

What Works, What Doesn't: Employment Equity in the Public Sector

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Abstract

This paper draws on research undertaken for the Pay and Employment Equity Taskforce to consider which practices and policies have, and have not been effective in improving employment equity for women. Within the wider context of changes that have occurred in the last two decades, we are particularly interested in human resources practices at an organisational level.

We set the scene by reviewing the secondary data across the health, education and public service areas of the sector, as well as the key legislative and policy shifts over that time. We then go on to discuss the case of the education sector in more detail. We argue that women in this sector are in general in a relatively strong position: they are more highly qualified than most women workers as a group, as well as being located in a female-dominated sector that is strongly unionised and has a coherent professional identity. 'On paper', EEO policies have long been part of educational institutions. However we find that these factors do not guarantee employment equity. We review secondary data across the sector (from early childhood to tertiary), then focus on fieldwork research on human resources practices in schools and their effect on employment equity outcomes. We finish the paper with our conclusions about which practices and policies have and have not been effective in improving employment equity for women, and their implications beyond the education sector. We present some recommendations for change and further research.