

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations
House of Representatives
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Dear Mr Worthington,

Thank you for the opportunity for the University of Western Sydney (UWS) to provide a submission in relation to the inquiry into *Pay Equity and Associated Issues related to Increasing Female Participation in the Workforce*.

UWS considers there to be multiple factors that contribute to the pay equity gap in Australia, including: -

- male dominated work cultures;
- undervaluing of women's work;
- concentration of women in lower paid occupations;
- concentration of women in part-time and casual employment;
- caring responsibilities predominately being undertaken by women;
- reliance of women on awards as their primary wage setting arrangement;
- and last but not least life-style, educational and employment choices made by women.

UWS Background

UWS is recognised as a leading employer of women and is one of only 99 organisations across Australia to receive the citation of Employer of Choice for Women 2008 from the Federal Governments Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA).

2008 figures show that 59% of all staff at UWS are female. Academic staff are fairly evenly split between males 51% and females 49%. However in terms of general staff, particularly the lower levels, female staff predominate with 66% of the total.

UWS has a strong commitment to gender equality and has a suite of policies and programs that deliver equal employment opportunities for women. The University already provides excellent staff development and training opportunities for all its employees, generous leave entitlements including 20 weeks paid maternity leave and the right to return to work part time after maternity leave for a period of up to two years and flexible working conditions.

UWS does have a lower than sector average pay equity gap, but nonetheless exhibits a pay gap of 15.5% due to the concentration of women in the lower level general staff classifications.

Pay Equity Audit

UWS has recently undertaken a pay equity audit using the EOWA pay equity tool and is currently undertaking a detailed analysis of the results. Establishing the audit has been a labour intensive operation, and establishment of rules and setting parameters for the data has been a very time consuming process. This exercise has highlighted the difficulties of developing rigorous data in the area, given the multitude of variables being considered. Questions remain as to how standardised and cohesive data can be collected from all institutions based on commonly defined variables. There are also issues in achieving comparability between data collected by these types of analyses and the national workforce data collected by ABS across industries.

Conducting a pay audit is a useful exercise for any organisation. It provides the basis for developing a future plan of action to address the problem and the impetus for more education and training, but quantification of pay equity gaps is merely illuminating the issue. However, many of the factors that contribute to the origin of pay inequity and lower female participation in the workforce are of a broader, more systemic and cultural nature.

Higher education institutions are already burdened by onerous reporting requirements and there is little evidence that mandatory reporting requirements alone have directly resulted in significant outcomes for equity target groups including women. As an example, within the NSW government sector, mandatory reporting of the representation of equity groups and the production of action plans has been required for over a decade but there is no evidence that this has increased the representation of those groups within the NSW government and quasi-government sectors.

One model suggested to tackle the pay equity gap is based on government legislating for employers to conduct pay equity audits, develop plans of action and remove internal barriers. Proponents of this model often recommend that this reporting be mandatory for the government sector and voluntary for the non-government sector. The UWS experience is that despite strong leadership, monitoring, reporting and developing policies and programs to address pay equity that has not been sufficient and that a wider multifaceted model is needed to address the problem. It stands to reason that when there is a multiplicity of factors which contribute to pay inequality that there needs to be a multifaceted approach to addressing the problem.

Strategies that promote cultural change should accompany solutions to the pay equity issue. The implicit and unspoken messages

inherent in an organisation's culture can be very powerful and can have a detrimental effect on the participation of women in the workplace and on equity of remuneration. Without a change in the way we value the type and mode of work performed by women, and the redefining of central concepts to the pay equity debate, there will not be any substantive change to women's participation in the workforce and pay equity.

Education

Education is an essential aspect of cultural change at an organisational level. We understand education to be a learning process that can encourage attitudinal and behavioural transformation. Alternatively, we consider training to be a tool that is more conducive to personal and professional development, as well as career progression.

