

IEUA-QNT SUBMISSION

[7 October 2021]

Submission: Consultation for a new Queensland Women's Strategy Discussion Paper

The Independent Education Union – Queensland and Northern Territory Branch (IEUA-QNT) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the Queensland Government's consultation for a new Queensland Women's Strategy Discussion paper.

About IEUA-QNT

IEUA-QNT represents ~17,000 teachers, support staff and ancillary staff in non-government education institutions in Queensland and the Northern Territory and consistently engages in debate concerning social justice issues through its Equity Committee and through its national counterpart, the Independent Education Union of Australia, which receives input from teachers in all States and Territories.

As a union of education professionals, our membership is predominantly (~70%) female and we are, therefore, well-informed and well-positioned to offer commentary around social and economic issues that affect women, including the systemic devaluation of work performed by female workers and the historical failure of State and Federal Governments to take sustained and meaningful action to challenge gender inequality.

In that context, we offer relatively high-level responses to the discussion questions, rather than exhaustive detail of specific actions, programs or initiatives.

Responses to discussion questions

1. What have been the most significant milestones, improvements and/or achievements in gender equality in the last five years?

1.1 Perhaps the most significant development in gender equality in the last five years has been an increased public awareness of gender inequality as an entrenched feature of our sociocultural landscape, and a greater willingness to engage in meaningful debate as to how such inequality might be addressed.

1.2 This means that the greater challenge now is to ensure that this awareness translates to meaningful, sustained actions that will have a direct, positive influence on gender issues.

2. What are the top three issues that need to be addressed to achieve gender equality in Queensland, and what are the most important actions to respond to?

2.1 After many decades of feminist action, we can no longer claim to be unaware that direct interventions are required with regard to: 1) affordability and access to

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childcare; 2) the sustained prevalence of discrimination and gendered-violence in our communities and workplaces, and; 3) women's particular vulnerability to social and economic hardship.

2.2 Finding solutions to these problems should be a priority in any Government-led initiative to advance gender equality.

3. What learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic are critical to inform a new Queensland Women's Strategy?

3.1 The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic include both deepening of pre-existing inequalities, and an amplification of gender-biased vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems [1].

3.2 This means the key learning from the pandemic is that we must act now to ensure that known inequalities and vulnerabilities are eradicated before the next crisis evolves. The disproportionate, negative impact of COVID-19 on women in the workforce means that strategies to achieve gender equity are an essential feature of recovery plans. All employer must, as a matter of urgency, be compelled to provide:

- equal and reasonable paid parental and carers leave entitlements for each parent to empower men to seek an equal share of the parenting responsibility;
- flexible work arrangements for each parent, so that women can participate in the workforce without comparative disadvantage;
- domestic and family violence support (including 10 days paid leave); and
- flexible and affordable childcare so that parents can return to the workplace.

4. What can be done in Queensland to address persistent gender stereotypes, and conscious and unconscious gender bias?

4.1 Much progress has been made in recent years, but gender inequalities remain an entrenched feature of our sociocultural landscape that will not be eliminated without a concerted effort on the part of Governments to put in place concrete strategies to disassemble the social constructs which give rise to gender inequality.

4.2 By committing to the provision of entitlements such as those listed in our response to the previous discussion question, Government can empower individual women, and their partners, to challenge existing sociocultural norms and establish new, more equal, sociocultural structures.

5. What do you think would be the most positive difference a new Queensland Women's Strategy could make for women, girls and gender equality in Queensland?

5.1 In articulating a clear strategy, with definite, concrete actions it will take to address gender inequality, Government is not merely sending a clear signal that gender equality issues are important, but also creating the social and economic conditions required to empower women, and their allies, to participate equally in civic life.

6. What does a gender-equal Queensland look like?

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6.1 In the simplest possible terms, gender equality is a state where access to rights or opportunities is unaffected by gender.

6.2 It is clear that our society has not yet achieved gender equality and, after decades of feminist activism, we have a clear idea of three key actions that will support its realisation: 1) the provision of affordable, accessible childcare; 2) a sustained effort to reduce the prevalence of discrimination and gendered-violence in our communities and workplaces and; 3) a reduction in women's vulnerability to social and economic hardship.

7. What do you consider to be the key role of the Queensland Government in addressing the needs of women and girls and driving gender equality?

