

Industry, Innovation and Science Women's Advisory Roundtable meeting record

The Industry, Innovation and Science Women's Advisory Roundtable held its first meeting on Tuesday, 13 March 2018, 3-5pm in Sydney. Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, Minister for Jobs and Innovation chaired the meeting.

In her opening address, Minister Cash noted that over the last years the attention towards women's role in the Australian economy has increased, and there are a number of strategies in place to lift it. They include the Women's Workforce Participation Strategy, Women in STEM and Entrepreneurship program, as well as the recently announced Women in Science Ambassador, and the expansion of the Superstars of STEM project.

The Roundtable aims to complement these existing initiatives and to focus on addressing gender equity across industry, science and innovation. To this end, the members include women and men, experienced researchers and academics, startup founders as well as senior executives from industry.

The Roundtable members then discussed a range of initiatives and ideas that could encourage female participation across a variety of sectors including early education and academia, as well as in decision making positions across the innovation system. The group noted that school curriculum will have a key role towards the future, as will the actions of the industry to complement governments' work. Many members emphasised the importance of women learning financial literacy.

The Chair updated the Roundtable on the recently announced *Women in Science Ambassador*, who will act as an advocate for gender equity in science. The members provided suggestions for how the role could be framed, including options for engaging states and territories, and for ensuring that the role is accessible for also those with caring commitments. The Ambassador could also consider engaging with the broader innovation system including business and other initiatives such as Male Champions of Change. The Chair agreed to seek comment from the group on the role description for the Ambassador.

The Office for Women presented an update on the Women's Workforce Participation Strategy. The group heard that Australia is progressing well – women's workforce participation reached a new high of 60.5 per cent in December 2017. The Strategy has links to the Roundtable since one of its five action areas is supporting women to innovate and succeed as entrepreneurs, as well as to thrive in jobs of the future. The members discussed ways that the government and industry could support women moving into non-traditional sectors. They noted that different strategies are needed to attract women to high level positions in traditionally female sectors such as caring professions, when compared to for example agriculture. The members proposed the vocational education sector could have a role by re-skilling workers to areas of need. As an example of this approach the group heard of the cybersecurity certificate programs put in place by the Cybersecurity Growth Center. The group also noted that local companies already implement relevant in-house policies.

The Roundtable members then discussed the available statistics on women's representation across the economy. Although data is patchy, there are indications that more women are entering the innovation system. Reasons include improved support for the entrepreneurial pipeline such as female-focused accelerator programs, and the ability of technology to enable new career paths and flexible working modes. Institutional barriers were mentioned, particularly in the academic sector,

along with practical steps that have been taken to address them, using the Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) project as an example. Work undertaken within the Commonwealth Bank Australia was noted, as a model that others could learn from. Considering removing barriers for women across science and research, the group discussed government's leverage in the system through the national research funding programs. The department welcomed any further thoughts the attendees may have about better targeting the programs.

The members expressed an interest in the group working towards its goals between the meetings. The group committed to collating case studies across a variety of areas (big business, startups, academia etc) on initiatives that work in supporting women. They also noted that it is important to get those stories across the media to showcase positive role models.

The members also discussed the aims and possible outcomes for the Roundtable. The department welcomes any comments the members may have on the Roundtable's Guidelines, which outline the group's functions.

The group re-iterated that the education system has a key role in promoting women in science and innovation. The Chair committed to inviting a representative from the Department of Education and Training in the next meeting. The group also commented that as a term, "STEM" may have negative associations and that perhaps they should start talking about attracting women to technology.

The Chair closed the meeting by noting that the present group forms the permanent membership of the Roundtable, and she will invite additional attendees to follow-up meetings. She expects to chair two meetings before the end of 2018. The members were encouraged to contact the secretariat within the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science for any additional matters.