

Workwatch

Professional development

In recent weeks several queries have been raised with ALIA concerning entitlements within the library sector for leave to undertake professional development (PD) activities. This month's column addresses definitions of PD, and the legal and other factors determining leave entitlements that might be available for that purpose.

Firstly, what might be regarded as PD activities? ALIA defines PD as any activity which an employee undertakes to enhance personal and professional knowledge and development of work skills required to improve an individual's career prospects. PD can include conferences, workshops, in-house training, professional reading, and further learning either through formal study or self-paced learning. For further discussion on this point see the PD section of ALIA's website at <http://www.alia.org.au/education/pd>

While the value of PD to an employee and to their employer should seem obvious, employees sometimes have difficulty in obtaining leave to participate in PD activities. The difficulty often arises where an employer might not consider a less formal activity such as committee work as constituting PD. They therefore may not be favourably disposed to allow employees to attend gatherings of people engaged in similar work in other organisations to discuss matters of common interest. Sometimes this kind of activity occurs during lunch breaks with some overlap with work time. In the library sector, networking is of particular value to library workers in one-person libraries where isolation from other members of the profession can be a disadvantage.

Workplace legislation and awards generally have little to say about entitlements to leave for formal training or PD. Reference is sometimes made to such entitlements in collective agreements and individual contracts and would be a matter for determination in each workplace. Employers are clearly obliged to provide training, as distinct from PD, in matters such as the use of new equipment or software, but the position concerning PD usually arises more by implication. In government and semi-government sectors, staff are usually appointed at a particular point in a salary range, with incremental increases being related to satisfactory performance. In the private sector annual salary negotiations and any bonuses are also performance-related, with employer expectations often being more specific than in the public sector. The existence of performance review measures carry an expectation that to work to a certain standard and remain up-to-date in matters affecting an employee's duties, he or she will need access to PD to remain abreast of developments in the relevant field. For that to happen, the employee will need occasional leave from regular duties to participate in PD activities. In other words, the issue becomes one of mutual obligation.

From that point, the question arises as to what is reasonable access to PD, which will usually be answered on the basis of the employer's resources, perceived relevance of the proposed PD activity to the workplace and the amount

of time involved. For small businesses, the issues of money and time, especially in the absence of staff back up, would often be an issue but it should be a reasonable expectation within any enterprise that staff will from time to time be entitled to participate in PD.

Where an employee has queries about PD entitlements, either generally or with regard to a particular PD opportunity, the matter should first be raised with a supervisor. For further information, reference should be made to the individual employment contract and any applicable collective agreement. If a dispute arises a union should be able to assist. For any library employee, ALIA's active support for PD within the library sector should always be a reference point.

Members may also be interested in specific research that has been done on the experiences of one-person librarians seeking to undertake PD. Ann Penhallow, a Master degree student at the University of South Australia, last year completed a study on that topic based on responses from 40 one-person librarians. For further information concerning this research Ann can be contacted at annpenhallow@hotmail.com

Changes to industrial relations laws

The Rudd Government's amendments to the Workplace Relations Act were passed by the Federal Parliament and became effective on 28 March 2008. From that time, Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) cannot be entered into, although existing AWAs will run their course. Some categories of employers will be able to offer agreements known as individual transitional employment agreements (ITEAs) which may run until 1 January 2010 when it is envisaged that all proposed changes to Federal IR laws will have been finalised. Further details of recent legislative changes are at <http://www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Publications/News>. The ALIA website is also being regularly updated to take account of the new legislation.



Heather Nash
Industrial Relations Advisor

heather.nash@alia.org.au



Join ALIA's PD Scheme

ALIA provides a broad range of Professional Development services, through the ALIA PD Scheme and PD pages, to support our personal members. Information on the scheme and registration form can be found at <http://www.alia.org.au/education/pd/register.pd.html>, by emailing pd@alia.org.au or phone ALIA's PD Officer on **02 6215 8216**