

AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN INC.

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Australia's Demographic Challenges
Social Policy Division
The Department of the Treasury
Langton Crescent
PARKES ACT 2600

SUBMISSION ON DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES PAPER

The Australian Federation of University Women (AFUW) is a national association of the International Federation of University Women with membership in 77 countries.

Our objectives are to unite the voices of graduate women by promoting the advancement of women worldwide and their equality of opportunity through initiatives in education, friendship and peace.

We have read the government's position set out in The Treasury paper "Australia's Demographic Challenges" issued in February this year. Overall, AFUW supports most of the proposals as they appear, on the surface, to benefit our members and those women in our client groups who have been quite concerned about the future security of their families in the areas of the economic growth, health, education and working conditions.

In supporting the general thrust of Choice No 4 – to look for ways to increase the size of the economy so that we all have higher incomes and are able to meet the costs associated with our aging population - we do have a few major concerns as follows:

- the need for a stronger gendered approach to this issue. The opportunities for more women to work are considerable, although hampered by disincentives within the tax-transfer system and traditional male-female parenting roles. Here there is a role for government in encouraging the type of cultural changes that will be more supportive of greater female labour force participation;

- preservation of training jobs and development opportunities for school leavers and workers in the younger age groups. While encouraging older workers to remain in the labour force longer, it should not be at the expense of employment of younger workers;
- reducing the much higher unemployment rates of the young, mature aged, indigenous, and regional members of our community. Here is another opportunity for the government to influence cultural change directly by example and also by encouraging employers to reconsider their biases against their provision of employment opportunities to these disadvantaged groups as well as those from non-english speaking backgrounds.

Comments on specific aspects of the paper

Table 1. Canada, the OECD country with the closest socio/demographics to ours is ranked in 6th place, higher than Australia (12th). However, Australia has much higher part-time participation rates than Canada.

Education and Training. Generally agree. Teenage and mature age unemployment rates are higher than that in the general community and both of these need to be improved and monitored to ensure neither deteriorate further.

To preserve the future capability of young workers, particularly school leavers, and to ensure there are suitable jobs for them, the education system must provide opportunities to develop, maintain and update the required skills. Primary school programs provide the basics (reading, writing, arithmetic and basic technology) and therefore play an important but often forgotten role in “employment ready” training strategies. TAFE programs provide valuable retraining opportunities particularly for women and AFUW currently has a policy promoting the importance of these courses within the education sector.

AFUW therefore recommends that any new provisions must incorporate a double “employment focused” strategy:

- (a) initial training for the young, going right back to primary level; and
- (b) re-training, with some emphasis on women, especially those returning to work after career interruption.

Health. Agree. Hopefully these preventative measures will include some focus on employers and managers improving safety in workplaces, and providing more conducive working conditions and less stressful jobs.

Better Incentives. Agree – like motherhood! Unfortunately the theory is not always achievable in practice.

Supporting more flexible work options. Strongly support - see related comment below particularly in relation to the participation of women and part time working conditions. This seems to be one of the key requirements for improvement and expansion. New provisions need to be carefully negotiated with both unions and employers.

Implications for Women. Strongly support any provisions to assist women continuing in their chosen careers and their ability to provide economic support to their families –

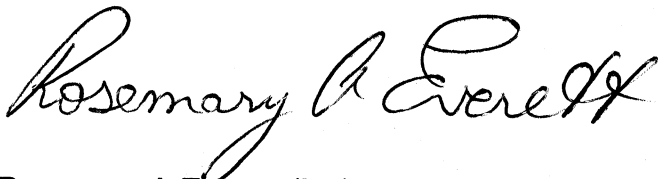
maternity leave (preferably paid), child care support (financial and availability of placements), family leave, flexible hours, pay equity, reduction in unpaid overtime, family friendly workplace meeting arrangements etc. However, it should be noted that while labour force participation rates for women have risen, the age profile still shows low participation rates in older age groups.

Part-time work. Strongly support more flexible arrangements advocating the availability of positions and acceptance by employers and peer group workers of this important category of the labour force. However, the incidence of part-time work hides the fact that many people have multiple jobs that makeup a full-time work load, hence in the statistics they are counted as full-time workers when their pay and conditions are closer to those of part-times.

Access to child care. Strongly support any provisions that improve access to and availability of high quality convenient child care which is affordable. However, improving the number of childcare places and the childcare subsidies do not address the issue of working hours for many women attracted to service industries which have operating hours outside regulated childcare hours of 7am to 6 pm. The much higher hourly cost of nannies who work all hours is prohibitive to many middle to low income women.

Extending peoples working life. Generally support these initiatives but there are plusses and minuses. There is concern that unemployment of young workers may increase as older workers remain at work longer and job vacancies will not emerge at current levels in "training positions". The lower skilled occupations do attract school leavers who are unable to handle or do not wish to undertake university and continuing education programs.

Your consideration of these AFUW concerns would be appreciated.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rosemary A. Everett". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Rosemary A Everett (Ms)
President