

Leading Issues Journal

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In this Issue

Section A

Address to Victorian Women Lawyers

By Rosemary Calder
First Assistant Secretary
Office of the Status of Women

This address by Rosemary Calder was delivered at a Seminar Sponsored by the Victorian Women Lawyers at Melbourne on 24 August 2000.

Calder candidly reflects on her own career "diversions and detours," and the "subtle and systemic" barriers women face in their working life. "Women are entering the workforce in ever increasing numbers. They recognise that education is their best bet in securing equality - on the whole they are better educated than their male contemporaries. They advance through the lower levels of their chosen profession without any obvious discrimination and on to the middle echelons which is where most of them are halted irrespective of their talent. Relatively few make it to the top of their chosen profession and this is the case in all professions...The masculine workplace culture still persists... The need to prove themselves in the workplace and make their mark usually comes at the very time when most women are having their children."

Focusing on the problems experienced by women specifically in the areas of Law, Medicine, Education, the Media and non-traditional areas of employment such as engineering and architecture, Calder goes on to explore the factors that contribute to gender bias in these areas.

Arriving at the crucial consideration, " So, how do we bring about significant change?" she points out that, "strength could be drawn from collaboration between women in different professions - and their supporting male colleagues - to share concerns, to compare objectives, strategies and achievements, and to cooperatively develop awareness and advocacy activities...One strategy that has great benefits in the advancement of women across all fields is mentoring and it is a strategy that is being heavily promoted by OSW."

Finally, she delineates how the Office of the Status of Women is working towards removing discrimination from the workplace. "I believe OSW too has a mentoring role - that it should not only monitor what is happening to advance equality but act also as a conduit for disseminating what is best practice and as a forum for debate...No policy advisory unit should ever work in isolation and OSW must be firmly connected to the community it represents. I see the office as a very active member of a partnership which involves the

government, the professions and industry. Its task is to formulate policy, encourage communication, identify best practice, provide role models in all areas that affect women in their professional and community lives... OSW must play a major role in strengthening the women's "sector" by helping to forge such strategic alliances...To that purpose, I am working on an idea to establish an annual women's conference that would be for all women and cover all topics. It would include the professions, business enterprises, Federal and State government departments, women's organisations - anyone who has a stake in women's affairs."

On 26-28 August 01, OSW will be hosting the first annual **National Women's Conference** in Canberra.

ADDRESS TO VICTORIAN WOMEN LAWYERS

**By Rosemary Calder
First Assistant Secretary
Office of the Status of Women**

At a Seminar Sponsored by the Victorian Women Lawyers
Melbourne 6pm Thursday 24 August

I'd like to begin by telling you a little about my professional life and its relevance to my current job with the Office of the Status of Women.

I began my working life on The Age here in Melbourne as a cadet, and worked as a journalist for 14 years, with eight years as a specialist in legal and industrial relations affairs, much of that time within this building.

After I had established my family, I studied sociology and worked part-time as a researcher in health and welfare policy. This eventually led me to become policy adviser for the national network of the Councils of the Ageing on a range of issues affecting older people - taxation, retirement income, superannuation, health improvement, health insurance and health service access and community and housing services.

In 1990, I joined the Victorian Health Department where I was responsible for policy, structural development and operation of state wide specialist health services for older people and those with specialist health care needs.

I believe my career progression mirrors that of many women today. My career diversions and detours were the consequence of my focus on my family and the need to tailor my personal and professional ambitions and expectations accordingly. This, and my consequent experience in a number of different enterprises and disciplines, has given me a broad perspective on the issues for Australian women in the current workforce.

An examination of women's standing and advancement in a number of different fields

confirms that discrimination exists to much the same extent, in much the same way, at much the same point in career development and across all the professions.

Women are entering the workforce in ever increasing numbers. They recognise that education is their best bet in securing equality - on the whole they are better educated than their male contemporaries. They advance through the lower levels of their chosen profession without any obvious discrimination and on to the middle echelons which is where most of them are halted irrespective of their talent. Relatively few make it to the top of their chosen profession and this is the case in all professions.

The masculine workplace culture still persists. There is the problem of high work hours - you aren't seen to be doing the job if you don't put in the hours and this of course impacts on women's ability to manage child rearing and all the other caring and nurturing tasks that remain the responsibility of women, almost exclusively. The need to prove themselves in the workplace and make their mark usually comes at the very time when most women are having their children.

Our society still undervalues work by women for a number of different reasons. As women overcome the historical and more obvious barriers to equality, our research shows that the obstacles being thrown up are increasingly subtle and systemic. They are expressed in stereotyped assumptions about women's and men's abilities, biases in the evaluation of merit and ability based on gender and work patterns that systematically limit advancement.

As I commented earlier, Australian women are joining the workforce in unprecedented numbers. Today, 55 per cent of Australian women aged 15 and above are in paid employment. Almost 2.25 million have full-time jobs and 1.7 million are in part-time employment.

The gap between women's earnings relative to men's is still substantial. Last year the *average weekly ordinary-time earnings* for women were at a record high of 85.1 per cent of male earnings. But if you look at average earnings overall, you will see that women earn only about 66 per cent of total male earnings. Reasons for this include factors such as hours worked each week, types of jobs performed, differences in levels of educational attainment and the fact that women's working lives are often interrupted by child birth and child rearing.

