

Election 2019 – Higher education

WHY IS THIS AN ISSUE FOR WOMEN?

- In 2017, 55.5% of all university students were women. Changes to the loan repayment scheme included in the 2017 Budget affect women disproportionately. On average, women graduates earn less over a lifetime of employment, particularly so in the first ten years after they leave university. Women graduates also tend to be concentrated in lower paid occupations such as nursing and teaching and are more likely than men to take time out of the workforce to raise children. These changes mean that graduates will begin repaying HELP loans sooner, and lower paid graduates will pay a higher proportion of their income.
- More than half of all academic staff are women; however, they are concentrated in lower level positions that are often classified as teaching-only positions and these positions are increasingly limited contract or casual appointments. Recent cuts to university have led to an increase in the number of casual academic staff as the university administrators try to contain spending. In theory, recent graduates and postgraduate students are gaining valuable experience while waiting to move on to permanent positions; however, funding cuts make it likely that permanent positions will not eventuate.

ELECTION COMMITMENTS

The table below sets out how fully parties' current election commitments address NFAW recommendations:

Full implementation

Partial implementation

No or negative response

NFAW RECOMMENDATION		
The government reverse changes to the HELP loan repayments outlined in the 2017 Budget.		
PARTY COMMITMENTS		
ALP	LNP	GREENS
NFAW RECOMMENDATION		
Benefits reserved for rural and regional students should be extended to students living in the metropolitan interface and disadvantaged areas.		
PARTY COMMITMENTS		
ALP	LNP	GREENS
The ALP has committed to ending the Liberals cap on university places and help 200,000 more young Australians graduate from university over the next decade. This policy will apply to both	The Government has continued to target rural and regional Australia by establishing a new scholarship program costed at \$93.7 million over four years to increase the number of domestic and international students studying at	The Greens are committed to abolishing tuition fees for undergraduate degrees. There will be unlimited free access to university for everyone.

<p>metropolitan and regional universities.</p>	<p>regional universities and TAFE colleges. This program, which will provide scholarships valued at \$15,000 pa to 4720 students, appears to be an attempt to placate the regional universities that were severely affected by the 2017 funding cuts, although their exact share of the total is unclear. The scholarships will benefit some women in regional areas, and some who are able to move to regional Australia in order to enrol, but they are not available to the majority of women students who are studying in metropolitan areas.</p>	
NFAW RECOMMENDATION		
<p>Funding for research into university teaching and professional development for university teaching staff should be restored.</p>		
PARTY COMMITMENTS		
ALP	LNP	GREENS
NFAW RECOMMENDATION		
<p>The cap on recurrent funding should be reversed to reduce dependency on casual teaching staff.</p>		
PARTY COMMITMENTS		
ALP	LNP	GREENS
	<p>There is no additional recurrent funding for universities in the Budget. In addition, new charges will apply to higher education providers from 1 January 2019, moving HELP administration to partial cost recovery and TEQSA towards full cost recovery. Universities will continue to struggle to work within their budgets and will seek any means available of reducing costs. In all probability, this will lead to even greater reliance on casual staff, many of whom are women as well as cuts to student services.</p> <p>Investment in research remains stagnant. The government states that funding for research has increased by \$191 billion. This appears to reverse the \$328.5 million cut announced in the budget update in December 2018; however much of the funding announced in the 2019 budget is directed to specific universities or</p>	

	<p>high-profile projects – the University of Melbourne will receive \$5.0 million to begin work on the Stawell Underground Physics Laboratory. Some of this is money that has already been committed in previous years e.g. the budget confirms that a scheduled payment of \$7.8 billion to the Medical Research Future Fund will be made in order to meet the previously announced target of \$20 billion by 2021 will go ahead.</p>	
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OTHER ELECTION COMMITMENTS		
Commitment	Party	Comments
That all publicly funded university research is in the public interest.	LNP	This policy has the potential to undermine the integrity of the peer-review process since the final decision to grant funds for any research project will be made by an anonymous panel using indeterminate criteria.
	Choose an item.	
	Choose an item.	

