



NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL ON
THE EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN
MANA WAHINE, MANA MAHI



National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women

1 March 2012 Forum Report

Executive Summary

NACEW hosted this Forum with over 80 delegates to explore what will make a positive difference to young women in employment and on their pathway to leadership¹. This report captures the insights and contributions from that day.

A number of recurring themes emerged from the Forum discussion:

- Role models and mentoring – the importance of women supporting women and also of having more tangible female leaders as role models
- Parental leave and flexi opportunities to manage work and family
- The role of business in delivering fair treatment
- Pay equity and efforts to achieve improved outcomes
- Careers advice and skill development.

Forum participants suggested a number of areas where NACEW might make a positive contribution to enhancing young women's employment and future leadership by:

- Examining opportunities available for young women still at school to access mentoring support and engage more with women who are successfully engaged in employment.
- Undertaking research on business benefits of flexibility and encouragement for men/fathers' greater use of flexible work to support their caregiving.
- Consider how women might be assisted with better information and enhanced skills in negotiating their pay.
- Continue to exchange ideas on the themes of this event.

NACEW will use the feedback provided through the forum in developing its future work programme and its ongoing engagement with stakeholders.

¹ The programme for the day and a list of participant organisations is attached.

Setting the scene

Government's agenda for women

Hon Jo Goodhew, Minister of Women's Affairs gave the keynote address. She talked of her enthusiasm for the work she has the Ministry of Women's Affairs focused on to support women's economic independence and better lifetime outcomes. This includes promoting more women onto boards and to consider non-traditional trades training as a career option, emphasising the importance of women making choices based on their interests and abilities, not on their gender. She also emphasised the importance of leaving here today enthused and to collaborate to keep momentum going.

The Minister announced that the Government intends to extend the right to request flexible work arrangements to all employees. This provision is currently available only to those with caring responsibilities.

Status of women in labour market

Joanna Gordon, Ministry of Women's Affairs Policy Director, followed with an outline of the current status of women in the labour market. She pointed to the fact that young women are leaving school with higher educational attainment and are succeeding at greater rates than men at tertiary level.

Women's labour market participation in New Zealand is one of the highest in the OECD (9th highest), and is also rising. While there is still a gender pay gap, that gap has been narrowing annually, from 13% in 2008 to 9.6% in 2011 (using median hourly earnings, NZ Income Survey). The gender pay gap for Māori, Pacific and Asian women is greater than that which exists for European women.

In closing, Joanna summarised key features important to positioning young women for positive outcomes in employment. These were:

Education:

- Women's skill levels provide a good basis to move from
- The choices that girls are making about their courses at school can both limit and expand options for tertiary education.

Working lives:

- A focus on more innovation in the area of work-life balance, and policies such as paid parental leave, childcare and flexible work.

Models of leadership:

- Role models, mentors and networks can provide invaluable support
- Increasing the numbers of women in decision-making roles.

Young leaders panel and student voices

A panel of inspiring young women in employment provided insight from their career and work experiences. The panelists were:

Hinerangi Edwards - Mother of four, Director of Parininihi Ki Waitotara Land Incorporation, a large commercial entity which reinvests in land, other investments, education and community projects that support Taranaki Māori.

Dr Renee Liang - 2010 Sir Peter Blake Emerging Leader Award recipient, paediatrician, published poet, short story writer and playwright.

Camilla Gibbons - 2011 Winner Young Engineer of the Year, and Engineering Geologist from Christchurch.

Sussan Turner - Group Managing Director, MediaWorks NZ Limited.

Selected quotes from the panel are scattered through this report.

Best career advice:

“If you don’t have a job in seven days you’re out of here...back on the bus to Hawera (home).”

“Successful people have at least five careers...and that no career is wasted.”

“A teacher asked me how I would fit into a man’s world, how are you going to cope? – made me think about it.”

Success comes with sacrifice...“Have to now know what you’re prepared to give up.”

Young women in employment

To capture views from tomorrow’s potential leaders in employment NACEW produced a DVD of interviews with a group of secondary school girls from Porirua College and St Cuthbert’s College. All of the 11 Year 13 girls were present at the Forum to see the DVD for the first time.

Quotes from those interviews are also scattered through this report.

What are your plans for further education?

A degree in law

Doctor

Business

Indigenous human rights lawyer

Performance

Travelling course

Not sure, but will be going to uni

Year 13 students

Employment leaders: today and tomorrow

A number of common and different themes emerged from the young women in employment and the students.

There was a clear reticence amongst the students about their futures that was not evident from the panellists. For students so much is still unknown; “it’s a jungle out there”. It is a competitive labour market, tokenistic approaches to managing diversity, being female, being young, being Pacific/Māori/Asian.

What obstacles and challenges have you faced?

“I try to glide past them without giving them too much energy.”

“The perceptions that others have of you – turn them on their head, make it go your way.”

“See it as a challenge and focus on figuring out how you are going to get around it.”

“Men’s approach to an obstacle is to get aggressive...I tend to try and defuse the situation...I’m no push over but don’t look to the bitchy, yelling power-suit role models.”

Young women in employment

By comparison, the young women in employment have had some experience of success in meeting challenges and this may have influenced their perception that there are no barriers to their advancement; it’s all about developing strategies. The students did acknowledge the huge opportunities that exist for them in terms of study and work. And while recognising the need for experience first, the passion and enthusiasm for breaking through barriers that may confront them in their pursuit of success and leadership was clear.

Do you see yourselves as future leaders?

“I want to be an example for the next generation – might be PI and from South Auckland – but you can still make it.”

“ I want to go back to the Cook Islands and create a business to improve the economy and employ lots of people as there is little work there.”

“My Māoritanga is who I am; I have a passion for helping my people.”

Year 13 students

Each of the young women could point to those who may have been role models for them; these were both men and women, some were people who demonstrated behaviour not to be emulated, some were formal mentors and previous bosses,

teachers and parents. Both the young women and students acknowledged the importance of teachers, parents and family members as role models and for their support. The students, however, commented that there were few good role models for them, citing the media and its focus on women in terms of how they look playing a big part in undermining women's confidence.

A particularly strong theme that came through from the Māori and Pacific students, and the young women is the drive felt to improve outcomes for their families/whānau, and for their people.

Finally, on the topic of managing work and family students discussed both "wanting it all" and some of the impact of cultural models of women as the primary caregivers of children. The young women, some of whom have children, acknowledged their partners and families who play major roles in sharing the responsibilities at home that supports them to manage their rich and full lives.

What made the biggest difference to you achieving in your career?

"A solid education and support from family, partner and mentors."

"Learning that the prize for doing a good job will always be bigger job."

A unique event "given me the opportunity to progress very quickly."

"Parents who gave me permission to follow my passion and help find me a way to make money from it."

Young women in employment

Delegate discussions

Table-top workshop discussions focused on NACEW's four current work programme areas and more general questions around support for young women leaders in employment. Comments from the workshops about areas where further work could be focused are summarised below.

1. Flexible work arrangements

Changing the culture of workplaces is key:

- There are benefits to business and families if parents can both share earning and care responsibilities.
- "Work that works" – make the conversation one about what employees, employers and customers have to gain, rather than focus only on meeting employee needs.
- Communication and trust are key; clear communication of job expectations, understanding the barriers and challenges and a willingness to recognise needs change and that continuous improvement may be needed.

Who has influenced your decisions about career and educational choices?

“Parents – Can talk to you about your future life in a way other people can’t.”

“Family – most of the girls in my family haven’t made it to 21 without having kids – I will.”

“Parents and teachers as well –always had really good science teachers which has been why I am interested in science.”

Year 13 students

There is still room for more research and information dissemination:

- What are the actual costs versus perceived costs of flexibility to employers, and do the benefits of improved retention and team stability really stack-up?
- Where is innovation happening in some more difficult sectors and industries in terms of flexibility?
- What helps lift awareness amongst those who may wish to use flexible arrangements about what is available and possible?

The potentially negative side-effects of flexibility also need managing:

- Never switching off from the job.
- Managing impacts on colleagues.
- Having the tendency to work longer in order to be seen to do a good job and be seen as ‘committed’.

2. Remuneration and equity data

There are no single answers, and many of the issues discussed today have a contribution to make to improving pay outcomes for women.

