Australia's information future

Innovation and knowledge management for the 21st century, project workshop

Australia is facing a crisis in its capacity to provide information resources for its research community. The creation of, access to and dissemination of scholarly information underpin the knowledge economy and Australia needs a knowledge management structure to provide cost effective access to global information resources. Some preliminary data supplied by university libraries in Australia indicate that, in the three years from 1996 to 1998, serial subscription expenditure increased by 29.92 per cent while the number of serial titles purchased decreased by 22.76 per cent. Similarly data from the OCLC Institute for the period 1986 to 1997 reveal the following trends:

- serials prices increased by 169 per cent;

- serials expenditures increased by 142 per cent;

- serials purchased decreased by six per cent;

- monograph prices increased by sixty-two per cent;

- monograph expenditures increased by thirty per cent; and

- monographs purchased decreased by fourteen per cent.

These trends result from a complex range of issues including the fact that many researchers provide their intellectual property to journal publishers at no cost and that this information is then purchased back by libraries to sustain the general research effort. A workshop was held at the Australian National University on 3 and 4 March to explore the range of issues relating to the information infrastructure required to support the research enterprise in Australia, and to develop cost effective national strategies for innovative reform of the scholarly communications processes, based on international best practice.

The brainchild of Colin Steele, university librarian at the Australian National University, the workshop was organised by representatives of libraries at nine universities and the CSIRO with the support of the Australian Research Council (ARC), Council of Australian University Librarians, National Library of Australia, National Academies Forum, the National Scholarly Communication and the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA).

Three international speakers, who have played key roles in addressing the scholarly research problems in their countries, provided an overview of innovative programs in the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada. Fifty invited participants from Australia represented the Academies, relevant Commonwealth Government Departments, university libraries, the national and state libraries, government research libraries and related national associations.

The workshop produced a healthy exchange of views between researchers, librarians, administrators and government officials on the challenges facing the Australian research community, in terms of information and knowledge support, and identified five areas for further action, namely:

1 intellectual property matters relating to the trade of scholarly research information and knowledge;

2 innovative means of changing the present processes associated with creating, publishing, disseminating and preserving research information and knowledge;

3 tactical responses to existing market forces in the scholarly information publishing industry;

4 mechanisms for increasing efficiency within, and between, libraries and information networks; and

5 fitness to compete through:
   i developing technological infrastructure;
   ii creating and distributing networked information content; and
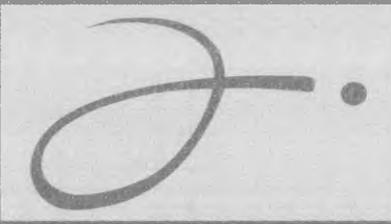   iii transforming organisations, professional practices and individuals.

At the workshop there was in-principle support from DETYA, the ARC and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee for the development of a high-level strategic-directions paper which would assist the research community, librarians and funding agencies to build a competitive and sustainable research information infrastructure in Australia. This paper, together with models of the prospective research enterprise, is under development and will be given wide circulation on completion.

An excellent summary of the project workshop entitled, *Strategic directions for Australia's research information infrastructure* has been prepared by Neil McLean (Macquarie University) and is available from URL: http://www.lib.mq.edu.au/general/publications.html.

One refreshing aspect of this workshop was that the presentations focussed on the reform of the research enterprise and the big picture — and many participants suggested significant changes in the way the business of research is conducted in Australia. It was acknowledged that librarians have to work with other players in the research enterprise to establish new business models that will ensure that Australia enhances its position in the global economy of knowledge.

The proceedings of the workshop will be published by DETYA in April. Further enquiries relating to the outcomes of the workshop should be directed to: Virginia Walsh, project manager, Phone: 0408 273 422, Fax: 02 6273 1631, or e-mail: virginiawalsh@ozemail.com.au ∎