

Letters

Of mature men and young women

Dear Editor,

I am concerned about the implications of a recent letter to *inCite* from M A Clinch (25 February 1991).

The letter outlined the progress of the Librarians-In-Training Committee in the NT. I fully support the establishment of LIT's however am disturbed by a statement within the letter claiming that: '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 further units and upgrade by taking the *professional* Librarianship course'.

What about all the mature *men*, or *young women* (not necessarily school-leavers) wanting to become a LIT!!

I think that this is a very sexist statement. What hope do we have of improving our image within the community if our colleagues are reinforcing the stereotype image of librarians. I also object to the describing of librarianship as '... professional Librarianship...'. You do not see doctors, lawyers, accountants or engineers described as professional doctors, professional lawyers and so on. But that is another issue altogether!

Mary-Anne Meginess

North Queensland Branch – to be or not to be ...#1

Dear Editor,

As a member of the North Queensland Regional Group of ALIA I would like to respond to Jean Dartnall's request for some debate on the Group's wish to be recognised as a Branch.

Although constitutions are important for a well ordered life of an organisation, I believe that Section 9 of our constitution and its attendant Bylaws Part 7 Sections 28 and 29 which focus on Divisions and Branches based on the political divisions of State and Territories in the Commonwealth of Australia are something of an anachronism these days. No doubt when the constitution was first formed in the 60s the areas north of Brisbane seemed a library and information wilderness. Political

boundaries in this Commonwealth stay put, but we do see changes in the movement of people and the growth of population centres outside the Southern triangle. Our Northern region bears testimony to that fact: there are now around 30 libraries in this region.

The North Queensland Regional Group has for many years been an active and progressive one. Professional activities are of a high standard and always well attended, which surprises our southern colleagues. We have achieved wonders and many firsts for the Association with little or no resources. We have even rated the front page of *inCite* in more than one edition!

To be told by such luminaries as Averill Edwards that ALIA should take seriously its duty to keep its members in remote areas informed and involved is, I feel, missing the point. We are involved and informed. We would like to be as involved and informed as our colleagues who happen to dwell in areas deemed appropriate for the formation of Branches. We pay the same membership fees. We have the same range of qualifications. We are employed in libraries the equal of any in Australia. We have grown up. We wish to be recognised on an equal footing with our peers. Of course we live far away from Brisbane, Melbourne and even, preserve us, Canberra. Most of us would say 'Whoopie!' to that.

We live in changing times. Instead of trying to fit us into this 1960s political map, how about a bit of de Bono's lateral thinking?

Perhaps groups should be based, not only on regional/population lines but proven professional interest. Branches could be brought into being after a given period and proof of commitment to the ideals of the profession and its aims. I am sure this would bring much more sense of belonging and an opportunity for new ideas and development of the profession.

If ALIA is serious in its wish to foster professional interests and aspirations it must take seriously the request of our North Queensland Regional Group and perhaps rethink the whole premise under which Branches are formed. If not, we in the North will once again be left with the feeling that we have been put in our place and been told what is good for us.

Pat C Kirkman

...#2

Dear Editor,

Averill Edwards' arguments (*inCite* 25 March) about the need for careful consideration of the constitutional implications of the proposals for a North Queensland Branch are generally sound. But her statement that an equally strong case could be made for other areas does

not bear serious examination.

NQ has a large population with a well developed community of interests, it has a wide range of services and institutions and a variety of library and information services to match, and of course it is a long way from its capital city — 1400 km from Brisbane to Townsville.

Surely a formula based on all these factors could be worked out which would exclude such silly proposals as branches for Central NSW or Port Hedland.

I don't wonder that Jean Dartnall is spitting chips.

Laurie Brown

...#3

Dear Editor,

Good on Townsville for putting non-metropolitan ALIA onto the front page of *inCite*! As the pressures for professional development mount, those of us living outside the capitals are even more aware of our isolation than before.

I agree with the Townsville diagnosis that our distance from Brisbane is a problem, but I am concerned about the remedy proposed.

Will a new branch based in Townsville make any difference to me in Mackay? What's the difference between a Townsville postmark and a Brisbane

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postmark? And I'd still be paying the airlines \$280 return to get to Townsville activities. Perhaps I'd get more for my travel dollar by going to Brisbane.

The new branch proposal may advantage Townsville members, but for those of us elsewhere in North Queensland, I fear it will be more of the same. Worse still, if ALIA spends money on this issue, it will have less money to spend on innovations to help the rest of us... and the people in Port Hedland, Alice Springs, Broken Hill, Launceston and so on.

This is not the time for ALIA to be splitting into smaller branches. Now, as never before, we should be using new technologies to bring us together.

Why aren't we teleconferencing so all members, including isolated members, can participate in the operation of national and State ALIA bodies? Why aren't we videoconferencing so everyone from Perth to Cairns can hear and see the best speakers in our profession?

Setting up a new branch is surrendering to the distance demon; let's conquer the demon instead.

Helen Penridge

Mentoring and getting back to the coalface

Dear Editor,

The late lamented LAA Registration Examinations had a great deal to commend them in that they were extremely cost effective, provided the LAA with significant and profitable professional involvement and could be relied upon to provide the profession with highly competent and aware librarians.

However, the LAA in its wisdom has bowed out of educational involvement at that level and we have instead a multi-million dollar library education industry. It means that any educational problems are now the responsibility of the educators or the profession or both.

So far as the profession is concerned, the resurrection of the mentoring ideas (*inCite* 12, no. 4) could not have come at a worse time. For years libraries have suffered inadequate bookvotes and many have now entered the next stage, namely insufficient numbers of staff. My guess is that today most librarians are fully stretched meeting routine demands. They are not in a position to accept the added commitment of conscientious mentoring. Moreover, given our heavy investment in library education, why should we?

If students find it necessary to 'illuminate the theoretical base acquired

in the academy' beyond the sympathetic supervision normally accorded to newly graduated employees, it should be seen as an indictment of the education they have received and it should be remedied at that level.

Geoff Allen's advocacy of the periodic return of educators to the coal face deserves support because, far from being a 'side issue', it is central to the problem, as a perusal of Margaret Trask's paper only too clearly demonstrates. She actually promotes 'the necessity to strengthen conceptual understandings', and finds present courses 'too short to be overburdened with current procedures and skills'.

If this approach has found acceptance with library educators, it's no wonder the recipients find themselves at a disadvantage when faced with the hard-nosed demands placed upon a library by its clientele and its corporate administrators.

I am convinced students will be better served when educators ease up a little on concepts and theories in favour of more practical library skills.

John van Dreven
Senior Librarian

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The Australian Writers' and Editors' Guide, ed. Shirley Purchase. Oxford University Press, 1991 383 pp \$24.95.

This entirely new production is based on *The Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors*, which itself had been revised from the 1905 *Authors and Printers Dictionary* as the house style of OUP. However, the Australian version differs greatly in content and approach, because it reflects the differences in meaning and nuance of Australian usage from English or American usage. It was pleasing to see that among other source books our own David J Jones' *Acronyms and Abbreviations* rates an honourable mention in distinguished company.

The text is a remarkable blend of dictionary definitions, brief notes on people and places, translations of foreign words and phrases, pointers to correct spelling and explanations of technical terms in editing, printing and the like. Obviously, when writing for a specific publication you would use the style guide produced or adopted by that publication. But that apart, most of us who are involved in writing or preparing material for publication would find this book of enormous value.

Peter Judge

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