



***Australian Federation of Graduate Women Inc.***  
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**Submission to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee  
Inquiry into Technical and Further Education in Australia  
March 2014**

The Australian Federation of Graduate Women (formerly the Australian Federation of University Women) is one of sixty-four national affiliates of the International Federation of University Women, the only NGO with status with UNESCO that focuses on education for women and girls. Founded in 1922, it pursues educational initiatives to advance the status and well-being particularly of women and girls privately and publicly, nationally and internationally. We view Education as essential for Empowering Women; Reducing Poverty; Improving Health; Understanding Human Rights; and, Maintaining Human Security and Building Peace. Membership is open to any woman residing in Australia who holds a degree from a recognised university or Higher Education institution worldwide.

While our main concerns have traditionally been with Higher Education in the sense of university education, AFGW has increasingly recognised that the blurring of traditional lines between the university and VET sectors, and the growth of pathways between them, means that the VET sector is now a matter to which we should pay greater attention. AFGW has a particular commitment to supporting and encouraging access to education and jobs particularly for women and disadvantaged groups. We see a healthy, publicly funded TAFE system as essential to achieving our objectives and for the advancement of Australian society.

At our Triennial Conference in 2000 we adopted the following resolution on The Significance of TAFE in the Education of Women: *“The 31<sup>st</sup> Conference of AFUW urges the Federal Government to re-examine its approach to Technical and Further Education; and, in particular, to restore the financial support needed to enable the nation-wide, urban and rural TAFE institutions to continue to provide those life-enhancing and paid-work-promoting courses which should not be funded on the ‘user-pays’ principle.”*

We have advocated since, through our state affiliates and through our membership of the national Women’s Alliances – Equality Rights Alliance (ERA) and the alliance for the economic Security4Women (eS4W) to advance this position. We made a submission to the 2013 review of TAFE and our committee member Dalma Jacobs contributed to the Brisbane public hearing on the submission to promote our argument. While the development of ministries under the Abbott government which has seen the separation of the Trades Training Program in Schools into the Education portfolio may have excluded this important aspect from this enquiry we have recently written to the Prime Minister to request he revisits his decision to make cuts to the programme.

In making this submission we strongly reiterate the premise of the 2013 inquiry that TAFEs have played a central role in the education of Australians for more than 100 years. For many Australians, TAFEs have provided critical pathways to the training and skills which are increasingly necessary for playing their part as citizens in building and supporting Australian society and its economy. TAFEs have also played a critical role in regional and rural areas and in providing access to disadvantaged groups, indigenous and CALD students and women.

The National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development signed in April 2012 stressed the need “for recognising the important function (of public providers) in servicing the training needs of industry, regional and local communities and their role that spans higher level training and workforce development for industries and improved skill and job outcomes of disadvantaged learners and communities” (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency 2012: 73). The aim was to achieve a vocational education and training (VET) system that delivers a more productive and highly skilled workforce, enabling all working age Australians to participate effectively in the labour market and contribute to Australia’s economic future. (SCRGSP 2014). Historically, government funded TAFEs have held this special position in building the capacity of people and of their communities.

## **A. THE ROLE PLAYED BY TAFE:**

### **1. Developing Skills and Opportunities especially for the Disadvantaged.**

The attractiveness of affordable fees and concessions, coupled with the provision of support services including language and literacy classes, counsellors, libraries and learning support, have made TAFE the pre-eminent provider of quality education and training and of “One of the chief principles of TAFE has been second chance” education.

The VET system provides great flexibility in accessing qualifications. The system (including apprenticeships and traineeships) delivers employment related skills across a wide range of vocations. It provides Australians with skills to enter or re-enter the labour force, retrain for new jobs, or upskill for an existing job. The education ranges from a single unit of competency to associate degrees. Delivery ranges from formal classroom learning to flexible self-paced learning and/or on-line.

Statistics published by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER 2012) showed that in 2010, 1.8 million students were undertaking courses in the VET sector, around 80% in government-funded places. Of these 70.8% were enrolled in TAFEs and a further 8.2% in dual sector Universities. The vast majority (94.2%) were local Australian students. More than one third were enrolled in basic post-secondary courses of Certificate III or lower. 91.2% of these were enrolled in courses which led to accreditation (AQF). In 2012 1.5 million students took part in VET government –funded programmes. This represents a 4.3% increase on 2011 and 23.1% from 2008 (SCRGSO 2014 p 5.3). 78.8 were enrolled in Certificate IV or below (p5.7).

