



GRADUATE WOMEN-NSW Inc

LG Floor, 280 Pitt St
Sydney NSW 2000
Phone: 9283 7878

Email: admin@gwnsw.org.au

Website: www.gwnsw.org.au

ABN: 23 098 188 689

Response to the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report

This response addresses issues of particular relevance to Graduate Women-NSW Inc. Graduate Women-NSW Inc. has as one of its main areas of focus a concern with government policies that have an impact on women and their education and wellbeing. Its scholarships and awards program supports women of all ages to undertake university education, ranging from early undergraduate levels through to travelling scholarships for research students. Educated women are essential to a strong, cohesive and democratic society.

We welcome the Interim Report, which is ambitious in its vision and scope (p. 28). **It seems appropriate to identify Priority Actions**, and we acknowledge the significance of Priority Action 2 (ceasing the 50% pass rule) for equity groups and Priority Action 4 (providing funding certainty, in particular for the development of programs and services to support students in equity groups). We are also pleased to note that Priority Action 5 includes a concern for staff and student safety (see also p. 38), a point not raised in our earlier submission, but significant for female staff and students.

We support the emphasis on increasing participation from equity groups, which include First Nations people, people from low socio-economic, regional, rural and remote backgrounds and students with disability. Although women may make up close to 60% of domestic enrolments currently (wgea.gov.au), **there are many systemic issues that continue to affect women students and women graduates**, including salary levels in traditionally female occupations, casualisation in female dominated occupations and employment of women as casual employees, including in universities, and the likelihood of interruptions in employment to take on carer responsibilities.

We support the emphasis on successful outcomes for students, especially those in equity groups. This brings together the interaction between several factors. These include the need for **increased income support and for opportunities for part time and online study** (pp. 78ff.), the need for **appropriate pathways** to tertiary education, including articulation from TAFE programs, and the **provision of micro-credentialing** for updating skills. The recognition that **teaching students from equity groups incurs greater costs and may place additional burdens on academic staff** must be matched by **increased funding**.

We note the call for **improved university governance** as part of the vision for a fresh approach to tertiary education. To the extent that this may include a focus on the **pay and working conditions of female employees**, who are more likely to be employed part-time or on a casual basis, and who are more likely to have been affected by the entrenched under-payment particularly of casual teaching staff, we support the principle. We make no comment on the mechanisms suggested.

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Tricia Blombery

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED] mobile: [REDACTED]



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The focus areas identified in the Interim Report have the potential to lead to a higher education system that is more inclusive and contributes to the creation of a society in tune with the complexities of the contemporary world. However, **the significant shifts and changes foreshadowed will be costly** and a major challenge will be in **engendering public support for the vision** so that the essential funding will flow through the budget over the next thirty years.



Hilary Yerbury
Education Convenor, on behalf of
'Tricia Blombery,
President
GW-NSW Inc.
22 August 2023

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'Tricia Blombery

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED] mobile: [REDACTED]