In spite of the significant imbalance between the number of men and women who occupy the top jobs, women are doing better in some professions than in others.

In the Commonwealth Parliament, women account for 24.5 per cent of MPs and senators, compared with just 14 per cent in 1995. The proportion of women in Australian state and territory parliaments has increased from 9 per cent in 1985 to 22.1 per cent now, and in local government, from 20 to 25 per cent. Indigenous women on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Regional Councils now make up 30 per cent the highest proportion to date.

Women fill almost 31 per cent of positions on Commonwealth government boards and more than 24 per cent of senior executives in the Australian Public Service are women. These increases in government jobs are due in large part to government efforts to address bias in the workplace and appoint people on merit.

In the private sector, women occupy 27.3 per cent of management positions in companies with 100 employees or more.

Comparisons between the professions highlight the fact that women in general have some way to go before they reach anything like equality. But precise comparisons of where women stand in the various professions are difficult to make because of the paucity of up-to-date information and statistics.

Let's begin with the law.

Women now make up more than 50 per cent of university law graduates in Australia. As employees, they are over-represented in lower status positions. NSW figures, which roughly equate to national figures, show that women are under represented in private law firms where they make up only 26.9 per cent of professionals, and concentrated in community (67 per cent), government (46 per cent), corporate sectors (43.5 per cent), and in legal academia (66.7 per cent).

Only 17.1 per cent of judges and magistrates in Australia are women - 159 out of 929. Nearly three quarters are appointed to the State and Territory District or County Court, 14 per cent to the Federal courts and 10 per cent are in State and Territory Supreme Courts. Of those appointed to Federal Courts, 65 per cent are in the Family Court.

In New South Wales, four out of 51 judges of the Supreme Court or Court of Appeal are women as compared with Victoria which has two women judges - both in the trial division of the Supreme Court. Queensland has six Supreme Court judges who are women and South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, one each.

About 10 per cent of barristers in New South Wales are women, one per cent of senior counsel, and seven percent are partners in private practice or managers within government practice.

In Victoria women make up 28 per cent of solicitors, 15.8 per cent of barristers and only 6 per cent of QCs.

Comparing the law with medicine, last year 52.7 per cent of medical school enrolments were women - very similar numbers to those studying law.

Women now make up 27.6 per cent of medical practitioners in Australia but the female medical workforce is growing at a much faster rate than the male workforce. In 25 years' time, 42 per cent of all medical practitioners will be women.

Most women doctors prefer to work in general practice. The most recent figures available show they make up 33.2 per cent of the primary care workforce but only 15.6 per cent of specialists. The female share varied considerably across the main specialist groups. Just 3.6 per cent are surgeons, 15.8 per cent are internal medicine specialists but more than 26 per cent specialised in pathology.

But the more important indicator of women's status in the medical profession is the proportion of female specialist trainees. They were well represented in internal medicine and

other specialities but poorly represented in surgery compared with males. Female hospital non-specialists were predominantly resident medical officers and interns rather than salaried or other career non-specialists.

In education, women make up around 78 per cent of primary teachers and 54 per cent of secondary teachers. There is no national data on the gender of school principals but it appears that a large majority is male. Looking at education as a whole - schools, TAFE, and universities - women make up about 66 per cent of professionals but fewer than 31 per cent of managers and administrators.

In higher education institutions, women comprise more than 35 per cent of non-casual academic staff. However they are clustered at the lower levels - 51.8 per cent of academics at "below lecturer" status are women. As they climb the tree, the numbers get fewer - 43.4 per cent of lecturers are women but they make up only 27.9 per cent of senior lecturers and when you get to the ranks above senior lecturer, only 15.6 per cent are women. This year there are four women university Vice Chancellors.

As with women medical practitioners, most women academics work part-time - 71 per cent of university part-time staff are women compared with 45 per cent of full-timers.

Some changes are occurring in other non-traditional areas of employment where women's participation between 1991 and 1999 has been increasing.

Women engineering students rose from 10.7 to 14.8 per cent of the total:

- in agriculture they increased from 33.3 to 41.1 per cent;
- in architecture from 34.1 to 36.5 per cent;
- in science 39.7 to 40.8 per cent; and
- in business economics and administration from 41.4 to 48.6 per cent.

These are important gains.

Another professional area of particular significance because it offers society a mirror of social assessment, issues and analysis, is the media.

Women in the media appear to suffer disadvantage and/or discrimination to much the same extent as in other professions and, in addition, a degree of sexual harassment that would not be tolerated in many another workplace.

Claire Miller, a senior journalist with The Age told the International Women's Media Foundation recently that about half of all journalists in Australia are women yet men continue to control the industry. There are no women editor-in-chiefs among the major media outlets and precious few in senior editorial positions with any influence on news values or judgements.

A recent survey of women in the media showed that while one third of respondents said women were well represented at all levels, the other two thirds said the opposite. These results reflect conditions in different workplaces - women in magazines, and regional/suburban newspapers tended to be satisfied with their status but those in the larger

organisations were not.

Women are still pigeon-holed in traditionally female areas like women's issues and fashion and, to a lesser extent health, education, the arts which are perceived to be less important than areas like politics or sports. Only a small proportion work in areas seen to be the most important to their organisation.

However, an astounding 22.8 per cent of respondents said they had left a job in the media because they felt they were being discriminated against in their promotion chances, as I did, many years ago.

