

Supporting Women as Leaders in the Public Sector

Recommendations report prepared for
IPAA Women's Leadership Network
Committee

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Supporting Women as Leaders in the Public Sector
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Introduction

The Project

The IPAA Women's Leadership Network Committee (the Committee) is exploring how it can work in partnership with the Public Service Commission to further its aims of increasing representation and supporting women in public sector leadership roles. The Committee is undertaking a project to investigate impacts and opportunities of the GSE Act on women, and develop a small, meaningful program to provide practical support and assistance to women in the public sector. The program will be tailored to women currently employed at executive level, and those currently employed in grade 11/12 or similar roles who are considering taking the next step up in their career to an executive level position.

The Government Sector Employment Act

The Government Sector Employment (GSE) Act 2013 introduces a range of reforms in the structure and management of the NSW government sector. The GSE Act modernises the framework for government sector employment and management in NSW. It reflects the commitment of the NSW Government to improve the government sector by providing employment arrangements that facilitate high performance, excellent customer service delivery and rewarding careers.

Two important areas of reform directly affecting staff are changes to the executive structure of the Public Service and changes to employment arrangements and management practices which apply more generally to non-executive employees of the Public Service.

The new executive structures will provide a common employment and development framework for Public Service senior executives; reduce management layers, thereby bringing decision-making closer to service delivery; and provide for flexible assignment of executives to roles, with an emphasis on capabilities, performance, development and mobility. Executive reforms include merit selection assessments for all existing SES and SOs who wish to be considered for placement within the new structure and employment arrangement; and roles will be defined in terms of their functions, scope, accountabilities and required capabilities for placement within a band.

A key change for non-executive employees of the Public Service is a shift away from appointment to a fixed position, to employment at a classification of work and assignment to a role, with reassignment to other roles within their agencies as priorities, resources, or an employee's development needs change.

Impact of the GSE Act on Women

The proportion of women in the NSW public sector as a whole has increased slightly between 2011 and 2012, from 60 to 61 percent. However, the proportion of women in the senior executive service remains low. The percentage of women in the SES has risen from 22 percent in 2002 to 25 percent in 2011.¹ There are less women in senior executive roles in the NSW public service as compared to the Australian Government. In 2012, only 27 percent of NSW Government SES positions were filled by

¹ These figures do not include casual staff. NSW Public Service Commission, NSW Public Sector Workforce Profile, 2012 cited at http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/women_in_nsw/current_report/leadership_and_representation/topic_2_nsw_public_sector_leadership/2.2_senior_executive_service_roles_in_the_nsw_public_sector, accessed 15 June 2014.

women, compared to 39.2 percent of Australian Government SES positions.² Women's earnings in the public sector are 12.9% less than their male counterparts, and in the private sector are 20.8% less than their male counterparts.³ Women often have carer responsibilities for children or elderly relatives etc. and women are also likely to have one or more career breaks due to taking maternity leave.

The GSE Act provides for changes to executive structures to be implemented over a three year period. Each NSW public sector agency must provide an implementation plan to the PSC for approval by 24 August 2014, and all agencies must complete implementation of their new Executive structures by 24 February 2017. This means that recruitment processes for all senior executive positions will occur over three years, requiring people in existing positions and those seeking to be promoted to the executive service to apply for these roles.

The recent changes to the Public Sector recruitment processes and executive structure may have specific impacts on women. Women will need to compete for executive roles alongside their colleagues, and will need to demonstrate the value they bring in terms of skills and experience. As successful applicants, women who are currently in the Senior Officer bands will also need to move to employment contracts and negotiate work and contract arrangements including salary, hours, and part time or job sharing options. This will require women to develop and enhance skills in applying for roles, promoting their strengths and negotiating for pay and working conditions that suit their capabilities and family responsibilities.

IPAA Women's Leadership Network Committee

IPAA NSW is committed to encouraging women in their careers within the Public Sector and each year provides a variety of programs to support women including the Young Professionals Network which supports young women in their climb up the career ladder, the annual International Women's Day event, the Drive your Career conference and mentoring program for high potential women, and the annual Women's Executive Luncheon.

IPAA Council has recently formed the Women's Leadership Network which aims to increase representation and support women in public sector leadership roles. The Network is actively promoting and supporting women already in public sector leadership roles, while addressing systemic organisational barriers to women's advancement in the public sector. We hope by working in these ways that the Women's Leadership Network will empower future generations of public sector leaders.

Methodology

A short survey was developed by members of the Women's Leadership Network and targeted at women employed in the NSW public sector and currently working in positions graded 11/12 and at the executive levels. Notification of the survey was distributed through the Women's Leadership Network. A total of 136 survey responses were received. Full survey results are included in the appendix.

