



Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations Incorporated

Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA)

Pre-budget Submission 2021-2022

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Compiled with the assistance of the staff and office bearers of the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) and its affiliated member organisations.

Prepared by Errol Phuah (National President), Adam Scorgie (Vice President) and Eve Walker (Policy & Research Advisor) and Kya Branch (NATSIPA National President)
Level 1, 120 Clarendon Street, Southbank, VIC, 3006

For comments, please contact Errol Phuah, CAPA National President +61 431 545 167
www.capa.edu.au

Foreword:

The Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) is the peak representative body for over 455,000 postgraduate students in Australia. Our policy proposals impact both coursework and research students, regardless of their nationality. Although our reach is nationwide, CAPA's current membership includes 27 affiliated university associations and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Postgraduate Association (NATSIPA).

CAPA carries out its mission through policy, research, and activism. We achieve this by promoting postgraduate interests to higher education stakeholders, some of which include: (1) the Federal Government; (2) state and territory governments; (3) political parties; and (4) minor parties. Our non-partisan policy positions are critical to this.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly had a significant impact on the Australian Higher Education sector. Many tertiary providers in lieu embraced blended learning models, discontinued courses, and announced unprecedented staffing cuts, many tertiary providers' unstable financial status.

These practices have allowed universities to survive into 2021, but students have been burdened with the negative repercussions. Although we are well-aware of the additional funding provided for through the Research Support Program (RSP),¹ it is crucial that supplementary resources are allocated to combat the diverse issues affecting postgraduate students. Mental health and financial hardship are two issues which will continue to impact postgraduate students throughout 2021. As such, we implore the Morrison Government to consider the following recommendations to support Australia's future professional workforce.

Recommendations:

Part I

- 1. Extend income support to all domestic postgraduate students.**
- 2. Provide universities additional guidance and assistance to support research students enrolled from 1st March 2020 onward by:**
 - a. ensuring universities the additional 1 billion to RSP funds is prioritised to support COVID-19 stipend extensions for HDR students affected by the pandemic.**
 - b. Provide ongoing additional RSP funding beyond 2021 to ensure pandemic affected students graduating in later years are also supported with stipend extensions towards the end of their degree.**
- 3. Continue Abstudy payments amounts in line with the fortnightly payment**

¹'Research Support Program', Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Australian Government, accessed 24 January 2021, <https://www.education.gov.au/research-support-program>

amount projected for recipients until 31st March 2021 as a permanently fixed amount (\$715.70 per fortnight, including COVID supplement).

Part II

- 4. Provide private companies accepting interns through the NPILF with tax deductions related to the training they provide students.**
- 5. Ensure that students are financially compensated for their labour.**

Part III

- 6. Fund University initiated mental health programs and training.**
- 7. Ensure that universities employ culturally competent staff for their health and counselling services.**
- 8. Acknowledge that no one can be ‘culturally competent’ in all fields and that a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach will not be appropriate in adopting these policies.**
- 9. Delegate oversight to external government bodies, such as the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency or Australian Skills Quality Authority.**

Part IV

- 10. Acknowledge the difficulties faced by many women seeking to balance their domestic responsibilities with their careers.**
- 11. Prioritise support systems for women in STEM by creating scholarship programs and subsidised childcare programs on campuses.**

Part I - The importance of supporting domestic postgraduate students:

The former Minister for Education, Dan Tehan, had stated that universities have an essential role to play ‘in educating a future workforce to boost jobs and boost productivity’.² It must be made clear to the Morrison Government that economic recovery is a paramount concern for the Australian public. Polling commissioned by the Australian Institute demonstrates that the health of the economy is the most important political issue.³ As five dollars is added to GDP for every dollar

² ‘Higher Education Funding at Odds with Skills Gap Shortages and Future Workplace Requirements’, Committee for Economic Development of Australia, accessed 25 January 2021, <https://www.ceda.com.au/News-and-analysis/CEDA-Events/Higher-education-funding-at-odds-with-skills-gap-shortages-and-future-workforce-requirements>.

