

QUEENSLAND WOMEN'S STRATEGY

*Submission to the Department of Justice
and Attorney-General (DJAG)*

October 2021

Introduction

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland (‘CCIQ’) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the consultation for a new Queensland Women’s Strategy. CCIQ acknowledges the significant role that women play in Queensland’s economy, businesses, and the community at large.

CCIQ is Queensland’s peak industry representative organisation for small and medium-sized businesses. We represent over 448,000 Queensland small and medium businesses who employ over 66% of Queenslanders working in the private sector. CCIQ works with a regional chamber network across Queensland to develop and advocate for policies that are in the best interests of Queensland businesses, the Queensland economy, and the Queensland community.

Previously, CCIQ developed two research reports seeking to better understand the many barriers that preclude women’s full participation in the economy, workforce, and business:

- CCIQ’s *Women in Business* report (2020) considered larger issues affecting women that include the large female participation gap, pay gap and the difficulties for women doing business. Working women face difficulties which include low levels of flexibility in their working arrangements, inadequate childcare support for working parents and dealing with the burden of high parental leave costs.
- CCIQ’s recently published report on *Domestic and Family Violence in the Workplace* (2021) sought to illustrate how domestic and family violence (DFV) may present and impact Queensland small and medium-sized businesses. While our research acknowledged that men also experience DFV, due to the fact that there is a considerably higher impact on women (one in four women and one in sixteen men), DFV is considered to be a gendered issue. Some of the findings from this report highlighted small businesses’ lack of awareness of this issue and how DFV can adversely affect workplaces. This pointed to a greater need for targeted incentives to dispel stigma and change workplace culture around DFV.

The findings from both the *Women in Business* and the *Domestic and Family Violence in the Workplace* reports showed that women do face specific challenges when working in small businesses. Improving equality and working conditions for all genders will lead to constructive social and economic outcomes for Queensland and its small business community. These reports are attached to this submission for your reference.

Previous Queensland Women’s Strategy

CCIQ acknowledges all the impacts and improvements that have stemmed from the 2016-2020 Queensland Women’s Strategy. With the four areas being addressed:

- **Participation and leadership:** women’s access to male-dominated occupations and industries such as technology, science, engineering, mathematics, building, construction, mining, and agriculture; access to flexible working arrangements; women’s workforce participation and more women in leadership roles.

- **Economic security:** the gender pay gap; women’s financial literacy and capability; retirement income gap between men and women; women and girls’ participation in traditionally male-dominated fields of study; financial recognition of domestic work and traditionally female-dominated industries; including teaching, early childhood education and care, nursing and community services; and women’s vulnerability to inadequate or unaffordable housing and homelessness.
- **Safety:** whole-of community approach to prevention, including awareness of how gender inequality contributes to violence against women; understanding the incidence of and best response to sexual violence, stalking, elder abuse, female genital mutilation, forced and servile marriage, trafficking, online harassment; high rates of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women; engagement of men and boys in actions to prevent violence against women and girls.
- **Health and well-being:** support for women in pregnancy, childbirth, and infant feeding; rates of smoking during pregnancy; women’s mental health and wellbeing; rates of women’s heart disease and cancer; challenges faced by rural, regional, and remote women accessing appropriate health services; women’s participation in sport and physical activity, especially among women experiencing disadvantage.

Although Queensland has made some important steps towards creating genuine gender equality there is more work still to be done. We would emphasise the need to make sure that:

- a) We are looking at the **core issues** and **finding effective mechanisms** to create avenues for women to succeed as **entrepreneurs, business women and small business owners**, and
- b) We need **further collaboration** with industry, employers, and SMEs to ensure that we are creating targeted approaches to tackling this issue in all businesses regardless of size.

Response to discussion paper questions

Gender Inequality

Q. 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?

The top three issues impacting and precluding womens’ full participation in Queensland’s economy include:

1. **Female participation in the workforce.** Women’s participation sat at 62.1% in January 2021 with the male participation rate sitting at 70.8%.¹ It is essential to find ways to increase female participation and female underemployment (women 16%) in Queensland.² Increasing female participation benefits the economy. Pre-covid, the value of the participation rate gap between

¹ ABS, Labour Force, Australia, January 2021, cat no. 6202.0, seasonally adjusted; Table 6.

² Ibid.

the genders \$20.6B.³ Bridging this gap would equate to an additional 6.8% in gross state product.⁴ It also provides benefits by making women more financially independent.

