

Workwatch

Professional standards

Shortly after joining ALIA I wrote a Workwatch article (*inCite* March 2007) focusing on the need for the library sector to be vigilant about professional standards in appointments to libraries throughout Australia. It is of concern that this issue comes increasingly to ALIA's attention and in relation to a wide cross-section of libraries.

In recent months I have received expressions of concern from ALIA members about advertisements for positions within libraries where library qualifications are deemed 'desirable but not essential' or where 'experience is preferred but not essential'. The posts where these situations have arisen range from library officer in legal chambers to a senior appointment in a local government library. In other cases, library technicians have been appointed to undertake the duties of librarians and vice versa, with libraries failing to recognise the distinct skills and training required for different roles.

Two main issues arise here. The first is that fully-qualified librarians and library technicians have completed several years of study to obtain skills deemed necessary by ALIA for performance of the work required for these roles. ALIA is the only recognised authority for assessment and recognition of courses of study appropriate for library work and it is unacceptable for library employers to ignore standards set by the relevant professional organisation. This is the same principle that applies to other professions, such as nursing, law, engineering, or surveying.

The second issue is that ALIA is also the peak body representing 12 million Australians who belong to libraries. ALIA therefore has a vital interest in ensuring that library users receive a high standard of service. A major focus of ALIA's course recognition process is on units of study relating to assistance to library users, whether they be general readers, members of the public seeking specific reference assistance, internet users, or school students requiring assistance with project work. Provision of appropriate standards of service is as dependent on professional expertise as on current acquisitions and up to date technology.

A current trend within public libraries and related institutions is to appoint as 'library managers' staff who will oversee the operations of a library as part of a larger portfolio of heritage and cultural services. In many of these posts it is determined that library qualifications are not essential, even though most of the staff in the relevant institutions are library workers. For appointments at senior levels, ALIA acknowledges that it is highly desirable for library qualifications to be supplemented by high level competencies in general administration, including budgeting and personnel management. It remains, however, that even wide general experience is no substitute for the specialised skills associated with any profession, especially when an appointee has to provide leadership to others in that professions. ALIA's perspective on this kind of appointment is set out in the Association's policy on senior appointments at <http://www.alia.org.au/policies/senior.staff.htm>

In smaller libraries, especially one-person libraries, it can be inevitable that duties undertaken by staff will spread across work levels. This can also occur in regional areas where it might be difficult to obtain staff who have the qualifications specified for each role. ALIA's concerns relate to those areas of the library workforce where staff are available for appointment at levels commensurate with their training. ALIA members should feel free to approach the National Office about issues of professional standards. The attention of employers should also be drawn to the senior appointments policy referred to above and to ALIA's education standards and work level guidelines at:

- <http://www.alia.org.au/education/qualification>
- <http://www.alia.org.au/employment/salary.scales/roles.and.pay.htm>



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Fair Work Act and Collective Agreements

The Fair Work Act came into effect on 1 July 2009. Details of the new legislation are at <http://www.fairwork.gov.au>.

A particular feature of this website is the guidance provided to employees and employers for negotiation and approval of collective agreements, also known as enterprise agreements.

The Commonwealth legislation covers an estimated 80% of the workforce. Workplaces **not** covered by the Federal legislation are principally state government public service sectors, other than in Victoria, partnerships, and sole traders.

Where a collective agreement has expired and a new agreement not been formally approved, the terms of the expired agreement continue to apply until the new agreement has been through all approval processes. As at 1 July, this scenario currently applies to agreements covering teachers in government schools in the ACT, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania and therefore affecting teacher librarians in those jurisdictions.

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