³ ‘Polling – National Political Issues December 2020’, Australia Institute, accessed 22 January 2021, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/polling-national-political-issues/>.

invested into research in Australia, postgraduate students, who are central to Australian research, could be a powerful engine for growth in the economy.⁴

On average, full-time postgraduate coursework degree holders have a median salary of roughly \$90,000 per annum.⁵ Significantly more significant than the \$70,000 per annum earned by those with undergraduate degrees.⁶ Undergraduate and postgraduate employment rates sit at approximately a 90 per cent likelihood of finding employment within four months of graduation.⁷ This means that while postgraduates have similar employability ratios, their increased salary means that they can make more significant HECS loan repayments at an earlier stage in their career. Yet, individuals who do not have the financial support needed to continue their studies are unlikely to do so.⁸

People from a higher socio-economic background are 35 per cent more likely to study a Master's level course than those who are not.⁹ Seventy-three per cent of respondents in the United Kingdom stated that the cost of tuition fees was their most significant concern, with living expenses and incurring debt being frequently cited barriers (both 49 per cent) as well.¹⁰ While this data is in the context of students in the United Kingdom, there is ample reason to believe that similar concerns exist for students in Australia.

On average, full-time postgraduate coursework degree holders have a median salary of roughly \$90,000 per annum;¹¹ this being significantly greater than the \$70,000 achieved by those with undergraduate degrees.¹² If we consider this on a purely economic level, people who hold postgraduate qualifications have a 92.4 per cent likelihood of finding employment within four months of graduation. This means that they can begin making HECS loan repayments, but only if they are financially secure to continue their studies.

One of the most harmful assumptions associated with the provision of Austudy support is that those pursuing a postgraduate degree already have alternative avenues of work available to them. For a course to be eligible for study payments, it must be either the 'fastest' or 'only pathway to gain an entry-level qualification for their profession'.¹³ This is why people undertaking a Juris Doctor may receive financial support, while those in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM), cannot.

⁴ PricewaterhouseCoopers Consulting, *Where Next For Tertiary Education?: How the COVID-19 Crisis Can be the Catalyst to Reboot Towards a Stronger Sector*, 2020, <https://www.pwc.com.au/government/where-next-for-tertiary-education.pdf>.

⁵ 'Graduate Employment', QILT: Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching, accessed 25 January 2021, <https://www.qilt.edu.au/qilt-surveys/graduate-employment>.

⁶ 'Postgrads are earning more than their undergrad peers', Postgradaustralia, accessed 25 January 2021, <https://postgradaustralia.com.au/latest-news/postgrads-are-earning-more-than-their-undergrad-peers>.

⁷ 'Postgrads are earning more than their undergrad peers'.

⁸ Josephine Hansom, Sarah Newton, et al., *Student and Graduate Views on the Proposed Master's Loan for Postgraduate Study*, May 2016, 9.

⁹ Hansom, *Student and Graduate Views*, 9.

¹⁰ Hansom, *Student and Graduate Views*, 9.

¹¹ 'Postgrads are earning more than their undergrad peers'.

¹² 'Postgrads are earning more than their undergrad peers'.

¹³ 'Masters by coursework approval for student payments' Department of Social Services, Australian Government accessed: 29 January 2021, <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/programs-services/student-payments/approved-institutions-and-courses-for-student-payments>

Ironically, most students who pursue postgraduate studies (approximately 30 to 37 per cent) are from either studied science and math or health or psychology degrees. While medical or engineering degrees might have lucrative financial outcomes,¹⁴ generalist science degrees are not. Many people interested in lab work are fuelled by a passion for their field of study rather than the idea of increased economic prospects. As such, the recent increase in university places in response to the Job-Ready Graduates package is likely to result in financial insecurity within the field the Morrison Government is looking to promote.

Higher Degree Research (HDR) students are generally not eligible for Austudy. During the pandemic, those who lost employment, or were underemployed, were some of the most vulnerable people in the tertiary sector.¹⁵ A vast majority of the new jobs created in Australia since the pandemic have been casual jobs; a factor which has doubtlessly been accelerated by the pandemic.¹⁶ Many HDR students who work as sessional teaching or research assistants have lost work for 2020 to 2021 and are also not eligible for JobKeeper. Wage theft is common among casual tutors on campus.¹⁷ Students of this cohort are willing to be exploited in exchange for the basic requirements of supporting their livelihood as many students do not receive a stipend scholarship for their research work.

In addition to this, despite the one billion dollars to universities through the RSP, our affiliate student organisation has not reported any increase in COVID-19 related stipend extensions. CAPA's submission to the COVID-19 Senate inquiry 'COVID-19: From a research student's perspective.' dives deep into contributions of research students the pressures associated with the degree in the pre-COVID era. Yet we are beginning to see many universities declining stipend extensions despite the challenges of 2020.

