



Queensland Independent Education Union

“Non-government education works because we do”

Thursday, 7 February 2002

Paid Maternity Leave

Queensland Independent schools do not meet minimum International Labour Organisation (ILO) standards for paid maternity leave, with one in six schools offering no paid leave to staff.

While ILO standards call for a minimum of 14 weeks paid maternity leave, almost 85 per cent of the 500 independent schools in Queensland offer six weeks paid leave as their highest maternity leave contribution, less than half that of the ILO's minimum standard.

This six week paid provision by some schools recognises the six week period of compulsory maternity leave associated with confinement as stated in the Family Leave Awards Act.

This legislation sees a financial penalty imposed on those women who return to the workforce for career or financial reasons in that six week period.

“The negotiation of six weeks paid maternity was typically most difficult in all girls’ schools,” said Terry Burke General Secretary of Queensland Independent Education Union (QIEU).

“There is a curious paradox that girls’ schools which champion the education and career aspirations of women are reluctant themselves to put in place a provision which is quite fundamental to career orientated women,” Mr Burke said.

“For these schools it’s a financial consideration as they often have a large number of young women on staff to take advantage of their cheaper classified salary.

“It appears that these girls’ schools fear an outbreak of fecundity of their younger female staff if they implement a paid maternity leave provision.

“Payment during the six week compulsory leave period is really a justice issue and ought to be a community standard.

“Unfortunately many employers in the non-government sector still view the payment as some sort of ‘baby bonus’ and are reluctant to make a payment to a woman for ‘having a baby’.

Mr Burke cited the system used by some employers who split maternity leave payments as a real indication of a ‘baby bonus’ mentality and one clearly out of touch with community standards.

“These employers will only agree to make an initial payment of 2-3 weeks at the time of confinement and the female employee has to return to work for one or two years before receiving the balance of the six weeks,” Mr Burke said.

Media Release

Provisions for paid maternity leave in Australia fall far short of international standards.

In many developed and even developing countries women have lengthy paid maternity leave entitlements with three to six months being typical.

Mr Burke commended the Catholic employing authorities for their far sightedness in putting a six week paid maternity leave provision in place.

The largest Catholic employing authority, Brisbane Catholic Education, recognised in 1996 during the course of enterprise bargaining that the time had come for the six weeks of compulsory maternity leave to be paid.

Once they took the initiative other Catholic employing authorities followed suit.

Until recent enhancements for employees in government schools Catholic employing authorities had a more generous provision for paid maternity leave in relation to payment associated with scheduled school vacation periods.

“Australia has the peculiar paradox that while it has one of the longer entitlements to unpaid maternity leave of 12 months it has no regulated requirement that any of it is paid leave,” he said.

“The standard set by the ILO is 14 weeks of paid maternity leave and Australia has a long way to go to even approach this level of recognition of the needs of working women. “

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