How did significant movements contribute towards women's equality as citizens in Australia during the twentieth century?

Introduction

One of the most important developments in Australia during the twentieth century was the gradual movement of women towards full citizenship through social, economic and political changes.

This unit will explore a number of movements that promoted these changes. But first, how much do you know about women and politics in Australia over the last hundred years? Try this quiz and then check your answers as you work through the unit.

Quiz: Women in Australian politics

1. The first women in Australia to gain the vote were those in South Australia in 1894. True False
2. Women were able to vote at the first Commonwealth election in 1901. True False
3. The first federal woman parliamentarian was elected in: 1903 1919
4. Women currently make up what percentage of the total membership of the Federal Parliament? 15% 23% 38% 43%
5. The number of women in the current federal ministry (2002) is: 1 3 5 9
6. The first woman federal cabinet minister was appointed in: 1912 1947 1975
7. The first woman to lead a political party did so in: 1933 1943 1963 1986
8. All Aboriginal women gained the right to vote in: 1902 1912 1924 1967
9. The first woman to be elected to the House of Representatives was: Enid Lyons Vida Goldstein
   Joan Child Nellie Powell
10. The first woman to be elected to the Senate was: Selina Siggins Annabelle Rankin
    Ivy Wedgwood Dorothy Tangney

1 What are we commemorating in 2002? Is it something to celebrate?

In a sense, it doesn't necessarily matter whether you know the specific facts in the quiz or not. The more important point is whether you are aware of the origins and development of women's contribution to the growth and development of political, economic and social change in Australia, and the movement of women towards full citizenship.

2002 is the centenary of female suffrage in Australia — in 1902 women were given the right to vote in a Commonwealth election. How was that milestone achieved? Did it apply to all women? And have women been able to influence the political, social and economic landscape in Australia since, and if so, in what ways? As one female Commonwealth parliamentarian has said:

It is the right and heritage of all Australians to know more of the lives of the women who went before them. Indeed, we cannot accurately know our present if we do not know our past.

(Senator the Hon. Rosemary Crowley, Images of Women, Women and Museums Conference Proceedings, 11-13 October 1993)
In 1902, the Commonwealth Parliament, composed entirely of men, passed the Commonwealth Franchise Act which gave the vote to adult women. This had only previously been achieved by New Zealand (in 1893) and South Australia (in 1894, to come into effect in 1895). Such a move was a daring political and social innovation at the time.

One hundred years later, women represent 25 per cent of the Commonwealth Parliament and between 12 per cent (ACT) and 27.5 per cent (South Australia and Tasmania) of state and territory parliaments — well short of their proportion of the eligible female voting population.

Women have been premiers and chief ministers — but only in three of the eight states and territories. Women have been in federal cabinet — but never Prime Minister. Women have led minor federal political parties — but never one of the three major parties.

So while 2002 marks the centenary of a great political achievement for women, the past one hundred years have not necessarily led to an equal expression of full citizenship for women, especially in the political life of the nation.

This unit examines some of the advances women have made in the social, economic and political life of Australia, some of the limitations on those advances and some of the reasons for the successes and failures.

1 Women and equal citizenship — the movement to win the vote

Full citizenship in a society involves three areas of rights:

- **Civil rights** — these are rights related to individual freedoms, such as freedom of speech and religion, freedom of contract, the right to own property, the right to just treatment.
- **Political rights** — these include such things as the right to form and join associations, the right to stand for, and be an elector of, democratic legislatures.
- **Social rights** — these include such rights as the right to security, ensured through welfare provisions.

Most women in nineteenth century Australia lacked many of these rights.

The lives of women revolved around raising families and domestic work. Women were only entitled to a limited education and property was in the name of fathers and husbands. Even women’s bodies were not their own — birth control was illegal and a woman often had to be sexually available to her husband whenever he wanted. Divorce was difficult even if the husband was clearly at fault and an abused wife had little legal protection.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century many women began to believe that the only way to bring about change was to influence the law-makers. Without a vote however, how could women do this? The answer was — to win the right to vote!

