



Australian Federation of Graduate Women Inc.

PO Box 345 Concord West NSW 2135

www.afgw.org.au

17 January, 2018

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

Dear Minister,

The Australian Federation of Graduate Women would like to thank you again for the many initiatives you have taken in your Education and Training portfolio and congratulate you on your appointment as Manager of Government Business in the Senate. While we do not always support your decisions we value your conscientious and dedicated approach.

Our present concern is the freeze introduced in the Mid-year Budget on funding of demand-driven University places. We see this as a far wider concern than a simple cutting of university funds. Based on the 2008 Bradley review of Higher Education, the demand-driven approach aimed at “better attainment of higher education qualifications”. While social inclusion and equity were never primary drivers of the recommendations, an increased participation rate from traditionally underrepresented groups was seen as a positive by-product of this better attainment.

Although the policy received bi-partisan support in its introduction, unfortunately it has never attracted levels of funding which would overcome the negative aspect of possible drops in quality, and in completion rates. The funding to these areas may be protected under the proposed freeze but are not at levels which will allow the training and employment of sufficient staff to develop the students from less traditional groups. This lack of funding for support and cutback in funding to many student services has disproportionately disadvantaged women and girls attempting to attain higher education qualifications for participation in the workforce. To freeze funding, and thus prematurely destroy what was a bold and largely successful initiative, is a negative judgement on the value of Higher Education and scotches any possible attempts at achieving student equity particularly in regional and remote areas.

The removal of the freeze in 2020 and basing university funding on bureaucratic performance criteria gives little encouragement for innovation and long-term planning and will significantly impact on staff and student satisfaction. This will be felt more intensely on those disciplines – engineering, sciences and most health courses – which depend on higher levels of government support. These are exactly the areas where more graduates are needed, as seen in the recent press reports on the imminent shortage of trained nurses, but the proposed funding model will act as a disincentive for Universities to develop these courses.

ABN 93656 106 863

ARBN 135 684 990

Tricia Blombery

11 Park Rd, Marrickville 2204

stuart_tricia@bigpond.com



Australian Federation of Graduate Women Inc.

PO Box 345 Concord West NSW 2135

www.afgw.org.au

It is disingenuous to criticise the Universities' spending on advertising and marketing when it is precisely the cuts in government funding which have created the competition and necessity for Universities to attract more students and external funding. The demand driven- approach, by its very nature, necessitates advertising.

Similarly the provision of education is one of Australia's largest export markets. The government and our economy has benefitted significantly from the marketing policies. In their recent report to investors the ratings agency Moody's echoed the concern of the universities that receding government investment risks their financial health and sustainability with the prospect of adverse effects on both students and the national economy. Freezing the funding will inevitably lead to cutbacks in the student places available for the overseas market.

We appreciate that the method of achieving these damaging cuts and the consequent budget "efficiencies" is not dependent on legislative changes and can thus be introduced directly by the government. However, we strongly urge you to consider the wider implications for higher education before prematurely curtailing the initiatives developed from the Bradley Review. We anticipate with significant misgivings the introduction of the legislation which will decrease the threshold for beginning repayment of student loans and will cap the level of assistance student can access to further their education.

We sincerely hope that 2018 will be an easier and more productive year for you and the Senate and that the government will be less distracted from advancing the interest of the country and all Australian people.

Best wishes,

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