The Abstudy scheme was designed to address the educational disadvantages faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by improving educational outcomes to a level equivalent to that of the Australian population in general.¹⁸ Conversely, domestic postgraduate coursework students are eligible for study payments only if their course meets the requirements determined by the *Education Institutions and Courses* Federal Government Instrument.¹⁹ Only 28 per cent of postgraduate courses have been approved for income support.

¹⁴ 'Postgrads are earning more than their undergrad peers'.

¹⁵ Rebecca L. Johnson, Ross A. Coleman, et al., 'The Quiet Crisis of PhDs and COVID-19: Reaching the Financial Tipping Point', Research Square, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-36330/v2>.

¹⁶ Dan Nahum and Jim Stanford, *Briefing Paper: 2020 Year-End Labour Market Review: Insecure Work and the COVID-19 Pandemic*, Australia Institute, December 2020, 1-2.

¹⁷ Alison Barnes, 'Wage Theft Flourishing at Australian Universities', National Tertiary Education Union, posted 5 August 2020, <https://www.nteu.org.au/article/Wage-theft-flourishing-at-Australian-universities-22226>.

¹⁸ 'ABSTUDY resources for community groups' Department of Social Services, Australian Government accessed: 29 January 2021, <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/organisations/community/community-resources-and-help/abstudy-resources-community-groups#a2>

¹⁹ 'Approved institutions and courses for student payments' Department of Social Services, Australian Government accessed: 29 January 2021, <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/programs-services/student-payments/approved-institutions-and-courses-for-student-payments>

In 2008, the Bradley Review recommended that the income support scheme be reviewed, granting financial support to all domestic students and would have cost \$186 million at the time.²⁰ However, owing to the Global Financial Crisis, this initiative was not implemented.

Similarly, the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People²¹ called for the Federal Government to examine income support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students undertaking postgraduate degrees.

Within the Job-Ready Graduates package, an ‘eligible Indigenous person’ for the purpose of CSP are specifically refers to those with a ‘fixed permanent address in a regional *area or a remote* area’.²² We find this discouraging as more than 81 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders live in metropolitan areas.²³ As of 2016, only 0.57 per cent of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people had obtained a university degree (3,708 out of a total population of 649,200).²⁴ With statistics as alarming as these, further barriers to postgraduate study cannot be accepted.

According to a paper recently published by Deloitte, an estimated \$140 billion in GDP can be contributed to increased productive capacity related to obtaining a university education.²⁵ International evidence demonstrates that strong university sectors are associated with economic prosperity and a higher standard of living. This, in turn, results in higher income levels per capita. Yet, Australia’s gross domestic expenditure of research and development is 1.79 per cent, compared to the 2.34 average seen in the OECD. While the 2020 budget showed great opportunity for growth in this area, the Federal Government must also ensure that funding is used to support future practitioners' needs within the research itself.

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²⁰ Denise Bradley, Peter Noonan, et al. *Review of Australian Higher Education- Final Report* (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008), 247.

²¹ Larissa Behrendt, Steven Larkin, et al. *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: Final Report* (Department of Education, 2012), xxi.

²² *Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020* (Cth), (Austl.), <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2020B00096/Explanatory%20Memorandum/Text>.

²³ ‘Census of Population and Housing: Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’, Australian Bureau of Statistics, released 19 February 2018, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/census-population-and-housing-characteristics-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/latest-release>.

²⁴ ‘Census of Population and Housing’.

²⁵ Deloitte Access Economics, *The Importance of Universities to Australia’s Prosperity: A Report Prepared for Universities Australia*, October 2015, iv.

the pandemic.

b. Provide ongoing additional RSP funding beyond 2021 to ensure pandemic affected students graduating in later years are also supported with stipend extensions towards the end of their degree.

3. Continue Abstudy payments amounts in line with the fortnightly payment amount projected for recipients until 31st March 2021 as a permanently fixed amount (\$715.70 per fortnight, including COVID supplement).

Part II - Quality control in the era of online learning:

As discussed earlier, many tertiary providers have been forced to lower the quality of courses through online delivery in 2020. It seems as if this ‘blended’ model will be used for the foreseeable future, despite negative reviews from students. Online classes tend to discourage students from interacting with lecturers and tutors based on how they are delivered. In particular, this disadvantages students with disabilities, poor English skills, or those who are from a lower socio-economic background.²⁶ Universities offering students the opportunity to omit their low grades through a pass/fail system further acknowledges the difficulties in learning online for many students.²⁷

Employers value soft skills, and results indicate that employers demonstrating greater satisfaction with students who have learned on-campus than those who have not.²⁸ Collaborative and adaptive behaviours are two areas in which students who have learnt online excel. When comparing the rates of satisfaction between undergraduate students and postgrads, the results are startling. Employers rated their satisfaction in graduate collaborative skills at 84 per cent for postgraduate students, and 91 per cent for undergrads. This difference is likely due to the amount of online study undertaken, in addition to a lack of ‘student-centred collaborative learning activities’.²⁹

While we cannot suggest that the Federal Government requires classes to be taught in-person again, additional programs must be run to supplement these skills in graduates. This can include implementing internships as a capstone requirement in many fields; an approach which would link the tertiary and private sectors.