Curriculum Guide: Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this article, students will be better able to achieve these learning outcomes that are common to most states’ and territories’ Society and Environment Key Learning Area:

| Time, continuity and change (History) | • Describe and explain lasting and changing aspects of Australian society and environments  
| | • critically compare representations of people, events and issues  
| | • explain the ways core values of Australian society have endured or changed over time  
| | • use knowledge about the past to explain contemporary events.  
| Culture and identity | • Analyse core values of groups and societies.  

The National Museum of Australia opened in March 2001 as part of the celebrations for the Centenary of Federation. The Museum employs a fresh and exciting approach to Australian history, culture and environment.

Each National Museum unit of work in STUDIES asks students to consider the stories and concepts behind Museum themes, objects and images, and can be used with students in Society and Environment, History, Geography and English.

By 1902, women had won a great victory — they were able to vote in the first Commonwealth elections. The right to vote in most state elections soon followed.

How did they achieve this landmark victory? Look at the following sources and identify the different factors that helped women to gain the vote.

Source A Some leading women involved in campaigning for female suffrage

**Edith Cowan (1861-1932)**

Edith Cowan was born in Western Australia. In 1894, she became president of the Karrakatta Women’s Club which encouraged women in education and public speaking.

She was active in improving the conditions of unmarried mothers and their children and in setting up nurseries for the children of working women.

She became the first woman elected to an Australian parliament when she won the seat of West Perth in 1921.
Emma Miller (1839-1917)

Born in England of a radical family, Emma eloped with Jabez Silcok and eventually emigrated to Brisbane in 1879. After his death in 1880, she supported her four children by sewing, often up to 70 hours a week.

In 1890, she was involved in the formation of a women's union, campaigning for equal pay and votes for women. During an 1891 Royal Commission, she gave evidence as a shirtmaker of the exploitation of women workers.

From 1894-1905, she was foundation president of the Women's Equal Franchise Association, where she campaigned for the female franchise.

As an international socialist she opposed Australia's involvement in World War 1.

Mary Lee (1821-1909)

Mary Lee was born in Ireland, and came to Adelaide to nurse her sick son, who subsequently died.

She worked to protect young women and to improve their conditions by raising the age of sexual consent to sixteen. She was later secretary of the Women's Suffrage League.

In 1894, her efforts, and those of others in the organisation, resulted in the granting of the vote to South Australian women. The League had wanted women to have the right to vote, but had not pressed for the right for women to stand for parliament. However, an amendment to the suffrage bill to extend the right of women to stand for parliament, moved in the expectation that it would make the bill too radical and would be thrown out, was surprisingly passed — and South Australian women gained far more than they had expected.

Rose Scott (1847-1925)

Rose Scott was born in New South Wales and was educated at home while her brothers were sent to school.

In 1891, she became secretary of the Womanhood Suffrage League. Like Mary Lee, she tried to have the age of consent for girls raised from 14 to 16, but without success.

She later became a leader in the Women's Political and Educational League and campaigned to change the laws relating to inheritance.

Vida Goldstein (1869-1949)

Vida Goldstein was born into a progressive family, where education of girls was valued and encouraged. In her early life, she worked for prison reforms and for anti-sweating laws.

In 1900, she became secretary of the Women's Federal Political Association, campaigning for the women's vote.

In 1903, she stood as a candidate for the Senate, not expecting to win, but to take advantage of the platform it gave her to try and influence people's ideas.
Source B  Some arguments for women’s rights

Here are some extracts from a speech by Rose Scott in 1892 in favour of women gaining the right to vote. Read it and answer the questions that follow.

Could a Government confer any greater honour on itself, any greater benefit to its children, than on bestowing on women equal rights with men?

Can it be good for the boy of 21 to feel that he has a voice in the Government of the country and his mother has none? … His father teaches him to be manly … to battle, to fight and to carve for himself a place in the world … His mother would teach him to cultivate his affections, to be unselfish, generous and moral. Is not hers the higher teaching? … Yet her influence in a practical way is solely confined to home, and too soon a boy is taught by his country’s laws & the ways of other men to despise and look down upon the woman’s teaching and influence in all business matters, and to think that his heart is meant only for the domestic circle, and that there it must be left, while he goes out to his business, or his Politics with a hard head and a stone for a heart …

In fact, gentlemen, to raise women is to raise yourselves.

