

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS IN THE WORKPLACE

Statement by Minister for Training and Workforce Development

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Minister for Training and Workforce Development) [9.03 am]: I rise to inform the house about a project that is driving cultural and organisational change in the public sector. Research demonstrates that better business and community service outcomes can be achieved with a diverse workforce. The state government is committed to ensuring that the public sector and its employees adequately represent the community they serve. A series of workshops is being delivered by the Public Sector Commission targeting human resources managers, decision-makers and recruitment panels on identifying and addressing unconscious bias in recruitment practices. At the second of three women's consultative forums I hosted in 2015, leaders across government, academia and industry identified unconscious bias in recruitment and promotion processes as one of the factors that can affect women's engagement in the workforce. Inclusive organisational policies and practices are needed to facilitate positive changes in attitude and behaviour towards women's return to, and retention in, the workforce. The Public Sector Commission is leading by example in providing unconscious bias training to senior public servants. Workshops are being held that explore the impact of bias, both conscious and unconscious, as well as promoting ways to identify bias. Decision-makers and human resource representatives are taught strategies to manage and reduce bias in their agencies. At this stage, one representative from each agency is invited to attend each workshop, with the understanding that they will share their learnings in their organisations.

More broadly, the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment is working with the Department of Local Government and Communities to progress actions from the series of three women's consultative forums. Actions have been developed to work towards improving women's workforce participation and their access to leadership opportunities. The percentage of women in senior roles in the WA public sector has steadily increased, with women in senior executive service roles rising from 20.5 per cent to 31.7 per cent between 2003 and 2015. The proportion of female members on all Western Australian government boards and committees also increased to 43.6 per cent in 2015. The state government is taking a lead role in promoting leadership and economic independence opportunities for women in Western Australia.