

Editorial

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who took the time and trouble to respond positively to the new BIALL journal. I am also grateful to those who may have been less than pleased with the new journal but were still able to make constructive and useful comments.

The Editorial Board were delighted that the overall response, particularly during the conference at Cork, was so supportive. We are well aware that there is work to be done to improve the journal, both in terms of presentation and content, and we will continue to welcome comments, and hope to respond constructively to them. We have resolved that later in the year we will seek to provoke comments by circulating a questionnaire to readers.

Copyright

Copyright issues and other elements of intellectual property are matters of growing concern for many lawyers. For legal information professionals, the issues over copyright which currently cause most concern are those relating to digital material.

This is a complex area and we make no pretence to have covered all aspects of concern within this issue. It is very likely that this will be an on-going matter explored within the pages of this journal on many future occasions. However, I am grateful to those who have produced guidance for our readers and particularly commend Laurence Bebbington's article on the issues which you have to consider in relation to digital rights management. We have also attracted Sandy Norman who is deservedly perceived as the leading expert in this field and I am grateful too to Kate Curr and the Australian Law Librarians' Group for permission to reprint Kate's article from the Australian journal.

We are on the edge of a new age in digital copyright security (Peter Kumik's article gives some insight into the sorts of methods that will become available) and that new age will undoubtedly require constructive and original responses from law librarians. One of the matters mentioned at the Cork Conference, and a matter which Laurence Bebbington refers to in his article, is the danger that new restrictions on copyright arising from licensing agreements may have the effect of restricting the use of material beyond that which might normally have attracted restriction. In particular, fair use may come under attack.

It is important for all those involved in legal information and librarianship to resist attempts by the holders of material to increase their profitability whilst restricting

access to material. Particularly in the legal field, few authors are keen to see this sort of restriction put in place. So many in the academic sphere, who are still the overwhelming majority of contributors to published work, gain most of their motivation for writing from their desire to spread the word (and, of course, the bizarrely weighted research assessment system) rather than from the desire to increase their income. The latter motivation, increasing income, is nevertheless important and there is nobody involved in legal information who would wish to deny their right to receive a proper reward for the work which has been done. But excessive restriction can have a restrictive effect even on income generation – outside the area of the established texts awareness is sometimes limited as to the range of work and material available (whether in paper form or electronically) and a reduction in restrictions can often bring the quality and value of that work to a wider audience.

I would like to take the opportunity to commend two sources for research into intellectual property. The UK Patent Office (www.patent.gov.uk) and the UK government's intellectual property site (www.intellectual-property.gov.uk) provide the level of public information which should be the standard for such sites and, for the more adept and informed, provide a number of useful jumping-off points for research through the Web. Using these sources for research may well be particularly valuable to our readers – and there is a considerable irony in the fact that this wealth of information is available free.

Survey

I am particularly grateful to Cathie Jackson for the prompt supply of the results from her survey carried out on behalf of BIALL and the SPTL. There have been occasions when the results of the survey have seemed to say little of value beyond the fact that things are pretty much as they were. I think the value of the survey has been revealed as we see the change in trends.

A blind man on a galloping horse could probably make a useful observation about the shift from printed matter to electronic matter. It is however only by careful analysis of the material arising from a survey of this sort that we begin to recognise the level of change in the academic sphere in the use of databases. The startling statistics showing the overall expenditure now devoted to electronic databases must be useful in defining the nature of the present roles of law librarians. The reality is that the need to master these databases and to understand their relative merit and the

areas in which they complement each other, and the areas in which they fail to complement each other, is now a principal part of the legal information professional's role. Inwardly digesting some of the more striking statistics from the survey, and being prepared to quote these when examined about the role of the legal information professional and the law librarian, is probably useful in defining and refining that role – and is certainly a useful marketing ploy in making others substantially aware of the value of the role.

I am in danger of coming full circle but, as stated in the last issue, one of the reasons for the changes made to the journal was a recognition that roles have changed and the role of the law librarian is not so easily defined as it once (supposedly) was. To a large extent this is the product of the change to the use of electronic databases and the level of use in the academic sphere is of course overshadowed by the enormous use made of these resources in private practice.

Cork Conference Reflections

I write this still reflecting on many of the issues raised at the Cork Conference, a selection of the papers from which will be published in the next issue. The overall quality of content at that conference was outstanding. We were also treated to a number of excellent social occasions.

One of the things which struck the Editorial Board about the conference was the level of feeling on certain issues – most strikingly the debate about publisher pricing policies in a restricted exchange. Clearly there were many people at the conference who had lots to say and who had many opinions to express. We would hope that they would take the opportunity to express those opinions within the pages of this journal. We are keen to encourage debate over a wide range of topics and if you have something worth saying I would invite you to send me a short article expressing your views for publication.

I could not however move on from the subject of Cork, and indeed surveys, without revealing the result of my personally conducted Cork-based survey: the Guinness really does taste better over there.



Laurence Eastham