2. **The pay gap between men and women.** The pay gap sat at 18.5% of full-time earnings prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic; which accounted for on average women earning \$331.60 less than their male counterparts.⁵ While the pay gap between men and women has closed significantly over the past decade, more work needs to be done to ensure that women are adequately rewarded and recognised for the work they perform, with sustainable solutions to withstand economic disruptions.⁶
3. **Difficult working environments for women in business.** The cost of childcare (25%) and a lack of flexibility (15%) were identified as having the biggest social impact on women in business. Small businesses' find individual flexibility agreements ('IFA') difficult to implement.⁷

Improving working environments for women in business can also be improved by addressing red tape and developing better representation and support structures. Providing support to reduce regulatory burdens will help to increase economic efficiencies, improving business performance in the economy and providing business environments that support women. Making sure there is female representation across positions, business size and industry through mentoring, female business groups and having female business champions.

Creating working environments that are in tune with womens' needs is required to improve gender equality in Queensland. Critically, improving small businesses' access and understanding of IFAs, making sure that childcare is accessible to working parents and addressing the burden of high parental leave costs.

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

Technology

The effects from rapid technological advancement of businesses during COVID-19 has been two-fold.⁸ Firstly, it has allowed businesses to provide more **flexible working arrangements** that were necessary during lockdowns (discussed in further detail below).

³ CCIQ modelling, Experimental Gross State Product Model (April 2020).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ ABS, Average Weekly Earnings, Australia, November 2019, cat no.6302.0, seasonally adjusted; Table 11C

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ CCIQ, 2020, 'Women in Business', p7.

⁸ Australian Government, 2021, 'Digital Economy Strategy 2030',

<<https://digitaleconomy.pmc.gov.au/strategy/australia/changing-how-we-do-business>>.

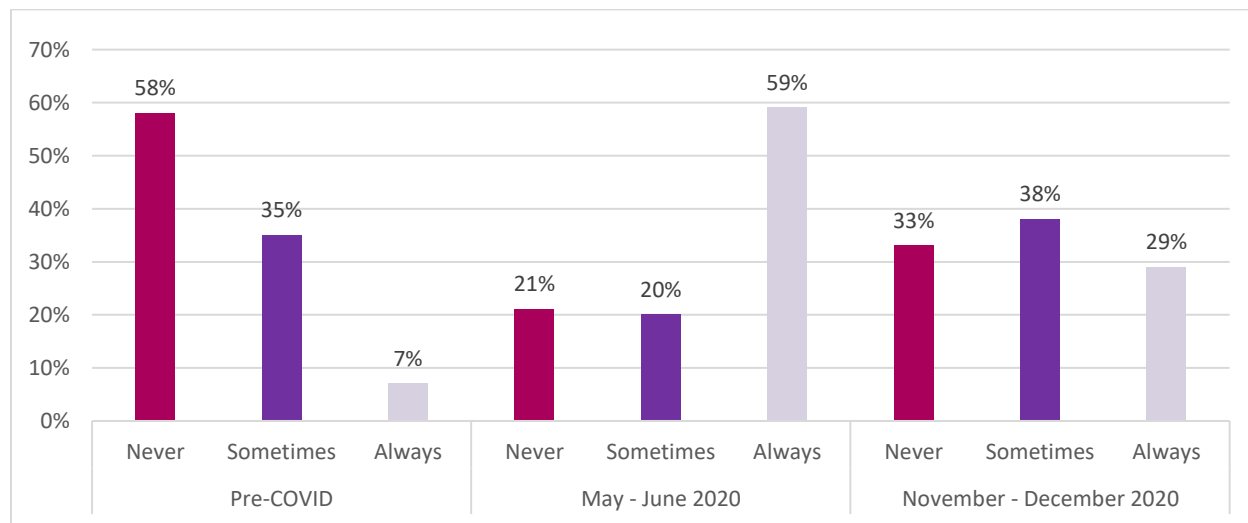
Secondly, it has enabled **greater connectivity and reach** which may pose as a risk to women’s **safety**. Technology facilitated coercive control is ‘violence and abuse by current or former intimate partners, facilitated by digital media.’⁹ It includes stalking using GPS data, audio and video recording, monitoring emails, calendars, threats via SMS, calls, accessing private accounts without consent and publishing private information.¹⁰

There is a greater need to understand both the opportunities but also the threats that technology may pose to women in the workforce, and how technology can be harnessed to promote *greater* safety and support for women impacted by sexual harassment and domestic and family violence.

