University and College Libraries
National Board Review report published

The ACT Group of the UCRLS met on 1 February to hear a presentation on the review by Professor Ian Ross, Chair of the Working Party on Library Provision in Higher Education Institutions and formerly Pro Vice-Chancellor of the ANU. Professor Ross gave 'a Chairman's view of the exercise', and what follows is based on his presentation. He has read these notes and made helpful suggestions and corrections, as has Margaret Henty, the Executive Secretary of the Working Party.

The Review report* is a substantial document of 150 pages, and has almost 50 recommendations — half way, said Professor Ross, between the desirable maximum of 7 and the 105 that they first drafted.

Of the 50 recommendations, 12 are directed to the Commonwealth Government, 5 to the Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee, 6 to the NLA (all to do with NBD and ABN), 3 to other organisations including AARNET and the remainder to higher education institutions and libraries. The recommendations range from the global (e.g. NO support for grants earmarked specifically for libraries; no 'formula funding') to the semi-micro (how should quantitative data be collected for new library buildings) or the really micro (advocacy for subject librarians; no charging graduates for ILL).

Professor Ross thought his colleagues on the Working Party had been a superb team: Alan Bundy, Margaret Trask, Barry Mitcheson and Eric Wainwright, and its Executive Secretary, Margaret Henty. They had presented a variety of professional points of view over twelve days of sitting and through much written material. In spite of the varied viewpoints, the recommendations all reflected opinions that the members could live with. Where there were clear differences of opinion, these may have been canvassed in the report, but were scrapped as recommendations.

Professor Ross had special responsibilities as the lay chairman. As a layman, he was able to provide a different perspective from his colleagues, and the resulting report was different in consequence. When necessary, he could focus their attention on the needs of the primary audience: the Vice-Chancellors and

Professor Ian Ross

the Government. One of those needs was that the report be written in simple English, rather than the jargon-filled 'libspeak' (or V-C-speak, or Gov-speak) that most professionals use without even realising it. Another was to provide enough information for the non-librarian readers to understand the complexities of, say, ordering a book, without drowning them in detail. (He commented that the Chairs of most such committees in the future will probably also be laymen, for similar reasons.) And, with the boot on the other foot, to explain the complexities of public administration in language comprehensible to librarian readers.

The most significant phrase in the terms of reference was the first seven words which covered all that followed: 'Within the context

of current resourcing levels...' The most significant recommended *outcome* of the review was that there will not be the 'Stage 2' that had been originally envisaged The review as conducted had been far more thorough and penetrating than had been thought possible in the time available. Quite apart from the drive and industry of the members of the Working Party, this had been helped enormously by availability of the AARL statistical database. In consequence, what was needed now was to press ahead with the implementation.

> ...there is **no way** that more funding will be provided.

'Current resourcing levels' may seem a dampener on the future, when it is obvious to everyone that more resources are needed. Professor Ross was adamant that there is NO WAY that more funding will be provided. Tertiary libraries now get about $200 million a year, or 6 per cent of the higher education budget of $3360 million. Suppose they were to get 10 per cent more — was there any assurance that this would be wisely spent, or would make a significant difference? Some tertiary institutions spend more than 6 per cent, others spend less — if there were an instruction that they should allocate at least 6 per cent of their budgets to libraries this might help some libraries, but other institutions might see this as an invitation to *cut* library funding. Also, formula funding would put the power to control spending into the hands of the Department, whereas the Working Party was convinced that this was properly the function of the institutions themselves — their institutional autonomy should be left inviolate.

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* Library Provision in Higher Education Institutions. National Board of Employment, Education and Training, Higher Education Council, Commissioned Report No. 7. December 1990. AGPS, Canberra. $16.95

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with the aim of providing more relevant and immediate support. This, along with the development of such packages as *Office Bearers' Guides,* goes a long way to assist office bearers. However, council and committee members can still feel somewhat isolated.

Some time ago, it was noted that national workshops would be conducted for ALIA Treasurers. While some Branches have taken the initiative and conducted their own (certainly NSW Branch did in 1990), to my knowledge nothing has yet been done on a national level. I'm sure Branches, Sections and Divisions would be interested in contributing financially to this kind of program and would certainly want it extended to positions other than Treasurers.

With the assistance of the National Office, it may even be possible to devolve this kind of activity to the Branches, although the issue of devolution of responsibilities raises the question of extra support at local levels. It is interesting to note that the issue of local presences is to be discussed again at the first meeting of General Council for 1991. While General Council endorsed the principle of local presences last year, it 'agrees that each State had different needs and to impose the establishment of a local office on each Branch may not be suitable in every case'.

