

Special Commissioner, Equity and Diversity

2021–2024 achievements and forward agenda

This report reflects on the activities and achievements in the three years since the appointment of Queensland's first Special Commissioner, Equity and Diversity, Dr Linda Colley, and the establishment of the Office of the Special Commissioner. It identifies potential next steps for the forward agenda.

There are tangible signals of progress in the Queensland public sector over the three-year period, including a substantial 30% reduction in the gender pay gap.

Influencing central laws, policy and strategy

Achievements

- Enhancements to the *Public Sector Act 2022*, including:
 - Replacing previous equal employment opportunity provisions with new principles of equity, diversity, respect and inclusion, in a focused Chapter 2 of the Act
 - Principles of pay equity
 - A modern approach to recruitment and selection processes, that maintains the goal of the candidate being able to do the role but introduces considerations around past performance, potential contributions to the agency, and bringing a diverse perspective.
- Innovative policy proposals to enhance working conditions, including:
 - Payment of superannuation on unpaid parental leave up to 52 weeks
 - Nation-leading policy to introduce 10 days of non-cumulative reproductive health leave, in support of women's workforce participation.

Proposed next steps

- Ongoing review of policy opportunities to progress equity and diversity and position the Queensland public sector as an employer of choice, especially those policies areas where Queensland has fallen behind other jurisdictions.
- Contribute to PSC policy and strategy priorities.

New awareness, accountability and evidence base

Achievements

- New legislated accountabilities in the *Public Sector Act 2022* that require chief executives to:
 - act on a positive duty to progress equity and diversity and promote respect and inclusion
 - submit an annual equity and diversity audit, for approval by the Special Commissioner
 - complete equity and diversity action plans (which can be part of workforce plans).These accountabilities extend to government owned corporations and most entities.
- Extensive support to agencies to develop the sector’s maturity in meeting these Act obligations. For example, each year, OSC supports the audit process by providing getting started workshops, audit guides and templates; check in sessions, and feedback on draft audit reports.
- Increased access to workforce data through:
 - Equity and diversity dataset dashboards for each agency, to inform agency audits
 - Public information on sector progress through an annual infographic
 - Collaboration with the PSC on a First Nations dashboard, shared with the Cultural Agencies Leadership and First Nations Ambassadors for Change (FNAC) networks.
- Increased awareness of the principles of equity and diversity and causes of inequity through:
 - discussions with executive leadership teams
 - capability workshops for every agency, targeted at HR and people experts
 - sharing of research findings.

Proposed next steps

- A renewed program to support awareness and capability including:
 - offerings for senior leaders
 - regular offerings of an introductory equity and diversity workshop for HR specialists
 - an advanced workshop to equip HR experts to progress pay equity and address occupational segregation
- Support an increase in sector maturity in equity and diversity processes, including:
 - enhanced analysis and narrative. For example, the 2025 audit guide will encourage agencies to delve deeper into respect, inclusion and sexual harassment.
 - more effective equity and diversity action plans that provide an authorizing environment for managers.
 - self-service resources that support agency capability.
- Continue to explore options to join the national Workplace Gender Equality Agency reporting and, in the interim, continue to publish an [annual gender equity infographic](#) outlining the Queensland sector’s gender pay gap.

Reducing the gender pay gap

Achievements

- Supported agencies to achieve a substantial reduction in the gender pay gap:
 - On base salary, from 7.35% in 2021 to 5.1% in 2024, being more than 30% reduction.
 - On earnings, from 7.82% in 2021 to 5.94% in 2024, being a drop of around 24%
 - Improvements in the gap across most agencies, age groups and every target groups.
- Included the principle of gender pay equity in legislation:
 - an increased focus on pay equity in bargaining in the *Industrial Relations Act 2022*
 - in the objectives and in Chapter 2 of the *Public Sector Act 2022*.
- Increased the focus on gender pay equity in enterprise bargaining, through:
 - Review of equity in 2019 round of enterprise bargaining, to identify how inequities across agreements contributed to the gender pay gap
 - Requested agency chief executives to progress equity in enterprise agreements (including focused discussions with Education and Health)
 - Advocated for equity initiatives in agreements.
- Public accountability through publication of an annual gender equity infographic on the OSC website, with a supplementary report with additional narrative published in 2024.
- Supported the sector to address occupational segregation and pay equity including:
 - Queensland Health, incl Nurses and Midwives Gender Equity project steering committee
 - Queensland Fire Department
 - Queensland Corrective Services
 - Queensland Police Service (including QHRC review)
 - Leading Women's Network (for uniformed and integrity agencies)
- Contributions to the national agenda, including a federal review of occupational segregation and discussions around the national equality reporting regime.
- Commenced research on occupational segregation in the sector.

Proposed next steps

- Advise on equity and diversity in bargaining and contribute equity principles to the forthcoming wages policy.
- Accelerate the sector's attention to occupational segregation:
 - Complete the review of occupational segregation and identification of structural issues
 - Develop tangible measures and interventions to support agencies with low diversity.
- Continue to provide strategic advice to networks and steering committees.

Women in leadership

Achievements

- Research – senior women’s voices

In 2022 the Special Commissioner engaged researchers to understand the career experiences of the sector’s most senior women (at SES3H and SES4 levels) through anonymous interviews. The findings confirmed that many participants had faced challenges related to visibility and opportunities, and some participants experienced gendered behaviours in meetings, in access to opportunities, and during times of organisational change (such as machinery-of-government changes).