7.1 As a legislative body, the Queensland Government has responsibility for both establishing a legal framework which defines acceptable and unacceptable standards of behaviour and practice and, less formally, for encouraging all Queenslanders to challenge gender inequality when they encounter it within their communities.

7.2 It is likely that the most effective initiatives to progress gender equality will vary from one community to another, as each will be at a different stage of sociocultural development and Government strategies will need to be flexible, but the requirement for minimal acceptable standards of behaviour and practice is imperative.

8. How do you think we should celebrate and recognise the achievements of leading Queensland women? Who do you think we should recognise?

8.1 In celebrating and recognising the achievements of leading Queensland women, it is important to identify a range of women whose achievements encompass a wide range of fields, including both areas of endeavour that are traditionally dominated by women, and those that have traditionally been dominated by men. This ensures that younger women, girls – and men and boys – become comfortable with women taking a leading role in all fields of human endeavour.

9. How can communities and individuals be best supported to address gender equality?

9.1 To challenge gender inequality in their own communities, individuals must be educated to recognise the problem and empowered to challenge existing norms and standards.

9.2 In that context, the Queensland Government has a clear role in establishing a legal framework which defines acceptable and unacceptable standards, but It is likely that the most effective initiatives to progress gender equality will vary from one community to another, as each will be at a different stage of sociocultural development.

9.3 We would, therefore, suggest that community-specific Government initiatives might be best developed through a place-based approach, similar to that applied in working with First Nations people and communities.

10. How can industry and workplaces be best supported to address gender equality?

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10.1 The responsibility of Government to support industry and workplaces to address gender equality requires two key areas of activity: 1) establishment of a clear legal framework which specifies high standards of behaviour and practice and; 2) provision of targeted support for specific initiatives that will enhance gender equality.

10.2 This is essential because, while a clear legal framework is essential to ensure that business and industry know what they must provide for employees, it is important that the overall effect is to support and encourage better standards and practices, rather than operating in a purely punitive manner.

11. How can men and boys, and all genders, be better engaged to support gender equality?

11.1 Early and frequent encounters with empowered women are pivotal in shaping the attitudes of young people. It is, therefore, important to ensure that women are able to live and work in places, and ways, that meet their own unique and situated needs and desires. If we can, as a community, establish a sociocultural environment that is compatible with true gender equality, we will have established the conditions for a better society in general.

11.2 It is important to note however, that some communities will require earlier, and more intensive, targeted support to overturn entrenched sociocultural norms. Resources should be set aside for such purposes, to ensure that no community is left behind in the transition to a more equal society.

12. What are some effective partnerships, grassroots or innovative activities that have positively impacted women, girls and gender equality in Queensland?

12.1 While we recognise that the intention of this question is to draw attention to successful programs and initiatives that might be celebrated, and modified for implementation in the broader Queensland community, we would stress that the achievement of gender equality will take different pathways in different communities.

12.2 We therefore encourage Government to focus on two key activities: 1) establishment of high minimum standards of behaviour and practice through legislation and; 2) provision of resources for the development and implementation of place-based programs and initiatives targeted to the unique and situated needs of specific communities throughout Queensland.

13. What can be done to further ensure diverse women and girls' voices are heard?

13.1 Supporting and encouraging business, industry and society more generally, to listen to the many, diverse voices of community members is now recognised as good economic policy as much as it is accepted as good social policy.

13.2 In that context, we would suggest that Government has a dual role in terms of both ensuring high minimum standards of behaviour and practice and the provision of resources for targeted programs and initiatives that will increase the diversity of voices heard in public debate and civic life.

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Concluding Comments

In general, our union believes Government has a dual role in relation to the pursuit of gender equality. Firstly, Government must take the initiative in ensuring that current legislative frameworks set the highest possible standards of behaviour and practice and clearly communicate these to business and industry. Secondly, it is also necessary to recognise that some sectors of Queensland are more advanced in their understanding and appreciation of gender issues than others and to commit resources to targeted, place-based education and support programs that address underlying social and cultural factors that give rise to gender inequality.

Further, we would argue that any comprehensive Women's Strategy must also incorporate specific initiatives and strategies to address the triple priority areas of: 1) affordability and access to childcare; 2) the sustained prevalence of discrimination and gendered-violence in our communities and workplaces, and; 3) women's particular vulnerability to social and economic hardship.



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References

1. United_Nations, *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women*. 2020, United Nations.