

Access to a world of information

The signing of the key Systems Integration contract last month by the National Libraries of Australia and New Zealand and CSC Australia gave the green light for the next phase of the National Document and Information Service Project (NDIS).

Warren Horton, Director General of the National Library of Australia, Peter Scott, National Librarian of the National Library of New Zealand and Peter Rehn, Managing Director of CSC Australia signed the contract on 31 March 1995.

The Systems Integration contract represents the culmination of five months work by the national libraries and CSC to finalise the technical specifications and the terms for this innovative project. Phase One can now start building on this foundation, implementing all the elements of

CSC's technical solution and resulting in the release of some services as early as next year.

One of the key requirements of the National Libraries is that Australians and New Zealanders must have easy access to NDIS services. Access to NDIS will, therefore, be provided by a

variety of means including the Internet, where NDIS will be the key resource discovery node for Australian and New Zealand electronic documents. The service will also exploit the facilities of the Internet to provide gateways into other related electronic information services.

People will be able to access the library and database systems of Australia, New Zealand, and the world via a computer in the home, workplace, library or wherever the



Peter Scott, Peter Rehn and Warren Horton signing the contract on 31 March 1995

user wants. Users will also be able to order the electronic delivery of documents to their desktop.

NDIS will upgrade the key information infrastructure used by libraries and the wider community on both sides of the Tasman. It will replace and extend the services currently offered by the Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN) and Ozone in Australia, and New Zealand Bibliographic Network (NZBN) and Kiwinet in New Zealand.

Partners in training

Cheryl Grant, one of the ABN trainers from the State Library of NSW was in Pakistan during March to train Pakistani librarians in cataloguing for an automated environment. The Pakistani librarians came from all types of libraries, from all over Pakistan, and included lecturers from schools of librarianship. The course covered practical application of



Cheryl Grant

AACR2R, DDC20, LCSH and USMARC. In addition there were opportunities for discussion of related issues such as workflows, participation of para professionals, using databases to find cataloguing copy, providing access to electronic materials, and an overview of the trends and issues raised by working in a networked environment.

The course was run for the Pakistan Library Association in association with the Netherlands Library Development Project and is being coordinated through Asian Partners in Training at the State Library of NSW.

We still pay more

Australian readers are still paying more for their books than their counterparts in the United States and Britain.

A survey by the Prices Surveillance Authority (PSA) shows Australian readers are paying, on average, 27 per cent more than Americans and 19 per cent more than British readers for the same books. This price gap will be examined during the PSA's inquiry into Australian book prices and the effect of the Commonwealth Government's changes to copyright law in December 1991.

The PSA price survey, conducted with the cooperation of book publishers and booksellers, is based on more than 900 new releases published in a six-month period in 1994 and calculated on the exchange rates prevailing at the time.

The Authority has obtained evidence suggesting the price gap has narrowed since 1989 when the PSA first examined the book industry. The evidence suggests that books on Australia's best sellers list now sell at prices closer to overseas prices, however, there are still disparities in the prices of technical and professional books.

The inquiry will assess whether a reduction in price differentials is linked to the business cycle, to the

1991 changes in the Australian copyright law or to other structural changes now occurring in the book industry, both in Australia and overseas.

The current inquiry was foreshadowed at the time the Commonwealth Government changed Australia's copyright law for books in 1991. The amendments followed an earlier PSA inquiry in 1989 which suggested Australian book prices were too high because copyright holders, usually the publishing houses, could control the importation of books and thus curtail the level of competition in the Australian market.

The 1991 changes relaxed the import restrictions but only in instances where publishing houses could not provide a timely and adequate supply of the required book. The amendments were designed primarily to improve the availability of books and were not aimed directly at reducing prices.

A public hearing was held in Sydney in early March with representatives from book publishers, booksellers and the respective peak organisations and a written submission from the Australian Society of Authors. We look forward to hearing the results of the inquiry.