… If women are anxious to see a higher Christian life in our Government let them not despise the legal means of increasing their influence … If she wants to do battle with the demon drink, if she wants to put better wages into the hands of the toiling mothers of families, let her ask for the vote. If it is refused her now on the ground that she is a woman … let her ask for it because she is a citizen of a great nation whose power is as wide as the whole earth & whose duties & responsibilities are commensurate with that power & because she is bound to help not only the material prosperity but the moral growth of her fellow citizens.

In a Government like ours where the basis of representation is so immensely extensive the whole business of legislation is carried on by pressure, the pressure of each represented class & party to get its grievances redressed to make its interests prevail. The non-represented classes necessarily go to the wall …

To be one of a represented class is a very much greater thing than merely to drop a paper into a ballot box. It means to be able to insist upon attention to the wants of that class & to all other matters of public importance which may be deemed deserving of attention.

Fellow Women … it is our duty to obtain the vote in order to help all women — yes and men also — who earn their living who suffer thro’ unjust laws or who dwell in misery and degradation …

It is against every Principle of Democratic Government that men should legislate entirely for women or that any class should legislate entirely for another class …

(Quoted in James Walter and Margaret MacLeod, 2002. The Citizens’ Bargain: A Documentary History of Australian Views Since 1890, UNSW Press, Sydney, pp. 81-4)

4 Identify the paragraphs in this speech where the basis of the argument is about:
• justice
• equality
• national self-interest
• women as ‘civilising agents’
• using the vote as a step to achieve other reforms
• democracy
• countering the arguments of the opponents of the women’s vote.

5 Would any of the issues discussed by Rose Scott still be of concern to women today? Explain your reasons.

Some democratic landmarks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>AUST</th>
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<td>1856</td>
<td>1858</td>
<td>1856</td>
<td>1877</td>
<td>1901</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1858</td>
<td>1872</td>
<td>1856</td>
<td>1901</td>
<td>1857</td>
<td>1893</td>
<td>1902</td>
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<td>Payment of members</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>1886</td>
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<td>Aboriginal female suffrage</td>
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<td>1965</td>
<td>1895*</td>
<td>1903*</td>
<td>1909*</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>1962</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


(* In theory — in fact very few Aboriginal people were able to exercise the right, or to even know it existed. See John Chesterman and Brian Galligan, 1997. Citizens Without Rights, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, chapters 5 and 6)

The situation today

Women won the vote in Australia one hundred years ago — do they now have full equality as citizens in this area? Look at the following evidence and decide for yourself.
A 1938: ‘Day of Mourning’

In 1938, Australia celebrated the 150th anniversary of the landing of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove — the start of modern Australian history.

Not everybody saw the occasion in the same way, and not everybody celebrated. In fact, for some it was a ‘Day of Mourning’.

Pearl Gibbs (1901-83) was an Aboriginal leader known also as Gambanyi (in Ngiyamba) and the first Aboriginal woman to broadcast Aboriginal issues on the radio.

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**Source a**  Women as proportion of members of parliament and cabinet ministers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parliament</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females as % of total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House of Representatives</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Commonwealth</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>25.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>22.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>464</td>
<td>22.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Government</td>
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<td>5960</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women as mayors</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>613</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATSIC Regional Councils</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source b**  An evaluation of women’s political influence

A hundred years after Federation not all the aspirations of the suffragists have been met. Women have taken up the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and have entered government, overcoming a range of obstacles. They have not, however, succeeded in making the kind of difference to politics which was both desired and feared at the time of Federation, when it was thought that women would be a purifying influence on public life and create a new and more moral world.

(Centenary article — Women and Government in Australia, 2001. Year Book, Australia)
Ladies and Gentlemen, I am an Australian, I have lived here all my Life. I love my country and I love its People. I wish something more for them than Riches and Prosperity. I wish for their greatness and nobility. A country must needs be great that is Just. A country must needs be Noble that believes in women and trusts them gladly with every Liberty which it has already given to its men. I would have my country all this, I would have it the Noblest country upon Earth. The Purest, the Most Free, Just, loving, generous and unselfish. And do you think it can attain to all this without the direct aid of its women? …

We aboriginal women are intelligent enough to ask for the same citizenship rights and conditions of life as our white sisters. Those of my race who understand our economic conditions have not a great faith in what the white man promises to do for us. We know that we must carry on the fight ourselves.

