

FRONT



Tony Ralli — President, ALIA WA Branch

A topic of continuing interest over the years is the role that ALIA should play in the education, training and professional development of librarians, and now, more recently, of information workers generally. It is an important role, from which the Association appears to have all but abdicated, apart from in the limited area of course accreditation. This has resulted in a situation that is far from satisfactory to all parties — graduates, employers, educators and the

profession at large. In spite of efforts by the Board of Education and concerned individuals, we have consistently refused to face up to the problem.

In response to concern expressed in Western Australia, the Western Australian Branch has established a working party to look at the whole area of education and training for both librarians and library technicians in the State. The review will encompass not only formal education courses, but also the needs for continuing education, professional development and on-the-job training. We shall be looking at what the proper balance should be between the responsibilities of individuals, employers, educators and the Association.

The working party will be looking at the skills required for the various levels of librarian and library technician as expressed by employers in their documentation, including such things as job advertisements, position descriptions and position classification statements. It also intends surveying individuals to clarify what they consider to be the important and necessary skills. It will, of course, be taking into account the work already done elsewhere, and, in particular, the competency surveys carried out in the United States.

Two issues have already emerged and warrant further discussion and

possible action. First is the need for a newly qualified professional to have access to a suitable mentor in the early stages of his or her career. The possibility of organising just such a mentoring network is already under examination by the Western Australian Branch's Public Affairs Committee, as part of its brief to attract and retain new graduates as members of ALIA. The ability to offer such support to new entrants to the profession is seen as being a positive benefit of joining the Association.

The second issue is the belief that someone who is entitled to use 'AALIA' should be clearly distinguishable from someone who has only taken a basic educational course in librarianship. It should exemplify a commitment to their chosen profession, and should also mark a high level of professional consciousness and achievement. In a recent seminar in Perth (run by the Western Australian Group of EDLIBS in conjunction with ADLIBS, the student body of one of our library schools) the need for a significant component of professional practice received wide acceptance. It was suggested that this could be achieved in one of two ways — either by means of an internship year forming part of the degree course, or as a year of supervised and mentored practice be-

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A small indication of the areas of our expertise.



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Are you worth a pay rise?

Award restructuring

In the National Wage Case Decision of 7 August 1989, the Industrial Relations Commission recast the principles under which wage rises could be granted. As a result, wages may be increased by 3 per cent followed by another 3 per cent no less than 6 months later.

Structural Efficiency Principle (SEP)

However, these increases are not automatic. Employers and unions are required to negotiate and reach agreement on award restructuring. These agreements must bring about changes to work patterns, structures and classifications that are consistent with the SEP.

For wage adjustments to be allowable under SEP, the Commission must be convinced that a fundamental review of the award has taken place. The review is directed towards improving productivity, but there are possible benefits for employees. The review should include:

- establishing skill-related career paths, providing incentive for continuing education;
- eliminating impediments to multi-skilling and broadening the range of tasks performed;
- broadbanding job classifications to minimise demarcations while providing a more varied range of tasks;
- creating appropriate relativities between different categories of workers within an award;
- addressing award provisions that discriminate against sections of the workforce;
- any other measures to improve efficiency and flexibility.

Restructuring and ALIA members

Library and information workers should not just sit back and watch this process unfold. It is essential that members of the profession take an active role in discussions at the earliest possible occasion.

Enormous pressure has built up to rush the first 3 per cent rise through.

Yet the agreements that must be struck in order to secure the wage increase will fundamentally change the way work is done and the long-term career prospects for all members.

Negotiations may proceed more slowly for members who are covered by State awards. The State Commissions have to first consider the National Wage Case Decision, but will probably move towards the same sort of outcome!

Reviewing the Awards

The ACTU has developed a series of 'blueprints' or proposals that establish relativities between occupations' common pay point structures. ALIA members who are active in unions should seek to obtain these to provide a basis for negotiations.

In approaching award restructuring negotiations, issues and options that must be considered include:

• Skill paths

Library Technicians may argue for an increased range in their salary scale. Progression up the scale would depend on qualifications obtained, i.e. Certificate, Associate Diploma or Diploma. The ACTU blueprint for the Australian Public Service considers using a technical classification rather than the ASO (clerical) classification.

Professional members should work towards the retention of mandatory qualifications as essential to employment in professional positions. Promotion to higher levels (e.g. level 3) may be contingent on attainment of accredited advanced skills. This may involve an increased Continuing Education Function for ALIA. Employers have placed merit or performance-based pay on the agenda at the higher classification levels.

• Multi-skilling

Employers may argue that some positions be opened to people with other qualifications, e.g. management. ALIA members should argue for increased job rotation, so that people may gain a range of skills in the profession and experience gained may count towards accreditation of an advanced skill level. Continuing education courses would facilitate multi-skilling. Training arrangements such as study will have to be considered.

• Appropriate relativities

In the past, pay rises have gone through in a piecemeal fashion, with one industrially strong group acting as a pace-setter for change, and then weaker groups such as librarians applying for catch-up increases. If relativities are set on common pay points, general increases may be granted to all those groups on a common professional strand. This is of great benefit to our members. It would speed up increases and ensure that the profession does not fall further behind. However, any future upgrading of our position relative to other professionals would be very difficult.

• Broadbanding

Two existing classifications may be broadbanded together, with employees asked to do a wider range of tasks. Progression to the higher rate of pay will then not be based on the job allocated, but on performance indicators or merit/skills competency demonstrated.

As a first step towards gaining the pay rises, ALIA members should approach their union and ask what the proposals for library staff are, and how advanced negotiations are in their area.

The next issue of *InCite* will carry an article on training initiatives being made available to assist in the restructuring processes.

If any further advice or information is required, please telephone me at ALIA head office.

Tom McKeon
Industrial Information Officer



fore registration as an Associate. The question of 'Professional practice — whose responsibility?', raised by Margaret Trask, still remains unanswered by the Association.

While our working party will be concerned primarily with these matters as they affect us in Western Australia, we shall nonetheless be interested in hearing from ALIA members in other States who may have ideas or experiences to contribute. Correspondence can be sent to the working party c/o ALIA Western Australian Branch Office, Technology Park, 2 Brodie Hall Drive, Bentley, WA 6102. The working party's report will form the basis for future action by the Western Australian Branch, and will be made available to the Board of Education.

Tony Ralli
President, ALIA WA Branch