



***Australian Federation of Graduate Women Inc.***

**PO Box 90 Nedlands WA 6009**

**[www.afgw.org.au](http://www.afgw.org.au)**

23 September 2015

Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham  
Minister of Education and Training  
PO Box 6100  
The Senate  
Australian Parliament House  
Canberra  
ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

I write on behalf of AFGW to congratulate you on your rise to Minister with responsibility for the whole Education and Training portfolio.

We have greatly appreciated your active and perceptive involvement in the VET sector and your attempts to legislate to prevent the questionable practices of several of the private providers. There is still much to be done in this area and we welcome The Hon Luke Hartsuyker MP continuing to clean up these problems and protect vulnerable students.

Your involvement in improvements to the VET-Fee Help program to stop courses being marketed to students without making them aware of the debt incurred has also been significant. While we strongly endorse the right to education, we have seen many students, particularly women, undertaking debt for courses with poor employment possibilities who drop out of their courses and may never be in a position to repay their debt. We see the rapid growth in poor debts as a result as a threat to the sustainability of the scheme.

We know that you share our views of the value of TAFE and the high level education it provides especially in regional and rural areas and for second-chance students. We look forward to the plans you have for TAFE but are apprehensive that a shift to total federal management may lead to the diminishing of TAFE's role when operating in a competitive funding environment as has been evident in some states. We are also very concerned that there has been a lessening of the levels of teacher training acceptable among TAFE staff where educators have been replaced by trainers.

With respect to Universities, I was encouraged to hear on the news this morning that you will revisit the plans for reform of the Higher Education sector especially the Universities and take a more consultative approach with staff and students to develop strategies which will ensure the funding that is needed for world class institutions. For immediate action we hope you will reverse plans to cut 20% of university funding until such discussions are complete.

As school education is now your concern I will inform you of our commitment to equity of educational opportunity, access, and outcomes which must be among Australia's national goals and affirm that we believe this can only be achieved by a unified approach between the States and a significant increase in funding.

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In our submission to the Gonski Review in September 2011 (with which I would be happy to provide you a copy) we strongly supported targeted investment in infrastructure to support data-driven and research-led educational innovation. We believe that only targeted investment strategies will provide assurance to schools with combinations of underperforming students. Recent material released by Adrian Piccoli, NSW Minister for Education, has confirmed this injection of targeted funds has indeed be effective in improving the chances of students with disabilities, students with low socio-economic background, students in remote areas, Indigenous students, students with inadequate English proficiency within the NSW system.

We sincerely hope you will revisit this area with a matter of urgency to implement more of the suggestions made in the Gonski review and to restore the funding for the final two years of the program.

We are also very interested in the STEMM areas of education at all levels particularly the promotion of the opportunities for women and girls in less traditional training and occupations. We have welcomed recent government initiatives in this area particularly the agreement between the State Ministers on STEM in school curriculums and the consultations with industry and the research and education sectors to develop the field. We hope you will continue to focus on this area of education across the sectors.

With such a vast range of aspects covered in the portfolio of Education and Training and with all the other responsibilities the government must undertake we are keenly aware of the financial constraints which govern what you are able to achieve but we are confident that you will approach this new challenge and attempt to balance the interests of the many stakeholders to advance an education system for the greater benefit of our society.

As Education and Training entails so many varied aspects I have no doubt we will be continue among your frequent correspondents. We wish you well in coming to grips with the extended education field and undertaking the tasks of your ministry.

Sincerely,

‘Tricia Blombery  
Convener Standing Committee for Education

for Dr Madeleine Laming, President AFGW