

Librarians and geologists — between a book and a hard place

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The New South Wales Pay Equity Inquiry, which was outlined in the March 'Work watch' column, is now well-advanced. The inquiry is part of the state government's commitment to equal employment opportunity and pay equity for women. It is being heard before Justice Leonie Glynn in the Industrial Relations Commission. She has been asked to inquire into whether work in female-dominated occupations and industries is undervalued against comparable work in male-dominated areas. The inquiry will develop principles and mechanisms for use in cases before the Commission to address identified pay inequities. It is expected to conclude shortly.

As a starting point, the inquiry reviewed a number of case studies to establish how gender-related pay differences have come about and to identify mechanisms which might be used to redress them. One of these is a comparison between librarians and geologists. It has proved very interesting. Twenty typical librarian jobs from the State Library of New South Wales were compared with twenty typical geologist positions in the Department of Mineral Resources. Each profession is heavily gender-dominated — the former by women (eighty-nine per cent) and the latter by men (seventy per cent). Each has a similar minimum educational requirement of a three-year university degree for registration. In practice, employers of both indicate a preference for people with four-year qualifications.

The study used points factor job evaluation as the method for determining comparable work value. This process involves analysis of dissimilar jobs using a consistent set of factors (knowledge/skills, problem solving, communicating/influencing, teamwork, accountability and responsibility, for example). Each factor is rated and job scores are totalled. For this case study, gender-mixed panels conducted the assessments, and included a representative from the New South Wales Labour Council and an observer from ODEOPE. All panel members were formally trained in job evaluation systems and in minimisation of gender bias. Two sets of evaluations were carried out, seven months apart, using a different panel and a different job evaluation system.

The results showed that librarians received less pay than geologists in jobs of comparable size. Having established comparable value and different pay, the study then looked for possible causes of the dif-

ference. It looked at award structures and the history of pay rates. Career structures, the impact of sex discrimination and differences between public and private sector markets for the two professions were compared. The research demonstrated that, while award structures were similar, the librarians' award had more steps, smaller pay increments and more competitive merit selection barriers to progression than the award covering geologists. A typical classification — Senior Librarian Grade 2 (8-10 years professional experience and a supervisory role) — was compared with an equivalent geologist classification — Senior Geologist. At the top of the pay scale, the librarian receives \$7900 per annum less than the geologist — or nineteen per cent of her salary. Moreover, career prospects for librarians are tougher, as State Library structures are flatter than those in the Department of Mineral Resources.

The research found that each profession had received pay increases of similar size and at similar times over the past fourteen years. Using the same comparison, the Senior Librarian Grade 2 rate was only eighty-five per cent of the equivalent Geologist in 1957 and remains at eighty-four per cent today. This confirms that librarian award rates had not changed relatively since the time when sex discrimination in pay was legal. The New South Wales Public Service introduced equal rates for men and women doing the same work in 1958. Before then, women doing exactly the same job as men earned only eighty-five per cent of the male rate. The case study also compared private and public sector rates of pay for the twenty jobs in each occupation. The librarians received between seventy-three per cent and ninety-six per cent of private sector librarians' pay. Geologists do better, earning between eighty-seven per cent and 114 per cent of their private sector counterparts.

Important background to librarians' pay disadvantage was gleaned from the 1972 study *Librarians: a survey*, by Encel, Cass and Bullard, which sourced the undervaluation of librarians' skills to conscious policy decisions by early state librarians to staff the library with women so

as to provide a cheaper service. The research also documents policies and practices which gave preferential treatment to improve retention of men in the profession. The way the work was described may also have contributed to its being undervalued. Some of its core components, such as classification and cataloguing, were described as routine mechanical clerical functions. This worked against proper recognition of the professional and technical expertise required. Much scientific work is routine and mechanical, particularly experimental and classificatory work, yet the knowledge base is not minimised in the same way.

The inquiry took evidence from state librarian, Dagmar Schmidmaier, who provided information on the nature of change in the information industry and its impact on librarians' work. She described the increased requirement for higher levels of professional knowledge to meet the demands of a more informed and expanding customer base. She confirmed that sex discrimination in pay had been a policy of earlier years.

Janet Good, general secretary of the Public Service Association, gave evidence on the history of industrial negotiations to increase librarians' pay. And two senior librarians, Kate Irvine and Kate Burnham described the nature of their work, its professional challenges and their management roles. They presented the profession in a very positive light. The inquiry also heard from a range of specialists in industrial relations, economics and discrimination law, and from researchers and experts on management and trade unions.

For librarians, the inquiry has been an opportunity to demonstrate that the perceived undervaluation of their work is in fact the case. ALIA's contribution has been significant, providing comprehensive information about the nature of the profession which was included in research presented. It is much appreciated.

Justice Glynn is likely to release her report in September or October. The next steps are in the hands of librarians, the Association and the unions. In the meantime, we are between a book and a hard place. ■

Di Fruin is an acknowledged authority on the effects of gender on pay equity, she recently presented the case for librarians to the New South Wales Pay Equity Inquiry. Among Di's published work on the subject is 'Gender aspects of enterprise bargaining: The good the bad and the ugly' (with Philippa Hall) in Dimensions of enterprise bargaining and organisational relations, University of New South Wales 1994. Over recent months, she has worked closely with ALIA's industrial service in developing her submissions.