

# GRADUATE WOMEN VICTORIA

*Serving and empowering women through education and advocacy*



276 Park Street  
North Fitzroy, 3068  
27 October 2020

The Honourable Dan Tehan MP  
Minister for Education  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister Tehan,

## **Re: Job-Ready Graduates**

Graduate Women Victoria (GWV) is a non-government organisation working to support the higher education of women and girls through a substantial scholarship program; it is also an advocate for women's rightful access to and representation in public life.

GWV, like its sister NGOs in Queensland, NSW, Western Australia and nationally (Australian Graduate Women) believes that education is a common good rather than a private privilege; that every Australian should have lifelong access to affordable education in their chosen field of knowledge in order, not merely that they may achieve personal financial security through employment, but also so that their knowledge may enable them to participate in, and contribute to, public life to the advancement of the democratic system espoused by Australia. In particular, GWV encourages and supports the education of girls and women, whose full participation may no longer be limited legally, but is still often constrained by cultural attitudes and financial disadvantage.

For this reason, Graduate Women Victoria (GWV) urges the government to reconsider certain aspects of its recent Job-Ready Graduates legislation. We are extremely concerned that the legislation will not have the intended outcomes and is likely to have long-term adverse and distorting educational consequences.

Raising the cost of studying the humanities so severely (by 113%) risks increasing and entrenching disadvantage for women, for whom the humanities has long been the main point of entry into tertiary education and hence employment. Students who select humanities and take out a loan will in the future emerge with a debt of A\$40,000 to A\$50,000. We know that students from low socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to be debt averse than high SES students and therefore likely to be repelled by the increases in fees.

GWV welcomes government incentives for study in STEM but is against incentivising this at the cost of making it difficult to choose to study humanities. Education is a rich palette of subjects that all students should be free to choose.

GRADUATE WOMEN VICTORIA (formerly AFUW Vic)

ABN: 65 475 228 451 Registered Incorporated Association: A0030910N

<http://gradwomenvic.org.au/>

The intervention is premised on a view that the connection between specific areas of education and employment outcomes is obvious. This premise is over-simplistic and at times simply incorrect. Students take a variety of paths to employment, and good communication, problem-solving and critical thinking are qualities fostered by the humanities and are essential capabilities for contemporary employment.

If humanities graduates figure highly among the current unemployment figures, that is because the effects of COVID-19 have been particularly severe on employment in the services area, which is where humanities graduates frequently find employment. If the government's aim is to encourage post-COVID growth, it cannot ignore the fact that the services area has already become a major area of employment growth and is predicted by economists to become even more so in the future.

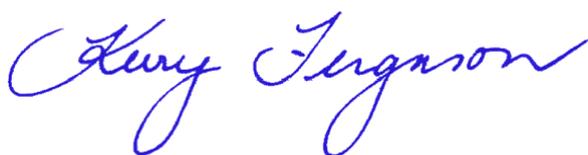
It is assumed that the legislation will be effective, and that economic targeting of study areas will move the students into areas which are perceived to be needed in the community. This assumes that student choice will necessarily be driven by economic ambitions rather than by vocational aspirations or personal interest. Others emphasize the inherent contradiction between the way that such targeting may affect student motivation as against that of universities, which still retain considerable control over admissions.

It is highly probable, as a result of this legislation, the study of humanities will shrink and universities' capacity to offer humanities will decline with an obvious trickle-down effect for teachers, students and the community. This will ultimately result in a shortage of humanities teachers as well as seriously undermine the benefits of a comprehensive educational curriculum.

Finally, the government has also been rightly concerned about the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of its citizens. We know a broad education as well as a cultural environment greatly assists in sustaining individuals through the trauma of the effects of the restrictions and deprivations required to manage this disaster.

We therefore urge the government to adjust the legislation to meet some of these serious deficiencies before permanent damage is visited on Australia's university sector; prospective students, its graduates and those who learn, teach and research therein.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Kerry Ferguson  
President  
Graduate Women Victoria

Cc: The Shadow Minister for Education and Training -The Hon Tanya Plibersek .

**From:** "Plibersek, Tanya (MP)" <[Tanya.Plibersek.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:Tanya.Plibersek.MP@aph.gov.au)>  
**Date:** Wednesday, 11 November 2020 at 6:41 pm  
**To:** Kerry Ferguson <[Kerry.Ferguson@vu.edu.au](mailto:Kerry.Ferguson@vu.edu.au)>  
**Subject:** RE: Graduate Women Victoria correspondence to The Minister for Education

Dear Kerry

Thank you for taking the time to forward me your correspondence to the Minister on this important issue. I appreciate your advocacy.

Like you, I am deeply disappointed American sized university debts are heading Australia's way thanks to [Scott Morrison](#).

It is heart-breaking to think about what our year 12s have been through as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic: remote learning, cancelled sport, cancelled formals.

After the year from hell, the last thing our Year 12s need is the Liberals making it harder and more expensive to go to uni – it's just cruel.

Young Australians want a fair go. Mums and Dad want opportunities for their kids. I don't want Australia to be like America – where our kids have to get a lifetime of debt to get an education.

We're talking about our kids graduating uni with a debt of around \$60,000 debt for a basic degree – at the same time as they're trying to find work, maybe save a deposit for a house, or start a family.

And as you raised in your letter, experts have spoken up against the changes, demonstrating that they won't actually get young people into high priority jobs as the Liberals claim.

No Australian should miss out on the job they want, and the education they need to get it, because they can't afford it.

We're in a recession, one in three young people are looking for work or more hours, but clearly Scott Morrison would rather see them on the dole queue than go to uni.

Please be assured that I will always fight to make sure that every Australian has access to a world-class education – from early childhood education right through to a strong and accessible higher education.

Thank you again for getting in touch.

Best wishes

Tanya