

Letters

VCE — a call to arms

Dear Editor,

In Victoria in recent times, there has been considerable comment about the pressures imposed on library services by the demands of the new Victorian Certificate of Education. An article in *The Age* (5 April 1991, p 1) samples some library opinion on this question. The picture painted is of various isolated outposts of empire valiantly fending off the barbarian hordes, with a strong suggestion that the response will have to be a resort to the tactics of denial.

It seems to me that this is a time, not for hand wringing, but for generalship; in short, a time for the profession to be heard by the libraries under siege, by a bemused public and by a disgracefully neglectful government. Surely, ALIA has a genuine opportunity to 'lead from the front' here by canvassing the issues in the popular press and by adopting a mediating role between the various libraries — public, academic and school — and other bodies involved (the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Board in particular). Certainly,

government deserves a generous serve en passant, the difficulties being faced by the State Library of Victoria being justification enough. Who better to weigh in than the body representing the library profession?

Hugh Green

Senior Librarian
Mentone Grammar School

prominently displayed in their MP's office. The local Member may also be pleased to be reminded that he or she can borrow from the library and use its other services as well.

John Brudenall

Mentors — a time for action

Dear Editor,

I would like to comment on John Levett's Front Line of 25 March, in which he outlined the desirability of a mentoring scheme for new graduates and inexperienced members of the profession. I have always supported this approach, and this ties in with some other items which have appeared in *inCite* of late.

Firstly, letters from new graduates Ian Delaney and Christine Jones have bemoaned the lack of employment opportunities for those without experience. While a mentoring scheme would not necessarily create more jobs, the experience and advice that a mentor could bring to a new graduate seeking work, I believe, would be valuable and could remove some of the frustration that people like Ian and Christine undoubtedly feel.

Secondly, I see in the Board of Education Report (also 25 March) that the Employment Sub-Committee is considering the issues of Employment Ethics, Graduate Destinations and a survey of the workforce via advertisements in newspapers. I believe that investigations in these directions are long overdue and I hope the findings of the committee will throw some light onto these three contentious issues.

They may also like to take up the President's (and Margaret Trask's) suggestion on mentoring. While I have only vague answers on the administration and logistics of such a scheme, I suggest it may best be run as a joint effort between ALIA and library schools in each State. Therefore, the Board of Education is ideally placed to put forward some concrete suggestions before the seed of the idea withers. Let's get a pilot project in place!

Malcolm Traill

Fisher Library
University of Sydney

Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works Library

Dear Editor,

Coral Mary Ware (*inCite*, 25 March 1991) states that the Board of Works Library is to be closed in June this year. No such decision has been made to close the library.

The library has served the Board well over many years. However, consistent with the Board's corporatisation thrust and its Framework for the Future, a consultant has been engaged to review the operations of the library and to investigate and identify the Board's library and information needs in a changing environment.

The review will explore alternative ways of satisfying those needs, including consideration of the Board's existing library services and services contracted from other libraries or information agencies.

The consultant's report is due by 30 September 1991 and it is expected that the preferred alternative for the provision of library and information services to meet the Board's needs will be implemented by 1 January 1992.

Netta Griffin

Manager Corporate Services
Board of Works

A PR idea for public libraries

Dear Editor,

Often people in the community in need of information approach the office staff of the local MP either at the State or Federal level. They think of the MP's office as a likely source of information, but overlook the local public library.

It would be very helpful to the staff in the MP's office to know just what is available from the local public library, because quite often they will need to redirect the constituent's query to an appropriate source. Often, the public library should be able to help and this should, in turn, help the image and reputation of the library.

Therefore, in order to make sure that the best local source of information is not overlooked, all public libraries are urged to make sure the library's phone number is



Anne Harrison Award 1991

Call for Applications

Reminder

Applications close on 31 May 1991. Guidelines for Applicants and further information are available from: Katherine Keily, Secretary, Anne Harrison Trust Fund Administrators, c/- Medical Library, Westmead Hospital, Westmead, NSW, 2145, telephone (02) 633 6262.

and the ability to apply these to a new job, they seemed to want to find someone with experience in doing exactly the same as the advertised job.

