

NSW librarians test case completed

On 12 November, the Full Bench of the New South Wales Industrial Relations Commission (NSWIRC) adjourned for the last time in the landmark pay equity test cast for library workers and archivists. The Bench has now fully ratified the new *Crown Employees (Librarians, Library Assistants, Library Technicians and Archivists) Award 2002*.

The award rescinds the interim award ordered in March this year to give effect to the hefty pay increases granted then by the Bench but, of course, incorporates those rates. They are the largest pay rises ever won by a significant section of the Australian library workforce, ranging up to twenty-six per cent per annum.

The new final award now builds on that earlier judgement by adopting firm qualification standards and detailed classification descriptors. Both acknowledge ALIA's critical role in determining appropriate arrangements for the sector. In the case of qualifications, the Full Bench has determined that the standard for the category 'librarian' shall be a person holding qualifications acceptable for professional membership of ALIA. The same approach has been taken with 'library technician'. For 'library assistant' the definition is a person 'who is eligible for enrolment in a course of study that leads to a qualification acceptable for either professional or library technician membership of ALIA'.

Classification descriptors are vastly better than in previous, and most other, awards or agreements. For all library worker grades, description of work at the various

levels is based very substantially on ALIA's *Work Level Guidelines*.

Both these outcomes represent great advances, both for the conditions of employment enjoyed by NSW government-employed library workers and for ALIA's status and profile.

For the future, the question is: can this excellent decision be used in other areas to improve the lot of library workers? There is certainly real potential for that to happen, but it will not be easy. The NSW case was run under new equal remuneration principles which do not exist in some states. The structure of the existing NSW award permitted direct comparison of rates for library workers with those of other categories. Most awards and agreements covering library workers these days contain generic classification structures which cover all staff. In this circumstance, it will be necessary to demonstrate that library workers are treated differently to other workers when classified within those structures. Clearly, the greatest potential lies in the NSWIRC finding that recent change to librarians' work per se has constituted work value increase 'of the highest order'. Logically, the major developments in information management which lie at the heart of that change cannot be rationally isolated to just this one group of workers. The task for ALIA, its members and their trade unions around the country will be to demonstrate that library workers elsewhere deserve recompense for changes of similar magnitude to those identified in NSW. ■

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