



Australian Federation of Graduate Women Inc.

PO Box 62 Enmore NSW 2042

www.afgw.org.au

26 July, 2016

The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP
Shadow Minister for Education
PO Box 6022
The House of Representatives
Australian Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Tanya,

We are delighted to congratulate you on your appointment as Shadow Minister for Education. We enjoyed working with you as Minister for Women in the Rudd government, and have watched your many contributions in various Ministries and Shadow Ministries and as Deputy Leader of the Opposition, so are confident you are well informed of this new portfolio and its significance for building Australia as an innovative nation.

As you know AFGW is the national voice of graduate women working, since 1922, through initiatives in Education especially for the advancement and wellbeing of women and girls. We view education as essential for empowering people; reducing poverty; improving health; understanding human rights; and, maintaining human security and building peace.

We advocate at state and federal level for improvements in education especially through development of curriculum, provision of resources, and initiatives in training staff. Among our particular concerns in your ministry are the cut-backs to school and University funding, the casualisation of many university academic positions and the low proportion of women in the higher academic ranks; and the disproportionately low numbers of women going into post-graduate and post-doctoral careers. We welcomed the results of the Bradley enquiry into University education and the Gonski report into schools especially the focus they have on improving the educational opportunities for disadvantaged groups.

At the school level our support of a nationally implemented funding model for schools is long standing. In our submission to the Gonski Review in September 2011 we strongly supported targeted investment in infrastructure to support data-driven and research-led educational innovation.

We further developed this resolve when in 2012 at our triennial conference AFGW adopted the resolution: *The 35th Conference calls upon AFGW and its State and Territory members to support through advocacy and monitoring the implementation of the recommendations of the Gonski Review of Funding for Schooling – Final Report – including:*

- *National implementation of the funding model as recommended in the report*
- *Establishment of a statutory and independent National Schools Resourcing Body*
- *Establishment of a national schooling resource standard with annual indexation according to actual costs.*



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We strengthened that position in November 2015 when the members accepted: *That the 2015 Annual General Meeting reaffirms AFGW commitment to the policy that equity of educational opportunity, access, and outcomes must be our national goals and consequently reaffirms the resolution of the 35th Triennial Conference to support the implementation of a needs-based model of schools' funding.*

That the 2015 Annual General Meeting calls on the Federal Government to uphold the promise made before the election not to make adverse changes to education funding, to reinstate \$30 billion which has been cut from the schools funding, as legislated for by the Australian Education Act 2013 to fund the full six years of funding.

AFGW is also very aware of the value of Higher Education to the economy both as a significant export and in providing a skilled workforce. The maintenance of our reputation and standards is vital to keeping our hard-earned place in world-class education. We have watched with growing apprehension the many iterations of policy for funding Universities and research. Universities and students cannot adequately plan and work in a climate of such uncertainty.

We have been particularly concerned by news in the press of University admission practices which have admitted students who may not have the educational background and skills to complete their courses. This is both harmful to the students themselves and also the country as their HELP debts are never recovered.

AFGW have been especially concerned with the education and employment of women and girls in the less traditional fields of engineering and science. The promotion of STEM subjects for women and girls is also a central focus for our international arm Graduate Women International. In Australia AFGW has endeavoured to promote women's achievements in STEM areas through our national and state scholarships.

Each year AFGW, its affiliated state bodies and branches, give over \$0.5 million in scholarships to woman and girls to further their education particularly at tertiary level. Many of these awards go to women studying in the varied fields of science. We also support a number of education projects for girls in the developing countries.

We were delighted that Education was mentioned as a key concern by so many voters at the last election and that the Labor Party has supported and promoted this focus. We appreciate what a vast field your portfolio encompasses and how much work there is to be done. We wish you well in taking up your new responsibilities.

Tricia Blombery
Convener Standing Committee for Education
for Dr Jane Baker, President AFGW

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