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Select Committee on the Impact of Technological Change on the Future of Work and Workers in New South Wales

NSW Legislative Council  
Parliament of New South Wales  
6 Macquarie Street  
Sydney, NSW 2000

Professor Rae Cooper  
On behalf of  
The Australian Women's Working Futures Study  
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Dear Chair Mookhey,

Thank you for the opportunity and invitation to make a submission to your Inquiry into the impact of technological and other change on the future of work and workers in New South Wales.

Our research team has recently undertaken a landmark study of national social attitudes regarding gender and the future of work. As part of our Australian Women's Working Futures (AWWF) study, we conducted a national survey of 2,664 Australian women and men and undertook 21 targeted focus groups with 154 women working across occupations and industries, including three groups with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Findings from our study reveal that women already face significant gaps and barriers as they undertake paid work and navigate careers. The inequalities they face are likely to reproduce, and even amplify, unless governments, businesses and other stakeholders take action to design gender equality into the future of work.

Our aim in this submission is to highlight the key research findings our team has produced in recent years through our project, which has an explicit focus on women's work futures. We would be happy to provide further detail and evidence if your committee would find this useful.

We set out below, against key papers, our findings and their implications for the future of work. A full list of source materials appears at the end of this document.

- (1) As published in our **Australian Women's Working Futures report**, women, similar to men, seek security at work and see this as lacking in their current work environments. Both women and men are concerned by the prospect of automation-driven job loss, but they are notably more concerned with poor company management. This suggests that technological innovation is not seen as a threat in and of itself, but rather workers are distressed by how organisational leaders might apply new technologies within the workplace. Importantly, in contrast to men, women must balance these concerns with other pressing issues, namely pervasive disrespect and inequality at work. Approximately 12% of women in our survey said they were *currently* experiencing sexual harassment at work, with reports of sexual harassment even higher in occupations where men greatly outnumber women (27% of women in these environments) and among vulnerable populations (18% of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse women; 19% of LGBTQ women; 21% of women with disabilities). Additionally, 61% of women (compared to only 28% of men) say that 'men are treated better than women' at work. Not surprisingly, women seek respect more than anything else when they consider their own work futures. Given these

findings, technological change is only one of a myriad of workplace issues that women must consider when thinking about the future of work. The broader issues of inequality, precarity and disrespect must be addressed by workplace stakeholders in order to meet women's future work needs.

- (2) In two insight papers drafted for the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, we detail how gender bias is embedded in current employment practices and why a gendered lens is needed when talking about the future of work. In one paper titled '**Gender Equitable Recruitment and Promotion**' we discuss how gender-based stereotypes affect which candidates get recruited and selected for specific roles and how these stereotypes further affect salary and career negotiations. There is emerging evidence that these biases are being integrated into new HR technologies (Ajunwa and Greene 2019). In a second paper, titled '**The Future of Work and Gender**', we note that narratives about the changing dynamics of work tend to go from 'shop floor to Uber' (Ticona and Mateescu, 2018), prioritising worker experiences in men-dominated occupations and industries. A gender focus on the future of work, we argue, brings three important themes to the forefront:
  - i. gender segregation across the labour market means that women and men are differentially exposed to the risks and opportunities created by new technologies;
  - ii. women's technological experience and expertise is systematically underappreciated and undervalued;
  - iii. women face greater threats than men to their autonomy, privacy and safety at work as a result of new technologies.
- (3) In focus group data, currently outlined in an academic paper titled '**Thrills and Chaos: Women's Uneven Experiences of Technology at Work**', working women express great enthusiasm about the potential for technology to improve work processes and to help them achieve positive social impact through their work. However, this enthusiasm is stymied, in many instances, by poor working conditions, particularly within the low-status jobs and feminised occupations where most Australian women work. In these environments, women detail how technological glitches and crashes intensify job stress, how technological interfaces enable dehumanisation and abuse by customers and how new surveillance technologies undermine their sense of job autonomy and privacy. In sum, women see opportunities for empowerment through work technologies, but the poor quality of feminised jobs hinders their ability to harness the potential of technological innovation for their own careers and for the benefit of Australian society.
- (4) In mixed-methods findings presented in an academic paper titled '**Gender Matters: A Multi-level Analysis of Gender and Voice at Work**', we find that opportunities for employee voice are shaped by gender. Women and men working in women-dominated industries and in organisations characterised by high levels of gender inequity are less likely than those working in other environments to report being consulted by their managers about work matters. Those working in organisations where they perceive high levels of gender inequality are also less likely to say they have an influence over work matters. Further, across industries and organisations, women describe how their attempts to have a say at work are blocked by their relatively low status within organisational hierarchies, by men's opportunity hoarding, and in many cases, by direct discrimination. Thus, within these gendered work environments, new technologies are likely to be implemented with limited worker input, and as a result, they risk being disconnected from everyday work processes and either disregarded or sabotaged by workers.

