



Speech by

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SET FOR SUCCESS

Dr LESLEY CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (11.42 a.m.): During the last sittings of parliament the Premier, Peter Beattie, tabled a report that I had prepared for him entitled *SET for success: Increasing the participation of women in science, engineering and technology*, careers collectively referred to as SET. This report had its genesis in a request last year from the Premier that, as his parliamentary secretary, I address the issue of women and the Smart State, in particular to advise him on new opportunities for women in the emerging industries that are central to Queensland's Smart State agenda. I was delighted to take up the Premier's request to explore the issue of women and the Smart State because I believe strongly that the economic, social and environmental challenges facing our world urgently require the abilities of women—their more community focused priorities and perspectives and their collaborative style of leadership.

It became evident from feedback from women in industry and from a literature search that a significant gender gap existed in the information communication technology industry. A review of current Queensland statistical data confirmed that the participation rate of girls and women in education, training and professional employment in ICT is only 21 per cent to 22 per cent, and I therefore adopted this area as my first priority. To this end I have worked collaboratively with the industry organisation Women in Technology, with staff from the Office for Women and with ministers Bligh, Foley, Barton and Lucas and their staff to support existing programs and initiate additional strategies to increase the number of girls and women in ICT education, training and employment.

In the latter half of 2002 I extended my focus to Queensland women in science and engineering. While in 2002 53 per cent of those studying science at university were women, they were concentrated in the life sciences and are still poorly represented in the physical sciences, mathematics and engineering. Women represent only six per cent of the work force in the latter field and occupy only seven per cent of senior positions in higher education in Queensland in all fields of science, engineering and technology.

The barriers to the participation of women and girls in SET are slow to break down, not because of their lack of ability in these fields but because of entrenched attitudes in society as to what work is appropriate work for girls. Many SET occupations also have a serious image problem, with many girls seeing them as boring, male dominated and lacking social value. The lack of appropriate up-to-date career information and visible female role models serves to reinforce this perception. The content and teaching method of SET subjects too often fail to appeal to the interests and concerns of girls. The SET classroom and workplace can be hostile environments for girls and women, and progress to higher levels in a SET career can be very difficult, particularly when women begin to juggle work and family responsibilities.

My report describes the success of existing government programs and outlines new initiatives now under way or due to commence shortly. The Department of Innovation and Information Economy has funded a number of exciting projects, including girls computer clubs like the Cairns based GIDGITS, to foster the ICT skills and career awareness of girls at high school under their ICT Skills Training and Role Models Program, known as i-STAR. Education Queensland launched Girls and ICTs Framework for Action 2003-04 in May, and schools can access innovation grants for projects to increase the participation of girls in ICT.

TAFE Queensland launched its 'Girls with IT, Smart Girls for the Smart State' web site project last month, and the Department of State Development has this year undertaken a series of 12 regional workshops for women—Smart Women, Smart Communication—which include opportunities for the development of ICT skills for business success.

Griffith University has proposed an exciting 12-month pilot project—Get SET, More Smart Women for the Smart State—which has been developed in partnership with Education Queensland and the Office for Women and will trial a range of strategies to encourage years 9 and 10 girls from two Brisbane high schools to consider a career in SET. It is anticipated that this project will commence in 2004.

The recommendations in my interim report for a new award program to showcase the achievements of women and girls in SET have been accepted. The inaugural Smart Women Smart State Awards were presented during Science Week and included four categories. I am very proud of the fact that three of the four winners were from far-north Queensland. In the secondary school students category Kate Smith from TAS in Cairns was the winner. The winner in the undergraduate students category, Amanda Fell, is from James Cook University. In the research scientist category there were two winners—Dr Joanne Aitkin, Director of the Centre for Research in Cancer Control, and Kym Runge, Senior Research Officer of Julius Kruttschnitt Mineral Research Centre. In the women in business category the winner was Dr Victoria Gordon, Managing Director of EcoBiotics Ltd.

The recommendations included in my final report are aimed at encouraging that commitment and holistic approach by changes in policy and practices within government and within the institutions where girls and women learn and work. If more women are to participate in SET industries, then as a priority we must increase the number of girls undertaking and succeeding in science, advanced mathematics and information technology subjects at school. I thank the Premier for the opportunity to investigate this important issue and to act as a catalyst for some exciting new initiatives.

Time expired.