

# LIBRARY COMPUTERISATION: An Interview with

As part of the Polytechnic's evaluation task in the tender for the library turnkey package, Mrs Lock Thi Xuan, Librarian and Chairman of the Library Computerisation Project Evaluation Committee, together with Mr Ho Sze Ying, Library Assistant and Secretary of the Committee, embarked on an on-site evaluation assignment in Australia, Canada and the United States in April this year.

The following is an interview with Mrs Lock on the evaluation by our library correspondent, Mrs Caroline Loh.

**NP News:** What was the rationale behind this trip?

**Mrs Lock:** In response to our tender for a library turnkey system, we received three proposals – the GEAC Library System which originated from Canada, the Virgi-

nia Tech Library System from the United States and the URICA System from Australia. We found that the demonstration packages were incomplete and the local vendors were not equipped to answer the queries that arose. Thus, the assignment was undertaken, among other things, to study the implementation strategies, assess the reliability of the hardware and software, and observe the trend of information services provided by libraries in an automated environment.

**NP News:** How did you decide on the sites to visit?

**Mrs Lock:** They were selected on the basis of the users' configuration and their feedback on the systems performance, the vendors' recommendations and the users' availability to accommodate us for the visit. For each system, we covered three sites, one of which was the main

evaluation site. We also had discussions with two consultants and visited three software suppliers.

**NP News:** Can you comment on the general trend of library automation in these countries?

**Mrs Lock:** It is well accepted that automated library systems will help libraries to provide better library and information services with a high degree of efficiency and productivity. The inexpensive powerful technology of the on-line minicomputer systems, coupled with the proliferation of library software, has accelerated the pace of automation activities in all types of libraries. Thus, the main trend has been from off-line to on-line and from shared systems to dedicated mini-computer applications. This move makes possible the on-line access to information and allows the libraries to provide

## our Librarian

sophisticated research services on specialised nationwide databases. Local area networking is another development extensively used in nearly all the campuses we visited. This has enabled the linking of terminals to the library system to facilitate the sharing of common data files for users in all departments.

**NP News:** What was the extent of reliance on the respective Computer Centres by libraries?

**Mrs Lock:** Most of the libraries do not rely on their Computer Centres. They make use of their own systems personnel who are in charge of coordinating the requirement of every area of the library operations and act as liaison officers with the suppliers.

**NP News:** How has automation affected their staff patterns?

**Mrs Lock:** The move towards automation has enabled libraries to deploy their staff to other areas such as the provision of specialised information services. In some cases, there has been an increase in staff requirements because computerisation has provided more sophisticated forms of control for library operations, budgeting, statistics and audit-checking.

**NP News:** What are some of your main observations from this trip?

**Mrs Lock:** We have observed in detail the systems performance and capabilities which enabled us to verify the functional features required. We have also gained a deep insight into the complexities of implementation, and the need for strategic planning to ensure operational effectiveness. Another important area is the need for on-site and

dial-up support, and our observations have helped us to impress upon the supplier to provide for such a support. Training is another area which must be organised well in advance of the installation of the various library modules to ensure that the staff members are well prepared when the system is implemented. We have also identified a need for a systems personnel to oversee and manage the whole computerisation project.

**NP News:** Of the systems you have seen, would you rate any to be the best?

**Mrs Lock:** Most systems can perform the basic necessities required, though some are more sophisticated than others. However, none can claim to have measured up to all our functional requirements.