Sexual harassment was of concern to most respondents with 51 per cent saying they had been sexually harassed at work but only 13.2 per cent indicated they had made a formal complaint.

A quarter of those who did not make a formal complaint did not do so because of fear of intimidation, victimisation or losing their job.

It seems sexual harassment is still part of work culture in Australian media organisations but women either don't know how or choose not to do anything about it for a wide variety of reasons.

That basically is the status quo in these professions and, to plagiarise a well-known but now departed educator - **Why is this so?**

The research about equality at the Victorian Bar shows that women generally find it more difficult to gain entry to, and support from, the mainstream Bar. They are less likely to be briefed as regularly as men and have a lower representation in longer cases. It is clear from work in other States that conditions are similar elsewhere in Australia.

Cultural factors that contribute to this gender bias include:

- a high level of criticism of female barristers;
- their exclusion or alienation from social networks, lunching rituals and other social events;
- issues of sexuality that are used to undermine their professional credibility; and
- a strong tradition of "no dobbing" which inhibits them from making formal complaints about gender bias or other inappropriate behaviours.

Bias in briefing practices and prejudices in solicitors, clerks and clients have been identified as being crucial in determining if women barristers receive work.

Despite the notion that the Bar offers a degree of flexibility to combine parenting responsibilities with legal practice, particular characteristics of the Bar make it difficult to take time off for childbirth and parenting.

These include fitting in around court schedules, maintaining solicitor contacts, and the entrenched work ethos that includes working weekends and long hours on a continuous basis. Perhaps this accounts for the predominance of women trained in law and working in

the community and public government sectors.

Similarly, a report by the Australian Medical Workforce Advisory Committee suggests that the strong preference of female clinicians for general practice is because they find it the most accommodating environment, presumably because they can combine their career with the raising of a family.

Specialist practice is comparatively more demanding in terms of time flexibility especially the surgical specialities. In 1998, more than 67 per cent of female specialists and 82 per cent of female surgeons worked full-time compared with 47 per cent of women GPs.

Although there are training programmes that are flexible, finding part-time employment in specialist areas is more difficult and fraught with problems. There are also strong indications that part-time work is not approved of or is not valued. It has been suggested that part-time work means less involvement in research which affects the rate of promotion in salaried positions. There is also guilt about working part-time in areas of doctor shortage and the perception that colleagues regard part-time work as inferior. Loss of skills, quality of care, quality of continuing education and maintenance of experience are also issues.

Significantly many of the factors cited as discouraging to women in taking up specialist training such as long hours and length of training are being aired increasingly by male counterparts.

Jane Talbot, senior lecturer in general practice at the University of Western Australia also pointed out that "in common with other professions women doctors are expected to assume a greater range of roles outside their work than their male counterparts. Society expects women to be primarily responsible for the home and children whether or not they have full-time careers and it is because of these responsibilities, in part, that their work patterns tend to be significantly different from male patterns.

Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

Equity reviews of universities have emphasised the systemic impediments to women's progression. The problem is redefined not as a problem with women but with the institutional and cultural impediments facing them in their pursuit of careers. The draft equity review of the University of Western Australia spelled it out. It said, "the single most important change required is to the culture of masculinity and its implicit values".

Organisational and university cultures are masculine. Historically, employment terms and conditions, policies, practices and reward structures have been organised around the cluster of characteristics, attributes and background circumstances typical of men.

Associated with this is the relative power men are able to exercise. Their capacity to influence decision-making is greater, and so men apply their value stances in staffing matters and in the distribution of resources which constantly reinforces the masculine norms.

EEO programmes in universities are going to be effective only if they focus on how past practices have become embedded in organisational policies, rules and work arrangements

and how the organisation can be changed.

So how do we bring about significant change?

One of the primary mechanisms for addressing gender bias in the **law**, as in other areas, is the establishment of a critical mass of women in senior decision-making roles. The challenge is what steps can be taken to bring about this representation of women of merit in the elite decision-making roles.

Professional associations can play an important part in making policies that change attitudes.

As you know, the Victorian Bar Council, consistent with the history of this State in supporting the participation of women in the law, commissioned its 1998 equal opportunity research out of a commitment to equality and the elimination of practices and attitudes which discriminate against women.

The council is to be highly commended since it is the first report from any jurisdiction to focus specifically on the position of women barristers and on the extent of gender bias in an independent bar.

The conclusion it reached wasn't particularly ground breaking but the course of action it proposed was. It was decided that positive intervention was required and that the Bar had an important role to play by devising, adopting and implementing strategies for change.

These include increasing women's membership of committees; a review of parental leave policy; annual reports to the Council by sexual harassment officers, and incorporating topics in the Bar Readers Course such as sexual harassment, anti-discrimination legislation, gender inclusive language and parental leave. Mentoring for junior women barristers has been provided through the Women's' Barristers' Association.

The Royal College of General Practitioners with its national networks and as the peak organisation is in a strong position to take a similar lead on this strategic issue.

A presidential taskforce has been set up by the college to develop strategies to support women GPs in practical ways at different stages of their career. It will start by appointing more women to its committees - women who can make a difference.

It will look at the significant life and career stages of women in general practice to identify their special needs and priorities. There will be assistance for business development, leadership, management, career planning and information technology. The aim is to find ways of ensuring female GP issues are mainstreamed as part of the future of general practice.

