

Career Pathways for Women and Girls: Emergent and Non-traditional Occupations and Industries (Viable Work)

Strategies to attract Women and Girls to Emergent & Non traditional Occupations and Industries

RATIONALE

The aim of this paper is to provide strategies to encourage girls and women to study and work in emergent and so called 'non-traditional' industries and occupations, most of which are heavily masculinised despite the availability of accredited training through apprenticeships and traineeships and study pathways in higher education that lead to well paid and potentially rewarding careers.

That Australia has one of the most gender-segregated workforces in OECD countries, with segregation being both horizontal (across industries) and vertical (level of appointments) is a well-rehearsed fact. However, that these biases are still perpetuated in an era when women's participation in the labour force is at record numbers is an indication of just how intractable this issue is. Literature searches reveal a plethora of research, projects, publications, best practice case studies, strategies and recommendations with a focus on attracting and retaining girls and women into non traditional areas, some of it dated 2, 3 decades or more ago. Indeed, much of the contemporary work in this area offers suggestions that, while being practical, sound and imminently do-able, are 'back to the future' in their similarity to earlier work. Given this, many the ideas listed here may well appear familiar. We make no apology for this- instead, we affirm the worth of these strategies and encourage sustained action rather than 'one off' 'trials where good work is implemented most often with promising results, then defunded and so disbanded (and forgotten) with no long term results.

Online survey research undertaken in late 2009 by APESMA¹ National Women's Reference Group of technical professionals across a range of Australian professions collated the experiences and views of approximately 1100 women respondents (average age 38.3 years), 78% of whom worked in a male dominated industry.² This research highlights the critical importance of a gender inclusive and sensitive *workplace culture* built on EEO principles in retaining women in male dominated industries and occupations. Given the urgent ongoing need to implement strategies to both attract then (importantly) retain women workers and professionals, these significant results can be read as signposting strategies required for implementation.

¹ APESMA: **The Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers, Australia** (APESMA) is a union representing over 25,000 professionals including engineers, scientists, veterinarians, surveyors, collieries staff, architects, pharmacists, information technology professionals, managers and transport professionals.

² APESMA, 2010, *Women in the professions: The state of play 2009- 2010. Executive Summary of the APESMA Women in the Professions Survey Report* <http://www.apesma.asn.au/>

Results include:

- 47.4% of respondents stated that their career progression had been affected by workplace culture.
- 67.3% of respondents to the survey (and 71.6% of engineers) said that taking maternity/parental leave (including unpaid leave) was likely to be detrimental to their career.
- Nearly 40% of respondents had been bullied and 38% discriminated against in the course of their professional employment.
- Nearly 20% reported that they had been sexually harassed. Figures for sexual harassment and discrimination were higher in male-dominated industries.
- 50% of respondents said that their career had affected their planning for parenthood. Of those, 37.4% responded it affected whether to have any children, 73.7% the timing of children, 43.8% the number of children.
- 55.5% of respondents said that balancing work/life had impeded their career development.
- 43.5% of respondents had children. 71% of those with carer responsibilities said that this had affected their career progression.
- 74.8% of all respondents believed that working part-time has or would have an impact on their career.
- Nearly one quarter of respondents (23.9%) expected to have left their profession in five years' time. This figure was higher for private sector respondents (29%).
- 48.3% of all respondents, and nearly 60% of engineers, agreed that in their occupation, women have to prove themselves where men are assumed capable³.

While the majority of respondents (64.7%) were satisfied (or very satisfied) with their current job, respondents also indicated that their career advancement had been affected by:

- Workplace culture (47.4%);
- Lack of women in senior roles (47.4%);
- Lack of job opportunities (46.8%);
- Lack of access to senior roles for women (46.5%); and
- Lack of role models (46.4%)⁴.

Workplace cultures must be equitable, family-friendly and safe, promoting a climate that enables women to access 'core conditions that are instrumental in promoting female retention and advancement'⁵. In C21st Australia, these features should be a given.

