

## **Dwindling knowledge banks**

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According to the Council of New Zealand University Librarians (CONZUL), the country's key "knowledge banks", its university libraries, are dwindling alarmingly in value.

The current debate on university funding has highlighted the plight of university libraries and the resources they need to support research and advanced study, so critical in a knowledge society. Years of spiralling inflation on the price of books and journals, combined with devaluation of the New Zealand dollar have seriously eroded the libraries' buying power. The situation is compounded this year by the universities' very tight budgets. Many of the libraries are having to cut book orders or cancel more journal subscriptions. Canterbury University Library is cancelling one million dollars worth, equivalent to about 20% of their journal budget.

"CONZUL supports the Vice Chancellors in their case for improved university funding" says the Chair, Sue Pharo. "We also believe the government should follow overseas models and invest in the national information infrastructure on a cross-sectoral basis, to support the knowledge society."

According to CONZUL, the government is increasing its investment in research, but is ignoring the need for access to the published output of the 99% of global Research and Development that goes on in the rest of the world. Governments in the UK, Finland, Canada and Australia are investing directly in the information infrastructure by supporting national electronic database networks.

The problem is not unique to university libraries. A recent New Zealand Library Association report estimates that up to 40-50% of the country's science research journal subscriptions have been cancelled in the last 20 years. However, the university libraries hold the primary collections in New Zealand of the quality published information required to support research, innovation and advanced learning.

University libraries provide services beyond their own students and staff, according to Pharo. "We have various arrangements for serving local research organisations; we are used by the general public on a walk-in reference basis, and through inter-library loans we serve researchers, students and the general public throughout New Zealand."

Library and Information Association of New Zealand: Access to Research, Science and Technology Information (<http://www.lianza.org.nz/nis.htm>)

For further information please contact

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