



ICAEW

100 Years of Women as Chartered Accountants

I have been a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England in Wales (ICAEW) for 37 years. My reason for deciding to qualify still stands today. My parents had 6 children and a large number of foster children. My father had worked as an accountant for a company in the motor parts industry in Birmingham for over 25 years when it was taken over by another business. My father was made redundant as the accountant from the other business was a Chartered Accountant and my dad wasn't qualified. I decided that I would never let that happen to me, and felt that it was more important for women to have a professional qualification so that they are taken seriously in their careers.

Having spent much of my career working in a sector that is held in even lower esteem in Australia than in England - local government - my qualification is even more important now I work for myself as a management consultant and need to convince potential clients of my credibility!

I receive the bi-monthly magazine of the ICAEW, **Economia**, and the current edition is celebrating 100 years of women being admitted as Chartered Accountants. I began to reflect on my own journey and how things stand in Australia in comparison to the UK.

On the cover there's a quote: 'I was the only woman among about 50 articled clerks. Some companies were surprised to see a woman and rang the firm to make sure they hadn't sent the secretary by mistake'. I experienced this too while training in Sheffield. When the audit team turned up at a business the directors assumed I was the 'comptometer operator' and spoke to the oldest man in the team regardless of me being the team leader!! I used to send the men on the team to hang out in the Gents to see if they could pick up any gossip the directors or staff were talking about. Maybe men's toilets don't operate like the Ladies!!

As a member of the local Yorkshire and Humberside District Society board I remember suggesting to the ICAEW that, since Chartered Accountants are in the personal service industry, trainees should be trained in customer service skills. They were so horrified by this lack of respect for the profession that they made me sit on the national Enterprise Group to shut me up!! That has been the story of my life since.

A couple of the articles in **Economia** also chimed with me. In 'Tales from the Frontline' PriceWaterhouseCoopers' Cardiff office senior partner Lynn Pamment explains her career choice of specialising in the public sector – *'I did a mixture of work in my early years, then specialised in the public sector when I was a senior manager. I've always been interested in working with organisations that make a difference to society. Public sector entities are complex businesses but they are ultimately service organisations delivering good for society.'*

Sonia Chandaria Tillu, leader of the finance function at Byrne Dean, talks about the skills needed today. *'The skills a finance leader needs today include empathy, the ability to manage a variety of stakeholders, and courage (to do what's right, not easy or convenient). I rely on all of these.'*

Unfortunately, when I have demonstrated the courage to do what's right, not easy or convenient, it hasn't been well received in NSW and has seen the end of my local government career with its *'underlying bias towards the status quo'* i.e. boys' clubs.

I have not worked in the finance industry as a Chartered Accountant in Australia so cannot speak for progress towards *male-female parity* in that sector, but the situation is dire in local government in NSW where, in 2018, only 29% of Mayors are women; only 14% of General Managers are women. 91% of councils have less than 50% female councillors. In the 20 years since I first worked in local government in NSW the only time the % of women who are General Managers of Councils has risen markedly was when the number of councils was reduced by the NSW Government from 152 to 128!!

Given that the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales could probably be described as one of the more conservative organisations in the world I find myself admiring the editorial quoted below. If these views were expressed in Australia would the author be shunned as a dangerous feminist?

The editorial says:

'One century ago, talented accountants were denied the right of chartered status purely on the basis of their gender. Women today have many more opportunities and influential role models at the highest level of organisations.....But we cannot allow complacency. While inequities related to career opportunities and pay for women exist then there is still considerable work to be done.

We need action, not words, to make the genuine adjustments to attitudes and behaviour that will result in real equality. The transformational step change that's required to reach male-female parity will not be achieved by empowerment seminars or women-only networking groups alone. The underlying bias towards the status quo means that changes on a voluntary basis will only ever be marginal. Is it time for a wide-ranging programme of measurement and reporting on all aspects of diversity and equality? The positive transformational effects of such a programme would outweigh the additional costs.

The global economy is poised in a precarious position – unleashing the full potential of all, rather than half, the population seems to be a sensible way to help it out.'

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