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TRAINING AND RETRAINING

Recent comments by politicians have indicated that women's lack of involvement in "top" positions is because they do not have sufficient training to accept positions requiring responsibility and independent decision-making. Although training is not the only solution to overcoming discriminatory practices against women in the workforce, it can play a very important role in opening up additional vocational possibilities.

Most jobs are currently sex-divided and labelled "men's work" or "women's work". Such labelling leads to recruitment and advancement based on sex rather than on ability and gives rise to a situation where women remain in the low-paid, low-value, low-prestige jobs.

Education/training is an important factor in influencing women's workforce participation. Generally the higher the level of education, the greater the woman's commitment to the workforce - even with short breaks for childbearing and rearing. There is no direct correlation between the level of education and the workforce participation of men.(1)

APPRENTICESHIPS

Very few women take on apprenticeships other than the traditional female area of hairdressing. From 1968 to 1975 there were 212 female applicants for trades other than ladies' hairdressing, whereas 70,900 males applied.

Table I: NUMBERS UNDERTAKING APPRENTICESHIPS 1971*

	Females	Males
Cooking	3	280
Dental mechanic	3	65
Fitting and turning	1	3,944
Men's hairdressing	3	71
Radio	1	323
Signwriting	1	112
Pastry cooking	1	146

Although there are no longer any formal bars to women entering apprenticeships, women are not encouraged to enter typical "male" trades. One of the most common excuses used by employers not to take on girls is the absence of female toilets; yet most employers have at least one female on their office staff and there is no reason why female apprentices could not share the facilities provided for staff. In any case it is quite easy to hire a portable loo - many firms do.

Many employers are reluctant to spend money on training women, believing that they are uncommitted workers with high absenteeism and discontinuous service. Some unions have supported these views. One Victorian union associated with the building trades has stated that the reasons for women not being apprenticed are "obvious - (a) the work is too arduous for a woman and (b) conditions on the site are at times bordering on the primitive". Fortunately other more progressive unions favour apprenticeships for girls and oppose discrimination against women in job opportunities.

The current Federal Government says it is concerned at the serious shortage of skilled tradesmen and is considering bringing out skilled migrants from overseas to help meet the demand. Yet in Victoria 24.7 percent of apprenticeship applicants issued with certificates from the Industrial Training Commission in July 1975 have been unable to find employment.

The Cochrane Report recommended that: *"It would seem reasonable to encourage those beyond normal apprenticeship age to undertake the necessary training. Unfortunately in most skilled trades there are severe restrictions barring access to training beyond a certain age . . ."* (2)

* The Victorian Government no longer keeps sex-segregated statistics.

INPLANT TRAINING

Few opportunities exist for women to undertake inplant training. Women comprise less than half the number of men undertaking on-the-job training under the National Employment and Training Scheme (NEAT). In training programmes for public servants males far outnumber females in almost every area, particularly in the management and trainer-training courses.

A survey⁽²⁾ conducted by the Victorian Chamber of Manufactures showed that there is very little on-the-job training given to women. The survey showed that an average 10 percent of working mothers needed retraining but only 7 percent were actually retrained. In the footwear industry, for example, 23% of newly appointed working mothers were in need of retraining but only 15 percent were actually retrained. There was no retraining given in other industries, such as food, beverages and tobacco, which employ a large number of working mothers. Of course these figures take no account of the women who were unable to obtain any employment because they had had no training.

Unless women gain access to trade and other tertiary training, they will remain concentrated in the traditional female occupations - clerk, sales, typist, stenographer, clothing and textile worker, nurse and teacher - and will be employed at lower average levels of pay than men.

Why do women comprise only 6.1 percent of students in trade courses? Why do only 1.9% of women in the workforce have formal trade qualifications?

GROWING UP FEMALE

Factors influencing the occupational choices of women are largely social. They arise from the family, schools and the mass media. These all condition women to think of their future role in terms of wife and mother. They presume that jobs are just temporary fill-ins for women before they move on to the real purpose of their lives.

In many formal ways schools - from kindergarten level upwards - separate the sexes. Although school curricula are ostensibly the same for boys and girls, many more girls than boys are studying typing and shorthand, cookery and needlework. Typing and shorthand provide girls with sufficient skill to get a job before they marry and the domestic arts are supposed to provide for their role as wives and mothers.

Boys, on the other hand, study wood and metalwork, mathematics, economics, sciences and they stay at school longer than girls. In 1973 the Karmel Report found that: "*Except on the highest socio-economic level, girls left school earlier than boys. Being a girl is an educational disadvantage except when it is also associated with high socio-economic status.*"⁽³⁾

Other aspects of school life such as uniforms, sports, teachers' expectations, text books and vocational counselling limit girls' vision of occupations open to them. Girls are not being directed towards scientific, trade or technological career paths.

Table II: ENROLMENTS FOR TERTIARY COURSES

	Females	Males
Trade & technician	19.3	80.7
Nondegree tertiary	33.3	66.7
Bach. & higher deg.	38.3	61.7

Although girls achieve better HSC results than do boys, fewer girls go on to tertiary study (table II). Only onethird of all university students are female and the majority of girls favour humanities courses which are cultural rather than vocational. Job options tend to be narrowly defined in traditionally female areas - teacher, social worker, librarian etc. Girls who leave school early work as secretaries, hairdressers, sales assistants or in factories - i.e. "women's" work - characterized by low pay and status.

