

Front Line



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President

Front Line 1991 has included thought provoking issues such as the role of libraries in society, the responsibilities of the library profession, the dangers of becoming instruments of government rather than servants of the people, new technology and innovation, continued professional development and mentors in the profession. While Front Line is the place for these matters to be continuously debated and challenged, I will concentrate on the issues facing the Victorian Branch and outline the Branches's objectives for 1991.

During 1990 the Presidency was shared by two people. Bev Kirby continued for the first part of the year as President, then I took up office for the last 6 months, continuing as

President for 1991. Like the situation outlined by Craig Grimison, NSW Branch President (*inCite* 11 March 1991) at the end of the year there will be a number of vacancies as office bearers move on. Craig noted that the lack of continuity can lead to office bearers spending much time without more experienced members to assist. The suggestions NSW put forward for overcoming the lack of experience have merit.

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1991 is the third successive year the Victorian Branch has received Local Presence Funding. The decision made at the last General Council to share the available funds between the existing Local Presence Offices has ensured that the Victorian office will provide the current level of service. The Victorian Local Presence Office operates from the Technilib premises providing the following services:

- typing and clerical support for the Branch

Secretary;

- information to members and non-members on matters related to activities and meetings, continuing education programs, general and membership enquiries and where appropriate referring questions to individuals and Sections;
- access to ALIA publications, equipment and materials to support the work of Branch Council;
- a point of access to a telephone and separate telephone number for Victorian Branch business;
- an address;
- a venue for meetings for Executive and Branch Council.

An exciting development is the foundation of Library Focus, Victoria, founded by Technilib, CAVAL and the Victorian Branch to foster and provide a focus for coordination and cooperation between the libraries of Victoria. Library Focus brings together in a single location these organisations and other inter library activities. For ALIA this ensures that we will be at the hub of library matters in Victoria. The Deputy Premier and Minister for the Arts will perform the official launch of Library Focus on 21 May 1991.

Currently the Branch is preparing its response to the draft document *New Directions for Library Services in Victoria*. The Branch has the opportunity to make a written response as well as a consultation with members of the Libraries Board at the end of May. While there is a sense of *deja-vu* about

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another attempt at a library policy, the Victorian Branch welcomes this opportunity to comment. The profession can present its view to government keeping in mind its responsibility to the public served.

Branches are only as effective as the office bearers and Branch Council make them.

The draft document is seen as the initial step in the policy development process. The draft emphasises planning and coordination between the different sectors. The document begins by defining the primary role of the different library services, which in principle the Branch supports. Looking back at the reviews and debate during the last 4 years on library service provision, public library funding, the setting up of the Council of the State Library of Victoria and the Libraries Board, this draft document can be viewed as an important achievement.

The political, economic and educational changes in Victoria over the last 18 months have been dramatic and far reaching. In the last 4 years there have been six Ministers for the Arts, three in the last 18 months. The

proposed re-development of the State Library of Victoria has finally begun but the Queen Victoria Hospital site which was to fund the project has not been sold. Economic disasters have created a climate of uncertainty with reduction in spending and Government cut backs across all sectors. Educational change has come with the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) replacing the Higher School Certificate (HSC).

The VCE, with a resource based learning approach and emphasis on student independence in learning, is having a dramatic impact upon all library services in all sectors, with the heaviest burden upon public libraries and the State Library of Victoria. Major curriculum changes in post primary education were made with inadequate planning for resourcing in a period of severe cutbacks.

I represented the Branch at a meeting called between the Ministry for Education, the State Library of Victoria, and the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Board to address this urgent issue. The VCE is a matter on which the Branch will continue to work in 1991.

The continuing objectives for the Branch in 1991 can be summarised as Membership and Marketing: service to members, active recruitment, promotion of the benefits of belonging to ALIA, a Branch program to meet members' needs and follow up with members who leave.

