

Budget 2021 - Education

Early childhood education and care overview

The Budget 2021 Women's Economic Security measure of \$1.7 billion to reduce child care costs is limited to families who have more than one child five years or under in child care, as well as higher income families, for whom the cap of \$10,560 on the Child Care Subsidy will be removed. Both measures will only apply from July 2022. For the much larger proportion of families using subsidised care, there was no change in this Budget. NFAW supports the Government's announcement of ongoing funding of \$1.6 billion over four years from 2021-22 for preschool, with \$589.0 million per year ongoing. NFAW is concerned there were no measures in the Budget to improve pay and retention of early childhood educators.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

The Budget

The 2021 Budget increases overall outlays on the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) from \$8.97 billion in 2021-22 to \$11.97 billion in 2024-25, with an additional \$1.7 billion over five years (and \$671.2 million per year ongoing) to increase support for parents with more than one child under five years of age in child care.

Program Expenses 1.2 Child Care Subsidy

	2020-21 Estimated actual \$'000	2021-22 Budget \$'000	2022-23 Forward estimate \$'000	2023-24 Forward estimate \$'000	2024-25 Forward estimate \$'000
Special appropriations:					
<i>A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999 (a) (b)</i>	8,968,183	9,491,616	10,644,486	11,180,039	11,969,947
Total program expenses	8,968,183	9,491,616	10,644,486	11,180,039	11,969,947

2021 DESE Budget Statements, p. 36.

From July 2022 the Government will increase the CCS by 30 percentage points, up to a maximum CCS rate of 95 per cent for the second child and subsequent children aged five years and under in centre-based child care, family day care and outside school hours care. The Government will also remove the annual \$10,560 per child cap on the CCS for families earning between \$189,390 and \$353,680 from July 2022. These measures are expected to reduce out-of-pocket costs for families with children in child care, as well as help to reduce the workforce disincentives faced by these families. The cap does not apply to families earning below \$189,390.

The Government will provide \$1.6 billion over four years from 2021-22 (and \$589 million per year ongoing) to make an ongoing Commonwealth funding contribution to preschool. The first four years of funding, covering the 2022 to 2025 preschool years, will be delivered through a new four year funding agreement to be negotiated with the states and territories to replace the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education. The new agreement will support continued universal access to at least 15 hours of preschool each week (600 hours per year) for children in the year before they start school.

Guaranteeing Universal Access to Preschool

Payments (\$m)	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Department of the Treasury	-	136.0	459.3	479.0	519.7
Department of Education, Skills and Employment	-16.0	20.3	12.9	7.7	3.6
Total — Payments	-16.0	156.4	472.2	486.7	523.3

2021-22 Budget Paper No 2, Part 2 p.91

Funding for preschool will be contingent on the states and territories agreeing to a reform timeline focused on increasing participation and school readiness. From 2023 this will include ensuring that every child enrolled in an approved preschool program will see the full benefit of Commonwealth funding (around \$1,340 per child in 2022), regardless of the preschool setting. From 2024 payments to states and territories will be tied to attendance targets. A preschool outcomes measure will be developed and trialled for introduction in 2025. The measure includes \$33.6 million over five years from 2021-22 (and \$2 million per year ongoing) to improve preschool data collection and underpin the new outcomes framework supporting the reform.

The Government has also allocated \$12.6 million over four years to streamline the regulatory system as part of its deregulation agenda, including a new consolidated child care website to make it easier for families to get accurate information about local child care services, as well as implement more monitoring, data sharing and compliance operations with jurisdictions.

The Government announced \$17.9 million is being allocated over four years to establish a new early childhood program focused on children with disability or developmental concerns. In addition, the Government has allocated \$100.8 million in mental health funding to support parents and early intervention, as well as establish child mental health and wellbeing hubs with the states and territories.

Gender implications

Why is this an issue for women?

More affordable and accessible ECEC is needed to support working families and boost women's work force participation. Australia ranks in the top ten OECD countries (and above the OECD average) for [financial disincentives to enter employment](#) with child care costs. The cost of ECEC can be a significant barrier for women and secondary earners taking on additional work. Research by [KPMG](#) and the [Grattan Institute](#) has identified that the interaction of ECEC costs with

Australia's tax and transfer systems commonly results in Workforce Disincentive Rates (WDR) of 75-120 per cent, whereby a WDR of 100 per cent means there is no economic benefit is gained from working additional days. From a workforce productivity perspective, this needs to be addressed as women are unlikely to increase their working hours if there is little financial incentive to do so.

In spite of major Australian Government reforms introduced in 2018 to make child care more accessible and affordable, families continue to report that the cost of ECEC is high and it impacts disposable income. This has been a consistent finding, particularly for low income families, in the [Household Income and Labour Dynamics Australia Survey \(HILDA\)](#). The [HILDA 2020 Statistical Report](#) notes that child care fees have risen by about 145 per cent in real terms since 2002. The Productivity Commission's 2021 [Report on Government Services](#) also revealed a sharp 21.7 per cent rise in the number of parents and carers in Australia who did not work because of associated child care costs in 2020, compared with the previous 12 months. This equates to more than 90,000 Australian parents.

What are the 2021 Budget impacts on women?

The NFAW welcomes the child care measures in the 2021 Budget but notes the allocation of \$1.8 billion over five years from 2020-21 under the Government's *Women's Economic Security Statement* (to improve women's workforce participation and economic security) is largely made up of the \$1.7 billion CCS child care measure. The NFAW is concerned that the Government's CCS affordability measure is limited to families with more than one child under five years in subsidised child care. It will not benefit families with only one child in child care, nor will it assist families with one child in child care and other children over five years of age in outside school hours care.

