



## Fair education and training Fact Sheet

Everybody acknowledges that education is the key to improving life circumstances – especially for people who are most disadvantaged.

Have you just completed your schooling, and hope to enroll in a TAFE Institute, private vocational college or public university? Or do you want to upgrade your skills to get out of a dead-end job, or after being out of the workforce raising children? Do you know if you can access affordable education and training? You want your existing skills and experience to be recognized and credited.

### What is the problem

Education and training plays a major part in improving social equality and inclusion, and reducing social and economic disadvantage. It is a major contributor to reducing inequalities between men and women, legitimating social skills and creating a fair, just, civil and sustainable society.

However, tertiary education and training is becoming increasingly unaffordable for many people – particularly those that need it most.

- University and TAFE fees have increased markedly, with some courses costing over \$100,000 per year
- Vocational education students now have to pay tuition fees and have limited access to loans or income support.

For those students who live in more isolated areas, travel and associated living costs can be prohibitive. This is particularly true for women, many of whom are sole parents also struggling to raise a family and make ends meet.

The barriers facing women with disabilities, immigrant and refugee women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women can lock them out of further education and training opportunities.

- Income support for students in many cases is below poverty levels

In many cases education is not counted towards activity requirements for income support recipients, meaning they have to take on additional paid work on top of study. For sole parents this is also on top of caring for their children.

The funding of educational institutions exacerbates this problem, with many programs required to be revenue generating or cost neutral and meet employer not student needs. Many are now funded and run by for profit institutions. As with early childhood education, it is very difficult to make a profit from tertiary education.

## What is needed?

More data and information on women's needs and outcomes in tertiary education is needed. Statistical collections now rarely publish gender disaggregated data.

WEL believes that the Australian Government needs to acknowledge through policies and programs of reform the specific educational and training needs of women from low socio-economic backgrounds and Indigenous communities in all categories.

WEL requests that the Australian Government incorporates in its national planning and advisory structures for education and training, objectives and targets which return gender equity as a core aim of all national strategic plans.

*WEL will be using our Feminist Policy Framework to lobby for policies that increase fairness.*

*WEL believes that fair policies are those that:*

- *Ensure the costs and benefits are fairly distributed between women and men, as well as between different groups of women*
- *Value and reward fairly people's different skills, experiences and contributions*
- *Recognise the value of caring and supporting roles, whether paid or unpaid*
- *Recognise and rectify past and current inequalities and between men and women; and*
- *Enhance opportunities for both women and men to take on equal rights and responsibilities in all aspects of society: politics, community, employment and social life*

## What can you do?

Ask your local member

- What do they know about student income support schemes and the specific needs of women students.
- Whether they are prepared to support equity programs that ensure that women who miss out can access courses.
- What is their party doing about the general funding issues and competitive tendering that is undermining the social functions of public education and training and increases issues faced by women students
- Do they support publishing educational information broken down by gender?

*Make your voice count for fairness*