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Engendering Diversity

women's employment in the public service

The case for diversity in the workforce is well rehearsed. It has shifted over the years from arguments based on human rights and equality to a business case. A growing body of research suggests that diversity in senior management makes for better decision-making and is generally good for business, whether that business is in the public or private sector. Recent research covering 33,000 workers in 28 countries further suggests that employees who work in a strong climate of diversity and inclusion are three times more confident about their organisation's ability to perform than those who work in companies with low diversity, and that the level of

organisational innovation in such companies is four times higher than in those with a weak diversity and inclusion culture (Wichert, 2014). Other research has shown that greater diversity in an organisation's workforce makes for enhanced customer responsiveness, and in the case of the public sector a means of enhancing the legitimacy of government activity (Battison et al., 2009).

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Figure 1: Gender jigsaw Ensuring gender equality requires a system approach and understanding how the pieces of the puzzle fit together

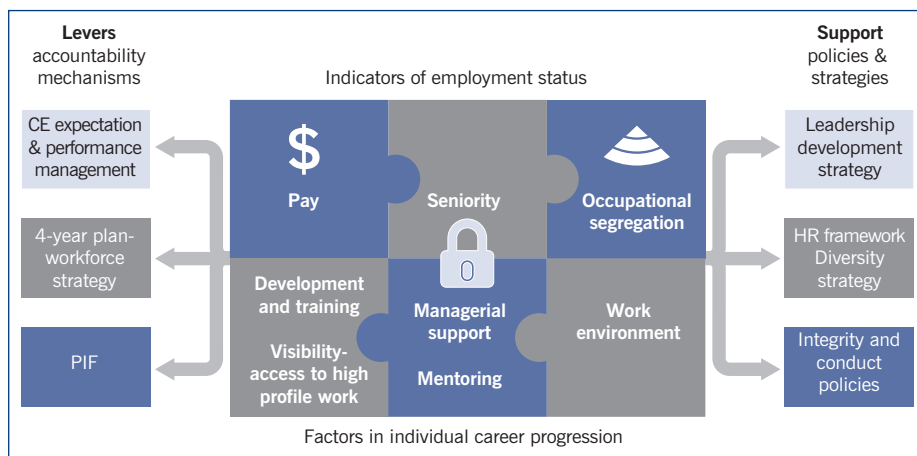
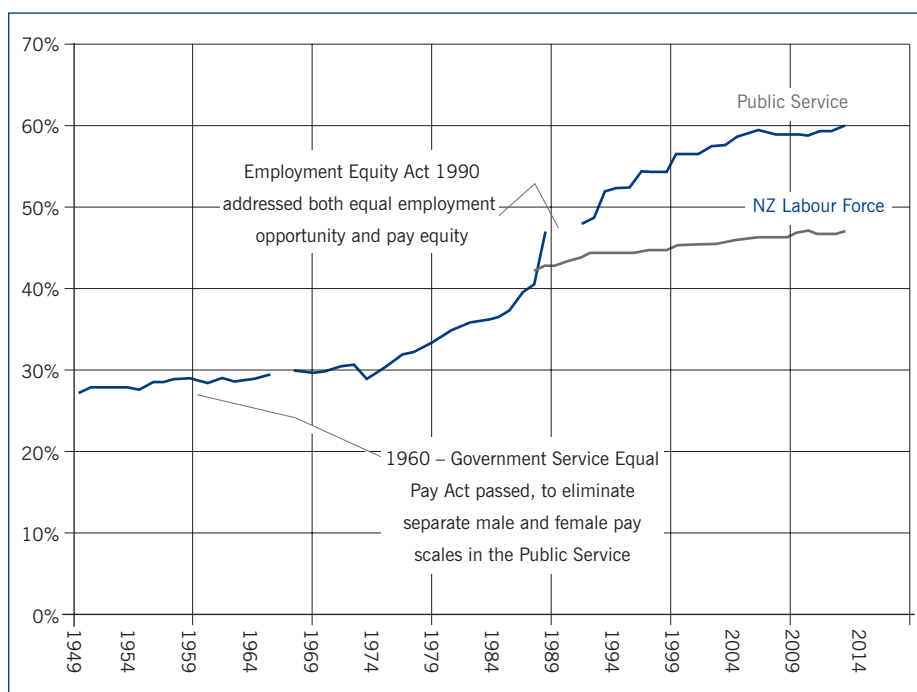