> ### Branches... are recognising the need to provide administrative support for its office bearers and Divisions.

It is also interesting to note that both the NSW and Victorian Branch Councils have submitted local presence proposals, based on the establishment of an administrative local presence rather than concentrating on a physical local presence. Branches which to date have been based on voluntary labour, are recognising the need to provide administrative support for its office bearers and Divisions. For example as part of its business plan for a local presence in NSW, it is proposed that the Local Presence Coordinator (for want of a better term) develop information guides for all incoming Branch councillors and Divisions. With this kind of assistance, it is hoped that Branches can devote more time to the issues confronting the profession and council members should be better equipped to do so.

Finally, I'd like to pay tribute to those members of the profession who have been or who are currently involved in an ALIA office. We are all essentially volunteers who are interested in developing our profession. If we can improve the support available to these members, along with ensuring greater continuity of experience, then perhaps the flow on effect may induce other members to become more active! □

So what can be done?

• **identify available mechanisms** — for example, the Government is setting up the *Cooperative Research Centres* program which is attracting $100 million of new money. Many of these CRCs will be based in universities, where the librarians ought already to be planning their bids for 6 per cent of the action. There should also be opportunities for *capital grants* for cooperative purposes, such as library stores. There is no sign, said Professor Ross, that electronic alternatives to books will take over in the foreseeable future, so that for some time to come a continuing building program will needed to create more space in tertiary libraries.

• **submit a high-profile program** in bite-sized pieces that can be funded through specific programs — one of the report recommendations looks at a possible program for special funding, with 15 developmental projects totalling $2 780 000 of National Board funds and $670 000 from other sources.

• create an understanding of library needs in relation to educating people — any changes in the educational activity of the institution must result in changes to its library. The Report recommends that all institutions should provide at least 90 per cent of the texts and other materials needed for their courses.

• **knock some heads together** – HARD! Librarians have harmed their cause in the past by squabbling among themselves, worrying too much about their status, and confusing their loyalty to their library with their loyalty to their employer. Certainly there is evidence that employer-employee relationships are defective. Librarians in universities, and maybe at large, have failed dismally to realise what is needed to be heard. Unless the university librarians and their employers can get together on real problems undiluted by other distractions there will be no progress.

As you might expect from this preamble, the first recommendation is that the primary responsibility for for determining the role of the libraries and for the resources they require continues to rest with the individual higher education institutions.

Professor Ross also identified Rec 1.6 as a pivotal recommendation, 'framed with care and some legwork':

1.6   (a) That the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) establish a **Standing Committee on libraries:**

• to act as a channel for the provision of advice to the AVCC on matters affecting libraries;

• to enable the AVCC to refer library problems to a specialist group;

• to effect liaison between the AVCC and the Committee of Australian University Librarians (CAUL);

• to identify priorities for cooperative developments involving libraries; and

• to provide oversight of investigations and projects funded by the Commonwealth and other bodies aimed at improving the higher education library system as a whole.

(b)   the proposed Standing Committee would have a Vice-Chancellor as Chair, another Vice-Chancellor as Deputy Chair, two members appointed by the AVCC who would be senior university officials with responsibilities for libraries or related areas, the Chair of CAUL and two other members nominated by CAUL. The AVCC would also assume responsibility for ensuring the collection of appropriate library statistics.

Why, you may ask, shouldn't this task be done entirely by CAUL? Although CAUL is now beginning to implement a formal structure following its meeting in Adelaide in November 1990, it has limited opportunity for direct political action and Professor Ross commented that it has no effective links with its proprietors. Why not ACLIS? It has a little money and some structure, but it has no power to act on behalf of the higher education sector.

Another recommendation calls for an **Inter-Departmental Committee** (IDC) of DEET, DASETT, DITAC and the NLA to examine 'overseas legislative arrangements for national funding of cross-sectoral library cooperative activities' and recommend draft legislation to the appropriate Ministers. There has been in the past, said Professor Ross, 'a profound level of ignorance in Government about libraries'. At least, he said, libraries are now on the agenda.

CAUL has just issued a Press Release on the review. It agrees that university administrators should have a better understanding of their libraries' problems, and that the Government should be aware of library issues. CAUL also agrees with the thrust of Recommendation 1.6 and says that 'in the long run this might prove to be one of the most important recommendations of the whole review.'

But at the end of the UCRLS meeting Colin Steele asked, '**Who will lobby for the follow-up?**' *There* might be the crucial question.

Peter Judge □