

# Pocket Time



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**T**HIS IS THE TIME of year when many students who are about to finish their courses start thinking of finding a full-time job, hopefully related to their field of study. You may have read about the sorry state of Graduate starting salaries. Some of the major newspapers reported the Graduate Careers Council of Australia's finding that graduate salaries had fallen to the lowest level relative to average earnings since 1977. While that is depressing, they maintain that having a tertiary qualification is worthwhile and important to career success, and the forecasters are confident that graduates will continue to enjoy lower unemployment rates and higher salaries than most young people without a degree.

Although starting salaries are important, for most graduates the major issue is finding a job at all in their field. None of this is news to you. Graduates of courses with a high technological component seem to fare the worst from unemployment. Everyone experiences similar economic hardship, but the longer these graduates are unemployed the more removed they are from the changes that are occurring in their field and hence the quicker their skills and knowledge become diminished or obsolete. I think you could class library technicians and librarians in this category, as well as other graduates of engineering, computer science and information technology.

In recognition of this danger to the future skills base of the profession, the Institution of Engineers and their union have worked out a graduate experience deal whereby graduates can work and train for one month without pay. Obviously this is sensitive industrial territory and I would be the last to suggest that people work for no pay, or that volunteer workers take the jobs of qualified employees. However, the Engineers' example shows that if such an issue can be negotiated and implemented in a structured manner, all parties can benefit.

Library workers are industrially fragmented - they belong to many unions. Hence there is no one library union with which our Association could strike such a deal. However such an arrangement could be negotiated at an organisational or institutional level if people were committed to it. When you have no relevant employment experience, any experience, even as short as one month, is a valuable asset.

Some time ago the NSW Branch of ALIA published a *Job Hunting in Library and Information Science* booklet. This is being republished by ALIA with the help of NSW Branch and will be available from mid-October. Requests for copies can be lodged with ALIA's receptionist.

## Award Restructuring

I recently attended a local government training workshop in Sydney on *Understanding the Process of Award Restructuring*, organised by the Association of Local Government Librarians of NSW and the NSW Public Libraries section of ALIA. I was asked to present an overview of the Australian industrial relations system to contextualise award restructuring. If members are in need of this kind of general information, then I can certainly provide copies of my paper to you.

In one of the sessions a panellist gave the group a good illustration of how the needs of the organisation and the provision of work experience to volunteers can coincide and complement one another. This public library was allotted a number of Skillshare trainees. They used the added human resources to free staff for training and consultation on job redesign, the need for which had arisen from the process of award restructuring.

One of the main changes in award restructuring is that many more people are involved in negotiating the award. It also involves some degree of choice as to how work, hours, classifications, are organised. Because negotiations are being conducted in a decentralised manner, for example, council by council, many participants find it difficult to obtain information about what other institutions are doing. I was impressed with this training workshop because it provided forum where people could ask each other questions, and get practical advice and suggestions relevant to their own sector.

Besides local government, the sector I am hearing most about with regards to award restructuring is higher education. The national HEGGS (Higher Education General and Salaried Staff) Interim Award, which incorporated a number of state awards, is being negotiated at the level of individual institutions.

While many universities are in the process of bargaining as yet only University of Queensland has reached agreement. It is being heralded as the sector's first enterprise-bargained industrial agreement and will be registered federally with the Industrial Relations Commission. ■