

Your voice

Celebrating Australia's library schools

Attacks on the standards of all except two Australian library schools by Professor Ross Harvey (*ALJ* February 2001, pp15–22) and ALIA president Dr Alan Bundy (*inCite* June 2001, p4), are atypical and unworthy of them.

Harvey bases his attack on a few conversations and personal reflections, plus five citations, only one of which is Australian. In Harvey's view the problems of Australian library schools are 'so grave as to be fatal' (p15).

Harvey adds that to-day's librarians have low status, low pay, are aging, and are less energetic than IT professionals (p20). In what way does Harvey see such stereotyping as helpful to anyone? The only things he forgets to mention are buns and spectacles.

What Harvey seems to want is an orthodox LIS profession with uniformity of thought and practice; with prescribed, rigid boundaries; which excludes people whose participation is not wanted. If the profession is true to this prophetic vision presumably it will be rewarded with high status, high pay,

youthfulness, and energy. Just like the North Americans.

So what about the Australian library schools? Apparently they are the guilty ones — it is their fault that the LIS profession cannot cross into Harvey's promised land, because all except two are alleged to have fewer than six full-time, library qualified academic staff. Apparently we are also guilty of admitting less worthy students than in the past.

At the time, the kindest response to Harvey's strange article was to quietly let it through to the keeper. But then — enter Alan Bundy with his *inCite* article to add his presidential authority to Harvey's 'analysis', and to the magical number of six staff.

In scoring their six, Bundy and Harvey seem to ignore the excellent contributions of staff who are part-time practitioner-academics, of library qualified research staff, and of the colleagues in recordkeeping, information systems, information technology management, knowledge management or other disciplines who team teach with library-qualified staff. In fact a school may need more or fewer than six full-time library qualified academics de-

pending on the academic context of the school and the needs of students and employers. There is a very strong case for multi-disciplinary teams to teach librarianship alongside other information specialisations, as we do at Monash University.

Bundy gives no credit to the excellent job being done by Australian library schools, under one of the world's best quality assurance regimes maintained by the ALIA Board of Education and ALIA staff. He apparently attaches no value to the present diversity and creativity of the library schools, operating in a range of interdisciplinary settings, establishing scholarly and industry synergies of all kinds, welcoming an ever more pluralistic student body from Australia and abroad, and achieving excellent job placements.

Bundy and Harvey seem to share a narrow, outdated vision of what LIS is. They don't seem to realise that, just like lawyers, librarians today work in a great variety of roles — and there are success stories comparable to the best in any profession: stories of high pay, high status, vice-chancellorships and deputy vice-chancellorships, Orders of Australia, and

Business Woman of the Year awards. But many librarians still seek their success in community and education related roles where there is little chance of big dollars and limelight, serving the most disadvantaged sectors of society in Australia and internationally.

In this rich ecology of LIS opportunities people are able to find their niche precisely because the LIS profession has not moved in the purist directions that Harvey and Bundy, and their favourite North American mentors, appear to prefer. The library schools and their graduates are succeeding precisely because ALIA recognition principles have increasingly supported many paths in our profession, including articulation with TAFE programs.

By misleadingly denigrating the standards of Australian library schools in the eyes of the world on the basis of Harvey's slender polemic, I believe our president has undermined years of patient work by the library schools, ALIA and the profession; and shaken the confidence of students, employers, graduates and academics — not a good day's work for a

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person whom we elected to be the profession's number one advocate.

No education systems — anywhere — are perfect, and of course the Australian library schools must continuously strive to improve. I hope readers will think for themselves and reject the Harvey-Bundy critique. In fact this is an excellent time to be studying LIS in Australia, or offshore in conjunction with Australian library schools. Our library schools are vigorous, engaged and offer many choices of approach and style. They are an excellent alternative to those of other countries. Come and join us.

**Professor Don Schauder,
Monash University**

It starts at school...

I'll wait for the outcome of the CASL commissioned *Public libraries network study* (July issue, p36) to be convinced of the need, but already I question the viability for another national body to represent and promote public libraries. After all, I thought 'too many kitchens and not enough cooks' was one of the reasons ALIA merged with the now defunct ACLIS, along with the issue of more than one peak body becomes confusing for effective national lobby/advocacy campaigns.

I am presuming the purpose of this CASL initiative is to establish an appreciation of public libraries' social capital, and to promote their contribution to information literacy and economic well-being throughout the community. More importantly, I presume it is seen as a lever to generate increased public funding, and possibly even private funding.

ACLIS had access to interesting statistics about ten years ago that canvassed the generational use of public libraries, by age and sex. It seemed those people who did use public libraries, used them in chartable waves, depending on what else was happening in their lives.

