

## Why women need to lead for better remuneration and working conditions

March 31, 2021

The UN theme for International Women's Day 2021 was "Women in Leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world".

This theme was selected to celebrate the tremendous efforts by women and girls around the world in shaping a more equal future. It also acknowledges that women bring different experiences, perspectives and skills and make invaluable contributions to decisions, policies and laws.

The culture of education systems and their management structures, wages, working conditions and organisational practices transmit strong messages about the value placed on the contribution and participation of women.

As I wrote about [women and leadership in the Journal of Professional Learning \(JPL\)](#) last year, Australia is not performing well when it comes to gender equity.



The World Economic Forum's 2020 Global Gender Gap Index ranks Australia 44th out of 153 countries (New Zealand ranks 6th) and has dropped five places in two years. According to the forum's report, gender parity has a fundamental bearing on whether economies and societies thrive.

From an historical perspective this is related to the way domestic and care work were not recognised or included in the early economic models. Activities traditionally undertaken by women such as raising children and feeding the family were not seen to create tangible goods that could be bought, traded or sold.

The early economists decided that such undertakings didn't contribute to prosperity and consequently that pronouncement has had a sustained negative impact on the value placed on, and wages within, industries where there are more women.

[The Valuing the Teaching Profession inquiry](#) has identified loud and clear that the work of teachers is undervalued and underpaid.

The last review into the workload and salaries of teachers took place in 2004 and since that time our salaries and status have declined compared with other professions.

Australia has one the highest rates of occupational gender segregation in the world and it's well known that when an industry is considered "feminised" the pay is lower.

This is exacerbated by the fact that unpaid care work is a significant part of Australian society and the economy, with the bulk of caring work undertaken by women.

More than 70 per cent of the teaching workforce in NSW are women so, given all of the historical factors and attitudes, it's no coincidence that the status and remuneration of the profession is less than it ought to be.

Moreover, the assumption that teachers will undertake additional work without commensurate time or pay is an extension of the "unpaid care economy" expectation and is unacceptable.

Among the key recommendations of the inquiry is a rise in salary of between 10 and 15 per cent to recognise the increase in skills and responsibilities of teachers.

Other recommendations refer to time, resources and staffing (including more permanent positions).

Women have a vital role to play in this campaign to increase the salary and status of the profession and to improve the working conditions for teachers. We must be active participants, and leaders, where decisions are being made.

For more information on [the inquiry](#) visit our website.