

Front Line



Bev Kirby
ALIA President

Take an interest in what state, federal and local governments are doing... It is your democratic right to ask questions and to offer suggestions.

THIS WEEK I RECEIVED copies of two memos that the Executive Director sent to relevant colleagues regarding ALIA's response to two very important reports. The first of these was the Mayer Committee Report, *Employment-Related Key Competencies for Postcompulsory Education and Training: A Discussion Paper*. The second was the *One Nation* statement by the Prime Minister, together with a document from the Minister for Employment, Education and Training and the Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services, *Employment, Education and Training Initiatives in the February Economic Statement, February 1992*, part of the *One Nation* package.

The Mayer Committee is seeking responses by 16 March so there is no time to invite you all to respond.

Both these reports are particularly relevant to our members in TAFE, UCRLS and School Libraries Sections. The Mayer Committee was established by the Australian Education Council (AEC) and Ministers for Vocational Education, Employment and Training (MOVEET) to review the concept of employment-related key competencies in education and training as proposed in the Finn Report, *The Review of Young People's Participation in Postcompulsory Education and Training*.

ALIA will make a response to both of these documents on your behalf and the National TAFE Section has been working for some time on a response to the Finn Report, which will come back to General Council.

I won't use this Front Line to talk at length about these reports, but they are examples of the enormous responsibility that rests with National Office, General Council and the Board of Education to ensure that we do make a response and that the response is co-ordinated, draws on the infrastructure of ALIA to promote the consultation process and in the end reflects ALIA policy, which is after all decided by the membership.

We usually have very little time to respond, which can lead to knee-jerk reactions or to silence. Silence is usually taken as tacit approval for everything that is being said, proposed or even legislated for.

Who writes these responses and how does the consultative process work?

ALIA is establishing communication patterns to ensure that we co-ordinate our responses. General Council encourages Divisions to contribute to joint responses. The co-ordination of these is usually left to General Council or the Board of Education as a sub-committee of General Council, with the assistance of National Office. We will do everything we can to avoid the duplication and confusion that was criticised in the library world's response to the Jones Committee Report. As a matter of policy ALIA will from time to time seek to present a joint response with ACLIS, CAUL, ASLA and other groups.

ALIA can only use the communication lines provided through its Divisions and groups. There may be little time to consult when we have to respond to reports such as those in front of us now. But we must do our best to make the consultative process work, even if that means seeking extra time.

Occasionally individual members, who are not part of a section or special interest group, will contact ALIA directly, perhaps through their Branches. I should like to tell you that we don't do enough of this—you have every right to ask your Association to ask questions on your behalf. But don't ask your Association to fire every gun, unless the target is acceptable to our members and the gun can be loaded with Association policy.

You can ask your ALIA representatives to ask questions and to get answers about government policy, about government actions and about proposed legislation. You must be able to do this without fear of reprisals that will affect your job or your status in the profession. If ALIA's office bearers or employees consider that your questions should not be asked they must be ready to discuss the matter with you.

Lobbying without becoming obviously involved, i.e., without writing letters or appearing in person at Branch meetings, means accepting that the responsibility for moving forward rests with the ALIA representative. It may be difficult to respect your privacy and take the action you require. You must be willing to assist ALIA to carry through with the issue. This may mean talking with others and getting them to present your case for you.

Please take an interest in what state, federal and local governments are doing. Get to know reports such as those mentioned above. It is your democratic right to ask questions and to offer suggestions. ALIA can assist you with this and your input will assist in the responses we make. Your vigilance should prevent restrictive or unworkable policy decisions and the passing of unsound or unnecessary legislation. You will make a significant contribution to the work of the Association and the benefits will come back to you. □