

**NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL ON THE EMPLOYMENT
OF WOMEN (NACEW)
ANNUAL REPORT 2000/2001**

Introduction

This Annual Report covers the period from 1 July 2000 to 30 June 2001. During the year NACEW has spent a significant amount of time on its research activities. The Council has also considered the need for ongoing analysis of the findings of the childcare report. In addition, the Council has submitted comments to the Minister of Labour on the Annual Review of the Minimum Wage, and to the Department of Labour on the ILO Maternity Protection Convention 2000. The NACEW website continued to provide useful links between NACEW and individuals and organisations interested in or researching employment issues for women. During the year the Council also decided to contribute to the Landmarks Project – Celebrating Women. There has been reduced membership of the Council during the year due to a resignation and delays in the appointments procedure.

NACEW research activities

The NACEW research budget was the subject of frequent discussions at meetings during the year. The Council decided not to proceed with a research proposal relating to sole parent women completed in June 1999. This was as a result of unsuccessful attempts to secure support for funding applications.

Members discussed a range of possible foci for NACEW research funding. A clear message that emerged from these meetings was the members' view that NACEW should fund in-depth projects that provided practical solutions to identified problems. It was resolved that the Council would put out a call for research proposals through its networks, website and newspaper advertising. In March 2001 an advertisement and instructions for completing an application were widely disseminated and generated a significant response. Eleven proposals for research funding were received on a diverse range of topics. A sub-committee was convened in April 2001 to make the selection and two proposals were successful and are described below.

a) The differential impact of Student Loans

Penny Ehrhardt was contracted by NACEW to carry out a research project on the differential impact of student loans on men and women. This research examines the nature and extent of the differential impact, its causes, and factors relating to how male and female students assess the risks and benefits associated with taking out a student loan. The research aims to explore the extent to which taking out student loans has a greater impact on Maori, Pacific Island and low income women. The research comprises a literature search, as well as focus group interviews with students, both male and female, in the Auckland region. The research project commenced in May 2001 and is likely to be completed towards the end of 2001.

b) Supporting Pacific Nations Women into early childhood education

Alison Stephenson, Jenni Armitage and Feaua'i Burgess of the Wellington College of Education were contracted to carry out research on a strategy for supporting Pacific Nations Women into early childhood education courses. The local Pacific Nations community was consulted extensively on the researchers' proposal to develop a bridging course at the College to support Pacific Nations women. A range of useful responses and suggestions were identified and emphasised the urgent need for more trained Pacific Nations early childhood teachers. The perception that a number of barriers existed preventing these women from entering training, and thereafter the workforce, was also a key finding. In its final phase, the project resulted in the development of a 72 hour module for Pacific Nations students designed to meet the particular needs of Pacific Nations applicants. The draft module placed emphasis on the learning needs of Pacific Nations applicants. The researchers noted that their approach to gather resources for use with Pacific Nations applicants had not been undertaken previously. The research project was completed at the end of June 2001.

c) Caring and providing: Combining paid work and parenting

During the year the Council maintained contact with Lynda Byrne, whose Master of Arts research was sponsored by NACEW in May 2000. Lynda attended the May NACEW meeting and presented some key findings of her research. The research used data from the Labour Market Dynamics Study to examine the paid employment decisions of twenty women with children (including five single women, five Maori women and ten New Zealand/European women). Lynda applied a tri-level analysis to the data, which included the individual and family context, the institutional context and the structural context of the factors influencing the participants' employment decisions.

The individual and family contexts of the analysis focussed on the contradictions for women as 'good mothers' and workers, exploring the 'excuses' made by women to justify their employment. Re-entering the workforce after having children was found to be difficult for reasons of confidence, gender roles in relation to housework and changing technology. Childcare was found to be expensive and led women to arrange work around available, informal childcare, or take children to work with them. The cost and access to childcare made women's employment secondary to men's, and led to precarious labour market attachment.

The institutional context of Lynda's analysis outlined how women's occupations changed after having children. It became difficult to return to their previous jobs, and they became segregated in low pay, part-time and casual jobs. This was related to changes in the region where the data was collected (Hawkes Bay). Workplace provisions for the women in the study were found to be minimal, while for the four women on the DPB, it was difficult to get off the benefit. Access to the childcare subsidy was also minimal.

The structural context of the analysis presented arguments in relation to the economic reforms from 1985-1995, where closure of firms and layoffs in the region, coupled with the restructuring of Government departments and technological changes had had a significant impact on the labour market outcomes of the women interviewed. The policy implications posited by Lynda of her work included that for the average working mother the combining of work and domestic roles was problematic. Factors influencing women's employment decisions were very complex and involved the home, economy and the state, and it was impossible to disentangle the three when considering women's working lives.

Policy implications of childcare survey and report

In keeping with the Council's intention to further shape the policy implications of the childcare report findings, NACEW contracted Annemarie Christopherson and Suzanne Snively of PricewaterhouseCoopers to develop a draft list of key recommendations. This work was presented to the February meeting of the Council for discussion. A brainstorming session by members resulted in the identification of broad criteria by which to prioritise the recommendations and included a focus on barriers to work for women (especially sole mothers), the childcare issues facing parents of children with special needs and issues for parents with more than one child.

