



GRADUATE WOMEN VICTORIA

As at 2/12 Tollington Ave
Malvern East, VIC 3145

3 March 2013

The Hon. E. Baillieu MP
Premier of Victoria
Parliament House
Spring St
East Melbourne, VIC 3002

Dear Mr. Baillieu

Re Budget provisions for TAFE

I write on behalf of Graduate Women Victoria to urge you to reconsider the government's decisions regarding TAFE education, with regard both to the targeting of certain courses for a reduction of support and to the overall cuts to funding, especially as these come in the wake of quite severe cuts last year. The current decisions appear to have been made without consultation with the sector or proper consideration of the effects that the drastic staff reductions will have on the quality of teaching and the maintenance of a diversity of courses, something that's essential to the maintenance of good long-term outcomes to meet the State's needs.

Graduate Women Victoria, an affiliate of the Australian Federation of Graduate Women and the International Federation of University Women, is an organization open to all women holding a university degree or tertiary equivalent. We believe passionately that education is the civil society's best protection against poverty and social dysfunction, and that the education provided by public TAFEs has shown itself in recent years to be particularly important in this respect for two groups:

- young people who, whether for socio-economic reasons or disaffection with the school system, have not completed, or do not want to complete, a more academic secondary education and are thereby at risk of a future of unemployment or employment that is unskilled and poorly paid;

- mature age women who want to return to workforce participation after a period of caring for children or other family members and need to update their workforce skills. You will doubtless be aware how much emphasis the Productivity Commission has put on the need to get these women into the workforce.

Yet these are exactly the groups which have least resources to meet the increased costs of study entailed in the extreme reduction in government subsidies for a range of courses, notably hospitality, business and entertainment. It is of particular concern to Graduate Women Victoria that these are very much the courses that attract women students and equip them for working in the areas most likely to employ them. There is an element of gender discrimination here that is very ill-judged.

We also consider questionable the decision to penalize public institutions which have shown themselves to be well-regulated and responsible providers while rewarding the private providers whose record has quite often been poor, with consequent dissatisfaction which may account for the reduction in overseas students which is contributing to the financial difficulties of the sector. While we are not opposed to the existence of private for-profit providers, we believe that it is public institutions that should have priority in the distribution of taxpayers' funds and that this principle should apply within all sectors of education.

Education is one of the best investments a government can make. It should not be sacrificed to ideologically driven demands for a surplus that many economists question as desirable at this time,

Yours sincerely

Dr Jennifer Strauss AM
President, Graduate Women Victoria

GRADUATE WOMEN VICTORIA