

Frontline



Dagmar Schmidmaier AM
ALIA President

Feedback to your Board of Directors

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

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

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The year has got off to a great start professionally with the Information Online conference held in Sydney in 30 January – 1 February. Well attended by participants and vendors, the conference had a terrific buzz throughout the three days. Two satellite events held after the conference were also well attended, as was the ALIA stand. Congratulations to the conference committee and to the ALIA staff who worked with them to make the conference such a success.

At the Online conference dinner I was very pleased to present an ALIA Fellowship to Elizabeth Swan for her contribution to the profession, particularly her support and encouragement for special librarians and their role, as well as her drive and commitment to the Online conference. The full citation for her Fellowship can be read on the ALIA website. [<http://alia.org.au/awards/fellowships/recipients.html>]

I am pleased to share my column with your Vice-president

Roxanne Missingham this month, but before handing over I would like to encourage you all to vote in the forthcoming election for the ALIA Board. The voting papers are included with this issue. I am happy to see so many strong candidates who wish to contribute to the work of the Association through the Board.

Meeting **future** librarians

This year I have been fortunate enough to meet students from two intakes into library education. At Charles Sturt University I met the 120 or so students who are enrolled in the Bachelor of Applied Science (Library and Information Management) and Bachelor of Applied Science (Library and Information Management)/Bachelor of Information Technology. The students come from a range of backgrounds: while a number are recent Year 12 graduates, many are library technicians upgrading their qualifications (including my niece) and others have come from a range of careers, including education. It was terrific to workshop with such a large group of bright, engaged and interested students ready to take on the challenges to library professionals.

The Canberra Institute of Technology's intake of library technicians (around 50 students) was similarly inspiring and also represented a range of ages and experiences. There were approximately 30 students at the orientation session. They are very fortunate in CIT's enthusiastic and well-informed staff and to be able to practice their library skills in a new model library (launched last year). The students were very interested in the contribution they could

make to literacy and reading around the world.

ALIA members have for some years expressed concern at the need to ensure that there is a supply of future library professionals – librarians and library technicians. Workforce planning is indeed a key issue for the profession, not just in terms of new entrants to the profession but also in terms of overall labour market trends in Australia. Recent reports suggest that the general Australian labour market has grown more rapidly in the areas of white collar and professional employment. The Intergenerational Report and subsequent Productivity Commission projections predict that the Australian labour supply will tighten significantly over the next 20 years. The Australian Treasury predicts that there will be a downward trend in the numbers of Australians aged 15 and under. Perhaps most significantly, Access Economics (for the Department of Health and Ageing) predicts that during the decade after 2020 the working-age population will grow by 125 000 per annum, a dramatic decline from the current rate of increase of around 170 000.

Given the radical change likely in numbers of labour market entrants, it is critical that libraries consider their

workforce planning both in terms of new entrants to the professions but also look for innovative ways to tap older and more experienced workers. The concept of a library fully staffed by ongoing permanent employees may well become outmoded, as the need for more flexible workforce patterns matched to a different management of demand from our users, in addition to project management through flexible teams.

I encourage you to think about education and the future library workforce. The ALIA Board has been discussing these issues and have identified it as a key topic for the 2007 National Policy Congress meetings: I look forward to receiving your input.

Achieving a quality workforce is a major challenge, so it is essential that higher education institutions produce able, informed and creative/innovative graduates. Both the new student groups I have visited so far this year have bright, dynamic entrants to LIS education. For tertiary institutions the significant challenge is to retain and develop them. As practitioners we need to ensure our workplaces are vibrant, fulfilling and flexible enough to meet the needs of these new workers.

Roxanne Missingham