

ALIA pay review proposals



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In my June column, I told readers about the Gender Pay Gap Review in Western Australia. It is now well-advanced and recommendations are expected to go to the state government next month. An ALIA submission has been lodged with the review panel. I have summarised it below.

ALIA was heavily-involved in the New South Wales Pay Equity Inquiry and I worked closely with the Office of the Director for Equal Opportunity in Public Employment [ODEOPE] and the Premier's Department in development of the Crown case. The subsequent Pay Equity Test Case for librarians, library technicians and archivists eventually produced a new award and radical improvements in both pay and professional recognition. In making submissions to the subsequent Queensland and Tasmanian reviews, ALIA strongly recommended incorporation of the New South Wales approach. We have now made the same recommendation to Western Australia's Review.

ALIA believes that at least part of its membership in Western Australia suffers pay disadvantage. We have argued that state government librarians in Western Australia are clearly held back at lower levels in professional officer classification structures. As a result, we say that remuneration standards are entirely inappropriate for a highly skilled professional category engaged in work that has been subject to huge change in recent years.

We have argued that wage levels in Western Australia library employment are lamentable by comparison with remuneration standards in New South Wales. These were set after very thorough analysis of the current work value of public-sector library staff doing very similar work to that of their Western Australian counterparts. It can hardly be disputed that the major shifts identified by both the New South Wales Pay Equity Inquiry and the Full Bench Test Case are broad and have strong relevance for all library professionals in Australia. In other words, it cannot be credibly argued that the NSW work-value adjustments result solely from local factors.

Analysis of current library professional jobs in Western Australian government employment reveals that of 469 employees, just 11 [or 2.3 per cent] earn more than \$60 000 per annum. Only 60 [12.8 per cent] earn more than \$50 000. Disturbingly, 60 per cent of Western Australian government librarians earn less than \$39 999. In New South Wales, the lowest possible point for a new graduate librarian with no experience is now \$39 594. There are twenty-one salary points for librarians attracting salaries from \$40 000 to \$91 554 per annum in New South Wales. Similar starting salaries for new graduate

librarians prevail across the Australian university sector under federal awards.

So it is clear that a high proportion of Western Australian government sector librarians are being valued at, or in many cases below, a level that is appropriate only for beginners in the profession. We have argued that this represents serious pay inequity for the employees concerned. We have suggested that the same problem of undervaluation is apparent in local government across Western Australia.

A similar situation has never existed in any male-dominated professional occupation covered by the same classification structures in Western Australia. Nor should it. We have recommended proper comparisons be made with these groups, along the lines of work done in the New South Wales pay-equity investigations. We have also suggested that prospects for improved fairness can be greatly enhanced if Western Australia follows New South Wales in identifying specific occupational groups for special attention. Obviously, we believe that library professionals should be one. Specifically, we say that the state government should lead by directing its Department of Consumer and Employment Protection to conduct a formal review of the contemporary work value of its library professionals. The Local Government Association should undertake similar analysis of local government employment.

ALIA's formal submission recommends, among other things, that the Western Australian Government investigate: the extent to which librarians and library technician jobs are concentrated at lower classifications than those of professionals in other non-feminised categories; what methods are used to define the work value of library professionals, bearing in mind the New South Wales finding that they continue to suffer serious pay disadvantage, despite having experienced work value increases of 'the highest order'; and whether there is a need for revised gender-neutral processes of job evaluation to be introduced so that judgements about the work value of library professionals are seen to be consistent with those made about non-feminised categories.

ALIA has proposed specific analysis of the contemporary work value of library professionals in state and local government employment in Western Australia, with particular attention to the findings of the NSW Industrial Relations Commission after its review of counterpart professionals in that state. And we have asked for prompt action to eliminate all inequities identified.

The full submission with attachments can be found at <http://alia.org.au/advocacy/submissions/wa.gender.html>. ■

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