

**Question on Notice  
No. 753  
Asked on 23 May 2007**

**MRS SCOTT** ASKED THE MINISTER FOR TOURISM, FAIR TRADING, WINE INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND WOMEN (MRS KEECH)—

What is the Office of Women doing to support women in their workplace negotiating skills?

ANSWER:

I thank the Honourable Member for her question and acknowledge the great work she does to support women in her electorate. The Queensland Government is committed to improving women's capacity to achieve economic security. One way to achieve this is through providing women with more flexible and accessible education and training.

In 2006 the Office for Women published an information paper which analysed the potential impact on women of the changes to federal industrial relations law under the *Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Act 2005*. The Paper identified a need to provide women with more skills and knowledge to assist them to gain fair treatment in the workplace, particularly those affected by the new legislation.

There have been concerns raised that, under Work Choices, Australian Workplace Agreements are able to be presented on a "take it or leave it" basis by employers, which undermines the basic notion that working conditions and pay ought to be agreed between an employer and employee after genuine negotiation. In this process, workers who lack the experience or ability to bargain are in danger of losing a range of conditions. Work Choices allows employers to refuse to negotiate with an employee's chosen representative by offering an individual agreement on a "take it or leave it" basis.

Young women, or women who are returning to the workforce after raising children, are particularly vulnerable in this radical industrial relations environment.

Studies show that men and women have widely different negotiating styles and women often lose out when it comes to bargaining for their terms and conditions. Women from culturally and linguistically diverse or disadvantaged backgrounds, who are more likely to be in casual, low paying positions with little bargaining power, may be even worse off.

The Office for Women has therefore partnered with the Queensland Working Women's Service to develop and deliver around the State a series of practical *Workplace Negotiation Skills* seminars for women. The aims of the seminars are to:

- increase women's knowledge of minimum conditions and rights;
- increase women's confidence in effective negotiation; and
- increase the likelihood of employers and employees negotiating mutually beneficial agreements.

As part of the seminars, participants are provided with take home workbooks which include a range of practical exercises and tips for successful negotiations, and participate in hands-on "role play" exercises presented as three workplace

negotiation scenarios. The workbooks include a planning tool to prepare for future negotiations.

Participants are also given information and contact details for relevant organisations including their union, the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, the Anti-discrimination Commission Queensland, and the Queensland Working Women's Service.

The Office for Women has developed additional information resources to assist women negotiate for better conditions in the workplace. This includes an information sheet on 'Women and work: understanding your rights' and a Workplace Negotiation Checklist.

*Workplace Negotiation Skills* seminars have been held in Arana Hills, Logan, Ipswich, Robina, Bundaberg, Toowoomba and Maroochydore. Feedback from participants has been highly positive. Additional seminars for this financial year are planned for Mackay, Rockhampton, Townsville and Brisbane city.