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Executive Director

Last month in my column I provided a report on the meeting Bill Linklater and I had with Brian Howe (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Housing and Regional Development) on 22 September. We are delighted that there have subsequently been several positive outcomes from our representations. Additionally, the Government and the Opposition have each released their Arts Policies in recent weeks and both have embraced the concept of promoting broad community access to on-line information through public libraries. My column this month provides an update on recent developments.

ALP National Conference

At the Australian Labor Party National Conference in Hobart, held during the week of our biennial conference in Wellington, Mr Howe successfully moved an amendment to the ALP Policy Platform which added a new clause. The revised segment of the Policy now reads:

- '73 In line with the principle of universal access —
- a. encourage the development and use of information services utilising the national telecommunication system, including access to library services;
 - b. recognise the strong network of public libraries funded and operated by local government. This sector is ideally placed to lead the way in maintaining universal access to the emerging information technologies;
 - c. ensure compatibility between terminal equipment and the national system; and
 - d. encourage new operator-assisted access to information services where the need exists.'

The addition of this statement to the policy platform of the ALP constitutes a significant development in consolidating a role for public libraries as digitised formats become the more prevalent mechanism for distributing information.

New Ministerial Advisory Committee

Further to the above initiative, on 4 October, in his opening address to the Institute of Municipal Management

(IMM) Conference, Mr Howe announced the establishment of a working party composed of representatives from ALIA, the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) and the Department of Housing and Regional Development. This group will work to ensure that public libraries are well-placed to seize the opportunities provided by the 'information revolution'. We believe that the committee should be composed of high-level and broadly-based representatives from publicly-funded libraries and those organisations that represent them.

ALP Caucus Committee

ALIA was invited to appear before the ALP Caucus Committee on Housing and Regional Development on 11 October. Happily, this date coincided with the Board of Education meeting and a delegation comprising the ALIA President, Bill Linklater, the Chair of the Board of Education and Librarian, City of Stirling Libraries WA, Kay Poustie, the Director General of the National Library of Australia, Warren Horton, Di Booker from the Learning Resource Centre, Adelaide, TAFE and myself attended. Our presentation provided an overview of the operation of public libraries in Australia and encompassed statistics on the number of library services, their users and funding regimes. This presentation, by highlighting community-access pilot projects in Australia, illustrated the potential for public libraries to provide leadership in this area and showed that public libraries are well-placed to ensure that the principles of social justice are applied in the provision of on-line information. However, the success of this goal is dependent on support from all spheres of government and requires leadership from the Commonwealth.

The Caucus Committee indicated its enthusiastic support for our cause and recognised that the benefits to the community, and ultimately to the economic and social well-being of our nation, are dependent on a high level of information literacy within the Australian population. We can look forward to

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further developments. The Caucus Committee passed four motions at the conclusion of our presentation:

1. *That libraries be included in the national benchmarking of access and equity standards as part of the Government's social justice strategy.*
2. *That the review of the financial Assistance Grants to local governments be used to achieve these national standards.*
3. *That the Minister, Brian Howe, report back to the Committee on progress in incorporating libraries as public access points on the information highway.*
4. *That the Government produce guidelines of the provisions of electronic information by its own Departments, with a preference for public libraries as affordable access points.*

We are also delighted that the issues of equality of access to information provision through public libraries was the subject of a debate in Parliament on 17 October which further raised the profile of these issues. The debate was brought on by the Member for Werriwa, Mark Latham, who has consistently championed this cause since his entry to Parliament in January this year.

The Opposition Policy

The Opposition has also been drawn into the debate. On 6 October, the Coalition released its policy on Culture and the Arts *The cultural frontier — coalition priorities for the Arts*. Here too, public libraries received credit for their role in information access. The statement, in part, reads:

- *In consultation with the States and Territories, a Coalition Government will address the need to facilitate universal access to broadband information resources through educational institutions and public libraries.*
- *A Coalition government will promote the development of a national heritage network which will allow the electronic exchange of resources, information and ideas by museums, galleries, public libraries and other cultural institutions.'*

The Government Policy

Creative Nation, the Commonwealth Cultural Policy was released on 18 October by the Prime Minister. That

Policy recognises the importance of information, and new information technologies, in the development of a rich and rewarding cultural fabric. It reads:

'The Government will work with the States to form local access points to enable Australians to participate fully in open learning opportunities, government services, small-business support, electronic communications, community networks and other opportunities for personal development. In particular, the 1 400 public library service points throughout Australia provide a major opportunity for linking communities to networked services, such as those available through the Internet. The Government will work with the States to deliver an effective program of community access.'

