



# Inquiry into Work and Care

## September 2022

---

### Introduction

The [Australian Academy of the Humanities](https://humanities.org.au) is the national body for the humanities in Australia, championing the contribution humanities, arts and culture make to national life. As one of the nation's five Learned Academies, we are a unique resource for government, working to ensure cultural, creative and ethical perspectives inform Australia's plans for now and into the future.

We welcome the Senate Select Committee's inquiry into Work and Care. Our submission provides historical perspective, and lessons from the higher education workforce (Terms of Reference (a) and (e) respectively).

In making this submission we draw on the Academy's Humanities Future Workforce report (forthcoming) and a piece we published this month by Honorary Professorial Fellow Professor Marilyn Lake AO FAHA FASSA on the 'Crisis in Care Work' (at Attachment A).<sup>2</sup>

### A "Commonwealth of care"

As Marilyn Lake wrote for the Academy recently "in all the discussion about the value of care work to our economy, there has been little analysis of the centrality of care to people's lives and the wellbeing of the broader society."

At Federation, Australian feminists championed a vision of enfranchised women leading the way to a society organised around human welfare – a "Commonwealth of care". We encourage the Committee to draw on this longer historical perspective.

Lake traces the evolution from these founding feminists' vision of a better society to later generations' narrower vision of women conforming to men's patterns of paid work. However, "women continued to do the bulk of care work, at work and in the home, and the continuation of such emotional and physical labour exacted a heavy penalty. One result has been the persistence of unequal pay."

---

<sup>1</sup> Australian Academy of the Humanities, Future Humanities Workforce <https://humanities.org.au/our-work/projects/future-humanities-workforce/>

<sup>2</sup> Marilyn Lake, The Crisis in Care Work, Australian Academy of the Humanities 'Five-Minute Friday' series <https://humanities.org.au/power-of-the-humanities/the-crisis-in-care-work/>

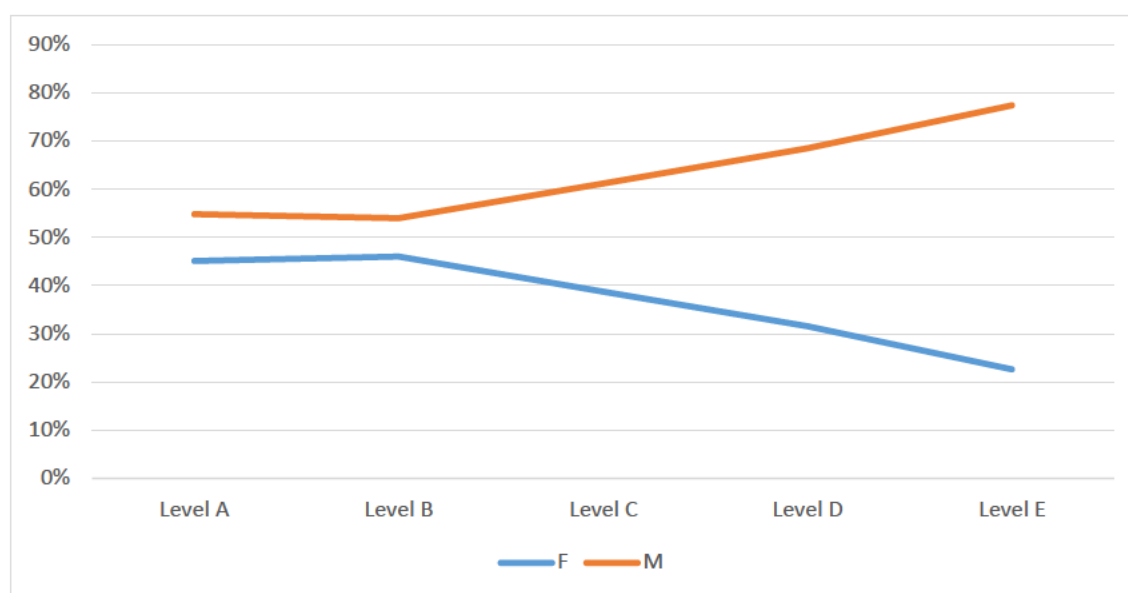
## Patterns of gendered work and pay in higher education

While women undertake most of the informal care work in Australia, career patterns continue to reward men over women. The Grattan Institute reports that female graduates should expect to earn 27 per cent less than their male counterparts over their careers.<sup>3</sup> We focus here on the state of play in the higher education sector – on women employed in research positions in universities.

