READING BETWEEN THE LINES: THE FEDERAL BUDGET 2011

There's rarely big news in the Federal Budget for libraries. The only library that is guaranteed a mention is the federally-funded National Library of Australia. Having said that, there is always plenty to ponder if you look at the finer detail of Federal Department spending. Each year, we plough through hundreds of pages of statements and figures to bring you, our members, the Federal Budget library-related information you're unlikely to get anywhere else.

This year the key topics for libraries in the Federal Budget were the National Broadband Network (NBN), internet filtering, cyber-safety, education, early childhood development and adult literacy.

The big ticket item for the Department of Broadband, Communication and the Digital Economy (DBCDE) was the NBN. ALIA continues to lobby for libraries to be key partners in helping to maximise the benefits of the NBN roll-out in local communities. There were a couple of opportunities for us in the Budget – one, to contribute to the *Digital Regions Initiative*; the other, to work closely with the NBN regional coordinators.

Also under the DBCDE banner was the announcement that the Government will not proceed with the *Voluntary Internet Filtering Grants Program*, worth $9.6 million over three years. Not quite the statement we would like to hear from Government about abandoning its plans for mandatory ISP-level internet filtering, but we felt it to be a nod in the right direction. There was a strong emphasis too on cyber-safety, again an area where libraries can play a key role, and an area in which ALIA has made its voice heard as one of the founders of the Safer Internet Group.

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations announced R*eward Payments for Great Teachers*, which we hope will recognise great teacher librarians, and *Teach Next*, an initiative to bring experienced professionals into the teaching profession in specialised subject areas where there are teacher shortages.

With the *National Year of Reading 2012* in our sights, and all the buzz around the fact that, according to the 2006 *Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*, 46% of Australians struggle with the basics of everyday literacy, the Budget happily focused on literacy from early years through to adult, including literacy initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We were particularly pleased to see the Government provide $20 million over four years to provide 13,000 additional training places for workers with low language, literacy and numeracy skills, and $143.1 million over four years to fund 30,000 places for job seekers under the *Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program*. In addition, the 2,000 *Broadband Kiosks for Seniors* received a $10.4 million boost to maintain their work around information literacy.

Research in higher education came under the spotlight in the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Budget. *Excellence in Research Australia* will go through a review process in 2011-2012, and funding for the *Collaborative Research Networks Program* was cut by $20.7 million.

The Arts Council of Australia was granted $10 million over five years to support young and emerging artists, with grants of up to $80,000 for new artistic works, including literature. However, funding for *Get Reading!*, the annual promotion of books and reading, was reduced by $1.6 million.

For the National Library of Australia and National Archives, the Budget was about continuing and completing existing projects, with little change to funding.

ALIA Executive Director Sue Hutley commented, "This year's Budget held no surprises. We would have liked to have seen greater recognition of the role of libraries, particularly in the area of early learning, and a mention of their potential as partners in the roll out of the NBN, but overall we came out of it unscathed and in the current economic climate, that's a result."

For a more detailed account of the Budget, log on to **membership.alia.org.au/scripts/cgiip.exe/WService=ALIA/ccms.r?pageid=39&CallerID=10337** and then select "2011-12 Federal Budget".

This budget brief was prepared for inCite by Sue McKerracher of The Library Agency. The Library Agency have developed and delivered a range of programs and materials for library advocacy for ALIA. Sue can be contacted at sue@thelibraryagency.org.au