One of the key principles of TAFE which reflects the policies of AFGW has been equity in education and the development of disadvantaged students. In 2003 our 32nd Conference resolved that *(a) AFUW encourages its State and Territory Associations to support rural, isolated and indigenous women to attain tertiary education and fulfil their potential; and (b) urges AFUW and State and Territory Associations to lobby their respective governments and other*

*corporate agencies to provide resources for rural, isolated and indigenous women to pursue their studies at all levels.*

Of the effective fulltime students in TAFE 15.2% were in the lowest disadvantaged quintile as measured by the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage and 39.5%, or almost four of ten students, were from the lower two quintiles. 3.9% were Indigenous students, while 20.5% of domestic students came from a home where a language other than English was spoken. 6.7% of students had a disability. Unpublished NCVER data cited in the SCRGSP report show that the Indigenous participation rate has increased substantially by 2012 with 21.7% of indigenous people aged 15-64 years involved in VET compared with only 9.2% of the non-indigenous group. The 5.2% Indigenous proportion in VET is double that of Indigenous people in the general population (2014 p 5.18). More collaborative community driven and responsive training programs that are not market based are urgently required in remote and indigenous communities.

A 2013 report from the New South Wales Board of Vocational Education and Training showed that Aboriginal enrollments had significantly increased to close to 37,000 in 2012. Over the past five years there had been a 90% increase in the number of indigenous students 15-24 years completing Certificate II and above. In a press release releasing the report on 20 May 2013 the NSW Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Victor Dominello, commented that “supporting our Aboriginal people to stay in schools and TAFE, as a pathway to fulfilling and sustainable jobs, is a major focus of the NSW Government Plan for Aboriginal Affairs”.

The NCVER data also support the position that TAFE is a second chance for many students. 50.9% of VET students in 2010 were in the over 24 years age groups. Of these 31.6% were 45 years or older. 7% used their VET qualifications as a pathway to higher education. Many VET students had not previously completed secondary education. 30.2% enrolled in TAFE in 2009 had education to Year 11 or less or had not previously attended school (NCVER 2009). This group includes a number of women who had either not worked at all or worked for short periods before marriage and childbearing and now need to increase their skills in order to enter the workforce.

In VET continuing declining funding for student contact hours is likely to affect quality and the provision of support for individuals with significant learning needs (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency 2012: 73). Funding per student annual hours declined 19.4% in the decade to 2009 in real terms. (Productivity Commission 2012: Table 5A:19)

## **2. Supporting Regional Communities**

For many Australians living in regional centres and remote locations TAFE is the only provider of post-secondary education. The NCVER data show that 42.1% of students enrolled in TAFE in 2009 were from regional or remote locations.

A particularly successful TAFE programme addressing the needs of these rural communities is the NSW TAFE Participation Program Initiative (PPI) (Sim 2013). This is a partnership between, schools, TAFE and the community to provide choices for students at risk of disengaging from school. Delivered by every NSW TAFE in 2011-12 it provided a mix of practical, technical skills; including applied language, literacy and numeracy skills; as well as team building, problem solving, communication and employability skills. The training is supported by partnerships with local businesses and community agencies and by individual mentoring.

A significant aspect of the programme is the connection it provides for participants with employment, in teaching them about what is happening beyond the school gate, and giving them the confidence to operate in an adult world of work. Such schemes are critical for meeting the complex and high-level needs of disengaged young people and teaching them the personal and practical skills to achieve employability. VET in Schools programmes have consistently shown participants have a better chance of successful transition to the workforce (Woods 2007). Such programmes are integral to the health of rural communities, in retaining their young people. They are endangered by government funding cuts.

TAFE Directors Australia recently issued a Charter for TAFE which cited among their four principles for how the public provider can operate in an increasingly contestable environment the recognition of TAFE's 'full service role' especially in regional and rural Australia (TDA 2012)

### **3. TAFE and National Productivity**

As well as providing benefits to the individual, improvements in educational attainment also yield long-term public, economic and social benefits (OECD 2008). These include improved productivity; accelerated rates of innovation; and the development of basic knowledge capabilities and the dissemination of new ideas (Murray 2009). Education is a key driver for improving competitiveness.

