



Dedicated to a better Brisbane

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

Attention: Ms Cheryl Scarlett

Re: Pay equity and associated issues to increasing female participation in the workforce

Dear Ms Scarlett

Thank you for your invitation to contribute to this enquiry. Brisbane City Council has a good record at supporting women in relation to participation and pay equity. We believe it is important to provide an appropriate working environment in which women and men feel safe, that their contribution is valued and that they are supported and not disadvantaged in their employment prospects due to other responsibilities and lifestyle choices.

Council has been recognised as an employer of choice for women and this is reflected in our ability to attract and retain women. Women currently make up 33% of Council employees with 48% in salaried staff (professional, technical and administrative) roles and 7% in wages (trades and operational) functions. Female participation rates are increasing across all levels of the organisation.

Council promotes a family friendly workplace and supports a sustainable work life balance for all employees. A key retention and attraction strategy is the promotion of flexible employment arrangements to all employees, both male and female. This is not just for women with children returning to the workforce, but to assist all employees balance work with other responsibilities and choices at every stage of their lives; from an increase in caring responsibilities for both young and aging dependants, to meet personal needs and goals, including study and travel, or to transition to retirement.

Women are still the primary carers in our society for children, disabled and aging family members. To increase female participation in the workforce someone else needs to provide the care. Increasing access to flexible employment arrangements and working hours for men can have a significant impact on the ability of women to participate in the workforce.

Council has a number of approaches to ensure gender bias free access to jobs at equal pay. The key approaches are:

- Roles in Council are described and objectively evaluated/classified in accordance with Mercer methodology or award-based processes, without regard to the gender or capability of the individual incumbent or applicants. Pay equity, on an hourly rate, is therefore not an issue, with most differences in income relating to the number of hours worked and any applicable penalties for work outside the award-prescribed spread of ordinary hours (eg 6.00am-6.00pm Monday to Friday)
- Merit-based selection processes are utilised, with a number of people involved in selection processes and approval/appointment by a separate 'delegate' to reduce risks of bias or favouritism.
- Women are a targeted equity and diversity group for which Council sets corporate and divisional employment targets, based on advice from the Equity and Diversity Team.

Council has engaged with employees and their unions through Enterprise Bargaining processes to introduce a range of initiatives which enabled us to increase the female proportion of the workforce. Initiatives included paid Maternity and Paternity Leave, up to two years unpaid parental leave, permanent flexible part-time work replacing long-term casual employment, flex-time for both full-time and part-time *salaried staff* employees, and the ability to salary-sacrifice from current earnings to self-fund additional periods of leave that would otherwise be unpaid. Paid Maternity Leave is available after 12 months service, and has progressively increased from 6 weeks initially to 14 weeks from 1 July 2006, and two weeks paid Paternity Leave has been available since 1 July 2003.

Council went through a significant organisational restructure which refocused the Council on delivering customer service and commercial competitiveness. The cultural change associated with this refocussing, impacted the working environment making it more 'comfortable' for women, especially those with family and caring responsibilities. In recent years Council has pursued an aim of achieving "Zero Harm" in all our workplaces, which has also helped overcome some reluctance by women to work in "non-traditional" roles, knowing that their employer and colleagues put a priority on their safety.

Council has established effective "Workplace Justice" processes, allowing employees to raise concerns over perceived harassment, bullying and intimidation which will be independently investigated, and know they will be supported and have their concerns resolved through mediation or disciplinary action, without fear of retribution.

To assist the national agenda the following recommendations are provided for your consideration.

Key Industrial / Legislative Initiatives

Recommendations centre on the "National Employment Standards" (NES) that impact work/life balance in particular and include:

1. **NES Division 3- Request for flexible work arrangements** – the current NES restricts requests to employees who have responsibility for the care of a child under school age and provides as examples of changes in working arrangements: change in hours of work, changes in patterns of work and changes in location of work.

