



Heather Nash

Industrial Advisor
heather.nash@alia.org.au

Workwatch

In recent weeks we have received workplace queries touching on topics covered in earlier Workwatch columns. These matters include appropriate recognition of librarianship as a profession, superannuation and entitlements to adequate breaks in the working day. This month's column provides updates on each of these issues.

Professional standing: In March 2007, this column referred to occasions where positions in libraries had been advertised with advice that appointees could be trained 'on the job', with no specific training or library experience required. More generally, ALIA is aware that in some organisations, library staff are not accorded the same professional recognition given to other professions in the same organisations. Since then, ALIA has been contacted by a group of health librarians whose employer is proposing that their salary scale be moved from a professional stream to a broader administrative salary range, with the implication that their training and experience is less specialised than is the case among other health professionals. ALIA has made a written representation to the employer, noting that health librarianship is a highly specialised branch of the library profession whose contribution to research and clinical decision making is a major part of provision of health services.

This is the kind of situation about which ALIA is vigilant. Library staff with concerns about any perceived lack of recognition should contact National Office to discuss what might be done to assist.

Superannuation contributions: A query has also been received concerning failure by an employer to pay the Superannuation Guarantee Contribution (SGC), amounting to 9% of an employee's earnings and which must be paid at least quarterly. Those eligible for SGC payments are employees aged between 18 and 70 whose pre-tax earnings exceed \$450 in a calendar month. Eligibility applies regardless of whether an employee works on a casual, part-time or full-time basis. For employers, SGC payments are tax deductible but with a charge being levied where payments have not been made by the end of each quarter. Relevant information for both employers and employees is at <www.ato.gov.au/super>. Click on either the 'Individuals' or 'Businesses' icons.

In many workplaces it is a legislative requirement that superannuation deductions be recorded on payslips. The requirement applies in any workplace covered by the Federal Workplace Relations provisions, that is, in Commonwealth departments and agencies; throughout the territories and in most workplaces in Victoria¹ (For payslip and other record-keeping requirements see the Workplace Ombudsman's site at <www.w.o.gov.au>.) Legislation in some states includes the same requirement. In all workplaces it is a right of employees to inquire as to whether timely deductions are being made and, where Choice of Fund is available, to ensure that payments are flowing to the nominated fund. In addition to records kept by employers, employees should check superannuation statements from their respective funds as to the frequency and amount of contributions.

More generally, the Federal Government has circulated a booklet entitled 'Better Super' throughout Australia. The booklet covers superannuation reforms which came into effect from 1 July 2007 and relate mainly to employees approaching retirement. Further information is at <www.ato.gov.au/bettersuper> and the link to 'SuperSeeker' is especially recommended.

Meal breaks: ALIA received a recent query from a member working in a small library where, in practice, she was only able to leave her workstation for short periods during a seven-hour day. Although her employer was aware of requirements to provide employees with at least one half-hour break, no efforts were made to provide backup when staff members took a lunch break from the reception/information desk. This situation will be familiar to library staff whose duties involve regular contact with the public in libraries which are open continually during the day and sometimes in the evenings.

At s. 607 of the Workplace Relations Act it is stipulated that an employer must not require an employee to work for more than five hours continuously without an unpaid meal break of at least 30 minutes. The only qualifications on this requirement would be where other recognised awards and agreements allow a different condition, possibly requiring more frequent breaks in workplaces where particular safety considerations exist.

Library staff who have concerns about meal breaks, or any other basic working conditions, should first check their contract of employment and workplace agreement (individual or collective) for relevant provisions. Where grounds for complaint may exist, employees should confer with supervisors and, if that fails to resolve the difficulty, with a relevant union or the Workplace Ombudsman. Although ALIA is not a union, we can be approached for advice as to entitlements and as to steps that may be taken to address the problem. ✦

1. In 1996 the Kennett Government in Victoria referred its industrial relations powers to the Commonwealth, as per s51(xxxvii) of the Australian Constitution which allows individual states to refer powers not otherwise in the bailiwick of the Commonwealth.

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about the two companies' different attitude to designing the way that fonts are displayed on their respective systems. It's not a surprise (at least to this Apple convert) that Microsoft has taken the decision to improve readability while Apple is more concerned with rendering the typeface as truly as possible.

Tips on blogging

I'm becoming more interested in blogging, mostly because I'm trying to see how government organisations can use all of the Web 2.0 technologies, so an article by Tom Johnson at <<http://www.idratherbewriting.com/2007/04/09/>> came along at the right time. What he's done is extract from his experiences and those of others a list of lessons learned (and those yet to be learned). One interesting point is that many of the comments listed after the article are cryptic or even unintelligible; maybe that's another usability tip that he could include. And I don't know what he'd make of the cartoon at <<http://www.bankruptcylitigationblog.com/archives/dog%20blog.jpg>>.

What not to do

And just for a bit of fun, consider this if you're ever in the position of an evil overlord, coming up to the climax of a movie or a bestselling seven-book series — <<http://www.eviloverylord.com/lists/overlord.html>>. ✦