

Your voice

What is a State Librarian?

Yes, I support the value of professional training and qualifications. Do you need them to run a large library? Maybe, but not as much as a range of other skills and attributes.

Some of the best library administrators do not have professional qualifications but enhance the title of librarian. Some of the worst are professionally qualified but defile the name.

Increasingly, appointment to head a state, university or other large library requires political, business and visionary skills more than professional knowledge. Appointees without an understanding of, and empathy for, libraries will not succeed but they are attributes that can be learned.

The State Library of NSW has made a courageous decision to appoint Regina Sutton. She brings skills and attributes which are necessary for the fulfilment of the Library's aspirations. They are also skills that will enrich the profession. Isn't it better that she be known as the State Librarian than as the chief operating officer?

Perhaps we should be turning our attention to the dearth of suitably qualified applicants, especially for senior positions. The future will see more appointments at all levels of the 'professionally unqualified'. This will reflect the rapidity of change in the knowledge environment and the shortcomings of library education.

**John Shipp, University of Sydney Librarian;
ALiA President 1998; CAUL President
1992-1996; Unqualified librarian**

What's in a name?

Writers to Your Voice [*inCite* August 2006] posed the question "What is a State Librarian"? Obviously the lawmakers of the past thought it was of great importance as when they drafted the *NSW Library Act 1939* that they specified the person holding the executive job be referred to as State Librarian.

What these august persons would not have foreseen was that the profession would have evolved to encompass such a diverse range of services and issues and that a narrow professional education would not necessarily equip librarians for the challenges of the 21st century.

The library and information profession actively embraces the ideas of other industries and promotes itself as being uniquely able to integrate this knowledge into practice. Despite this some seem unwilling to extend this philosophy to a non-librarian in an executive position.

Each successive State Librarian has bought a unique flavour to their role to the ultimate benefit of the people of NSW. The previous State Librarian, Dagmar Schmidmaier, provided a new strategic direction for the State Library of NSW and set in place a number of initiatives to assist public libraries in the delivery of high quality services to their local communities. She continues her high-level leadership as President of ALiA.

Regina Sutton, the newly appointed NSW State Librarian and Chief Executive brings tremendous business acumen and qualifications to this role, coupled



with a diverse and successful leadership portfolio. Her support team includes over 100 librarians, 70 library technicians as well as highly skilled administrative and curatorial staff.

The members of Public Libraries NSW – Country welcome Regina to this senior executive position. We were delighted that she was able to attend our recent conference in Coonabarabran only days after taking up this role and we look forward to working with her in the future.

**Ewan Tolhurst, Chairman; Jan Richards,
Secretary; Public Libraries NSW – Country**

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Ready, set, go! [cont...]

- ▶ to act in the best interests of the association as a whole.

The Board has two major tasks: to ensure that ALiA delivers services to support members in accordance with the strategic plan and that the business and financial aspects of the association are well managed.

To achieve a skill set for good Board participation, members need knowledge of, and some experience in:

- complex financial management;
- the legal responsibilities of boards and corporations;
- policy development and strategic planning;
- monitoring business activities and decision-making; and
- communication skills.

ALiA is committed to assisting members to develop these skills and we will be discussing Board preparedness at regional National Advisory Congress meetings. We hope that a one-day event can be organised by ALiA in 2006 to enable members to increase their skills. We also encourage ALiA members to attend events and courses such as the Australian Institute of Company Directors courses (see <http://www.companydirectors.com.au>) and Getting on Board seminars (<http://www.womenonboards.org.au>). I encourage all members who are interested in running for the Board to think about preparing themselves through courses or local events. ALiA's continuing success depends in no small way on having a strong and effective Board. By preparing candidates we will benefit ALiA and the general business knowledge of the profession.

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Don't be jealous, be zealous

I would love to know why the push for a State Government Award Precedent stopped at the borders of New South Wales. It has been a while now and the other states are lagging behind in terms of real wages, conditions, professional recognition etc. Surely there must be a multitude of frustrated librarians out there seething at this injustice – or am I the only one? If ALIA campaigned for this change, they would be taken more seriously as a professional lobby group.