Despite many courses being run online, universities have been faced with unforeseen costs related to operational health and safety. Many universities are having to run additional labs and

²⁶ Fujuan Tan, Lee Nabb, et al. ‘International ESL Graduate Student Perceptions of Online Learning in the Context of Second Language Acquisition and Culturally Responsive Facilitation’, *Adult Learning* 21 (2010), 12.

²⁷ Natassia Chrysanthos, ‘Australian Universities Start Wiping Fail Grades as Students Plea for Amnesty’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 April 2020, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/australian-universities-start-wiping-fail-grades-as-students-plea-for-amnesty-20200331-p54fmf.html>.

²⁸ QILT, *2019 Employer Satisfaction Survey National Report*, January 2020, 7.

²⁹ QILT, *2019 Employer Satisfaction Survey National Report*, 7.

workshops to work within COVID safe procedures.³⁰ These are unrealised costs to universities that are not considered when realigning funding with expenses indicated in the *Job-Ready Graduates* package. Operating on similar funding levels, universities should be given an additional levy to alleviate the additional administrative burden required to comply with the National Priorities Industry Linkage Fund (NPILF). The tightening of budgets can only be detrimental to the quality of education to no fault of students.

The NPILF addressed this last year through the allocation of block grants to universities to support industry engagement.³¹ Increased workforce opportunities are integral to supporting the demand created by the 100,000 new university places available to students by 2030.³² Despite higher education being fundamental to Australia's future, we need the private sector to support these reforms as well.

Currently, the NPILF supports universities in delivering work-integrated learning opportunities for students. To suggest that universities pay students for all internships would be unreasonable, especially considering the net-benefit this will have to private institutions using internship derived labour. In saying this, training costs the company's money. As such, we would suggest that the Federal Government consider providing these companies with tax deductibles as an incentive.

This program would function similar to other employee training deductibles found in s 8-1 of the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997* (Cth). By treating interns more like employees, businesses are more likely to be invested in their vocational outcomes. One of the primary goals of the NPILF is to give students industry experience.³³ Therefore, by increasing the quality of their training through the incentivisation of the private sector, the Federal Government would also be increasing the chance of interns being offered long-term employment contracts.

Recommendations:

- 4. Provide private companies accepting interns through the NPILF with tax deductions related to the training they provide students.**
- 5. Ensure that students are financially compensated for their labour.**

³⁰ Emma Whitford, 'COVID-19 Mitigation Costs Still Add Up After Students Sent Home', *Inside Higher Ed*, posted 9 October 2020, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/10/09/trying-curb-covid-19-campus-expensive-whether-colleges-plans-work-or-not>.

³¹ Department of Education, Skills and Employment, *National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund: Consultation Paper* (Canberra: DESA, 2020), 3.

³² DESA, *National Priorities*, 3.

³³ DESA, *National Priorities*, 5.

Part III - Supporting individuals with mental health concerns:

Mental health has one of the most significant impacts on an individual's productivity level. Almost one in five Australians experiences mental illness in any given year,³⁴ with presentations being higher among student cohorts. This is partially due to the age demographics of mental illness in general,³⁵ but social factors such as financial insecurity and unstable support networks contribute.

It is not surprising that social distancing measures imposed due to the impacts of COVID-19 have had negative implications on postgraduate students. This has had drastic consequences on productivity levels; with a 92 per cent increase in difficulties faced by those working in health and medicine in 2020.³⁶ If the Morrison Government wishes to increase employability prospects for its graduates in 2022, quality mental health resources need to be available.

The Federal Government should amend the *Higher Education Standards Framework 2015* (Cth) and the *Standards for Registered Training Organisations 2015* (Cth) to require all tertiary education institutions to have a student mental health and wellbeing strategy. This strategy would be a requirement for registration; ensuring that the university's duty of care to students is met.

