

Inquiry into the role of libraries

The Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee has announced an Inquiry into the Role of Libraries in the Online Environment. Submissions have been called for and close on 16 August 2002. The committee will report to Parliament by the last sitting day in March 2003.

The terms of reference are:

The role of libraries as providers of public information in the online environment, having particular regard to:

- (a) the current community patterns of demand for public information services through libraries, including the provision of such information online;
- (b) the response by libraries (public, university, research) to the changing information needs of Australians, including through the provision of online resources;
- (c) possible strategies which would enhance the wider use and distribution of information resources held by libraries, including the establishment of library networks, improved online access in libraries, online libraries, and greater public knowledge and skill in using library resources;

(d) the use of libraries to deliver information and services over the internet to more effectively meet community demands for public information in the online environment; and

(e) the roles of various levels of government, the corporate sector and libraries themselves in ensuring the most effective use of libraries as a primary public information resource in the online environment.

[http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/ecita_ctte/online_libraries/index.htm]

ALIA is preparing a submission — a draft will go to the 2 August Board meeting. Contact Michelle Baird for more information. Much of the lobbying we have done over the last few years will be of value to the submission.

Senator John Tierney is a member of the committee and a proponent of the Inquiry. As a member of the National Library of Australia Council he has shown interest in a national information policy, an interest that has been followed up with the New Zealand Library and Information Association regarding their work with the NZ government on the national information policy. ■

Reviewing VET

Potentially significant changes are ahead for industry advisory arrangements in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. In the 2002 Federal Budget the Commonwealth government effectively removed its funding to the state/territory industry advisory bodies. As a consequence states and territories are re-evaluating their industry advisory structures and some states, such as New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and South Australia, are foreshadowing the closure of industry training advisory bodies (ITABs). CREATE, the national ITAB, has made representation to the federal government's administrative body Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and state and territory governments on behalf of the states and territories ITABs.

Meanwhile, and coincidentally, ANTA has commissioned an independent review of its existing national arrangements for gaining industry policy advice, for release in December 2002. Early mail is that the current national ITAB system could change significantly to move away from the 'one size fits all' approach to one that reflects innovative and effective ways of meeting the particular needs of each industry. A strengthened role for industry is likely. CREATE has always promoted to ANTA and the federal government that the cultural industries have characteristics that need industry-specific solutions. It is taking this review opportunity to propose some innovative models for providing industry policy advice in future. ■

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