Figure 2: Females representation in the workforce 1949 – Present



A general goal of diversity can mask the differences between the various groups that have traditionally been disadvantaged in the workplace and hence the different strategies required to create a level playing field. This article concentrates on a subset of the diversity story: the state of women's employment in the New Zealand public service. The status and experiences of Māori and other population groups is not covered; inquiry into these groups is also warranted.

In 2000 the State Services Commission conducted the first Career Progression and Development Survey (CPS), primarily to investigate concerns of the then commissioner about the number and diversity of candidates, and in particular

women, putting themselves forward for chief executive positions (State Services Commission, 2002). The survey explored public servants' perceptions of their work environment and their career progression opportunities and sought to uncover any specific barriers to women's career advancement. The survey found that women had similar career aspirations to men. The factors deterring them from seeking higher-level jobs – apart from clashes with responsibilities outside work – were a perceived lack of experience and confidence to put themselves forward. It was argued that giving women more access to work roles and high-profile projects – opportunities mediated by managers – would enhance their readiness

for and access to more senior roles. The survey findings were said to serve as a 'benchmark for the future'. So, what has changed in the last 15 years?

The CPS was repeated in 2005 but then dropped. Despite not having the richness of the information generated through the CPS (quantitative and qualitative), we do, however, have significant gender-related workforce data collected through the State Services Commission's Human Resources Capability Survey (State Services Commission, 2014c) and its Integrity and Conduct Survey (State Services Commission, 2014d) that can be tested against the CPS benchmark. This article uses that data¹ to draw a picture of where women currently sit in the public service in terms of representation, occupation, seniority, pay, and perceptions of their career progression opportunities and work environment. We show that progress towards gender equality in the public service is slow, and may have plateaued. We argue that the relative autonomy of chief executives and their agencies – the vertical nature of the accountabilities inherent in our public management system and the variation between agencies this creates – may have detracted from policies to build equal opportunity across the public service workforce, and that a more system-wide approach to gender equality and other forms of diversity is required. We argue that the Better Public Services environment – with a greater emphasis on system-wide capability and a more joined-up approach to identifying and developing top talent – offers a window of equal opportunity and a chance to put gender back on the workforce development agenda.

Methodological framework

We use the 'gender jigsaw' framework shown as Figure 1 to describe the elements or indicators relating to women's employment in the public service. The boxes on the left describe the levers or accountability mechanisms where we would expect to see an emphasis on diversity if this is a system priority. The boxes on the right describe the strategies or policies required to enable and support gender and other forms of diversity.

Current state: the gender scorecard

Representation

Women's representation in the public service has doubled since the 1970s. Women now make up 60% of the public service workforce, compared with 47% in the New Zealand labour force overall (Statistics New Zealand, 2014a). Women's over-representation in the public service is the case in many countries, including the United Kingdom, Canada, and all Scandinavian countries (OECD, 2013).

