



## GRADUATE WOMEN-NSW Inc

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20 December 2020

The Hon. Alan Tudge MP  
Minister for Education  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister Tudge,

I am writing on behalf of Graduate Women-NSW to congratulate you on your appointment as the Minister for Education and to introduce our organization to you.

GW-NSW has worked for over 125 years to empower women through education. We do this chiefly through a range of scholarships across all levels of education, through donations and sponsorships to education bodies both in Australia and overseas, and through advocacy for the advancement of women and girls in education. A brief history is included with this letter.

In July we welcomed your support for the visa changes for International students. We also note your considerable experience and interest in education as an advisor to previous Education Ministers and, since taking your seat in Parliament, on the Education Committee and the Education Policy Forum. We believe passionately in the importance of education and research in developing our society and in growing and sustaining our economy. We see women's participation in research and education and in the workforce as significant contributions. We hope that you share these beliefs and that they will be reflected in your ministry.

We appreciate this will be a difficult task as the importance of the role of education has not appeared to have been a particular aspect of government policy over the past decade. We seek your attention in four particular areas:

### **1 The Tertiary Sector:**

While we welcomed the Government's initiative to develop policies for the funding of tertiary education, we cannot support the decisions made by the previous minister. We consider these are based on untenable assumptions on the nature of tertiary education and discriminate against women and promote further gender inequality.

First, we contend that the development of an education policy to produce job-ready graduates must be based on an integrating system of funding that includes both Universities and TAFEs to provide training to student of varying talents and interests.

Secondly, the assumption that preferencing STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) courses because industry and employers have stated that future workers will need to interact with technology is flawed. STEM training on its own will become outdated. What is required is critical thinking and creative problem solving which are developed in studies of the humanities that encourage student to explore human-to-human relations and human-to technical and robotic relations.

In addition, the differential pricing of courses which penalises the humanities and social sciences acts to increase significantly gender inequality. Figures for the past ten years show that these courses have had a

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higher proportion of female students. In 2018 two-thirds of student in these fields were women. Women will incur far higher debts in pursuing them and, because of the interrupted career path which has characterised many women, it will take them longer to repay the debt and to be in a position to make significant spending and investment decisions.

### **2. Research funding:**

Cutbacks in funding to the CSIRO and academic grant schemes in both the Universities and commercial sectors have led to projects being abandoned and researchers facing precarious employment opportunities. The future of Australia depends on the new ideas generated by researchers working in diverse fields and on the men and women developing this research. Too often these benefits have been lost to our country when processes and scholars have been forced overseas to achieve the value and recognition they deserve.

### **3. Technical and Further Education:**

More than ever the rapid changes in industrial processes and technology as we move to a more sustainable future make it imperative that the government take action to provide opportunities in training and reskilling that will fit workers for the society of the future. Cutbacks in TAFE funding, the disastrous and expensive experiments in privatising the sector, and the complete abandonment of support in apprenticeships, have resulted in the collapse of the sector. While we appreciate, much of this is a concern for the state governments, we submit that leadership and policy at federal level is essential to reinvigorate and focus the sector to provide the workers we need for growth and development.

### **4. Literacy and Numeracy:**

Australia appears to continue to slip in our place in International tables. This is depressingly so for our indigenous students, for those from non-English backgrounds, and those who are socially and financially disadvantaged. We applaud the Government's initiative in providing tutoring and counselling in schools to compensate student for Covid closures. However, while we know that Literacy and Numeracy are practically state education matters, focus and leadership at a national level would be beneficial.

Again we congratulate you and look forward to working with you. We realise we have set you a difficult agenda but cannot stress enough the importance for our society and the economy of building and focusing our education systems. Please accept our greetings for a fulfilling and relaxing break before undertaking the complex and challenging tasks of your new Ministry.

'Tricia Blombery  
President  
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C.C. The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP Shadow Minister for Education and Training

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