The Australian Government's [joint ministerial media release](#) prior to the Budget announced that the CCS measure is expected to benefit around 250,000 families and the removal of the \$10,560 cap on CCS will benefit around 18,000 families. Around 933,000 families use subsidised care ([DESE child care data](#), March 2020). The measures will therefore will only assist a relatively small proportion of families who can afford to have more than one child in subsidised care – there is little benefit for all other families. Moreover, the measures are deferred to July 2022 and may be 'too little, too late' to help families struggling with the cost of care during [the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

The NFAW supports the Government's announcement of ongoing funding for preschool and, in particular, that funding is to follow the child whether their preschool program is a state/territory school, a long day care centre, a stand-alone or community preschool. This a welcome change for around 80,000 children in preschool programs around Australia who do not currently get the full benefit of Australian Government preschool funding because some states and territories do not pass it on in full. The NFAW notes that no measures were announced in the Budget to support preschool provision for three-year-olds or boost early engagement in preschool by vulnerable or disadvantaged children. However, the NFAW welcomes the investment of \$17.9 million to create an early childhood program for children with disability or developmental concerns, as well as \$100.8 million allocated for mental health funding to support parents and early intervention, including establishing child mental health and wellbeing hubs with the states and territories.

The NFAW notes there were no measures in Budget 2021 to support better pay for child care educators – a predominantly female, low-paid workforce. Currently, there are early educator workforce shortages which improved pay and conditions might help address. Better remuneration for early childhood teachers employed in government and non-government preschools and child care centres will likely need to be considered as a result of the Fair Work Commission’s recent decision on [Equal Remuneration and Work Value](#), which proposed modifications to the remuneration structure in the Education Services (Teachers) Award and pay increases.

Recommendations

The NFAW calls on the Australian Government to implement a broader range of measures to address the affordability and accessibility of ECEC to support *all* families and boost women’s workforce participation, particularly in view of the [effects of the COVID-19 pandemic](#):

- amend the Child Care Subsidy Activity Test to make it easier for families to get the hours of subsidised ECEC they need for work, study, training or recognised volunteering activity, as well for as children’s early development
- ensure that vulnerable or disadvantaged families and ECEC services are not left unsupported or in debt through complex requirements for subsidies
- increase support for Aboriginal controlled child care services and initiatives to promote engagement by Indigenous children and families
- provide funding for 15 hours per week of preschool for vulnerable and disadvantaged three-year-olds
- provide incentives to child care services to make child care cheaper for families, for example, by paying a higher hourly rate for shorter sessions of care (say, 6-9 hours per day rather than 10-12 hours, which is the standard session of care in centre-based day care)
- raise the hourly rate cap for each service type to reflect higher than inflation increases in the cost of ECEC (rents, wages, food and other overheads) and avoid these costs being passed on to families in higher child care fees
- introduce monitoring of fees by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.

In the longer term, the NFAW recommends the Government consider:

- raising the level of CCS from 85 to 95 per cent for low-income families below \$70,000, with a more gradual taper to make child care more affordable (cutting out at zero per cent for very high income families)
- introducing subsidised ‘wrap-around’ care options families using stand-alone community or government preschools, similar to outside school hours care for school age children
- further exploring flexible care options for families undertaking shift work or working from home (following on from the Nanny Pilot Program which ended in December 2017)
- offering a tax offset up to 32.5 per cent for approved care options for families not eligible for the CCS

- supporting further increases to minimum wages for early childhood educators under the Children's Services Award and Educational Services (Teachers) Award, to help address low pay, recruitment and retention issues as well as the gender pay gap for feminised caring professions.

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Budget 2021 – Education

Schooling overview

NFAW welcomes the extra spending in education but notes the disparity in the percentage increase for government schools at 7 per cent and non-government schools with 13 per cent. Given this is a Budget seeking to “secure Australia’s recovery” and direct Australia’s exit from the pandemic, the lack of an integrated education structure for upskilling the community in digital expertise is disappointing. The expansion of the Digital Economy and the role teachers and education will play has not been fully acknowledged and requires more attention and resources. As women have been more heavily impacted by COVID-19 than men (WGEA 2020), better outcomes for the recovery could be achieved with a more nuanced and cooperative approach across a range of sectors with women as the central focus.

Schooling

The Budget

Funding for Schooling falls into two categories: funding provided to schools and territories to support school education; and additional funding for specific Australian Government education programs and policies.

Funding provided to schools and territories to support school education

In 2021–22, the Australian Government will provide funding of \$24.8 billion to support state education services, including \$24.4 billion in Quality Schools funding and \$409.1 million through National Partnership payments. This includes recurrent funding, capital funding, funding for non-government school reform support funding, Choice and Affordability Fund funding and other prescribed purpose funding.

While there has been an increase in funding for both government and non-government schools, the non-government sector has received an increase of 13 per cent while the government sector has only had an increase of 7 per cent. This undermines the principle of needs-based school funding and the necessity for the Schooling Resource Standard to be fully implemented.

Government Schools National Support

	2020-21 Estimated actual \$'000	2021-22 Budget \$'000	2022-23 Forward estimate \$'000	2023-24 Forward estimate \$'000	2024-25 Forward estimate \$'000
Annual administered expenses:					
Other services (Appropriation Bill No. 2)					
Additional Support for Northern Territory	12,804	14,242	12,263	10,035	7,536
Special appropriations:					
<i>Australian Education Act 2013</i>	9,038,811	9,712,514	10,411,123	10,992,250	11,439,159
Total program expenses	9,051,615	9,726,756	10,423,386	11,002,285	11,446,695

2021-22 Portfolio Budget Statements No 1.4, p. 39.

Non-Government Schools National Support

	2020-21 Estimated actual \$'000	2021-22 Budget \$'000	2022-23 Forward estimate \$'000	2023-24 Forward estimate \$'000	2024-25 Forward estimate \$'000
Annual administered expenses:					
Other services (Appropriation Bill No. 2)					
Non-Government Representative Bodies	40,013	40,013	14,004	-	-
Adjustment Assistance	9,131	1,676	491	-	-
Choice and Affordability Fund	156,045	107,682	110,912	114,240	117,667
Special appropriations:					
<i>Australian Education Act 2013</i>	12,804,610	14,560,971	15,383,946	16,085,732	16,634,577
Total program expenses	13,009,799	14,710,342	15,509,353	16,199,972	16,752,244

2021-22 Portfolio Budget Statements No 1.4, p. 41.