The survey included four questions:

² Women NSW, *Women in NSW Report*, http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/women_in_nsw/current_report/leadership_and_representation/how_does_nsw_compare, 2013.

³ 2012 Executive Women Australia, <http://www.executivewomenaustralia.com.au/about-us>

- What skills would you like to gain or improve on to prepare for, and make the most of the new environment?
- What do you think would be useful to include in a program to assist women currently in, or planning to apply for executive level roles?
- Thinking about your experiences, what has been particularly valuable or helpful to you in your career?
- Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

In addition, members of the Women's Leadership Network were asked to conduct interviews in person, using the same questions. Interviews with three women currently employed in senior executive roles were undertaken.

This paper summarises the key themes in the responses from women who participated in the survey and interviews. It also includes some direct quotes from respondents within text boxes throughout the key themes.

Key Findings

In general survey respondents congratulated IPAA on collaborating and creating an opportunity for people to provide input. A couple of respondents offered to assist or be involved with the program if required.

A number of issues, challenges, and measures relating to the GSE Act and associated changes were raised by survey and interview respondents, and during the desktop research. These can broadly be defined as short term and long term considerations. Short term considerations include more immediate issues and opportunities and may be addressed through a number of channels including information briefings and tailored training courses. Long term considerations are issues to be addressed relating to career development and capability building.

Skills: A number of skills were identified as relevant areas of focus for women in the new public sector environment, as well as a broader range of skills that are required in moving into executive roles in the new public sector environment.

Short term measures

Short term skill development needs identified include:

- Information on recruitment processes. Many respondents said they would like to learn more about the recruitment process, the capability framework and the psychometric assessments.
- Understanding strategic focus of executive level positions (i.e. some respondents sought information on the gaps between the grade 11/12 and the executive level and how to addressing them).
- Presentation and interview skills. Many respondents indicated a desire to develop their interview skills and their ability to successfully compete for executive roles in the recruitment process.
- Communication - how to present skills and personal value to be considered for positions, and also how to target messages effectively to audience.
- Negotiation skills – respondents frequently referred to a desire to enhance their negotiation skills. They saw this as necessary to successfully access and manage part time senior roles and flexible working arrangements and to negotiate employment contracts. There were also a number of

comments around how to influence without being aggressive from women who had been exposed to aggressive and non-aggressive styles of leadership.

Longer term measures

- Financial management and economic analysis skills – many respondents said that senior public sector roles will broaden to take more responsibility for this under the new structure (particularly budget/financial roles). Many women indicated that they needed to develop these ‘harder’ skills to be successful through the transition to executive positions.

I feel that the biggest skill gap is in Financial Management. The new environment is providing for greater responsibilities in the financial control area however the skills required for this are often not gained through other roles. Being responsible for our budget is great but it is very new.

I would like to gain more confidence in financial management and cost benefit analysis interpretation.

- People management – many respondents indicated that they wished to develop or enhance their people management skills in order to lead and perform in executive roles.
- Change management – many women spoke of the need to develop skills to lead change in their organisations in this current environment. For some respondents this included building emotional intelligence e.g. being aware of how others may react to change and preparing ways to address those reactions
- Effective time management (as a component of a program – not as the sole focus)
- Keeping women engaged during career breaks, article suggested by respondent: www.smh.com.au/comment/next-step-in-parental-leave-is-tailoring-it-to-give-women-best-career-rebirth-20130910-2ti6p.html (one option could simply be a page dedicated to this on the forum so that women can share ideas, and even the forum itself can keep people in the loop that are on a break)
- Training for all employees (men and women) – some respondents also spoke of the need for training and awareness raising for all people in senior roles in the public sector, particularly in relation to gender equity issues, unconscious bias in recruitment, bullying and harassment, and in relation to flexible working arrangements. Another respondent spoke of the need for a program for senior executives to make it easy for them to begin mentoring, implement best practice succession planning and build capability.

Networking: Many respondents recognised there are some existing networking opportunities, although it seems many respondents prefer small – medium sized networking events and the opportunity to connect more frequently and form meaningful connections. Suggestions included training courses, workshops and information events. One respondent suggested an online forum (with discussion boards) that enabled women to form new networks and share knowledge and information.

Networking opportunities with other like minded female colleagues at the Executive level would be useful.

Workshops and other networking/support opportunities would be useful.

Mentoring: The survey and interview responses revealed a very strong interest in mentoring programs, and a common view that mentors have been one of the most helpful career influences. Around 115 out of 136 responses suggested access to mentoring to assist them to move into executive roles. There were a range of areas of focus for mentoring: leadership development; balancing work and family responsibilities, and generally supporting career development. Mentoring is also seen by many respondents as a way of being championed and provided with useful career advice.

