

Council Response to the ASA Membership Survey

Stephen Yorke (ASA President)

The ASA Council is very grateful to Rowena Loo for all her work in developing and conducting the membership survey and the analysis of the responses. Perhaps even more significantly, it is very grateful for the findings and the depth of analysis provided by the results. It is only through this kind of survey that we find things about the Society meaningful both in terms of what has happened to the Society and, more importantly, to give an idea of the direction we should be taking.

Council is pleased that 47% of membership responded to the opportunity provided by the survey. That is, to provide information about themselves and their attitude to the Society as an organisation and their desires concerning future activities of the Society. Given the size of the response, Council takes the survey results as an accurate presentation of the views of the membership and it has no dispute with any of the findings.

This response does not aim to go over the results item by item, as this would not contribute anything of significance to the findings. Rather, the aim of this response is to take up a few matters in more general terms that have been raised by the survey.

Demographic Profile

The average member of the Society is ageing. Members are now in the 50 to 64 age group (along with other characteristics identified in the Survey). On first inspection, the high relative age of members should be of concern for the long-term health and survival of the Society as a whole. But this may just represent the general ageing of the Australian population and perhaps be compensated to some extent by the expected

extension of working careers and longer life expectancy. This situation is in contrast to the trend of the past two decades for early retirement from the workforce.

To assess the issue properly requires data on the impact of an ageing population on equivalent associations to the ASA. It may be no consolation but we may even be better off than many other associations. Alternatively, the 'ageing' may partly be a result of a general disinclination or lack of incentives for younger persons to join professional associations compared with previous generations. Again, there is no data to backup these possibilities.

Answers to these questions would require a survey of those who potentially could be members of the Society along with comparable data from other professional associations (and their non-members) which operate in similar areas to the Society. For example, data from those associations operating in the areas of recordkeeping, libraries, and museums. Ideally, similar questions should be asked in any survey of these areas. This is an issue Council will consider further.

Level of Involvement with the Society

This is an issue covered under 'Question 21: Would you like to be more involved in the ASA?' From Council's perspective, the results for this question show the paradox of the vast majority of members wanting more from the Society but being unable to have a deeper direct involvement in the Society's operation. This is a problem Council continually comes up against not just in providing new services or benefits but also in the provision of existing services and day-to-day administration. As we are a voluntary professional association, and with very limited access to external funding sources, this is a situation likely to continue into the future. Again, the Society is not alone in this regard.

Council, however, does have to do more. In the first instance it needs to find and gain access to the 19% of members who indicated that they would like to be more involved with the Society. We do not know who these members are.

Being a more effective professional society

This is covered by 'Question 24: What does the society need to do in order to be a better or more effective professional society?' The three most significant areas raised by members for consideration are discussed briefly below.

Professional development

This is a matter that Council has paid significant attention to in recent years especially through education and training issues. For example, such as with the establishment of the Education Committee, the conduct of the Educators Forum of 2003, and implementation of the Forum's findings.

But while we can (and have) provided seminars, workshops, and the like, the Society does not have the size or the resources to develop a sustained professional development program like that provided by other professional associations such as accountants.

Council does recognise this is an area to which it must give more attention and to provide additional resources for professional development. Council does note the list of areas of interest for development and will be discussing this at coming meetings.

Public profile, advocacy and promotion

Council recognises this is an area of importance and has given greater attention to it in recent years with various initiatives. In 2005, a brochure will be available based on a British model and is intended to explain in a 'glossy' way what archives are and why they are significant. This is intended for distribution to those who can be useful to the archives profession.

To cater for all archives and broaden perspective

Council is very conscious of the fact that the Society has a very wide membership base and to avoid having a narrow perspective as to the areas in which it should operate. But it is particularly difficult, for example, to cater for the desires of many of the Society's members who are sole archivists due to the nature of diversity of their employment and interest. If any member has a suggestion for a project that would

assist them in their work, then Council would be very pleased to hear from them.

Council would like to express our thanks once again to Rowena and to all those who took the time and effort to respond to the questionnaire. The results will be a guide to Council for quite some time to come.