Flexibility

Flexibility is seen as one of the key enablers of gender equality. Many women in the workforce must also balance their family role, a situation that is sometimes referred to as ‘work-life conflict.’¹¹ The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted greater utilisation of flexible working arrangements. A survey conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies found that, before COVID-19, 58% of employees had never worked from home. That number dropped to 33% during November-December 2020 (see figure 1, below).¹² This is a significant change and has shifted the dial on businesses’ appetite to offer workers more flexible working arrangements. There is hope that a legacy of COVID-19 will be greater willingness by employers to offer employees high levels of flexibility, and the opportunity this could present for women’s participation and advancement.

Figure 1: Percentages working from home in 2020, if employed¹³



⁹ Dragiewicz, M, et al, 2018 ‘Technology facilitated Coercive Control: Domestic Violence and the competing roles of digital media platforms.’ *Feminist Media Studies*, vol 18 Issue 4 p 609 – 625.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Women in Research, 2021, via <https://www.womeninresearch.org.au/flexible-work-arrangements>.

¹² AIFS, 2021, ‘Employment & Work-Family Balance in 2020’ https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/2105_2_fias_employment_and_work_family_balance_in_2020.pdf, 1.

¹³ Ibid, 4.

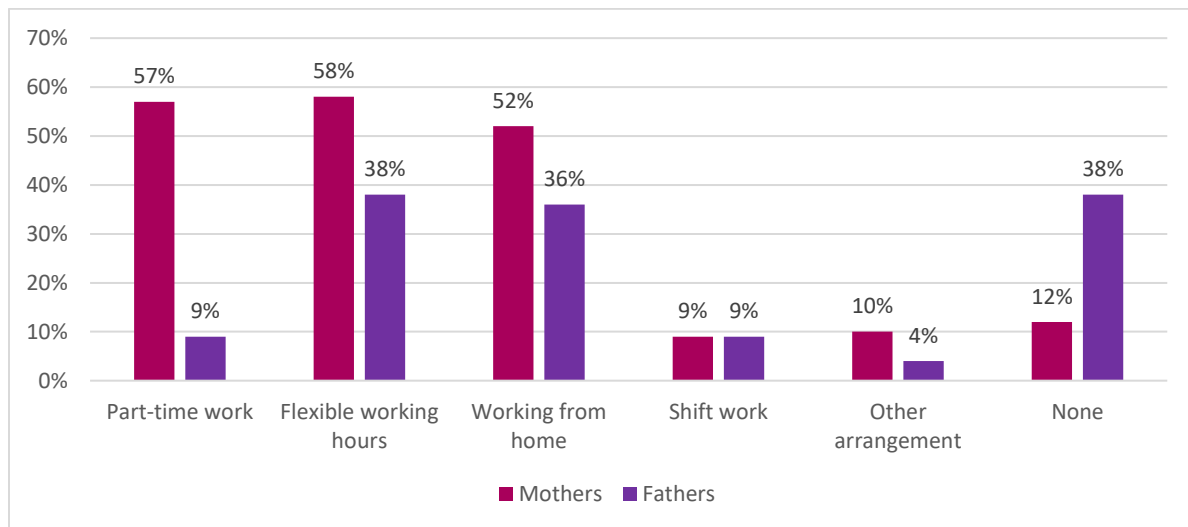
However, flexible working has also amplified work health and safety risks regarding women’s safety at home. If women are experiencing domestic and family violence at home, working from home may be a risk to their safety and businesses may be liable for injuries that occur in this new ‘workplace.’ Businesses, communities and support services need to be more aware of new dynamics and safety issues that may arise out of new modes and places of work.

Childcaring duties

With lockdowns enforced around Queensland, we witnessed a shift to working-from-home and school-from-home for families, leading to challenges to work-life balance and mental health stressors for many.¹⁴

It is known that women often bear the brunt of child-caring responsibilities within the family, and that mothers are also the most likely to alter their working arrangements to facilitate this compared to fathers (see figure 2, below). Access to affordable childcare to keep women employed and active in our labour force is a critical service to support female workforce participation.

Figure 2: Employed mothers’ and fathers’ work arrangements used to care for children¹⁵



Female dominated industries most disrupted

Industries with a disproportionately female workforce, including accommodation, retail and hospitality, also happened to be some of the most disruptive and ongoingly impacted industries from the COVID-19 pandemic, especially during periods of lockdown.¹⁶ Supporting women to work in a wide variety of

¹⁴ Ibid, 1.

¹⁵ Ibid, 8.

