

EDITORIAL

Libraries and information centres are currently exhibiting slow growth rates in many countries, or even no growth at all. This is not because the demand for library services has stabilized, but rather because financial resources are not forthcoming to enable any expansion of library provision. Many libraries are directly or indirectly dependent upon government resources, and libraries operated by private organizations are often vulnerable to any vicissitudes in the economic climate. Libraries must devote a considerable proportion of their budgets to their buildings, equipment and, of course, their stock, but wages often account for a large part of expenditure. It is not surprising, therefore, that staffing levels have often been frozen, if not actually reduced, in recent years. In the United Kingdom, for example, Nick Moore demonstrates in his article published in this issue, that unemployment has grown in the librarianship sector in recent years, and library school graduates are finding it more difficult to secure employment.

This situation is inevitably of concern to the library schools, whose own resources ultimately are dependent upon the level of student numbers. In the face of a falling demand for staff from the traditional library market, however, solace is increasingly being sought in what has been termed the emerging market. A growing number of jobs are involved with the organization and retrieval of information (but not necessarily documents), but these jobs fall outside the traditional library or information centre. Such jobs are not aimed specifically at library school graduates; indeed, the stereotyped image of the introverted, book-oriented, conservative and timid librarian may militate quite markedly against such library school applicants. Nevertheless, the jobs in this emerging market do require some of the skills which a graduate from a library school should possess; they should be sought by such graduates and can be successfully gained, but often against stiff competition from people with other backgrounds—these jobs are not there just for the taking.

The success with which librarians and information scientists can attack this emerging market depends in part upon the library schools. Firstly, can they encourage the kind of flexibility which prepares their students to seek employment in a variety of work environments; secondly, can they provide these students with the skills which the emerging market demands; thirdly, can they attract the kind of entrants to library schools who will have a chance of competing with rivals from other disciplines in this new market in which they have no built-in advantage. This emerging market is still small compared with the traditional market, but this relative balance is likely to change in favour of the former in the years ahead. The success with which the library schools can meet the challenge of this new market may well play an important part in deciding their fate.

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