

Introduction to the Women's ACTIVIST Kit

In a profession and a union dominated by women, teacher unions must surely be setting the standards of equality. People, depending on who you ask, largely respond to this proposition in the affirmative, believing this to be true. However, scratch the surface of AEU Branches and Associated Bodies and you might find the processes, culture and orientation of our union still leaves much to be desired by its women members. Unless we are brave enough to acknowledge this and change our ingrained method of operating, we will be guilty of the same charge as so many other traditionally male establishments.

Teacher unions historically do have a much better track record of involving women (being the majority of the profession and union membership) than many others in the traditionally "blokey" union movement.

However, as the AEU Federal Women's Conference in 2003 (and many other local women's conferences in the past) found, women "do unionism" differently and have a varying set of obstacles that can often prevent them "doing unionism" at all – in the traditional sense.

BUT, unions should not interpret this as lack of interest, lack of capability, or lack of commitment by their women members. Instead, unions can perhaps look for ways to adapt to and incorporate the many and varied ways women can play an integral part of the union's work – this approach to affirmative action is LESS about quotas and positions in leadership (though important) but MORE about culture and breaking down outmoded union structures/operations.

The AEU Women's Activist Kit will provide Branches and Associated Bodies a starting point for encouraging women into areas of union campaigning as well as deconstructing what an activist means and how unions can facilitate women's activism better.

The Kit is to be used by women's officers, workplace union reps, throughout union training, women's conferences and other local networks of union women.

The 2003 Federal Women's Conference aimed for the Women's Activism Kit to become a catalyst for real change and empowerment for the majority of the unions' membership. How this can be achieved is limited only by imagination or real discrimination by those who might have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. We hope neither becomes an issue.

What's in it?

In this kit you will find 12 issues pertinent to women in education that can be used both as individual leaflets (with the issue on one side and suggested action on the back) or as a whole kit for the purposes of training/union conferences etc.

The issues covered are:

1. Wages and Conditions
2. Part-Time and Casual (Precarious) Employment
3. Employment Equity
4. Bullying and Personal Safety
5. Sexual Harassment
6. Human Rights in Schools
7. Barriers to Work and Family Balance
8. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education
9. Bi-sexual, Lesbian, Gay, Intersex and Transgender issues
10. Gender Equity
11. Mentoring and Promotion
12. Superannuation

In addition are explanatory papers that accompany the issues to help you justify why the kit is still needed, why members and unions need to give priority to gender equity and how your Branch or Associated Body can utilise the Women's Activist Kit in an ongoing way. They are "Why Women's Activism", "Contemporary Challenges for Women in the Education Sector and Education Unions" and "Using the Women's Activist Kit". These can be used as the basis for additional leaflets for members, journal articles or for union training.

The Women's Activist Kit has been devised as a broad shell resource for Branches and Associated Bodies to customise for local use, add to in time and incorporate into union activities as they see fit. As provided to Branches and Associated Bodies in CD form, it is for long term use but in the short term can also be used as a catalyst for local networks or a one off forum.

Please take direction from your Women's Officer, women's committee/network about suggested activities for your workplace and promotion of any broad based forums or activities that may be linked to the kit.