Our lobbying efforts continue. While the issues under current scrutiny have involved public libraries, there has been a broader emphasis placed on the importance of the role performed by library personnel in all sectors. We have endeavoured to ensure that federal politicians recognise the co-operative efforts that are underway between public, university and school libraries and the important role performed by government and private sector special libraries in providing a professional service in the delivery of on-line, timely and relevant information. ■

Response to draft competency standards

The number and quality of the responses to the Draft Competency Standards for inclusion in ALIA's submission to Arts Training Australia was most pleasing. A first analysis highlighted the following (refer inCite 10, p14-15):

- almost all of the 67 units attracted some comment;
- the three streams were seen to be appropriate by all but one group;
- the majority of responses wished to see a level beyond the current industry level 6, equating to Australian Standards Framework level 8, and several supported the inclusion of a level below industry level 1, equating to ASF level 1;
- some people criticised the document for a lack of future orientation and a focus on traditional library services;
- many people felt that some librarianship competencies should be included in the core units, with a general cataloguing-type unit or a version of unit 28 being suggested areas;
- the cataloguing and acquisition units attracted the most comments, with suggestions that they are required at both higher and lower levels than in the draft;
- the computing units and the units in levels 5 and 6 attracted least comment;
- the key competencies need to be listed to avoid repeating problem solving, communication, in the industry competencies;
- responses were split about the inclusion of training as a core unit;
- some concerns were expressed about the capacity of specialists, for example, cataloguers in large libraries, to meet the core requirements;
- some unevenness was seen to exist between the complexity and magnitude of units at the same level;
- evaluation was not seen to be covered adequately;
- some educators felt that it would be difficult to turn the competencies into curriculum documents.

Anne Hazell

Australian Library and Information Association

Honorary awards

Nominations are now being called for the following honorary awards of the Australian Library and Information Association

HCL ANDERSON AWARD

The General Council may confer the HCL Anderson Award on any person who is a professional member of the Association or who holds an overseas qualification in librarianship or archives, which is recognised as a professional qualification by a library association or archives association in the country concerned, and who has rendered outstanding service to librarianship or the library profession in Australia, or to ALIA, or to the theory or practice of librarianship.

REDMOND BARRY AWARD

The General Council may confer the Redmond Barry Award on any person who is not eligible to be a professional member of the Association and who is not employed in a library, who in the opinion of General Council, has rendered outstanding service to the promotion of a library or libraries; ALIA; the theory or practice of librarianship, or to an associated field such as bibliography.

ELLINOR ARCHER AWARD

The General Council may confer the Ellinor Archer Award on any person employed or who has been employed in libraries, who is not eligible for Associateship of ALIA, who has rendered outstanding service: to libraries, the promotion of a library, or libraries: the theory or practice of librarianship or to an associated field such as systems, conservation, management or bibliography.

Confidentiality

It is essential that nominees should NOT be aware that they are nominated for an award. Nominations are considered by the Honorary Awards Committee and Council in committee, and details are published only when the nominations are successful.

Divisions of ALIA are particularly asked not to note nominations in their agenda papers or minutes. Disclosure of such details can prejudice a nomination.

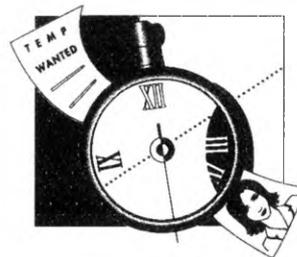
Nomination forms

Nomination forms and further information on each of the awards may be obtained from the National Office. Nominations for the HCL Anderson Award, the Redmond Barry Award and Ellinor Archer Award close on 1 February 1995.

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