After many years of working in and observing the library and information industry, it continues to amaze me how much the library profession at large undervalues the school libraries sector. In a real sense, school libraries hold the key to our future. Aus-

tralia's school libraries are the ones imprinting and moulding the library users (and non-users) of tomorrow — for all other sectors, not just public libraries.

Those who read June Wall's *Frontline* in the same July issue, will understand how school libraries and teacher librarians are the life-force of our profession, yet in many Australian communities, their professional ranks are severely depleted and their libraries, sadly under funded. (Incidentally, like the public libraries CASL/ALIA example, they are already under the umbrella of at least two peak national associations, ASLA and ALIA.)

I tend to think the answer to promoting the interests of public libraries starts at school.

Jan Gaebler, Adelaide

Experience required? — experience provided!

We read with interest Phil Teece's article 'Experience required' (*inCite*, July 2001, p40). Management at Flinders University Library have for the past eight years supported a traineeship program specifically directed at providing experience to promising new graduates in library and information science. And eight years down the track we feel that this policy has served the library well, in addition to giving the necessary support to future candidates for the profession.

On occurrence of a suitable vacancy, library traineeships are advertised in the *Saturday Advertiser*. The advertisement clearly states that the vacancy is for a trainee position. Candidates are required to have completed their formal qualifications, usually a bachelor's degree plus a post-graduate qualification in library and information science. Also stressed is the fact that applications are sought specifically from candidates with little or no experience in the field. Consistently there are many applications, and the candidates are of a very high calibre.

Appointments are made to continuing positions subject to the standard probationary requirements. The appointee is placed initially in the designated vacancy, usually for a year and then moves through a range of positions in all sections of the library.

They are regarded as the incumbents of the relevant positions and trained to be able to perform all the duties and carry all the responsibilities of the position.

Nine trainees have been appointed since the beginning of the program and three have progressed to demanding and responsible positions as subject liaison librarians. The trainees feel well satisfied with the program. They receive position-specific training, as well as being able to participate in the library's more general staff-development program. There is also the opportunity to work in a range of positions, thus gaining extensive experience. They report, too, finding satisfaction in being able to be able to put into practice, so quickly, much of the theory learned in their degree studies.

Library management, as well as assisting in the development of future professionals in their chosen field, are well satisfied in that they are able to recruit staff of a very high academic calibre, and then train and develop them with the most relevant skills for the institution. The library's staffing profile is re-invigorated with the trainees bringing enthusiasm, new ideas and flexibility with them. Succession planning is also managed, with this regular intake of staff to junior positions.

With these clear advantages to both new graduates and the employing institution, the future of library traineeships is assured at the Flinders Library.

**Helen Culshaw, staff
development officer, Flinders
University Library**

IFLA & FID — an open letter

IFLA's Executive Board has decided to issue this open letter to IFLA Members on the relationship between IFLA and FID, in order to correct some inaccurate information which has been circulating.

During the course of 2000, it became apparent that the International Federation for Information and Documentation/Fédération Internationale d'Information et Documentation (FID) was experiencing financial problems. In mid 2000, FID's executive director left and he was not replaced. The biennial congress, due to take place in Brazil in October 2000,

was cancelled. *FID Review* was not being published.

As IFLA's secretary general, I was invited to a meeting FID's Executive Committee at a meeting held in Lisbon, Portugal, in November 2000. During this meeting I presented a plan, which had the approval of IFLA's Executive Board, to ensure the continuation of FID's professional program within the IFLA structure. This plan would have enabled FID's special interest groups and specialist committees to continue in a newly created Division of IFLA. There would have been slots in the program at our annual conference and opportunities for FID members to meet there in professional and business meetings. *IFLA Journal* would have carried articles and news destined for *FID Review*. A special offer was being prepared to enable FID members to join IFLA at a discount. The plan was designed to ensure that FID's traditions and core values could be sustained.

However, we came to understand that this plan was rejected by the FID, although that decision has never been formally communicated to IFLA. IFLA's Executive Board, therefore, decided at its meeting in March 2001, to withdraw the rescue proposals.

We understand that FID has, in practice, ceased operating with effect from 31st March 2001, although no formal announcement appears to have been made.

Although the plan has been withdrawn, IFLA remains willing to do whatever is appropriate to enable former FID members to continue their interests and their contributions to improving the quality of information systems. FID has achieved a great deal since its establishment in 1895. It would be sad if there was no way for its distinctive contribution to continue.

**Ross Shimmon, IFLA secretary
general**

Your voice

Your letters on any issue of relevance to the library and information sector are welcomed.

All letters should be addressed to the *inCite* editor and may be e-mailed to incite@alia.org.au, or faxed to 02 6282 2249, or posted to: *Your voice*, ALIA, PO Box E441, Kingston ACT 2604. Please include your name and postal address with your letter or e-mail.

Letters will be accepted for publication until the 18th of the month.