VOCATIONAL COUNSELLING

Careers in professions or skilled trades will remain closed to most women so long as schools do not consciously divert the interests of girls into other than stereotyped channels. Career guidance should aim to:

- (1) broaden girls' choices to include traditionally male jobs;
- (2) promote the recognition of women's abilities; and
- (3) counteract prejudice against the employment of women.

Women wishing to re-enter the workforce after a period of involvement with family responsibility face special problems. They need help in choosing and preparing for work outside the home. They need adequate childcare facilities available locally or flexible working hours, part-time or shared jobs. They need help to overcome the handicaps of their inadequate initial education and vocational training as outlined above.

LIFE-LONG EDUCATION

A number of important government-commissioned reports such as the Cochrane Report on Labor Market Training, the reports of the Australian Schools Commission and the Commission on Technical and Further Education have all stressed the need for recurrent education to be available to all people regardless of age or sex. These reports also examine the needs and particular difficulties faced by women if they wish to return to the workforce or take up some form of training.

The Cochrane Report states: "*Many women are anxious and uncertain about re-entering employment after a period of absence. Previously learned skills may be out of date or obsolete and may not match new career aspirations. They may need help in assessing their aptitudes and abilities, in deciding between various career possibilities, in techniques of job search and application, and in obtaining the remedial education and training to help overcome earlier shortcomings.*" (4)

The need for increasing the access of women to tertiary education and technical and further education has also been recognized by the Open Tertiary Education Report which states: "*Some persons from disadvantaged groups develop an interest for advanced educational work themselves . . . But many are not interested, partly because they are not aware of what higher education can offer them and partly because it has never occurred to them that higher education was an area in which they might be involved . . . the groups might well include women, and particularly women who left school at a time when prejudices against the secondary and higher education of girls were stronger than they are now.*" (5)

There is an urgent need for educational institutions to provide special programmes for adults to overcome their lack of motivation and lack of confidence in their own abilities. There are some daunting features about traditional educational institutions which need to be taken into account when preparing programmes for older people, i.e. certain psychological or emotional problems associated with being incorporated into classes with young people who have remained in the formal education process continuously.

The Second TAFE Report states that: "*All too frequently the internal atmosphere resembles the buildings themselves - school-like classrooms and school-like teaching methods deter many people who are not anxious to repeat their school experiences and do not provide an environment which makes learning easier and more enjoyable.*"

The Report recommended that:

- (a) *Special orientation or initiation courses should be designed to assist women to move into traditionally 'male' areas. Sensitive counselling services should be developed . . .*
- (b) *Time-tabling of courses should be more flexible. New patterns of work and study could lead to greater access to TAFE for women.*
- (c) *Child-minding facilities are an essential prerequisite for many women seeking TAFE . . .*
- (d) *There is an extensive need for special bridging and preparatory and refresher courses for women seeking to re-enter the workforce. In the case of migrant women these courses should contain an English language or bilingual component." (6)*

TRAINING GRANTS

Very few such bridging and refresher courses are available and many women are unable to undertake them because of lack of financial assistance while training. Both the NEAT and Tertiary Assistance schemes allowances are means-tested on a spouse's income.

Requirements under NEAT limit most tertiary training to the equivalent of one year's fulltime study and this requirement closes most possible occupational doors. Almost no counselling is available about labour market prospects after training.

Positive efforts should be made by unions and employers to ensure that equal opportunities are provided for both sexes. In Sweden the government provides special training grants to employers who train women for "men's" work or men for "women's" work. The United States Government will not contract with companies which discriminate against women.

WHAT UNIONS CAN DO

1. Support the development of community learning centres which provide non-institutional learning.
2. Reconsider their policy of restricting apprenticeship to young people and open up apprenticeships to adults to meet a demand for skilled tradespeople.
3. Press for the introduction of paid educational leave. This is especially important for people who have missed out on earlier opportunities.
4. Campaign against cuts in government spending which threaten the implementation of recommendations from government-commissioned enquiries associated with education and training. It is important that unions be aware of the reports mentioned above and take immediate steps to ensure that the recommendations are fully carried out.
5. In order to ensure women's fullest participation in union activity - guarantee that women receive equal access to trade union training, which should be planned so that women can attend courses.

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"Training cannot, of itself, solve all of the problems which continue to beset women in the workforce . . . (but) it is to be expected that, as opportunities for training and retraining are extended to cover a wider range of occupations, the traditional concentration of women into a narrow band of 'female' occupations will be broken down. However this is not simply a question of changing the attitudes of employers and trade unions towards the employment and training of women - women themselves must be persuaded to consider seeking training for jobs beyond such customary areas as office work, retailing, catering, nursing and clothing and textiles." (4)

REFERENCES

- (1) ILO Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Women Workers. Report VIII 1975.
- (2) Childcare Report. Victorian Chamber of Manufactures May 1974.
- (3) Report of the Australian Schools Commission May 1975.
- (5) Open Tertiary Education in Australia - Final Report of the Committee on Open Universities. Canberra AGPS December 1974
- (4) Report of Committee of Inquiry into Labor Market Training May 1975
- (6) TAFE in Australia. Second Report May 1975.