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To Carol Schwartz

Workplace Gender Equity Act 2012

Consultation on reporting matters

women@fahcsia.gov.au.

Dear Ms Schwartz

We thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Workplace Gender Equality Act.  We appreciate the aims and intentions of the Act, and think that there is merit in both the intention and design of the reporting requirements.

The Higher Education sector is a large employer of women, and has been consistently recognised in the annual Employer of Choice for Women citations.  For the past two decades the sector has been at the vanguard of structural change in the Australian workplace that supports gender equity, for example in the provision of work based child care, in the offering of extended parental and partner leave, and in the provision of a wide range of flexible work and leave practices that support a better integration of work with other aspects of an employee’s life.

Yet the Higher Education sector also faces some intractable gender equity challenges, particularly within the academic staffing stream, that go to what impedes gender equity in employment more generally. That is the pervasiveness of gendered workplace norms, about what work is done, by whom and where, and how work is valued.  These are cultural issues that no amount of data collection will, of itself, address.

The under representation of women in academic staffing at higher levels is in part due to success and merit being measured by outputs more readily achievable by men than women working in universities.  Examples of this are the concentration of research funding in areas that have traditionally been male dominated disciplines,  and an undervaluing of many of the time intensive activities (such as face to face teaching and tutoring and relationship building) that often fall to women.

We would like to see more diversity in the WEGA reporting requirements that capture good practice and cultural change while not necessarily being data driven. We also believe that after several decades of reporting to a Commonwealth agency on gender equity in the workplace, Australian employers should now be asked to demonstrate the ways in which they recognise diversity within gender, be that in services, or employment benefits, or in diverse representation within leadership structures.

Several specific issues have several concerns that we believe need to be addressed in order for our reporting to be more meaningful and cost effective.

1. Reporting deadline for the Higher Education Sector.

Our reporting date for other staffing matters and for student matters is 31 March each year. This date corresponds with the student census date and finalises many of our staffing requirements, and staff to staff, and staff to student ratios.  It is also an important date for other institutional funding and reporting requirements for Research and Higher Education Funding. It can take several pay cycles and end of month dates for our internal departments and planning sections to complete and release collated 31 March data.  We also require time after the census date to analyse data and prepare our report.  We would like to recommend extending the reporting deadline for Higher Education Institutions to 31 July.  Several states also require their gender equity employment data by this data.

1. Combined submissions

We would strongly urge the Commissioner to consider combining compliance reporting with Employer of Choice reporting. The dual submission process is arduous and does not necessarily reveal any new information.

1. Gender Pay Gap

The pay equity analysis is a valuable tool to better understand gender equity issues in the workplace.  However, in the higher education sector, the pay equity gap is generally not the outcome of unequal pay for work of real value, but rather is a stark indication of the challenges within the academy to attain equitable distribution of male and female staff.  Our workforce is clearly divided into Academic and non-Academic staff.  We believe that it is better to examine our work force as two individual workforces, and that casual staff are excluded and analysed separately.  This is because are casual staff are often closely tied to our Research Student profile, moreover, casual staff are often as a result of research grants and teaching buy-outs rather than as a central strategic staffing position. Overall the pay and conditions of staff in this university is strictly governed by the terms of the collective staff agreements and adherence to performance management policies.  When annualised salaries are analysed by level and step, there is necessarily, no gender pay gap.  The greatest gender differences are not seen by examining salaries, but by analysing headcounts at each level of professional and general staff.

1. Flexible work

For all of our staff, flexible work practices are protected under the Agreements, and even academic staff can nominate preferred teaching times. Except where operational considerations prevail, all staff have the opportunity to work flexible hours.  The means that the best measure we have of flexible work practices is the count of referrals to the Senior Executive for adjudication of application of flexible work policies or practices.

1. Gender Equity on Boards

Universities traditionally have multi-level governance and complex committee systems. Our highest level board is University Senate, to which members are appointed by state governments, the Governor, as well as elected by staff and students.

We would very much welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with you further.

Yours sincerely

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