As far back as 1984, the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission proposed a range of measures to improve opportunities for women academics.

Higher education institutions were the first group of employers to be covered under the Affirmative Action (Equal Opportunities for Women) Act in 1986 which required them to

report annually on their compliance in establishing full affirmative action programmes.

However, in 1997 a report on the evaluation of gender equity in Australian university staffing indicated there was some considerable way to go before women academics would achieve parity with their male colleagues. To achieve equitable employment "those traditions and habits of thought which make it easy for gender-based inequities to be generated and to accumulate" would have to be altered.

Shifts in the distribution of resources were necessary to retain, develop and progress current existing women staff and to attract more in areas where women were under-represented. There was also a need to allocate more time to some sections of the workforce for their own professional development.

The report called for an integrated and coherent plan of action from senior members of universities aimed at providing equal employment opportunities for women. It also called for mechanisms through which women to express their views and offer advice.

Women in the media have further to go - the changes that women in the media want to see include the advertising of positions and the introduction of proper selection and interview procedures.

They also want training about equal employment opportunity and gender issues for their male colleagues and provision of childcare but have not yet identified strategies to achieve their aims.

From the list I have just outlined, it seems to me that strength could be drawn from collaboration between women in different professions - and their supporting male colleagues - to share concerns, to compare objectives, strategies and achievements, and to cooperatively develop awareness and advocacy activities.

One strategy that has great benefits in the advancement of women across all fields is mentoring and it is a strategy that is being heavily promoted by OSW. It involves a more skilled or experienced person guiding, assisting and empowering a less skilled or experienced person to develop personally and professionally.

Mentoring also offers organisations many potential benefits. It means they can better utilise the skills available, progress towards diversity in their leadership, enrich the commitment of longer serving members, provide more informed management and enhanced management skills, and an effective tool for organisational change.

Many successful and eminent women today attribute much of their success to the help of mentors. A number of this year's Australian Business Women's Hall of Fame inductees praised their mentors for the part they had played in their careers.

Fiona Horman, managing director of Regency Recordings suggested women should be willing to seek and accept advice from others, find a mentor or mentors and learn and share from their experience.

Elizabeth Lewis-Gray, Director of Gekko Systems a minerals processing equipment market

suggests you should surround yourself with mentors, champions, teachers and forward thinkers.

The Hon Judi Moylan, former Commonwealth Minister for the Status of Women, says she was fortunate since her teenage years and through various stages of her career that she had mentors who invested their time, knowledge and skills in her and gave her the confidence to persist when things got tough.

So what do I see as the role of the Office of the Status of Women in the move to remove discrimination from the workplace?

I believe OSW too has a mentoring role - that it should not only monitor what is happening to advance equality but act also as a conduit for disseminating what is best practice and as a forum for debate.

No policy advisory unit should ever work in isolation and OSW must be firmly connected to the community it represents. I see the office as a very active member of a partnership which involves the government, the professions and industry. Its task is to formulate policy, encourage communication, identify best practice, provide role models in all areas that affect women in their professional and community lives.

I see my own role as that of a facilitator and my prime aim is to establish good relationships between the various parties. I believe there should be frequent meetings between organisations - and sectors - to exchange ideas, bench mark our gains and achievements, identify problem areas and plan for the future.

I would be keen to explore with women in the law, and their male colleagues, the potential for a think tank, or a round table, to enable the professions I have discussed, and other similar professions, to consider the common issues, and to endeavour to develop strategies based on experience or research that could have application - perhaps including the development of indicators of women's participation and access, for use by a number of professions.

OSW must play a major role in strengthening the women's "sector" by helping to forge such strategic alliances.

To that purpose, I am working on an idea to establish an annual women's conference that would be for all women and cover all topics. It would include the professions, business enterprises, Federal and State government departments, women's organisations - anyone who has a stake in women's affairs.

Each year we'd have a major theme with keynote speakers and from here, we would develop sub-themes. The Government could present its big messages about policy, and out of the workshops and meetings women would come up with their big messages for government.

Whatever changes are made to the current system, success is down to the individual herself, and every woman's advancement paves the way for those who follow, a sentiment reinforced by the Honourable Justice Sally Brown of the Family Court of Australia.

Speaking at the Law Council of Australia Forum on Equal Opportunity in the Law, Justice Brown spoke of the need to take action now, she said that the tardy removal of a limited number of more obvious barriers was a very limited form of progress.

"One of my friends says that the only thing that the passage of time will do is make us old. It is a grim prospect but I fear it is true.

"Change requires in this, as in many other areas, individual action, personal responsibility and hard work. We have to think systematically but we have to act individually."

From my own experience, I believe that we have to work from within the system to build a platform for the individual.

Thank you.

Source: OSW

Section B

Tony Brown is the Executive Director of Adult Learning Australia (ALA). ALA, established in 1960, is the peak national organisation for adult learning providers and facilitators and a voice for adult learners. Through leadership, advocacy, advice and action, ALA promotes and supports lifelong learning, working towards a learning society that is democratic, nurturing, productive and sustainable.

Some interesting Facts by the ALA

- About 1.4 million adults each year attend a community-based adult education course
- 21% of Australian adults never return to learning after leaving school.
- 34% of Australian adults have inadequate literacy and numeracy skills.
- 30% of school students do not complete year 12.

