



*Patron: Her Excellency The Honourable Dr Jeannette Young PSM AC
Governor of Queensland*

19 March 2024

Hon Jason Clare MP
Minister for Education - House of Representatives
PO Box 153
BANKSTOWN NSW 1885

Via email: minister.clare@education.gov.au

Dear Mr Clare

RE: NCWQ Response to Australian University Accord

The National Council of Women of Queensland (NCWQ) is a not-for-profit umbrella organisation with broadly humanitarian and educational objectives. We work to improve conditions for women and their families. NCWQ who represents over thirty women's organisations and over forty individual members welcomes the opportunity to comment on this important review.

This response has been prepared by our new Advocacy Hub which includes NCWQ Advisers, members from the Management Committee and interested members some of whom are tertiary students.

NCWQ Recommendations in Summary:

- Fee Free higher education and preparatory courses going forward particularly for older women who are increasingly at risk and an underutilised resource and women reentering the workforce.
- Removal or reduction of the burden of debt of students of higher education by the removal of indexation to halt the spiralling debt of students and graduates
- Paid placements and adoption of alternative approaches for students to undertake compulsory work experience to enable them to engage fully in their studies, improve retention and course completion.
- Career education from Prep to year 12 to challenge stereotypes and encourage women into non traditional fields in particular STEM and trades.

NCWQ commends the Australian University Accord for its frank review with a simple message that Australia needs a more equitable higher education system. NCWQ agrees that significant change is needed to address skills shortages in the areas of early childhood education, teachers, care workers and nurses which are traditionally filled by women as well as increases in graduates from engineering, manufacturing and innovation. NCWQ agrees P-12 Career Education for all students is needed to increase tertiary participation and challenge stereotypes.



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In order to address current and future skills requirements, significant investment, new approaches and openness to change are vital. Students will need to be supported to complete their studies and fees charged reviewed to encourage more people to engage in further education and to complete their studies. More graduates are needed. Engaging and supporting women to engage in and complete higher education study in traditional and non traditional fields would be a step in the right direction. The Accord recommends changes to career education.

The Accord recommends making significant changes which NCWQ supports including; changes to student contributions and repayments and suggests paid placements along with new ways to approach compulsory work experience.

Student Contribution

Current fees associated with higher education, indexation of loans, and repayment expectations impacts on student's willingness to engage in higher education studies and to engage in full time employment post graduation. This debt impacts career pathways and earning potential. Debt carried forward impacts credit ratings affecting the ability to gain future finance for example for a home. NCWQ feels strongly that the debt incurred gaining the qualification should not exceed the earning potential of the student as suggested in the Accord. The burden of this debt impacts women disproportionately due to the high percentage of women in the lower paid care industries and limited earning capacity given the proportion engaging in part time employment due to family responsibilities and for some, to avoid having to repay the debt. NCWQ agrees with the fee-free preparatory courses suggested but feels it should be expanded to other courses for example the modular, stackable skills suggested, STEM and trades. Fee free courses targeting older women who are emerging as the demographic most at risk of homelessness in addition to the suggested cohorts would empower them to become more economically independent. Similarly NCWQ recommends fee free courses for women reentering the workforce after taking time out for family responsibilities. Ultimately this would save the government money.

Paid Work Experience

Currently placement poverty impacts student's ability to reach their full potential and engage fully in their studies. Students of social work, child care, teaching, nursing, aged care etc are expected to undertake unpaid work in order to gain experience in their chosen field. This expectation places pressure on the students who have ongoing living expenses and an inability to engage in paid employment while doing their compulsory placements. Paid placements would enable increased participation, promote retention and completion of study. Alternative approaches are also worthy of consideration and have been trialled by Social Work students with positive outcomes. NCWQ supports including, as suggested in the Accord, work experience in an existing paid employment, recognition of prior learning and sponsoring students during placement in industries where it is difficult to place students.



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Below are a list of references consulted when preparing this response.

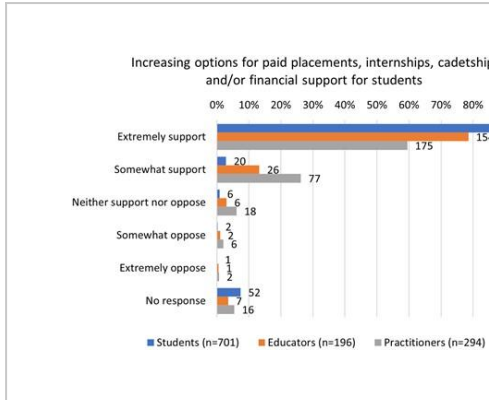
Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Sandy Smith'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'S' and 'M'.

Sandy Smith
PRESIDENT

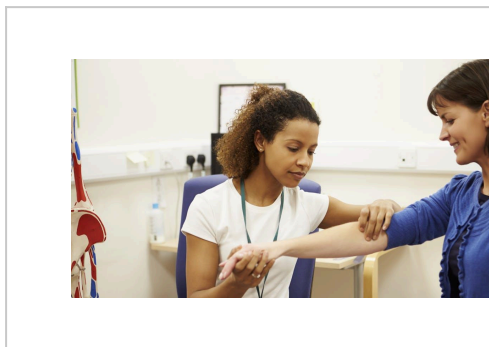
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Re-Envisioning Field Education in Australian Social Work to Combat Placement Poverty: Students’, Educators’ and Practitioners’ Perceptions

In Australia and internationally, there is increasing pressure from people within the social work profession—including students, educators, practitioners and pe



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A new survey has found the financial burden of work placements on students can be crippling.