

Letters

Library Technicians...

Dear Editor,

I read with some amazement Zena Wallace's recent letter to *inCite* about library technicians. I wish to discuss some of the points raised by that letter.

There were no inferences to be drawn or points scored by the issue of *inCite* No 14. It was a good idea very well realised. If other Sections wished to take part in special editions of *inCite* I'm sure ALIA would be happy to talk to them about it.

ALIA is not a union. It has provided very good industrial advice to *all* its members over many years and also provides a strong lobbying voice. If technicians have chosen to make use of the industrial advice they have been given are they to be pilloried? Does this constitute joining ALIA for monetary gain? I think not.

I, as a technician with 9 years' experience and a supervisor, am paid more than a newly employed librarianship graduate. Graduates that I have spoken to think that this is just. I have no wish to be paid more, nor could I be, unless I went out and got a degree in librarianship. My task is to assist librarians to provide an optimum service and to free them from the repetitive tasks that reduce their professional status. Technicians are paraprofessionals. If a technician wishes to become a librarian it is for their betterment and that of the profession.

Some employers do employ technicians when they should be employing librarians. And vice versa. In fact, through the years technicians have had many problems with librarians applying for technician level jobs. This situation is far more of a concern if one is worried about the status of the profession than the supposed aspirations of some technicians.

The Australian Library Technicians' Association (ALTA) does 'compete' with the Library Technician Section of ALIA but only to the extent that it too wishes to help technicians. The bulk of ALTA's membership is in Victoria.

The design of Associate Diploma and Bachelor courses deserves further examination but not on the terms Ms Wallace seems to fear technicians would demand. Library technicians are popular with employers because of the cost factor and because their courses are vocationally oriented. It seems that technicians are now to bear the brunt of suspicion about course content! It is difficult for those doing Bachelor or Graduate courses to find work. It is difficult for everyone. No blame should be placed for this. It is not only difficult, it is fruitless.

I understand Ms Wallace's concern over technicians wishing to take a more active part in the education of library technicians. The debate is just beginning and it looks as if it will provoke lively discussion. Ms Wallace's sentiments are to be welcomed, because of her standing as a technician educator and as a basis for discussion. It is clear that if a technician educator feels that the education technicians are receiving might be inappropriate for the jobs they are filling, then the whole structure of education for librarianship may need re-evaluation.

The last point I wish to make is that this is not a 'them and us' situation. We are one workforce. I respect and even admire many of the librarians I work with and I think they have come to see technicians as an integral part of their working environment. If employers are creating an unbalanced situation through false economies then perhaps it is the employers, not librarians or technicians, who need further education.

Ellen Ennever

Dear Editor,

Queensland Library Technicians were bewildered by Zena Wallace's attack on technicians (*inCite* 17, 1990). Surely as a lecturer and course coordinator she should show more support for her students.

The library technician course is equivalent to 2 years full-time study, therefore, technicians who later study librarianship deserve any credit points they receive towards a degree. These technician/librarians would be an asset to any library because of the depth of their knowledge and experience and valuable teachers for a library technician course. Experienced lecturers are more valuable than those with only an educational qualification.

Library technicians do not want 'librarian content' in their course, however, there will always be some overlap in the tasks performed by technicians and librarians. Therefore, we do require a sufficient level of knowledge to allow us to perform tasks to our own and our employer's satisfaction.

Why should librarians want to perform tasks that can be adequately carried out by technicians? Librarians should be free to give more attention to reader services, library management and tasks requiring a higher level of library skills. All we ask is that librarians respect technicians for their abilities and skills and allow us to use those abilities to the full.

Technicians have joined ALIA because we believe that a united body is stronger than fragmented and smaller self interest groups. We should be working together to raise the profile of librarians and library technicians alike and to provide a better service to our users, not trying to score points off each other.

Jilleen Chambers
President

Queensland Library Technician Section

Dear Editor,

On behalf of the library technicians of South Australia I would like to reply to the article in *inCite* on 29 October 1990 by Zena Wallace, which was full of false accusations and contradictory statements. I can only hope it was a ploy to get the reaction of librarians and library technicians.

As a past member of the National Library Technician Executive and a current member of the Library Technician Committee I have never heard of library technicians joining ALIA for 'the main purpose of obtaining salaries equal to or better than librarians.' They join to keep up to date with issues that concern the library profession in general, including the issue of salary/award restructure.

It is surprising that a library technician educator could make a comment about course content and compare a library technician associate diploma course with a librarian degree course. ALIA Board of Education keeps a close eye on the institutions offering courses for librarians and library technicians as well as course content. When will ignorant librarians stop accusing library technicians of taking their jobs for less pay? The sooner people like Zena Wallace accept change, and accept library technicians for the asset they are to a library, the happier everyone will be.

In the meantime, here in SA, the enlightened librarians and library technicians will keep an eye on positions advertised and advise employers how to find the most suitable person to fit the task, be it librarian or library technician. SALT and SA Branch Council make sure library courses are adequate and strive together for a professional attitude in the library and information world.

Margaret Rowe
ALIAtec

Dear Editor,

It is unfortunate that letters in *inCite* towards the end of last year revealed a destructive divisiveness in our ranks. We have enough problems on the outside without turning inwards upon ourselves.

Like its predecessor LAA, ALIA welcomes to membership anyone who supports its objectives. It is not and never has been an exclusive club for librarians only.

Library technicians have an important role to play in the provision of library services and an important role to play in furthering the objectives of ALIA. We should be welcoming and supportive of this new group, not critical and hostile.