In 2000-01 the Commonwealth allocated

- Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs - \$12 billion.
- Australian National Training Authority - \$998 million.
- Adult and Community Education (ACE) - \$750 thousand.

ALA launched an Adult Learning Agenda in May 00, beginning by delivering a set of policy and funding proposals — Lifelong Learning: Investing in a Better Society — to every Member of the House of Representatives and Senator. It aims to win commitments to these proposals, prior to this year's federal election.

Featured in this section is an article by Tony Brown entitled,

"A clever country means extending learning



opportunities."

In this article, Tony Brown asks a number of critical questions about the status of Australia's education, the political thinking that has influenced its scope and function, the growing divide in the populace of the 'educational elites' and the less well-educated, and the challenge to extend learning opportunity.

"In Australia there are separate national policies on higher, school, vocational and community education. But there is nothing that integrates these areas. They are separate and national policy remains fragmented and incomplete. There is neither a national framework nor a national policy statement outlining the Government's general commitment to lifelong learning."

His question, "Will the clever country be for all, or for those who are already educationally privileged?" calls for urgent debate and leadership on a crucial issue that affects us and our children.

A clever country means extending learning opportunities

By Tony Brown, Executive Director, ALA

Tony Brown is the Executive Director of Adult Learning Australia (ALA). Before joining ALA he taught adult educators at the University of Technology, Sydney and before that was a Senior Policy Officer at the NSW Board of Adult and Community Education.

ALA is the peak national organisation for adult learning providers and facilitators and a voice for adult learners. Through leadership, advocacy, advice and action ALA promotes and supports lifelong learning, working towards a learning society that is democratic, nurturing, productive and sustainable. ALA is a non-government organisation with a membership drawn from the broad spectrum of adult education and learning in the public, private and community sectors. Established in 1960, ALA has state and territory branches and a national office in Canberra.

A clever country means extending learning opportunities

by Tony Brown, Executive Director, ALA

Will the clever country be for all, or for those who are already educationally privileged? Post-Olympic discussions about the clever country have focused on the importance of resuscitating science, research and university funding, and equipping Australians to keep pace with technological innovation.

Labor hopes that education, and in particular its plans for a 'knowledge nation', will be a key factor in the next election, and it appears that the Government may be preparing to match

Labor's pledge. Others are pointing to the need for Australia to match its sporting commitment by funding scientific research, higher education, and technology innovation.

But if we are serious about building a learning society then we must aim for more. The relatively easy option is to fund educational elites at the expense of widening and increasing general participation levels. In the words of the Canadian writer John Ralston Saul, 'Highly sophisticated elites are the easiest and least original thing a society can produce. And the most difficult and the most valuable is a well educated populace.'

We have in Australia an existing and serious learning divide that weakens the foundations for a clever country. A few examples highlight this divide.

- Large scale national research last year showed that 21% of adult Australians will not participate in any structured learning once they leave (or escape?) school.
- Approximately 34% of people, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997 survey of adult literacy levels, do not have the minimum skills that would enable them to cope with the increasingly complex demands of civic life and employment. The ABS found that 17% of Australians are on the lowest of five levels having very poor literacy skills, and a further 27% at the second level can only deal with material that is simple, clearly laid out and deals with a single source of information.

More recently the OECD's International Adult Literacy Survey, *Literacy in the Information Age*, shows that the proportion of Australians at the lowest literacy level is about double that of the Scandinavian countries. Inequalities in literacy levels correlate with economic inequalities.

- Three out of every ten school students do not complete their full schooling. And poor school experience inhibits future learning. Since the mid 1990s the rise in school retention rates has been reversed. The costs for those kids who leave early, for their present and future families and for the community are high in both economic and social terms. Those who do not complete are disproportionately from groups already disadvantaged in society and they will disproportionately experience unemployment, be unemployed for longer periods and have substantially lower lifetime earnings. Their disadvantage is compounded and passed on.

Why press for widening participation in adult education and learning? Firstly, because education for all is a democratic right. Secondly, because the general well being of the society needs an educated, informed population to respond to social, economic and technological change.

To be a clever country we must do more than acquire new employment skills. We must also learn to facilitate informed discussion on key issues that often seem intractable. We can think of gene technology, reconciliation, salinity, safer communities, national identity, drug use, gambling, an ageing society, as areas where informed discussion would strengthen our civil society and help resolve some of these national discussions.

A learning society is mutually beneficial. Accomplished adult learners are more likely to support their children's learning; to be aware of and attend to their own health and well being; to be optimistic and purposeful in facing the future; to readily acquire new knowledge

and skills when required; to be interested and involved in local affairs; and to be skeptical of dogmatic and simplistic solutions to difficult social issues.

While some state governments are showing leadership through innovative programs (the learning towns program in Victoria for instance) at a national level, Australia is being left behind.

Britain, Singapore, Ireland, the OECD, the Group of 8 industrial nations have all committed themselves to working towards realising the learning age. In the UK there is a Minister for Lifelong Learning.

In Australia there are separate national policies on higher, school, vocational and community education. But there is nothing that integrates these areas. They are separate and national policy remains fragmented and incomplete. There is neither a national framework nor a national policy statement outlining the Government's general commitment to lifelong learning.

Adult Learning Australia has been pressing the federal government to take the lead in coordinating a national response for a learning society. Two steps should be taken. Firstly the government should convene a national lifelong learning summit that would bring together relevant industry, education, government agencies and community organisations. Secondly, the goal of this summit should be to generate a national policy framework.

