

Will the younger members of ALIA please stand up?

John Brudenall discusses ways of encouraging younger members to become more active in ALIA matters

ALIA needs the active involvement and participation of its younger members for two important reasons. First, the ideas and views of its younger members are likely to be highly-relevant at a time when the traditional approaches of the profession are being challenged and new technologies are changing the fundamental roles of libraries and librarians. Second, the younger members who participate in ALIA now will provide the Association with the leadership it will need in the future.

It makes good strategic sense for ALIA to work hard to make sure that younger members of the profession are encouraged to join and to participate in ALIA. This matter was discussed at the last meeting of General Council and it was suggested that I prepare an article for *inCite* and to make a number of suggestions concerning the encouragement of younger members to stimulate further discussion. All members are encouraged to discuss the issue and I suggest that ideas be sent to *inCite* or shared with colleagues at Branch meetings.

ALIA policy work

The Association must concentrate its attention on relevant, contemporary issues likely to be of interest to younger members who are looking toward an exciting and challenging future for libraries and librarians. The consultation process and working parties to deal with these issues must all involve younger members. Long-winded discussions of administrative detail are to be avoided at all costs.

Adjustment of the membership fee schedule

A discount rate for younger members for their first three years of ALIA membership and their professional practice may be a worthwhile inducement for younger members to join the Association or to continue their membership as they move into the workforce from the student member category. The discount rate should be graduated to avoid a sharp increase in fees as members, after three years of practice, being asked to pay the full membership fee, com-

mensurate with their salary.

Mentors for new members

Institutional members and Branches should be encouraged to take part in an Association sponsored mentoring scheme which should include all new members in their first three years of professional practice.

For medium-sized and larger libraries it is sound staff development policy to make sure that commencing professionals have the opportunity to receive guidance, the benefits of experience, encouragement and advice as they commence work and begin to apply their academic study. ALIA should prepare special materials on mentoring for application by its larger institutional members. For staff in smaller libraries the Branch should step in to provide and appropriate mentor for newly appointed librarians.

Each Branch Council should be asked to identify a number of members with suitable experience who would be prepared to act as a mentor. The Branch would then administer the mentoring scheme, as is currently the case in Victoria and Western Australia with mentoring schemes in other ALIA branches already under development, linking its mentors with new professionals shortly after they commence work. The Board of Education could draw up a 'Mentors handbook' during 1996 to assist the process.

Participation in committees and working parties

Branches should set the lead and establish guidelines to ensure that at least twenty per cent of committee and working party places are filled by younger members. This will require the active involvement of Branch leadership if the target it to be achieved. Branches and other divisions will develop a livelier annual program of activities under the influence of younger members and this will probably lead to increased participation by members in all age groups.

ALIANet

A special role should be given to a group of younger members to develop

discussion groups and to operate a list-serv on ALIANet. This should be a high priority as the Association moves to make effective use of ALIANet.

ALIA Board of Education and CPD

The Board should give priority to continuing professional development for members in their first three to five years in the profession. The broadening of experience and the opportunity to gain practical experience in all aspects of professional work are important at this career stage. ALIA may be well placed to assist younger members who are interested in job exchanges or secondments and in applying other suggestions from the Board.

inCite

A column for members to present their ideas for the future of the profession should appear in, say, every second issue. At least half the contributions should come from younger members.

ALIA conferences

All ALIA conferences should contain program segments which provide an opportunity for younger members to make a contribution. Branches should encourage, for example, the presentation of a poster session by younger members on a successful innovation or application of a technique which will be of interest to all ALIA members and Branches could use the mentoring process to assist in the preparation of a conference paper.

Australian library journal

Editorial policy should include the commissioning of at least one article per issue from a younger member. Again, active pursuit of this policy will be needed by the editor.

I have not put an age limit on 'younger members' although I think of people who have not yet reached the age of thirty-five as being in this category. Whether ALIA needs to be prescriptive deserves some debate. Librarianship does attract a number of 'mature age' entrants and 'beginning professionals' as well as 'younger members' may deserve special consideration. ■