

# FRONTLINE – PRESIDENT ELECT JULIE RAE

Please join me in thanking Vanessa Little for her contribution and dedication over the past 12 months as President. Her commitment to fighting the continual battles of ensuring libraries across the nation survived in times of economic downturns has been nothing less than outstanding. From Queensland to Western Australia, Vanessa tirelessly raised the flag for libraries by working with the Board and ALIA staff to fine tune and further develop our advocacy campaigns.

We also say farewell to Kathryn Cass and Joseph Cullen, our departing directors. At the same time I would like to welcome the incoming board members, Susan Coker, Alyson Dalby, and Damian Lodge, and I look forward to working with them over the next 12 months.

Over the past two years the ALIA Board has been grappling with the future of the Association and what it will look like in the next 10 to 50 years so that we can plan accordingly. But this future is about much more than the Association; it is about our professional existence.

Over the next 12 months, we as a profession are faced with a number of challenges. Most will not be dealt with within this timeframe, but what we do over the next year will help shape the future of what we become. The difficulty is, as David Pogue suggests in his paper *A few guidelines for anyone attempting to predict the future of technology*<sup>(1)</sup>: "everybody who takes a stab at these kinds of predictions inevitably winds up looking like an idiot" as you invariably get it wrong.

So I am not suggesting that we will predict the future, but we can see some big issues that we need to face as a profession together.

The issues that the board will be working on over the next 12 months are:

## Ebooks

Sarah Houghton in her blog *Librarian in Black* aptly writes that she is breaking up with ebooks, and the reason why is, she says: "I mean the whole messed up situation – the copyright nightmares, the publishers, the fragmented formats, the ridiculous terms of service, the device incompatibility, the third-party aggregation companies libraries do business with – all of it."<sup>(2)</sup> I can understand her frustration, however we do not want to break up with ebooks. We want to embrace all they have to offer and work with our colleagues who

write and publish these works to ensure the future of reading through libraries is still maintained.

Over the past number of years we have seen libraries morph into places that are no longer just repositories of the printed word, but community spaces where people come together, readers meet authors, patrons hear stories, study groups form, tutoring takes place, and people 'hang out'. Regardless of whether it is in print or digital, the use of words, the sentence, or ideas go to the very heart of what we do. Without the container, are libraries merely community spaces where people come together? How many people have you heard over history talk about the importance of their local library and how it played some part in their success?

## The semantic web

Google, Amazon, Apple, Kobo, etc have all taken over our role of making books available and they are doing extremely well at it. They have large collections of ebooks, many free, making it easier for people to download and read without the extra hassle of leaving their home or having to return the book.

We teach people how to use the internet; our reference collections have been replaced with the world wide web; bookclubs are online; communities are online; individually, we connect with more people than we ever have before through social media, web 2.0, and online chat rooms. The much talked about web 3.0 will have a direct impact on our information services by bringing back results tabulated and ready for use. Tim Berners-Lee originally expressed the vision of the semantic web as follows:

"I have a dream for the Web [in which computers] become capable of analyzing all the data on the Web – the content, links, and transactions between people and computers. A 'Semantic Web', which should make this possible, has yet to emerge, but when it does, the day-to-day mechanisms of trade, bureaucracy and our daily lives will be handled by machines talking to machines. The 'intelligent agents' people have touted for ages will finally materialize. Will these so called intelligent agents replace the need for a reference librarian?"

## Funding of libraries

Schools fight battles every day with limited funds and higher expectations of students' literacy levels, but how do they

connect to the word, whether it is digital or on paper? What role will they play if the funders continue to think of libraries as just places for books?

## Open access

Over 20 years ago, academic libraries experienced the demise of printed periodicals and have battled the landscape to build collections in digital formats. The battle still rages with access to titles withdrawn, escalating costs, and now open access is the new frontier. IFLA's position paper on open access describes it as follows:

"Open access is the now known name for a concept, a movement and a business model whose goal is to provide free access and re-use of scientific knowledge in the form of research articles, monographs, data and related materials. Open access does this by shifting today's prevalent business models of after-publication payment by subscribers to a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access." [IFLA]

## Big data

The new frontier, according to SAS, the corporation that consults with businesses on this topic, states that 'big data' is a popular term used to describe the exponential growth, availability, and use of information, both structured and unstructured. Much has been written on the big data trend and how it can serve as the basis for innovation, differentiation, and growth<sup>(3)</sup>. What impact will this have on our profession? While initially the concept of big data is mostly being discussed in commercial companies, what can we do with our own data to assist in our future growth? Also how do we manage and maintain the data our own organisations may produce through research? Governments are now stating that research conducted with public money will need to be available for all to use. While there are projects like the Australian National Data Service (ANDS), will more of these be required, can our particular set of skills morph into this field?

## Qualifications

If funders and others believe there is no role for libraries, and that libraries restrict trade, this may have a direct impact on the need for qualifications and the recognition these bring. Accredited professionals, highly valued for their skill and able to adapt to our

changing environment, are a vital ingredient for the success of libraries. ALIA's role in accreditation of courses and ensuring courses are relevant and accessible is an important element in this mix.

**Copyright**

Copyright plays a major role in our work, with issues of length of copyright, exceptions, and fair use becoming more important than ever. How these issues are addressed over the coming years will have a major impact on libraries' capacity to deliver services.

**Future of the profession**

As part of our strategic plan, ALIA is looking at the future of the profession – where we will be in 50 years, 100 years. Yes, the landscape is changing, but does the premise of what we do – connecting people to information and ideas – continue? Our futures paper will develop over this time and we welcome your contributions.

As you can see from the list, there is much to consider, think about, and investigate, and this can not all be done in just 12 months. These are ongoing issues that we must all address as a profession. I, for one, am excited about the possibilities for our future. Already we have started delving into the detail of some of these issues:

ALIA has developed a set of principles on ebooks and elending, through our consultations with you, you can find them on our website.

ALIA will continue to be represented at the Book Industry Consultative Committee, discussing elending and the availability of ebooks with the other industry stakeholders.

ALIA will participate in international activities through IFLA, especially in the area of copyright and other legal matters, open access, and ebooks.

ALIA will continue to work on copyright issues with the Australian Digital Alliance and the Australian Libraries Copyright Council.

ALIA will continue to work with academic boards on course accreditation and requirements for the profession.

ALIA will continue to monitor the trends and future technologies that may have direct impact on our profession and will keep you informed through our various conferences, publications and communiques.

ALIA has developed a futures space for all of us to contribute; [aliafutures.wikispaces.com](http://aliafutures.wikispaces.com). Let's work together to help shape our role and importance into the future.

1. <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=the-future-is-for-fools>
2. Houghton, Sara. *breaking up with e-books*. *librarian in black*. [Online] 21 August 2012 . [Cited: 1 march 2013.] <http://librarianinblack.net/librarianinblack/>.
3. <http://www.sas.com/big-data/>



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