Occupational segregation

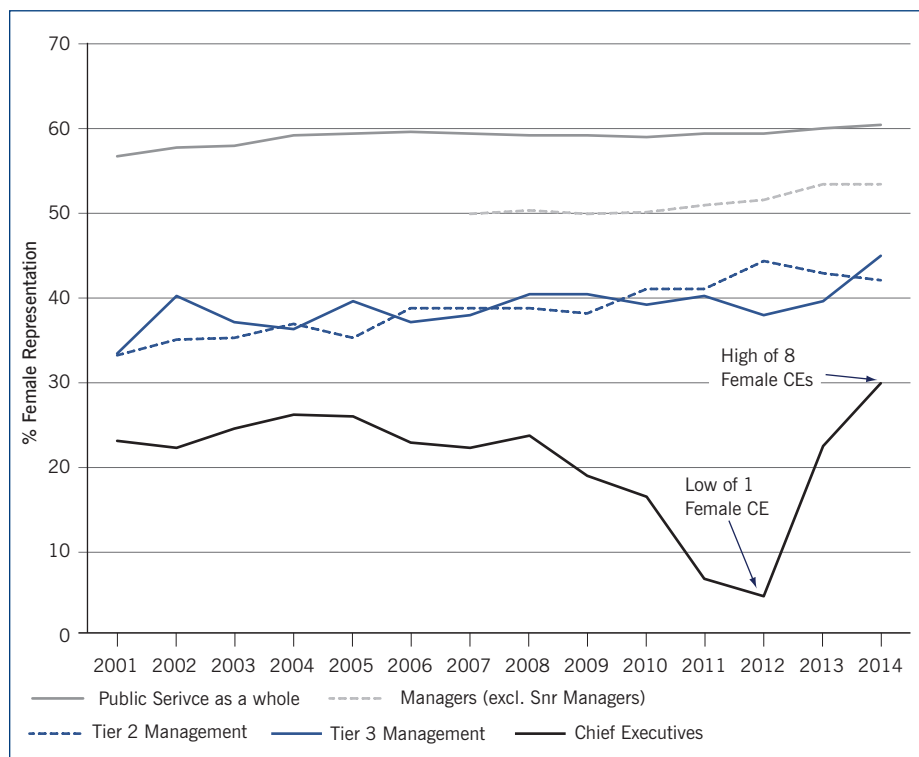
Despite increases in women's representation overall, occupational segregation has not changed significantly. Indeed, some female-dominated occupational groups, such as clerical, administrative and contact centre roles, are becoming more so. In the New Zealand public service, 81.2% of clerical and administrative workers are female (compared with an OECD average of 65%). Moreover, there is diminishing demand for these types of roles. The number of clerical and administrative staff has decreased by 20% over the last four years in the public service, a trend also in the wider labour market (Statistics New Zealand, 2014b). On the other hand, women's representation has not increased in occupational groups where the demand is likely to increase, such as ICT professionals, where fewer than a third of employees are women, a figure that has not changed over the last six years (see Table 1).

In the managerial occupational group, female representation has increased from around 40% in the early 2000s to 51% in 2014. The New Zealand public service rates well internationally in this regard: the OECD average is 40% (OECD, 2014). However, the trend in New Zealand, as in the UK and Australia, is one of gradual change and that upward trend is slowing. Moreover, while women are represented equally within management positions overall, as roles become more senior women's representation falls. While New Zealand women's representation in senior management rates among the OECD's best (second only to Poland), senior management positions continue to be male-dominated. Eight out of 29 chief executive positions are currently held

Table 1: Female representation in the public service, 2007, 2014

	% Female	% Female
	2007	2014
Clerical and administrative workers	81.0%	81.2%
Contact centre workers	70.0%	77.0%
Social, health and education workers	76.7%	75.6%
Legal, HR and finance professionals	59.7%	60.8%
Information professionals	56.1%	59.7%
Policy analysts	55.9%	56.2%
Managers	47.4%	51.3%
Other occupations	38.9%	47.9%
Inspectors and regulatory officers	40.9%	44.9%
Other professionals not elsewhere included	36.5%	43.9%
ICT professionals and technicians	31.8%	31.9%

Figure 3: Female representation at different levels of hierarchy in the public service, snapshot as at 30 June of each year



by women, and in tier 2 management women hold 81 out of 181 positions. Women make up 41.5% of the top three tiers of management in the New Zealand public service, compared with just under 40% of top management roles in the UK (37.7% of the senior civil service) and the Australian federal government (39%) (Cabinet Office, 2014; (Australian Public Service Commission, 2014).