As the grand-daughter of a full blooded aboriginal woman, and having lived and been with them as much as I have been with white people, I realise the cruel and unjust treatment, also the starvation that my beloved people, the aboriginals, exist under. I myself have been on compounds that are controlled by the Aborigines’ Protection Board of NSW: the aged and sick, no proper education for the children — is there any wonder that my aboriginal people are broken-hearted and discouraged at such shocking conditions!

Ah! My white sisters, I am appealing to you on behalf of my people to raise your voices with ours and help us to a better deal in life […] Surely you are not so callous as to ignore our plea. Those of my people living in the more civilised parts of Australia are not asking for the stone of anthropology — but for practical humanity, for the opportunity to feed our children properly, to educate them; in a word to grant them all the rights and responsibilities of DEMOCRACY.


She grew up around Yass in NSW and later in the Brewarrina area. She attended a racially segregated school, and worked as a private domestic in Sydney.

In the late 1920s, she assisted other Aboriginal domestic workers. Then in the 1930s, she organised strikes among Aboriginal pea pickers at Nowra. She became a major figure in the Aborigines Progressive Association and drew large crowds to her speeches.

She was involved in organising the Day of Mourning on 26 January 1938.

In later life she continued her activism in justice issues.

Here are some extracts from a speech she gave in 1938.

1. Citizenship involves civil, social and political rights (see page 2). Identify at least one example of each of these mentioned in the speech.

2. Gibb’s appeal is to her ‘white sisters’. Why did she feel it was necessary to make an appeal to non-Indigenous women for help?

3. Do some further research on the ‘Day of Mourning’ event. How important do you think this event was in raising the awareness of Australians to the plight of Indigenous Australians?

4. Here are some questions about that referendum and what it achieved. See what you know about it. You might also like to ask your family what they know about it. (The answers to the quiz can be found in the text which follows.)

The 1967 Referendum on the Commonwealth’s Aboriginal powers:

- Gave citizenship to Aboriginal people. True False
- Gave the vote to Aboriginal people. True False
- Meant that Aboriginal people could be counted at the national census. True False
- Gave equal rights to Aboriginal people. True False
- Gave the Commonwealth the power to make laws specifically for Aboriginal people. True False
- Took away the states’ rights to make laws for Aboriginal people. True False
- Outlawed racial discrimination. True False
- Gave Aboriginal people land rights. True False

B 1967: A full and equal citizenship?

As you have seen in the above example, one of the major flaws in the development of political and civil rights in Australia was the continued denial of significant citizenship rights to Aboriginal men and women.

That situation changed in 1967, when a referendum was put to the Australian people to create an equal Australian citizenship.
Look at your answers to the short quiz. Discuss what the answers should be.

What qualities did Faith Bandler show?

How and why would these qualities be important in a person who is a campaigner for change?

What role did women play in improving the rights of Indigenous Australians?


One such campaigner was Faith Bandler. She was a Pacific Islander born in New South Wales in 1923, who left school at 15 to become a dressmaker’s apprentice and cook. During World War II she spent three years in the Women’s Land Army. In 1951 she was part of a dance troupe invited to visit Bulgaria, then under communist rule. On their return, the members had their passports confiscated, sparking in Faith an interest in politics, and a drive to achieve peace.

She became a member of the Australian-Aboriginal Fellowship which worked to remove discrimination against Indigenous people. This culminated in the passing of the 1967 Referendum. The Referendum did not actually give any citizenship rights to Indigenous people. What it did do was to allow Indigenous people to be formally counted at the census, which had the effect of bringing about a change to electoral boundaries to reflect the distribution of Indigenous people in Australia. More significantly, it gave the Commonwealth power to make laws affecting Indigenous people, and thereby override any discriminatory state laws.

Speaking of the 1967 campaign in later life, Faith Bandler said: ‘I gave ten years of my life to work to change a discriminatory federal Constitution. Those changes turned the tide for Indigenous Australians. Finally there was access to schools that were not segregated, opportunities for higher education, and the establishment of councils to oversee Indigenous health, housing and arts. The 1967 Referendum ... returned dignity to us as a people and, for me, this is the core of respect for human rights.’