It is recommended that the NES standard broadens eligibility to all employees irrespective of reason or at least those with a broader range of responsibilities such as children of all ages and dependent adults, including aging parents and other relatives.

It would also be helpful to expand on the range of examples of changes in working arrangements:

- Changes in hours of work eg a reduction in work hours – part time or job share
 - Changes in patterns of work eg flexibility to vary standard start or finish times (flex time, working more hours over less days, changing days of work)
 - Changes to the “span of ordinary hours” outside of which shift or overtime penalties apply
 - Changes in location of work eg working from home or another location
2. **In addition to changes to NES Division 3 it would be beneficial to run a government sponsored education campaign focussed on providing fair access to training and promotion for employees who have flexible work arrangements such as reduced hours –** along the lines that Australia will need all workers to reach their maximum potential and to stay in the workforce as long as possible in order to remain competitive with less new entrants to the workforce every year and a growing skills shortage.
 3. **NES Division 5 - Annual Leave** –recommend a new inclusion that an employee may take twice the period of annual leave on half pay (with no minimum period) and allow the maximum period of 8 weeks at half pay to be extended in parental leave circumstances.
 4. **NES Division 6 - Personal/carers leave and compassionate leave** – NES proposes the annual provision of 10 days paid personal/carers leave, cumulative, and two days compassionate leave for each permissible occasion, including to attend a family member with life-threatening condition in addition to bereavement situation. Given that women are the principal carers in our society, such extension of traditional bereavement leave to pre-deceased situations in addition to personal/carer's leave may deter some employers, especially small employers, from employing women on other than casual arrangements.

Brisbane City Council offers 2 days Bereavement Leave, with a third day for an employee who has primary responsibility to arrange the funeral. This is separate from and in addition to 10 days Carers' Leave for full time employees (pro-rata for part-time employees) which is available to employees to be with and support family members undergoing medical treatment, including with life-threatening conditions or where death is imminent. In addition, Council has operated “Safety Net Sick Leave” for 12 years where all reasonable request requests for sick leave will be approved, subject to provision of medical certification after 2 days or five occasions in one year and participation in rehabilitation processes after five consecutive days absence. This has been provided and refined through successive Enterprise Bargaining Agreements to replace accumulating sick leave entitlements under various awards. This arrangement does not discriminate against employees with shorter periods of service, many of whom are women, and separates leave for personal illness from caring responsibilities and bereavement situations.

In addition to the recommendations relating to National Employment Standards:

- **Resource a government run advisory body on classification and remuneration benchmarks** to provide advice to employees and employers (as per recommendation 4 in "Pay Equity -Time to Act", QLD Industrial Relations Commission Paper, September 2007). This would be particularly helpful to overcome equity and parity issues for occupations with low wages and poor job security.
- **Work outside core hours at ordinary rates of pay.** One of the limiting factors to employment of women and men with caring responsibilities is the ability of those employees to work before and after 'normal business hours' without penalty payments applying. Where the role is suitable and the employee has the skills, Council has the following clause in the workplace agreement to support telecommuters (employees working from home) to work outside normal business hours, at their choice, at ordinary rates of pay.

Employees working under an agreed Telecommuting Agreement may work their ordinary hours of work to suit to their individual circumstances. These ordinary hours of work may be worked outside the span of hours as provided in the Award at ordinary time.

If an employee is directed by their manager to work outside or in excess of their ordinary hours of work, they shall be paid in accordance with the Brisbane City Council Salaried Staff Award 2004.

Finally, Council encourages women and men to pursue their careers to senior roles in operational, administrative, technical, professional and management functions, and to maintain good physical, psychological and emotional health by balancing work with family and lifestyle. We support internal reference groups, consultative committees and profession-linked Women's Networks, study assistance and professional development, and about 22% of our senior executives are women, some of whom have accessed Maternity Leave and part-time working arrangements whilst performing executive roles.

I hope that the Committee find this information of use, and if further clarification is required you may contact our Chief HR Officer,

Yours sincerely



Jude Munro
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER