

JULIE MELLOR'S SPEECH TO AUSTRALIAN EQUALITY CONFERENCE

SPEAKING NOTE

INTRODUCTION

Delighted to be here because:

- Great opportunity to share challenges and ideas
- In GB we are moving towards creation of a single equality body – want to learn from how you work things here

You might need to explain here what our role is, esp. that it only covers gender.

Lots of similarities and lots of differences between GB and Australian (good opportunity here to pick up on anything that has particularly struck you about the place)

Stereotype of Australia in GB in past was often of a very macho country – all beer and sport – but this image is changing. And in terms of sex equality, we recognise that Australia has often been ahead of GB:

- women could vote in Australia from 1902, and even earlier in some states (1928 for all women in UK);
- currently 25% of members of Australian Parliament are women in comparison with 18% in UK

In this speech, want to:

- Look at what have been the key sex equality issues for GB in recent years
- Say how we at EOC and others have tried to address them
- Describe future challenges

LIFE CHANCES

In GB we have made significant progress in overcoming obstacles to sex equality in last 25 years e.g. in 1975 only 2% of managers were women, now it's 24%

BUT one of our biggest challenges is complacency – people thinking that sex equality has been achieved, we've done that.

The reality is that girls and women still face obstacles to equality at every stage of their lives (and boys/men still face sexist stereotypes too):

Young people

- Parents say they treat their sons and daughters equally but what they say differs from what they do e.g. recent survey by a building society showed that boys were paid five times as much as girls for unloading the dishwasher, four times as much for taking about the rubbish and three times as much for cleaning their pet's cage!
- In one so-called 'modern' apprenticeship scheme:
 - only 2% of young engineering and plumbing trainees were girls
 - 25% of hairdressing trainees and none of the childcare trainees were boys
 - the engineering and plumbing trainees earned 89% more per hour than the hairdressing trainees and 103% more than the childcare trainees

Adulthood

- Women working full time earn only 81.5% of men's wages
- There is only one registered childcare place for every 7 children aged under 8
- 54% of women and 10% of men report experiencing some form of sexual harassment at work

- 25,000 sex discrimination cases reach tribunals each year

Older years

- average weekly income for single female pensioners is £145 – for men it is £190

TACKLING THE AGENDA

So the scale of the task is enormous. One thing is certain: EOC, which has 117 staff and budget of just £7m (equivalent to around Aus\$21m), cannot do all this by itself. So we place a high priority on getting others – government, employers, unions, service providers – to do things differently.

Over last three years, EOC has been working on four priorities:

1. Closing the gender pay gap
2. Balancing work and the rest of life
3. Getting more women into public and political life
4. Making public services relevant and accessible to women and men

Will go on now to look at each of these in more detail

Gender pay gap

It's huge and the pace of progress is far too slow:

- Hourly earnings, full-time employees: 18.5% (slow progress in the right direction)
- Hourly earnings, part-time employees: 41.4% (getting slightly worse)

In 1999 EOC commissioned a task force to identify what needed to be done to make decisive progress. It identified need for action on five fronts:

- Raising awareness and understanding of the issue;

- Reforming equal pay legislation, including requiring employers to review pay to identify and put right gender pay gaps
- building expertise in addressing the problem;
- improving transparency and accountability for implementing equal pay;
- social and economic policy measures to support women's changing place in the labour market

The Government shares our desire to close the gap but wants to take a voluntary approach i.e. not willing to require employers to do pay reviews. In light of this, our approach has been to:

- keep the issue on the boil
 - campaigns and media work
 - supporting and publicising individual cases
- help and encourage employers to do pay reviews:
 - pay review tool kit
 - equal pay forum
- set pay review targets and monitor employers' progress towards them

How is this going so far?

- Gender pay gap is right back on the agenda (and it wasn't three years ago)
- Some employers are taking action
- Campaigning is having an impact e.g. our graduates campaign (we are looking for slide of the campaign barge to add in here) has raised students awareness
- But doubts about whether a voluntary approach will have sufficient impact

Work life balance

- The past quarter of a century has witnessed a social revolution of women's mass entry into labour market; in 70% of couples both partners are in paid work

- Old distinction between public and private sphere, in which men were the full-time breadwinners and women the full-time family carer has broken down - employers and government can no longer presume that family care is a private matter of no relevance to the workplace
- The challenge facing Britain is to adapt to this new social reality – harder than you might think e.g. changing the assumption that it is women's wages that pay for childcare

How have we fared?

- Limited statutory maternity rights in place since 1978 but short time off on low levels of pay
- Progressive employers have provided better maternity leave
- No comprehensive infrastructure of childcare for young children in Britain –demand far exceeds supply and even where it is available, many parents are unable to afford childcare.
- British dads have the longest hours in Europe - 65% of fathers work in excess of 40 hours a week.
- Many mothers work part-time – so they can combine motherhood with paid work – but predominantly in low-paid jobs without career prospects

Happy to say that the picture is improving – a raft of new employment rights being introduced from April 03 will give

- Better paid and longer maternity leave
- A new right for fathers to paid paternity leave (for which EOC has campaigned for over 20 years)
- A new right for mothers and fathers with young children to request a change in their hours of work – employers will be under a duty to give their request serious consideration.
- Government is working to stimulate childcare development and assist lower paid parents with the costs of childcare

This is a big step forward.

But there are disappointments as well:

- new rights confirms mothers as the primary carers of their children

- limits options for couples who wish to share the caring role more equally, or reverse their roles.

For women, childbirth will continue to have a major impact on their working and professional lives, resulting in lower pay and reduced career opportunities over their life-time. Many women are already calculating the cost and are voting with their feet – choosing not to have children at all. If current trends continue, within 10 years, 25% of women in the UK will be childless, and Britain's average family size is the lowest ever – 1.6 children per family.

Fathers who take an active role in caring for their children will continue to face an uphill struggle in getting working hours and time off which they need to fulfil their caring role.

The Government's initiative has focused exclusively on parents, and by doing so has omitted to look at the needs of carers. The numbers of carers are expected to rise with the ageing of the population - by 2037 the chances that people aged 30-54 will have to become a carer will have increased by 88%. Far more workers in future will have a caring responsibility at some point during their working life.

Getting more women into public and political life

What's the problem?

- Men are more likely to be on public bodies than women – 66% of those appointed in 2001 were men
- Men are much more likely than women to hold political office than women – 72% of local councillors and of MPs are men
- Black and minority ethnic women and disabled women are particularly under-represented
- Women wanting to get into politics face discrimination in all the major parties (the red knickers eg)
- In GB, where voting is not compulsory, turn out in elections is falling – and women are even more disenchanted with the political process than men

So what are we doing about this?

EOC commissioned research showed clearly that:

- it is discrimination that holds women back – it is not that the women coming forward do not have the right skills or that they don't come forward at all
- special measures, such as all-women shortlists, are the most effective way of increasing the number of women in political institutions

We are using these findings to work with the main political parties to ensure procedures are fair and to try to change party members' views of the stereotype of an MP.

We have been helped by the passing legislation that allows political parties to use positive action to promote the selection of women candidates if they wish. Parties can choose what kind of action to take, although we are urging all of them to act.

Similar to the Australian Labor Party's national affirmative action targets, the British Labour Party is proposing to use all-women shortlists to select candidates for a certain percentage of seats at the next general election in 3 or 4 years' time; and this should make a difference. The other main parties are also examining their procedures to see what they can do to ensure a wider range of candidates, including more women.

The proof of this particular pudding will be in the eating, and EOC will be watching carefully to see whether promises translate into effective action.

But there has been one major success so far, which is the change in the debate: we now have senior figures in all parties advocating positive action

Public services

The quality of public services is one of the hottest political issues in Britain, largely because citizens feel that many services simply don't meet their expectations.

- Huge political priority of reform and delivery of public services

- Big questions of who funds, role of public v private sector in delivery, reforming management, customer-focussed delivery
- Especially education and health, but also transport, local government services, policing and justice system

So why is the EOC concerned about all this? Because Government thinking and public debate are largely ignoring the gender implications and we think that promoting gender equality is part of the solution:

- Women are the majority of employees providing public services and the main users of some key services e.g. public transport, health and - on behalf of their children - education
- Yet one in five nurses have been forced to leave their jobs because of difficulties balancing work and caring responsibilities
- Despite evidence that what women and men need for services can be different, the design and delivery of services does not usually reflect these differences

Want to take transport as an example.

- women are twice as likely as men to be using public transport, and the main users of buses
- but the key government transport targets include only rail and tube, not buses
- Women tend to make multi-purpose journeys: such as house-childminder-school-work-food shopping-childminder-house
- But transport policy is based on the idea of the single purpose journey, so women who use public transport to make multipurpose journeys can be using four different bus services, none of which are planned to fit together.

So how can we get these problems tackled?

- A public sector duty to promote sex equality (Julie: we suggest that you don't go into the broader agenda re age, disability etc here for reasons of time)

This would mean that those designing and delivering public services would have to think explicitly about the needs of both men and women should produce services that better meet needs. Should benefit men as well e.g. could lead to improvements to primary health services for men.

THE FUTURE AGENDA

The positive trends we have seen over the past quarter of a century will continue:

- women are expected to take 2/3rds of new jobs,
- more women will be taking higher skilled and better paid jobs.
- women are beginning to outnumber men at university – and highly qualified women have a far higher attachment to the labour market than lower skilled women
- the proportion of couples in which women will be earning more than their male partners will increase.

But some bad habits are proving hard to break:

- Closing the gender pay gap will take determined action over many years
- Getting rid of a culture in which gender discrimination and stereotyping limit our lives could take longer still

But if employers want to attract and keep the best workers they will have to embrace these realities and adjust their working patterns from the old full-time male norm to meet the more diverse needs of the modern workforce.

If the public sector wants to deliver the best possible services, it will have to respond to the demands of its women workers for greater flexibility and better pay. And services will need to be planned with women as well as men in mind.

And if political institutions want to be truly representative of the country and to get women at large interested in politics again, they

will have to transform themselves in to places where diversity is celebrated.

And what's our job at the EOC? To work as hard as 117 women and men can to help them do just that.