

## Your voice

### Levetty and lists

September's 'Your voice' was full of surprises for the Monash Department of Librarianship, Archives and Records. Helen Tait mischievously revealed the unsuspected octogenarian status of my sprightly professorial predecessor, John Levett. John Brudenall added to the merriment by ranking the professorship in the Monash Department, along with University of New South Wales, among the 'ten top jobs' in Australian librarianship — otherwise read: 'this is a list of the ten people to blame if things go wrong'. If his listing was meant — at least in part — to stir up good-natured teasing and controversy, let me assure him he succeeded. I agree wholeheartedly with his main point — that librarians should aspire to career advancement, for their own sakes and that of

the profession. However I'm sure he would agree with me that the co-operative nature of librarianship gives everyone who works in our field, irrespective of seniority or employing organisation, a crucial share of responsibility for what we collectively achieve. It is a fundamental strength of our professional culture to value mutual respect more than rankings; and collaboration more than competition.

**Don Schauder**  
*Monash University*

### No need to be defensive

I was very disappointed to read John Brudenall's letter (*inCite*, September 1996, p5) because I thought our profession had moved on from such defensiveness. I am proud to be a librarian but I do not feel any need to

hide behind a wall of restrictive trade practices. I am confident that my skills and those of my colleagues are demonstrating their value and will stand the test of comparison with others.

In the university world, eight of the twelve people with executive responsibility for computing and library services have come from a library background. A similar pattern in the United Kingdom confirms that we need not be defensive.

As for the list of top jobs, my list would start with the teacher librarian who imbues children with love of learning, the shelfer who takes pride in the good order and ease of use of the collection, the cataloguer who is concerned with first class access rather than mere application of cataloguing rules. Not everyone has a director gener-

al's gavel in his or her briefcase. We need first-class leaders and first-class managers, but, much more, we need first-class librarians, library technicians and other library and information workers. We need to put our clients first and strive for excellence in all we do.

All of us can set a good example to our colleagues and our clients. All of us can be mentors, as John did me when I was a student and for which I will always be grateful.

**Alex Byrne**  
*Northern Territory University*

### Where to from here?

My thanks to all of those who contributed to the succinct and dismaying analysis of the recent Federal Budget which arrived in

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wishes to invite Australian ERL-users, present and prospective, to join its

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the folds of my September *inCite*; we had all suspected some of the catastrophes which appear to have taken place, but the extent of the damage revealed is considerable. Where to from here? We all now have a useful checklist of issues with which to engage our local [government] member, and certainly we cannot afford to let some of these issues to sink without trace or protest. Perhaps future issues of *inCite* could inform us of the impacts of these budget decisions on actual communities so as to sharpen our perspective and give focus to any representations which we might make to government.

**John Levett, Middleton**

### Impact of electronic publishing

I found Margaret Phillips ideas on the impact of electronic publishing (*inCite*, p10 August 1996) very interesting. She is right that librarians face a challenge in providing access to electronic publications in the future. There is probably general agreement that the various search engines available on the web are not the final answer, they are just the best we have at present. Librarians need to adapt their skills of indexing, abstracting, and just being aware of avenues for finding information, so that they can compile useful tools for their clients to find information on the web.

Having passed myself off at various times as librarian, archivist and editor, I am not convinced, however, that librarians can — or even should — attempt to solve the problem of 'acquiring', preserving, or even cataloguing networked documents. The Macquarie Dictionary defines a library as a place set apart to contain books and other literary material for reading, study or reference. The definition implies that libraries must have physical custody of a

publication before they can place adequate control over it.

Records managers and archivists are already dealing with the problem of preserving the networked documents and publications that form part of our cultural heritage. They see these documents as records of an organisation's functions and activities. The publications unit of a government department will keep a final copy, probably several drafts, comments from staff, accounting, marketing, printing and distribution records of a publication, as evidence of the department's work. This documentary evidence should be created no matter what format the publication takes, and should be preserved, in the case of a government publication, according to the importance of the publication and the directions of the government archives.

Margaret Phillips is right when she says that existing MARC fields do not allow librarians to adequately describe networked documents. The International Council of Archives is already working on standard archival descriptions that will. Librarians would do well to talk to their sister professions such as archivists, records managers, and IT professionals, rather than re-inventing the wheel.

**Danielle Wickman, Canberra**

### A follow-up to State Libraries?

Congratulations on your series of articles about the State Libraries in Australia (*inCite* July). Hopefully this interesting series will be followed by others comparing other groups of libraries such as the parliamentary, university, major hospital libraries and so on.

Some people who know of Information Edge's connections with the State Library of New South Wales may have been puzzled however that Information Edge was not mentioned in the article about the library.

Information Edge is no longer associated with the library, and has moved to new premises, but continues to provide support to the sector.

**Elizabeth Swan  
Information Edge**

### An enjoyable and rewarding challenge

I am a library technician employed by Richmond-Tweed Regional Library on the Far North Coast of New South Wales. My current position as Goonellabah library officer involves the running of a one-person branch in a suburb of Lismore. Kerry Smith's article (*inCite*, p16 October 1996) inspired me to write a letter of praise for her intention to commence a series of studies of one-person libraries and librarianship in Australia.

Librarian or library technician, in single-person branches there is only you to do the daily duties — so motivation is essential. There is no-one immediately at hand with whom you may discuss matters and tasks are often interrupted. Patience, as they say, is definitely a virtue! I've found working alone to be both an enjoyable and rewarding challenge and have been fortunate to be able to spend one day each week at our larger area branch where I can catch up on any new developments and stay in touch with other staff.

Each issue of *inCite* contains a variety of informative articles from ALIA members around Australia. I've often thought it would be wonderful however to see more input from library technicians and/or more articles concerning the value of the library technician in the library. Come on technicians of Australia, what do you think?

**Louise Somerville  
Goonellabah Public Library**

### A pleasant sinecure

Librarians hardly need to be told that their jobs are often regarded

as a pleasant sinecure for the vocationally disabled (Frontline, October 1996).

This view gets the literary treatment in Alice Munro's *Lives of girls and women* (Penguin, 1992), an anthology of stories which is on the NSW HSC syllabus. I quote:

'There was seldom anybody in the library except the librarian, Bella Phippen, deaf as a stone and lame in one leg from polio. The Council let her be librarian because she could never have managed a proper job. She stayed most of the time in a sort of nest she had made behind the desk, with cushions, afghans, biscuit tins, a hot plate, a teapot, tangles of pretty ribbon ... Once I asked her where to find something and she crawled around the desk and limped heavily along the shelves and came back with a book. She handed it to me, saying in the loud lonely voice of the deaf, "There is a lovely book".'

We might have to battle it out with the physically disabled to determine who had the right to be most offended by this vignette!

Unfortunately the character described reminds me strongly of the 'librarian' in charge of the local library when I was a child. She was certainly lame and, as I remember, wore slippers.

Fortunately customer demand prevents the job of a librarian from being a sinecure these days. I find a smart turn of speed very necessary.

**Verna Aslin, Tamworth**

### Your voice

**Your letters on any issue of relevance to the library and information sector are welcomed.**

All letters should be addressed to the *inCite* editor and may be e-mailed to [incite@alia.org.au](mailto:incite@alia.org.au), or faxed to 06 282 2249, or posted to: Your voice, ALIA, PO Box E441, Kingston ACT 2604. Please include your name and postal address with your letter or e-mail.