



New Zealand Federation of Graduate Women Inc

Whakaminenga Wahine o Aotearoa kua whiwhi Tohu

Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into New Models of Tertiary Education

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The New Zealand Federation of Graduate Women (NZFGW) is the national body representing members in six branches throughout the country. Our purpose is to represent the interests of women graduates on matters that affect their education, employment and professional status and we aim to make a positive difference to the education and employment outcomes for girls and women in New Zealand and internationally. We work in partnership with other national civil society organisations representing the voice of women in New Zealand and we are affiliated to Graduate Women International.
- 1.2 Through our branches NZFGW distributes approximately \$1.5 million annually in scholarships and awards to support women to access undergraduate and post-graduate education and to undertake research. A major purpose of these awards is to enable women to enhance their lives and employment outcomes through access to further education and second chance education. We reserve a number of awards to enable women to take up industry and trade training, to support women into STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and to undertake second-chance education as mature students. Our Graduate Women Wellington branch has three major three-year awards for women who are the first in their family to study at tertiary level, and these have a particular focus on young Māori and Pasifika women.
- 1.3 We have a strong stakeholder interest in tertiary education and how it supports the best educational, employment, economic and social outcomes for women and their families.
- 1.4 We welcome the opportunity to put forward our response to the Inquiry's issues paper. It is a wide-ranging inquiry, and we do not address all the questions raised since many of them are beyond our remit. We do however have a number of comments and suggestions.

2 Summary of recommendations

- 2.1 The final paper should have a robust gender analysis, of both (1) the current situation for women in tertiary education, including those in the priority groups identified in the terms of reference; and (2) of the potential impacts on women of any new models of tertiary education that are proposed.
- 2.2 The discussion on student choices in education needs to be broadened to look at gendered aspects such as the gender wage gap and the impact of occupational segregation on women. Constraints on student choices needs to have a sharper focus on the causes.
- 2.3 The Inquiry is directed to look at priority groups (Māori and Pasifika; at risk youth; those with limited access to traditional campus-based education) but there is no gender analysis or discussion of the situation for women, either separately or as part of these priority groups. This should be addressed in the final paper.
- 2.4 The Inquiry should use data across government to look at the gaps that exist between those who are in the system and those who are not. This is particularly important for those most at risk.
- 2.5 A rigorous quality assurance system must be part of any move towards new models of education; as well as a robust and adaptive regulatory system so that there can be full student and public confidence in the system in future.

3 Lack of gender analysis

- 3.1 We are surprised and disappointed that the paper contains no gender analysis looking at women's experience and outcomes in tertiary education, or of the impacts on women of possible changes in the system. We consider that this is a major deficit that should be rectified in the final paper. A particular focus of this analysis needs to be not only the women who have accessed tertiary education but also those who have not. The terms of reference direct the Commission to investigate opportunities to improve access, participation and achievement of priority groups such as Māori and Pasifika, at risk youth, and those with limited access to traditional campus-based provision. We support this focus, but we believe that the investigation should also explicitly include looking at how the current system supports best outcomes for women, particularly those not currently succeeding, and what is needed to improve these outcomes in future.

3.2 The gender pay gap

Women have a high participation rate in tertiary education (56% of students, Fig 4 page 5), but we know that once they are in employment gender pay gaps increase over time and five years after study, women earn less than men across all levels¹. A further finding of this Ministry of Education research is that, after five years, the difference in earnings was widest at doctorate and masters level and at level 1 -3 certificate. So at both the highest and lowest

¹ https://www.educationcounts.gov.nz/publications/tertiary_education/education-outcomes/147233

levels of tertiary education, the outcomes for women are worse than those for men, and this should be of considerable concern to the Inquiry.

3.3 *Occupational segregation*

There is no substantive discussion in the paper of occupational segregation and the impact of this on economic outcomes for women. The Ministry for Women has a brief discussion about the gender wage gap and its causes², stating that female-dominated occupations tend to be lower paid than male-dominated occupations. Given that many female-dominated occupations require tertiary qualifications (for example, nursing, teaching, allied health professions), the Inquiry should also have a stronger focus on the choices that students make in deciding on their tertiary education, and the impacts that these will have on their lifetime earnings. The gender pay gap is also affected by the fact that women predominate in part-time work; that they take time out of the workforce for unpaid family and caring responsibilities; and that there can be unconscious bias that holds back women's career progression. While these factors are not directly attributable to tertiary education, we believe that a future focus on getting the best from tertiary education for individuals, their families and communities, society and the economy should be part of the discussion.

