

The Work and Family Policy Roundtable (WFPR) Election Evaluation, August 2013

How the major parties rate against *The Work, Care and Family Policy Election Benchmarks* issued in March 2013

<http://www.workandfamilypolicyroundtable.org/>

In March 2013, the WFPR, made up of 30 academic experts from 18 universities, released its **2013 Election Benchmarks**.

They identified 8 priority policy areas in the current election context: childcare; paid parental leave; job security, flexibility and working time; pay equity; workforce participation; superannuation; care for the ageing; and workplace leadership.

Paid parental leave has been a major topic in the current election. There is strong evidence in support of improved paid parental leave. However, good work and family policy is about more than good parental leave: it must also respond to the intensive demands of early childhood that reach beyond the moment of birth – important as it is – to ensure quality care for children and also address the work and care challenges associated with an ageing population.

PAID PARENTAL LEAVE (PPL)

The WFPR supports increasing the length of PPL. The WFPR also supports encouraging employers to top up the existing Government minimum wage payment level to full replacement earnings, as some already do. The WFPR also supports the payment of superannuation while on PPL. The Coalition PPL scheme – which, if adopted, would start in mid-2015 – is superior to Labor's existing scheme on all three grounds. However, as proposed, its funding requirements are large and uncertain, and some details of its implementation are unclear – for example, how existing employer PPL schemes will be treated.

In the current context, a balanced work and family policy mix is required, one that recognises the pressing issues around childcare and workplace flexibility, as

well as the need for PPL and increased paternity and partner leave.

CHILDCARE

Quality, affordable childcare is a work and family priority in view of the increasing rate of mothers' participation in paid work. Both major parties share the policy objective of further increasing this participation rate; the lack of childcare currently inhibits women's participation and concern about its affordability is acute. The WFPR recommends increasing direct government support to lift both wages and the quality of care, and streamlining childcare payments.

The Coalition supports a Productivity Inquiry into the affordability of childcare. While an inquiry is necessary, it will not address the immediate challenge of affordability, nor will it ensure good quality care.

Labor has promised \$300m to boost the wages of childcare workers, to continue the roll-out of its National Quality Standards for childcare, and to increase support for out-of-schools care by \$450m, allowing schools to either extend and improve their existing program or to establish a new program. Labor's policy on childcare is superior to the Coalition's, but more is needed to address significant childcare challenges.

SECURE, FLEXIBLE JOBS & FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKING TIME

Secure, decently paid, flexible jobs with access to paid leave are a critical work and family support.

The Coalition states that they will make minimal change to IR policy in its first term, when it will hold a Productivity Commission review into IR.

Labor has been more active, broadening the right to

request flexible working arrangements to more workers who need them, including workers with caring responsibilities (which will assist those caring for aged family members), parents of school-age children, workers with disabilities, mature age workers, and those experiencing family violence. It has also required that, in changing awards, the Fair Work Commission must take account of the need to provide penalty rates.

Neither party has addressed the issue of insecure work, the lack of paid leave for those who work in an ongoing basis in casual jobs, or the lack of an appeal mechanism for those refused a request for flexibility.

PAY EQUITY

The gender pay gap has widened in Australia with important implications for gender equality, productivity, workforce participation and retirement equity. Labor has now established a Pay Equity Unit in the Fair Work Commission. The Coalition has not made any commitments on pay equity.

SUPERANNUATION

The Coalition has committed to providing superannuation in its PPL scheme. However, it would abolish Labor's superannuation contribution tax rebate of up to \$500pa which especially assists women and low paid workers.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

See the full text of the WFPR Benchmarks, and the Roundtable's membership and principles at <http://www.workandfamilypolicyroundtable.org/>
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