The challenge in the 21st century is how to extend learning opportunities, to recognise and support new forms of learning. The challenge for the Government and Opposition is how to respond to these challenges now. At the moment our horizons are too limited.

Source: Adult Learning Australia.

This is the original text submitted to the *Australian*, published in the Opinion Column in an edited form on 18 October 2000.

Section C

Peter Kearns is Principal of Peter Kearns and Associates, a Canberra-based consultancy firm established in 1990 which has specialised in policy, review, and evaluation studies in fields of education and training. He has undertaken over 50 consultancies since 1990, mainly for government agencies such as DETYA and ANTA, with most of his work focused in the VET sector.

As part of the Adult Learners Week 2000 Conference held in November 00 entitled, "Agenda for the future: Lifelong Learning in Australia," Peter Kearns presented the Paper:

Policies and Strategies to Build a Learning Culture An Overview of Some International Experience and Lessons for Australia

This Paper is based on a study that Global Learning Services undertook for the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) in 1999-2000 on *Building a Learning and training culture: The experience of five OECD countries* (Kearns and Papadopoulos, 2000) and on an earlier study undertaken for NCVER in 1998 on the implications of lifelong learning for vocational education and training in Australia.

Adopting an analytical framework to examine policy and strategies in five OECD countries: Britain, United States, Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands, Kearns identifies three models of approach to building a learning and training culture - the British, American and Nordic Model. He then considers, "Which of these models could provide the pathway for Australia towards a learning society, or is the Australian way some hybrid, yet to be articulated, which draws upon each of these approaches?"

"Building a learning culture and society is a complex and difficult process, but is essential for Australia. When we wrote *VET in the learning age* my view was that this would only be achieved through a grass roots revolution in Australia, with local initiatives across the country. I still hold that view, and I am encouraged by initiatives such as the Victorian Learning Towns, but a national framework to facilitate local action is also necessary. At present Australia has no national policy or vision for lifelong learning (although this exists in the ACE sector), and this will impede our progress. I leave with you the critical question of how can we build such a shared national vision and construct the necessary alliances to turn vision to reality."

To build a learning and training culture, Kearns offers a table of nine major implications for Australia arising from the study. "The major implications of the study for Australia relate mainly to gaps in the policy framework rather than to current policies. This reflects the situation that demand side policies are not sufficiently developed and there is no shared national vision of Australia as a learning society to provide a national framework for concerted partnership action associating all stakeholders."

Policies and Strategies to Build a Learning Culture

An Overview of Some International Experience and Lessons for Australia

By Peter Kearns

Peter Kearns

Peter Kearns is Principal of Peter Kearns and Associates, a Canberra-based consultancy firm established in 1990 which has specialised in policy, review, and evaluation studies in fields of education and training. He has undertaken over 50 consultancies since 1990, mainly for government agencies such as DETYA and ANTA, and has published a number of books, including *VET in the Learning Age*.



Section D

Support Strategies for Women Councillors in NSW - An Issues Paper, March 2001

By the NSW Department for Women

The Hands Up for Women in Council! Project

*In NSW, 51% of the population are women, yet women represent just over a quarter (26%) of all local councillors. While there has been some increase in the number of women elected to local councils in recent years, there is clearly a long way to go to achieve more equal participation of women. Women's participation at all levels of government will ensure that there are some different voices heard in decision making. With more women on council, decisions are more likely to reflect the diversity of the communities they serve and take into account a broader range of community interests and concerns.

Promoting women's election to council is, however, only one aspect of increasing women's greater participation in local government. As well as providing women councillors, particularly newly elected councillors, with the necessary skills, knowledge and confidence to operate effectively as councillors, it is also important to retain women in local government once they have been elected. This is more likely to happen when their experience in council is positive.

The Department for Women (DFW), with the support of the Australian Local Government Women's Association (ALGWA), the Local Government and Shires Associations (LGSA), the Department of Local Government (DLG) and the Premier's Council for Women (PCW), recently initiated the Hands Up for Women in Council! Project. This project is aimed at identifying the support requirements of women councillors, and developing and piloting a best practice model of initiatives to address their support needs. It is proposed that the model be piloted and evaluated in three councils representing metropolitan, regional and rural local government areas.

This issues paper is intended as a first step in identifying women councillors' support issues and canvasses a number of possible elements of a best practice model of support. *

Featured here are excerpts from the Issues Paper:

Section 3: Support Issues features Issues of concern for women councillors. These are identified as: practical barriers to participation; dealing with inappropriate and harassing behaviours; professional development through needs-based training and information (including training on meeting processes and procedures and other aspects of local government); access to information and training; professional and personal support through peer support, networking and mentoring relationships.

Section 5: A 10-point action plan of best practice for supporting women councillors

The *Hands Up for Women in Council!* working party has put together a draft action plan for councils. The draft action plan sets out key best practice strategies to be adopted and implemented by councils to better support women councillors.

Section 6: Where to from here?

This section invites comments and/or feedback all of which will be considered in the development of the best practice model.