Moving from a focus on the prevention of discrimination against women to the promotion of gender equality requires a significant shift in workplace culture. This requires redefining central concepts such as remuneration, gender-neutral language to describe tasks and skills and developing gender-neutral analyses of job evaluation and inclusive approaches to skills acquisition and transferability. There also need to be changes to the nature of management positions such that increasing the flexibility of senior roles will make these positions more attractive for women.

Education initiatives need to be developed, implemented and evaluated by employers to address a wide range of factors relevant to pay equity, including:

- gender equality principles;
- flexible work principles;
- employee entitlements;
- implications of managing part-time employees;
- creation of part-time employment opportunities at all levels of the organisation; and
- how to develop a public sector culture in which employees feel comfortable accessing flexible work entitlements.

These education initiatives need to be targeted to specific groups within the organisation: managers and supervisors, part-time and casual workers, women, and others with carer's responsibilities. Further, we recommend such education initiatives be facilitated for trade union officials in NSW so that issues pertaining to gender pay equity inform all union work.

Within a higher education context, an opportunity also exists to incorporate education on gender pay equity and work value in the curriculum of management courses.

Training

Training, such as that provided by UWS, is necessary to develop women's human capital endowments, which in turn increase women's options for career advancement and higher remuneration.

However, the accessibility and effectiveness of training needs to be examined, as women are identified in research as being less likely to receive training and even those women who do access training remain clustered in under-valued feminised areas of work. This is often due to women working on a part-time and/or casual basis, women being predominantly the carers of very young children and women being in lower level jobs.

The effectiveness of training available to women is also an important consideration. Organisational training audits, such as that undertaken at UWS, may reveal that women are accessing training and other professional development opportunities, but are neither progressing in their career nor earning comparable wages to their male counterparts.

As resource limitations are often raised at an organisational level, as barriers to the extension of education and training initiatives, we recommend that the Federal Government establish a funding scheme to assist employers and trade unions with the implementation of gender pay equity related education and training.

Mentoring and networking

A mentoring program can encourage women to develop new skills and provide entrée to the organisational cultural nuances that are rarely made explicit but are essential for career progression to senior positions. Mentoring may be formal or informal, but willingness to mentor women staff promotes a message that women's contribution to the organisation at all levels is valued.

Career progression is often reliant on informal networking which tends to occur out of business hours without due consideration for the inability to participate of those with caring responsibilities. Ensuring that networking opportunities are available during times when women can participate, and actively encouraging women to take these experiences will increase women's opportunities of career advancement.

Beyond the organisational level

The multiplicity of factors that contribute to the gender pay gap, including broad systemic and cultural influences, require national strategies beyond the scope of individual organisations.

At the national level, a clear starting point to addressing gender equality and pay equity is ensuring that there is a national paid parental leave system which is available to both men and women on a "use it or lose it" basis (as is the system in Sweden). This approach would have the effect of simultaneously allowing women to share the career break load with men, whilst influencing the common misperception that women's role as carers demonstrates their lack of attachment to the workplace. The potential of losing an entitlement such as parental leave is often the only impetus which men feel is sufficiently legitimate to allow them to take career breaks to care for children. The gendered history of the value of labour in Western societies also demonstrates that de-feminising work is often the only way to enhance the community perception of its value.

This legislative reform would signify the beginning of a major cultural shift within and outside individual organisations, led by government so that all workers increasingly access the range of work family benefits available. Change of this magnitude is just the first step in developing a society in which we see caring responsibilities to be the responsibility of all parents and indeed of the community at large.

Other critical initiatives that require the endorsement and funding from government include an industrial relations system that ensures that the work that women do is properly valued and remunerated. This includes measures for the better regulation of casual work where women are disproportionately represented, and better regulation of working time to reduce the impact of growing hours on work life balance. It is these structural employment issues which relegate women to the role of secondary earners and therefore the career and income losers in the vicious cycle that feeds inequity in women's pay.

Yours sincerely

Rhonda Hawkins
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