

Stimulating innovation in education



Kay Poustie

Chair, ALIA Board of Education

As I come to the end of my term on the Board of Education, it is timely to think on the role of the Board and the challenges that face educators in preparing students to work in our profession.

I make these observations after almost six years service on the Board. Six years of participating in some of the most stimulating and thought provoking discussions of my professional life, where I have come to appreciate the role of the educational institution in shaping the face of the future profession and to value the contribution that the practitioner can make in articulating the competencies required of new entrants into the workplace.

The ALIA Board of Education

The Board of Education has taken a major role in influencing the development of education for librarianship in Australia. From the days when it was the Board of Examiners to the present time it has ensured that the Association has kept pace with changes in education and the workplace.

One of the major roles of the Board is to stimulate innovation in education by providing a forum for the discussion of issues, by preparing documents outlining possible future developments for General Council and the Association at large and through discussions with library educators and practitioners.

The stimulation of innovation in education is most important to the validity of the profession in Australia today. The workplace into which new graduates come — and in which those of us who have been in the profession for some years find ourselves — is changing daily.

Therefore, it is important that we re-think our approach to education in order to provide the new members of our profession with the skills that they will need in the changing workplace.

Librarians and library technicians need to have the ability to retrieve information provided in the new digitised formats and to assess the quality of that information. They need to understand the issues of censorship, intellectual property rights and copyright issues in order to manage the information now so freely available. New graduates need to be aware of the ethics of the profession and the freedom of information and speech that is at the heart of our vocation.

Additionally, new entrants to the profession have to be able to market their products and themselves. They need to be able to contribute to their organisations those unique skills that they have and to make their organisation aware of these skills. There are many people out there in the world who are capitalising on the skills we

have had for years whilst we quietly sit in our libraries wondering why they are being downsized or closed.

Co-operation between educators and practitioners

What is vital to our profession is that practitioners and educators work together to ensure that the very best-quality education is provided to our new graduates. We owe it to them to make education for the profession relevant and meaningful, and to ensure that graduates leave their institutions with inquiring minds. New graduates should be prepared to see their qualifications as the first step to a lifetime of learning and professional development.

Practitioners and educators can work together on Course Advisory Committees to ensure that there is meaningful dialogue between the two groups on an ongoing basis. Practitioners must be prepared to assist educators by giving guest lectures and most importantly, by providing students with well programmed and extensive practicum experience. If we want top-quality graduates we must be prepared to spend time to find them relevant experience in the workplace when they undertake their practicums.

As practitioners and educators we must open the channels of communication and be prepared to listen to each others views. There is much criticism from both sides that is ill-informed and damaging to our profession. We criticise educators for being out of touch with current trends in the workplace, but many practitioners are unwilling to employ educators to give them opportunities to up-date their experience.

Professional development

One of my 'hobby horses' whilst on the Board has been continuing professional development. I remain convinced that this is one of the single most important issues for the Association and for those of us working in the field. Retaining our relevance and continuing to update our skills must be high on the agenda for those of us working in the library and information sector. We can be the leaders in our organisations when it comes to the introduction of new technology and strategies for handling information if we are prepared to continue to keep up with the changes in our field. I applaud the work of continuing professional development officers in Branches and would encourage members of the Association to take advantage of the opportunities for continuing professional development that are being offered.

The Association has played, and will continue to play, a major role in education for the profession. It is right that it does this and continues to do so. ■

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