

Australian Academic Libraries look to the future

Boyd Rayward and Christine Henderson look at a critical seminar on the next decade for university libraries, identifying key issues and seeking a consensus on preferred futures

LIBRARIES PLAY A key role in the provision of higher education and it is essential that we develop strategies which support that position in the most effective and efficient manner possible. This seminar, through its examination of the current position and future needs of university libraries, will be instrumental in [considering] the most appropriate measures which can be taken to develop those strategies.'—the Hon. Peter Baldwin, Minister for Higher Education.

The seminar Mr Baldwin referred to (but was unable to

exist with new electronic services and sources. The latter, however, are continuing to develop rapidly and are already relentlessly transforming the way university libraries do business and the business that they do. Although Professor Buckland was scrupulous in not commenting on the Australian scene, from his discussion of developments in the US, many participants thought that Australian university libraries were lagging behind.

Among other speakers Professor Ken McKinnon, Chairman of the AVCC, thoughtfully explored some of the funding and other issues confronting libraries and the institutions of which they were part. He stressed the importance of institutions maintaining a high level of investment in the provision of information and in the technological infrastructure required for making it available. Dr Gregor Ramsay, Managing Director of NSW TAFE, issued a challenge. How could university libraries become the basic providers of library resources for TAFE staff and students as well as their own clientele? He declared that the TAFE system, which increasingly has the ear of the federal government, would not be able to meet its library requirements itself, nor should it try.

George Zuber of the Higher Education Division of DEET outlined the changes in the pattern of funding of higher education by DEET, especially the move towards 'one bucket' funding. Richard Prinable of the management consulting firm Corporate Breakthrough, discussed the contribution that University libraries necessarily make to achieving national goals such as that of becoming a clever country. He suggested that it was only by speaking the language of important social and political objectives such as this, as opposed to the language librarians used professionally for their own purposes, that they could engender enthusiastic interest in libraries. Such interest was required sympathetically to focus the attention of institutional and other sponsors on library needs and potential for the future.

Tom Cochrane, Director of Information Services of Queensland University of Technology, raised an issue that was widely discussed at the conference as critical for the future not only of libraries but of universities themselves.

He pointed out that the system of scholarly publishing as it presently exists is a massive and probably inappropriate drain on institutional resources. Academic researchers virtually give away their intellectual property to commercial publishers who repackage it for resale to the universities with an extremely high value-added impost. The material gets sold back to the universities repeatedly, often by the same publishing conglomerate, as it is expressed in different print, electronic and other formats and is represented in indexing and abstracting services, the abstracts usually provided by the authors. The costs of this system, seemingly unregulatable, have been rising consistently faster than the CPI for decades and libraries are by themselves relatively powerless to introduce effective limitations in the system.

There were a group of issues related to technology that were identified for further attention at the national level. There needed to be much more effective strategic planning to improve access to information technology in libraries. There was also a concern to see greater integration of technology interests on individual campuses and for a much greater collaborative approach to the development and use of networks nationally. Australia does not have forums such as the Coalition for Networked Information in the US in which librarians, network managers, directors of computer facilities, database providers and so on come together.

A major issue still to be resolved is a more effective use of the Australian university research network AARNet and the Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN) in this connection. The



From left: Professor Michael Buckland (Uni of Calif); Pro-Vice-Chancellor Tony Wicken (UNSW); Dr Christine Henderson (UNSW Librarian); Tom Cochrane, Director-Information Services (QUT); Professor Boyd Rayward (Head UNSW SILAS)

attend) was 'Confronting the Future: University Libraries in the Next Decade.' It was organised by the University of NSW School of Information, Library and Archive Studies (SILAS) and the University Library and met on Friday 12 June at Shalom College in the University of NSW. Almost 200 senior staff from university administrations, the academic community and university, TAFE, state and national libraries were in attendance representing virtually every state of Australia.

An important background paper for the conference helped set the scene. It was prepared by Stephen Oakshott, a doctoral candidate at the University of NSW. He analysed a range of recent government reports on higher education. He concluded that lip service was sometimes paid to academic libraries. On the whole, however, he concluded that their contributions to the quality of academic performance in terms of the teaching-learning process and to productivity in research are usually ignored or overlooked. He suggested that academic libraries have to find better ways than they have in the past to achieve recognition and funding both from government and university chancelleries if they are to be successful in making their special contributions to the educational enterprise.

