

FRONTLINE

This month I would like to present a few thoughts for your consideration and advice.

NATIONAL INFORMATION STRATEGY

Setting an information agenda for all Australians is becoming more critical as each year goes by, and, given the change in federal government, we hope that it will become a feature of Coalition policy.

A national information strategy would help ensure that all citizens have the opportunity to access and utilise our nation's knowledge bank. It would address some of the issues we face around copyright, open access, big data (including research data, data and text mining, and linked data), broadband, cybersafety, ebooks and e-lending, online education, preservation of the human record, and literacy in all its forms – reading and writing, digital literacy and information literacy.

Of course, a national information strategy has many stakeholders, in addition to library and information professionals, and information has many different aspects – multiple formats, multiple uses, multiple delivery platforms. It would be difficult to grapple all this into one national strategy, but isn't this essential if we are to succeed in the global knowledge economy?

The new government will have many issues to contend with. We can not only hope that a national information strategy will be one of them, but also lobby to help ensure that it reaches the top of the pile.

CHANGING OUR LANGUAGE

With a new Coalition government in Canberra and a shift of power towards the Liberals in the states and territories, we need to think about the language we use to describe what we do. 'Social justice' and 'social inclusion' will be less important than 'enterprise' and 'knowledge economy'.

Our values and beliefs remain the same, but how we express ourselves needs to change. This will be challenging but we already have some good assets.

We have the return on investment report for public libraries, produced by the ALIA Public Libraries Advisory Committee, and ALIA has partnered with Health Libraries Inc, Health Libraries Australia, AGLIN, ALLA and SGS Economics to develop a dollar value figure for the return on investment of health, government, law and corporate libraries. These reports will be published in late October/early November.

We have the case for literacy, developed for the National Year of Reading 2012, and an early years strategy for public libraries, again under development by our ALIA Public Libraries Advisory Committee. Both of these talk

in terms of the business case for investment, reducing the cost to society of disadvantage, unemployment and delinquency.

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A NEW RESEARCH AGENDA

An important theme for 2014 will be research, and we look forward to working with our Research Advisory Committee to develop a three to five year ALIA Research Agenda. Our concern is that there may be significant gaps in LIS-related studies, but without carrying out an environment scan, it is difficult to know if these exist and where they lie. We will be seeking expressions of interest for an initial project to map the LIS research landscape.

This work will enable us to create our ALIA Research Agenda. The agenda will support our ALIA grants and will assist researchers seeking funding from other sources, especially government.

We see this as an 18-month to two-year project to reach consensus on our Research Agenda. We will then review our ALIA grants and identify any further potential investment in essential LIS research. We will also be conferring with colleagues in academia about joint lobbying of government to support further investigations into important issues affecting the profession.

By early 2015, we will have a revitalised approach to research, which will support new content for our scholarly journals, *Australian Library Journal* and *Australian Academic and Research Libraries*, and will enable us to seek further donations to the ALIA Research Fund, which has been in abeyance for the last few years.

FIT FOR PURPOSE CONSTITUTION

At our last Board meeting, we discussed proposed changes to the ALIA Constitution, as it has not been reviewed for several years. The changes are few. For example, it is proposed that we reduce the quorum for our AGM to 11 from 21. We hold the AGM in Canberra each May and it is always a challenge to achieve a quorum. (Thank you to our ACT members who turn out every year to support the Association). We have looked at holding the AGM in other cities, but as it has been tied in with a three day Board

meeting, when the old Directors depart and the new ones arrive, the cost of hiring meeting rooms and flying people to different places has been prohibitive. We are also looking at including a clause that people can join the AGM via electronic means, either video or teleconference.

We had considerable discussion concerning the length of term of the appointment of Directors, currently two years, with the potential to be re-elected for one further two year term, making four years in total. I was fortunate to have had three years on the Board before I took up my presidency in May and so I 'hit the ground running'. Fellow Board members have said they find it takes a year to get to grips with the complexities of the Association, the second year they are better able to contribute to setting the direction, and they would welcome a third year to see through the initiatives they have helped get off the ground.

We could increase the length of appointment from two years to three or four years, but the contrary view from our Directors was that many individuals and employers

would find this extended time commitment too challenging and this would greatly reduce the number of people who could apply to join the Board.

We would welcome your thoughts about this (email boardofdirectors@alia.org.au), and about the possibility of changing the term of office of President from one year to two years. I have completed my two consecutive terms of office and will leave the Board in May 2014. I am pleased with how much we have been able to achieve and set in place for my 12 months in the role, but I am sure future Presidents would find a two year term would give them even greater scope to deliver against ALIA's strategic plan.



JULIE RAE
ALIA President

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