Mentoring - I want to know how other women progressed their career, juggle career and family, how to get to executive level despite all of the other complexities life and family may add. Is it worth the risk moving to an executive level?

Mentoring programs would be useful, advice regarding how women can progress to the SES, women in leadership programs for each government department. It would be good to have a formal mentor program for women in government, in the same way that the private sector has various mentoring programs for women. It would also be great to have a women in leadership program in government departments to assist high potential women to progress their career (e.g. several private sector companies have them in place. NAB has a women in leadership program which provides female staff with a senior executive mentor to assist them moving up in the organisation with the aim of increasing female representation in senior management.

My last GM was extremely supportive of my development which included pushing me into challenges I may not have chosen for myself however which assisted in my development at a strategic level. What is important is that this is done in a supportive environment and not one where the motive is to set you up for failure.

Coaching: Many respondents requested corporate or executive coaching sessions. This is usually a private service that has been anecdotally found to be effective in assisting women to secure and maintain senior roles.

My natural leadership style is very direct and I'm quite ambitious, which is applauded in a man but often seen as abruptness in a woman. I've had some executive coaching over the past 24 months and this has helped me to adapt my style to be more affiliative, which has in turn allowed me to be more influential.

One on one coaching, mentoring with an executive staff member or external leader would be useful, topic - returning to work (or finding a new position) after maternity break, career planning, how to access a job share or part time arrangement.

Secondments: A high number of respondents noted that they were interested in secondment or job rotation opportunities, and that this learning on the job has led to career progression, exposure to

different viewpoints and approaches, valuable learnings and diverse experience, and a greater understanding of the public sector, particularly when central agencies are involved.

Some respondents referred to the benefits of working outside government and suggested there is potential to partner with other sectors such as the private sector (e.g. efficiency, return on investment) and not-for-profit sector (e.g. achieving more with less, customer focus).

One respondent suggested that a central talent pool be created where people wishing to learn from other areas through secondment can register for opportunities.

Short term secondments have assisted me to develop skills and broaden my outlook and knowledge.

Secondments to other agencies (particularly central agencies) would be useful. This would assist in providing a broader view of Government policy and practices.

Role rotations and project sharing would be useful.

Boards: A number of respondents expressed an interest in working with or being appointed to a board. There is potential to partner with Women on Boards either through promoting their workshops and services, or incorporating Women on Boards as part of a workshop or package of information.

Succession planning and capability building: A number of women believed being 'championed' was a key component of their career progression. Some executive-level respondents referenced the value of succession planning and identifying and developing emerging talent at all levels (not just direct reports). There could be value in developing a program or information package for senior executives demonstrating implementation of best practice succession planning and capability building.

Considerations in designing support programs

It will be important for IPAA to consider some key design principles and objectives when developing programs to support women transition to the new employment environment.

Respondents and interviewees made many comments that are relevant to developing these design principles. Some suggestions for principles include:

- Leverage and build on existing IPAA and public sector activities.
- Offering services / assistance / advice across a number of platforms (and times) e.g. workshops, mentor programs, social media (Linked In), online forum, webinars, Women's Leadership Series (breakfast / lunch discussions), profiles/case studies of successful women and men allowing people to model behaviour.
- Ensuring that there is support for women working in regional NSW (or non-Sydney areas) – this could be through online forum / webinar options for events etc.
- Including Aboriginal groups to have forums and sessions across all programs, and opportunities for both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal women to network
- Consider different development activities for people at the 11/12 grades and executive levels, as they may have different needs and aims.
- Programs should be large enough to have sufficient impact and follow through.

- Include men to make sure women are promoted (and seen to be promoted) on merit, not because they are women, which may have negative repercussions. Consideration may also be given to equipping men with the understanding of different approaches and styles that women employ, along with the benefits of this diversity. This would help to address an issue that some respondents raised that 'some male colleagues are suspicious about continued focus on women in leadership'
- Explain the context of focusing on women. Some respondents were unsure of why the program is focusing on women. A clear explanation and a strong and compelling case explaining this focus should help clarify this for men and women alike.

Existing programs and examples to draw on

There are several programs that are already in place that could be leveraged or used as a basis for designing a specific program to support the NSW public sector reforms.

Some existing NSW public sector programs include:

- IPAA Drive Your Career: Targeted at high potential women graded up to 11/12 and includes many topics raised in responses e.g.: goal setting, leadership, networking, positive internal voice, understanding male & female styles, communication, time management, negotiation, risk taking, personal brand, and putting yourself forward for opportunities. (http://www.nsw.ipaa.org.au/2013-Drive-Your-Career-program_1.aspx)
- ANZSOG: Executive Masters in Public Administration and short courses <http://www.anzsog.edu.au/> (many respondents spoke highly of this course and expressed interest in undertaking the Masters program)
- Public Service Commission funded places to attend Graduate School of Government at Sydney Uni: <http://sydney.edu.au/arts/gsg/>.

