

## EDITORIAL

The name of Roger N. Bowes, recently appointed to the position of Chief Executive of the Association for Information Management (previously called Aslib), is not likely to be familiar to readers outside the UK and it would be surprising if it was. What might be surprising to overseas readers, though, is that the name is not very familiar to the information profession in the UK, unlike Roger Bowes' predecessor, Dennis Lewis, a highly regarded member of the Institute of Information Scientists. Prior to taking up his appointment, Roger Bowes was Chairman of Citybridge Ltd, a management consultancy. In previous times he has been Chief Executive with Express Newspapers PLC and also the Mirror Group. Despite the fact that he has served on the Library and Information Services Council (England) it is fair to say that his background is in business, rather than information work.

It is not unusual to appoint those outside the profession to senior posts. George Cunningham, Chief Executive of the Library Association (UK) was a politician, and Wayne Smith, President and Chief Executive Officer of OCLC, was a business executive and university professor. It is worth asking whether the appointment of those outside the profession to senior posts has become a trend or whether these are just isolated cases. Many would, no doubt, argue that the organizations cited above are different to libraries and information centres in that they all have to be run on a proper business footing and need, if not to make profits, to generate enough income to cover costs. The appointment of someone with substantial business experience is, therefore, justifiable and, in fact, desirable in these circumstances. The implication, though, from this is that this type of background is not necessary in libraries, where such aspects as income generation, cost efficiency, etc. are not needed. Whilst it may have been true in previous times that library managers were given money by library boards and left to spend it as they wished, fortunate is the manager today who does not have to work to precisely defined budgets, come up with revenue generating ideas, market services effectively, monitor costs closely, etc. In other words, the library manager is required to organize the library on business lines. If, therefore, libraries are being viewed, whether we like it or not, as businesses, will they not in future be run by those with business experience? Will the managers of the future be from without the profession rather than from within? It has to be said at this point that many library managers, recruited from within the profession, organize their libraries and information centres on extremely efficient business lines. In response to the question, though, about where they acquired these skills, many answers would be given, but particularly popular would be answers such as, 'I learnt the hard way' or 'on the job,' i.e. by trial and error with little formal training. The information professional with such a background is surely in the future going to find it extremely difficult to compete for senior jobs with those with business experience, including formal training in business administration.

In the Information Technology industry there is now recognition that aspiring IT

managers, wishing to progress, need to have business experience, and courses are increasingly being developed to cater for these people. With developing links with Business Schools, Departments of Information Studies are well suited to assist education and training in these areas and, indeed, many are currently doing so. There is, though, an immediate problem which does not seem to apply in the case of the IT industry. The employers of IT professionals are apparently both able and willing to find the necessary resources to sponsor staff on the lengthier more intensive courses. A full-time one-year MBA course at Strathclyde University (Glasgow, Scotland), and there is no reason to believe that it is particularly expensive, costs £3,100 for fees alone (for UK Students — £5,000 for those from overseas). To do the course as part of an open learning package (work at home) costs £5,000 for UK students. These are figures which most individuals, no matter how ambitious, would find difficult to meet from their own resources, but how many libraries are prepared to sponsor promising members of staff?

There is, of course, no easy answer to the problem but unless library boards, library managers, educational institutions, professional associations, etc. can work together to devise and implement a policy of management training to equip some information professionals for the highest posts, these will increasingly be filled from outside the profession. In time such a trend will undoubtedly change the nature of the profession.

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Editor