



## GRADUATE WOMEN-NSW Inc

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1 June 2022  
Hon Jason Clare MP  
Member for Blaxland  
Minister for Education  
Australian Parliament House  
Canberra

Dear Minister Clare,

I am writing on behalf of Graduate Women-NSW to congratulate you on the election of a majority Labor government and your appointment as Minister for Education. I would also like to introduce our organisation to you.

GW-NSW has worked for over 125 years to empower women through education. We view Education as essential for Empowering Women; Reducing Poverty Improving Health; Understanding Human Rights; and, Maintaining Human Security and Building Peace. We work to achieve 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. We aim to

- Promote equitable educational opportunities and lifelong learning
- Improve the status and well-being of women and girls
- Encourage women and girls to be active leaders and decision-makers in public and private life.
- Inspire and support women graduates to put their education and professional training to the service of the local, national and international community.

We appreciate this will be a difficult task as you do not seem to have experience in this field and the importance of the role of education has not appeared to have been a particular aspect of government policy over the past decade. Although our emphasis has been on education for women and girls, we seek your attention in four particular areas:

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

We hope the government will develop, as a matter of urgency, policies for the funding of tertiary education. We could not support the decisions made by the previous ministers. 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

**1921-2021 A century promoting women's education**

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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 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:**

We hope this will be integrated with the Education portfolio and you will work closely with the Minister for Skills and Training. 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.

### **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. While we know that Literacy and Numeracy are practically state education matters, focus and leadership at a national level would be beneficial. Especially significant would be achieving the 100% funding for state school students promoted in the Gonski scheme.

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 congratulations and encouraging greetings for undertaking the complex and challenging tasks of your new Ministry.

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