A range of private sector organisations are also in place with existing programs for women to support career development and progression to leadership roles. These include:

- Chief Executive Women: <http://www.cew.org.au/>
- NAB/MAFC 2014 Women's Mentoring Program: <http://www.mafc.mq.edu.au/experience-the-centre/key-reasons-to-choose-us/mafc-nab-womens-mentoring-program/>
- Women & Leadership Australia: <http://www.wla.com.au/programs.html>
- Women on Boards: <http://www.womenonboards.org.au/>
- MOOCs: <http://www.mooc-list.com/language/english>
- Konnect Learning – Women in Leadership Masterclass: <http://www.konnectlearning.com.au/system/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Leadership-for-Women-Masteclass-Final-Brochure.pdf?3ad6f3>
- Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *Training and development, Establish and maintain effective mentoring programs* found at https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/GEI1.3.1_mentoring_programs.pdf

Recommendations

It is recommended that IPAA explore the development of the following programs or initiatives to support women transition to the new employment environment under the GSE Act.

The following programs could be discussed and developed in partnership with the Public Service Commission for immediate implementation:

- Training and event opportunities around interview and job application skills, and negotiation skills in the context of new employment contracts. An online element to these activities will be explored
- An online program that aligns with IPAA's digital strategy and explores mentoring and coaching opportunities.
- The development of a tool kit to support mentees in selecting and securing mentors for formalised mentoring.
- Regular networking events for women at senior and executive levels. This may include a quarterly networking lunch which would also provide an opportunity to recognise and encourage male champions of change.
- Information briefings on the new recruitment process. This include monitoring what Agencies are doing.

The following programs could be developed for medium to longer term implementation to build women's leadership and management skills and providing ongoing career development opportunities:

- Information on how to access skill development courses particularly around leadership, financial and budget management and people management.
- Development of a register for expressing interest in rotations and secondments across agencies and explore the possibility of extending opportunities into the non-government and private sectors.
- Development of an online forum to facilitate networking, information and knowledge sharing, and with the potential to host the secondment register mentioned above.

Table of Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION	SURVEY FINDINGS	OBJECTIVE / OUTCOME	EXISTING PROGRAMS / COMMENTS
1. Develop mentoring program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong interest in mentoring: 114 out of 133 responses mentioned mentoring in some form. Request for women at 11/12 level to be partnered with an executive level mentor (within government or across sectors). 	Assist women with leadership and career development.	Suggestion from survey response to look at NAB women in leadership program.
2. Create secondment register	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong interest in secondment or job rotation opportunities. Suggestion for central agency secondments or partnering with other sectors. Recommendation for a central talent pool where people can register for secondment opportunities. 	Assist career progression and skill development.	Skills such as financial management, achieving more for less, and developing a customer-focus could be gained from partnering with the private and non-profit sectors.
3. Create networking forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong interest in networking opportunities. Request for smaller networks with more frequent meetings, facilitating meaningful connections. 	Create accessible networking opportunities. Facilitate information sharing.	
4. Facilitate skill building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Particular skill areas identified for development include: financial management, negotiation, change management, effective time management, emotional 	Develop skills.	IPAA Drive Your Career course: www.nsw.ipaa.org.au/2013-Drive-Your-Career-program_1.aspx Includes many topics raised in survey

RECOMMENDATION	SURVEY FINDINGS	OBJECTIVE / OUTCOME	EXISTING PROGRAMS / COMMENTS
	intelligence, and communication.		responses e.g. goal setting, leadership, networking, positive internal voice, understanding male and female styles, communication, time management, negotiation, risk taking, personal brand, and having the confidence to apply for more senior roles.
5. Working with Boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Request for advice on how to be appointed to a Board. Request for advice on how to work effectively with Boards. 	Assist women to work with boards, and be considered for appointment to a board.	<p>Women on Boards: www.womenonboards.org.au</p> <p>There is potential to partner with Women on Boards either through promoting their workshops and services, or incorporating Women on Boards as part of a workshop or package of information.</p>
6. Develop online forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online forum (with discussion boards) and network – allowing women to share knowledge and information, and opportunities (e.g. short term secondments, job vacancies). 	<p>Facilitate networking, and advice, knowledge and information sharing.</p> <p>Keep women engaged during career breaks.</p>	

Appendix

Survey and interview questions.

1. What skills would you like to gain or improve on to prepare for, and make the most of the new environment?
2. What do you think would be useful to include in a program to assist women currently in, or planning to apply for executive level roles?
3. Thinking about your experiences, what has been particularly valuable or helpful to you in your career?
4. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?
5. Please select your current level of employment.