

Answer to Question taken on Notice by Austroads Canberra Hearing, 7 May 2012

Question:

Senator McKenzie - Can you give an update or outlook on what those enterprise agreements look like now and what you think they could look like to make them more attractive to women as opposed to family-friendly enterprise agreements, which would be attractive, hopefully, to parents?

Response:

Attracting women to the profession of engineering is complex. It starts with girls in school making subject selections that will enable them to study engineering. It involves career advisors in schools being aware of the various options in study and employment in engineering fields. It also includes women's experience of in the university study program and finally in employment. Engineers will be either covered by individual contracts or by enterprise agreements. Public sector enterprise agreements tend to make better provision for flexible work arrangements and progressive family and carer options. Private sector arrangements that favour women may only be available for more senior roles where female engineers are often highly valued for their creativity and management skills. The cost of such arrangements is small when compared with the cost of finding and replacing skilled female engineers.

Examples of provisions attractive to women that can be included in enterprise agreements or in individual contracts are:

- Working from home arrangements
- Job share arrangements
- Flexible hour arrangements
- Purchase of additional annual leave
- Career break leave on leave without pay
- Carer leave for family members including elderly parent leave

The culture of an organisation is particularly important for women as employees. It is critical that the culture value the participation of women, that female role models exist in senior roles and that the organisation shows empathy and understanding in personal situations for all their employees.

Question:

The Chair – after discussion Mr Nugent took the question to be: Have we increased the proportion of project costs that we would link to legal dispute?

Response:

Austroads and the Capability Task force don't have any information that can answer this question. Perhaps it is a question for industry initially. Roads Australia who made a submission to the Committee and may be able to assist. The question was predicated on the information provided by those tendering for work that they increased the tender to accommodate increased litigation costs, but it was not clear whether the litigation is with road authorities or other parties. Road authorities could track whether there have been increases over time in the cost (and amount) of litigation relating to projects, but that would not necessarily be a causal link to 'failures' or to the skills and capability of those engaged in the projects or industry generally.