

## **AUSTRALIAN VICE- CHANCELLORS' COMMITTEE'S ACTION PLAN FOR WOMEN EMPLOYED IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES, 1999 TO 2003**

Australia's universities are leading organisations in promoting gender equity. Universities have pursued equal opportunity and affirmative action policies with respect to their employees. Increasing proportions of their staff are women, including senior level staff. Universities also strive to provide an educational environment which practices equity in all its forms and promotes the academic and personal development of women students across all fields and at all levels of study. This provides the basis for full and equal participation in their careers and the community, including within higher education. In addition, universities contribute leadership to the broader community debate that has led to changed expectations for women and the creation of equal opportunity legislation in Australia.

Nevertheless there remains much still to be done to ensure women staffs' equal participation in all aspects of university operations. Research provides evidence of the continuing pattern of disadvantage characterising women's employment in universities. This disadvantage is a part of broader labour market patterns which require sector wide responses. There remains considerable under representation of women at senior levels within universities and in traditionally male occupations and disciplines. For academic and general staff, the lower earnings of women cannot be explained by differences in qualifications, experience or job content. (Probert et al 1998).

In the last ten years universities have committed considerable resources to affirmative action programs for women. However policy changes and innovative programs have not yet produced the extent of cultural change required: as in other formal organisations, informal values and expectations change very slowly. In response, and reflecting its recognition of the significance of this issue for the quality and strength of Australian higher education, the AVCC will implement a national plan to secure greater gender equity within universities.

The plan has three main elements:

- to exert the AVCC's leadership to promote the achievement of gender equity in Australia;
- to develop strategies based on research for overcoming barriers to gender equity for university staff;
- to refine the AVCC and university staff development services to target gender equity more effectively.

These objectives are focussed on the responsibilities of the AVCC. In support of the plan each university will undertake its own actions targeted to institutionally specific priorities.

The AVCC will review progress against the plan each year.

**Objective One: To exert the AVCC's leadership, across the higher education sector and more broadly in the community, to promote the achievement of gender equity in Australia**

### **Rationale**

Universities have played a significant role in identifying the extent to which equality between men and women, particularly in public life, is yet to be achieved in this country, the costs of this situation to the community, and factors significant in preventing its more speedy resolution.

In the last few decades the ethnic origin, gender composition and family structures of the Australian workforce have changed dramatically. The expectations of the community, as citizens and as consumers, has changed correspondingly.

In the current climate of budget constraints and the significantly increased and global nature of competition between institutions, the quality and relevance of academic programs and research activities, as well as the successful management of universities requires them to take advantage of the full breadth of abilities, skills and perspectives. By employing a diverse range of people including women at all levels, universities are able to anticipate and meet the needs of students (more than half of whom are women) and other clients.

The AVCC recognises that its members must demonstrate leadership in promoting gender equity and bringing about change in their institutions and the sector.

Continued promotion of the AVCC's commitment to gender equity will:

- provide clear and public leadership in identifying, supporting and promoting the need for more sustained and effective initiatives to achieve gender equity in all aspects of life in Australia;
- provide the stimulus for more effective institutional action to achieve gender equity and continued affirmative action for women within universities;
- ensure universities provide models of good practice for the community in relation to gender equity.

### **Action**

A. The AVCC will take a leadership role in communicating that concerted and sustained action to improve gender equity in the sector more rapidly is a priority for the sector.

*At suitable occasions and regularly over the period of the plan.*

B. The AVCC will publish this action plan.

In pursuing the objectives of the Action Plan the AVCC will continue to consult with the Colloquium of Senior Women Executives in Higher Education (the Colloquium).

*In 1999 and ongoing.*

- C. The AVCC will develop a policy statement communicating the significance of more rapid progress towards the achievement of gender equity in the sector and providing guidelines to universities on actions critical to its achievement at the institutional level.

*By July 2000.*

- D. The AVCC will collate base line quantitative data on the position of women employed in higher education.

The Affirmative Action Agency will be asked to assist with this task, and to provide analysis of the sector's position and examples of good practice with respect to affirmative action, as part of its role to support and encourage action by lead sectors. This work should include analysis of the position of women in those professional areas whose qualification basis is academic programs where women remain a significant minority.

*In 1999.*

- E. The AVCC will recommend that all universities include gender equity performance measures in institutional plans and quality assurance processes.

*In 1999.*

- F. The AVCC will monitor and promote more equal representation of women to men on AVCC committees; and ensure the fair and effective representation of women when it nominates or approves representatives to national and international fora.

*Annual.*

- G. The AVCC will consult with relevant organisations on the viability of organising a high profile national forum or conference about the merit principle in the context of gender equity, productivity, efficiency and serving the community. The conference will be funded on a cost-recovery basis.