In all fields of research – across the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and humanities, arts and social sciences (HASS) – gender inequities serve to devalue the contribution of women both socially and economically.

Women are over-represented in junior research roles and under-represented in senior roles. This is true for both STEM and HASS fields. As the figures below show, the disparity at the most senior level ('E', Professors) is stark.

**Figure 1 Percentage of male and female research staff (Full-time equivalent – FTE) by employment level – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields**



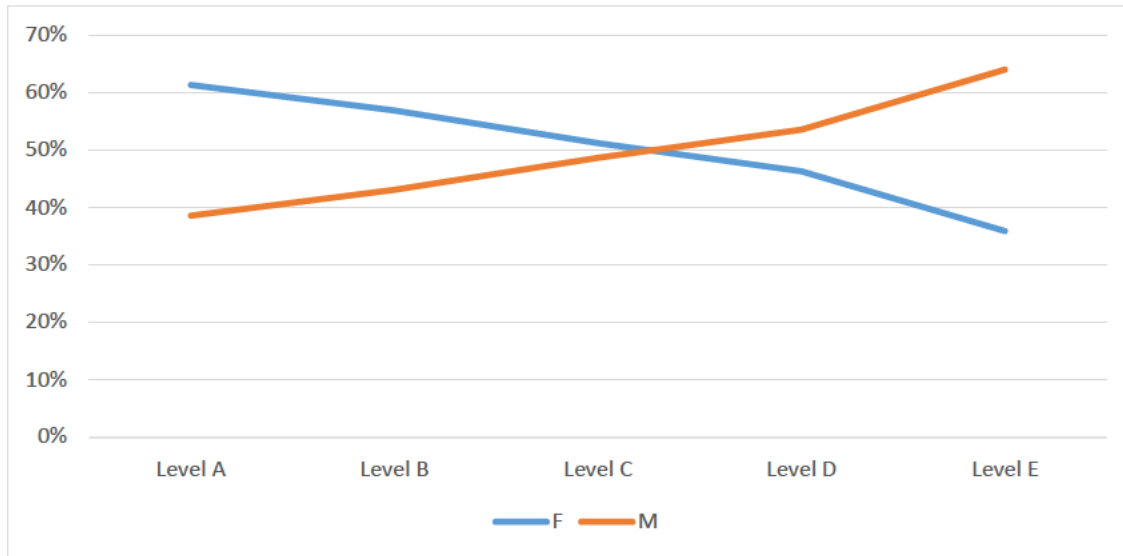
SOURCE: Australian Research Council, *Excellence in Research for Australia 2018*.

Whereas STEM is male-dominated, HASS is a feminised workforce, and it shares the challenges and inequities faced by other feminised workforces (such as education and training more broadly, and health care and social assistance).

In HASS fields women outnumber men at more junior ranks – 61 per cent of Level A employees are women and 39 per cent men; at Level E this is reversed, with 36 per cent women, and 64 per cent men.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Norton and Ittima Cherastidtham, *Mapping Australian higher education 2018*, Grattan Institute Report No. 2018-11, 2019, p. 77. Available at: <https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/907-Mapping-Australian-higher-education-2018.pdf>

**Figure 2 Percentage of male and female research staff (Full-time equivalent – FTE) by employment level – Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) fields.**



SOURCE: Australian Research Council, *Excellence in Research for Australia 2018*.

To date national approaches to address gender inequity in higher education and research have focused almost exclusively on STEM fields, where stark differentials in demographic composition drove a focus on the ‘pipeline’. Yet the composition of the humanities workforce, in which women work predominantly in roles that are typically less senior and less secure, demonstrates a need to move on from the simple ‘pipeline’ approach, which presumes that greater number of women within a workforce translates into balanced workforce profile down the line.

