**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

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| Full implementation | Partial implementation | No or negative response |

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

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| **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 metropolitan and regional universities. | 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. | The Greens are committed to abolishing tuition fees for undergraduate degrees. There will unlimited free access to university for everyone. |
| **NFAW RECOMMENDATION** | | |
| Funding for research into university teaching and professional development for university teaching staff should be restored. | | |
| **PARTY COMMITMENTS** | | |
| **ALP** | **LNP** | **GREENS** |
|  |  |  |
| **NFAW RECOMMENDATION** | | |
| The cap on recurrent funding should be reversed to reduce dependency on casual teaching staff. | | |
| **PARTY COMMITMENTS** | | |
| **ALP** | **LNP** | **GREENS** |
|  | 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.  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 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. |  |

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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.