



Australian Federation of Graduate Women Inc.

PO Box 62 Enmore NSW 2042

www.afgw.org.au

1 January, 2016

Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham
Minister of Education and Training
PO Box 6100
The Senate
Australian Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

I'm writing on behalf of the women of AFGW to tell you how surprised and disappointed we are at your decision to withhold the final two year's funding as planned under the Gonski scheme. As you know we firmly believe that equity of educational opportunity, access, and outcomes must be our national goals and that this can only be achieved by a unified approach between the Federal government and the States and by a significant increase in funding.

We were greatly heartened by the release of the national Innovation and Science Agenda with its promise to "usher in an ideas boom" and by Prime Minister Turnbull stressing he was "absolutely committed to ensuring that our students have the skills to find high wage and rewarding jobs". However, as Ms Haythorpe of the Australian Education Union stated on December 8, the Government "must tackle inequality in schools and shortages of maths and science teachers if it is to succeed".

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.*

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.*

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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.

We welcome your announcement on December 7 of \$51 million in new funding “to help Australian students embrace the digital age and engage with science and maths in the early years”. This approach is not enough. Initiatives with limited focus such as improved teacher training, a blitz on STEM subjects, and others advanced at State level may go some way to improving the chances of students with disabilities, students with low socio-economic background, students in remote areas, Indigenous students, students with inadequate English proficiency and all student with general disadvantage. However, we maintain that all such initiatives are outweighed by the benefits which could be achieved by implementing the national scheme recommended by the Gonski Review.

Only targeted investment strategies can provide assurance to schools with combinations of underperforming students and concentrations of disadvantage that they will be able to provide the same opportunities, resources, facilities and support. The funding scheme has already begun to deliver results. Material released by Adrian Piccoli, NSW Minister for Education, to which I referred you in my letter of September 23 2015, has confirmed this injection of targeted funds has indeed be effective in improving the chances of disadvantaged students within the NSW system. The restoration of funding for the final two years is essential if improvements are to continue.

We are not alone in our position. A compelling statement from the National Reform Summit held in August 2015 representing leaders from education, business and industry noted when addressing the need for increased productivity that one of the key requirements was adequate funding for schools especially the disadvantaged.

We are well aware of the current budget position and the approaches the government is taking to improve it. We strongly endorse attempts to increase revenue but cannot support cuts in schools funding which will further disadvantage so many young people. How can we have an “ideas boom”, how can we “ensure our students have the problem-solving and critical reasoning skills for the jobs of the future” without ensuring that all students get a basic grounding? We urge you to reconsider your decision and restore the promised education funding your party endorsed before the last election.

Best wished for the New Year,

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

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