Strategies should address:

- A requirement for on-site counselling services. Where available, tertiary providers should have an effective triage system which links students with the broader healthcare system.
- A description of how the university will meet requirements outlined within ss 5, 6, and 22 of the *Disability Act 1992* (Cth) and Parts 3.4, 3.5, and 7 of the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Cth).
- The creation of a best-practice guideline to be provided to all staff, in addition to on-site training courses which address mental health and wellbeing.
- Creating an implementation timeline outlining how the university will meet the guidelines outlined within the *Higher Education Standards Framework 2015* (Cth) and the *Standards for Registered Training Organisations 2015* (Cth).
- Evidence that cultural competencies have been considered when developing policies. This should encompass information on their internal and external support. Success should be measured by creating an annual report that outlines which cultures are represented in the university's support framework and what steps are being taken to increase the scope of these services.

While the criteria we are prescribing is currently implemented at the university's discretion, employing a 'one size fits, all' approach would be unsuccessful. Bodies such as the Tertiary

³⁴ Productivity Commission, *Mental Health: Productivity Commission Inquiry Report Volume 1* (Canberra: Productivity Commission, 2020), 2.

³⁵ Productivity Commission, *Mental Health*, 5.

³⁶ Flaminio Squazzoni, Giangiacomo Bravo, et al. 'No Tickets for Women in the COVID-19 Race? A Study on Manuscript Submissions and Reviews in 2347 Elsevier Journals during the Pandemic', preprint, 19 October 2020, <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3712813>.

Education Quality and Standards Agency or Australian Skills Quality Authority would need to assess the merits of the mental health and wellbeing strategies.

We understand that the *Tuition Protection (Up-front Payments Guidelines) 2020* states the ‘amount of tuition fees does not include a fee that is: payable in respect of the provision to students of amenities or services that are not of academic nature’.³⁷ This source of income cannot be used to support these initiatives.

At the discretion of the university, mental health support services are provided to students through SSAF funding.³⁸ However, the use of SSAF in lieu of the university investing money into its infrastructure is equivalent to students funding their mental health support. Reform on the mental health regime would not only improve people’s quality of life but is projected to add the annual benefits of up to \$1.3 billion due to increased economic participation.³⁹ Roughly 90 per cent of these benefits could be achieved by identifying priority reforms.⁴⁰ Despite the \$2.4 billion upfront costs, this would generate \$1.2 billion per year in savings.

Funding should be allocated based on EFTSL enrolment numbers. While Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP) could technically be used to calculate the amount of funding allocated to each university, this would neglect courses not covered by CSP. Additionally, this approach would suggest that international students' mental health is less important than domestic students. Considering the financial impact related to international enrolment numbers, this would have negative optical consequences.

Recommendations:

- 6. Fund University initiated mental health programs and training.**
- 7. Ensure that universities employ culturally competent staff for their health and counselling services.**
- 8. Acknowledge that no one can be ‘culturally competent’ in all fields and that a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach will not be appropriate in adopting these policies.**
- 9. Delegate oversight to external government bodies, such as the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency or Australian Skills Quality Authority.**

³⁷ *Tuition Protection (Up-front Payments Guidelines) 2020* (Cth), (Austl.)
<https://jade.io/j/?a=outline&id=781131>.

³⁸ *Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities) Act 2011* (Cth), (Austl.)
<https://www.legislation.gov.au/details/c2011a00130>.

³⁹ Productivity Commission, *Mental Health*, 2.

⁴⁰ Productivity Commission, *Mental Health*, 2.

Part IV- Disproportionate disruption to women in STEM fields:

The Women in STEM Decadal Plan was implemented as a roadmap to promoting STEM at every level from early education development in school to full professional careers. CAPA acknowledges the Morrison Government for this initiative and welcomed the additional funding that broadly supports women in the workforce. However, these provisions do not account for the excessive casualisation of teaching and research jobs in our sector.

Poor job security disproportionately affects women in the Higher Education Sector.⁴¹ This is especially concerning as the representation of women working in Australia's STEM qualified occupations stood at only 14 per cent in 2019.⁴² Underemployment concerns will continue for women throughout 2021, despite government initiatives which target increasing graduate levels within these fields.⁴³

Studies have shown that women submitted proportionally fewer research publications than men during lockdown periods.⁴⁴ Lost publishing opportunities significantly affect an individual's overall publishing performance in the long run; an issue worsened when considering how applications for competitive grants are considered. This substantially penalised the scientific productivity of women.⁴⁵

Though men participate in housework and childcare more than ever, women frequently manage the household, even when they are employed. In a 2019 study run by Arizona State University, 9 out of 10 women feel solely responsible for organising their family's schedule.⁴⁶ This is especially problematic given that 65 per cent of participants were employed.

