

# A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...

## Lamis Sukkar, Cataloguing Manager at CAVAL



Did you know that there is a team that specialises in library materials in 70 languages, in fact any language\*\* in which there is reading material published?

I enjoy managing this team of 16 cataloguers and 10 technicians, ranging from full-time to part-time to casual as needed. Our office is like a mini-United Nations, with most team members fluent in two or three languages. For example, apart from English, Trevor speaks Hindi and Bengali, and Helen speaks Russian, German, and Polish – and the intellectual level in the department is palpable. I am sure it's the largest team of multicultural cataloguers in the southern hemisphere and good planning allows us to scale up or down in any language quite rapidly.

Personally, I am a qualified librarian,

with almost 17 years of cataloguing experience. I've been a professional member of ALIA for 10 years, starting at CAVAL as an Arabic cataloguer,

**O**ur office is like a mini United Nations, with most team members fluent in two or three languages.

and taking on management of the cataloguing team in 2001. I am fluent in English and Arabic and I can help the

team with queries when they need a second opinion.

It's only a short drive to work, which is one of the perks of working outside Melbourne CBD at the La Trobe University campus in Bundoora, about 30 km from the city.

My day starts with a coffee and a catch-up in the kitchen with my colleagues. Often I'll swap news with Eva Varga, who manages our CARM storage solutions, CAVAL's giant environmentally-controlled secure vaults, with multiple floors of custom racks, where academic libraries store their offsite collections and last copies.

After that, I head to my office alongside a dozen work stations where some of my cataloguing team have already settled in. My morning tends to be taken up with queries, rostering, emails, client liaison, and reporting/meetings. The premises are light and airy, very different from many libraries, where the cataloguing areas are in the bowels of the building. There's a good atmosphere in the team. There are shared desks, so each morning people will find a place, bring in their trolley, and start work. Some wear headphones and catalogue to music; others will just carry on cataloguing as if they are the only ones in the room.

Cataloguing can be a very intense intellectual exercise with its challenges of how to classify a particular resource. When you are working in such a variety of languages, the challenges are amplified. Creating transliterations, vernacular script, and cultural interpretations are all in a day's work. Naturally, our high-end library management system takes care of many steps on a customised, automated basis, allowing our output and costs to be kept within expectation.

I work closely with my colleagues at Languages Direct, which we acquired from the Foreign Language Bookshop and DA Information Services in 2011, creating a fully integrated workflow for the selection, acquisition, cataloguing, processing, and delivery of library materials in Languages other than English. The team has pioneered a collaborative cataloguing model that has already reduced costs



CAVAL cataloguers at work

for many public libraries. On a daily basis, the team carries out a great variety of tasks:

- working with clients on profiles for each language, appropriate to their local community needs;
- selection of books, AV, and similar materials directly from the region of origin;
- consolidated acquisition and international logistics that ensures stock arrives quickly;
- receiving, allocating, prioritising, and monitoring each client's requirements.

Most libraries now require shelf-ready items, so in addition to the above, I work with libraries who send us their acquisitions and backlog for cataloguing, which is where my team excels. This entails:

- cataloguing the materials to specifications which vary from one customer to another, adding transliterations, vernacular script, holdings, and local data as appropriate;
- physically processing the catalogued items which might include covering, creating spine labels, encoding RFID tags, and other required tasks, exactly to each specification;
- dispatching the items to customers to designated address.

Another part of my role is my leadership in professional training, accredited by Libraries Australia, running courses on demand for RDA, LA Cataloguing Client, and similar technical and professional development.

For me, the outlook is bright as I lead this team into the transition not only to RDA, but also to digital resources. We tell clients they are in safe hands because skilled cataloguing results in better discovery of resources and therefore the library's return on its investment.

As I said, it's all in a day's work.

### Lamis Sukkar

CAVAL Cataloguing Manager  
lamis.sukkar@caval.edu.au

\*\* including Afrikaans, Arabic, Bengali, Bosnian, Burmese, Chinese, Croatian, Danish, English, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Macedonian, Maltese, Persian, Polish, Punjabi, Russian, Serbian, Sinhalese, Tamil, Thai, Turkish, Urdu, and Vietnamese.

# AUSTRALIA DAY HONOURS

We were delighted to see that a number of Australia Day honours recognised the achievements of people involved in the library and information profession.

Consultant Janine Schmidt, who now has her own business, Mukurfa Advisory, and was previously with McGill University (Montreal), the University of Queensland, and the State Library of New South Wales, was awarded Member in the General Division (AM), for 'significant service to the promotion of library services and information sciences, particularly through the development of electronic access initiatives'.

Also receiving an AM was Robert Thomas, President of the Library Council of New South Wales, for 'significant service to the community of New South Wales through contributions to library governance and to business'.

State Librarian Alex Byrne said, 'As a member of the Library Council of New South Wales since 2006 and its President since 2007, Rob Thomas AM has worked tirelessly to promote the State Library and its unparalleled collections in Australia and its region. He has become that best advocate for libraries, a layman who understands the key roles that libraries play a memory institutions and as vital community resources'.

In addition, teacher librarian and volunteer archivist Helen Paatsch, and historical society librarian and cataloguer Dr Dawn Peel, both of Colac, Victoria, each received an OAM.



Robert Thomas, President of the Library Council of New South Wales