Pay: mind the gap

The gender pay gap remains real across the New Zealand public service. The pay gap has decreased only slightly over the

past 15 years – from 17% to 14% – and has been stagnant at 14% for the last three years (State Services Commission, 2014c). By comparison, in the UK the pay gap across the whole civil service closed from 12.5% in 2010 to 9.9% in 2013 (Cabinet Office, 2014). Moreover, there is significant variation across New Zealand public service departments, with only one department at pay parity and several with pay gaps over 20% (Human Rights Commission, 2014). Men outnumber women by two to one in the ranks of public servants earning over \$200,000 per annum (around 240 men and 120

Figure 4: Gender pay gap and future projection based on the rate of change over the last 15 years

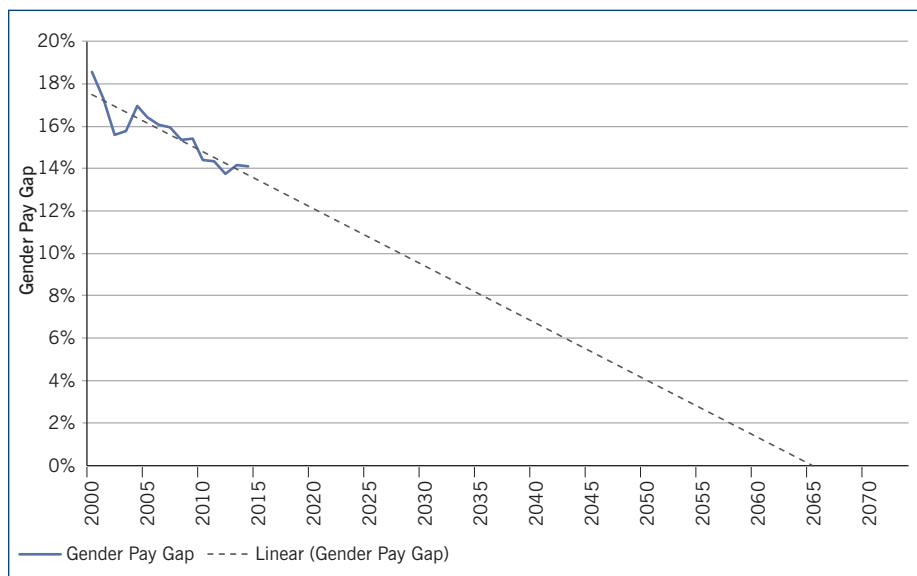
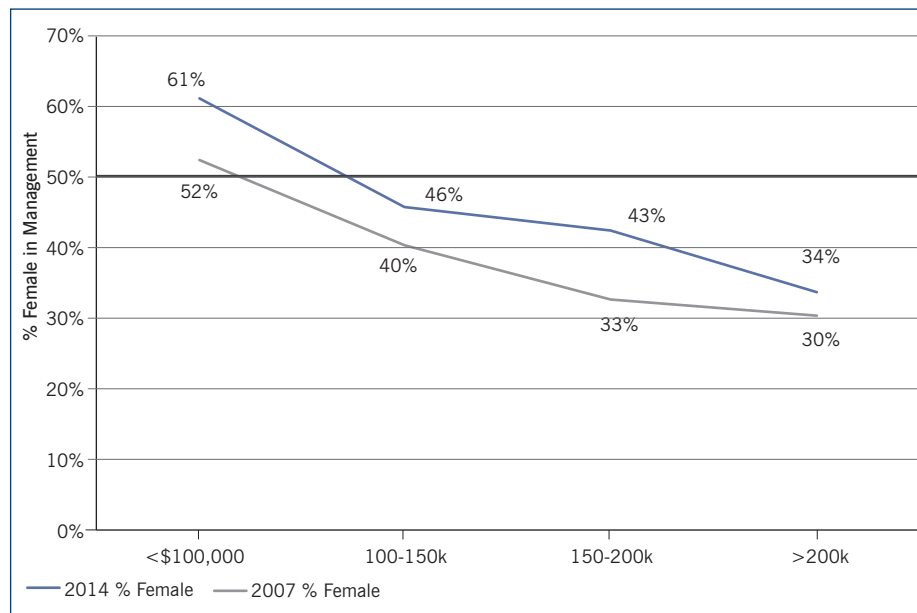


Figure 5: Female representation in management cut by salary groups



women). If the rate of change over the last 15 years were to continue, New Zealand would not reach pay parity in the public service until 2065 (see Figure 4).