It is indisputable that VET qualifications are significant for our economy. In 2010 16.9% of VET students were enrolled in engineering or related technical fields and 20.4% in management and commerce courses. Of those completing VET qualifications in 2011, 87.7% of those over 24 years were employed or in further training in 2012 (SCRGSP 2014 p B58). Over 89% of students completing qualifications in TAFE in 2011 were satisfied with the quality of their training. Similarly 84.8% of employers who were engaged with TAFE in the past twelve months reported that VET was meeting their skills needs (SCRGSP 2014 pB59). Without sufficient funding there is a risk of either not reaching Australia's future qualifications needs or lowering the quality of education and training (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency 2012: 75)

A key 2014 report from McKinsey drawing on samples from youth, employers and government-sector education providers in eight European cities has shown that a significant factor in reducing youth unemployment was the accessibility of well-coordinated subsidised VET programmes. These were most successful for transition to work when there was a high level of information for post-secondary courses available in the schools and where courses provided general skills for employment such as spoken communication and work ethics. These benefits of VET training were especially significant for small businesses who cannot afford to invest in training future employees (Mourshed et al 2014)

Low-paid workers, especially low-paid women, are significant clients of the VET sector and they are more likely to move to higher-skilled employment after VET than after other training (Skinner 2008) More programme initiatives with a gender informed focus to increase participation of women in training and employment in 'non traditional' industries and occupations is required on both state/territory and a national basis.

A NCVER report in October shows that the public VET sector is able to provide this support for national productivity with little need for additional government funding. Financial information for 2012 shows operating revenue for public VET at \$8.24 billion compared with expenditure of \$8.3 billion (NCVER 2013).

### **B. THE EFFECTS OF A COMPETITIVE TRAINING MARKET**

Recent innovations in government funding arrangements for VET have seen the proliferation of private for-profit providers accessing government funding for the first time. AFGW is concerned that the VET market is still poorly regulated. Some are not providing adequate training and students have wasted their once-only entitlement to government funding for training.

AFGW welcomed the news released on 3 August 2013 by the Australian Council for Private Education and Training that there would be fee increases of between 170% and 280% for training providers to maintain their registration and hope this will lead to greater regulation and accountability.

During 2013 several state governments have expressed their support for the VET sector and introduced initiatives to increase opportunities for skills training. Among these are NSW *Smart and Skilled* scheme, the Queensland *Great Skills. Real Opportunities* programme and the South Australian *Skills for All* initiative. In May 2013 the Victorian Minister for Higher Education and Skills, Peter Hall announced \$200 million over four years to support innovation and structural reform through the establishment of the TAFE Structural Adjustment Fund. On 18 October 2013 John-Paul Langbroek, Queensland Minister for Education, Training and Employment announced a partnership with private provider Construction Skills Queensland to subsidise up to 100 places (20 for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students) for workers with experience and some skills in the building and construction sector (Langbroek 2013).

Introducing new providers and partners into the VET sector allows the potential for increased funding for VET courses and the possibility of innovative and different approaches. Some schemes are already beginning to show results. Grace Portolesi, South Australian Minister for Employment, Higher Education and Skills reported on 28 January 2014 that under the Skills for All programme South Australia had the highest growth rate for the number of government-funded VET students – 21.3% increase overall in 2012 over 2011 figures and 28.8% for higher level courses of Certificate III and above (2014). Significantly the greatest increases were 43% in free and subsidized courses especially in such areas of skills shortage as engineering, health and community services (Portolesi 2013).

Another positive achievement reported by Scott Ryan, Parliamentary Secretary to the federal Minister for Education, is a partnership between five local Catholic secondary colleges in the Bankstown area of NSW using a \$5million grant from the federal government to set up a Trade Training Centre to provide skills in engineering, construction, automotive and electro technological trades (Ryan 2014).

The development of a competitive training market also has the potential for greater involvement of industry and employers which could lead to a higher integration of courses with skills needs and higher satisfaction for student and employers in the outcomes for satisfying and sustainable jobs. This aspect was seen by McKinsey & Co as one of the key initiatives to improve youth unemployment (Mourshed et al 2014).