Source: *-* from Section 1.1 and 1.2 of *Support Strategies for Women Councillors in NSW - An Issues Paper, March 2001*

**Support Strategies for Women
Councillors in NSW - An Issues Paper,
March 2001**

By NSW Dept for Women

3. Support issues

Issues of concern for women councillors identified include:

practical barriers to participation;

dealing with inappropriate and harassing behaviours;

professional development through needs-based training and information (including training on meeting processes and procedures and other aspects of local government);

access to information and training;

professional and personal support through peer support, networking and mentoring relationships.

3.1 Practical barriers

Many councillors have significant business and family commitments which need to be balanced with their role as a councillor. The lack of childcare or allowances for childcare, inflexible or inconvenient meeting times, and/or excessively long meetings place an additional strain on councillors. So too are such factors likely to dissuade other talented members of the community from considering running for election.

Council business should be conducted, where possible, with due regard to councillors' competing commitments and responsibilities.

3.2 Inappropriate and harassing behaviours

The incidence of inappropriate and harassing behaviours perpetrated by councillors and council staff on other councillors and staff is an issue of considerable concern to women councillors. Such behaviours can have serious consequences, operating to impede the democratic process. They can impact upon the ability of councillors to work effectively to represent the views of their constituency and, in some cases, affect councillors' and staff members' self-esteem and personal relationships.

Often such behaviours are dismissed and characterised as simply a normal part of operating in a political environment. There is a distinct difference, however, between political game-playing and behaviour which serves to stifle the ability of councillors to carry out their duties.

Councillors' experiences of inappropriate and harassing behaviours vary. There is a consensus, however, that these behaviours are common in local councils and that they are perpetrated and experienced by both male and female councillors. There is also agreement that current mechanisms to deal with such behaviours are neither widely publicised, nor sufficient to adequately address the problem.

There is clearly a need for a better framework to deal with these behaviours in council.

3.3 Professional development through needs-based training and information

Based on consultations with women in council, the following have been identified as key elements of an information and training strategy for women in local government:

- information on **the rights and responsibilities of councillors** in local government and **skills new councillors need** to be effective representatives of the people;
- information on the **roles and responsibilities of the chairperson** at council meetings, including setting the tone of meetings, maintaining order and dealing with inappropriate and harassing behaviour;
- training on **the political nature of local government and how to deal with the political games that are played out** — Councillors often enter local government on an issues basis and may not be prepared for the politics. Caucusing with other women or men across party lines may be part of the political nous that needs to be learnt. Some councillors have also expressed frustration at being excluded from internal management and planning committees, which limits their access to appropriate information to make informed decisions and therefore the power to be an effective representative of the people (see further Appendix 1);
- training on **effective communication techniques** — It has been suggested by some women councillors that training on effective communication techniques in adversarial settings, will help new women councillors to feel more confident in contributing in meetings. This should ensure that a diversity of opinions is canvassed;
- training on **meeting procedures**, including on how to use standing orders — It is recognised that being aware of and understanding the structure of meeting procedures will assist women councillors to develop their confidence and assertiveness, enabling

them to more fully and actively participate in council meetings. Newly elected women councillors have reported situations in which their lack of knowledge about meeting procedures has been used by other councillors to disempower them at council committee meetings. With a better knowledge and understanding of relevant meeting procedures, women councillors are less likely to experience meetings as an arena where they are made to feel powerless; and

- information on **the provisions of relevant codes of conduct** and **available remedies** for breaches of the code and other objectionable conduct.

It is recognised that training is particularly critical for newly elected councillors who may have had little experience or exposure to the workings of local government.

3.4 Access to information and training

Women councillors in rural and regional areas have identified problems accessing appropriate councillor training, largely due to the travel costs involved in attending relevant courses, conferences and seminars. Some councillors report feeling pressure to show that they are not spending council finances on training and conferences as this is generally perceived by constituents as a waste of ratepayers money.

A difficulty experienced by all councillors is that information on relevant conferences, workshops and seminars is filtered through council staff who may not pass the information on.

3.5 Professional and personal support through peer support, networking and mentoring relationships

Mentoring relationships

Mentoring can be an effective way of helping women overcome personal and professional barriers to success and to give needed perspective and advice for dealing with difficult situations. In the local government context, experienced councillors in NSW who have 'been there' and 'done that' could act as mentors to newly elected women, helping them negotiate the many unwritten rules for surviving council meetings and life as a councillor.

The availability of mentoring support for councillors who are dealing with inappropriate and harassing behaviours may be particularly valuable.

Peer support and networking

Women councillors have identified the value of support from other women councillors on the same council or other councils. Traditionally men have had the support of business networks through their membership of local service clubs, sporting clubs, and Chambers of Commerce. This support is made available to male candidates while campaigning, and often continues as sitting councillors are often members of these organisations and can act as mentors to other members newly elected. Men's networks also are in a position to provide, in many cases, significant financial backing. Women, however, have traditionally formed community-based

networks which tend to be less formal and provide less financial support.

Networking for women councillors has the added advantage of offering relief to isolation experienced by women who may be the only woman on a council or are otherwise isolated by living in rural or remote areas of the State.

5. A 10-point action plan of best practice for supporting women councillors

The *Hands Up for Women in Council!* working party has put together a draft action plan for councils. The draft action plan sets out key best practice strategies to be adopted and implemented by councils to better support women councillors.

