 3 October), Robyn Williams of the ABC Science Show will be presenting *Bringing Science to the Nation*. Crispin Hull, Editor of the *Canberra Times* and Joyce Kirk, University of Technology, Sydney are also on the ANZAAS Thursday morning program. Arrangements have been made for our delegates to participate in ANZAAS functions at reduced costs.

The structure of the ALIA TAFE conference is designed to encourage debate and discussion through the presentation on each day of a morning plenary, followed by workshops providing opportunities to work through practical issues and initiatives. These will be presented by a wide range of people, some of which are TAFE LRC/Library personnel from around the nation.

Each day will take on a special theme:

Day 1: Learning futures will focus on new initiatives in learning delivery and TAFE LRC/Library responses — a trip on Adelaide's innovative response to urban transportation

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merely in degree, but in kind.

The Arts Industry Training Boards in at least two States are currently poised to begin work on the long-awaited library skills audits; it will be in the Association's interests to assist these audits to the fullest, perhaps even to assume a shaping role. The audits may contain some unpleasant surprises for us; if a significant proportion of librarians is found to be engaged in work, which by the Association's own guidelines and policy statements, is other than at a professional level, then much of the very hard work which has gone into defending the concept of librarianship as a profession will be undone overnight.

Recent debate over whether or not technicians should be involved in the answering of reference queries highlights the issue, and underlines the need for extremely careful demarcations in those situations where a technician and a librarian may be working side by side in a context which involves a mixture of task-levels. This is not merely an issue of professional snobbery, of bedpans and bedside manners; it is much more fundamental than that. If Alison Crook is

right, then in her library we would expect a clear demarcation of duties on the ground that librarians are too expensive to be used at any other than the professional level.

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But since the user, as we know, makes no distinctions between categories in terms of those who serve in libraries, then such libraries must also make clear the *functional* differences which apply between the categories of service. The issue comes to a very sharp point indeed in relation to reference service; when the user is served from a point which contains both professionals and technicians, when the demands of shift work and lunch breaks sometimes result in a service point being staffed only by technicians, then, given the dedication (and dare I say it, the professionalism) of the latter, it is inevitable

that the technician present will endeavour to respond to a request for information, especially if the user evinces any degree of urgency in her need.

If a reference point is staffed by both professionals and technicians, each answering or receiving reference questions over the same counter, dressed similarly, speaking the same language, using the same tools, then it is hardly to be wondered at if the user is unaware of the distinctions. This blurring will continue to apply while all reference queries are given a value of one, and while they are all conducted in the same ticket-counter context.

The reference context highlights the problem; but it also exists, I would guess, in other areas, such as technical and support services. In addition, as a scanning of the *Directory of Australian Public Library Services* reveals, there are sometimes considerable differences in the balance of professionals, technicians and others between otherwise similar libraries; this raises further questions about the levels of service sought and offered, and about the relative effectiveness of the salary dollar, which is still the fattest dollar in any library's budget.

Meanwhile, the auditors, the skills auditors and others, are watching... □

TAFE Biennial Conference continued from 1...

problems, the O'Bahn Busway — will deliver delegates to the brand new Tea Tree Gully College of TAFE. Dubbed as the college of the 21st Century, the venue will lend itself to the exploration of the issues of lifelong learning and enterprise skills, worksite learning delivery, literacy, communication and information technologies — the solutions and issues for TAFE LRCs and libraries will be wide ranging — and an innovative venue — a joint-use library!

Day 2: Developments in vocational education and training. The recently released *Finn Review of Post-compulsory Education and Training* calls for greater emphasis on practical job-related training to keep teenagers in the education system. This report provides a background to the insights that Brian Stanford, Director of Adelaide College, will give us into vocational education and training and the impacts for TAFE LRC/libraries. After 12 months working in the Learning Technologies Unit of the UK Department of Employment Training Agency, and with a long commitment to quality learning resource provision, Brian's presentation will inform, challenge and provide practical directions for us all.

Union, education and industry representatives will also give us their perceptions and views, valuable context and environment information which is otherwise difficult to gain. An overview of this session will be provided by Bill Hall, Director, TAFE National Centre for Research and Development.

Cocktails provided by the Hospitality

students will ensure a lively AGM and dinner! Rest at last? ...no fear, the program continues to Day 3 starting with an (energetic?) walk and breakfast.

Day 3: Building bridges, establishing partnerships, bringing about change.

Professor Denise Bradley A/Vice-Chancellor of the new University of South Australia will set the theme. Denise is a distinguished librarian and educator who has been involved many times in situations demanding change.

She reminds us of the resolve and understanding needed if we are to make dreams realities for TAFE libraries in a time of contracting resources and expanding demands:

'...Accept that you may at times be unpopular. It is foolish to court people's poor opinion, but if you have strong views and are engaged in a struggle for sparse resources or changes in policy, you may find yourself a controversial figure at times...'

Bob Wilson, Campus Manager of Tea Tree Gully College will lead representatives from each State and from ALIA through this struggle and controversy as he acts as facilitator and poser of issues in the Hypothetical — *Will*



Keynote speakers Ian Lowe (left) and Brian Stanford (right)

there be TAFE libraries in the year 2000?

All the regular features of a national conference are also planned — displays, tours, demonstrations and meetings — lots of opportunity for the exchange of news and the meeting of colleagues.

And finally at the end of a busy program — John Levent, National President of ALIA, who will be present throughout the conference, will respond and close the conference with his ideals and concerns about TAFE libraries and learning futures.

Are you tempted to join with colleagues who want to explore issues, raise questions and join in debate in the invigorating Adelaide spring weather from 1-3 October. Register as soon as you can. Contact Di Booker on (08) 213 0377. Cost: \$165 members, \$225 non-members. Students and persons not in employment \$80.

Chris Harrison
National President □