The Branch has appointed a Recruitment Officer to assist the Professional Development

Officer. Following the very successful Student Recruitment night in September last year, another is planned for 1991. Final year students will meet a panel representing the different sections to discuss opportunities for employment, the benefits of membership, and the importance of the professional network. Students are encouraged to join up on the night.

Another initiative is the compilation of a speaker's kit for members of Branch Council to use when invited to meetings, library schools, etc. As well, the Branch continues to produce Branch Watch, a monthly newsheet publicising all the forthcoming activities. This is distributed by Branch Council to Sections and as wide a distribution as possible encouraged. All members receive a copy of Vibra, an annual list of office bearers of the Sections, Regional and Special Interest Groups in Victoria.

At the last General Council Meeting membership was identified as one of the National Office's priorities in the implementation of the Strategic Plan. The Victorian Branch strongly supported this; it will complement the Victorian Branch's efforts.

Branches are only as effective as the office bearers and Branch Council make them. Commitment, participation and feed back to the Sections will ensure that the Branch objectives are met. The Victorian Branch has made a good start in 1991. □

New statements continued from 1...

been left to the enquirer, who selects what is felt to be wanted from the undifferentiated mass of information supplied. To a certain extent, technology will call the tune here, as it does in other areas of practice; nonetheless, there will remain a significant degree of discretion in what to leave out, what to supply, and perhaps most importantly, in the indication of omissions.

'Structuring information'. 'Construction; arrangement of parts; manufacturing...' In a sense, what we do in collection-building, but this is an activity relatively remote from actual need, and indeed, the collection-builders themselves will not always be faced with the consequences of their efficiency or otherwise. Building information into a construct is rather more specific and immediate.

'Organising' and 'Preserving information' are already on our agenda, and are things which, given the resources, we already do very well indeed. The future organisation of information may call for us to address micro-issues in more detail, especially if, as is happening elsewhere, the information industry moves further into specialised or niche marketing.

'Packaging information'. 'Packaging' is a term with some negative connotations, but since very little of information packaging finds its way into landfills, we can perhaps ignore these. Certainly the process of packaging is one of the keys to marketing success; this is

evident in the use of specific 'packaging' formats, such as the employment of what used to be called comic strips to convey information of considerable seriousness. Military manuals use this format with great success. Textbooks are also evolving to reflect more effective ways of packaging information, witness the evolution of cooking books over the last decade; and while we're on this point, one of the runaway successes of information packaging has been the *Australian Women's Weekly* series. Very few of the 50 or so recipes in each volume is new, but the packaging is fresh, original, cleverly priced, and sales are in the tens of thousands.

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'Educating clients to access and use information'. Otherwise known, somewhat crudely, as 'information literacy'. For a few practitioners, this may be difficult, as some aspects of the end-user debate indicate. It would be provocative to suggest that there is a tendency for some practitioners to obfuscate this aspect of their work, but, as one or two letters which I have received on the subject of

mentoring reveal, there exists a real reluctance to devolve what are seen as the 'inner mysteries' of the profession to others, even to our own apprentices. Further, not every librarian is by nature an educator, and some further qualification of this tenet may therefore be called for.

'Advocating the provision of information services'. And their retention? 'Advocacy' calls for particular skills, and characteristics; it is not for the faint-hearted, or those with short time horizons. Nevertheless it is the keystone on which all our achievements so far rest. Information services are not provided gratuitously by farsighted and benevolent governments. They never were, even though in the past there were as many advocates outside the profession as from within it. The virtual disappearance of the lay advocate is one of the less desirable side-effects of our professional maturing.

Well, that's the revised statement; it is one of the most important documents of the last decade, with enormous implications; the challenge for us — practitioners, educators and the Board, is to explore these concepts more fully. The looming ELISS Conference in Melbourne (25-26 June) will no doubt address these issues.

The advance, for the revised statement does indeed amount to a major step forward for the profession, carries with it some major implications, challenges and risks, and these should be widely discussed by all Divisions.

John Levett