

## Industrial report from Western Australia

Prior to November 1985, library staff with a library technician qualification were classified as P-1 in the professional salary scale. After the introduction of Broadbanding, these people were put into Level 1 along with library aides. They were called by many differing titles and expected to have a library technician qualification and accept the same salary as staff with no qualifications.

### Compounding issues

Issues which have either caused confusion or hampered library technicians gaining paraprofessional status in the State Public Service:

- We have not had enough active members in the Section to stand up and fight for our beliefs. The union would not support us until we started to 'fight' our own battles.
- The fact that we have had to overcome prejudice from librarians who have felt threatened by us. By maintaining a high profile in the library world and proving ourselves we have now been taken seriously — this has overcome the prejudice.
- The two library technician courses: a TAFE course that originally offered a Certificate and Diploma course and from 1989 is now offering an Associate Diploma; a WACAE

course that has been and still is offering an Associate Diploma. A technician qualification from either course was acceptable to most library employers, but the issue confused the Public Service Commission and many other people.

- ALIA's Board of Education has been accrediting both courses and considers them 'equal', although the entry and exit levels have been different, as have the content of the courses.
- The Public Service Commission in WA has chosen to ignore points of view put forward by a professional association such as ALIA. It will only take notice of the educators.
- TAFE libraries in WA had not fully supported the graduates of the course taught at TAFE until recently. They were not recognising the qualification by paying more money employing 'library technicians'.

All these obstacles made the task of obtaining an occupational category extremely difficult and time consuming. It took a concerted effort on the part of a few members and other interested people to gain the recognition we deserve.

### Action taken

The local library technician section

lobbied vigorously in 1988 to get the Civil Service Association (CSA) to help us in our case. Consequently, a working party was set up early in 1989 consisting of four library technicians, three librarians plus a CSA industrial officer. This working party met on several occasions to discuss the issues of:

- getting an occupational classification for library technicians within the public sector with a career path;
- obtaining entry into Level 2 of broadbanding for the technicians; and
- drawing up a list of the employment tasks library technicians could be expected to perform in a library.

Eventually a meeting was arranged between the working party, the CSA and the Public Service Commission (PSC). At the second meeting with the PSC we were told by the PSC representative that we could either have an occupational category of library technician with various strings attached or else each technician graduate employed in a library could 'go it alone' and try for a Level 2 position but be called by one of the many different titles around. The working party felt it was important to stay united and we insisted on the occupational category — library technician. The 'strings' were that only the Associate Diploma would be considered for entry into Level 2 as the Associate Diploma had an entry level of Year 12 and exit level of 2 years post secondary. We argued that the two courses were considered 'equal' by ALIA. The PSC were not interested. However they gave TAFE certificate graduates 2 years to convert to Associate Diploma status. Within this 2 year period, if any technician positions at Level 2 were advertised then people with the Certificate or Diploma would be able to apply. The 2 years were to start from January 1989. This in reality meant 1 year as by October 1989 when this decision was made it was too late for anybody to enrol for the Associate Diploma units in 1989. Since then the PSC has extended the time to December 1991.

### The present situation

The problem now for TAFE certificate graduates is that to convert to the Associate Diploma they have to complete an extra 12 units. TAFE is only offering the conversion course for this year — 1990. So far only about 10-12 people have taken advantage of the conversion course. Another problem cropped up when Diploma graduates enquired about their qualification's status against the Associate Diploma. The section wrote to the Minister for TAFE and his reply indicated that the Diploma was equivalent. This has since proved to be the case. We also do not have a career path in place. Hopefully this will come in time.

## Award restructuring - what part do you play?

The whole Australian workforce is currently engaged in award restructuring and the process looks like it's set to continue for some time. No matter what part of the workforce you're in, you are likely to have to come to grips with it soon — if you haven't already.

Award restructuring can be a bewildering business but there are some things you can do to sort out what your position should or could be — even if you're not a member of a union.

- Find out your exact classification and rate of pay within your organisation. You must know where to start from before you see where you're going.
- Find out whether you are in a structure that is common to many workplaces or only your own e.g. a public service structure as opposed to a private one.
- Approach ALIA or a union to give you the big picture. Have award restructuring discussions taken place with your employer? Are they even planned? Where do people like you stand?
- If award restructuring is planned, make sure you get both the employer's desired structure and the union's desired structure clear in your mind. Sometimes the two may not substantially differ, but at other times they may.
- Once you have accurate information on your position, consider your feelings and opinions about your future. Don't get into the habit of thinking that you're just one small cog in the machine. Your future as a

library technician is just as important as that of other library workers.

- If you feel you can, consult with other people in your organisation. See how they feel about award restructuring.
- Ask ALIA or the appropriate union to keep you up to date with negotiations on restructuring.
- Award restructuring, amalgamations, industrial disputes, and pay claims are all separate issues. It can be confusing if two or three sets of information are coming into your organisation about separate matters. Keep separate files of information on each issue if you want to keep things clear in your mind.
- Take part in the restructuring process — otherwise you may have to live with a result that you don't like. The opinions of individuals can make a difference.

All the above is fairly general and are only things observed from personal experience. ALIA can provide a great deal of information about the process of award restructuring but it is *not* a union — remember the difference; don't confuse the two. Also remember that the library workforce is *one* workforce — it isn't librarians or technicians or library assistants in isolation. Industrial outcomes affect us all. Tom McKeon's regular updates in *inCite* are an important source of information. For this special issue he has put together a nation-wide overview of the situation for library technicians.

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