

## Merit Document Summary

Explanation of a merit document

A merit document needs to fit into a specific legal framework. It is essentially the story of your job, the reasons it is female dominated and the factors leading to it being

undervalued in both pay and other conditions. Below we have taken the Teacher Aide

Merit document and created a fictional character, Maria. Maria and her mothers' role are based on key factors that come from the Merit document for Teacher Aides. Their story is structured around Principle Two of the Principles for the Implementation of Equal Pay, which must be considered when making a case for pay equity.

2. In determining the merit of the claim as an equal pay claim, the following factors must be considered:

A. The work must be shown to be predominantly performed by women and may also include areas where remuneration for this work may have been affected by:

- i. any occupational segregation;
- ii. any occupational segmentation;

***"My name is Maria and I am 33. I have been a teacher aide for the last 10 years and I love my job. Teacher aides are overwhelmingly female – one estimate puts the figure at 94% female."***

B. The work may have been historically undervalued because of:

- i. any relevant origins and history of the work and the wage setting for it;

*My Mum started working in my school as a teacher aide in 1992 when I was just 7, they were called ancillary assistants back then. This was after the 1989 Education Act granted all students, including those with additional needs, the right to attend local schools.*

*The role of a teacher aide was developed alongside inclusive education practice; it was a logical and cost effective way to deliver inclusive education for schools with limited resources and high needs.*

*It was a year after the Employment Contracts Act was passed into law. This meant voluntary union membership, individual employer bargaining, and the possibility of individual contracts. For Support Staff in Schools it led to the amalgamation of their union, the Educational Services Paraprofessional Association (ESPA) with NZEI in 1992 to ensure sufficient numbers for negotiations.*

*Whilst the Ministry of Education moved to a system that meant teacher aides were needed, they didn't put the school requirement for support staff in the funding formula. So there was no mechanism to adjust funding for increased support staff employment.*

ii. any social, cultural or historical factors which may have led to undervaluing or devaluing of the work and the remuneration paid for it;

*I've talked to Mum about how she got into this work, I certainly understand why she's kept doing it because I love it too. I grew up knowing that girls can do anything, but my Mum grew up in a world that was slightly different. Back in 1992 she had me and my little brother (who had just started school) and she had to try and find work that would fit in with being a solo Mum.*

*She had left school in fifth form and started working in a local shop before she got married to my Dad. It was still pretty normal for women to stop working once they got married back then and Dad was an accountant so we had enough money to get by comfortably on one income. Once they divorced it was pretty hard to get by on the domestic purposes benefit, so Mum started looking for something to supplement this. Becoming a Teacher Aide was perfect, it meant Mum could be at school with us, she started learning so much about education and how to support the children she worked with.*

iii. there is or has been some characterisation or labelling of the work as "women's work";

*When my Mum was growing up there were limited options for a career, at school she could do home economics, sewing and typing. While more and more women were moving into the workforce the options they had were still limited. As a girl who left school early she had a choice of working in the service or manufacturing industries. She really enjoyed working with children so after she had us becoming a teacher aide seemed a natural fit.*

iv. any social, cultural or historical phenomena whereby women are considered to have “natural” or “inherent” qualities not required to be accounted for in wages paid;

***My Mum is an amazing woman, she has a magical ability to connect with anyone and she loves working with children with additional learning needs. She is patient, empathetic and has great communication skills. She has always been at the centre of our family life. These skills have been so crucial to her work as a teacher aide and she has definitely passed them on to me.***

C. Whether gender-based systemic undervaluation has affected the remuneration for the work due to:

i. Features of the market, industry or sector or occupation which may have resulted in continued undervaluation of the work, including but not limited to:

2.i.1. a dominant source of funding across the market, industry or sector;

***I'm lucky enough to have a permanent role at my school, but many of my colleagues are on fixed term contracts and are not sure whether they will have a job next year. It's pretty tough, but it's been like this for teacher aides for as long as I can remember. I know my Mum finds it hard as well.***

***Her role is ORRS funded, so it changes all the time. Even after working for over 20 years she is still only at the top of Grade B on the pay scale. The union negotiated an extra step for Grade B a couple of years ago, but this still means she is only paid \$20.69 an hour. The ORRS funding for one of the children she works with has just gone down, so she is only working 15 hours a week at the moment. Mum would love to work 40 hours, but that's just not the way the funding works.***

2.i.2. the lack of effective bargaining;

***It's really frustrating that the important role we play in New Zealand education is not valued. Our Principal wants to be able to pay us more, but in the past a substantial increase in pay would have potentially impacted the amount of hours we have. The union has made it clear that when we win pay equity the funding should be set up in a way that ensures we do not lose hours.***

ii. The failure by the parties to properly assess or consider the remuneration that should be paid to properly account for the nature of the work, the levels or responsibility associated with the work, the conditions under which the work is performed, and the degree of effort required to perform the work.

***Over the last few years the union has tried to bargain a living wage for us, we have had a few campaigns highlighting the need for us to be paid more for the work that we do. But the Ministry has mainly been concerned with the increases in pay fitting in with the existing funding model and whether there is a need to increase pay in order to attract more people to the work. This has meant that our pay has stayed at a low rate for a very long time.***

iii. Any other relevant work features

***It is important that we consider our Treaty of Waitangi obligations, the role of Kaiawhina and the unique cultural context of New Zealand throughout this process.***

***This issue does not neatly fit into any of the Pay Equity principles, but is woven throughout the entire process.***

Pay equity makes a difference

*Some of my friends and whānau question why I got into this work, after all I've seen how undervalued my Mum's work has been for years. It may not pay well, but I love it. It is so rewarding to know you have made a difference in a child's learning. The impact of a good teacher aide can be huge. Growing up I saw how much Mum loved the job, I always loved working with children and when I had my own it seemed a natural fit. I could work within school time and still have time for my own children. When Kristine Bartlett won her pay equity case I didn't really see what difference this would make for me, but it seems to be having a flow on effect to all sorts of areas of work. It was exciting to see Education Support Workers win their pay equity claim, I'm sure they'll be celebrating alongside us when we win too.*