The gender pay gap relates to a range of differences between men's and women's participation in the workforce, including occupation, seniority in their role, age, and the number of years they have been in the workforce. Time spent out of the workforce can negatively affect seniority and associated salary. However, the Human Resource Capability Survey 2014 report (State Services Commission 2014), shows that the largest factor in the size of the current gender pay gap

is occupational differences. Women continue to be over-represented in lower-paid occupations and at the lower levels of other occupational groups. Moreover, even controlling for factors associated with the gender pay gap, five percentage points of the pay gap remain 'unexplained'. This part of the pay gap is usually attributed to unconscious (or conscious) bias (Committee for Economic Development of Australia, 2013).

Even within occupations, such as the policy workforce, there are gender-based pay gaps (see box).

Factors used to 'explain' the pay gap are often used to 'excuse' it, and can

subsequently reduce the pressure to take action to reduce occupational segregation, support women to return to work following parental leave (and keep them connected while they are on leave), and enhance flexible working arrangements to enable women (and men) to balance their work and family responsibilities (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2013).

Life/work balance and public service roles

The Career Progression and Development Survey showed that in 2000 more than three-quarters of public servants worked more hours than they were employed for; dissatisfaction was expressed with high workloads and a culture where people felt compelled to work extra hours. The long hours required of very senior jobs were a deterrent to potential candidates, especially women. We have no current data on hours of work and subsequent impacts on life/work balance, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the public service work environment is more, rather than less, pressured. Moreover, women continue to do the bulk of household and child care work. The most recent Statistics New Zealand Time Use Survey showed that women perform almost twice as much unpaid work as men (4.3 hours per day compared with 2.5 hours) (Ministry of Women's Affairs, undated). When looking at getting women into more senior jobs, we need to examine the attractiveness of the job as well as building the talent pool.

Career development: progression opportunities and work experiences

The 2013 Integrity and Conduct Survey revealed relatively poor perceptions of career progression opportunities across the public service. Fewer than half of public servants (44% of women and 46% of men) agreed or strongly agreed that 'There are good opportunities within my agency to progress my career' (State Services Commission, 2014d). Recent international research has suggested that the top three factors accounting for women's promotions are: critical job assignments (high-profile work, stretch assignments, being able to show what you're made of); networking opportunities (having access to and being visible to senior leaders); and personally seeking opportunities for new

career options (Wichert, 2014). The first two of these factors are typically mediated by managers. As noted earlier, the CPS recommended that giving women more access to work roles and high-profile projects would enhance their readiness for and access to more senior roles.

While much research has argued that confidence is a factor in women not putting themselves forward for senior jobs – and women have subsequently been advised to ‘lean in’ (Sandberg, 2013) – results from the Integrity and Conduct Survey did not point to an ambition or ‘shrinking violet’ problem. Proportionately more women than men (100% of women and 96% of men) in tier 1–3 management roles responded that ‘I am confident that I have the leadership skills to do my job’. Ambition and confidence, at those levels at least, does not appear to be a significant issue. The CPS showed no gender-based confidence barrier at the lower management level either. Confidence questions are not asked of less senior staff in current surveys, so we cannot verify whether that is still the case.

In contrast, the 2013 Integrity and Conduct Survey showed small but statistically significant² differences between women and men on a range of factors related to relationships with managers, development opportunities and perceptions of fairness at work. Women were less likely than men to agree or strongly agree that:

- my agency takes steps to develop its talented people (43%/47%);
- promotions and appointments to new jobs within my agency are generally based on merit (46%/50%);
- my manager treats me fairly and with respect (81%/85%);
- my manager gives me the support I need to do my job (75%/79%);
- I have opportunities to be innovative in my job (66%/70%);
- my manager encourages me to build my capabilities and skills for my long-term development (67%/69%).