However all initiatives have not seemed as positive. In Victoria changes to meet the move to a more competitive training market have seen unpopular government intervention in TAFE management. In October 2012 the Victorian Government passed amendments to the Education and Training Reform Act giving the Minister power to hire and fire TAFE directors and boards. In justification of the changes Minister Peter Hall said “It takes very specific skills to oversee a large educational institution and selecting people with the right skills and experience to excel in the job is vital” (Hall 2012). In March 2013, Minister Hall exercised this power in dismissing the Chairs of seven TAFE Boards.

This action was taken despite the government endorsement of the report of the TAFE Reform Panel prepared by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in January 2013. In the introduction to the report the Chair of the committee, Dr Ken Latta, strongly affirmed “Our considered view is that Government should not seek to make wholesale changes to the structure of the TAFE sector. The aim should be to allow TAFE institutions to make changes required to be a more competitive vocational training market” (DEECD 2013)

While the government has not given reasons for sackings the TAFE Board Chairs, Brendon Sheehan of the LH Martin Institute of the University of Melbourne states “one can reasonably assume that the chairs were dispatched because of a perceived lack of business expertise” (Sheehan 2013). However, it would not appear to be the case. Jonathon Forster, Holmesglen TAFE, is the founder and now executive chair of Kane Constructions, a company with an annual turnover of \$500 million, 285 full time employees and which operates throughout the east coast of Australia and overseas. David Gittins, GippsTAFE, is the managing director of the LaTrobeValley’s biggest car dealership and has a background in community service.

It is yet to be seen whether these measures taken to make state’s TAFEs more “commercially oriented” have been successful. The Victorian Auditor General’s report of May 2013 shows that ten of the fourteen TAFEs are at risk in financial sustainability due to difficulties in self-funding and capital replacement.

We also have reservations in the continuing ability of providers to provide affordable and accessible VET programmes. AFGW is very concerned that the ideological paradigms promoting a competitive training market will not be compatible with continuing to encourage equity in VET education for the disadvantaged - the intellectually and physically disabled, those students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, those from non-English speaking backgrounds, students in remote areas, and those seeking a second chance to play a meaningful role in our society.

The competitive market in VET has seen significantly less government funding going to TAFE which has led to cuts to teacher numbers and programmes, higher casualization of the workforce, increased class sizes and increased fees.

## **C GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY FOR TAFE**

In the words of our 2002 resolution *AFUW urges the Federal Government to re-examine its approach to Technical and Further Education; and, in particular, to restore the financial support needed to enable the nation-wide, urban and rural TAFE institutions to continue to provide those life-enhancing and paid-work-promoting courses which should not be funded on the ‘user-pays’ principle.*”. We would extend this request to the various State governments.

In recent years the role of TAFE in providing opportunities for the workers, for disadvantaged students and the regional students has been eroded in a shift from publicly-funded TAFE institutions to the support of for-profit privately funded providers. Between 2011 and 2012 there was an increase of 20% out of government funding to non-TAFE providers. Currently there is approximately \$1.4 billion being spent on private providers (Rhiannon 2014). As David McLean, TAFE manager of RMIT University Melbourne observed “People’s rights to well-funded public education have been forgotten to initiate an ideologically constructed user-pays market” (2012).

His remarks were directed to the Victorian situation where the 2012 budget saw \$1.2 billion over four years in cuts to the TAFE budget. Although some of this funding has subsequently been restored by the Napthine government it is not enough. It is not even enough to mitigate the increased costs that are already discouraging low-income students, nor to cover the costs of re-instating courses that have been discontinued, or for replacing lost staff. Guidelines for monitoring and regulating the Victorian TAFE sector developed in April 2013 in accordance with Part 5.2 of the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 state under section 7 Financial Objectives of TAFE Institutes (b) “ensure that TAFE institutes set fees efficiently, ie set fees that take into account economic factors, including levels of development, on the TAFE Institute’s capacity for and cost of supplying services”. This goes far beyond the usual concept of “user pays”! The Victorian reforms have seen the TAFE market share decrease from 66% in 2008 to 45.6% in 2012. (Tebbutt 2013c)

Cuts are not limited to Victoria. In NSW \$800 million was cut from the TAFE budget. NSW Opposition Education representative, Carmel Tebbutt MP, states “This is a critical time for TAFE in NSW...the budget cuts in NSW will slash 800 teaching and other jobs in TAFE and increase fees” (Tebbutt, 2013a). These cuts particularly focus on TAFE arts education affecting the creative industries sector which contributes more than \$30 billion to Australia each year. In a Press release for National TAFE Day in June 2013 Ms Tebbutt further extolled the economic value to NSW where every dollar invested in TAFE returns benefits worth \$6.40 to the NSW economy” (Tebbutt 2013b).

