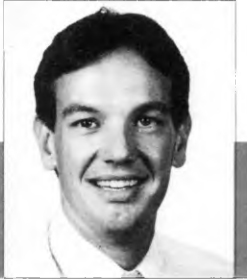


Front Line

Craig Grimison

NSW Branch
President



Having re-read John Levetts' Front Line in issue 1 of *inCite* for 1991, I was again impressed by his thoughtful statements about the role of libraries in society, but more importantly about the responsibility we have as members of the profession and indeed members of society, to ensure that libraries continue to expand and reflect the importance we place in them. While I wish to discuss issues of a more pragmatic nature, I do intend to take up the theme of responsibility, in particular the responsibility that the Association has to the members of its many councils and committees.

This year will be an unusual year for NSW Branch Council. As I will be leaving on an overseas study visit at the end of June, the Vice President, Frances Bluhdorn will take over as

President — this will of course result in a casual vacancy for Vice President. At the end of the year, the positions of Secretary, Treasurer, Professional Development Officer and General Councillor will fall vacant.

This lack of continuity can lead to new office bearers spending much of their time without the benefit of experienced members to assist them.

Along with the loss of the Past President, this creates a serious 'brain-drain' for NSW Branch Council. While this may be an unusual situation in terms of the numbers of vacancies, it is potentially a problem that all ALIA Councils and Divisions confront. This lack of continuity can lead to new office bearers spending much of their time without the benefit of other more experienced members to assist them. In many cases this leads to the wheel being re-invented, criticism I have heard from members at all levels.

Strategies have been developed to alleviate this problem, for example the concept of a 3-year cycle for Presidents: Vice President, President and Past President. However, this

has not been applied to executive positions, nor at all to some Divisions and Special Interest Groups. NSW Branch Council will need to develop its own strategies for filling the vacancies in an effective manner before the various terms expire. Preliminary discussion has commenced on introducing a 'mentoring system' in Branch, i.e. the appointment of assistants who will work closely with the current officers throughout the year. This means that more experienced members would be available to nominate for positions as they fall vacant. While this does not prevent other interested members from nominating for vacant positions, it does ensure a larger pool of experienced committee members. An alternative to this would be to extend to other positions the 3-year structure which currently applies to Presidents.

Although constitutions often restrict the number of years any members can hold office on ALIA councils and committees, to avoid the possibility of domination and stagnation, it may still be possible for councils to call on the experience of previous office bearers. This may be particularly relevant for national bodies such as General Council. While the concept of a sub-committee of elders may sound somewhat pompous, the expertise these members may be able to offer to the discussion and resolution of certain issues could be invaluable. How then can the National Office assist in this mentoring or guidance process? I realise that ALIA National Office has restructured its services and staffing

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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! □

Cover story continued from 1...

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 be 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 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 □



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