

BACKGROUND:

The proportion of senior female staff at La Trobe University increased for the fourth consecutive year in 2006, co-inciding with an increase in the number of staff taking advantage of flexible work practices, and simultaneously a substantial reduction in inquiries and complaints of harassment and discrimination.

Among the top-down equity policies driving the University's Award-winning environment are selection and recruitment processes requiring that at least one female is included on every employment selection panel. Such meetings may not be held outside the family-friendly work hours of nine-to-five.

La Trobe's Faculty Deans are required to ensure female representation on all major faculty committees is not less than 50 per cent, and that both sexes are represented on all university committees.

As a member of the senior management team, the University's Pro Vice Chancellor (Equity and Student Services), Dr Kerry Ferguson, visibly "walks the talk" - chairing not only the University's Equal Opportunity Committee but also its Senior Women's Network.

Dr Ferguson is also the Chief Investigator of a University-funded longitudinal study currently in progress on the career paths of academic women, which sets out to identify issues affecting female academic staff. The results of the study will further inform the University Operational Plan.

As a leading employer of women academics, La Trobe's current gender balance of academic staff is surpassed only by three other Australian tertiary institutions - Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, the Australian Catholic University and Notre Dame. The percentage of women academics at La Trobe as at March 31 2006 was 49 per cent, with 50 level E professors and 85 male, against between 56 and 58 per cent per cent women academics at the three other leading institutions.

While women at La Trobe do not apply for promotion in the same numbers as men, when they do they enjoy an exceptionally high success rate – 100 per cent of those seeking promotion from Senior Lecturer to Associate Professor or Reader or Principal Research Fellow in 2005 succeeded, as did 100 per cent of those seeking promotion from Associate Lecturer to Lecturer, and 90 per cent of those seeking promotion from Lecturer or Research Fellow to Senior Lecturer or Senior Research Fellow.

A higher proportion of women than men have been provided with career development at La Trobe through higher duties arrangements. La Trobe also provides a Diploma in University Administration that is particularly attractive to women staff. The university has provisionally approved research funding to evaluate the impact of this diploma on women's career development.

Flexible work practices include job sharing, flexible seven-hour working days in a 35-hour working week, a compressed working week, a 48/52 arrangement offering additional leave entitlements without pay; paid time off in lieu; an extended work

hours scheme; a pre retirement scheme enabling staff to wind back to part-time work up to five years prior to retirement; seasonal or part-time employment and fractional employment.
