

INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

I am fortunate to have one of the best jobs in the library and information profession. As a lecturer in librarianship at Charles Sturt University I have some great parts to my job and one of these is our study visits, where we have a week visiting libraries.

THESE SURVEYS PROVIDE A TERRIFIC RETURN ON INVESTMENT FOR ALIA AND THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY ALLIANCE.

This last month I took 40 library students to Brisbane visiting some of the best libraries in the country. During the week I heard from a number of librarians about the work they do, the services the libraries provide and plans for the future. Many spoke of the good work ALIA has done in advocacy and the research ALIA has undertaken recently in the areas of return on investment and ebooks.

Let's take a look at the ebook study. The ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance, formerly known as the ALIA Public Libraries Advisory Committee, carried out two surveys, the first in January 2013, the second in May 2014. The results paint a clear picture of the difficulties faced by libraries in providing their users with ebook collections.

The key findings of the comparative surveys included:

- Nearly all Australian public libraries lend ebooks; up from 69% in 2013 to 97% in 2014.
- On average, ebooks make up 5–6% of a public library's collection.
- In 53% of public libraries, ebooks account for less than 1% of loans, and in almost all, they account for less than 5% of loans.
- Between half and two thirds of libraries are less than satisfied or not satisfied with the choice of bestsellers, books by Australians, popular authors and overall content.

From these and other findings, we were able to produce an attractive 10 page report and to circulate this to members and to the media. As a result, we had coverage in *Australian Policy Online*, *The Conversation* and on Sydney independent radio.

We were able to explain that, while libraries are experiencing demand for ebook lending, there remains an underlying issue with sourcing content from the major publishers. Fears of piracy and a negative impact on sales has meant the big players have resisted engaging with libraries until very recently and even now, some of these publishers will not sell ebooks to libraries in Australia.

These surveys and the report that ALIA published portray the real life situation and, with all costs covered in house, have provided a terrific return on investment for the Association and the Australian Public Library Alliance.

Reports produced in house with limited resources are at one end of ALIA's research continuum, at the other end are the academic research projects that result in peer reviewed conference papers and articles for our scholarly publications, *Australian Library Journal* and *Australian Academic and Research Libraries*. In some years, ALIA contributes more than \$60,000 to library and information sector research through commissioned reports and grants.

We see the Association's role in the research environment as underpinning library and information sector research through the work of our Research Advisory Committee, our relationships with Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative, Australian Research Council (ARC) and other bodies, our grants program and the ALIA Research Fund. We also commission and create research as described above, provide channels for its dissemination and promote non-ALIA LIS research through *ALIA Weekly*, *INCITE* and our social media.

The ALIA Board commissioned a study of the LIS research landscape at the end of December 2013 and this is due to be delivered this month, to enable us to develop an ALIA Research Agenda, which will help guide our investment in LIS research in the future. It will also help academics and researchers seek funding from other bodies, by stating that their proposals are linked to this National Research Agenda.

ALIA already makes a significant contribution to a healthy research environment in the library and information sector. Our aim for the future is to provide leadership and support for all our Members – academics and practitioners – who value research and the innovation and best practice that follow in its wake.



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