*In 2000.*

- H. The AVCC will work with relevant government and community agencies in projects which improve the position of women in universities, and promote and use the skills of university women in the community, for example the AVCC Register of Senior University Women and the Office of Status of Women Executive Search Program.

*1999 and continuing.*

### **Performance measures**

- 1(a) The percentage of academic staff at level D and above by sex.
- 1(b) The ratio of the percentage of academic staff at level D and above who are women to the corresponding percentage of all academic staff who are women.

Data presented by institution and nationally.

Target: progress the female ratio to 1:1 faster than 1994-1997 trend line.

- 2(a) The percentage of general staff at level 10 and above by sex
- 2(b) The ratio of the percentage of general staff at level 10 and above who are women to the corresponding percentage of all general staff who are women.

Data presented by institution and nationally.

Target: progress the female ratio to 1:1 faster than 1994-1997 trend line.

- 3. Number of universities including gender ratio targets in their major performance indicators.

Target: all universities to have equal employment opportunity targets for women staff and to monitor these through key performance indicators.

- 4. That women are represented on all AVCC Standing Committees and the ratio of the percentage of women on AVCC Standing Committees to the percentage of Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors and Pro-Vice-Chancellors who are women.

- 5. Target: At least two women on any AVCC committee of 6 or more people and a ratio of 1:1.

## **Objective Two: To develop strategies based on research for overcoming barriers to gender equity for university staff**

### **Rationale**

Existing research points to evidence that cultural and structural barriers continue to limit the career paths of women in universities. The next stage is to examine the precise nature and dimensions of these barriers to identify and put in place mechanisms to remove or counteract their impact more directly and effectively.

### **Action**

A The AVCC will support the following projects, listed in priority order. The AVCC will support funding applications (eg. under the Evaluations and Investigations Program or SPIRT).

- i. Analysis of the employment histories and career paths of three groups of male and female general staff (HEW 2-4, HEW 6-8, and HEW 9-10) to identify the key factors associated with gender differences.
- ii. A scoping study to identify the nature and effectiveness of career supports for both teaching and research, and the relative weighting given to them. This would be done by studying representative samples of both male and female academic staff at different career stages across different institutions;
- iii. Establishing the current numbers of women and men in three separate categories for the purpose of estimating potential female cohorts available for positions in the academic workforce at future dates.

The first category would be current PhD students by field of research; the second category academic staff currently employed at levels A and B; the third level Cs. These would provide different pools of staff for different levels of academic positions in (say) five and ten years time.

Projects (i) and (ii) are designed to follow up the main findings of the Probert et al Gender Pay Equity study. Detailed projects would need to be developed later in 1999 for work to be done over 2000.

B The AVCC will disseminate outcomes of this research on mechanisms to address barriers through relevant AVCC subcommittees, organised workshops and staff development programs.

*1999 and later years, tied to research outcomes: should mainly be 2001 to 2003.*

C The AVCC and individual institutions will devise effective policies and programs based on the research that will overcome the identified barriers.

*2001 to 2003.*

## **Performance measures**

- 1.** Increased representation of women academic staff at level C and above and especially in leadership positions, eg heads of Academic Organisational Units, heads of faculty and senior executive level.
- 2.** Increased representation of women general staff at levels 6 and above and increased opportunities for recruitment and career progression for women from HEW level 5 and below to positions at level 6 and above.

### **Objective Three: To refine AVCC and university staff development services to target gender equity more effectively**

#### **Rationale**

Staff development programs are a significant basis for creating the conditions necessary for effective action to achieve gender equity. Programs are needed that counteract and dismantle the structural and cultural impediments to gender equity by means of the broad range of staff development and leadership programs directed to university managers and other leaders, as well as those targeted more specifically at women.

#### **Action**

- A. The AVCC will devise training programs for senior staff to enable them to provide more effective leadership in gender equity in their institutions. The AVCC's current staff development programs will include gender equity issues as relevant.

*2000 onwards.*

- B. Support the development of an information, communication, and mentoring network for women preparing for more senior leadership roles through options such as a sector-wide electronically maintained information database, web site and chat line.

*Database in place in 1999 and with other options from 2000.*

- C Based on existing research and that sponsored under Objective Two, re-examine sectoral staff development policies to address the specific barriers facing women in universities.

*From 2000 based on existing evidence and each year thereafter taking account of any useful research outcomes.*

- D AVCC to support the Colloquium monitor women and leadership programs across the sector and within the 37 universities to identify any gaps in provision for action by universities.

*In 2000.*

#### **Performance measures**

1. Usage of the AVCC's information network.
2. Development and delivery of more effective staff development programs targeted at gender equity both by AVCC and universities.

*References: Probert, B, P Ewer & K Whiting (1998) Gender Pay Equity in Australian Higher Education, NTEU, Melbourne*