

# Letters

## Bringing in the International relations

### Dear Editor,

*Wainwright's odyssey* (*inCite*, 11 March, pp 8-9) contained some gems from his recent travels. The acknowledgement that Australia's visibility is low outside these shores, and the need to keep in touch with developments overseas, should encourage General Council to take a more positive attitude towards a greater involvement with IFLA and other professional organisations in the region. International Relations has had a low order of priority in recent years.

It was good to see Eric's comments concerning 1992 and Europe — there will be impacts on professional practice and the employment of librarians. Library and information services and research have been areas of high priority for investment in Europe — we may be able to learn some lessons in developing the 'Clever Country'. ALIA 1990 tried to get a speaker from Europe to talk about EEC developments for the Perth Conference — but could not raise the expenses — can another major Australian conference bring a well-informed speaker here quickly?

*Patricia Layzell Ward*

Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor  
Curtin University of Technology

## Return to Conspectus

### Dear Editor,

I have always admired Geoff Allen's tenacity. However, waging a battle through the letters column of *inCite*, where substantial issues can hardly be debated in depth, seems both sterile and unlikely to enlighten those librarians with an interest in cooperative collection development. Nevertheless, I need to make a final comment on his last letter.

It is unfortunate that Geoff did not bother to turn up to relevant sessions of the recent ALIA conference and the pre-conference seminar on the Acquisitions Section in his home city of Perth, where there could have been an intelligent debate on Conspectus and its possibilities in the context of the Distributed National Collection. Nor did Geoff attend a recent presentation in Perth by the new Conspectus Officer, Margaret Henty, where again, the audience could have heard a face to face debate.

Clearly Geoff and I will never agree about Conspectus. However, others may

## Want a letter from ALIA?

Many of the letters Sue Kosse and I get are from colleagues who want ALIA to 'exert pressure' on an employer, a government department, or a bureaucrat.

All of the requests are, I am sure, genuine, and of considerable importance to the writer of the letter. But it is only fair to point out that ALIA cannot exert pressure on anybody, least of all on a sovereign entity with its own and legitimate agenda.

What we can do is offer a reasoned argument, putting the point of view of the professional body in relation to the issue in hand. And quite often, this is influential where the issue

hangs in the balance. To be effective, however, such a letter must be well-informed. So when you write to us seeking help, we can be more effective if:

- You set out the background, including, if you can, both sides of the issue;
- You give us the names, office, rank or position and address of the influential stakeholder;
- you give us arguments relating to the *public* benefit of a proposed course of action;
- Best of all, *you* draft for us a letter to the key stakeholder/s.

And we'll see what we can do...

*John Levett n*

wish to consider the following:

- Is it useful for libraries to have detailed collection development policies?
- Is there some advantage in libraries cooperating in their collection development?
- How do libraries cooperate effectively unless they know what each other is trying to do, i.e. what their collection policies are?
- Isn't cooperation easier and cheaper if there is some reasonably standard way of comparing collection policies?

Geoff has argued that even if the answers to the above are positive, Conspectus is too expensive and the money would be better spent on the National Bibliographic Database (it is noteworthy that his own library is one of the very few academic libraries where records have still, 10 years after the establishment of ABN, not been contributed to the NBD!). The \$750 000 recommended by the Review of Library Provision in Higher Education Institutions may sound a lot of money. However, the combined budgets of the higher education libraries this year are about \$220 million, i.e. the recommended grants (just over \$20 000 per institution on average) would represent 0.34 per cent of 1 year's expenditure. In contrast, the National Library alone will spend about \$2 million this year on its support of the NBD — and while no figures are available, I suspect that Australian libraries spend around \$10 million a year in their support of the NBD.

How much is it worth spending on Conspectus as a tool of cooperation? This is a value judgement that we all have to make — but the National Library believes that approximately 0.15 per cent of its budget over 1991/92 is a small but useful investment in a tool that could assist in a range of future cooperative activities.