Addressing pay disparities at the low paid end of the labour market can assist a lot of women:

- Increases to the minimum wage have a big impact on lower paid, and more female occupations.
- A sticking point is the value ascribed through pay rates to skills in traditionally female occupations such as caring roles.

More information about pay rates and how to negotiate could assist women:

- Career advice needs to be part of the process to support subject choices from NCEA Level 1 so girls better understand the impact of the choices they make.
- Greater transparency in pay rates would enable women themselves to act with knowledge.
- Outcomes from negotiation of pay rates suggests men are better equipped at negotiation and that women are less inclined to know their value or push for higher pay rates.

Some also suggested the discussion is about the earnings gap and not the pay gap, and the importance of greater engagement with employers about the business case for pay equity.

3. Gender representation in television aimed at under 12 year olds

Most of the discussion referred to the representation of females in programming and advertising, and the extent of gender stereotyping found right across the media. The students in particular commented on how media representation of women as having a major focus on their looks undermines the confidence of women and limits the extent to which women might pursue employment where looks are valued so highly. Further, women are not seen or are invisible in the media representation of some occupations and this further limits the extent to which women/girls might consider those as career options:

- Women are frequently portrayed in the media in stereotypical ways; as fashion models, as fairies and princesses, family cooks and cleaners, also children's programmes are predominantly male-dominated.
- There would seem to be fewer representations of both girls and women in credible, real-life roles e.g. as students and in the full range of roles that women play in modern society.

What motivates you?

"I like to make a difference...achieving things"

"Everything I do is a passion and...I feel I can make a difference."

"I set goals and deadlines that I have to answer to other people for."

"Gratitude is the fuel in my engine – my parents gave me so much, and there is still so much to do."

Young women in employment

4. Men supporting women in employment through contributing to childcare

The work/parenting model where one parent has primary care responsibility and a second parent, the primary earner responsibility is commonly held in policy contexts:

- Real choice to adopt a different model is misleading as access to flexibility and maintaining optimal incomes means that partners options can be constrained. In addition, the conflict for some women around earning and a desire to be primary carer enhances the greater likelihood that roles will be gendered.

Research on effective approaches to support greater involvement of men/fathers in caring for their children is warranted:

- What are the workplace models that work for men/fathers to access and utilise flexibility and other provisions that support their parenting role?
- What are men and boys' aspirations about how they want to parent and care for their children, and how do these fit with their working lives?

Policy frameworks can help support and encourage men also:

- How different would options be for men if a dual earner/dual carer approach to family and employment policy was adopted?

- Having paid parental leave that is only available to fathers has been effective internationally in increasing fathers' leave-taking.
- Greater access to assistance for families, irrespective of their working, that better supports parents could also improve the real choices that families have around their decisions about who provides care (e.g. the Australian Baby Bonus, high quality childcare).

Women can also play a greater role in sharing the caring roles:

- Don't let men opt out – make your partners “real partners” and expect and support them to share in the caring.

5. Supporting young women to be leaders in employment

- The importance of role models of women who are successful in a full range of roles was a theme during the day, and the importance of having tangible role models was highlighted. Too little opportunity is provided for young women to observe, meet and learn from the experiences of other women.
- Mentoring was a second key theme; there are a number of successful programmes in New Zealand secondary schools that utilise both formal and informal processes to support young women in their decision-making. These could be replicated to spread access and awareness of these opportunities.

How organisations can support women into pathways of leadership?

“Find ways to be in a position to have conversations with us.”

“Support mechanisms need to be there but the drive to be a leader is up to the individual.”

“Look beyond your own circles...who's missing from the table.”

“Flexible work arrangements.”

Young women in employment

6. Supporting young Māori and Pacific women leaders

Similar themes emerged to support greater attainment for young Māori and Pacific women. Greater engagement with whānau, families and schools may ensure a wider range of visible role models.

The development of support networks that encourage the voice of Māori and Pacific girls and young women to tell their stories and gain support are also key.

Next steps after the Forum

- Distribute this report to participants.
- Complete evaluation of the Forum.
- Make the DVD available on the internet.
- Consider the participant input to NACEW's future workplan.