

The process of renewal



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In case the series of reports and statements on the Association's renewal process has not been your choice of bed-time reading, I hope this brings you up-to-date.

For years many have asked why we have two bodies representing what appears to be a single industry with common concerns. These two organisations were ALIA and ACLIS. ACLIS represented institutions, and ALIA personal members. There has always been overlap in the work of the two organisations — especially in the area of lobbying. With a finite number of people working in the industry, many individuals were actively involved in both organisations. In 1997 and 1998 reports were drafted by external consultants — the *Gardini report*, and the *Lunn/McCallum report*. Both of these recommended that a single peak body be formed.

ALIA and ACLIS jointly signed a *Memo-randum of understanding* in September 1997. Shortly after this, a leadership committee was formed consisting of three officers from each organisation.

This committee met from September 1997 until mid-1998, winding up in July 1998. Since then ACLIS has wound up as a legal entity and ALIA has made a formal commitment to change through the *Charter of renewal* — including commitments to improve institutional membership, and to incorporate under *Corporations Law*.

ALIA General Council has now set up a renewal working group. Some members have expressed concern that another sub-committee will just impede change. Change management theory, on the other hand, tells us that effective change must come from a group external to the body being changed. The renewal working group has been deliberately set up with broad terms of reference, and one specific instruction — 'do not let the process get bogged down in yet another sub-committee'.

The group consists of Mairéad Browne, (ALIA vice-president/president-elect); Robyn Collins (State Library of South Australia); Helen Mandl (University of Wollongong); Jennefer Nicholson (acting ALIA executive director); and myself, as ALIA president.

The key function of this group will be to carry the impetus for change forward. Members, the leadership committee, and the officers of both ALIA and ACLIS have already put a considerable amount of work into the details of change. This work will form the basis of the progress of the renewal working group. Amongst other matters, the group will

look at the new Association's structure, issues of accreditation, relationships with related organisations, and very importantly, the wholehearted inclusion of institutions into the new Association.

Institutional participation and support will be critical to the success of the new Association. The new Association must engender institutional enthusiasm if it is to be successful. This will be necessary for financial support; for the time that institutions allow for their employees to spend on Association business; and for the institutions' political support.

Will the renewal working group, and ultimately, ALIA General Council please everyone? Probably not — we have 8000 members and 8000 opinions on what should be done. We are aiming to set up a robust, flexible framework in which individual members and groups of members (both personal and institutional) can carry out the functions that they think their professional association should carry out. In my opinion, the time, effort and money spent on 'Association business' should be minimal — the national or state bureaucracies should be as close to invisible as possible while supporting all members in the pursuit of their individual and collective aims.

Much of the most effective work of our (or any) Association happens at the grass-roots level — through networking, mentoring, training, educating and sharing experiences and ideas. We certainly need a state and national structure. We need this for accreditation, standards setting, lobbying, publications and a myriad of other functions — but we need a structure that serves local needs at the same time. ALIA has traditionally struck this balance well, and the new Association must continue to do so.

So, what of the future? The renewal working group will be presenting a series of recommendations to ALIA General Council, which will be communicated as expeditiously as possible. One of the most important of these will be support for incorporation — a move that must supported by a majority of members.

Over the next twelve months, *inCite* will include a series of articles about the progress towards a new Association. In addition I will, along with the new executive director and other office bearers, seek to meet ALIA members at every opportunity. I look forward to meeting with you, hearing of your concerns and needs, and working together towards a new Association. ■

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