

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S HISTORY NETWORK

- ❖ Successive Australian governments have savagely slashed funds from Australia's world-leading universities. The Morrison government's [Job-ready Graduate Package](#), together with the Labor government's flimsily conceived and opportunistically applied [Closing Loopholes Acts](#) and [recent caps](#) on international and domestic students, have wrought havoc on the tertiary education sector.
- ❖ Cuts and restructures at various universities signal the sector's anaemia, centralising power at the cost of education, employment, and the nation's intellectual capital, with disproportionate impact on regional universities and students and employees from historically marginalised backgrounds.
- ❖ These actions reduce teaching capacity, erase or diminish entire teaching programs, and intensify workloads for university staff. The knock-on effects limit education opportunities for students and negatively affect the Australian university sector's global competitiveness.
- ❖ Blithe disregard of the [Universities Accord](#) could set the tertiary sector on a course to destruction, diminishing hopes for Australia's future as 'the clever country'.
- ❖ There is a crisis of governance in our universities. The Australian Women's History Network calls for an end to a [destructive model of governance](#) of Australian universities, a transition to collegial university governance, and immediate reduction of senior executive salaries to meet community expectations.

Full statement

The [Australian Women's History Network](#) (AWHN) expresses dismay at the proposed cuts and redundancies impacting academic and professional staff at universities Australia-wide. The AWHN promotes research and writing in the fields of feminist, gender, and women's history and is an affiliate of the [International Federation for Research in Women's History](#). It counts among its members teachers, researchers, and professional staff at the frontline of the wave of attacks on the higher education sector.

Proposed changes and job cuts impact teaching, learning, and the student experience. We are gravely concerned about immediate consequences for students currently enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts and related degrees. This cohort, in which [women are disproportionately represented](#), has suffered from the devaluation of the humanities in political discourse and dramatic increases to degree costs under the terms of the [Job-ready Graduate Package](#).

Universities are collectively owned and integral to the future of youth on this continent. Proposed restructures disproportionately impact regional universities that serve educationally disadvantaged communities and mature age students, including incarcerated students. This will have untold implications for how such universities will ongoingly respond to the equity provisions outlined in the [Universities Accord](#), with its aim to serve students living in outer suburban, regional, rural, and remote areas.

The students of today are the future of research and innovation. The cascading impact of austerity and degree devaluation upon our Higher Degree Researchers (HDRs) shapes the vibrancy and sustenance of our own discipline, leaving our subfield of feminist, gender, and women's history facing an uncertain future. We are alarmed by the lack of viable job opportunities for scholars in training, junior colleagues, and the staff at all career levels who are set to suffer the current sweep of projected job cuts and redundancies.

Insecure employment and systemic university mismanagement impact the lives of AWHN members at various career stages. Our sector's [over-reliance on precariously employed staff](#) is well documented. Rather than meaningfully working to stamp out wage theft and guarantee pathways that enhance job security, universities have opportunistically [circumvented new legislation protecting casual staff](#) – i.e., the [Closing Loopholes Acts](#) – by [sacking casual teachers](#) and redistributing their workload among overworked colleagues. [Overpaid executives](#) address job insecurity by creating positions that overburden highly qualified researchers with 'academic housework' that can limit their opportunities for career progression. The consequences of these measures are gendered. Academic precarity is a feminist issue.

The AWHN is acutely aware of the disproportionate effects of austerity and the proposed restructures on senior scholars and the exacerbation of gendered ageism in a sector that retains a persistent glass ceiling for too many women. The AWHN counts among its members valued senior colleagues – including some of those who founded the network in 1987. Senior scholars offer indispensable mentorship to network members. By targeting senior academics and pressuring senior staff into premature retirement, universities sever the transfer of institutional knowledge and deny emerging scholars access to mentorship. Undertaken in the name of cutting costs, the targeting of senior academics undermines collegial ties between generational cohorts and different employee categories within the institution.

Workers in our sector are under attack. Staff currently bracing for change report that university communication strategies can pit staff and work areas against each other and undermine their capacity to develop collective responses to change plans alongside their colleagues and union representatives. A lack of transparency, cycles of change, and undefined timelines for implementation can cultivate a [culture of fear](#) among university staff that undermines [wellbeing](#), work performance, willingness to point out or challenge unfair workload models, and collegiality.

The AWHN expresses unwavering solidarity with staff and students of Australian universities. We implore the federal government to reverse the catastrophic decisions currently hastening the destruction of our sector and support a parliamentary inquiry into university governance.

Australian Women's History Network

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The Australian Women's History Network (AWHN) is convened by Chelsea Barnett, Micaela Pattison, Michelle Staff and Ana Stevenson. The AWHN is affiliated with the International Federation for Research in Women's History <http://www.ifrwh.com/index.html>

Email: auswhn@gmail.com | Web: www.auswhn.com.au/ | Bluesky: [@auswhn.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/auswhn.bsky.social) |
Twitter/X: [@auswhn](https://twitter.com/auswhn) | LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/auswhn/

The AWHN's journal is *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal* | Web: www.auswhn.com.au/lilith/ |
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