

Strengthening our profession

ALIA's 70th birthday provides an important opportunity for all of us — librarians, library technicians and information professionals — to think about what makes our profession strong. The contribution we make through our organisations — be they national, state, public, university, school, TAFE, special, law or health libraries or information organisations to Australia is tremendous. The services provided by libraries in collecting our nation's heritage, developing print and electronic collections and delivering reference, research and web services, support Australian education, business, communities and democracy.

ALIA's first object, 'To promote the free flow of information and ideas in the interest of Australians and a thriving culture, economy and democracy', sets a framework to support Australians in their access to information through libraries. In 2007, ALIA has been actively pursuing this goal through advocacy, particularly in light of the forthcoming federal election. We have emphasised the role of national, state and public libraries, the need for funding for Electronic Resources Australia, national digitisation programs, Protecting Australian Families Online and copyright. ALIA, in representing all library sectors, has an important voice in these discussions. This role is as critical now as when our predecessor, the Australian Institute of Librarians, was formed in 1937.

Our second object, 'To promote and improve the services provided by all kinds of library and information agencies', has been an area of great activity in recent months. The Northern Territory and National Library Technicians Groups have held extremely successful events — the Top End Symposium and national conference respectively. Presentations at these events have enabled libraries from all sectors to share thoughts, analysis, information on new services and Library 2.0. Conferences held by the Australian School Library Association (ASLA) and Australian Law Librarians Association (ALLA) have also enabled information sharing. ALIA and ASLA signed a memorandum of understanding in September to enable members of both organisations to cooperate, including support of the national school library survey.

Our third object, 'To ensure the high standard of personnel engaged in information provision and foster their professional interests and aspirations', has also been an area of activity in recent months. ALIA convened a meeting of library technician educators in October and is planning to evaluate every course in 2008. Input was sought as to the parameters of the evaluation, in addition to fostering discussion between educators. Workforce and education was also a focus for National Advisory Congress meetings and feedback from members (personal and institutional) is invaluable in shaping the agenda for the Education Forum to be held in March 2008.

The remaining objects are being addressed through advocacy, member services and publishing activities.

In September, I was very fortunate to launch ALIA's new book, *Uniting a Profession* by Jean Whyte and David Jones, which describes the early years of the Australian Institute of Librarians. The book, available from <http://shop.alia.org.au/>, is a riveting read, demonstrating the triumph of the vision and leadership of a small group of individuals, overcoming rivalries and competing interests of sectors, states and individuals. A major theme is the status of the profession. In 1944, the Australian Institute of Librarians established a Committee on Services, Standards and Status of Librarians to consider and recommend salaries for the different types and levels of library work. A submission to the International Federation of Library Associations reported that the status of and salaries in Australian libraries were most closely comparable to teachers, although librarians' salaries were lower. Those in special libraries were comparable to technical workers. Interestingly, young people were being attracted to the profession.

Whyte and Jones note that librarianship 'crept up the professional ladder' in the following decades. They credit this to 'the emergence of postgraduate schools of librarianship, the growth of library services, the rapid adoption of technology and the hard-won Royal Charter (of the Library Association of Australia)'. Today, these themes are still valid. Education has been further discussed around the nation and provides an important area for ensuring the quality of entrants to the profession. Presentations at recent conferences indicate, if not the growth of libraries, the significant growth of services and the adoption of technology, including podcasts, web services and digitisation for better access by clients.

The status of librarians and library technicians will be a significant topic for discussion with the launch of the ABC series *The Librarians*. Achieving a national profile through a television series has, in the past, been primarily the preserve of medical and legal practitioners. No doubt the series will use some stereotypes to add colour to entertain and engage viewers. Share your thoughts on the series at the new blog — <http://www.alia.org.au/thelibrariansblog/>. Overall, however, we need to engage ourselves and seek opportunities to celebrate our new profile with humour and verve. I congratulate Sue Hutley and her staff for the work that they have undertaken to use media opportunities to ensure that there are stories about the excitement of real libraries across the press — in radio, newspapers and television. I encourage all library staff to think of ways to promote the role of libraries, library staff and ALIA. If you have activities and promotion planned, please contact ALIA's national office staff to share your ideas and information — enquiry@alia.org.au.



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Feedback to your Board of Directors

Board members welcome your comments and feedback. Please feel free to contact a Board member any time.

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