

So, what does a student in a theological library most appreciate? Naturally, a helpful and patient librarian, who can direct them speedily to the right section of books for that impossible essay. Recent publications are a must, likewise a clearly displayed 'new books' area for easy quick perusal. Journals and indexes, accessible and well lit. A simple and easy to operate OPAC that doesn't require a computing degree to use. Lastly, an open borrowing system, as many, for as long as you like!!!

The last six months transition from student to Librarian has been, and continues to be a vertical learning curve. My sympathies are slowly but surely realigning towards the long suffering kind, self-controlled wonderful librarian.

Susan Phillips



Fences and gates

Industrial issues and workplace safety

Phil Teece

Phil Teece, Industrial Services Manager in ALLA's National Office presented details of the changing nature of Australia's labour market in general and in the library sector particularly. In doing so, he referred closely to ALLA's recent national survey of employment conditions for library workers, the most comprehensive research project of its kind ever carried out. Among the many facts presented the following stood out:

The age profile of library workers is remarkable, by comparison with the general workforce: 72% of workers are aged 40 or older, compared to 40% of all Australian workers.

In the past year, 66% of library workers received a pay increase. After analysis, the intuitively-felt pay disadvantage of library workers relative to the total workforce is confirmed. Library workers whose pay increased, other than via promotion or change of job, received an average wage increase of 3.4% - significantly lower than increases in Australian average weekly ordinary time earnings of 4.5% and increases from enterprise agreements (4.4%). This is notwithstanding the finding that library workers are better educated, more experienced and more stable in their employment patterns, relative to the total workforce. Given that a very high proportion of library workers is found in the public sector, real wage differentials for library workers can be seen as even greater when comparisons are made with average wage increases for public sector workers as a whole (6.1%). The relatively small proportion of private sector library workers fared much better than their public sector counterparts with average increases of 4.9%. Some gender differences were evident: for example, among full-time librarians 50.4% of men earn more

than \$800 per week, compared to 41.6% of women. Pay data from the survey is already being used in the New South Wales Pay Equity Inquiry.

Adoption of enterprise bargaining is relatively high in library work. 63% of workers in the sector are covered by some form of negotiated agreement. But awards remain important with a third relying entirely on an award to regulate conditions of employment. A further 40% are subject to an enterprise agreement which operates in conjunction with, rather than instead of, a registered industrial award. Individual arrangements are becoming significant, however, with 12% of librarians covered by either common law or registered individual employment contracts. Very few (1%) library technicians are subject to individual contracts.

Library workers are highly unionised. 57% of library workers are members of trade unions compared to 31% in the total workforce. This does not confirm the oft-expressed view that librarians, employment benefits are inferior to those of some other workers because many librarians are not union members. A more likely explanation is poor representation by unions of library worker members, coupled with, and arguably to some extent resulting from, insufficient involvement in union affairs by library workers.

Library work is less casualised than work generally. A higher proportion of library workers (17.2%) occupy permanent part time positions, compared to the general workforce (7.3%) or the public sector (11.6%). The proportion of casual library workers (5.6%) is surprisingly low. A large majority of library workers is generally satisfied with working hours, with 26% preferring to work less and 7% wanting longer hours. In respect of flexibility in standard working time, it is clear that enterprise bargaining has increased the numbers of library workers who can be rostered to work beyond the traditional Monday-Friday work week of workers covered by enterprise agreements, a much higher proportion are subject to 7 day rosters when compared to those subject to award coverage only. While 20% of librarians are working more than 8 hours overtime per week, full-time library workers as a whole work an average 3 hours less per week than the average for all Australian full-time workers. Overall, these data do not indicate a wholesale dismantling of jobs in the library and information sector which is sometimes suggested. They do suggest that, while the labour market's so-called core-periphery divide is of concern to some, its current effects on the sector generally may be slightly exaggerated. This impression is supported by the Survey finding that 94% of library workers are employed by only one employer.

Library workers are more positive than others in describing changes in the work environment. For example, 36% of librarians and 43% of library technicians reported an increase in job satisfaction over the preceding 12 months, compared to 30% in the total workforce. Library workers are particularly positive about autonomy and their ability to use their own ideas in their work with 41% of librarians and more than 57% of library technicians reporting this had increased in the past year. Only 10% and 3%, respectively, reported a reduction. But increasing dissatisfaction with management was evident, with almost 50% of librarians and 53% of technicians reporting a decline in satisfaction levels in the past year. Allied to this, 44% of librarians felt they now have less say in

organisational decisions affecting their jobs. And more than 60% of respondents are experiencing greater stress levels at work. The policy indication from this is that library workers are fundamentally positive about their work, but want and would respond well to greater effort by management to consult and involve them.

Finally, there is significant insecurity about the future among library workers. It is focused heavily on workplace and industrial relations issues, with more than 50% expressing major concern in this area. A third of respondents were worried about new technologies, some fearing that the very profession of librarianship was threatened by a prevailing view that 'anybody' can now use new information systems. Others doubted their capacity to keep abreast of rapid technological change. New technology skills are the dominant training need identified by respondents. From a policy perspective, it is true that many of the changes giving rise to these concerns are probably inevitable facts of life. But their ubiquity suggests organisations and senior managers in the sector will be well advised to address, and where possible minimise, employee fears if organisational performance targets are to be met.

*Phil Teece
Industrial Relations Officer
Australian Library & Information Association*

After completing his formal presentation, Phil conducted a highly-interactive workshop on current industrial issues confronting delegates at the workplace level.

ANZTLA Conference 1999

Luther Seminary

Adelaide

1st – 4th July 1999

Plan to be there!