

Feedback

Libraries for the masses

A vice-chancellor's view

The ACT Group of the University, College and Research Libraries Section invited Professor Don Aitkin on 24 April to give his views on libraries in higher education. They received a most entertaining insight into the changes in the university system over the last 40 years.

In the 1950's, said Professor Aitkin, an elite system reigned and those who went through university did well. There was an assumption that the 2 per cent of the population who went to university reflected the distribution of intelligence. Today that attitude has totally changed. In Canberra, for example, 85 per cent now finish school and about half of them go on to higher education.

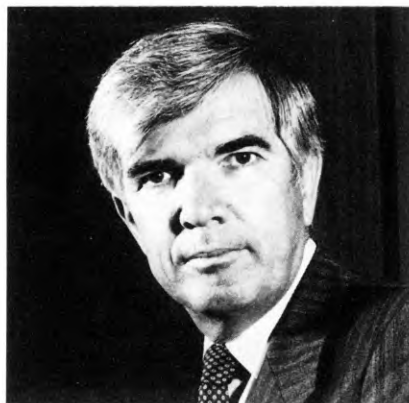
Formerly, those who did well at university stayed there as academics. Now,

they become merchant bankers, lawyers or doctors. There are many more First Class Honours, reflecting a greater working class and female intake. But the broadened intake means that universities have to do more for them — 'we can't just point them at the library, we have to *talk* to them'. Or to find new ways of teaching them — more funds are not the only answer; and fighting for increased funding might give at most 2-5 per cent, just 'vegemite money'.

Professor Aitkin said that many academics see themselves still in the old elite system, instead of accepting that they are part of a mass education movement. They see themselves as researchers, although many are not very good at research and would be more useful increasing their teaching activity.

What does this mean for libraries? Librarians in universities, too, need to accept that they are serving a mass clientele and ensure that they are responsive to changes in teaching policy and practice. A shortage of resources may push them into more cooperative working — Professor Aitkin speculated on the possibility of a single (multi-campus) higher education library for the ACT. At which point he rushed off to see his counterpart at the ANU...

Don Aitkin



LCSH brush-up: half-day workshops

The Victorian Cataloguers' Section and the Department of Information Services, RMIT will jointly present four repeat workshops on the Library of Congress *Subject Headings*. Topics to be covered include LCSH policy and format changes, subdivision practices, ABN decisions, and future directions. Exercises and notes will be provided, and participants will have the opportunity to view a brief demonstration of LCSH on CD-ROM. The workshops will be held on the morning and afternoon of 10 and 17 July. For information see *Events*, and/or contact Stephen Gillespie on (03) 660 3108 or Cheryl Schauder on (03) 660 3059.

Peter Judge

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