

ALIA and non-English speaking readers

Derek Whitehead reports on Commonwealth assistance to multicultural Library services

IN LATE 1991 ALIA wrote to several Commonwealth ministers about assistance to multicultural public library services, in relation to the Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP). ALIA received replies from Gerry Hand and Kim Beazley.

Mr Hand wrote in January saying that he had referred the matter to Mr Beazley, the Minister for Employment, Education and Training. He also said that the national language service organisation proposed in the ALLP would relate *only to interpreting and translation* (our italics), and not to other matters.

Mr Beazley (April 1992) agreed that 'the importance of libraries is clearly acknowledged' in the ALLP; stated that the Commonwealth 'has undertaken initiatives in the areas for which it has major funding responsibility'. He emphasised that 'Funding for public libraries is fundamentally a State and local government responsibility.' There is a very clear statement that public library funding is not, in this area and in others, a Commonwealth responsibility. In other words, libraries are an important part of the ALLP but not a Commonwealth responsibility.

The Australian Language and Literacy Council (ALLC)

This was established early this year, and three references were submitted to it by the Commonwealth, and advertised in the national press. The references give some scope for library involvement, and ALIA wrote to the ALLC in April. The ALLC acknowledged receipt of the brief submission, and agreed that 'libraries play a significant role indeed in the learning of adult English and literacy as well as languages other than English.' Further input from ALIA will be sought.

The ALLC reports to the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET)—i.e., firmly within the education industry. It is chaired by Rodney Cavalier, and mainly represents educational interests.

It has established three working parties:

National Language Policy Liaison Group (NLPLG)

The NLPLG met in Sydney on 16 May, and Derek attended for ALIA. A few points which emerged from the meeting:

- there was much discontent (of long standing) about the loss of an integrated approach to language policy—its administrative location, loss of autonomy and education-based terms of reference have sidelined non-education aspects;
- there was widespread discontent with the ALLC, and particularly with its lack of representation from schools and from the community;
- FECCA and the NLPLG will probably organise a deputation to the ALLC, with the main objective being to exchange views, and clarify the role and interests of the Council;
- the general environment is seen as unfavourable, with blocking in the Commonwealth bureaucracy, and increasingly simplistic approaches to policy. Much current work now tends to involve monocultural assumptions.

National Education Forum (NEF)

A new peak body representing organisations with interests in education has been formed at a national level, meeting in Melbourne. A member of the ALLC, Claire Woods, is a member of the NEF. In order to promote the role of libraries in education (the scope covers schools and tertiary education), ALIA should certainly join this body. Derek believes that successful lobbying can only be achieved in concert with other organisations.

The National Library's role

Goal 4 of the ALLP says:

Language services provided through interpreting and translating, print and electronic media and libraries should be expanded and improved.

Although the Commonwealth has clearly said that it has no role in public libraries, it does run the National Library, and the NLA's role in relation to multicultural library services should be clarified in correspondence with the relevant

portfolio (DASETT). In particular, the following statement in the ALLP should be clarified in correspondence with the Minister:

At the Commonwealth level, the National Library of Australia has supported some public libraries by making bulk loans from collections in some Asian languages, such as Korean. It may be expected to play a role in both coordination and direct support.

The NLA has recently declined to waive charges for inter-library loans of multicultural materials.

Suggestions for future directions

It has to be admitted that Commonwealth assistance to public libraries seems less likely now than at any time in the past eight years. In order to pursue funding for multicultural services, ALIA should lobby state governments (and oppositions). It would be useful to write to the states seeking information about their policies on multicultural public library services.

There have been some successes in obtaining research and development funds and support for programs of this kind, both through the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia and through the National Policy on Languages. Opportunities of this kind should continue to be pursued through the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia, which is holding a major conference late this year.

The following are suggested (including some suggestions made above):

- 1 That ALIA join the National Education Forum. ALIA should take opportunities in the education sector which arise. More or less unrelated to multicultural library services there is a very strong ALIA interest in education, since it is a major library sector. ALIA should join with other organisations and should aim to make them library-conscious.
- 2 That ALIA write to the Commonwealth Minister for Arts, Sport, Environment, Tourism and Territories in order to seek clarification of the National Library's role in supporting the Australian Language and Literacy Policy.
- 3 That ALIA contact the Coalition ▶

► (at the Commonwealth level) in order to ascertain its views of the ALLP and its general attitudes on these matters. The relevant shadow ministers are David Kemp (Employment, Education and Training) and Philip Ruddock (Ethnic Affairs). Copies of any correspondence should be sent to FECCA. Derek will prepare a draft.

- 4 That ALIA maintain contact with the ethnic lobby via the NLPLG, including participation in its delegation to the ALLC. The NLPLG body consists of a wide range of organisations which can assist libraries generally in their lobbying efforts; it should focus more on library resources in education, and Derek would be glad to take this matter up.
- 5 That ALIA develop a strategy, focussing on state and local government, to obtain specific funding for support of non-English language and literacy materials in public and state libraries.

Derek writes that he would willingly become involved in these proposed courses of action should ALIA wish to pursue them.

Trainline



Carol Kenchington
Training and Development
Officer

THE VERY FIRST issue of ALIA's *Training and Development Directory* is now available. It has been sent to all Divisions. It contains information about training and development opportunities, arranged by place and date, and by subject. If you would like a copy, phone the National Office. Most of the records relate to events, but there is room in the database for

information about speakers, publications, and units in award courses available for continuing education. By the time the next issue comes out in August I hope there will be lots of entries in these categories. Perhaps you can help.

Do you know of a member of the library and information services community with expertise, skill and a willingness to communicate? Are you aware of a publication in the ALIA network that is the result of training or could be used in training? A good example of this is the WA Branch's video on Professional Ethics. This address given last year by Professor Ewin, University of WA, could well serve as a focus for a lively group discussion.

Please let the Training and Development Officer know of people, publications and events which should be included in the database. The database is on trial at present, and any feedback would be very welcome.

This is my last Trainline, as I take up a new position shortly. However, old buffers never disappear, so I hope to see you at ALIA training and development events from time to time. Best wishes to you all.

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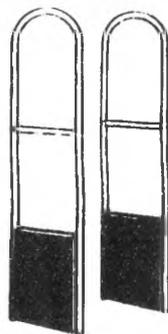
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