¹⁶ Australian Retailers Association 2020, Women in Retail Series, viewed 19 May 2021 < <https://www.australian-retailers-association.com/women-in-retail-series>>; Australian Bureau of Statistics, Gender Indicators, Australia, 2020, viewed 19 May 2021 <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/gender-indicators-australia/latest-release> .

industries by creating female friendly cultures and conditions of employment is an important consideration for protecting the vulnerabilities of the female labour force.

Vision for women, girls and gender equality in Queensland

Q. 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?

The Women's strategy should seek opportunities to:

- close the participation gap,
- close the wage gap, and
- conditions that make it easier for women to do business.

Queensland businesses identified that the **cost of childcare** (25%), **inflexible working arrangements** (15%), the monetary burdens of **parental leave** (13%), and the **lack of diverse women in leadership** (12%) were the key social factors most impacting women in the workforce.¹⁷ By promoting the use of individual flexibility agreements, access to affordable childcare, and by making it easier for women to do business, significant barriers could be addressed towards achieving greater gender inequality within Queensland workplaces.

Accountability for these initiatives however is critical to ensure efforts are meaningful, targeted where most in need, with progress reported on to further understand barriers.

Q. 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?

The Queensland Government has a key role in not only leading and encouraging best practice but also implementing best practice as an employer of choice. The Queensland Government must commit to, and share, all work to bridge the participation gap, pay gap and make it easier for women to do business in Queensland.

To bridge the **participation gap** and the **pay gap**, the Queensland Government needs to:

- a. Provide the resources and training to improve business understanding of the value individual flexibility arrangements can offer to employees;
- b. Provide advice on the implementation of IFAs, including any runoff affects that can occur when entering into informal agreements;
- c. Support the improved access and reduced costs of childcare so that women can easily re-enter and maintain ongoing participation in the workforce.

To make it **easier for women to do business** the Queensland Government needs to:

¹⁷ CCIQ, 2020, 'Women in Business', p 7.

- a. Address red tape, provide summaries of legislation in layman's terms, provide affordable resources and tailored advice for businesses, and provide complete translations for all legislation;
- b. Provide affordable awareness training to small businesses on issues impacting women, including gender inequality, sexual harassment, and domestic and family violence.
- c. Create an effective awareness campaign to inform the community that gender inequality, sexual harassment and domestic and family violence are not accepted culturally in Queensland.
- d. Creating a Small Businesswomen's Advisory Council comprised of women from a variety of industries to put forward unique issues that affect them and allow for knowledge sharing.

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

We have found that the initiatives such as acknowledging champions, rewarding best practice, and promoting awareness have been effective in the past to provide incentives, encouragement, and a stronger sense of community. These initiatives have created leaders and provided incentive, encouragement, and a sense of community. Suggested initiatives which could prove effective include:

- a. **Champions:** the creation of Champions that are endorsed by the Queensland Government helps encourage others and provides inspiration. Small business has a campaign called 100 faces of Small Business which displays the diversity and breadth of small business owners. Although this group currently represents a wide variety of female business owners it would be good to ensure that inclusion and diversity is considered across all social minorities as well as representative of diverse sectors.
- b. **Awards:** The Department of Employment, Small Business and Training's annual Women in Business Awards promote ambition, cultivates confidence to inspire female leaders now and into the future. The supporting educational program and masterclass series for award applicants is also invaluable in growing women's business literacy and knowledge base. This program of awards should be continued, with opportunities to further celebrate success of female business owners in Queensland.
- c. **State-wide week:** creating a state-wide week to discuss issues affecting women in business. This could potentially form a part of the Queensland Women's Week that is already in place, with a greater focus on providing events and stories to support female entrepreneurs, female small business owners and female business leaders.

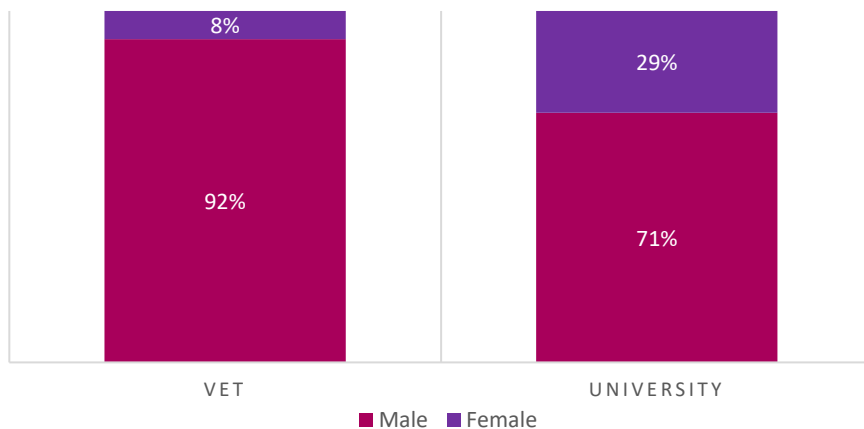
Q. Who do you think we should recognise?