It is vital that the Committee sees past mere participation in the workforce, to the more difficult issues around empowerment of those who undertake care work, both informal and formal.

Through ‘relative to opportunity’ measures universities have sought to recognise professional achievements in relation to professional opportunities their personnel have enjoyed; the main Australian granting agencies (such as the Australian Research Council) emphasise a similar approach in grant application assessment.

In order to address inequity in academia, greater focus must be placed on the capability and potential of candidates, rather than on the number of publications or research grants they have secured. There also needs to be more effort dedicated to defining what constitutes excellence, and an investment of effort into recognising individual circumstances and assessing excellence within specific contexts. Academia still tends to value and reward traditional career narratives, and when it considers career interruptions it is with the implicit expectation that the person who has experienced an interruption will need to “catch-up” in order to be competitive.

## Effective support mechanisms

There are a range of innovative models and exemplars at the institutional level in Australia that could be drawn upon to inform future policy direction.

Many universities are, for example, looking to develop (or have already put in place) specific grant schemes to assist 'academic returners' with provisions for teaching relief, research assistance, research grants and targeted support for female researchers with the aim of increasing the number of female investigators in grant applications.<sup>4</sup> Some have also introduced primary carers' support funds for research and conference attendance, and they also now list childcare as an allowable budget item for travel costs on all internal grants.<sup>5</sup>

Carer costs (such as taking dependents overseas or allowing for the care of dependents while a carer is overseas) are allowable in ARC grants, but are seldom taken up, and as such this is an area that could be promoted more overtly. Another positive trend is the initiative at some universities to require a 50:50 gender split across all their internal grants. Investment in mentoring, research support, re-entry programs and affordable on-campus childcare facilities are also recognised as strategies that can drive an inclusive agenda.

In Attachment B, we outline international trends for gender-based performance indicators and suggest that these should be developed and incorporated into the granting processes in Australia in an equally comprehensive manner.

We (the Australian Academy of the Humanities) have adjusted our own grants schemes and now provide for care work and dependents' travel costs as eligible research expenses.

## Next steps

Achieving gender equity in the higher education sector will involve comprehensive cultural change and will require both a whole-of-institution and a whole-of-research (STEM + HASS) approach.

The challenge to create public policy and workforce cultures that enable adequate recognition and remuneration for those undertaking crucial care work across the whole of Australian society is acute. 'Leaving it up to families' to manage the burden of care not only abrogates our social and moral responsibilities, but misses significant opportunities for Australia to produce world-leading public policy innovations that support families and enhance productivity.

---

<sup>4</sup> SAGE applications available online <https://sciencegenderequity.org.au/category/application/> See La Trobe University SAGE application, p. 51; Macquarie University SAGE application, p. 87; CSIRO SAGE application, p. 128.

<sup>5</sup> Macquarie University SAGE application, p. 87; ANU SAGE application, p. 44; Macquarie University SAGE application, p. 87.

## Attachment A

# The Crisis in Care Work

**Professor Marilyn Lake AO FAHA FASSA**

Available at: [Australian Academy of the Humanities](https://humanities.org.au/power-of-the-humanities/the-crisis-in-care-work/) (https://humanities.org.au/power-of-the-humanities/the-crisis-in-care-work/)

Suddenly the crisis in care work is at the top of the political agenda. Whether it be nurses' and early educators' strikes or the shortage of childcare and kindergarten workers or the exploitation and exhaustion of the aged care and NDIS workforce, care work is all at once attracting public attention. Political leaders and media commentators have suddenly started to talk about what they like to call, in a telling phrase, the 'care economy'. But there is a deeper and broader anxiety: if women stop looking after those in need, what will happen?

At the same time, the continuing pay gap between men and women in paid work has again become a news item. It is not always noted, but these things are, of course, related. Women's greater responsibility for caring for the young and the old, the sick and the disabled, has a large impact on the sorts of paid work they can undertake, its duration and location, and its pay rates. Many more women than men work part-time so they can also do unpaid care work, but the care of family members at home is not limited by shifts, and it takes a toll.

