

MEDIA RELEASE

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**AUSTRALIAN
WOMEN
LAWYERS**

Law firms challenged to end discrimination in graduate starting salaries

Australian Women Lawyers (AWL) today challenged Australia's law firms to commit to paying male and female graduate lawyers the same starting salary within the same firm.

A report recently released by the Federal Government's Gender Workplace Equality Agency (GWEA) reveals that in 2012, the median starting salary for male graduate lawyers was 7.8% more than for female graduate lawyers. The gap blew out by 4% since the previous year.

This discrepancy in pay rates exists despite women comprising a majority of law graduates (currently over 60%) for many years.

Kate Ashmor, President of AWL, said in response to GWEA's report:

"Paying a male graduate lawyer a starting salary higher than a female graduate lawyer in the same office is sexist and blatantly discriminatory. There is no reason why a male and female graduate lawyer within the same office should be paid different starting salaries. Each lacks experience in practising as an Australian lawyer, and each must yet learn invaluable skills in their trainee (formerly articles) year, including client interviewing, time management, marketing and networking.

One wonders whether the discrepancy revealed by GWEA is largely due to unconscious biases within many law firms, and the fact that on average only around 20% of partners (the ultimate salary decision makers) are female.

AWL challenges all law firms to publicly commit to paying their graduates the same starting salary. Understandably there will be variations between capital cities and the sizes of law firms, but firms cannot in good faith market themselves as being 'employers of choice' for women unless they abolish discrimination in graduate starting salaries."

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