Authorised by Kate Gunn, Sydney.

Budget 2019 – Higher education

Higher Education Budget Overview

Measured against the higher education priorities for women that we have identified, the 2019 budget is disappointing. Although the government states that it has invested a ‘record \$17.7 billion’ in higher education, a substantial amount of the money has already been allocated in previous years. In 2017, the government froze funding for student places without accounting for inflation until 2020 resulting in an effective funding cut of \$2.1 billion. These changes effectively reintroduced a cap on undergraduate places, leading to a reduction in the number of graduates, including women graduates. **Individual Budget measures are examined in the Budget Measures table below**, but there appear to be few gains across the sector and universities continue to be concerned about base funding that provides student services.

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- More than half of all academic staff are women; however, they are concentrated in lower level positions that are often classified as teaching-only positions and these positions are increasingly limited contract or casual appointments. Recent cuts to university have led to an increase in the number of casual academic staff as the university administrators try to contain spending. In theory, recent graduates and postgraduate students are gaining valuable experience while waiting to move on to permanent positions; however, funding cuts make it likely that permanent positions will not eventuate.

BUDGET MEASURES

The following table sets out the priorities identified by NFAW and the relevant 2019 budget commitments.

NFAW priorities	In 2019 budget?	Comment (if any)
The government reverse changes to the HELP loan repayments outlined in the 2017 Budget.	No	Changes to the HELP loan repayment scheme that have had a significant impact on women students have not been reversed. HELP debts for teachers in very remote areas will be remitted. Many of these teachers will be women, and some will be Indigenous women, but there will be many more women who do not live in remote areas, who continue to suffer from the effects of the 2017 changes to the repayment schedule.
Benefits reserved for rural and regional students should be extended to students living in the metropolitan interface and disadvantaged areas.	No	<p>The Government has continued to target rural and regional Australia by establishing a new scholarship program costed at \$93.7 million over four years to increase the number of domestic and international students studying at regional universities and TAFE colleges. This program, which will provide scholarships valued at \$15,000 pa to 4720 students, appears to be an attempt to placate the regional universities that were severely affected by the 2017 funding cuts, although their exact share of the total is unclear. The scholarships will benefit some women in regional areas, and some who are able to move to regional Australia in order to enrol, but they are not available to the majority of women students who are studying in metropolitan areas.</p> <p>There will be no increase to Youth Allowance or Austudy above inflation which will disadvantage many women students.</p>
Funding for research into university teaching and professional development for university teaching staff should be restored.	No	The Budget contains no funding for research into teaching or staff professional development. The lack of funding for professional development will have an adverse impact on women academic staff who are concentrated in lower level and casual positions.
The cap on recurrent funding should be reversed to reduce dependency on casual teaching staff.	No	<p>There is no additional recurrent funding for universities in the Budget. In addition, new charges will apply to higher education providers from 1 January 2019, moving HELP administration to partial cost recovery and TEQSA towards full cost recovery. Universities will continue to struggle to work within their budgets and will seek any means available of reducing costs. In all probability, this will lead to even greater reliance on casual staff, many of whom are women as well as cuts to student services.</p> <p>Investment in research remains stagnant. The government states that funding for research has increased by \$191 billion. This appears to reverse the \$328.5 million cut announced in the budget update in December 2018; however much of the funding announced in the 2019 budget is directed to specific universities or high-profile projects – the University of Melbourne will receive \$5.0 million to begin work on the Stawell Underground Physics Laboratory. Some of this is money that</p>

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NFAW is dedicated to promoting and protecting the interests of Australian women, including intellectual, cultural, political, social, economic, legal, industrial and domestic spheres, and ensuring that the aims and ideals of the women's movement and its collective wisdom are handed on to new generations of women. NFAW is a feminist organisation, independent of party politics. This position paper is one of a set of position papers developed by NFAW's Social Policy Committee which summarise 2019 Budget measures of importance to women in Australia.