



Disseminator of information

Felicity Butler, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade library

In early October the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade library will move to its new location on the fourth floor of the R G Casey Building. The move will be a huge endeavour, involving the relocation of approximately 35 000 monographs and some 500 journal titles. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade library is a special library serving Australia's foreign and trade interests. The library's collection is shaped by the department's foreign and trade policies, with a special emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region. While retaining a specialist knowledge of foreign and trade-related matters, the library's objectives and goals have grown to fully complement the diverse and often complex information needs of the department.

Following the library's restructure in 1991, the focus of service altered to concentrate on providing a library service to Canberra-based officers and students enrolled in the department-sponsored tertiary education programs. Recently however, the library has started to play an increasingly active role in the Canberra special libraries community, and currently enjoys a productive dialogue with other departmental libraries. At present most of our users are departmental officers and their information needs always take priority. But we do welcome, and will continue to make our collection available to private researchers.

As many of the department's officers are not based in Canberra, the library produces three publications — including a 'Current awareness bulletin' — which are circulated throughout eighty overseas posts and regional offices. These publications are held in high regard by staff and raise the library's profile by contributing to our role as a disseminator of valuable and relevant information.

The library maintains three special collections, the most significant being a full set of

OECD books and journals, of which the library has legal repository status. We also selectively collect United Nations documents and publications and have a complete set of the Australian Treaty Series.

The library also attempts to retain a copy of every publication produced by the department. With the exception of the United Nations collection, all of the library's holdings are on ABN. Our journal and monograph collections cover the areas of political science and contemporary international affairs. The library has developed expertise in several areas of interest, and possesses one of the most comprehensive collection of works relating to diplomacy and statecraft in Australia.

The library has been keen to use electronic media — it was the first area in the department to gain access to the Internet. Ever since its installation it has been part of the library's role to introduce the World Wide Web to the department. For security reasons the library does not have e-mail access. Over the last two years the library has provided Internet training to many departmental officers. This service has been highly beneficial and has greatly enhanced the library's profile.

While the Internet is a useful reference resource, the library continues to use conventional on-line services including Dialog, Lexis-Nexis and Ausinet. Recently however, we have started subscribing to several CD-ROM products which have proved extremely popular with our readers. The library now collects four CD-ROM titles, three of which are generalist databases broadly covering international current affairs and the social sciences, and a specialist CD-ROM database containing citations on global economics and trade. Within the department the library now functions as a contact point for electronic media, an environment where many of our readers have gained first-hand practical experience with new information technologies. ■

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