Another of the gratifying aspects of the campaign for Faith Bandler had been the rallying together of Indigenous people. ‘Many young Aborigines who have never opened their mouths in public before, are now appearing on television and radio interviews and making speeches to church, trade union and factory gatherings.’

However, the Commonwealth initially did little to use this power. It was not until the 1980s that all traces of states’ citizenship discrimination against Indigenous people were removed.

5 Look at your answers to the short quiz. Discuss what the answers should be.

6 What qualities did Faith Bandler show?

7 How and why would these qualities be important in a person who is a campaigner for change?

8 What role did women play in improving the rights of Indigenous Australians?


The situation today

Indigenous Australians have full legal equality as Australian citizens. There is even an area of rights, Native Title, which is available only to Indigenous people.

However, there is a difference between having equal rights in theory, and being able to exercise them fully in practice. In many areas where people’s quality of life are evaluated — such as health, education, the criminal justice system and employment — many Indigenous Australians are over-represented in the most disadvantaged areas.

Further research

Research the statistics for these aspects of citizenship, and the different solutions that are offered to help address the problems faced by Indigenous Australians.
For the first half of the twentieth century women were employed in limited areas, and for much lower wages than men.

During World War II a shortage of men forced many businesses and government agencies to employ women in jobs that had previously been reserved only for men.

Many historians argue that it was this unforeseen effect of the war, leading to an increase in women entering the workforce, and into jobs from which they had previously been excluded, which enabled women to gain a greater citizenship equality.

Look at this collection of evidence about women and employment during the war and decide if you agree with this view.

**Source a** Images of women during war

**Source b** Some women’s comments

a After the war was over there was a gradual dismissal from the factories. The men came back and took the jobs that the women had obtained and women went back to the usual women’s jobs — secretary, typist, shop assistant, waitress and so on. Some women had been given responsible jobs in quite managerial roles, and they were excellent at it, but the men just took over the jobs that the women were doing so well. The same thing happened to me because as the war ended our organisers were dismissed and finally there were just two — a man and myself — and I was pressured: the man had a family and it was only right that he should continue, and would I resign. They knew that if I’d stood I would have won it because I’d won every other. So we were really pressured out of our jobs.

b When the war was over, I went back to being a clerk in the Bourke Street store of Coles. I didn’t mind because it was made perfectly clear to us when we were made managers that it was for the duration of the war only. You’ve got to remember that women were second-rate employees and we didn’t argue with it. Women just weren’t given these opportunities and we didn’t worry about it, it was accepted in those days.

c The war had a tremendous effect on the liberation of women. To be important, that was the thing: to be absolutely necessary for the running of the country, that women should work, and this is not a light thing and it couldn’t possibly be forgotten once the war was over.

d We can get out of those slacks and put on one of those vogueish floral cottons with crisp muslin frills, and dress our daughter in a snip of the same. Hand in hand we can skip down the drive and forget the half-ton of wood dumped there waiting for a husband to come home and cart it into the garage.

e It was a bitter pill for ladies who had decided on careers…. People who had responsible jobs in banks were to become shop assistants behind stocking counters in Department stores.

### Source c  
**Men’s and women’s employment, 1933/1943/1947**

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<thead>
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<th>Occupation</th>
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<th>1947</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Primary production</td>
<td>19 747</td>
<td>554 119</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Mining and quarrying</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>68 161</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Manufacture, building and construction</td>
<td>137 779</td>
<td>728 392</td>
<td>15.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>D Transport and communication</td>
<td>11 732</td>
<td>212 161</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Commerce, property and finance</td>
<td>112 335</td>
<td>339 057</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Public administration and professional</td>
<td>107 102</td>
<td>125 092</td>
<td>46.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G Entertainment, sport and recreation</td>
<td>3 972</td>
<td>20 278</td>
<td>16.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>H Personal and domestic service</td>
<td>190 024</td>
<td>52 354</td>
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<td>TOTAL A–H</td>
<td>582 902</td>
<td>2 099 614</td>
<td>21.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>I Armed Services</td>
<td></td>
<td>44 700</td>
<td>842 160</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL A–I</td>
<td>58 902</td>
<td>2 099 614</td>
<td>21.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>J Inadequately defined industries/employed</td>
<td>65 601</td>
<td>129 829</td>
<td>33.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL A–J</td>
<td>648 503</td>
<td>2 229 443</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Not in workforce</td>
<td>2 614 184</td>
<td>1 123 098</td>
<td>69.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(80.12) (33.49)</td>
<td>(77.66)</td>
<td>(26.74)</td>
<td>(81.03)</td>
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<td>TOTAL A–K</td>
<td>3 262 687</td>
<td>3 352 541</td>
<td>49.3</td>
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</table>