I was fortunate, after looking for some months, to be offered the position of librarian at Blacktown Hospital. Here I found that experience from other jobs and interests was important, including the ability to communicate with people at all levels of library expertise, and a basic knowledge of computer hardware and software.

As well as running the library alone, I introduced various services such as Medline and ABN to the library. I discovered that few librarians, even those with many years experience, knew, for example, how to set up an AUSTPAC connection, or even knew what it was. I learnt how to find out about things at the source (e.g. find out about AUSTPAC from Telecom) and, most importantly, I learnt a lot from other people.

The librarian at Mt Druitt Hospital had previously been the librarian at Blacktown Hospital, and was able to fill me in on details of specific policies and procedures, both of the library and of the institution. The staff at Westmead Hospital library took me in for a week at the beginning to give me a grounding in health science librarianship, and provided continual guidance from then on. In addition I found great community spirit among librarians in the Health Libraries Section of ALIA and the GRATIS interlibrary loan network.

Because I was helped so much as a new librarian by other people, I was particularly interested in John Levert's article on mentoring. I felt an initial spark of hope that with a mentoring system people might be more willing to employ inexperienced staff, in the knowledge that there was someone there to guide them. I ended up discouraged, though, because in my experience library employers want experienced staff even if they will be working in a hierarchy with many other librarians who would be able to give them guidance and assistance. With such caution, I don't see how the promise of a mentor outside the workplace would make much difference.

My other reason for feeling less optimistic is, as Christine Jones and Tom McKeon (*inCite* Vol 12, No. 1) have both mentioned, employment prospects for librarians (both inexperienced and experienced) depend on the availability of jobs. When there are few jobs, an experienced librarian who is otherwise equal to an inexperienced librarian will get the job.

One response from some staff at the University of NSW to the oversupply of library staff is to encourage students to consider non-traditional library jobs (such as indexing, or work with online databases). If this is likely to be a long-term problem, then limiting the number of students who are admitted to library courses may be necessary to decrease the oversupply and increase the quality of library graduates.

Glenda Browne

Disaster for *inCite* 5

Carbonised in postal crash

Almost 3500 copies of *inCite* were destroyed when an Australia Post semi-trailer overturned and burst into flames near Albury on 15 April. Among the 40 000 items on the truck were all the *inCites* for Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Their loss was confirmed to the *inCite* staff on 18 April, and after an anguished flurry of activity the copies (and their inserts, cover sheets and mailing labels) were reprinted and on their way again within 7 days.



Photo: The Border Mail

Writer, Reader, Critic by Dorothy Green

Primavera Press 1991. 190 pp. Paperback \$14.95.
Limited cloth edition \$48.

This inspiring book was published just before the death of the author, after a long illness, in February this year. Dorothy Auchterlonie Green was equally a scholar, critic, poet, journalist and teacher. She was at all times committed to justice and her writing is fearlessly critical, incisive and powerful.

Here we have a collection of reprinted essays concerning the place of literature in society and of writers as social critics, the dependence of writers on good readers and the responsibilities of writers, readers, and critics.

Of writers: they can make beneficial contributions to the quality of our lives. There is a distressing overproduction of books due to self-indulgence by writers who seek to be published, to earn a living; we need only the writers who feel a deep compulsion to write but 'it does not follow automatically that every piece of writing should be published'.

Of readers: 'the first object of reading is pleasure', the second is to evaluate: the reader

must read and understand the words on the page and he must interpret them for himself.

Of critics: There is some history of methods of critical review and a discussion of the necessity for retaining critics.

Dorothy Green's writing is engaging not only for its clarity but also for its wit: '...clear the ground of all but the most dedicated and necessary authors' to 'allow trees to breathe more freely and diminish the carbon imbalance'.

For tertiary literature students this book should be essential reading; for the serious and independent reader it is absorbing and stimulating.

The format of the book is unusual, the pages being almost 2 cm longer than standard. The margins are wide and the print large (10 1/2 point), promoting easy reading. The publishers take great pride that the book is printed on permanent paper — it is probably the first Australian book to state that the permanence of the paper conforms with the USA standard.

Anne Cortis