Quality Schools funding

\$million	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	Total
2020-21									
Government schools(a)	2,815.4	2,098.1	2,030.7	924.7	611.0	222.7	130.8	220.2	9,053.6
Non-government schools(b)(c)(d)	3,893.5	3,520.3	2,840.2	1,271.4	809.4	299.2	227.9	147.9	13,009.8
Total	6,708.9	5,618.4	4,870.9	2,196.1	1,420.4	521.9	358.7	368.1	22,063.4
2021-22									
Government schools(a)	3,009.9	2,270.2	2,157.8	1,020.6	665.7	234.3	142.9	227.3	9,728.8
Non-government schools(b)(c)(d)	4,454.8	3,796.5	3,156.3	1,494.3	1,062.5	321.6	236.4	187.9	14,710.3
Total	7,464.8	6,066.7	5,314.1	2,514.9	1,728.2	555.9	379.3	415.1	24,439.1
2022-23									
Government schools(a)	3,212.0	2,451.4	2,286.1	1,121.9	722.9	244.0	156.0	231.1	10,425.4
Non-government schools(b)(c)(d)	4,705.4	4,012.1	3,323.4	1,570.1	1,116.6	339.9	244.8	197.1	15,509.4
Total	7,917.4	6,463.5	5,609.5	2,692.0	1,839.4	583.8	400.8	428.3	25,934.7
2023-24									
Government schools(a)	3,386.3	2,605.6	2,395.0	1,200.2	762.8	252.8	167.0	234.6	11,004.3
Non-government schools(b)(c)(d)	4,914.9	4,201.7	3,470.3	1,636.1	1,163.7	355.7	252.7	204.8	16,200.0
Total	8,301.2	6,807.3	5,865.4	2,836.3	1,926.5	608.5	419.7	439.4	27,204.3
2024-25									
Government schools(a)	3,525.9	2,727.0	2,481.8	1,251.4	789.6	260.5	175.3	237.3	11,448.7
Non-government schools(b)(c)(d)	5,076.3	4,359.9	3,590.4	1,687.8	1,199.5	368.9	259.4	210.0	16,752.2
Total	8,602.2	7,086.9	6,072.2	2,939.2	1,989.1	629.4	434.7	447.3	28,200.9

- (a) Includes funding for the Northern Territory to accelerate evidence-based reforms to improve outcomes for vulnerable students and includes Literacy Support for Tasmanian Students.
Includes capital funding.
Includes prescribed circumstances funding.
Includes funding for non-government school reform support and the Choice and Affordability Fund.

2021-22 Budget Paper No 3, Part 2, p. 38.

Additional funding for specific Australian Government education programs and policies
The Government will provide \$77.5 million over four years from 2021-22 (and \$5.5 million per year ongoing) for further initiatives to support teachers, students and young Australians.

While each of these programmes are individually worthy of being funded, they are not part of a wider integrated structure with long term goals. Indeed, the funding for some of these projects is only for one year.

This is particularly true of the STEM proposals which are very small given the size of the Australian Schooling sector.

However, NFAW welcomes the inclusion of young women into the Clontarf Foundation's programmes which was a recommendation from the analysis in the 2020 Budget. (Women's Budget p48)

Funding includes:

- \$20.0 million over four years from 2021-22 to continue and improve the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on school students with disability, to ensure the quality and integrity of data that underpins ongoing funding for students with disability.
- \$16.6 million in 2021-22 to assist boarding providers with a high proportion of Indigenous students to remain financially sustainable during the COVID-19 recovery period.
- \$11.9 million over four years from 2021-22 (and \$3.0 million per year ongoing) to support the Australian Children's Television Foundation to continue to support the development, production and distribution of quality Australian children's screen content and educational resources.
- \$8.1 million over four years from 2021-22 for Together for Humanity to deliver a program to students, teachers and parents so they are equipped for diversity, and to foster greater inter-cultural understanding and a sense of belonging.
- \$5.8 million over four years from 2021-22 (and \$1.5 million per year ongoing) to continue investment in the Australian Teacher Workforce Data collection, to help improve teacher workforce planning and outcomes.
- \$4.0 million over four years from 2021-22 (and \$1.0 million per year ongoing) to continue and expand the Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education Students, to assist aspiring students to make informed decisions about their suitability to become teachers.

- \$3.0 million in 2021-22 for the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award in Australia to encourage young people to volunteer time in their communities, participate in sport and recreational activities, and develop social skills.
- \$3.0 million over two years from 2021-22 for High Resolves to deliver a learning experience to young Australians to help build social cohesion, strengthen cultural understanding and promote positive participation in their local community.
- \$2.9 million in 2021-22 for the *Commonwealth Scholarships Program for Young Australians* to support up to 240 training scholarships for young people aged 15 to 24 years in ten regions, with funding to be redirected from unused places in the *Commonwealth Scholarship Programs for South Australia*.
- \$1.2 million over four years from 2021-22 to co-sponsor the Young Australian of the Year Awards
- \$1.0 million in 2021-22 for youth engagement activities, including improving Year 9 and Year 10 students' learning about civics and citizenship through the annual National Schools Constitutional Convention, delivering activities for Ministerial engagement with youth, and providing greater information to young Australians on programs and services that support them.

Schools and Youth — supporting students, teachers and young Australians

Payments (\$m)

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
National Indigenous Australians Agency	-	16.6	-	-	-
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications	-	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Department of Social Services	-	2.3	0.7	-	-
Department of Education, Skills and Employment	-2.9	14.4	8.4	9.7	11.2
Total — Payments	-2.9	36.2	12.1	12.7	14.3

2021-2022 Budget Paper No 2 part 2, pp. 78-80.

STEM Funding

The Government will provide \$0.5 million in 2020-21 for the Resources Technology Showcase 2021 (the Showcase), to be held in June 2021 in Perth.

The Showcase will provide approximately 10,000 school age entrants with the opportunity to interact with the technology and innovation that drives growth in defence and space industries, and to promote science, technology, engineering and mathematics opportunities within defence industries (2021-2022 Budget Paper No2 Part 2, p. 87)

\$42.4 million over seven years from 2021-22 to establish the Boosting the Next Generation of Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Program by co-funding scholarships for women in STEM in partnership with industry (2021-2022 Budget Paper No 2 Part 2, p. 81).

Gender implications

Why is this an issue for women?

