



Job and Skills Summit Two Minute Intervention Delivered on 1 September 2022

I'd like to thank the organisers for the invitation to attend and speak here today, and for kicking this Summit off with a discussion of gender. Because if we are not able to put gender at the heart of this discussion, then frankly, we might as well go home now.

The pandemic showed us that our economic systems are propped up by the unpaid and underpaid labour of women. Female dominated industries were critical to our economic survival during covid. But, to paraphrase a tired teacher and mother quoted in recent research by Fiona Jenkins and Julie Smith¹, we're frankly sick of babysitting the economy. It's time to change how we do work.

We can take steps to improve women's workforce participation rates. But most women are already working fulltime, even more than full time. We're just not paid for it. We must shift the distribution of unpaid work so that men do their share, and we have to change our workplaces to make this possible. The pandemic showed us that flexibility in work is possible, but it must be flexibility that aims to give autonomy to workers who need to care for children, for aging parents, and for themselves. Employers should expect everyone to work part time and flexibly at some point in their careers as they meet their fair share of caring work. All leadership roles in workplaces must be capable of being worked part time - otherwise we'll never get enough women into leadership roles to reap the economic and social benefits that come with gender balanced leadership. Improved paid parental leave is critical. Government procurement frameworks can be used to provide incentives to employers.

¹ Jenkins F, Smith J. *Work-from-home during COVID-19: Accounting for the care economy to build back better*. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*. 2021;32(1):22-38. doi:[10.1177/1035304620983608](https://doi.org/10.1177/1035304620983608) p. 1

We also need to put a strong gender lens on our education system, because that's where the gender barriers in our workplaces first emerge. Let's take workplace-based training. If you're training or studying in a female dominated industry, you will pay your institution for the privilege of completing your placement. But if you're in a male dominated industry, you'll be paid to complete your workplace training. We need the upcoming University Accords to contain a focus on gendered outcomes for students. We need improved funding for public vocational training, with a focus on critical industries, including free and subsidised training in critical areas. Australia has one of the most gender segregated workforces in the world. All education and skills strategies must include ending this segregation as a key priority.

Enterprise bargaining has failed to produce decent wages in many female dominated sectors, such as childcare. Keeping enterprise bargaining in those sectors will keep wages low and feed that stubborn wage gap we're having such trouble shifting. We support the Government's move to Fair Work Commission must be empowered to Strengthen the Fair Work Commission's powers to order increases for women in low paid female dominated industries by establishing a statutory equal remuneration principle and new expert panels to hear equal pay cases.

Finally, by far the biggest barrier to getting women to work is childcare, which I'll leave to Georgie Dent to discuss.