

SUBJECT SPECIALISATION AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA

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On 1 July 1993, a fundamental change was made to the organisational structure of the Information Services Section of the National Library of Australia. The section changed from a functional structure, with generalist staff, expected to be competent across a wide range of subjects, to one of subject specialisation using subject specialist librarians. The size of the Library's collections, close to 5m volumes of monographs alone, approx. 150 000 serial titles together with a variety of formats such as pictures, maps and manuscripts has made exploitation of the collection by users much more complex. Information is now appearing in many forms, especially differing electronic formats and it was decided that the most effective way to use the collections to the full was to develop staff in particular subject areas. The National Library is a research library, with highly sophisticated collections and its primary clientele are researchers wherever they may be and this change is designed to support such research use.

An analysis of past enquiries, an examination of collection strengths and an assessment of what areas Australians would expect their National Library to be expert in was made in order to develop a list of subjects. As it was not possible to cover all areas of knowledge, a selection had to be made. Once this was done, staff were asked for the subjects of their degree, any post graduate work, any relevant experience (our music librarian had worked for 9 years in an engineering library!) and asked for an expression of interest in particular subjects. On the basis of this the subjects were allocated.

Two teams, Sciences, including Social Sciences, and Humanities were formed. The Humanities team covers Australian history, history, Australian literature, literature, religion and philosophy, bibliography and generalities, music, biography and genealogy. The Sciences team subjects are Sciences generally, cartography, geography, applied science: Social Science, UK and Australian law, US law, overseas law, international organisations, statistics, public affairs (politics and government), sociology including women's issues, administration and management, economics. Some of these subjects may change with changes in staff or in the environment and it is expected that staff may be able to change subjects at regular intervals.

The duties of subject specialist staff will include consultations with users over the materials relevant to their enquiry in the collections, proposals for titles for purchase for the collection, great familiarity with materials in the Library's collections in whatever format, but principally with the printed materials, increasingly with electronic information and the searching of electronic databases. Preparation of reader education aids such as printed *Reader Guides*, presentation of reader education sessions, publishing of papers, bibliographies, presentation of papers at conferences etc will also form part of their work. It is not possible to turn librarians into subject specialist librarians at the drop of a hat - so only quiet announcement is being made of this fundamental change at the moment. It will take some time for staff to feel secure in their job, on top of their subjects and its issues and its resources and to become familiar with their specific resources within the Library.

In the case of religion and philosophy, Dawn Melhuish, the subject specialist librarian has already an excellent grounding in the field for she has worked with the Library's large Rare Book collection for some years now. That collection has many works on these subjects and so Dawn is already familiar with an important part of the Library's resources. Her article on some of the riches of the Rare Book collection is also in this issue.

We would be happy to hear from those of you with information enquiries, details of holdings, either at the Library or elsewhere in Australia or to

discuss with you what references/resources might be useful in your research work. The Information Services Section locates materials and answers reference queries received by telephone, letter or onsite visit, and will undertake online searches of overseas databases for a fee. There is a large reference collection in the Main Reading Room, 725 serial titles on open access(latest issue only) and an array of CD-ROMs. Special interest tours for groups of people can be organised, if arranged in advance. We would be happy to hear from members coming to Canberra and wanting to see the collections but please write or call first. The telephone number for the telephone information service is (06) 2621 434, 2621 266. Dawn Melhuish can be contacted on (06) 2621 316.

We are confident that this restructure will provide a better service to our users, both offsite and onsite. As the collections become more complex and the catalogues become larger it becomes more difficult for users to find easily and quickly the information they need. For the Library's collections and for referral to other collections, we hope that subject specialisation will be more effective for our users and will exploit the Library's riches for more people.

RELIGION COLLECTIONS IN THE NATIONAL LIBRARY

Dawn Melhuish, Subject Librarian

Within the Australian standard zero to five description of collection strengths, works classified at the National Library in Dewey class 200, Religion, are mainly at levels 1 and 2. While religious thought does not fall into the central aims of the collections, and so collecting is limited, this basic information collecting can support general inquiries and study in many fields of religious thought and history. Devotional and evangelistic writings are collected at a very minimal level (level 1) as are religious writings from or relating to areas of lesser geographical priority. From geographic areas of higher priority, the collecting is at basic information