Women make up 81.9 per cent of teachers in primary schools and 61.1 per cent of secondary school teaching staff (ABS 2021). Covid has had a significant impact on their workplace with changes to working conditions requiring them to prepare learning materials for the home and to teach online. This had some serious implications for professional skills and development.

While school lockdowns were in place findings suggest that it was women who took much of the responsibility for schooling from home (WEGA 2020). This was considerably stressful for those with limited access or skills around technology. Connectivity became a concern for these women in trying to ensure their children had equal access to learning (The Smith Family 2020).

Despite Covid women remain the major care givers in the family continuing to spend more time in housework and caring duties as well as caring for the majority of single parent families (ABS 2020). Hence, further pressures around lack of IT and its impact on limiting educational opportunities fell disproportionately on women.

What are the 2021 Budget impacts on women?

The 2021 Budget has some serious implications for women, not just those working in the schooling sector but also for women caring for and educating their own children.

Of particular concern in this budget is the disparity in the funding percentage increase between government and non-government schools. Given that 65.6 per cent of students are in the government sector this impacts heavily on the female dominated workforce (ABS 2020).

The lack of a national plan for STEM and short-term funding arrangements means women have difficulty accessing what limited professional development is available.

While female students continue to complete year 12 in more numbers than their male counterparts (ABS 2020) it is imperative that many more young women have basic skills in STEM. This requires a national plan with all students acquiring skills from the earliest years of schooling.

Many young women are unable to access STEM programmes in the last years of schooling due to lack of basic knowledge (The Smith Family 2020).

Recommendations

- NFAW recommends that the STEM skills of all Australians can only be enhanced by a national policy that is fully funded and supported by the government.
- NFAW recommends that a national STEM programme for all young people be established in schools. Such a programme would need to be fully funded and resourced.
- NFAW recommends that all classroom teachers be given the opportunity to develop their knowledge of digital technologies to enhance the quality of their teaching.
- NFAW supports universal access to high quality education for all Australian girls and calls on the government to overturn the disparity in the percentage increase of funding to government and non-government schools and fully implement the Schooling Resource Standard. This will help assure more equitable educational outcomes as well as better support the many female teachers working in the government sector.
- NFAW calls on the government to ensure all Australians have access to the internet to enable them to avail themselves of full educational opportunities as well as other aspects of Australian life.

References

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Commonwealth of Australia (2021) Portfolio Budget Statement 2021-22 Budget Related Paper 1.4 [Education, Skills and Employment Portfolio](#).

Commonwealth of Australia (2021) Budget Paper No 2 [Budget Measures](#).

Commonwealth of Australia (2021) Budget Paper No 3 [Federal Financial Relations](#).

[The Smith Family](#) (2020) *Without Access to Computers and the Internet, disadvantaged students are getting left behind*

[Workplace Gender Equality Agency](#) (2020) *Gendered impacts of COVID-19*.

Budget 2021 – Education

Overview – Vocational education and training

The COVID 19 pandemic impacted disproportionately on women with the loss of jobs in hospitality, retail, arts and tourism. The Government's vocational education and training budget allocation continues with funding for a range of programs, but no major program aimed at increasing women's participation in a greater diversity of vocational fields of study.

The Government gives some recognition to the ongoing issue of women being concentrated in certain fields of study in the Women's Budget Statement, but then allocates the bulk of funding to the **Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program** with **Boosting Apprenticeship Commencements** wage subsidy of up to \$7000 per quarter for 12 months to businesses.

Women make up only about one quarter of apprentices. The Budget initiatives targeting women in non-traditional trade occupations are tokenistic. Yet these trade occupations continue to be areas of skill shortage.

The other major initiative is the **Job Trainer Fund** which has benefited women who, according to the **Women's Budget Statement** represent 56 per cent of enrolments.

Vocational education and training

The Budget

	2020-21 Estimated actual \$'000	2021-22 Budget \$'000	2022-23 Forward estimate \$'000	2023-24 Forward estimate \$'000	2024-25 Forward estimate \$'000
<i>Sub-program 3.1.1 - Skills Development</i>					
Annual administered expenses:					
Ordinary annual services (Appropriation Act No. 1 and Bill No. 3)					
Australian Apprenticeship Support Network	271,724	310,362	257,752	194,651	193,896
Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program	2,188,123	2,769,192	1,485,984	547,705	574,375
Commonwealth Scholarships Program for South Australia	1,179	100	-	-	-
Commonwealth Scholarships Program for Young Australians	3,868	5,582	-	-	-
Mid-Career Checkpoint	1,500	12,150	24,747	36,473	-
Skills Checkpoint for Older Workers Program	3,984	4,024	4,081	4,138	4,193
Trades Recognition Australia	31,344	44,491	41,159	42,510	43,885
Special appropriations:					
<i>Trade Support Loans Act 2014</i>					
Trade Support Loans	43,714	61,512	59,741	63,410	64,529
Total component 3.1.1 expenses	2,545,436	3,207,413	1,873,464	888,887	880,878
<i>Sub-program 3.1.2 - Access to Training</i>					
Annual administered expenses:					
Ordinary annual services (Appropriation Act No. 1 and Bill No. 3)					
Skills for Education and Employment	116,976	116,715	125,048	131,574	139,155
Foundation Skills for Your Future Program	14,283	14,283	14,283	7,139	-
Foundation Skills for Your Future - Remote Community Pilots	1,622	3,284	3,323	-	-
Total component 3.1.2 expenses	132,881	134,282	142,654	138,713	139,155

Source: DESE Budget Statements 21/22 (p. 72).

