

GRADUATE WOMEN VICTORIA

Serving and empowering women through education and advocacy



Response to the Australian Universities Accord- Interim Report

Graduate Women Victoria (GWV) is an Association that advocates for and supports women to achieve their educational goals.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Interim Report.

There is much to support, with the major focus of the Report on an equitable higher education system that meets the highest of standards in both teaching and research.

GWV conducts a scholarship program that considers not only academic ability but also disadvantage, so we know firsthand the overwhelming financial obstacles experienced as the barrier to participation and excellence.

Educational experiences and outcomes are in our experience also gendered, with women holding the larger share of domestic and family responsibilities. This was evident and documented throughout the pandemic for both students and staff.

We fully support the gathering of data that is nuanced and highlights the intersectionality of disadvantage, and we welcome the focus on tailoring support to the individual.

The university systems in our experience are often a barrier, with students finding it difficult to discover and apply for the support available, particularly financial support. As an Association with a significant scholarship offering we struggle to penetrate firewalls and find a location in Universities to communicate our Scholarship Program

As mentioned through our student applications we also glean rich information about financial and personal burdens that are frequently coupled with debt aversion particularly for the low SES cohorts.

We fully support the focus on improved income support measures, we have previously advocated for the raising of the Research Training Program stipend to be above the poverty line and in line with the minimum wage.

The financial barriers to participation need to be addressed if we are to meet our equity targets.

Full time university is now a luxury many students can't afford- National Union of Students.

The level of work commitments for many students creates an uneven playing field. These students do not have the resources or time to reach their potential, which inevitably has a flow-on effect for employment prospects and contribution to society. We applaud any efforts to facilitate study flexibility and the combining of work and study pedagogies and practical supports.

The advancements in micro credentials and tailored study programs that also recognize other types of knowledge and learning, are providing opportunities for innovative and excellent pathways for students.

To ensure transparency monitoring data should be independently gathered, as opposed to Universities preparing reports to maximize equity income, needs to be considered.

We agree and emphasise that students are partners and stakeholders in progressing this critical agenda for the Higher Education sector and wish to emphasise that aspect of the report.

Dr Kerry Ferguson
President
Graduate Women Victoria