In Australia, the majority of domestic postgraduate students are between 30 and 39 years of age.⁴⁷ This puts female postgraduates in the demographic most likely to be starting a family.⁴⁸

These trends have the most significant impact on HDR students in STEM. Although guidelines state that a full-time research student should commit a minimum of 32 hours per week to their research, 76 per cent of PhD candidates regularly spend over 41 hours a week completing their

⁴¹ [<https://www.science.org.au/sites/default/files/rrif-covid19-women-stem-workforce.pdf>]

⁴² 'Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM): Quick Take', Catalyst, posted 4 August 2020, <https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-science-technology-engineering-and-mathematics-stem/#:~:text=The%20representation%20of%20women%20working,%2C%20from%2011%25%20in%202009.&text=In%202019%2C%20women%20accounted%20for,workers%20in%20STEM%2Dqualified%20industrie>.

⁴³ [<https://www.science.org.au/sites/default/files/rrif-covid19-women-stem-workforce.pdf>] Rapid Research Information Forum (RRIF)

⁴⁴ Squazzoni, et al. 'No Tickets for Women in the COVID-19 Race?'

⁴⁵ Squazzoni, et al. 'No Tickets for Women in the COVID-19 Race?'

⁴⁶ Arizona State University, 'Invisible Labor Can Negatively Impact Well-Being in Mothers: Study Finds Women Who Feel Overly Responsible for Household Management and Parenting Are Less Satisfied with their Lives and Partnerships', ScienceDaily, 22 January 2019, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/01/190122092857.htm>.

⁴⁷ Department of Education and Training [DET] (2017). '2016 All Student's. Canberra: DET, Australian Government.

⁴⁸ Australian Institute of Family Studies, 'Births in Australia', AIFS, accessed 25 January 2021, <https://aifs.gov.au/facts-and-figures/births-in-australia#:~:text=Age%20of%20new%20mothers&text=In%201991%2C%20women%20most%20commonly,2011%20and%2048%25%20in%202016>.

thesis.⁴⁹ Balancing these working with having a family is nearly impossible, especially when childcare is unavailable due to financial or health restrictions.

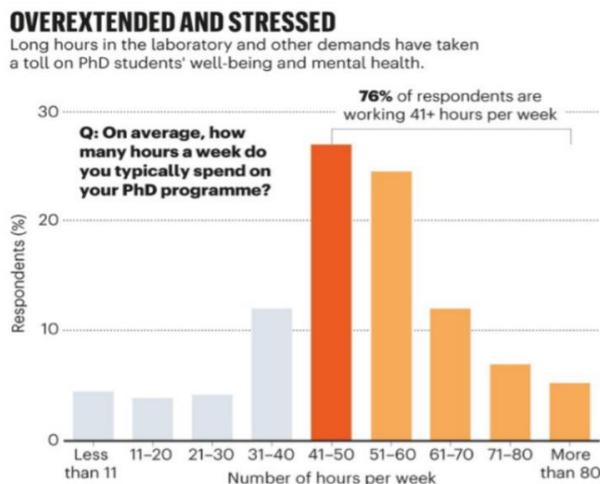


Figure 1: National survey of hours worked per week by PhD students indicate 76 per cent spend 41-50 hours a week on research⁴⁹

To combat these issues, the Federal Government should provide additional financial supplements to women in STEM undertaking postgraduate studies. This change could come in a variety of forms. While tax deductibles are unlikely to benefit low-income earners, the availability of affordable childcare on campuses is paramount. Otherwise, additional scholarships should be made available.

Recommendations:

- 10. Acknowledge the difficulties faced by many women seeking to balance their domestic responsibilities with their careers.**
- 11. Prioritise support systems for women in STEM by creating scholarship programs and subsidised childcare programs on campuses.**

Concluding remarks:

It is readily apparent that COVID-19 has highlighted the instabilities in the tertiary sector that has always existed pre-pandemic. Reforms to higher education were inevitable as intended with the *Job-Ready Graduates* package. However, it is also essential to acknowledge the full effects of these reforms are only beginning to be realised. This submission highlights that despite the financial adversity universities faced, the burden is ultimately placed on students and their research and education quality. We urge the Morrison government to recognise postgraduate

⁴⁹ Chris Woolston, 'PhD: the tortuous truth'. Nature – Career Feature. 14th November 2019. Online. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03459-7>

education is essential to Australia's economic growth and should invest in them accordingly with the following recommendations.

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