### Source d  
**Nominal and real wages, male and female (average weekly wage)**

This is a way of comparing the purchasing power or value of money during different periods of time. The figure of 100 is set for one year, then other years are measured against this standard. If the figure is below 100, that means the value of the money is less for that year. If it is over 100, then the value is greater than it was in the base year, and people can purchase more with the equivalent amount.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Money Wages</th>
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<td>1945</td>
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Describe the affect of war on women’s employment.

What happened to women’s rates of pay?

What attitudes are represented here about the changes that occurred?

How do you explain this variety of views?

What was the main role of women in Australian society before the war, during the war and after the war?

Look back at the historians’ claims mentioned at the start of this section. Do you agree with them? Explain your reasons.

Source e  Average weekly earnings

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<td>Full-time adult employees — Average weekly total earnings</td>
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<td>660.60</td>
<td>683.50</td>
<td>714.50</td>
<td>750.60</td>
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Further research

Look at the most recent census statistics that you can find for women’s occupations today. Are there still areas in which women are disproportionately represented or under-represented? If so, suggest reasons why this over- or under-representation might exist. Are there occupations where women continue to be paid less than men?

According to the 2001 census, more girls than boys are now completing Year 12 and going on to university studies. What impact do you think this situation will have on female employment in the future and on the state of female citizenship as a whole?

4 Women and equal citizenship — The feminist movement

Many women had fought for greater social, political and economic equality for Australian women during the twentieth century, but in the late 1960s a new movement, ‘feminism’, gave this trend a mass base and a major impetus.

One of these main popularising influences was the publication in 1970 of Germaine Greer’s The Female Eunuch, which challenged the stereotypical roles often applied to women. From 1972 the Women’s Electoral Lobby (WEL) directly challenged male politicians to publicly declare their policies towards gender-relevant issues.

There are many varieties of feminism, but in its most basic sense it refers to full equality of opportunity for women in any aspect of life.

In practice it involves equal pay, job opportunities and conditions, education and access to promotion and power.

The feminist movement also focused attention on some of the structures in society that acted against women being able to gain equality — including child care facilities, family-friendly work policies, access to women’s refuges for battered women and women’s health centres.

Many changes to the social and economic equality of women in particular were introduced by the Commonwealth Parliament. Important milestones included:

1973 — Maternity Leave (Australian Government Employees) Act

1974 — Minimum wage extended to women through the Arbitration Commission

1975 — First Sex Discrimination Act (South Australia)

1986 — Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Act

1986 — Affirmative Action (Equal Opportunity for Women) Act

Many popular television shows, and magazines such as Cleo and Cosmopolitan, began to change the popular image of women — increasingly showing them as competent and powerful decision-makers. However, many others continued to show women (and men) in limited, stereotypical ways.

Not all gains have come without associated costs. Striking the balance, for example, between traditional mothering and home-maker roles and the demands of full-time work is difficult, and made even harder by the recent controversy about the possible effects on young children of providing outside child care at an early age. In some instances professional women in their 30s and 40s feel that they have sacrificed their opportunities to bear children for the sake of a career.

Look at the following documents on feminism and answer the questions that follow.

The first document illustrates one woman’s attitude to and assessment of feminism in her life.
Kate Lundy

Kate Lundy was elected a senator for the ACT when she was 28. Writing in the book *Talking Up* she says:

*My interpretation of feminism is very personal … My life experience is one of manual work, motherhood and politics. I never anticipated a representative role in the Australian Parliament. I am not a lawyer, academic or businesswoman. My formal qualifications consist of a Year 10 Certificate, scaffolder's licence and hoist driver's ticket. I have managed to balance a family and work, and this balance is my measure of personal achievement … I asked myself what the hell I was doing, contemplating election to federal parliament … Diversity strengthens Australian society and if our parliaments are to be truly representative, this diversity must be reflected there. I came to the conclusion that if a semi-educated labourer with two young children can be elected, then this was a positive reflection of our democratic system.*


1. What are the main elements of feminism that Kate Lundy discusses?
2. How has her feminism had an effect on her behaviour?
3. How has her behaviour had an effect on Australia?