*Eric Wainwright*

Deputy Director-General  
National Library of Australia

## A conspiracy of silence?

### Dear Editor,

How refreshing it was to read Ian Delaney's comments in *Picket Line*, Vol. 12, No. 1. At last someone has had the guts to address the problem which most people pretend isn't there — the mad aunt in the attic — the soul-destroying problem of unemployed newly qualified librarians. The problem is particularly prevalent in WA.

Like Ian, I graduated last year, and am still out of work. I achieved distinctions in every unit of my course, was our student representative, was a volunteer at the ALIA Conference, sat on a Library Department Board of Study, offered to write a paper for the student conference, attended the student conference, (and cleaned up afterwards), helped to run a café bar for library students, attended all ALIA functions within my limited financial resources, joined the ALIA Public Affairs Committee, joined the Library Promotion Council (WA) Committee, and received excellent references from both practitioners and academics. I was even nominated for the Sharr Medal, and was one of only five

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graduate librarians in WA to be invited for an interview for it.

I have been, and am still, involved in the profession in every way possible, yet I am still out of work. Short of handcuffing myself to passing practitioners, what else can I do to be accepted into the fraternity?

Among my fellow students, I do not know of a single case where voluntary work has led to paid employment. Many organisations, not just libraries, are using volunteers to fulfil duties which ought to be fulfilled by paid employees. In today's funding environment, I can understand why they do it, but this does not make it ethical. In my opinion, accepting voluntary work is the employment equivalent of offering to cut your own throat. My opinion was confirmed recently by a senior officer of the CES, who told me that while it is better than sitting at home quietly losing your marbles, and while it can keep your skills up to date, he has never known voluntary work to lead to a paid job offer, in any field.

I have nearly 9 years' non-professional library experience, and have found, to my horror, that I cannot even go back to this, because as soon as employers see that grad.dip. on my résumé, they refuse to even grant me an interview. I enjoyed my non-professional work, and would be happy to return to it, but now even this avenue is closed to me, and I am worse off than I was before.

I have no particular gripe with ALIA. My anger is directed towards the conspiracy of silence among practitioners and academics. Why do library schools keep taking as many students as they can get? I enjoyed my course, which was well-taught and interesting, but that is little consolation when I have to face the fact that I have spent a lot of time and money, and my employment prospects are worse than they were before. When are academics going to break the silence and tell students the real chances of their gaining employment?

To any prospective librarianship students who may be reading this, my advice is, 'Get a non-professional position, study part-time, and wait for a promotion.' To anyone who may be considering leaving their job to study, I say, 'Wait for a change in the economy, and don't hold your breath.'

Christine Jones

B.A. (Industrial Relations)

Graduate Diploma in Information and Library Studies

P.S. I forgot to mention that I have put my name on the books of two employment agencies, specialising in library work. One has ignored two phone calls and a hand-delivered note. The other has *one* vacancy on its books, for which I am not qualified. □

## Braille Book of the Year

What do Alan Bond, Dorothy Hewett, the world of Sydney film-making and the Chinese Cultural Revolution have in common? They are some of the subjects covered by the Braille Book of the Year Shortlist for 1991. The Literary, Panel, consisting of Paul Carter, Joyce Nicholson and Barrett Reid, has selected the following titles from the output of Australian publishers during 1990:

*The rise and fall of Alan Bond* by Paul Barry (Bantam Books)

*Tartar city woman: Scenes from the life of Wang Hsin-Ping* by Trevor Hay (MUP)

*Wild card: an autobiography 1923-1958* by Dorothy Hewett (McPhee Gribble)

*The selling of the Australian mind: from First Fleet to Third Mercedes* by Stephen Knight (Heinemann)

*The great world* by David Malouf (Chatto & Windus)

The story of the year of 1912 in the village of *Elza Darzins* by Thea Welsh (Simon & Schuster)

*Poppy* by Drusilla Modjeska (McPhee Gribble)

The Braille Book of the Year Award is now part of the official program of the 1991 Melbourne Writers' Festival, Melbourne International Festival of the Arts.

The Award ceremony will take place on Monday, 16 September between 2-4 pm in the Beckett theatre at the CUB Malthouse.

Patricia Connery

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