A number of other issues were identified by members as being of significance including the impact of cultural differences for Maori, Pacific Nations and migrant parents, the care of sick children, transport issues (especially in Auckland), and the difficulties experienced by low income parents in accessing affordable childcare. The availability of after school care was also cited as a key issue in the consideration of the availability of childcare for parents in paid employment.

This work stimulated lively discussion among members and will form the basis for further work by the Council.

Submission on the Annual Review of the Minimum Wage

In October 2000 NACEW was invited to submit comments on the Annual review of the minimum wage to the Minister of Labour in response to four key questions raised by the Minister.

1. Proportion of people dealt with directly affected by the minimum wage.

NACEW noted that the higher proportion of adult women on low incomes suggested gender based inequalities in the New Zealand labour market and cited figures from the Income Supplement of the Household Labour Force Survey of June 1999 to support this assertion. The statistics for youth wages presented a slightly different picture although it was acknowledged that accurate estimates of the labour market position of young people were difficult to make given their involvement with education and training. Overall, due to the over representation of women on low incomes, NACEW considered the issue of minimum wages to be of importance.

2. Gains from a moderate increase in the minimum wage.

It was the view of the majority of Council members that increases in the minimum wage were likely to have a positive effect on the employment experiences of women.

In common with other workers at the lower end of the labour market, greater equity and parity was likely to be achieved as a result of increased minimum wages. A higher minimum wage was also likely to increase incentives to work for some women not currently participating in the labour market. Such an increase would have benefits for women paying for childcare or carrying out overtime work, and further, would result in a reduction of in-work poverty amongst women. In the view of most Council members, the benefits would be greater for Maori and Pacific Islands women.

3. Employment losses resulting from an increase in minimum wages.

NACEW acknowledged the debate on the possible adverse effects of increased minimum wages on the employment market, but the majority of Council members had not reached any conclusions on the evidence presented. The Council also acknowledged the possible impact of changes in employment regulations, viz. the Employment Relations Act, the review of minimum employment conditions and the review of the minimum wage.

4. Other issues

NACEW suggested that monitoring and collection of data on income distribution by gender, ethnicity and age was maintained and improved.

The enforcement of the minimum wage, related to the dynamics of the informal economy, was also identified as a key issue. The Council noted that an increased minimum wage would provide workers with a greater incentive to receive wages alone, rather than combining wages below the minimum level (without being taxed) as well as benefits.

Submission on the ILO Maternity Protection Convention 2000

NACEW prepared a submission for the Employment Relations Service of the Department of Labour on the ILO Maternity Protection Convention in December 2000. It should be noted that Government representatives on NACEW abstained when a vote was taken in relation to the content of this submission.

The Council considered that the aspects of women's employment covered by the Convention were vital components of women's employment lives, and further, noted the New Zealand Government's support for the Convention at the ILO meeting in June 2000. Members also noted that some European countries were adopting policies that increased the amount of paid maternal leave provided to women.

NACEW acknowledged that the Convention was incompatible with current New Zealand government legislation, making ratification unlikely. The Council recognised that in some respects current New Zealand legislation exceeded the provisions suggested by the Convention, while in others it fell short. The Council suggested that legislation, policy and practice were amended to bring New Zealand into line in the areas where maternity protection fell below the provisions outlined in the Convention. NACEW urged the New Zealand Government to move towards the full ratification of the Convention.

Website

Visits made to the NACEW website resulted in a number of requests for information relating to the Council during the year from individuals and organisations interested in women's employment issues.

Landmarks Project

The Council was invited to consider contributing to funding for the Landmarks Project – Celebrating Women, a proposed installation of plaques at the Wellington Cathedral in recognition of the achievements of New Zealand women. NACEW voted at the February 2001 meeting to donate funds for the establishment of a plaque commemorating the Council's establishment in 1967.

Council membership

During 2000-2001 the Council has operated with reduced membership. In December 2000 Susan Wetere-Bryant resigned following a family tragedy. Suzanne Snively was reappointed to the Council for a further three year term in January 2001. At the end of the 2000-2001 year the appointments of six members were pending. The Council looks forward to attaining full membership once more during the 2001-2002 year.

COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

The membership of the Council as at June 30 2001 was as follows:

Claire Johnstone (Chair)	Wellington	Ministerial Appointee
Colleen Tuuta	New Plymouth	Ministerial Appointee
Suzanne Snively	Wellington	Ministerial Appointee
Beverley Main	Wellington	Ministerial Appointee
Philippa Revell	Christchurch	Ministerial Appointee
Jude Bleach	Wellington	State Services Commission
Barbara Burton	Wellington	Business NZ
Sheryl Cadman	Wellington	NZ Council of Trade Unions
Margaret Ledgerton	Wellington	NZ Council of Trade Unions
Liz MacPherson	Wellington	Department of Labour
Jenni Norris	Wellington	NACEW Executive Officer
Sarah Metwell	Wellington	Ministry of Women's Affairs
Sarndra Hamilton	Wellington	Ministry of Youth Affairs
Ann Reeves	Wellington	Ministry of Social Policy
Angela Wallace	Wellington	Department of Work and Income
Gayelene Wright	Wellington	Ministry of Education
Andrea Frost	Wellington	Te Puni Kokiri