The next two documents show differing attitudes towards feminism and its role in young women’s lives and identity. Compare the two cartoons.

Cartoon 1 Horacek

*There’s more to finding your own vision than just getting the right sunglasses*

My god – the world needs more social justice as well as 100% UV protection


Cartoon 2 Wright

*Like German women, I haven’t worn colours since the Gulf War. AND THIS IS WHAT I’VE CHOSEN TO WEAR IN THE EVENT OF A FULL SCALE AMERICAN ATTACK ON IRAQ – A CLASSIC LITTLE BLACK DRESS. I LOVE IT!*

*You’re a politically aware woman, and you’ve got great legs. You’re concerned about the prospect of global war. AND THIS IS WHAT I’VE CHOSEN TO WEAR IN THE EVENT OF A FULL SCALE AMERICAN ATTACK ON IRAQ – A CLASSIC LITTLE BLACK DRESS. I LOVE IT!*

*Makes such a statement – you’re serious, and yet sexy. You’re a woman with ambition.*

*You haven’t always been this politically active – I used to wear just any old thing.*

*I haven’t always been this politically active – I used to wear just any old thing.*

*Me too – remember those times I wore the filmmakers campaign – how inappropriate were these things.*


4. Discuss the two cartoons and compare their:
   - content (the details of what it shows)
   - target (who it is directed at)
   - style (how it presents the content, through images and words)
   - message (the key point it is trying to make, or the idea it is putting forward).

5. Why do you think different attitudes exist towards feminism in our society?

The fourth document is a contribution to a current issue — paid maternity leave.
The Mother of All Mistakes


The first mistake was letting women read and write. They got to find out what was going on — an error the medieval world did not make. It got worse — women wormed their way into universities and chained themselves to railing until the embarrassment of arresting nice middle-class women became too much and they got the vote.

Not that many women would have noticed much change in their lives over the first half of last century; as the 1907 Harvester judgement made clear, the mark of a prosperous nation like Australia was that it could afford to keep its women at home. Justice Henry Bourne Higgins, that childless * Non Conformist reformer, considered that the basic wage was one that allowed a man to support himself, his wife and three children …

The Next Big Mistake was the Second World War. Middle class women worked. They took jobs in unprecedented numbers and they liked it. After the war was over and they were told to put their aprons back on, they did so with great reluctance and often not at all. Women began to invest in their careers by identifying themselves with their work, and by investing time and money in training and education. Women started to assume the right to participate in the paid workforce. At that stage, if they worked then their family needs were not to get in the way. No accommodation was necessary for working mothers. It was part of an unspoken secret pact to enter the club of paid work.

Then the mother of all mistakes; the contraceptive pill. Women were suddenly able to control their fertility; to choose to have children. The world has not been the same since.

The fertility rate dropped sharply in the 1960s as a direct response to contraception and despite the still-prosperous nature of Australia. When John Gorton needed more public servants and removed the ban on married women working, the fertility rate dropped sharply again. It has been dropping ever since …

But women are persistent creatures. They seem to quite like the idea of having children and, armed with increasing evidence that community and family life are at risk, women are now asking that the workplace meets them part way. Women are still prepared to be superwomen, but they expect personal respect and some accommodation for the awesome responsibility they bear for the care of their families …

But combining reproduction and work responsibilities is a lot harder. Many women — especially professional women — move through their working lives free from discrimination until they start their family. Then, to the shock of many a bright eyed and confident young woman, who thought all this anti-discrimination stuff was old hat and the war was won, reality hits.

6 What is the social issue that the opinion piece is presenting?

7 The piece is written in an ironical style. Explain what this means, and give an example in your explanation.

8 Why, according to the writer, is this issue one which means that pregnant working women have fewer citizenship rights than others who are not pregnant?

9 What different possible solutions are raised?

10 Which solution does the writer seem to favour?

You can follow this issue by accessing the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) website for the issue discussion paper and other classroom materials. Go to <www.hreoc.gov.au> and follow the links to Sex Discrimination.

