

Friday 8th March 2024

**NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF AUSTRALIA**

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY STATEMENT**

Today, as we celebrate International Women’s Day, I would like to welcome and comment on three very important reports/strategies that were released over the past two weeks.

On 24th February 2024, the Minister of Education released the Australian Universities Accord Report, setting out 47 recommendations to enable Australia to achieve a more equitable and innovative higher education system. Reform around the Higher Education Charge (HEC) / Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) will reduce the financial burden on low-income earners, limit disincentives to work and ensure that indexation will not outgrow wage increases.

The National Council of Women of Australia (NCWA) would like to advocate further that indexation should cease immediately with the view of adopting the New Zealand interest-free tuition fee loans. Indexation of HELP severely disadvantages women who, due to family and care responsibilities, often require a longer period post qualification to achieve the full potential of their intended careers. Addressing placement poverty in the areas of nursing, care and teaching was also captured during the review process, and the NCWA strongly supports the Australian government to work with higher education providers and employers to introduce fair pay for fair work and end the unfair nature of up to 1,000 hours of unpaid placement work.

On 27th February, The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) released the 2022-2023 Gender Equality Scorecard. This scorecard was prepared using data submitted by public and private sector employers with over 100 employees. Mandated by the Workplace Gender Equality Amendment (Closing the Gender Pay Gap) Bill 2023, employers report (annually) on six gender equality indicators (GEI).

The 6 GEIs are:

1. Gender composition of the workforce
2. Gender composition of boards and governing bodies
3. Gender pay gap
4. Workplace flexibility to support family and care responsibilities
5. Workplace consultation on gender equality
6. Workplace sexual harassment and discrimination

While there were many commentaries about the stubborn pay gap, it is important to look at other data that will go towards improving the gender pay gap in the long term. Despite being a signatory to the G20 Leaders Declaration in 2014 to reduce the gender gap in labour force participation by 25% by 2025, Australia has not included this measuring metric in the annual WGEA reporting. Gender composition in the uptake of flexible workplace offerings will also lead to a better understanding of sharing family and care responsibilities.

The NCWA recommend employers use the [WGEA’s Data Explorer](https://www.wgea.gov.au/data-statistics/data-explorer) to further engage with their employees to improve business and societal outcomes, remove career barriers and improve economic and financial success for every Australian.

Yesterday, 18 months after an exhaustive nationwide consultation on the Draft National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality, the Hon. Katy Gallagher released the [“Working for Women: A Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality”](https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/working-women-strategy-gender-equality). Intended as a forerunner to today’s International Women’s Day celebrations, the headline act was the introduction of paying superannuation on Paid Parental Leave for children born or adopted from 1st July 2025. Recommended by the Women Economic and Equality Taskforce (WEET) some 12 months ago, this was a single tangible policy announcement that will be followed by more policy work focussing on the areas of gender-based violence, unpaid and paid care, economic equality and security, health and leadership, representation and decision-making.

We are only two months away from the next federal budget, where many of the recommendations from the past two weeks will be costed and presented to the nation, Australia needs to get serious about lifting overall productivity, increasing women’s workplace participation, and improving the gender pay gap whilst providing a safe and respectful working environment.

The NCWA recommends that our government invest in meaningful structural policy changes to pave the way to achieve gender equality for all Australians.

Chiou See Anderson

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