- (5) In an academic paper titled ‘**Subjective Well-being at Work and Expectations of the Future: Migration and Gender in the Australian Workforce**’, we use data from our national survey to demonstrate that migrant women born in Asia are particularly vulnerable to concerns about the future of work. Among women (but not men), workers born in Asia report lower well-being at work than those born in Australia across a number of indicators, including reduced job security and skill-job alignment and heightened levels of isolation, cultural discrimination and sexual harassment. We also find that women born in Asia, compared to those born in Australia, are more likely to be concerned about their work futures, and that their concern is driven, in part, by the relatively diminished quality of their current work experiences. Thus, to the extent that new technologies and other workplace changes might undermine job security and job quality, women born in Asia are likely to be acutely affected.
- (6) Finally, in a published paper titled, ‘**Young Women and Men: Imagined Futures of Work and Family Formation in Australia**’, we find that Australian workers, especially working parents, identify formal workplace supports for care, such as paid parental leave and childcare, and workplaces flexibility as very important to their future work and family success. However, important gender gaps exist among non-parents, with men without children less likely than women without children to be thinking about supportive work and care policies and equitable gender divisions of labour within the home. As previous research demonstrates that technology can intensify work pressures and expand the boundaries of work (i.e., Gregg, 2013), it is necessary that all members of society are thinking proactively about how technology can improve, not further impede, work-family balance.

Cumulatively, our research shows that the impacts of technology and other changes on the future of work in Australia are unlikely to be gender neutral. Persistent gender segregation in the labour market means women and men experience technological and other work and labour market changes at different times, at different rates and in distinct forms.

As debates continue about the impact of these changes on jobs, the fact remains that women’s paid and unpaid work is undervalued, that traditionally feminised jobs are overwhelmingly precarious and low paid and that women across fields – from healthcare to the high-tech sector – lack voice and authority. To promote an equitable and productive labour market in the future, we recommend legislative and broader efforts focus on:

- (1) expanding women’s participation and inclusion in male-dominated sectors, especially in STEM fields where technological innovations are often envisioned and designed;
- (2) improving the quality of jobs in rapidly growing, feminised fields such as healthcare and social assistance;
- (3) addressing persistent gender biases within work policies and practices, including within newly automated recruitment and selection tools, that serve to limit women’s mobility into leadership positions;
- (4) creating mechanisms for ensuring the inclusion of women’s voices in work planning systems and processes;
- (5) providing a care regime to support gender equality in work and care across the life course so that new technologies can serve as resources in improving, rather than exacerbating, persistent gender inequities at home.

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Source materials produced by the AWWF research team are listed below:

**The Australian Women's Working Futures (AWWF) report**

<https://www.sydney.edu.au/content/dam/corporate/documents/business-school/research/women-work-leadership/women-and-the-future-of-work.pdf>

**Gender Equitable Recruitment and Promotion WGEA Insight Paper**

[https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Recruitment\\_and\\_Promotion\\_0.pdf](https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Recruitment_and_Promotion_0.pdf)

**The Future of Work and Gender WGEA Insight Paper**

[https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/FoW\\_insight\\_paper.pdf](https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/FoW_insight_paper.pdf)

**Thrills and Chaos: Women's Uneven Experiences of Technology at Work**

Presented in 2019 at The Australian Sociology Association conference and in 2020 at the Association of Industrial Relations Academics in Australia and New Zealand. Currently under peer review at *Work, Employment and Society*.

**Gender Matters: A Multi-level Analysis of Gender and Voice at Work**

Currently under peer review at the *British Journal of Management*.

**Subjective Well-being at Work and Expectations of the Future: Migration and Gender in the Australian Workforce**

Presented in 2019 at The Australian Sociology Association conference and in 2020 at the Association of Industrial Relations Academics in Australia and New Zealand. Currently under peer review at *Feminist Economics*.

**Young Women and Men: Imagined Futures of Work and Family Formation in Australia**

Hill, E., Baird, M., Vromen, A., Cooper, R., Meers, Z., & Probyn, E. (2019). Young women and men: Imagined futures of work and family formation in Australia. *Journal of Sociology*, 55(4), 778–798. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783319877001>

**Other works cited:**

Ajunwa I and Greene D. (2019). Platforms at Work: Automated Hiring Platforms and Other New Intermediaries in the Organization of Work. In *Research in the Sociology of Work: Work in the Digital Age*, 61-91

Gregg M (2013) *Work's Intimacy*. John Wiley & Sons.

Ticona J and Mateescu A (2018) Trusted strangers: Carework platforms' cultural entrepreneurship in the on-demand economy. *New Media & Society* 20(11): 4384–4404.

Yours sincerely,

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*Submission to Inquiry into the impact of technological and other change on the future of work and workers in New South Wales*

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