



National Council of Women of New Zealand

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Wahine O Aotearoa

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Submission on the Consultation Document Change Proposal – Gender & Women’s Studies programme

Introduction

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 50 nationally organised societies and national members. It has 26 branches throughout the country attended by representatives of those societies and some 150 other societies as well as individual members. The Council’s function is to serve women, the family and the community at local, national and international levels through research, study, discussion and action.

Education, especially for women, has been one of the major concerns of NCWNZ since the Council’s inception in 1896.

We note with regret the proposal to completely disestablish the Gender and Women’s Studies programme (GWS) despite the continued support of the Academic Board and the recommendations of the Working Party set up to review the programme.

Specific Comments

The Working Party Review Report on GWS recommended that:

1. The GWS programme should continue but not in its present form. “If any University should withdraw the subject, it should not be Victoria”.
2. VUW should articulate a “strategic vision for GWS at Victoria’ which could make ‘a significant contribution to the equity goals of the University’. The University should “regenerate its teaching and research in gender studies’ and re-establish GEND 101.
3. The University ‘has considerable strength in gender studies across a number of its Faculties and Programmes’ and ‘has the opportunity to create a new programme with high visibility and a coherent curriculum in gender studies which could bring its expert academics together and capture the full benefits of these strengths for staff and students’.
4. The GWS programme be relocated to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS), at the Kelburn Campus and staff be incorporated into an existing School in this Faculty.





The report does state that the programme is currently understaffed and cannot continue in its present form. As stated in the Working Party Review Report, page 8, “a new approach will enable the teaching and research in gender to align with international trends in the subject area, make VUW’s strengths in the field more visible and create a high quality programme.”

We are concerned that once the Gender and Women’s Studies programme is terminated at Victoria University, gender issues and an important part of social history will be forgotten. It is important to ensure students understand the impact of gender on modern society. The GWS programme with its focus on historical and contemporary writings will inform students on issues that include biculturalism, origins of feminist thought, sexualities, paid and unpaid labour, education, health, and media representations of women and gender relations.

Note: Victoria University situated in the capital city with New Zealand’s seat of government needs to retain this programme as a contributing part of government, public service and NGO policies supporting social equity. Despite a number of policies and initiatives over recent decades women are still being discriminated against in both the public and private sectors. Currently gender analysis is mandatory only for social policy. It is likely that in the very near future gender analysis will be mandatory for all policy development.

Conclusion

We strongly support the retention of the Gender and Women’s Studies programme at VUW including the recommendations of the Working Party Review Report that consideration be given to support the inclusion of gender related issues in the other courses named in the report.

Elizabeth Bang
National President

Rae Duff
Education Standing Committee Convener