That the cuts to government funding in NSW will lead to significant increases in TAFE fees is evident in a press release in July 2013 from the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) of a recommendation that under the NSW Smart and Skilled programme fees should be applied equally across TAFE and registered private providers. Under this proposal from July 2013 the government should meet 60% of the base funding of courses on the Skills list and students 40%. Apprentices and trainees will face the largest fee rises as their positions are currently most subsidised. IPART chair, Peter Boxall, states that the “approach seeks to balance affordability and availability of VET in New South Wales” (IPART 2013)

The NSW Greens have been actively exposing the effects of funding cuts which may significantly affect equity and accessibility to disadvantage groups. On 4 November 2013 Dr John Kaye, NSW Greens Education spokesman revealed that the Sydney Institute of TAFE intended to shed 36% of its permanent teaching workforce in courses providing basic skills and prevocational education. Core-funded places which now cover 87% of current enrollments will be replaced by training entitlements which will be available to only 23.5% of the students (Kaye 2013a).

In a subsequent press release Dr Kaye announced the NSW Greens intention to launch The Greens TAFE Changes Moratorium (Secure Future for Public Provision of Vocational Education and Training) Bill 2013, stating as one of the main reasons for such a Bill being that “Outreach and equity programmes will become add-ons that are unlikely to survive” (Kaye 2013b) and “Disadvantaged students, those with special needs, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, long-term unemployed and women currently out of the workforce will be the hardest hit”.

Commencement of the new TAFE term in 2014 has shown the realisation of the fears of the effects of TAFE cuts. At North Sydney Institute of TAFE courses in food handling which were previously available free to student with intellectual disability are now demanding \$825 in fees. A retired friend, very active as a volunteer in the Men’s Shed and the restoration of heritage machinery on Cockatoo Island in Sydney

Harbour, enquired at TAFE about updating his fitting and turning skills so he could make a greater contribution discovered it would be around \$2000 a sum well beyond his means.

The effect is also on courses and teacher numbers. At Miller Institute in western Sydney plumbing apprentices have discovered that the evening catch-up classes in an essential subject necessary to complete their trade training have been cancelled due to cut backs in teaching hours. Ironically plumbing is listed as a skills shortage area! Phil Chadwick of the TAFE teachers' association reports he knows of institutions where trade course attendance has been cut from 36 weeks to 30 weeks in order to save money. (Sun Herald 2014)

In Queensland, through restructure, a total of 13 campuses will be closed while another 12 will be transferred as part of the merger between the Central Queensland University and the Central Queensland Institute of TAFE. Tasmania is cutting the TAFE budget and amalgamating campuses. Western Australia is also reducing TAFE funding. In South Australia, recurrent funding to the TAFE sector has decreased by 45.43% since 2003. The market share of TAFE SA dropped to 62% in 2013. VET funding per student contact hour fell 14% between 2006 and 2010 in 2010 terms (Productivity Commission 2012: Table 5A.19).

Across the TAFE system the NCVET report of May 2013 shows that government cuts to apprenticeship and traineeship programmes has resulted in one year in a decline of 130% in commencements in non-trade areas. In their 2014 pre-budget submission Group Training Australia, the largest employer of apprentices and trainees in Australia, emphasized "funding cuts in recent years have already caused hardships for some employers and apprentices, and that any further cutbacks could risk layoffs and unemployment" (GTA 2014).

AFGW urges the national and state governments to ensure that TAFEs are provided with sustained funding so they may continue to provide access and equity in courses for disadvantaged groups and focus targeted funding on the non-trade and lifestyle courses that enhance their ability to contribute to our society.

#### **D.GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE TO TAFE STUDENTS**

There are two further areas not specifically addressed in the consideration of TAFE funding where the AFGW thinks the government can assist TAFE students. Tim Pitman, a senior research fellow at the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education at Curtin University, in analysing the submissions to the government enquiry into the Demand-driven system noted that 27 of the universities making submissions recommended that the system be extended to sub-bachelor courses to help address areas of national skill shortage (Pitman 2014).

