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As Australia's swing to enterprise bargaining gathers momentum, recent research by the Federal Department of Industrial Relations confirms the need to develop strategies which take proper account of the characteristics of individual enterprises.

As the Department's earlier landmark Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey revealed, there are enormous differences between organisations. As well as the obvious issues of industry sector, geographical location, public or private ownership and size, industrial relations features such as union density, award coverage, gender and racial make-up of workgroups and human resource management practices vary markedly.

In a research paper for the Department, *Enterprise Bargaining: Choosing an Appropriate Strategy*, (Commonwealth of Australia 1992, ISBN 0 642 18608 1) Richard Curtain suggests that, though decentralised bargaining is becoming conventional wisdom, it will work well only where specific criteria are met. Using a number of individual enterprise case studies, Curtain shows how difficult it is to adopt a decentralised bargaining process successfully in larger organisations with a history of centrally controlled business strategy.

According to the case studies, the basis for getting the decentralised bargaining process right is a culture where line managers have traditionally been able to make the decisions about how the money is spent and where disputes or grievances are settled at a local level.

Public sector organisations in particular will find it hard genuinely to embrace real decentralised bargaining because very few are able to work that way. There, the study warns if line managers are asked to negotiate directly without full control of the process, then enterprise bargaining will flounder because they will quickly be seen as 'unable to deliver'.

As always in industrial relations the centre of gravity will soon move to the place where the real decisions can be made. In these cases it will be as well to adopt a more centralised approach from the beginning.

The Victorian Government has lost another round in its fight to stop workers escaping from the controversial new industrial system in that state. The Full Bench of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission has refused to adjourn 15 cases which involve unions seeking federal award coverage through the Federal Government's 'escape hatch' legislation. That legislation remains the subject of a State Gov-

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ernment High Court challenge. The ACTU is now moving to have most Victorian unions lodge applications for federal coverage almost immediately to remove the vast majority of Victorian workers from state awards.

The Association has made representations on behalf of Queensland local government members who have been disadvantaged in translation to a new integrated classification structure. In implementing the award, the Queensland Local Government Association had refused to recognise the status of professional librarians who qualified by completion of the Registration Examination.

We have argued that this discriminates against one group and fails to follow the course adopted for other disciplines, where all professionals were treated equally despite differences over time in the way they qualified. This is an example of difficulties being experienced by librarians in a number of states and sectors.

At the time of writing, I am hopeful on the basis of discussions with Local Government Association officers that our submissions will be accepted and the anomaly removed. If so ALIA will have made a significant breakthrough which may be helpful in other areas. ■



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