Personally, I have difficulty with the idea of 'articulation' of library technician qualifications into professional qualifications, but that is not the point. The point is whether library technicians should be accepted as part of the team in our libraries and in our association. On that I vote yes.

Neil A Radford
University of Sydney

Library training for the Northern Territory

Dear Editor,

In a letter to *inCite* printed in the issue of 27 August, the NT Branch President, David Hugo, outlined the efforts of the local Librarians-In-Training Committee to make it easier for Northern Territory residents to become qualified librarians. Until now the only methods of qualifying professionally here have been through external study, or by travel interstate. The members of the committee are Anne Alderslade, Alex Byrne, Margaret Clinch, Diana Leeder and Colette McCool.

The committee received widespread strong support from the Branch. The Public Service Commissioner's Office has recognised our needs by including Librarianship as a career in its annual scholarship offerings to school leavers. These scholarships, tenable only at the NTU, provide for a payment of \$3500 per annum to full-time students who are studying in fields which will contribute to the development of the Northern Territory.

The committee is now working with the NTU and Charles Sturt University to develop an award based on a combination of NTU and CSU units in mixed mode to provide the equivalent of a 3 year full-time integrated undergraduate degree course. This is being coordinated by Alex Byrne. The award will aim to maximise units already available at the NTU, in general subjects and in management and computing, and combine these with already accredited units to be available by contract with the Charles Sturt University. These latter units would be taught externally by CSU staff, with tutorial assistance and summer schools being provided at the NTU. Apart from school leavers, and mature women returning to the workforce, it is anticipated that many of those qualified through our Associate Diploma of Arts (Library Practice), will wish to gain further units and upgrade by taking the professional Librarianship course. Accreditation and professional recognition of this award will be sought through normal procedures. Initially, approximately 60 per cent of the units will be taught locally, and about 40 per cent externally. To allow for changing circumstances, the committee will not be committed permanently to one course. It is hoped to upgrade local availability as student numbers increase.

The committee is also seeking sponsorship of scholarships for holders of first degrees, to enable them to travel to complete graduate diploma awards at library schools outside the NT. An assured mechanism is needed to allow NT students with competitive entry scores to obtain access to courses in competition with home State applicants seeking admission.

We approached the Board of Education last year, and the Executive Director (Sue Kosse) is documenting Commonwealth sources and policies which may be useful to isolated students in gaining funding for professional study. These will be printed in *inCite* when available. In the meantime, readers may also be able to suggest possible sponsors. Please contact me c/- NT University, PO Box 40146, Casuarina, NT 0811. The committee extends warm thanks to those who have helped us so far, and is grateful for the advice and support offered by the Board of Education.

MA Clinch
Coordinator
NT Branch
Librarians-In-Training

ALIA subs and tough times

Dear Editor,

It was with dismay that I received my ALIA Membership Renewal for 1991. The economic climate is tough, and yet there is no recognition of that in the ALIA scale of fees. I feel torn between my desire to support my Association, as I have for more than 10 years, and my need to keep the money to stretch my already thin household budget. The Association has won out this year but alas I can subscribe to no ALIA serial publications.

I would appreciate it if *inCite* would consider publishing the contents pages of all other ALIA serial publications.* Then, those of us who are unable to subscribe can check out our local library for articles of interest, or as in my case, order on interlibrary loan those articles. My own public library is too poor to subscribe.

I feel sure that other ALIA members would appreciate this service. It may even encourage some cross-Sectional reading!

Mary Anne Kennan

(*We have started doing this — Ed)

ILL trivia

Dear Editor,

It is disappointing that you chose to print in *The Source* (*inCite* 10 December 1990) a contribution which totally trivialised a major ACLIS study on a topic of significant importance to many ALIA members. The Interlibrary Loans in Australia project collected and analysed data on over 25 000 transactions received by nearly 400 libraries in three State in May 1989. The data analysis problems which were given such prominence in *The Source* were a very minor part of the total picture. It was judged more valuable to the ongoing debate to achieve early publication rather than to rerun analyses which would not have altered any key

outcomes. It was however necessary to caution readers about the incorrect data.

ALIA members fortunately have access to a more considered and comprehensive review of the Interlibrary Loans project and I refer readers with a real interest in the topic to *The Australian Library Journal*, May 1990, p 177-178.

C Taylor

Library charges not the answer

Dear Editor,

Those librarians who view charges for library services and entrepreneurial activities as the solutions to library funding problems, should take heed of the situation in which the British Library finds itself.

In 1986/87 the BL earned 25 per cent of what it spent, generating more revenue than any other library in the world. The BL's Chief Executive stated in the 1986/87 Annual Report: '... after 7 years of grant-in-aid falling short ... there is a narrowing margin between the resilience of the staff, their appetite for enterprise ... and the weight of the work ...'

In 1990/91, the revenue target for the BL is £23.9 million which will be raised from document supply services, information services and publishing. This is equivalent to 29.1 per cent of the total gross expenditure budgeted for the BL in 1990/91 (Personal communication, R Aspey, Personal Assistant to the Director, 19 December 1990).

In spite of its outstanding success in generating income, the real value of the BL's grant-in-aid has continued to decline for years. In the *Library Association Record* of November 1990 it was reported that the BL is suspending its subscription to more than 200 high quality science journals as a consequence of its severe financial position in 1990/91.

The lesson to be learnt from the BL is simple: Charges and entrepreneurial activities do not result in a well-funded library service.

Tim Bruwer □

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