

French fields for Mireille

Mireille Eid, a reference librarian at Macquarie University, has recently returned from the first Australian exchange with a French librarian. Mireille worked for 6 months as serials librarian at the Bibliothèque Interuniversitaire de Médecine de France, during which time she visited many libraries in Paris exploring French national treasures and finding out about the latest in European technology. She encouraged bilingual professional and cultural exchanges between the two countries by speaking to many groups and by speaking to individuals about Australian libraries — and about the fact that kangaroos, unlike dogs, are not generally kept as pets!

The major issues that the French research

libraries she visited are facing at the moment can be put into three categories: Heritage, public access and, of course, applications of technological advancements.

- **Heritage**

The heritage question arises with the replacing of the Bibliothèque Nationale with the new *Grande Bibliothèque de France* and the focus which such a major national project brings to the collections of existing historical libraries e.g. the Sorbonne's library, the National Library, the Museum of Natural History's library and many others. This also relates to the need to retain a strong French identity within the European Economic Community after 1993.

- **Public access**

The concept of open public access in research or university libraries is fairly new in France and many libraries are now seeing this as a move towards modernisation. It is a slow process as space is an extreme problem, particularly in Paris, and staff numbers cannot be increased. This issue is causing quite a stir among researchers and scholars who imagine the well-kept collections disintegrating in the hands of the public. As President Mitterand puts it, 'even the *Grande Bibliothèque de France* will be accessible to all', a far cry from the Bibliothèque Nationale's rigid rule that no one goes through the door unless they carry a pass from a research institution.

- **Technology**

It is heartening to see that the libraries' need for automation can be incorporated in the country's technological innovation. Each household in France is entitled to a computer terminal with their telephone, the Minitel. This allows them to find out anything from a telephone number, as with a telephone directory, to daily job lists, banking or train reservations. Some libraries saw this as a chance to make their catalogue publicly accessible through the Minitel. This assumes, of course, that the library's catalogue is computerised and that the policy of public access is in operation, as is the case with the library of la Villette. Many libraries are currently in the process of automation and each one considers this option as part of its public access policy.

An interesting pilot project taking place also with wide ranging implications is *Foudre*, the digitised document delivery service. Six libraries within a small radius are participating and it is envisaged to extend this project on an international scale through the EEC's Group for Electronic Document Interchange. Many other technological applications are underway, such as the automation of the *Catalogue Collectif National*, electronic mail and interlibrary loans.

Anyone interested in French libraries or an exchange in France could contact Mireille on (02) 805 7566.

Mireille Eid □



TV Moscow

Mireille was in Moscow, too. Here she leads the demonstration in Red Square.

ALIA is flattered... continued from 1...

Unfortunately, while ALIA's submission argued strongly for Commonwealth assistance to multilingual public library services, the white paper falls to deliver on this issue.

The white paper relates to the Education, Employment and Training portfolio. Despite changes as a result of criticism of the green paper, it shows little understanding of the nature of bilingualism and the needs of people whose first language is not English. It retains a fairly narrow focus on formal education, and does not place this in its social context. It emphasises literacy ahead of language, and singles out eight languages for priority treatment; it has a strong emphasis on the economic value of language and literacy, and is weak in dealing with social and human needs and rights.

The new policy proposes greatly enhanced funding for literacy and for funding for English as a second language (ESL) and for Aboriginal languages. It establishes an Australian Language and Literacy Council.

Libraries, specifically excluded from the green paper, have now been restored in the white paper. Goal 4 of the new policy specifies:

Language services provided through interpreting and translating, print and electronic media and libraries should be expanded and improved.

However, nothing more tangible than advice is offered to libraries (p 21):

Libraries contribute to literacy and ESL learning and promote skills in languages other than English by enhancing access to appropriate print and electronic resources. Library acquisitions policies should contribute more effectively to implementation of the other three goals of the ALLP by ensuring that library collections respond to the linguistic, cultural and educational needs of the relevant community.

Well, yes — we knew that.

The white paper in fact abandons the commitment of the National Policy on Languages to the support of libraries. As such, it is a retreat from the NPL, and must be deplored as such.

Derek Whitehead

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