The keynote address for the seminar was given by Professor Michael Buckland from the University of California at Berkeley. Professor Buckland analysed the changing nature of the University library. He stressed the importance of its being able to participate effectively in the increasingly electronic world of information transfer. paper-based libraries will continue to co-

▶ ABN is still looked on as a basic catalogue for the nation's libraries and the 'distributed national collection'. It could become the foundation of a broad set of national bibliographic services available to libraries and their clientele including more effective and automatic access to locations and the journal literature. It would also develop a news and scholarly publishing function.

It is clear that mechanisms will eventually have to be set up to monitor what is accessible through these networks and the Internet and to control and order traffic that is already threatening to become chaotic in its volume and complexity. The need for directory services was seen as one of the forces contributing to a redefinition of the 'reference' function of the library. The library of the very near future will need to be able to do for mushrooming electronic information sources what traditionally it has done for paper-based,

conventionally printed sources.

The conference struggled with how to resolve the increasingly difficult tensions, between the need for new developments and meeting present basic library needs. Most libraries now face enormous pressures on their current staff collections and technological infrastructure from massive and escalating undergraduate use.

They also must respond to pressures to provide more effective information skills training especially involving computer literacy, electronic information storage and retrieval, and exploration of national and international networks. Under these difficult conditions in a climate of steadily reduced budgets, how are they to meet the present research needs for their institutions, participate in national initiatives currently underway to exploit the nation's library resources more effectively and prepare for an increasingly electronic future?

One of the most important issues raised in the conference was who speaks for university libraries at the national level and how could useful information and advice be made available to government and to the higher education community more generally. There were calls for more detailed consultants to build on existing coalitions. The need for systematically prepared position papers on the issues facing libraries was also recognised. There was a clear recognition that it was now urgent that academic libraries begin to find a consensus on their preferred futures and to map out more clearly they have in the past the options and strategies that had to be explored to realise these futures.

Papers from the seminar will be published as a special monograph issue of the journal, *Australian Academic and Research Libraries*. ■

AIMA to move to Canberra

Heads of Agreement signed by AIMA and NLA

THE AUSTRALIAN Information Management Association (AIMA) was formally established on 17 May 1985, with its founder Margaret Trask as its Executive Director. Based upon the American Organisation OMS, AIMA was formed to provide training in advanced management skills for librarians. Since then, AIMA has built up a distinguished record in all parts of Australia and in New Zealand, and has expanded its range of offerings to include such topics as strategic planning.

The AIMA Board agreed in 1991 to explore the possibilities of AIMA not only moving from its present site at the Macquarie University Library to the National Library of Australia (NLA) in Canberra, but also changing its management structure. On 2 June 1992, the Board considered the Heads of Agreement drafted jointly by AIMA and the NLA to provide for the transfer of AIMA to the NLA, and resolved to accept them. The Heads of Agreement were then signed by the president of AIMA, Marion Bate, and the Director-General of the NLA, Warren Horton, and will go to AIMA's AGM in September for ratification.

Under this agreement, AIMA will continue in very much its present form. This involves minimum change to the legal arrangements under which AIMA operates, and demonstrates confidence by both

parties in the basic structure of AIMA and its programs, to ensure continuity in the institutes and other courses



Margaret Trask

over the next 2-year planning period. Other familiar elements will also continue, such as the use of co-trainers and consultations with members and clients on future training needs.

A new management committee, chaired by the Director-General, will consist of two nominees of the Director-General and three nominees of the existing AIMA Board: the President Marian Bate, the Vice President Hans Groenewegen and the Treasurer Steve O'Connor. An appropriate advisory committee will facilitate consultation with members and clients.

Margaret Trask will move to


Canberra for a minimum of twelve months from about 13 July, to oversee the transition. The office will gradually be transferred between that date and the end of September. Until then, inquiries should be directed to AIMA at Macquarie.

At the Heads of Agreement ceremony, Marian Bate expressed her pleasure that the NLA was prepared to join in the further expansion and diversification of AIMA and to provide a new home for it. Warren Horton emphasised that NLA saw part of its role as holding AIMA in trust for the library community. He acknowledged the enormous part that Margaret Trask had played in developing the provision of continuing education for library managers in Australia and New Zealand. ■

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