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20 August 2008

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

Dear Secretary

**Pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce**

Thank you for your letter of 15 July 2008 inviting industry comment on the above subject. GHD, as a global organisation, is committed to enhancing opportunities for females in our business and aims to ensure that female equity is addressed in terms of pay, training, opportunity and promotion across our global business. At this stage in our business our measure of progress is through submission of our Equal Opportunity Workplace Assessment Report each year.

As a means to monitor and improve our commitment we have developed and implemented a "Women in GHD" initiative which transverses our global business. This forum encourages discussion on key issues affecting women in our business and provides for escalation as required. We therefore draw your attention to the response from the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency:

*"In reading your report, we noted the comprehensive analysis of your workplace and the actions taken such as providing development opportunities for your female staff with the launch of the Women in GHD Forum, career mentoring programs, Women in Leadership course, increasing the percentage of women in technical and senior roles at GHD and significantly enhancing your maternity leave provisions to assist in attracting and retaining your female employees".*

The attached comments have been prepared by a number of senior female GHD staff.

We trust you find these helpful, and we commend the Standing Committee for its efforts to promote increased female participation in the workforce.

Yours faithfully  
GHD Pty Ltd

**Des Whybird**

CEO

### **Comments by Women in GHD Forum**

GHD has come a long way in recent times in relation to equal opportunity but there is further opportunity to take positive steps to identify, predominantly through the females in our organisation, areas that need to be addressed.

The specific points you requested comment on are as follows:

1. The adequacy of current data to reliably monitor employment changes that may impact on pay equity issues;
2. The need for education and information among employers, employees and trade unions in relation to pay equity issues;
3. Current structural arrangements in the negotiation of wages that may impact disproportionately on women;
4. The adequacy of recent and current equal remuneration provisions in state and federal workplace relations legislation;
5. The adequacy of current arrangements to ensure fair access to training and promotion for women who have taken maternity leave and/or returned to work part time and/or sought flexible work hours; and
6. The need for further legislative reform to address pay equity in Australia.

As a general statement to points 1-4 and 6 above, GHD's view is that there is no disproportionate impact on our female workforce because we do not conduct pay reviews based on gender-based criteria and our annual pay review process and salary structure continues to demonstrate that equity is being achieved. Our business values equally the input of males and females in their professional, technical and managerial areas of speciality and our career progression model ensures such equality is achieved.

However if we looked closely at GHD, or any other similar industry workforce, and the trends over the last twenty years or so, what would the data show? This is difficult to answer and we could speculate that it has taken a long time for women to be accepted in non-administrative roles. It may also be fair to say this is indicative of the industry in which we have historically operated. This raises the question as to whether there are in fact technical professional women in the industry and if so - where are these women? And the answer may simply be that they have chosen to pursue their maternal instincts and raise our generations of the future. This in itself is their decision and irrespective of business offerings of promotion and salary etc they still may have made this decision. It is these questions that we cannot answer with any supporting data.

Whilst it can be rightly observed that females currently do not hold positions on the global Management Group, the reasons surrounding this fact are not related to equality, rather, they reflect the historic nature of our business being largely construction and infrastructure focussed and limited attraction of females into these fields. In recent years, our business has diversified considerably in our professional service offerings and it is expected that the make-up of our senior management and leadership team will in time be reflected by the appointment or promotion of females to more senior positions within GHD.

With respect to point 5, it is not easy to assess whether or not current arrangements to ensure such fair access are adequate, as the view on adequacy will differ between organisations and industries. GHD supports part time work and flexible working hours for all staff that require such working arrangements.

However it could also be argued that women who have children usually take maternity leave and if and when they rejoin their employer, the bulk of the "caring" role stills falls to women, this is culturally a fact, - so it is the woman rushing off to pick up the children at 3pm and it is the woman doing the grocery shopping and arranging the home and the woman going to the childs' recital. The net result of all of this is that there is the possibility that women do not get chosen for promotion because they could be *perceived* as less committed to their job than a man who does not bear the primary responsibility for doing all of these things. The question then is; "How many women end up leaving the workforce because it makes more financial sense for the family that the woman, not the man, stays at home?" What could be done to address this problem? (e.g. better quality and cheaper priced childcare, more acceptability and availability of flexible working arrangements, greater cultural acceptance that attending a family event does not mean that one is not committed to their job, etc).

The issue of promotion opportunities for women after return from maternity leave is in the main dependent on the amount of maternity leave available to staff under company policy and guidelines, and also on the length of such leave taken by the employee. For example, a 3 month leave period will have minimal impact; however, a leave for 12 months may have an impact especially if promotion opportunities occur whilst the employee is on maternity leave and another appropriate person is available. On the other hand, dependent on the skills, experience and future potential of the person on maternity leave, a promotion position may be held until return thus having no impact. A leave period of say 2 years, (extended or consecutive maternity leave periods) is likely to see an inevitable slowing in promotion.

Access to training could be viewed with more flexibility as it may be possible in many circumstances, with the agreement of all parties, for training and continued professional development to be accessed during maternity leave. If this does not occur, the same impacts as described above with respect to promotion could well prevail. GHD's professional development process does not discriminate between full time or part time employees in the identification and provision of training needs.

At GHD we have senior staff who work part time, however the very nature of professional services organisations is such that part time workers at senior management level continue to face challenges in meeting their KPIs and work outcomes irrespective of their employment arrangements. For many organisations this issue will remain a challenge largely because much is dependent on the culture and attitude of the organisation and indeed of individuals within the organisation itself. This will need CEOs and senior people in both public and large private corporations to demonstrate commitment or indeed practise flexible working arrangement to get such a cultural change happening.

In response to Point 5 it can be commented therefore that there is not a 'one size fits all' solution for employees or employers but rather that a basic framework is essential to allow guidelines for decision making. Of importance however is the requirement for flexibility within the framework as different circumstances will require separate consideration.