3.4 *Gender analysis of the impact of student choices in education*

The diagram (Figure 3, page 4) of the main participants of the education system misses out a key component: the families and communities of students. These are hugely influential in shaping the choices students make. Box 1 on page 6 refers to numerous studies finding that family, peer and societal influences are important in shaping individuals' predispositions towards tertiary education, but there is no further discussion. There is no doubt that many young women are directly advised – and indirectly nudged – by families, communities and their schools towards study and subject choices that lead to female-dominated occupations. This is not intended to belittle these important and useful occupations; the point is that the data shows that these choices can constrain women's lifetime earnings (and retirement savings) vis-à-vis those of men. Ensuring that occupations of similar skills, effort and responsibility are paid equally is beyond the remit of this Inquiry, but it cannot be ignored as a matter of public policy. The tertiary system undoubtedly has a role to play in supporting women to take up and stay in education and training in male-dominated occupations, particularly where there are skill shortages. It would be good to see some proposals on this in the final paper.

3.5 This section also refers briefly to constraints on student choices, including affordability, admission requirements and geographical proximity. These are very real constraints, and are particularly hard to overcome for people from low wage or beneficiary families. That is why Graduate Women Wellington has established awards for young women who are the first in their family to go to university. However this is a tiny contribution to what is a much wider and systemic issue about lack of access, disadvantage and inequality, and one which we feel the Inquiry should have a sharper focus on.

² <http://women.govt.nz/our-work/utilising-womens-skills/income/gender-pay-gap-analysis>

3.6 *Using data to reveal gaps between achievement and potential*

There is a great deal of data available on students and the tertiary system, but it is focused on those already in the system and what they have achieved. What it does not tell us is what the gaps are, and why they exist. The exception to this is the work on NEET (young people not in employment, education or training), where government has put in considerable policy and resource effort to address the issues for this group. However, once on an employment track, these people disappear from view and little is known about whether a gap remains between their achievement and their potential. Joining up the data that exists across the government system would help show the gaps that exist, and suggest effective policy responses – government is already doing this for its social investment approach in the health, social welfare and justice sectors.

3.7 *No gender analysis of Māori, Pasifika and at risk youth*

The terms of reference direct the Inquiry to look at issues for priority groups. Questions 53 – 58 have no reference to women, either separately or as part of the priority groups. Figure 34 on p 78 looks at some tertiary models tailored to Māori students. Pages 40 – 43 look at some of the issues for Māori and Pasifika and other ethnicities, but there is no reference to women in these groups in either discussion, nor is there a gender analysis. This needs to be addressed in the final paper.

4 New models of provision and the need for adequate regulation

4.1 The terms of reference direct the Inquiry to look at national and international trends in innovative models of tertiary education, and some examples are given. The impression is that the future focus will be away from state provided, institution-centred delivery and towards more privately provided, learner-centred, self-directed, open sourced delivery. However, we believe that the most at risk consumers in such systems will be more vulnerable. We recognise that the system must be flexible and adaptive, and there are many directions that can be taken that will support good outcomes for students, their teachers, and their eventual employers, but it must also ensure that no one is left behind.

4.2 Any moves towards increasing private provision must be supported by rigorous quality assurance of courses, qualifications awarded and providers, and a strong regulatory system will be vital. Such moves must also support access for the most at-risk groups; the danger is that they will get left even further behind if positive actions are not taken to ensure their inclusion.

4.3 *The lessons of regulatory failure*

Around ten or more years ago, there was a series of failures of private training establishments (PTEs), particularly the ones focused on international students. They were found to be issuing qualifications improperly and to be operating illegally. There was a relatively weak regulatory system in place at the time. The result was a loss of confidence in

New Zealand education in overseas education markets, and considerable national reputational and economic damage that has taken many years to rebuild.

- 4.4 In other sectors there have also been well-documented failures of regulation: the Pike River Royal Commission pointed out the tragic failure of a light-handed health and safety approach that shifted responsibility to employers and then ceased to support or monitor them; the move in the 1990s to a more self-regulated building industry resulted in the leaky buildings crisis which continues to have a major economic impact.
- 4.5 The point here is that innovations in tertiary education delivery must be supported by robust adaptive regulation so that there can be confidence in the system and its quality assurance. This should not only be quality assurance of the provider, but should also cover the quality of the learning outcomes. We note that many professions are regulated (for example, the health, law, teaching, accountancy, engineering professions) by their professional bodies who certify the competency and qualifications of registered practitioners. Where there is no independent professional body, the public and students must rely on the quality assurance and regulation framework of the education system to have confidence in the qualifications. Pages 74 and 75 set out some examples of new models of education being tested in New Zealand and overseas, but it lacks any discussion of quality assurance and regulation.

5 Conclusion

- 5.1 We have made a number of recommendations that are set out in section 2 of this submission. We hope that they are useful to the Inquiry and we would be happy to meet the Commission to discuss the matters that we raise in this response to the issues paper.

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