The fact that women's burden of unpaid work in the home increased during the pandemic has been identified as one source of women's unequal pay. The lack of affordable child care is also understood to be preventing some women from going 'back to work'. Women, it is widely agreed, must be encouraged to enter the workforce because nothing less than 'national productivity' is said to be at stake. But in all the discussion about the value of care work to our economy, there has been little analysis of the centrality of care to people's lives and the wellbeing of the broader society. It is largely women in the paid workforce and at home, who look after babies, children, after-school kids, siblings, the sick, the disabled, aging partners, frail parents and old people in general. So many people need care, yet out of sight it goes unseen, and because women have traditionally done it, care work is taken for granted, and its impact on women workers goes unrecognised.

Feminists have long realised this reality, but the mainstream policy response has been to try to make it easier for women to assimilate to men's patterns and rhythms of work, which took for granted male workers' lack of responsibility for caring for others. Those



who assimilate most faithfully to the masculine pattern will be best rewarded. But assimilation to men's traditions of work hasn't always been the feminist priority.

It has been long forgotten that Australia's founding feminists, those who celebrated the inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901 and their achievement of political equality the following year, put forward a transformative vision of a society founded on different values and priorities. "The Country whose chief ambition is the Almighty Dollar," declared [Rose Scott](#), the leader of the New South Wales suffrage movement, "is the meanest country on earth."

Australia's founding feminists had radical alternative ideas. They imagined that the new nation that came into being at the beginning of the 20th century would be a commonwealth of care; it would be different from older societies by prioritising human need rather than maximising profit (just as their contemporary [HB Higgins](#) promoted a needs-based living wage). They wished to enshrine the humanist values of care and compassion as collective commitments. Founding feminists believed that women's enfranchisement would bring a "new element" into political life. Accordingly, Rose Scott looked forward to the advent of "the mother-woman's world with loving heart and sheltering arms..."

As I wrote in *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism*, they envisaged a welfare state instead of a warfare state. [Bessie Rischbieth](#), leader of the Australian Federation of Women Voters, believed that women's enfranchisement would be effective in establishing "a human basis for welfare" and that women could create new channels whereby "human welfare shall play the first and great part in our social system." Human needs would be the starting point for organising the economy and polity. But this shouldn't mean relegating women to economic dependence and poverty.

When Scott extolled "the national motherhood of women," she didn't mean that all women should become mothers, but rather that the values, skills, emotions and perspectives nurtured by the distinctive experience of caring for others, such as compassion, responsiveness, empathy and putting others' needs first, should be prioritised in the organisation of the new Commonwealth.

Scott was a fierce believer in women's economic independence – it was a key demand of early feminists. Like fellow activists, she believed that ways should be devised to enable those who did care work – most women – to also enjoy the citizen's right of economic independence.

From the 1890s through the 1930s, feminists fought to achieve the economic independence of women alongside proper recognition of the value of care work to society at large. They knew that care work was hard work and that it should be appropriately remunerated – by the state if necessary. But with the advent of the 1930s Depression, when attacks mounted on women in paid employment, and new

discriminatory laws were enacted, feminists changed tack and began to insist on women's 'right to work'; their right to work in the same jobs and for same wages as men.

**Muriel Heagney**, once a fierce advocate of a scheme of motherhood endowment paid by the state, helped form the Council of Action for Equal Pay in 1937. Ditching earlier demands for recognition of gender difference – different values, needs and life patterns – feminists henceforth would encourage reforms that enabled women to better assimilate into the workforce on the same terms as men. Few men assimilated to women's pattern of work and took on their double or triple load. Women continued to do the bulk of care work, at work and in the home, and the continuation of such emotional and physical labour exacted a heavy penalty. One result has been the persistence of unequal pay.

More than 120 years ago, our pioneering democracy enshrined the equal political rights of men and women. The persistence of a gendered division of labour that systematically exploits women by taking the caring work of women for granted, refusing to recognise its cost or adequately remunerate such work is an indictment of our democracy and betrayal of our founding feminist values.

