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A vision for education

One of the very important issues on ALIA's agenda for the last twelve months has been the question of education for the profession. ALIA has a key role in establishing standards for the profession and in providing professional recognition of programs. In addition ALIA has the responsibility and opportunity to review the vision for education for the next ten to twenty years and, in so doing, to review and shape our vision for membership of the Association. Earlier this year the Board expressed the view that we would like to simplify categories of membership and in particular consider the two-tier membership structure that was established in the 1970s when the technician programs were introduced. I would like to explore this issue in 2007, in conjunction with the broader educational issues.

In the university sector the diminution of some librarianship programs and the complete closure of others must be of serious concern to all of us if we continue to aspire to be a graduate profession. In Australia the acquisition of graduate status and the recognition it brought to the profession was critically important. It is interesting to realise that this recognition is recent history. The first librarianship course in a university was established at the University of NSW in 1960, with John Metcalfe as Director of the School of Librarianship as well as holding the position of University Librarian. After undergoing a number of restructures and different alignments within the university, the specialist course in librarianship at the UNSW was no longer offered after 2004.

The 1970s saw an enormous expansion in education in general and librarianship in particular, with the development of librarianship courses in Colleges of Advanced Education (including the provision of courses in distance mode). The development of courses that are fully delivered online has been one of the success stories of the past five years.

The first library technician course was established at Box Hill Technical College in Victoria in 1970 and courses in the other states followed during that decade. As the vocational education system has developed, there have also been changes, mergers and amalgamations to ensure viability of educational programs in this sector.

The Dawkins reforms in the early 1990s saw the beginning of the period of contraction, which continues today at an ever-increasing rate. Graduate programs, in particular Masters programs, attract higher fees; this has been one of the reasons given anecdotally for a lack of enrolments in librarianship courses over the past five years.

I believe that we need to address these matters in a structured and sustained manner over the next one to two years so that through discussion we develop a vision and a plan, followed by strategies for action.

The last ALIA National Education for Librarianship Conference was held in Melbourne in 1991. While there have been a number of specialist conferences since then, it is perhaps time to begin planning for the first 'ALIA National Education for Information and Librarianship Conference' for the 21st century with a target date of 2008. We need practitioners with a passion for and commitment to education for the profession to participate actively in this debate as well as considering the option to undertake higher degree studies. How we are to encourage and achieve this is one of the issues we need to discuss in the coming months. It is an exciting opportunity to shape our future and I invite you to be an active participant.

As this year draws to a close I would like to wish all members and their families and friends a happy and safe Christmas and New Year and thank you for your support and involvement with ALIA. I would also like to thank our Executive Director Sue Hutley for the enormous energy and enthusiasm she has shown during her first year as well as the staff at ALIA National Office and our LLOs for their commitment and support. And finally to my fellow Directors – many thanks for your support and hard work, and I look forward to working with you in 2007. ✨

Feedback to your Board of Directors

Do you have an idea, compliment or concern about your Association? Contact any director and ideas will be reviewed at each Board meeting.

E-mail to feedback@alia.org.au will be automatically forwarded to all Board members.

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