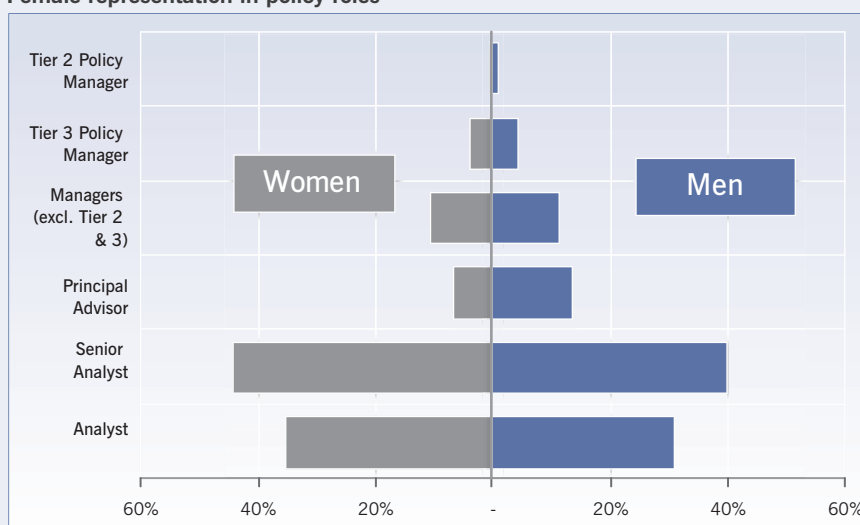
It is encouraging to see overall high rates of agreement on issues related to managerial fairness and support. Over 80% of both men and women agreed or strongly agreed that their manager treated them fairly and with respect. We

The Policy Workforce

In a recent speech to the Trans-Tasman Business Circle, the secretary of the Treasury likened the state sector to a ‘team that manufactures ideas to solve policy problems’ and argued that ‘we need diverse perspectives to produce the best ideas we can’. He called diversity (gender, ethnicity, of ideas) a ‘performance advantage’ (<http://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/media-speeches/speeches/diversityadvantage>). The main ideas machine in the public service is arguably the policy workforce. So how does it stack up in the gender equality takes?

Women account for 54.5% of the overall policy workforce. From Tier 4 managers and below women make over half of policy management and analyst positions, except at Principal Advisor/analyst level where women make up just over a third (36%) of those roles.

Female representation in policy roles



The pay gap is also evident in the policy cadre. At analyst level the gender based pay gap is 2%; it rises steadily with seniority up to 12% at Tier 3 and 16% at Tier 2.

lack robust cross-agency data on access to development and training opportunities and information on access to coaching and mentoring, which are also key factors associated with getting ahead in the workplace.

From EEO to diversity – central to departmental focus

The gender jigsaw framework shown above suggests that strategies or policies are required to enable and support gender and other forms of employment equality. If diversity is the desired future state, then equal employment opportunities (EEO) strategies are the means to that end. Several recent reports have suggested that there is patchy attention across the public

service in this domain. Only about half of respondents to the Integrity and Conduct Survey and proportionately fewer women than men (48%/51%) agreed that ‘Senior leaders make efforts to ensure equality and diversity in my organisation’, suggesting that diversity may not be a priority for many of our senior leaders, or, if it is, that they fail to communicate that priority. This perception mirrors the findings of research by Lucy Sanderson-Gammon who interviewed human resources managers in the public service: ‘Interviewees were asked whether they had specific gender diversity policies, processes or initiatives in place to address gender balance in their organisations. The majority had none, and those that did, provided anecdotes that indicated the

initiatives were not achieving the desired outcome' (Sanderson-Gammon, 2013). Similarly, the Human Rights Commission report *What's Working?* argued that, despite EEO obligations under the State Sector Act (section 56 'good employer' obligations, and section 58 requirement to develop, publish and report annually on an EEO programme), patchy performance and significant differences between public service departments in terms of EEO were evident. That report delivered bouquets and brickbats. In terms of gender equality, it singled out the Department of Corrections for its efforts to improve opportunities for women staff (through gender-balanced

progression of equality and diversity in their departments.