	2020-21 Estimated actual \$'000	2021-22 Budget \$'000	2022-23 Forward estimate \$'000	2023-24 Forward estimate \$'000	2024-25 Forward estimate \$'000
Sub-program 3.1.3 - Support for the National Training System					
Annual administered expenses:					
Ordinary annual services (Appropriation Act No. 1 and Bill No. 3)					
Australian Industry and Skills Committee	1,532	1,550	785	-	-
Industry Training Hubs	15,469	14,722	16,735	-	-
Industry Workforce Training	50,498	40,025	29,008	9,109	8,733
Integrated Information Service	1,799	1,820	845	872	896
Licensing of International Vocational Education and Training (VET) Courses	1,193	1,193	1,193	1,193	1,193
My Skills Website	577	585	592	601	608
National Careers Institute and Ambassador	6,312	13,348	13,037	1,039	-
National Centre for Vocational Education Research	706	715	724	734	743
National Skills Commission	7,804	5,100	2,365	2,400	1,900
National Training System COPE	38,591	46,980	53,708	37,642	37,896
Skills Communication Campaign	15,935	11,270	-	-	-
Skills Organisation Pilots	13,641	15,195	9,839	-	-
VET Data Streamlining	2,418	16,111	12,994	8,965	6,632
VET Information Strategy	1,591	943	851	557	569
Nationally Consistent and Accessible Subsidy and Apprenticeship Information Industry Clusters	-	4,329	4,926	1,547	1,547
	-	7,044	73,908	104,851	106,740
Total component 3.1.3 expenses	158,066	180,930	221,510	169,510	167,457
Total program expenses	2,836,383	3,522,625	2,237,628	1,197,110	1,187,490

Source: DESE Budget Statements 21/22 (p. 73).

Gender implications

1. Women earn less than men. The full-time total remuneration gender pay gap based on WGEA data is 20.8%, meaning men working full-time earn nearly \$25,679 a year more than women working full-time. The care economy, where women predominate as workers, needs investment by government and better regulation so that government subsidies are not disproportionately pocketed as profits. These areas of women's employment need to be adequately remunerated and subsidized training places allocated to fill skilled vacancies.
2. Women are over-represented as part-time workers in low paid industries and in insecure work. Diversification of their occupational choices and expansion of opportunities is enabled when they receive adequate and unbiased career advice. Tertiary education opportunities through TAFE or a VET provider should be presented to them at various stages – post-school, during their early employment years and when returning to work after a period of child-raising. (GEN VIC Productivity Commission – Interim Report Submission Skills and Workforce Development Agreement.)

3. More women than men have lost their jobs during the COVID health crisis. Their re-entry in a changed working environment will depend on their augmenting their skills, improving their qualifications or retraining or training into an emerging occupation.
4. The gender or sex-segregated labour market contributes to women's economic insecurity by perpetuating the gender pay gap. The VET system with its extensive course offerings across a range of occupations and accompanied by an appropriate range of training support can facilitate women pursuing work opportunities through apprenticeships and traineeships provided they are linked to a welcoming employer committed to long-term staff retention and upskilling.
5. Women, through a range of organisations and involvement in many pilot programs targeted at encouraging women into male dominated occupations, have lobbied over many years for funding initiatives to support female students wishing to enter male dominated trades and other occupations, where there are more training subsidies, wages and conditions are better, job security is assured and there are opportunities for establishing small businesses.
6. The VET sector, through the public TAFE system, had a reputation for providing affordable and targeted programs for women. These need to be re-established and promoted by all VET providers and Group Training Organisations. TAFE needs to be recognized as the standard setting VET provider and funded accordingly. Instead it is increasingly a marginal provider with only 779,200 students enrolled in 2019.
7. The obsession by governments with having an industry-led, user-pays system, reflected in successive budgets and endless reviews and reform, has simply resulted in dramatic declines in apprentice and trainee numbers. As of September 2020, according to NCVER figures on commencements of apprentices and trainees, only 2 per cent of workers were employed as an apprentices or trainee. Of the 126,665 commencements, there were only 60,115 trade apprentices – a decline of 15.7 per cent from 2019 and 66,545 non-trades down by 21.4 per cent from 2019. Of the total, 81,955 were male and **44,710 were female**, down 18.6 per cent from 2019. Overall the decline in commencements as well as completions has continued its downward spiral. Between 2016 and 2020, commencements fell by 25.4 per cent and completions fell by 22.4 per cent. The ideologically based solutions have not addressed the decline.
8. Women are not an homogenous group and the VET sector has always recognized that Indigenous women, CALD women and women with a disability faced particular challenges in training environments shared with their male counterparts, but compounded by their gender. They require specialized support which is culturally sensitive, co-designed with CALD or Indigenous communities and responsive to their needs and priorities. In a properly resourced VET learning context such support is negotiated with the student and customized to address their learning requirements.

What are the 2021 Budget impacts on women?

While the government continues its policy and funding commitment to an industry- led VET system in a contestable training market with private providers competing with each other and TAFE to supply training products and services, as set out in [the Heads of Agreement for Skills Reform](#) the system dysfunctionality complained of by industry and governments will continue. This is damaging to the reputation of the VET sector.

This Budget, like the last, should have been used as an opportunity to re-set policies which have led to training market failures and extensive exploitation of government funds. The industry-led VET system is constantly criticized by those who are leading it. The public provider, TAFE, has been side-lined and struggles to meet its statutory obligations. The program **Revitalising TAFE Campuses**, which sits under payments for specific purposes, has not been expanded. The allocation of \$25 million nationally is totally inadequate. The public TAFE system should be refunded as essential social infrastructure for recovery and re-skilling. It is a national asset with a wide geographical distribution.

There are two big ticket initiatives: **Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program (AAIP)** and the newer **JobTrainer Fund**. The much-vaunted **Skilling Australians Fund**, which was to be the answer to falls in enrolments and skill shortages has all but been abandoned with an allocation of only \$75.3 million.

[Trade Support Loans](#) have been allocated an increase. The allocation for [VET Student Loans](#) has also increased to \$196.017 million. The new rules governing these loans have reduced the number of eligible providers and courses. There is no gender dis-aggregated data in the [Annual Statistical Report for 2019](#).

The [AAIP](#) has an allocation of \$2.7 billion. This program provides a range of payments for industries and occupations traditionally associated with the apprenticeship system. It also targets traineeships and apprenticeships in new and emerging industries where there are skill shortages. Payments are made to employers and to Registered Training Organisations. It is now the flagship program for increasing apprenticeships. It has been supplemented by further wage subsidies through the **Boosting Apprenticeships Commencements (BAC)** initiative with an additional \$2.7 billion.

Of major concern to women with respect to this program, is the failure to include them in the Equity Groups meriting special assistance in the [Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program Guidelines](#). This would be a way of demonstrating that women apprentices are welcome and will receive priority attention!

