

Heather Nash: ALIA's new Industrial Adviser

Heather will be starting work with ALIA initially on 18 December as human resources and industrial relations advisor. She comes to ALIA from the ANU, as did our longest-serving employee Marie Murphy. (We hope this is a good omen.) From January 2007 Heather will be working four days per week (usually Monday to Thursday) and is very much looking forward to meeting members, receiving your e-mail enquiries and phone calls.

Heather grew up and completed schooling in Sydney before enrolling for an Arts degree, majoring in History, at ANU in the mid-1970s. She has spent most of her adult life in Canberra, apart from a four-year stint in the administration of the University of Wollongong and an 18-month working holiday in the UK and Europe. At the ANU, Heather worked first in the Faculty of Law office, before transferring to the Faculty of Arts. Since February 2003 she has been Senior Employment Strategies Advisor in the ANU's HR Division.

In 1991 Heather returned to study and over six years completed part-time LLB studies. More recently she completed examinations for the Australian Institute of Company Directors and earlier this year was elected a Fellow of that organisation. This builds on her experience as a Director of UniSuper Limited and of the Uniting Church (NSW) Trust Association.

When not at work or studying, Heather reads voraciously (thrillers, history, politics and the Saturday papers), keeps fit at the gym and in the pool and plays bridge.

Work Watch

In preparing my first Work Watch column I am mindful of the high level of service provided by Phil Teece over nearly fifteen years, in his many contributions to *inCite* and, via e-mail and telephone, advice to members on all manner of workplace issues. I will be doing my best to emulate Phil's standards.

I come to ALIA after many years at the Australian National University, most recently as Senior Employment Strategies Advisor in the Human Resources Division. During 2001-2006 I was also a director of UniSuper, which will be well-known to ALIA members in the higher education and research sector. Both of these roles should be an advantage in my work for ALIA, especially as my position in the National Office has been expanded to include wider human resources duties.

Superannuation in 2007

In the last two years superannuation has been the subject of as much, if not more, legislation than workplace relations. The first Work Watch column for 2007 therefore seems an excellent time to review recent superannuation changes and advise members as to sources for further information. Recent measures enabling consolidation of individual superannuation accounts are of special relevance to the library and information workforce, given the high level of casual employment and numbers of women in the sector taking breaks in service for family reasons.

Most people are broadly aware of the superannuation Choice of Fund legislation applying to many sections of the workforce from 1 July 2005 and which in 2006 was extended to cover employees working under state awards. So far it is estimated that 11 per cent of eligible employees have exercised choice, but that many others may simply have not found time or been deterred by the belief that it is yet another complex superannuation matter. It is actually fairly simple to complete the choice process and members with more than one superannuation account, large or small, should consider moving all their superannuation to a single fund offering better returns and lower fees. For eligible employees, this can be done at any time and not only when changing jobs. A good explanation of 'Choice of Fund' provided by the Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia (ASFA) can be found at www.superannuation.asn.au, clicking on the 'Superguru' icon, then 'Consumers'. The same site also provides excellent information about other superannuation issues.

Members who have been employed in several areas of the workforce, especially if over a long period or with career breaks, may have made small superannuation contributions to several funds, bringing in minimal returns and subject to fees. Anyone with concerns about this should contact previous employers and check the Australian Tax Office's website at www.ato.gov.au, clicking on the 'Find your lost super' icon on the right-hand side. (Before making these inquiries, have your tax file number handy.) Again, this is not a complicated process.

Further current provisions relevant to the demographics of the library workforce are the transition to retirement arrangements available for many workers in the 55-65 age group. In some situations, people who are still working may draw from their superannuation benefits. Further information is at www.superchoice.gov.au/employees/general. As 65 per cent of the Australia library workforce is aged over 45, there is a foreseeable library skills shortage looming, so many ALIA members may wish to keep working or move to part-time work at the same time as looking forward to retirement.

WorkChoices

The WorkChoices (yes, it is one word) legislation came into effect at the end of March 2006, amending the 1996 Workplace Relations Act. Case law applying the new provisions is beginning to appear. In the last fortnight a major case involving the Village Cinemas group has gone some way to clarifying the right of employers to dismiss workers for 'genuine operational reasons', even where an employee may be clearly redeployable. The determination by the Industrial Relations Commission places the onus on the employer to establish that the dismissal was for genuine reasons, as opposed to using a restructure as an excuse for dismissal.

The Village Cinemas case points to issues on which the library workforce needs to be vigilant. Many libraries in the public, higher education and research sectors in particular continue to undergo major restructuring, often resulting in job losses. Library staff and their advocates involved in relevant negotiations should therefore ensure that the employer can prove a genuine need for not continuing to employ a staff member, rather than simply asserting that a restructure requires the shedding of staff. Further, both sides often overlook the fact that many collective agreements stipulate that redeployment must be pursued ahead of redundancy. It is not appropriate for employers to assume that employees will prefer redundancy, often carrying substantial payouts, and not point to required and sometimes preferable alternatives.

I look forward to discussing superannuation, WorkChoices and other issues with ALIA members, especially during trips interstate and to regional centres.



Leigh Mardon

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