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Industrial Information Officer

The Federal Government recently agreed to fund a major project, the *Libraries Competency Standards Project*, to develop standards that will be submitted for endorsement to the National Training Board. When adopted, the standards will form a basis for ensuring national consistency in vocational education and training and for development of enhanced career opportunities for employees in the library and information services sector. The standards will clearly be crucial to the increasingly decentralised process of industrial negotiation which is developing in all parts of Australia.

Members will be only too aware that the issue of competency development has been a controversial one over the past couple of years, with a number of false starts. The Association's keen desire to see a competency development program commence as a matter of urgency has been frustrated on several occasions. Now, however, we can be more optimistic about progress.

The Government has recognised the National Arts Industry Training Council (trading as Arts Training Australia) as the competency standards body for our industry and this Council will coordinate the project. A joint Task Force will drive the process, comprising five employer and five employee representatives, with a single member from each of the Australian Council of Library and Information Services and ALIA.

There will be a three-stage informa-

tion collection process involving a wide range of library workers and other Industry Training Boards with an interest in this area, such as the Local Government Board. The Federal election has delayed the start of the project, but it should now gather pace.

The approval of the Competencies Standards Project provides an opportunity for ALIA to review its approach to our own *Workforce Program*. This has been done, but at the time of writing General Council still had to consider proposals for a coordinated process to address the employment issues confronting the industry. Effective monitoring of the new conditions resulting from award restructuring, enterprise bargaining and new employment agreements will need consultation and liaison across the industry.

Victoria

All Victorian awards ceased to exist on 1 March, being replaced by the Kennett Government's individual and collective agreements. In response several Victorian unions, such as the State Public Services Federation and the Hospital Services Union, have applied for federal award coverage for their members. Several ALIA members (both employees and employers) who are finding problems with the new arrangements have asked me for clarification.

As I write, the likely outcome is far from clear. The Federal Labor Govern-

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ment had earlier passed legislation which would allow transfer from state to federal coverage, but the Victorian Government tried to block this with an application to the High Court, arguing that the legislation is aimed solely against the state of Victoria and so would discriminate against that state. Such arguments prevented the Federal Government from intervention in the Queensland electricity dispute several years ago. If the application is allowed, the Australian Industrial Relations Commission would be unable to hear the unions' submission for creation of federal awards.

On 9 March, Justice McHugh refused the State Government's submission for cancellation of a federal award issued by Commissioner Riordan of the Australian industrial relations Commission to cover 40 000 Victorian nurses. The application to strike down the Federal legislation on constitutional grounds has still to be determined and is expected to go to the Full Court shortly. If it is allowed, the Australian Industrial Relations Commission would be unable to hear the unions' submission for creation of federal awards. Meantime, Victorian unions are able to continue moves to escape the Kennett Government's reforms.

Integrated classification structures

Many members have called me with concerns over the translation of library staff into new integrated classification structures

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arising from award restructuring, in which the librarians may be disadvantaged. ALIA does not normally involve itself in individual industrial disagreements or disputes, but the Association has a strong interest in ensuring that the status of the profession is recognised and enhanced.

Classification arrangements (for ex-

ample in NSW Local Government) where different professional groups are integrated into a single-stream structure have potential benefits for librarians, because librarianship has often been undervalued relative to other groups. But historical inequities will only be corrected if the new structure properly recognises the status of

library staff. If it does not, a new set of inappropriate relativities could be set in place, with opportunities for redressing them possibly years away.

I would be most interested to hear from members who are having difficulties of this kind, so that ALIA can make representations to the authorities concerned. ■

The Australian Book Fair 1993

To be opened by Oodgeroo of the Noonuccal, a great Australian

Aboriginal elder and author Oodgeroo of the Noonuccal, custodian of the land Minjerribah, will embody the spirit and intent of the International Year for the World's Indigenous People when she officiates at the opening of the second Australian Book Fair to be held at Darling Harbour on 26 and 27 June, 1993.

Oodgeroo, writer, artist, lecturer, poet, was born Kathleen Jean Mary Ruska on 3 November 1920, on North Stradbroke, an island in Moreton Bay about 30 kilometres east of Brisbane, and the home of the Noonuccal tribe. At the age of 13, and as an Aborigine with no future in the State Education System, Kath went into domestic service in Brisbane, from which she was rescued by serving in the Australian Women's Army Services in WWII. She married Bruce Walker, a waterside worker in Brisbane, and had two sons Denis and Vivian.

The sixties saw Kath become a prominent figure as she wrote and spoke for Aboriginal Rights. In 1965 her first volume of verse and the first by an Australian Aborigine, *We Are Going*, was published by The Jacaranda Press (with the encouragement of Judith Wright and the aid of a Commonwealth Literary Fund). Her second volume, *The Dawn is at Hand*, followed in 1966. They were to be the forerunners of a considerable output which includes short stories, speeches, paintings, drama and film.

The Civil Rights struggle of the 60s

and 70s saw Kath active on many local, State and, later, National Committees. In 1969 Kath Walker was the Australian delegate to the World Council of Churches



Oodgeroo of the Noonuccal

Consultation on Racism in London, bringing the plight of her people to overseas attention for the first time. This was the beginning of many journeys overseas: Fiji, Malaysia, PNG and Nigeria (surviving a plane hijack on her way home).

In 1978-79 she won a Fulbright Scholarship and Myer Travel Grant to the USA. In these same years, almost as if it were a necessary antidote to travel, she established Moongalba, or 'sitting down place', a five-hectare piece of coastal bushland on North Stradbroke Island where archaeological evidence shows that her ancestors had been in occupation for over 20 000 years. There in her caravan she welcomed visitors of all ages and races.

For many Aboriginal and Islander children from the cities, this was their first experience of the natural way of life of their ancestors. For people of other races it

was a rare insight into another culture. To date, over 28 000 children and adults have learned about Aboriginal food-gathering practices, participated in a revival of arts and crafts, and listened to aboriginal story tellers, and by so doing have come to understand, and more particularly respect, the often fragile but sustaining interrelationships of Australian nature.

The seventies and eighties saw more books and films, and also Kath's close involvement with the Land Rights Movement, which culminated in despair when the Federal Labour Government refused to honour its promise to enact National Land Rights Legislation.

So Kath Walker became Oodgeroo of the tribe Noonuccal, custodian of the land Minjerribah. Many of her awards she retained but in 1987, as a Bicentennial protest, she returned the insignia of the MBE (awarded back in 1970) to the Crown. Notwithstanding this action, Oodgeroo and her son Kabul (Vivian) were scriptwriters and producers for the Dreamtime story *The Rainbow Serpent*, which was a major feature of the Australian Pavilion at the World Expo 88. 1988 was also the year of the award of an honorary Doctor of Letters from Macquarie University, and the following year Griffith University awarded her the degree of Doctor of the University. And in 1990 she published the third edition of *My People*, which includes the rich detail of her own biography.



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