As part of the **BAC** subsidy, 5000 Gateway Services places have been allocated for women interested in undertaking an apprenticeship in a non-traditional trade occupation. This is a welcome targeted initiative. But the number of places will be spread very thinly once divided amongst state and territories. It is an inadequate allocation.

The **JobTrainer Fund** was established as part of the economic response to COVID-19. The Government partners with states and territories to provide free or low fee training courses across

Australia. There is an amount of \$500 Million announced, but only \$339 million in the Portfolio Budget Papers. It is targeted to school leavers and young unemployed and aims to provide 163,000 training places for 17–24-year-olds.

This Fund according to the **Women’s Budget Statement** has supported almost 115,000 enrolments with 56 per cent of these being women. The program has been extended to December 2022 so has the potential to assist many young women into training. There are also an additional 33,800 new places targeted to support aged care skills. The predominance of women workers in this sector may mean a boost to women’s skills, employment prospects and potentially their wages.

The newly established **National Skills Commission** has had its allocation reduced and estimates taper off in the forward years. This Commission should be harnessed to bring more cohesion and leadership to the sector. It has the responsibility *to identify current and emerging skill needs and developing “nowcasting” (?) capability to understand the state of the labour market in almost real-time*. It has no specific brief to look at gender participation or segregation.

The **National Careers Institute** (NCI) has had its funding doubled to \$13.3 million and a proportion of these funds will go into a grants program to facilitate partnerships with industry, employers or schools for innovative projects that support women’s workforce participation. It is designed to support women to make informed decisions about career pathways. It is difficult to see how such a small amount of money is adequate to the task set for the program. It appears to be window-dressing!

Another modest pilot program – **Mid-Career Checkpoint (MCC)** – has also received an apparent funding increase to \$12.1 Million and is forecast to grow in the forward years to \$36.4 million by 23/24. Its allocation in last year’s budget was \$22 million. These fluctuating figures indicate challenges with implementation or poorly conceived and designed programs. This **MCC** aims to provide advice to people returning to work after a break for caring responsibilities. It is focused on women aged 30 to 45 years. There is a \$3000 grant to participants. This was a core service in TAFE. It was a Counselling and Course Information Service. It has become a poorly funded grants program. What kind and quality of advice is accessed, cannot be determined from the papers.

Under the Heads of Agreement for Skills Reform a new National Skills Agreement is being negotiated with states and territories to be signed by August 2021 worth about \$6.4 billion over four years. It is aimed to reform the VET sector.

Recommendations

NFAW recommends that:

- The implementation guidelines or criteria for funding of the **JobTrainer Fund** should require reporting on student enrolments and completions by gender. Female enrolments and their fields of study should be collected with male students and further disaggregated by language background, disability, Indigenous group and so on. Good program design requires reliable data.

- The brief of the **National Skills Commission** should be expanded to include the identification of occupational areas into which women may be attracted to diversify their occupational choices aiming for more economic security and closing the gender pay gap.
- Women should be added to the list of Equity Groups on page eight of **AAIP Guidelines**.
- The National Skill Needs List and the Occupational Skill Shortage Information should be kept under constant review and the responsibility for the compilation of these two lists brought under one jurisdiction. There should be data accompanying the lists showing numbers of males and females employed in the occupations as a guide to employers and potential trainees and apprentices as well as VET providers planning courses provision and establishing priorities.
- **Revitalizing TAFE campuses across Australia** program should be adequately funded so that the public VET provider can fulfil its community service obligations and provide the targeted programs for women of diverse backgrounds with appropriate specialist student support.
- All targeted programs under the **Gateway Services and Mid-Career Checkpoint** announced in the Budget need to be evaluated and reported upon for their effectiveness.
- Women's and girls' needs should be explicit in all VET funding policy, with all VET-related legislation and programs being accompanied by a requirement for women's impact statement to ensure that programs are equitable and inclusive. The data should be annually published in the **Women's Budget Statement**.
- **VET Student Loans** Statistical report should include gender disaggregated data.
- The NCVER needs to collect data by sex. The data published in the **Atlas of Total VET** is not adequate for detailed statistical gender analysis on VET enrolments. Hence claims of growth or success are difficult to establish from the available data.

Budget 2021 – Education

Higher education overview

This Budget has not provided the rescue hoped for by university leadership. Instead it has cut funding in real terms. The pandemic has already had a severe impact on the higher education workforce, largely because universities were excluded from JobKeeper funding. Recent modelling by Universities Australia estimated the decline in university revenue would mean the loss of 21,000 jobs, or 16 per cent of the total university workforce.

Data released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2020 shows that there was a 7 per cent drop in the number of women enrolled at universities and some vocational courses, and a 2 per cent drop in the number of men. Participation among women above the age of 25 dropped more sharply than among younger women and the presumption is that many of these women have been forced to abandon or at least postpone their studies to undertake caring duties, including supervising children learning at home.

Significant increases in fees are likely to further deter women from obtaining a higher education, particularly when fee increases are higher in female-dominated subjects and faculties such as arts and humanities. This will have flow on effects to women's lifetime earnings and economic security.

Higher Education

The Budget

The Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) provides funding to eligible higher education providers for students enrolling in bachelor degrees and other higher education courses of study 'designated' by the Minister for Tertiary Education.

Commonwealth Grant Scheme

	2020-21 Estimated actual \$'000	2021-22 Budget \$'000	2022-23 Forward estimate \$'000	2023-24 Forward estimate \$'000	2024-25 Forward estimate \$'000
Special appropriations:					
<i>Higher Education Support Act 2003</i>					
Cluster Fund and Place Loadings	7,338,409	7,309,436	7,128,454	7,147,976	7,276,971
Regional Loading	37,545	-	-	-	-
Transition Fund Loading	172,799	250,380	96,837	19,256	-
Total program expenses	7,548,753	7,559,816	7,225,291	7,167,232	7,276,971

(Commonwealth of Australia (2021), Budget Related Paper 1.4, Program expenses 2.1 Commonwealth Grant Scheme, p. 52)

Notwithstanding the proposal from [Universities Australia](#) for a comprehensive support package, there is no relief in the 2021-22 Budget for the university sector despite the catastrophic losses brought about by the 2020 global pandemic and the resulting decline in the number of international students. Operating revenue fell in 2020 by about 4.9 per cent, or an estimated A\$1.8 billion. In spite of this, the [Australia Institute](#) estimates that funding for the university sector will decline by 9.3 per cent over the forward estimates. In contrast, the tourism and aviation industries that also experienced severe losses due to the pandemic will receive a rescue package totalling is \$1.2 billion.

