



**Australian Graduate Women Inc.**  
<https://australiangradwomen.org.au/>

13 August 2020

Senator the Hon. Dan Tehan, Minister for Education  
Senator the Hon. Marise Payne, Minister for Women  
The Senate, Parliament House  
Canberra, ACT 2600

Dear Minister Tehan,

The impact of COVID-19 on Universities in Australia has been profound. Without diminishing the impact on students, both domestic and international, the major impact from the cost cutting strategies has been on staff, especially academic staff.

Recent media reports have highlighted the increasing practice of casualisation of the workforce in Universities<sup>1</sup>. Casual and short-term contract academic and research staff, in particular, are targeted to garner immediate cost mitigations.

As the Australian peak body for graduate women, Australian Graduate Women, we wish to add our voice to the concerns articulated and in particular the impact on women and their careers, their livelihood and their future.

The reporting in the media is not only about the number of casual staff whose employment has been terminated but also on the more conservative figure of redundancies both voluntary and forced. The reporting has been on Full Time Equivalent (FTE) numbers rather than a headcount<sup>2</sup>.

This misleads the public and does not focus attention on the true impact on staff particularly those with insecure employment. The figure reported for Victoria was a staggering 68.74% of academic staff employed as casuals or on short-term contracts. Some of Australia's richest tertiary institutions with significant reserves have over 70% of staff on insecure contracts. It would also now appear from the case against Melbourne University that many of the casual staff have not only been insecure but also underpaid<sup>3</sup>.

Higher Education statistics reveal that women have a higher representation in this group of casual and contractual staff with insecure employment. According to the most recent HE statistics, women hold 58% of actual casual positions. The flow-on from this impact is profound and compromises some of the most important gains women have made in employment and representation especially in higher education and in the longer term significantly diminishes their superannuation savings.



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AGW requests that Universities be obliged to reveal the true numbers (desegregated by gender) of academic and professional staff impacted by the measures to mitigate the reduction in revenue caused due to COVID19 impacts, and loss of international students. This would allow transparency to understand the cost-cutting strategies being currently utilised by Universities and in particular the impact on women.

We would be happy to speak further or answer any questions you might have about this letter and the issues we raise.

Yours sincerely

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-17/university-casual-workforce-redundancies-dirty-secret/12462030>

<sup>2</sup> <https://melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au/lh-martin-institute/fellow-voices/casual-university-staff-not-one-size-fits-all>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-08-05/university-of-melbourne-announces-450-job-losses/12527576>

cc Tanya Plibersek Shadow Minister for Education and Shadow Minister for Women