Graeme Samuel, Chair of ACCC⁶, provides an example of proactive leadership required to shift the inherent gender bias in Australia's workforces, through the example of inclusive practices in ACCC. He comments that Australia needs 'broad changes in cultural attitudes'; that such a change would be more effective than 'narrow process changes or similar isolated initiatives. We need to break out of the male club mentality.'⁷ He goes on to state that:

organisations needed to emphasise female role models, while male 'champions' at board level in particular could dislodge 'male-club' thinking, breaking patterns that disadvantaged women from the inside of institutions.⁸

³ Ibid p3

⁴ Ibid p6

⁵ Ibid p9

⁶ ACCC: Australian Competition & Consumer Commission

⁷ Samuel G, 2011, Women and Leadership Australia. 'Right women right place, right time'. Address by G Samuel, chairperson ACCC at Australian Women's Leadership Symposium Melbourne 26/6/11

<http://www.accc.gov.au/content/item.phtml?itemId=994084&nodeId=fb8cc23b6ffc2b7923b856cfbef5158c&fn=SPEECH%20-%20G%20Samuel%20-%20Women's%20leadership%20-%2024%20June%202011.pdf> accessed 27/6/11

⁸ Ibid p 10

Such widespread cultural change is well overdue. While it can be argued this is the missing link in advancing equality in Australia, sustained vigilance and insistence on EEO action to ensure women friendly workplaces (good for all employees) from top level employers and managers needs to be supplemented and supported by gender sensitive policies at national level across inter-related portfolios (e.g. Education and Training/VET; Employment; Workforce participation & IR) and wide spread local action by States/Territories, Industries, workplaces, unions and professional bodies. Coordinated gender sensitive action is needed at a number of levels to enhance informed decision making with the potential to widen career options and advancement for women and girls, as well as ensure viable skilled workforces for Australia's future. This includes, for example: -

- Inclusive curriculum and resource materials from primary school levels on, that portray and so normalise girls and boys, women and men undertaking a wide range of paid and unpaid work, including parenting, caring work and sharing work in the home.
- Career advice for girls (and boys) at school in relation to work experience, and study pathways, including confidence in their ability to learn 'non traditional' skills and have careers in related industries.
- Advice to girls (and boys) undertaking VET in Schools programs – as above.
- Online information relating to career choices, including career paths and future prospects that is gender inclusive and encourages girls and women to 'think outside the square'.
- Advice given to girls and women by Training Organisations and Welfare Agencies and Organisations engaged in enhancing employment participation, whether beginning work, re-entering the labour market &/or retraining.
- Advice available to parents through schools and TAFE/training organisations, including that relating to emergent industries and occupations and future career paths that breaks down gender stereotypes through positive examples.
- Work shadowing for women and girls in male dominated industries and occupations.
- Gender inclusive practices for VET traineeships, apprenticeships and on and off the job training – in both work experience and off the job learning contexts.
- Attention to women friendly inclusive workplace cultures and practices.
- Industry specific (including Industry Training Councils) promotions in areas of skills shortages that target women specifically, as well as men.
- Government (Federal, State/ & Territory) training policies and initiatives, including apprenticeships, in areas of skills shortages and so on with gender sensitive &/or affirmative initiatives built in.
- Gender sensitive and (where needed) affirmative policies and action plans for recruitment and retention of women, from apprenticeships, graduate employment programs and on, at all levels.
- Mentoring for women and girls, especially in industries and workplaces that are male dominated.
- Sharing and promotion of EEO Women focussed best practice case studies and success stories.

Given the scope of this Project, focus for strategies is limited to the following areas:

- The inter-relationship of VET and Employment
- Workplace culture
- Attracting and retaining women and girls to non-traditional and emergent occupations and industries.

In particular, strategies are provided for: -

- Career Advisors
- Employers - Workplace Recruitment