Closing the borders left higher education in a highly vulnerable position. The [2020 Gender Lens on the Budget](#) explained in detail the extent to which Australian universities have relied on international students to compensate for inadequate recurrent funding and the magnitude of the impact caused by closing the borders. Overall, [international student numbers dropped](#) by 43,000 from the same time in 2020. New enrolments from China, previously the primary source of international students, fell to by 22 per cent from 2020 figures. The decline among students from India is even sharper, with new enrolments dropping 52 per cent from 2020 figures.

The 2020-2021 Budget injected an extra A\$1 billion into the [Research Support Program](#) to alleviate the impact of lost revenue from international students fees, but this has not been repeated in the current budget and the funding announced in the 2020-21 budget intended to help universities transition to new funding arrangements arising from the Job Ready Package falls off a cliff in 2024-25.

There are some positive measures relevant to the higher education sector including:

- \$1.1 million over two years from 2020-21 to create new employment pathways for students and boost financial incentives for universities to enrol students in 'Industry PhDs'
- A new \$54.2 million Global Science and Technology Diplomacy Fund to support strategically important science and technology collaborations with global partners
- \$42.4 million over seven years to establish the Boosting the Next Generation of Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Program by co-funding scholarships for women in STEM in partnership with industry

- Initiatives to support the delivery of primary care and the health workforce in rural and remote Australia
- \$216.7 million over three years from 2021–22 to grow and upskill the aged-care workforce through additional nursing scholarships and places and related measures
- \$27.8 million to increase the number of nurses, psychologists and allied health practitioners working in mental health settings through 280 scholarships and 350 clinical placements
- A \$9 million cut over five years to the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teachers (QILT) suite of surveys
- Additional post-graduate scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait nurses and allied health professionals to undertake formal aged-care and dementia qualifications.

Funding for the Australian Awards for University Teaching and the Learning and Teaching Repository will end after the 2021 awards.

However, much of this funding has been repurposed or announced previously. For example, a new \$54 million global science and technology diplomacy fund, designed to support strategically important research collaborations with global partners, will come from the cessation of other international science programs and save the government \$6.6 million. According to Dan Nahum from the Australia Institute, the only *new* spending in the 2021-22 Budget is \$9.4 million to support online and offshore education models, and an extension to the FEE-HELP loan fee exemption by six months.

To cover the shortfall in revenue, the Education Minister has encouraged Australian universities to enrol more domestic students and announced that ‘small phased programs for international students’ could start in late 2021. Nevertheless, Budget paper No 1, makes it clear that international students will not be able to return in large numbers until mid-2022 at the earliest, as ‘the rate of international arrivals will continue to be constrained by state and territory quarantine caps over 2021 and the first half of 2022’ (p 36). The shortfall in international enrolments may extend for up to five years, leading to serious consequences across the whole sector. Students can study online, and some universities are offering discounted fees as an incentive, but there are real fears that many students will not return to Australia, preferring to go to Canada or the UK which have more relaxed entry controls and higher rates of vaccination.

Higher Education Partnerships and Participation Program

The Higher Education Partnerships and Participation Program (HEPP) was a stand-alone that emerged from the findings of the 2008 Bradley review of Australian universities. HEPPP funding enabled universities to attract and support underrepresented groups to higher education.

In the 2021-22 budget, HEPP has been rolled into the Indigenous, Regional and Low SES Attainment Fund making it impossible to determine what funds have been allocated to different cohorts of underrepresented or disadvantaged students, or if the total funding has been reduced.

Indigenous Student Success Program

The Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) is currently managed by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet provides supplementary funding to universities.

The *Higher Education Support Act 2003* appropriates funds to universities to help students take on the demands of university and succeed. The Indigenous Student Success Program is administered under Part 2-2A of the Act and the *Indigenous Student Assistance Grants Guidelines 2017*. The total funding for the Indigenous Student Success Program remains unchanged over the forward estimates.

Gender implications

Why is this an issue for women?

Higher education workforce

This Budget has not provided the rescue hoped for by university leadership. Instead, it has cut funding in real terms. The pandemic has already had a severe impact on the higher education workforce, largely because universities were excluded from JobKeeper funding. Recent modelling by Universities Australia estimated the decline in university revenue would mean the loss of 21,000 jobs, or 16 per cent of the total university workforce. Nahum states that the true figure is much higher. He calculates that 35,000 jobs were lost in 2020 up to November.

The Australian tertiary education sector is characterised by a highly casualised and female dominated workforce. The Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2020 survey demonstrates female staff make up 59 per cent of all tertiary education sector employees; 75.9 percent of part time employees and 59.4 per cent of casual employees. This survey includes employers from non-university higher education providers. There is no agreed definition of a casual academic position and it includes short-term replacement appointments, exam markers as well as teaching staff employed on a series on revolving contracts.

The 2020 Gender Lens on the Budget reported on the complex mix of internal policies relating to recruitment and promotion and external social factors including childcare and other family commitments that impede women's careers in academia. Poor remuneration and insecure modes of employment for early and mid-career female academics and researchers drives them to seek alternative employment thereby shrinking the pool of talent. The loss of such expertise is a significant waste of knowledge, capability and investment.

There are additional structural barriers for the advancement of female academics especially in STEM which most Australian universities are addressing through participating in the Athena Swan program. However, the continued level of Australian Government funding for the Commonwealth Grants Scheme as presented in this Budget presents challenges for universities to employ more permanent academics and researchers. There widespread reports of continuing redundancies as universities implement austerity measures.

Higher education students

A university degree continues to be a sound investment (although the rate of return has declined). Statistics from Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) show most graduates find full time employment within one year of graduating even during COVID. Employment rates were higher for people with non-school qualifications.