Lever: accountability mechanisms

So what are the current levers to ensure chief executives and their agencies live up to their statutory 'good employer' responsibilities, and to what extent does this include a focus on equality and diversity? As part of the specification and review of chief executive performance, the State Services Commission expects chief executives to ensure that their agencies have organisation cultures that value diversity, and also to help develop leadership capability across the system

on diversity, namely: 'How well does the agency develop and maintain a diverse, highly engaged workforce'? In short, therefore, the key accountability mechanisms do indeed all set expectations for chief executives and their departments related to diversity. At a whole-of-system level, EEO performance is reported through the annual report of the Human Resources Capability survey, where there is commentary on the status of each EEO group.⁴ Human Resources Capability survey data has been recently made more accessible to departments, enabling them to generate more in-depth analysis of their own results and to compare those results against those of other departments. The Human Rights Commission has criticised the lack of critical analysis of departmental EEO progress by central agencies, although it could be argued that the commission itself plays an important role in this context.

Better Public Services reforms: a window of equal opportunity?

The Better Public Services reforms implemented over the last two–three years have emphasised a move away from a focus on individual agencies towards a greater focus on the overall system, and how the government machine can collectively add value to the lives of New Zealanders. This is evident in the Better Public Services results (substantive policy targets), functional leadership (system leadership and developing capability in business functions) and people capability (developing current and future leaders).⁵ This more systemic focus offers an opportunity to build diversity into leadership and people capability strategies that apply across the public service (and the wider state sector). The *Public Services Briefing to the Incoming Government* – the first time chief executives have collectively briefed an incoming government – asks (but does not answer the question) 'whether our public service workforce is diverse enough to meet the challenge of successfully providing citizen-centric services for more diverse communities' (State Services Commission, 2014f). The State Services Commission's *Briefing to the Incoming Minister of State Services* also includes references to diversity,

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teams, access to mentoring and leadership programmes) and highlighted the results of those efforts, including a negligible pay gap.

The EEO 'monitoring' capability at the centre has also reduced over time. In the late 1980s State Services Commission had an EEO team of around six staff with a mandate to review departmental EEO plans and provide promotion activities. By the time the first CPS was released in 2002 there was just one full-time equivalent working on EEO. The focus of those policies has also changed over time, from EEO to diversity. In 1996 the state services commissioner convened a steering group of chief executives, resulting in the strategy document *EEO Policy to 2010* (State Services Commission, 1997); this was subsequently reviewed in 2007, leading to the Equality and Diversity policy, a one-page policy document requiring the integration of equality and diversity into departmental planning and reporting (State Services Commission, 2008). It emphasised individual chief executives' accountability for the

to contribute to increased diversity in the leadership pool for the state sector.³ Central agency guidance on departmental four-year plans similarly includes expectations related to diversity. That guidance advises agencies that four-year plans 'should include a description of how your workforce strategy supports your strategic direction and ... should cover at a high level your agency's strategy and intentions around:

- change leadership
- organisational culture and engagement
- diversity
- workforce capacity
- capability, and
- costs' (State Services Commission, 2014b).

Central agencies review four-year plans, with the State Services Commission taking the main responsibility for commentary on workforce capability, including the appropriateness of the department's stated diversity intentions.

The Performance Improvement Framework (State Services Commission, 2014e) also includes a lead question

in relation to senior leadership roles – ‘We will embed a recruitment strategy into the state sector that supports an increasingly diverse leadership cadre who are representative of New Zealand’ – and in relation to wider workforce strategies (or future leaders) – ‘We are building a system leadership pipeline that is both more diverse and more able to respond to the needs and expectations of New Zealanders’ (State Services Commission, 2014a). The commission’s relatively new Leadership Capability Development and Deployment (LCDD) team (led by the chief talent officer) confirms that it is applying a diversity lens across the LCDD programme (personal communication). That programme is also looking at building and developing the pipeline of new public servants and is responsible for the running of career boards and developing and appointing people to ‘key positions’ (Pratt and Horn, 2014).⁶ These will be crucial mechanisms for identifying and developing senior leaders and for ensuring that women, and other historically disadvantaged groups, get appropriate exposure and development support.

