

Growth a priority...



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Membership growth is a priority within the 2003 – 2004 plan *ALIA: making the difference*. Some interesting information on our membership is coming out of the work we are doing on the strategies for growth.

Preparatory work done by Phil Teece shows that the total workforce for librarians and library technicians has declined from 17 800 in 1997 with a sharp drop in 1998 to 16 100 and gradual increase to 17 100 in 2002. Though the overall figures have been climbing back since 1998 the librarian workforce has decreased (13 100 in 1997 to 10 300 in 2002) and at the same time the library technician workforce has increased (4700 in 1997 to 6800 in 2002).

The pattern of numbers in the librarian workforce is reflected in ALIA's membership numbers. The participation rate in ALIA is consistently just under fifty per cent. We are aiming to increase this participation rate even though the continuing 'slight fall' in the workforce is predicted. However, based on the workforce figures for library technicians the participation rate in ALIA is around ten per cent. Improving this is a challenge that director Kevin Dudeney and I will be pursuing with our loyal and hardworking technician members.

Our growth strategies will of course include those in the wider information sector but as Phil has previously written reliable employment figures are harder to pin down.

Care always needs to be taken in using figures to also look at what is happening around those figures. ALIA's membership numbers took a big hit in the period from January 2000 to July 2001. There was a significant drop in personal membership of 613, or around eleven per cent, in a period that saw the introduction of the GST and the move by the Association from the calendar to the financial year for membership fees. This involved two renewal periods: January to June 2000 and July 2000 to June 2001. Even though the Board decided at the time that the Association would absorb the cost of the GST on membership fees, and continues to do so, this drop in numbers at that time is a strong reminder that for many members paying membership fees is part of their discretionary spending. Institutional membership numbers have remained stable. Voucher membership declined by 308, or fifty-seven per cent, due to the introduction of the GST and the drop in use of ILL vouchers, and continues to decline.

Similarly, recently released ABS figures show union membership falling from 24.5 per cent of the workforce in 2001 to 23.1 per cent at August 2002. Understandably the ACTU questions the figures and again, in accepting the limitations of statistics, claims the figures do not show the ACTU's achievements over the last few years in rebuilding the union movement's grassroots or the recent good performance in gaining wage increases in union-negotiated enterprise agreements compared with non-union-negotiated agreements.

In commenting on the ABS figures in the *Weekend Australian Financial Review* Ron Callus, director of the University of Sydney's Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training says 'The real problem is they can't service members' individual concerns as well as they could before, ... so if there's no point of contact in the workplace, it becomes harder to retain members as well as recruit new ones.'

This demand for servicing members' individual concerns is consistent with feedback from many of our members over the last few years. Increasingly we hear that services need to meet their here and now requirements, which is a shift from the previous situation of many personal and institutional members joining as a professional commitment. How to meet the varying needs of over 6000 members is an ongoing challenge for the Association. From the cohort of members in all categories who joined in 1993 only 12.8 per cent was still a member in June 2002 and all of these were Associates. In our recent follow up of unfinancial members the majority of reasons for not renewing were due to changes in work circumstances such as retired, or working in another area, or could not afford it because they were now in part-time or casual work. This last category is one where it would seem that ALIA membership should be of great benefit and one that we will have to pursue further to better meet these needs. The reality is that ALIA's members more and more move in and out of the workforce, and the sector, and don't necessarily carry their membership with them.

The good news is that our 2003 – 2004 plan focuses on better targeting services to the needs of personal and institutional members. This month we will be celebrating the launch of our new membership system and re-designed and improved ALIANet that will offer member-only access to web-based services and products as just one of many new features — more about these in the June *inCite*. This is an important step in our ongoing plans to deliver value to members in a way that meets their needs.

Feedback to your Board of Directors

Do you have an idea, compliment or concern about *your* Association? Contact any director below on personal issues and ideas will be reviewed at each meeting of the Board.

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

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