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HOWARD FLOREY INSTITUTE

25 August 2008

Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations
House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

To The Secretary

Re: Pay Equity and Associated issues relating to increasing female participation in the workforce

The Howard Florey Institute is a Neuroscience Research Institute and currently employs approximately 280 staff members and students. The Institute has implemented a number of initiatives in an endeavour to provide a supportive and rewarding work environment to its female staff members and students.

These include:

- 20 weeks Paid Maternity Leave
- Family Leave provisions
- Flexible work arrangements
- 48/52 working year
- Harassment & Discrimination Policies
- Professional Development Opportunities for female researchers

Senior Management at the Institute has been aware of several areas that have an impact upon the participation and advancement of female workers and as such have implemented some of the above initiatives'. There is however a lack of female representation at the executive level and at senior research fellowship level. The Institute has put in place a Scientific Promotions Committee to develop a process and selection criteria for the internal appointment of senior research fellows and will endeavour to incorporate measures to increase female representation at this level. As we are governed by National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) funding criteria are hands are somewhat tied in relation to the appointment of senior research fellows as it is dependant on the individual scientist being successful with their grant submission from the NHMRC.

Across the other areas of the workforce female staff represent 53.4% of the total workforce with student female numbers representing 65.4% on the total student population. Our overall percentage of females has steadily increased over the years and the trend appears to be continuing however I believe it will take a number of years before we see a similar increase at the more senior scientific levels.

The scientific world is challenging for all concerned but especially for our female scientists who decide to blend their scientific work with their family responsibilities. The nature of scientific funding requires scientists to maintain a high standard of reputable scientific publications and the demands of achieving sustainable research outcomes. The writing of publications and detailing the progress of scientific work requires scientists to maintain contact with their laboratory and the associated research.

The Institute has implemented support mechanisms for all our staff members with particular emphasis on our female staff, in assisting them continue their important work at the institute.

Initiatives:

Paid Maternity Leave:

The Florey provides up to 52 weeks maternity leave to female staff members, 20 weeks of which is for paid maternity leave. This leave can be combined with other paid leave entitlements such as annual leave and long service leave. This provision has been written into the organisations EBA and is seen as being a positive initiative.

Flexible work arrangements

Female staff members returning from maternity leave normally have the option to resume duties on a part-time basis following consultation with their immediate supervisor. We will encourage and try to accommodate all our female staff who wish to return to work by working reduced hours or job sharing. We encourage flexibility around work hours and attendance with work usually allowed outside the usual business hours which includes evenings and week-ends if suitable.

Family Leave Provisions

The Florey also provides special family leave provisions to staff members with responsibilities for the care of a family member. A staff member is entitled to access sick leave to a maximum of 10 days per year to support a member of their family such as a dependant child with additional leave available at the discretion of the Director as well as providing the use of single annual leave days at short notice to provide care for immediate family members.

48/52 Working Year

This is an Institute initiative to assist employees with family responsibilities as well. A full-time member of the staff may work 44 weeks of an agreed twelve-month period. Within that 12-month period the Employee will be entitled to have four weeks of paid leave in addition to the normal four weeks annual leave, with a commensurate reduction in salary. This allows staff to take additional time off work during various periods of the year such as school holidays.

Harassment & Discrimination

In accordance with State and Federal legislation the Florey endeavours to make all areas of employment, such as recruitment, conditions of employment, training and development, promotion and the supervision and management of staff, free from direct or indirect

discrimination. The Florey is affiliated with the University of Melbourne and adopts the University's harassment and discrimination policies.

I do not believe there are pay equity issues for our female workforce as we have strict salary and classification guidelines which clearly outline grading levels and responsibilities, the more pertinent issues relating to females participating in the scientific research workforce are around maternity leave support, flexible work arrangements and progression or barriers to progression at the more senior research levels which have traditionally been male dominated both at senior appointment level and the awarding of successful grants and funding submissions.

Funding is very much an issue within the Scientific Research field given the limited amount of Research Fellowship grants available and the process where individual research scientists are made to apply for and compete in the open market which I believe could discourage certain scientists including female scientists from applying or being successful with their grant submission.

The answer may be to provide additional funding for the progression and development of senior female scientists at a fellowship level.

Yours sincerely

Gary Gray
Chief Operating Officer