The second area is in the provision of financial support to individual students. VET FEEHELP was introduced in 2005 to encourage students to take up courses for higher skills qualifications through providing student loans. However the benefit applies only to students enrolled in courses for Diploma and above. In order to promote greater accessibility and equity in VET courses, especially for students in regional and remote areas, we suggest that the possibility of extending this assistance to other VET students be investigated.

#### **E.TAFE EDUCATION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS**

The Terms of Reference for this inquiry have omitted a significant aspect of TAFE education that we consider very important. We are concerned at the neglect of gender perspectives in an otherwise valuable discussion. Any inquiry that fails to recognise the need to address gender as a possible factor in inequity must



be seen as inadequate, even if gender issues are raised only in order to be dismissed as already satisfactorily dealt with. The inquiry would need to demonstrate that groups of women who are disadvantaged in other respects – namely women from low socio-economic backgrounds, Indigenous women, rural and remote women, immigrant and refugee women and other women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds - do not suffer further disadvantage in respect of their access to and successful participation in TAFE education. The position for women with disabilities also requires urgent attention. In making these observations, AFGW would also like to point out that it is very difficult to monitor the participation of women and girls either by level of qualification or by field of education as sex disaggregated data for these important attributes are not published free of charge in official statistical reports.

Nevertheless, AFGW is convinced that the needs of Australian girls and women are not adequately recognised in current TAFE structures, curricula and procedures. We note particularly

- the poor attention given to informing girls in secondary schools of TAFE programs that are available and well-suited to their further education and career options. In NSW Pru Goward, Minister for Family and Community Services and Minister for Women, has introduced a Girls in Trade resource package to encourage girls in schools into a career in non-traditional trades for which we commend her ;

- the financial difficulty in accessing TAFE or obtaining appropriate support within the sector that is experienced by older women seeking to increase their skills in order to return to, or increase their participation in, the workforce;

- the under-representation of females in apprenticeships and traineeships, 66% of which, according to ABS data, are filled by males.

As cited by NCVET (2012a):

If we look at apprenticeship and traineeships, NCVET data shows that from 1995 to 2011 the proportion of women commencing an apprenticeship or traineeship in the technical and trade occupations has remained a steady 15%, with a similar proportion completing. And the women are almost wholly concentrated in the lower-paid trades of hairdressing and food. This contrasts sharply with the approximately 55% of women making up the commencements in the non-trade occupations.

AFGW were actively involved with eS4W in producing a submission to Skills Australia in November 2010 where we affirmed our belief that “It is vital to build the economic security of Australian women and girls by ensuring their access to government funded relevant training that enhances career pathways and equitable employment outcomes through their participation in VET. This includes women’s participation across all programs including traineeships, apprenticeships, and employment creation programs.” (eS4W 2010)

We maintain that it is important to identify industries and occupations with viable career pathways – work that is emergent, in skills shortage areas including non traditional fields where existing participation of women remains at a low ratio in work and study in VET

In this submission to Skills Australia, we recommended actions to overcome this discrimination against women and girls including the need to:

1. Identify, collate & prioritise documented best practice gender sensitive programs and strategies that have been successful for women in emergent and non-traditional areas of work.

2. Identify selected industries and occupations where initiatives including programs for women can be run to increase and support women's engagement and inclusion.

Such programmes will not only increase the financial security of individual women, they will also increase the financial security of the nation. As the Productivity Commission has frequently pointed out, notably in its findings on paid parental leave, an increase of women in the paid workforce is essential if an improvement in national productivity is to be achieved.

### **In Conclusion**

We welcome the initiative of the Federal Government in initiating this consultation into the role of the Technical and Further Education section and its operation. TAFE is the only national institution in Australia for the public provision of post-compulsory education and training. We firmly believe that a healthy, government-funded, affordable and equitable TAFE system has a significant position in Australian society through building the capacity of our people and our communities. There is a constant need to innovate with design, course delivery and financing to make education more accessible and affordable. While we welcome and consider very important a greater involvement of industry in TAFE we are concerned that the VET sector should more appropriately be administered in the Education portfolio. Failure to provide a well-integrated publicly-funded VET system in schools, post-secondary and higher education will lead to increased social exclusion and greater unemployment for those who leave school undereducated and unqualified. We hope our submission will contribute positively to your deliberations.

Submitted on behalf of the Council and members of the Australian Federation of Graduate Women Inc by  
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February 2014

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