- Research - SES applications and appointments

The OSC tested anecdotal evidence that senior women were not applying for SES jobs. Our review of SES selection reports from 2019–23:

- Confirmed that women were under-represented as applicants for SES roles, comprising only around one-third of applicants. This seems to be improving, with women nearing 40% of applicants in 2024.
- Identified that women comprise around 60% of appointments, consistent with literature findings that women do not apply for roles until they can meet all of the criteria.

- Established an Executive Women’s Network (EWN)

The EWN invites the sector’s most senior women at SES4 and SES3 levels, as well as First Nations women at all SES levels, to a series of events through the year. The network has been co-sponsored by the Special Commissioner and Director-General Deidre Mulkerin. The OSC has convened 11 events to date (including International Women’s Day events), with the most recent event reflecting on how to lead in times of change and uncertainty.

- Chief Executive appointments

In 2023 the Special Commissioner reviewed the CEO Recruitment and Selection Directive and remuneration criteria to identify potential gender bias. The Special Commissioner consults with external recruitment firms involved in CEO recruitment to support inclusive processes.

- Communicated findings. The Special Commissioner communicated research findings to:
 - Leadership Board
 - most agency executive leadership teams
 - focused workshops with every agency’s HR team.

Proposed next steps

- Analyse the 2024 Working for Queensland results, to identify the experience of senior women, and plan an appropriate response (such as communication and new strategies).
- New requirements in future agency equity and diversity audits, to support each agency to conduct their own analysis of diversity in SES applicant pools.
- Consider opportunities to extend the Executive Women’s Network.

Inclusive recruitment and selection

Achievements

New Recruitment and selection framework.

- Developed new provisions for recruitment in *the Public Sector Act 2022* and supporting directive, providing a progressive opportunity to link merit and diversity in recruitment.
- Provided input to website resources.
- Communicated the new directive provisions including:
 - Participated in PSC webinars for the sector
 - Briefed Leadership Board
 - Briefed most agency executive teams
 - Briefed the Recruitment Consultants Association members

Action 18 Inclusive recruitment and selection in the Even better public sector for Queensland strategy

- The OSC is leading Action 18 Inclusive recruitment and selection. Data gathering to date has included:
 - understanding the candidate's view of how equity and diversity is embedded into recruitment processes, through review of 300+ job advertisements and role profiles.
 - Understanding HR experts' experience via workshops and survey of 200+ HR experts.
 - Understanding hiring manager experience, through survey of nearly 200 hiring managers who completed a recruitment process in May/June 2024.
 - Analysis of workforce data to gauge whether the directive had changed the profile of applicant pools or diversity in appointments.
- The findings have been consolidated into a report with recommendations on:
 - New tools and resources to support recruitment processes
 - New capability for leaders, HR experts and hiring managers
 - Several systems issues including:
 1. the authorizing environment to incorporate equity and diversity in recruitment processes
 2. the interface of role descriptions and job evaluation requirements
 3. The need for agency HR models to better support recruitment and selection processes and outcomes.

The recommendations have been considered by Strategic Workforce Council, and the OSC and PSC are planning the implementation of required changes.

Proposed next steps

- Collaborate with PSC on new resources to support HR experts and managers
- Lead a new round of communication to raise awareness and commitment to the changes
- Lead and support capability workshops across the sector
- Lead working groups to address systems changes.

Safety, wellbeing, respect and inclusion

Achievements

Sexual harassment

- Nation-leading policy framework for preventing and managing sexual harassment in the sector, which is gender-informed, trauma-informed and person-centred.
- Established an agency implementation group, to support agencies to implement the directive requirements such as a local policy and a contact officer network
- Led extensive communication with agency executive teams and with the HR teams in larger agencies, to support understanding of the changed approach
- Supported the PSC to procure training, for specialists, managers, and to all employees.
- Increased knowledge of the sector's experience of sexual harassment, including:
 - Additional questions in the Working for Queensland survey
 - 2023 specific sexual harassment survey, to guide central and agency resources.
- Working with the PSC to respond to emerging obligations in federal and state regulation.

Respect and inclusion

- Support the positive duty to promote respect and inclusion in the Act, by working with the PSC to develop a respect and inclusion program of work.
- Commenced research on flexibility for frontline workers and executives.
- Collaborated with the PSC and LGBTQIA+ Steering Committee to co-design the LGBTQIA+ Action Plan 2023-2025, informed by the 2022 Working for Queensland survey.
- Special Commissioner briefings to the First Nations Ambassadors for Change network.

Proposed next steps

- Support PSC work including respect and inclusion, and addressing the 2023 Disability Royal Commission recommendations.
- Support the sector's maturity by expanding equity and diversity audit requirements such as:
 - a sexual harassment dashboard with metrics on complaints, contact officers, training, and WfQ survey results
 - a narrative reflecting on the respect and inclusion elements of their WfQ results.
- Support the sector to comply with new WHS regulations and develop agency level sexual harassment prevention plans (with lack of diversity being a key risk for sexual harassment).
- Partner with PSC and other agencies to establish new projects, including:
 - Access to and management of flexible working
 - occupational violence and aggression
 - diversity aspects of job insecurity.
- Develop a central workplace guide on gender affirmation, to support those undergoing a gender affirmation process, as well as managers and colleagues.

For more information email osc@psc.qld.gov.au.