In 2020, women (70 per cent) overtook men (68 per cent) in obtaining non-school qualifications. Forth per cent of Australians aged 15-64 years who were studying a non-school qualification were studying bachelor degrees, while 18 per cent were undertaking postgraduate studies, and 19 per cent were completing a certificate III or IV.

Of the Australians undertaking undergraduate or postgraduate studies, 57 per cent were women. Women also made up 53 per cent of the Australians currently studying for a certificate, diploma or advanced diploma.

Data released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2020 shows that there was a 7 per cent drop in the number of women enrolled at universities and some vocational courses, and a 2 per cent drop in the number of men. Participation among women above the age of 25 dropped more sharply than among younger women and the presumption is that many of these women have been forced to abandon or at least postpone their studies to undertake caring duties, including supervising children learning at home.

Initially suspicious of the figures, Norton found that women with children were more likely than those without to defer or abandon study when the schools closed and children were learning at home. He also noted that difficulty in completing clinical placements and teaching rounds during COVID-19 restrictions might have contributed to these declines, as women make up the majority of students in health and education courses. Moreover, he found that the gender differences in enrolment could be partly explained by the timing of travel bans. Chinese students, the majority of whom are female, were prevented from entering Australia on 1 February, while Indian students, who are more likely to be male, were not excluded until 20 March, exacerbating the gender difference.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

The Department of Education reported that nationally, 6296 applicants from an Indigenous background applied to university, an increase of 7.7 per cent compared with 2019. This represents 2.2 per cent of all applications. Offers to Indigenous applicants increased by 6.9 per cent to 4987 in 2020. 79.1 per cent of applicants from an Indigenous background had attracted an offer in 2020.

The introduction of bespoke measures to support the transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander female students graduating from high school to attend university would contribute to high rates of applicants and graduates. Universal access to childcare would also support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women undertaking undergraduate and postgraduate studies including higher degrees and research.

In this Budget, the additional post-graduate scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Islander nurses and allied health professionals to specialise in aged care and dementia is welcomed but should be expanded to other priority areas.

What are the 2021 Budget impacts on women?

Higher education workforce

Universities Australia asserts that the Australian Government's assumption that Australian borders will remain shut until mid-2022 will adversely impact revenue of the university sector for 2021. With little additional funding going into the university sector and without international students due to ongoing border closures, Universities Australia estimates at least another \$2 billion will be lost this year. High job losses for casual and part-time staff in the sector, mainly women, should be expected for 2022.

Secure career pathways for early career female academics seem precarious at best with the number of men outnumbering the number of women in permanent, senior academic positions. Workplace mobility in the Australian university sector will be reduced and talented emerging researchers will seek positions internationally or in research teams at private institutions which are well resourced and supported. It will prove difficult to build cutting-edge technology hubs in the absence of properly-resourced university staff and infrastructure.

Higher education students

As outlined in NFAW 2020 Gender Lens on higher education, the changes to student contribution for courses as a result of the Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020 adversely impacts women.

The impact of the Jobs Ready Graduate package is yet to be reflected in the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) suite of surveys. Data on whether this substantial change to courses has incentivised students will be available in the future from the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (Portfolio Budget Statements No 1-4, p. 51-52, 2021).

However, the impact is likely to be felt more keenly by young women, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds, mature age women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and women and women with disabilities. In 2020, the most popular fields of non-school study for women were Society and culture (28%), Management and commerce (19%), and Health (19%). The first two of those courses are in Band 4, which includes law and economics, management and commerce, society and culture, humanities, communications and behaviour sciences. Students especially women who choose those courses are being required to choose between a career of their own choice or unsustainable levels of debt which will impact their ability to purchase their own home and sustain a good living standard.

Many submissions to the Senate Inquiry to Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020 asserted the student contribution for courses in commerce, humanities, communications, economics and law was inequitable especially to women. For example, the Australian Communications Advocacy Group

[\(ACAG\) submission](#) to the Inquiry highlighted that the public relations and communications industry is female-dominated, with women accounting for 69 per cent of professionals, men representing 29 per cent and 1 per cent preferring not to state their gender.

Women will benefit from the \$216.7 million over three years from 2021–22 to upskill the aged-care workforce through additional nursing scholarships and places. Women should also benefit from the \$27.8 million to attract more nurses, psychologists and allied health practitioners working in mental health through 280 scholarships and 350 clinical placements.

Whatever the case of the decline in female enrolments, measures in the [Women's Budget Statement](#) that support more women to pursue higher degrees in STEM are welcomed. In 2020, of the 445,100 Australians studying science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM), 72% of these students were men. The new measures include:

- \$42.4 million to support over 230 women to pursue higher STEM qualifications by co-funding scholarships in partnership with industry.
- \$600,000 (from existing funds) for the Women in STEM Ambassador to develop an evaluation toolkit for gender equity programs (Women's Budget Statement, p. 53, 2021).

The desire of the Australian Government to boost the numbers of women in non-traditional trade occupations and women in STEM does not extend to measures to support students to minimise financial stress and poverty, to maintain wellness, and [to successfully complete their tertiary qualifications](#). These would include improved support in accessing childcare, as well as respite care, social security and social housing.

Even before the pandemic, [research](#) showed that young people, including graduates, were finding it harder to get a foothold in the labour market. Those who have recently graduated are experiencing some of the harshest effects of the pandemic. The current decrease in affordable housing across metropolitan and regional Australia together with continued austerity measures for social security payments will have adverse impacts on students who are young women from low social economic backgrounds, matured aged women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and women living with disability.

Recommendations

NFAW recommends that the Australian Government:

- Institute equitable fee structures for all university courses;
- Recognise the pivotal role of higher education the recovery of the [Australian economy](#);
- Restore *per capita* funding through the Commonwealth Grants Scheme to enable universities to provide quality teach and end their dependency on casual staff;

- Consider the 12 point plan proposed by Universities Australia that would create a sustainable funding system capable of providing comprehensive support for teaching and research;
- Provide new scholarships to help enable women offset education, travel and childcare costs; and
- Increase the number of scholarships/fellowships for early career researchers for women and annual funding for travel and childcare for presentations at conferences.