Gregory Segal, Melbourne

Phil Teece, ALIA's industrial relations adviser, replies:

Proper recognition of Australian librarians is a constant objective for ALIA and wage justice is an important element. But the Association is not a trade union and cannot play a direct role in industrial cases. The New South Wales improvements, to which Gregory refers, originated in a formal Pay Equity Inquiry ordered by the state government after lobbying from various parties, including ALIA. At that time, only NSW was prepared to conduct such an Inquiry. The actual pay rises were won in a later Test Case for librarians conducted by the relevant union before a Full Bench of the NSW Industrial Relations Commission. Since then, several other states have conducted Pay Equity Inquiries after further lobbying and changes of government. On each occasion ALIA has made formal submissions on behalf of librarians in that state, the latest example being Western Australia. Those submissions can be found on ALIA's website. It is indisputable that the NSW case has encouraged improvements beyond its direct area of legal application, notably in parts of the private sector. However, ALIA would like to see more of this and continues to advocate to that end, despite continuing problems associated with the profession's highly feminised characteristics. As it is, official aggregate salary levels for Australian librarians are better than they were. Librarians currently receive 120 per cent of the Australian average wage, compared with other feminised professions like Child Care Co-ordinators (95 per cent), Counsellors (117 per cent), Primary School Teachers (120 per cent), Psychologists (140 per cent), Registered Nurses (120 per cent) and Social Workers (113 per cent).

Boat-building for our children

"Compassionate early parenting is like a well-built boat, protecting the child from the sea of all subsequent disappointments, temptations, frustrations, and sorrows. Blaming teenage crime on peer pressure...or anything else in current culture...is like blaming a storm for overturning a child's poorly built boat...do we blame the wind and the rain...or do we start building better boats for all of our children?" (*Nature or Nurture?*, Jan Hunt)

Programs such as those outlined in Tania Barry's article 'Powerful Partnerships' (*inCite*,

August 2006), are helping build our children's boats. During training as a Butterfly Wings facilitator (<http://www.butterflywings.com.au>) it became clear to me how much money the government has to spend on special needs programs in schools, targeting those children whose early literacy 'boat' has holes. If money is spent on early childhood programs such as those mentioned in Tania's article, perhaps there wouldn't be as great a need for the programs later in a child's life when perhaps it's too late to repair the holes.

It's time that libraries recognised the 'boat building' they do for their communities' children and promote this throughout their communities and their colleagues as Tania has done, not only with her article but also with her presentations at conferences (See *neXt* 2005 at <http://e-prints.alia.org.au/archive/00000056/>).

Well done to Tania and the other libraries that are building boats and giving children a chance to sail the seas in something more than a dinghy!!

Sharon Uthmann

<http://alia.org.au/~suthmann>
<http://dunnandwilson.blogspot.com/>

All thanks to ALIA!

I just want to share my wonderful news with ALIA. I contacted Marie Murphy at National Office more than three years ago, wanting to find out what the ALIA requirements were in regard to my overseas qualifications.

Marie guided me through the process of becoming a professional Associate and also put me in touch with Dr Trish Milne at the UC, who advised me to enrol in the Knowledge Management postgraduate course.

I have just completed the course and received the award of Master of Knowledge Management at the end of last month. It was a very nice and festive ceremony held in the Great Hall of Parliament House.

Thank you once again for to Marie for her professional input and encouragement; it took a while before I could join Australian professionals but I do now feel fully acknowledged and a member of the group in a true sense.

Renata Dyer, Reference Librarian, Defence Library Service



Views on 'Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources'

After identifying and discussing the five major landscapes in the thought-provoking Environmental Scan report (2003), OCLC has gratified us with another enlightening survey, *Perceptions of Libraries and Information*

Resources. Although intended primarily for OCLC members and staff, the content of this document deserves not only a wider diffusion among the library community, but more importantly, it needs to be discussed in library schools, library associations and other forums because it raises issues crucial to the profession. It was high time to gather up-to-date feedback from library patrons about the usage trends of various information sources: from the traditional print to electronic ones, how they perceive the library as a brand and what advice they have to give us. It also sheds interesting light on the information seeking-behaviour patterns across the six countries, namely: United States, Great Britain, Australia, Singapore, India and Canada. Since customers should be at the heart of all library operations, policymakers and library managers must pay heed to them and act accordingly.

What of the library and information workers themselves? What is required now is a third document surveying LIS workers from all continents about the technological and other changes which are positively or negatively affecting their profession and what they believe needs to be done. I suggest that such a survey should encompass Asian countries, such as South Korea, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and China; selected African and Middle Eastern countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Botswana, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt; and South America where library schools, libraries and cultural institutions are firmly established. A more global perspective might thus be obtained.

I congratulate the OCLC team for this excellent report and I encourage them to gather the views of a representative sample of LIS professionals worldwide on this report and what needs to be done. I humbly believe this is the missing information that remains to be tackled. I trust OCLC will do it superbly. In the meantime, I invite library and information professionals worldwide to study this report seriously and draw appropriate conclusions.

Ibrahim Ramjaun, AALIA, IFLA/OCLCFellow, Mauritius

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, or faxed to 02 6282 2249, or posted to: Your voice, ALIA, PO Box 6335, Kingston 2604. Please include your name and postal address with your letter or e-mail.

Letters will be accepted for publication until the 18th of the month.