

EDITORIAL

It is the practice of compilers of programmes for sporting encounters to provide brief biographical details of all the players. The details of the members of the Scottish Rugby Union Under 18 schoolboy team which recently played a match against Australia provided some interesting information on career choices. Five of the fourteen boys who had decided on careers wished to enter the banking world. Three wished to become farmers and the remainder selected a variety of careers. It was hardly a surprise that no-one mentioned librarianship or information studies as a possible career.

There are, of course, many reasons, some rational, some not quite so rational, for career choice and, indeed, many people who have reached the pinnacles of their particular careers will admit that they drifted into the career entirely by accident. One factor, though, which affects choice is the image of the career and this is largely determined, in these times, by the media exposure received. An example of how the power of media exposure can affect a profession is shown by the dispute which currently exists between the school-teaching profession and the United Kingdom Government. The dispute centres around salaries and conditions of service and, in reporting events, newspapers have drawn comparisons between the pay of teachers and comparable professions. Inevitably, the pay of teachers compares unfavourably and this, combined with the reported low morale of teachers, has undeniably been a factor in the marked decline in the number of applicants for teacher training courses. It is likely, too, that in the aftermath of a number of serious criminal cases which highlighted inefficiencies and poor working practices among social workers, that recruitment there has also been affected.

The nature of school-teaching and social work does mean, though, that they have a high public profile and are therefore of media interest, even if at present in the U.K. this is working against them. Librarianship and information science do not have such high profiles and rarely, if ever, attract any level of media interest. This seems to suggest that the media determine the image but this is not necessarily the case. A recent article in a Sunday newspaper reported on how the image of the university lecturer varies between the U.S.A. and the U.K. [1]. The American professor is portrayed in films and books as handsome, dynamic and heroic while his British counterpart is bumbling, unprepossessing and probably subversive. It was argued, though, that the image is a reflection of the views of the average person because universities in America are an accepted way of moving up in society and provide the "culture" so required whereas, in Britain, the way to the top is not necessarily by universities and British universities have become detached from the people.

The image of the librarian as portrayed in films and books has hardly been more favourable than that of the British academic. The information scientist, though, has not even managed, it would appear, to have established even an unfavourable image. The information profession and the educators in particular are everywhere involved in extensive curriculum design to meet the challenge of the 1980s and 1990s. This effort, however, will have limited value unless able young people can be attracted and for that an attractive positive image is required. How to achieve that, though, is a formidable task but one which the profession cannot afford to set aside.

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Editors

Reference

1. *The Observer*, Sunday, 19 January, 1986, p. 3.