

X + Y = attracting new generations of library professionals



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Feedback to your Board of Directors

Do you have an idea, compliment or concern about your Association? Contact any director and ideas will be reviewed at each Board meeting.

E-mail to feedback@alia.org.au will be automatically forwarded to all Board members.

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I recently attended the International Association of Technology University Libraries (IATUL) conference in Krakow, Poland and as part of the study tour visited the Jagiellonian University's Institute of Information and Library Science. There are 500 students enrolled in courses offered by the Institute and the young graduates readily find work, we were told, because of the reputation of the Institute across Poland. Although this picture may seem very different to the current situation in Australia, the importance placed on the reputation of the Institute and its courses reminded me of the important role that ALIA plays in recognising library and information studies courses in Australia.

ALIA makes a major contribution to the library and information sector in Australia through its role as an education standards body. ALIA provides an educational framework including the development and review of education policy statements, course recognition visits, and annual course returns. Courses are considered against library and information science theory outlined in the education policy statements, and the list of ALIA-recognised courses is made available to people interested in getting qualifications to work in the sector. Employers are able to accept Australian library qualifications on the basis of a candidate's 'eligibility for associate membership of ALIA' and graduates who have studied an ALIA-recognised course are automatically accorded professional status, or in the case of library technicians, para-professional status.

Courses offered by educational institutions vary quite markedly and reflect the society in which information workers operate today. ALIA's recognition process must be sufficiently flexible to encompass the broad range of offerings while still ensuring that the core knowledge, skills and attributes are addressed. While it is not a case of comparing apples and oranges, it does recognise that not all apples are the same.

Before ALIA incorporated as a public company in 2000, there was a Board of Education that addressed ALIA's role as an education standards body, guided by Object 3 'To ensure the high standard of personnel engaged in information provision and foster their professional interests and aspirations'. More recently, this role has been pursued by the Board of Directors and the LISEKA Project. During the LISEKA consultation process, members made it quite clear that ALIA should retain its role as a standards body for the profession, and at the last Board of Directors meeting in May 2004, an Education Reference Group was established to be chaired by the ALIA vice-president. Membership also includes an educator and a practitioner, with the executive director or delegate as an *ex offi-*

cio member. The Education Reference Group will make recommendations to the Board on matters relating to ALIA's education policy statements, the quality of programs for which initial and ongoing recognition is sought, and provide assistance to Australian institutions seeking recognition. I am delighted that this group has been formed to support the Board of Directors in what I believe is a very important role for the Association.

The Association also needs to work with educators and employers to encourage suitable young students to enrol in these courses. We know that many of the librarians currently working in libraries today are likely to retire within the next ten to fifteen years and we are faced with a situation where, unlike in Poland, we need to actively recruit and develop our young librarians for positions of leadership in the future.

Natalie Blanchard in her Frontline column in March 2003 introduced us to such a group of enthusiastic, passionate young library professionals whilst she also reminded us that the librarian is an endangered species. This is not because there is no future role for librarians and information workers — far from it — but we do need to attract new generations to the profession and in turn to the Association. Vicki Whitmell, previously executive director of the Canadian Library Association, has recently been in Australia working with some university libraries to promote succession-planning strategies for libraries and information organisations. ALIA has also been aware of this requirement for some time and has already been active in developing strategies to attract young librarians.

The ALIA New Graduates Group was formed to facilitate networking for the new generation of library professionals and the New Librarian's Symposium to be held in December 2004 provides a forum to consider career and life planning. However, it is time — or even overdue — for everyone in the library and information profession, in the work place, in library and information science education, and within the Association to actively plan for generational change. Numerous articles on this topic inform us that these workers bring very different values to the workplace and do not automatically associate working in the profession with joining an association, so as the baby boomers make way for generation X and Y, we will need to continue to develop strategies to attract younger members.

The challenge ahead is how to encourage young school-leavers to see library and information work as an interesting career choice, how to offer relevant educational experiences that prepare these information workers for the dynamic world of work, and how to ensure that our Association remains relevant to these new generations. ■