Women across a variety of industries and business types should be recognised and rewarded. Particular attention should be drawn to women succeeding in male dominated industries, as well as senior management positions.

Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) is a good example of industries that are lacking in gender equality. The gender split of men to women based on tertiary qualifications can be seen in figure 3, below. Both women who are VET and University qualified are lagging far below male

representation in STEM. The lack of female participation is attributed to a variety of factors such as stereotypes and biases, a lack of job security, the impact of career disruptions, social and cultural barriers, gender discrimination and sexual harassment in STEM workplaces.¹⁸ Recognising women in these fields can challenge stigmas, recognise their achievements and encourage greater participation in these fields.

Figure 3: Gender participation by tertiary education¹⁹



We should also look to celebrate women supporting other women, female-owned or majority- female-owned businesses providing services and products to women, and women who are at the forefront of innovation in their field.

Critical factors to best drive change

Q. How can we best support Queenslanders to address gender equality?

It is important that the full cross-section of our society are involved in working to address gender inequalities in Queensland: industries, workplaces, communities, men, boys, and places of work, education and leisure.

CCIQ believes that workplaces – large and small – do have a role to play in addressing gender inequality, particularly on the issues of sexual harassment, discrimination, and domestic and family violence. Small and medium sized businesses can do the following to better support Queenslanders to address gender equality:

1. Write workplace culture into employee and stakeholder contracts or workplace policies.
2. Building awareness within the business on issues that impact women including (but not limited to) sexual harassment, discrimination, and domestic and family violence.
3. Collaborate with other small and medium businesses through roundtable forums and information sessions.

¹⁸ Office of the Chief Scientist, 2020, Australia’s STEM Workforce, p24.

¹⁹ Office of the Chief Scientist, 2020, Australia’s STEM Workforce, pv – vi.

4. Participate in female working groups to gain a better understanding of the challenges facing women in business.
5. Stay aware of the data and resources that exist to understand, recognise and support the needs of women in business.

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

Both the *Women in Business* report and the *Domestic and Family Violence as a Workplace Issue* reports published by CCIQ found that **small businesses have unique difficulties addressing gender inequality in the workplace.**

These barriers require policy change by the Queensland government, we recommend the following measures to better support addressing gender inequality:

1. Raising small and medium-sized business awareness on gender inequality in the workplace through a Queensland Government led campaign.
2. Providing a single-source platform for businesses to go to access information, resources, toolkits and training on gender inequality in workplaces.
3. Providing training that is priced and developed for smaller businesses.
4. Greater promotion of female working groups.
5. Improving access to female small business mentor services.

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

At CCIQ we constantly seek to recognise businesses that are best practice and innovative in their approach to address issues impacting them. We have three examples of businesses taking the initiative and addressing gender equality within their own small businesses:

- **The Fitting Room on Edward** promoted equality amongst all staff members through equitable pay; the ability to transition between casual, part-time and full-time employment; flexible working through shortened, compressed workdays; and working remotely from home to allow employees to better balance family and other commitments outside of work. This has required the business to focus on creating a culture of greater communication and collaboration.
- **Media 4 Media** is working to address gender discrimination in a sector that has predominantly male representation. They did this through having a zero tolerance to gender discrimination internally, mentoring, and through the 'She Society', an initiative that aims to encourage social change by promoting the positive initiatives of women in business.
- **The Turner Group** has created a working environment that supports women. They have flexible working arrangements that include varied start and end times, working from home days, and equal remuneration for employees so that they are better able to balance their family lives with work.

To learn more about these businesses and the steps they have made toward gender equality please see the attached *Women in Business* report.

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

Gender inequality is a complex issue, it does not look the same for every group it impacts. We need to ensure that there is diverse representation at all levels of these discussions looking to understand and address gender inequality in Queensland.

Gender inequality may present differently for social minorities or otherwise disadvantaged groups. These groups may include (but are not limited to) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, migrant women, LGBTQIA+ women, or women with a disability. We need to make sure that diverse voices are included so that we can allow them to lead discussions on the issues that affect them.

Conclusion

CCIQ would like to thank the Department of Justice and Attorney-General for the opportunity to make a submission to this consultation for the new Queensland Women's Strategy. If there are any questions in relation to the submission, please contact Luisa Baucia (Policy Advisor) at lbaucia@cciq.com.au.