

EDITORIAL

The economic pressures on publicly funded educational institutions in many countries of the world in recent years have become quite considerable and show every sign of increasing rather than lessening. Library and information schools, for the most part merely small units in these institutions, are under the same and sometimes even greater pressures. Reduced funding for the schools, though, has come at a time when requirements for teaching about technology and its use have meant a significant increase in the need for resources. Twenty years ago library and information schools in teaching modern information retrieval techniques could do so with a few edge-punched and body-punched cards. Today modern information retrieval techniques require expensive hardware to be employed. No school apparently can call itself up-to-date unless it possesses a laboratory equipped with a dozen microcomputers and associated mass storage. The pressure to ensure that the equipment is up-to-date is also only too prevalent.

This technology, though, provides a possible way out of the dilemma. Whilst the current graduating library/information students will have acquired perhaps quite a high degree of familiarity with information technology, many professionals already in post will be in need of education and training. The provision of short courses in the new technology area can be a lucrative business as can be witnessed by the number of firms in the private sector whose entire existence is based on providing training courses. In the United Kingdom non-residential training courses in information technology run by firms in the private sector rarely cost less than £100 per person per diem. A firm in the U.K. is currently offering a 2 week non-residential course in library automation for £800. The overheads of library and information schools should be much less than those of private firms so that even after undercutting these prices it must be possible to make handsome profits which can be used to ease funding restrictions imposed by the parent institution.

Costs of this dimension, though, are, perhaps not surprisingly, unpopular with those expected to pay them. Recent correspondence in *INFORM*¹ criticized the charge of £140 for a two-day course offered by ASLIB compared with that of a full 1 year course at the Open University in England (£175). In reply it was pointed out that the Open University received a grant of £60 million whilst ASLIB was entirely self-financing. The implication here is that publicly funded bodies should be able to offer cheap, perhaps even subsidized, courses.

The dilemma for schools operating in a mixed economy is very real. Schools do recognize their obligation to the profession at large, but their funding relates directly

¹ *INFORM* No. 82 (1986) 3.

to the number of their registered students and if their policy in charging for courses is aimed at acquiring revenue to be used to improve facilities for these students, then it can be seen to be an understandable policy.

If the professions and their members feel otherwise and feel that schools should offer courses at subsidized prices, then they must agitate in all appropriate places to ensure that schools receive adequate funding to allow this to happen.

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