### **About the author**

Marilyn Lake AO is Professorial Fellow in History at The University of Melbourne. She is the author of 13 books, including *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Allen and Unwin, 1999) and *Progressive New World: How Settler Colonialism and TransPacific Exchange Shaped American Reform* (Harvard University Press, 2019). In 1997 she was appointed Visiting Professorial Fellow at Stockholm University, and between 2001 and 2002, she held the Visiting Chair in Australian Studies at Harvard University. Professor Lake was elected to the Council of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 2007 and served as the Academy's International Secretary between 2008 and 2010. During this time, she was Chair of the Academy's Awards Committee and served two terms as President of the Australian Historical Association between 2010 and 2014.

## Attachment B

# International directions in gender equity for research

A review of the introduction of the Athena SWAN Charter on gender equity in Canada has made it clear that the promotion of gender initiatives across the university sector must be coordinated with similar efforts by national granting agencies.<sup>6</sup> As entities that have a significant impact on the way that research is performed and evaluated, the way that granting agencies approach the notion of equity is a critical aspect of advancing change, and ensuring that it is embedded within the excellence framework.

The EU's flagship research and innovation initiative program, Horizon Europe, requires organisations applying for research funds to meet four eligibility criteria concerning gender equality:

1. Publish a gender equality plan and actively communicate it internally.
2. Dedicate resources and gender expertise to implement the plan.
3. Collect disaggregated gender data and report on it annually.
4. Conduct a whole-of-organisation, evidence-based, ongoing and long-term training program, including unconscious bias.<sup>7</sup>

The EU recommends that organisations consider five themes in their plans:

1. Work-life balance and organisational culture.
2. Gender balance in leadership and decision-making.
3. Gender equality in recruitment and career progression.
4. Integration of gender dimension into research and teaching content.
5. Measures against gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.

Canada's three major federal granting agencies – the Canadian Institute of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada – have developed guidelines to help applicants incorporate diversity and gender equity within their

---

<sup>6</sup> In Canada, the Athena SWAN Charter was modified to increase equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in all disciplines, with the aim of achieving deep cultural change across the entire research ecosystem. It was also expanded to address the underrepresentation of a range of groups in academic research, including Indigenous Peoples, women, racialised minorities, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQ2+ community. See Government of Canada, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Dimensions: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Canada. Available at: [http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/EDI-EDI/Dimensions\\_Dimensions\\_eng.asp](http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/EDI-EDI/Dimensions_Dimensions_eng.asp)

<sup>7</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Horizon Europe guidance on gender equality plans, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/876509>. Available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ffc06c3-200a-11ec-bd8e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>



proposals. In their 'Tri-Agency Commitment to EDI (equity, diversity and inclusion) Statement' these entities explicitly link EDI goals with research excellence by integrating these goals into their policies, processes, indicators of excellence and evaluation criteria. To address the EDI selection criteria, applicants are asked to consider the type of research environment they will establish as research leaders according to (a) team composition and recruitment processes; (b) training and development opportunities; and (c) inclusion. For each area, research teams must identify at least one concrete practice that they will implement to address one or more systemic barriers.<sup>8</sup> This approach ensures that all individuals in the ecosystem recognise that barriers exist, that they develop a strong understanding of these barriers and their consequences, and understand how researchers can help to address these barriers by engaging with them in the grant application process.

A similar approach also underpins the ADVANCE program in the United States, which has been run by the National Science Foundation since 2001. These grants require a research contribution to the scholarship on gender equity and inclusive practices.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Canada Research Coordinating Committee, Best Practices in Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Research. Available at: <https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/nfrf-fnfr/edi-eng.aspx>

<sup>9</sup> See Sue V Rosser et al., "Athena SWAN and ADVANCE: effectiveness and lessons learned," *Lancet* 393 (9 February 2019), pp. 604-608 and National Science Foundation, ADVANCE at a Glance. Available at: <https://www.nsf.gov/crssprgm/advance/>