

New workplace laws

As foreshadowed in my article last month, the Federal Government has tabled legislation to amend national industrial relations (IR) laws. The Workplace Relations Amendment (Transition to Forward with Fairness) Bill focuses on abolition of Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) and the introduction of ten National Employment Standards.

The proposed National Employment Standards cover the following:

- Maximum weekly hours of work, usually 38 hours
- Requests by parents for flexible working arrangements
- Parental leave (and related entitlements) for both parents
- Annual leave
- Personal/carer's and compassionate leave
- Community service leave
- Long service leave
- Public holidays
- Notice of termination and redundancy
- Fair Work Information Statement

These points expand on the five minimum conditions set down under the WorkChoices legislation and public consultation will take place until early April. Further information is at <http://www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/publications/news>

Of particular relevance to the library sector are the provisions for flexible working hours and arrangements for parents, including expanded parental leave. Given that a large proportion of Australian library workers are women and that the profession has a comparatively high rate of part-time and casual work, the Government's proposals could assist those with family responsibilities who may wish to take advantage of the proposed parental leave rights.

Redundancy and termination payments

During my time with ALIA there have been a steady number of inquiries as to notice periods for redundancies and guidelines for calculating termination payments. Under the Forward with Fairness proposals, there would be greater consistency in redundancy arrangements and the scale for

termination payments would be as determined by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission in 2004. The revised requirements would also apply to a greater number of workplaces than under WorkChoices, as only employers with fewer than 15 employees would be exempt from redundancy provisions, including grounds for redundancy, whereas exemptions currently apply where there are fewer than 100 workers.

At present, conditions relating to redundancy are covered by the relevant industrial instrument, that is, collective agreement, AWA, individual contract or state award. The amount of notice which must be given by an employer varies, but is usually between two to six weeks, with payment amounts usually related to length of service.

General exemptions

Some variations from general provisions of the new legislation will apply to employees earning more than \$100,000, which in the library sector will mainly be those in senior positions whose duties have a significant management component.

Interim arrangements

In the current period of transition between workplace laws, perceptions of terms and conditions within the labour force may become blurred. It also needs to be restated that not all workplaces are covered by the Federal laws. Those areas that would be covered by existing and future workplace relations laws are Australian Government employees, employees in the Territories and most workplaces in Victoria.

If employers or employees are uncertain as to applicable laws, contact should be made with the Workplace Infoline on **1300 363 264** or at the website mentioned above. For specific library workplace queries, please contact my office

heather.nash@alia.org.au
02 6275 8228



Heather Nash
Industrial Advisor



Tech girls are chic, not just geek

Sixteen of the IT industry's hottest young female professionals have embarked on a mission to transform the image of their industry in the minds of teenage girls. By participating in the book *Tech girls are chic, not just geek*, the team of 20-somethings, who look more 'Sex and the City' than 'Star Trek', hope that they can dispel the stereotypical image of women in the IT industry.

<http://www.techgirlsarechic.org>

The book is co-edited by Griffith University researcher Jenine Beekhuizen, who juggles her PhD study into online music piracy with her small business as a jewellery designer, and Rebecca Dorries, a project manager at an international airline.

Launched at Griffith University on International Women's Day, March 8 the book will be distributed to high-schools nationally.