

Budget 2020 – Women in STEM

Women in STEM Overview

The Government has provided specific funding in the 2020-21 Budget to boost the number of women studying and working in STEM. This includes \$25.1 million over five years from 2020-21 for a Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Industry Cadetship program and \$14.5 million over four years from 2020-21 to extend or expand existing initiatives that support girls and women to gain STEM skills and capabilities.

The additional funding for women in STEM is commendable. As noted in the Schools paper, students and teachers must be provided with STEM training to further boost Australia's future workforce capability in this area.

The funding for Women in STEM is comparatively meagre when compared with the funding provided in the 2020-21 Budget for supporting apprenticeship and traineeships, most of which is anticipated to support men and boys.

STEM

The Budget

A funding allocation of \$25.1 million over five years from 2020-21 will establish a Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Industry Cadetship program to support 500 women working in STEM industries to complete a four year Advanced Diploma through a combination of study and work integrated learning experiences. Employers and universities will collaborate to provide sandwiched programs combining study and work in STEM fields (see the [Department of Education, Skills and Employment Portfolio Budget Statement 2020-21](#), page 15 and the [Women's Economic Security Statement](#), page 26).

It has also provided \$14.5 million over four years from 2020-21 to extend or expand existing initiatives that support girls and women to gain STEM skills and capabilities, including the Women in STEM Ambassador, Women in STEM Entrepreneurship grants program and Girls in STEM toolbox ([Budget Paper No. 2](#), page 67-68, 2020-21).

Gender implications

Women continue to be under-represented in STEM subjects in schools, university and careers. According to the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources' [STEM Equity Monitor 2020](#), girls aged 12-17 years old in 2019 were less likely to aspire to a STEM related career than boys – 27 per cent compared with 42 per cent. This continues at university and in vocational education and training where women comprised 21 per cent of total STEM course enrolments and 23 per cent of total course completions. In contrast, women comprised 64 per cent of students in non-STEM university course completions (STEM Equity Monitor, p. 8). In 2018, these figures were particularly poor for women who made up just 15 per cent of enrolments and 19 per cent of completions. In 2018, of all higher education enrolments, only 9 per cent of women were studying STEM courses compared with 35 per cent of men.

The STEM Equity Monitor also measures outcomes for women and men in STEM post-education. There is a significant pay gap for women in STEM fields from their very first job – women earn around \$14,000 less than men following a VET qualification, and also less than men after most university and all post-graduate studies in STEM fields (p. 10). The STEM equity monitor has a detailed breakdown from the annual full-time median incomes for women and men STEM graduates by field of study (pp. 10-11).

The Government also has an [Advancing Women in STEM 2020 Action Plan](#) under its overall [Women in STEM strategy](#), which is a commendable strategic document that highlights the necessity of action on STEM gender equity. Action areas set out in the Plan include enabling STEM potential through education (more women and girls studying STEM), supporting women in STEM careers (active recruitment and retention) and making women in STEM visible (helping women and girls see potential opportunities).

What are the 2020 Budget impacts on women?

The Budget allocation for Women in STEM is positive and will assist more girls and women study STEM subjects at school and higher education and work in STEM fields in the future. This is to be commended. However, the amount of funding provided is small particularly compared with the amount of funding allocated to boosting apprentice and trainee numbers, most of which will benefit boys and men.

Careful monitoring of the program design, participation and outcomes of the new STEM program is required to ensure that it is meeting its purpose of boosting the number of women in STEM related jobs and that the gender pay gap in STEM occupations is addressed.

Recommendations

1. That Government consider raising the funding amount for women in STEM programs to ensure that more women can take up STEM-related job opportunities in the future.
2. That program design and outcomes of the new Women in STEM program are carefully measured through an evaluation strategy, which includes women's salary data.