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24 July 2008

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations
House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
This copy by email

Dear Ms Scarlett

PAY EQUITY AND ASSOCIATED ISSUES RELATED TO INCREASING FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKFORCE

Government Skills Australia (GSA) as the Industry Skills Council for government and community safety supports the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations inquiry into pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce. I wish to submit this response on behalf of the local government sector, which is one of six industries represented by GSA.

The role and participation of women in local government is a key issue that is being considered by the Local Government Industry Advisory Committee, and is currently reviewing the findings contained in the following documents:

Women in Local Government - an overview of current literature identifying the role and participation of women in Local Government, developed by Australian Local Government Training, October 2007; and
Women in Local Government Management - LGMA National Strategy, developed and adopted by the Local Government Managers Association in response to a review of the National Framework for Women in Local Government - The Way Forward.

In 2001, 44% of the women employed in local government are working part time, this supporting the hypothesis that the major proportion of the women who work in local government are employed on a part-time basis.

In 2007, the review of the National Framework for Women in Local Government, 46% of women said that job selection and promotion was an

issue as were lack of career structures and lack of part-time work in senior positions.

Cultural change in the local government workplace is seen as critical for the retention of both female staff and elected members.

GSA is working with a number of organisations to explore and where appropriate, advance key strategies to promoting and encourage women's access to vocational education and training (VET) and local government, including:

- Delivering accessible and quality VET for women that address their requirements as clients with particular needs- e.g ensuring that gender issues are addressed when developing and reviewing nationally endorsed Training Packages;
- Promoting the success of VET for women using role models and mentoring;
- Improving links between informal and formal pathways in VET;
- Resourcing support services for women including childcare, customised counselling and career advice, language , literacy and numeracy tuition;
- Targeting women who are not yet in the workplace; and
- Funding for flexible and remote delivery that is not only available 'online'.

As the prime national focus on increasing the participation rate of women in local government has already identified a range of issues and strategies it is logical that any future directions consider the way forward proposed by the National Framework. In the review of the National Framework, a set of questions is provided to stimulate discussion about how local councils might encourage and promote greater gender equity.

The following questions which are listed in the National Framework are aimed at developing strategies which support increased participation of women as employees in local government:

- Does the council actively implement a home-based work policy? What proportion of staff at all levels regularly work from home as an agreed part of their employment conditions?
- Does council offer flexible working hours at the workplace? What proportion of staff at all levels take advantage of that system?
- Are women included in all job selection panels?
- Are there priority childcare places for staff in council child care centres and family day care schemes?
- What support is provided for women returning from maternity leave?

GSA is interested in the issues raised in the terms of reference for the inquiry, and would like to provide a link with the local government sector to the identification of policies and best practice can facilitate equitable

participation of women in the workplace, particularly, in the local government sector.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for further information or access to any of the documents cited in this response.

Yours sincerely

Andy Smith
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