That is where paid maternity leave comes in. As part of a suite of policies to ease the burden of this combination of responsibilities, to enable each mother to exercise her choice of work and family balance. In OECD countries other than the United States and Australia, paid maternity leave is provided by governments. This recognises both the social import of maternity and the inevitable discrimination that would result were payment required of employers. In the developing countries of Asia, Africa and the Americas, it is mandated for employers, with little or no contribution from government. Australia, with no national provisions for paid maternity leave but with good unpaid leave provisions and public service arrangements, is in a category all its own.

When my Paid Maternity Leave discussion paper is released (within the next month) I hope it provides the material for an informed public discussion of these issues.

References

1 The Mother of All Mistakes

2 Others countries such as the United Kingdom have, for example, had a female prime minister. What difference would it make to the influence of women on social, economic and political change in Australia if we were to have a female prime minister? Are there other factors that would be more important in bringing about greater long term social, political and civil rights for women? Explain your ideas.

3 Conclusion

1 This unit has asked you to consider the development of citizenship rights of women in Australia over time through social, economic and political change. This is an important aspect of our national history. Prepare a display or presentation focusing on some significant developments in citizenship equality in Australia. You may want to:

   • illustrate the development
   • explain it
   • analyse and evaluate it
   • celebrate it
   • develop suggestions for taking it further forward.

2 How important is it to mark the centenary of female suffrage in Australia in 2002? Do you agree that ‘not all the aspirational goals of the suffragists have been met’?

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5 You can investigate this idea more fully in the article looking at women in front line combat occupations in the article on page 3 of STUDIES of Society and Environment magazine 3/2002.
It's the team spirit you'll like!

I felt the comradeship and team work of the Air Force the minute I joined. It helps along every job we do, smooths out difficulties, and makes one proud to share in it. Of course I appreciate the many practical privileges of the Air Force—the good pay, free home leave travel passes, and the fact that clothes, board, dental, medical and hospital care are free, and so on, but it's the companionship of this grand group of women I like—just as you would! Why not join us—you can find out all about the Air Force from the R.A.A.F. recruiting centre or local R.A.A.F. committee.

Good Pay
Deferred Pay Nest Egg
Fare Concessions
Free Clothing Kit
Free Medical and Dental Attention
Repatriation Benefits
Valuable Training
Will help you obtain well-paying positions after the war

Enlist today in the
AIR FORCE
WOMEN'S AUXILIARY AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

Obtain full particulars from the nearest R.A.A.F. Recruiting Centre or your LOCAL R.A.A.F. COMMITTEE, at once. If you cannot call, write for illustrated folder: "Everything you want to know about the W.A.A.A.F."
Many a modern Grandmama could do the job you're doing now. Get a Victory job. You will find it the most interesting job you've ever done.

Only then will you be doing your full share... you will be turning out equipment to speed the end of the war. Don't hesitate. Every day you put it off may see the loss of precious lives at the Front.

Come in to the National Service Office in your suburb or town. Talk it over with another woman specially trained to help you select the right job.

There are jobs packed with interest—
- In War Production Factories.
- In Essential Foods Production.
- In Australian Women's Land Army.

THE WOMEN'S SERVICES AUXILIARIES ALSO NEED RECRUTS
LIKE GERMAINE GREER, I HAVEN'T WORN COLOURS SINCE THE GULF WAR.

AND THIS IS WHAT I'VE CHOSEN TO WEAR IN THE EVENT OF A FULL SCALE AMERICAN ATTACK ON IRAQ - A CLASSIC LITTLE BLACK DRESS.

I LOVE IT!

IT MAKES SUCH A STATEMENT - YOU'RE SERIOUS, AND YET SEXY.

YOU'RE A POLITICALLY AWARE WOMAN, AND YOU'VE GOT GREAT LEGS.

YOU'RE CONCERNED ABOUT THE PROSPECT OF GLOBAL WARFARE, AND YOUR BOTTOM DOESN'T LOOK TOO BIG.

I HAVEN'T ALWAYS BEEN THIS POLITICALLY ACTIVE - I USED TO WEAR JUST ANY OLD THING.

ME TOO - REMEMBER THOSE HEELS I WORE DURING THE FALKLANDS CAMPAIGN - HOW INAPPROPRIATE WERE THEY?

J. WRIGHT