Future human resource capability reports will show whether the embedded ‘diversity lens’ (as opposed to a separate ‘diversity strategy’) approach to equal employment opportunities is successful. This approach contrasts with recent overseas developments, such as in the United Kingdom, which has recently launched a Talent Action Plan (Cabinet Office, 2014). That plan includes a range of concrete steps towards diversity (including gender and other EEO groups), with permanent secretaries being held accountable for results, including an obligation to nominate ‘board-level diversity champions’ in each department. Moreover, where individual departments lag behind the average, permanent secretaries and chief executives will be required to ‘set out to the Cabinet Secretary and Civil Service Board a clear and proactive plan for sustainable improvement’. The plan also makes

diversity learning part of the formal induction process for all civil servants, and ‘all managers will be required to do Unconscious Bias e-Learning’. The Civil Service Board will review progress against the plan, on both a whole-of-civil-service and individual department basis, every six months. It will be interesting to see the impacts on women’s employment in the UK civil service.

Conclusions

If the desired future state is diversity at all levels of the public service, then we have a way to go. Progress towards gender equality in the public service is slow, and slowing down. Neither equal opportunity nor diversity will happen automatically. What gets measured matters, and vice versa. The Better Public Services results have shown that reporting against goals is a powerful motivator for attention, action and change. In all aspects of reform we need to know where we are heading, how we are going to get there and how we will know when we have arrived.

We appear to have most of the statutory and accountability mechanisms in place, and enough information to piece together and benchmark the state of women’s employment in the public service. While women make up the majority of public servants, disparities remain in terms of seniority, occupational segregation, pay and career progression opportunities. We cannot continue to ‘explain’ those disparities as being the result of a lack of confidence or of personal choices (of occupation, to take time out for children, to balance work and family life). Instead of telling women to ‘step up’ or ‘lean in’, we need to ‘lean back and listen’ in order to develop specific strategies – in agencies and across the system – to enable and support women’s career progression.

More analysis of the current state (this article provides only a limited snapshot), a more comprehensive ‘vision’ of the future state, and better details about the direction of travel from one to the other is required. The Australian federal government and the British civil service

regularly survey their staff to monitor and promote engagement, leadership capability and career progression (Australian Public Service Commission, 2014b; Civil Service, 2013). A repeat of the Career Progression and Development Survey, or similar, would give us a fuller picture of women’s work expectations and experiences and where efforts to remedy barriers to advancement would be best directed.

The Better Public Services environment holds the potential to improve employment opportunities for women and other EEO groups via a more joined up whole-of-government approach to leadership and capability underpinned by a recognition that the public service needs to be more representative of the population it serves. Moreover, a focus on results and collective impact requires leaders, at all levels, who have expertise in collaboration and relationship and network management (CEB, 2014) and are skilled at bringing people together to get things done. We will increasingly need more ‘host’ (collaborative) as opposed to ‘hero’ (authoritarian) leaders (Leadership Development Centre, 2013). The private sector is increasingly cognisant that ‘[t]oday’s more open and collaborative organisations typically require management behaviours which women are more likely than men to adopt’ (Wichert, 2014). If the public service is to continue to attract top talent and remain an ‘employer of choice’ for women, then a more deliberate and targeted effort is required. Better Public Services provides a window of equal opportunity for putting gender back on the agenda and for reaping the business benefits this might afford.

1 Largely drawn from the Integrity and Conduct Survey.

2 Tested to $p < 0.05$ level.

3 Personal communication.

4 With the exception of people with disabilities.

5 <http://www.ssc.govt.nz/node/8893>; <http://www.ssc.govt.nz/bps-functional-leadership>; <http://www.ssc.govt.nz/developing-future-leaders>.

6 <http://www.ssc.govt.nz/developing-future-leaders-key-positions>

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