The action plan advocates the adoption by councils of the following principles:

1. The council will develop and implement an induction program for new councillors, which provides opportunities for orientation, learning and new goal setting and empowers new councillors to be effective representatives of the people.
2. The council will adopt and enforce the model code of conduct, provide training on the code to councillors and staff on the provisions of the code and provide information on appropriate avenues for redress for breaches of the code. Councils will keep adequate records of reported breaches and their resolution.
3. The council will distribute copies of the *Hands Up for Women in Council! Information Kit* (to be developed by the working party) to all women councillors.
4. The council will facilitate equal access to information for all councillors.
5. The council will facilitate all councillors' participation in the preparation of the council's management plan. This might include planning sessions being held in addition to, or as part of, council meetings.
6. The council will ensure that planning meetings are inclusive of all councillors to promote a greater diversity of community opinions being taken into account.
7. The councils will ensure that all councillors are given equal access to appropriate training and support to carry out their duties.
8. The council will support mentoring and networking opportunities for new councillors.
9. The council will ensure all councillors, regardless of whether they are a member of a particular committee, are given the opportunity to attend and speak at committee meetings.
10. The council will regularly review its performance in relation to the implementation of this

action plan and cooperate in any independent review of its performance.

A copy of the draft action plan appears at Appendix 5.

6. Where to from here?

The *Hands Up for Women in Council!* working party are distributing copies of this paper to all women councillors in NSW. We would like to invite you to send your comments and/or feedback on this information paper to us at the address, fax number or e-mail address listed below by 30 April 2001.

Your comments will be considered in the development of the best practice model.

HAVE YOUR SAY

The *Hands Up for Women in Council!* Working Party invite you to provide your comments and/or feedback on this issues paper to the address, fax number or e-mail address below.

We value your comments, which will be considered in the development of the best practice model. Thank you for supporting this important project.

Address: The Hands Up for Women in Council! Working Party

c/o Zoe Petridis Department for Women

Level 4 – Stockland House 181 Castlereagh St

Sydney, NSW 2000

Fax no: (02) 9287 1939

E-mail:

Support Strategies for Women Councillors in NSW - An Issues Paper was prepared by the NSW Department for Women on behalf of the Hands Up for Women in Council! Working Party. You can view the entire Paper [here](#):

Section E

Have you ever thought of standing for election to a Rural Lands Protection Board?

Did you know that there are more than 380 directors of NSW Rural Lands Protection Boards (RLPBs) and just 34 are women. The RLPBs are holding their 4-yearly elections in September 2001 with nominations to close in August–September. The Department for Women and the RLPBs' State Council want to encourage more women 'on board' and can show you how.

What do RLPBs do? RLPBs play an important role in your community, looking after: herd or flock based animal health; control of feral animals, such as wild dogs, rabbits, feral pigs and foxes; and v control and management of traveling stock routes and reserves. They also have a role in natural disaster relief.

Why become a director? Becoming a director of your local RLPB will give you an opportunity to: have a say in decisions that affect your local community; build on your skills; and meet and work with people in your rural community.

Who are the directors? Directors are everyday local people who want to make a difference in their community. They can be farmers, schoolteachers, or simply people committed to their local area.

Source: RWN

Standing for Election to a Rural Lands Protection Board

Have you ever thought of standing for election to a Rural Lands Protection Board?

What is a Rural Lands Protection Board?

There are 48 Rural Lands Protection Boards (RLPBs) in NSW. Each Board is a statutory authority operating under the Rural Lands Protection Act 1998 and the Stock Diseases Act 1923, (copies at <www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/>).

The Boards provide services to their ratepayers and the wider community relating to; herd-based animal health, pest animal control and management of travelling stock routes and reserves.

Why do we need an RLPB?

The RLPB ensures a healthy and sustainable environment is maintained by local people who understand the problems and logistics of their area.

Who runs an RLPB?

The boards are made up of Directors. Each of the Board's voluntary Directors are elected by

the ratepayers of the Board, from amongst the ratepayers of the Board - that's you and me! Elections are held each 4 years. The Directors meet once a month to set policy, which is implemented by Board staff.

Why stand for election?

It is vital to have a broad representation from all ratepayers on each Board. The expertise of women and men from all industries occupying or owning large or small land parcels is needed on an RLPB.

Do I have the right skills?

Do you know about: your local region; issues affecting rural NSW; communicating with people of different ages and backgrounds; day-to-day land management issues; 'clean green' agriculture?

If you do, then you have skills the RLPBs are looking for.

Am I eligible?

If you are an owner or occupier of rateable land in an RLPB Division you are eligible for nomination in that Division. Any occupier of rateable land in a Board District may nominate a person for election in that Board District. Two persons per rateable land holding may vote in an election of Directors.

WHAT ABOUT...

The cost to attend a meeting? A day's lost wages? The cost of childcare? There is a travel allowance for use of your motor vehicle to attend meetings . From 1 June, 2001 a sitting fee per day may also be paid.

How much time does it take?

It takes about one day a month to prepare for and attend board meetings. If you are interested in a particular issue, you can volunteer to spend extra time investigating it for your board. It is entirely up to you.

What do I have to offer?

You have a wealth of experiences from problems and solutions in your daily life and occupation.

What next?

Contact your local RLPB office for more details and a nomination form, or call Lee McKenzie, RLPB State Council, on 02 6391 3242 for a contact in your area. Nominations close in August. Elections will be held in September.

[To find out more about what the RLPBs do, look at the RLP Act 1998 \(available from](#)

Source: Rural Women's Network, NSW Agriculture

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