



March 2022

WAVE Policy Briefing Paper

Policy Ambition

A sustainably funded inclusive adult and vocational education system enhanced through intentional support mechanisms and specific programs is one critical way for the Australian Government to address gender inequity and increase opportunities for women in Australia. COVID-19 has amplified existing inequities in the role that adult and vocational education plays for women and girls.

WAVE advocates for women in all their diversity, recognising that focus must also take account of those women and girls made more vulnerable through issues associated with intersectionality, such as but not limited to Indigeneity, dis/ability, location, poverty and age. WAVE highlights important strategies and proposals that should be part of the funding and policies for adult and vocational education of all political parties as we approach the 2022 federal election.

WAVE's proposals are consistent with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹ to which Australia is a signatory. Relevant SDGs include SDG 4 ('Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'); SDG5 ('Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls') and SDG 8 ('Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive economic employment and decent work for all.')

Issue 1: Short-term training is not the answer to decent work for women and girls

Funding and provision of short-term upskilling and re-skilling have been a key feature of policy responses to the impact of COVID-19. Short-term ad-hoc training alone will not provide women and girls with the education and training they need to find decent work, defined by the ILO as 'opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.'² Current opportunities offered through Job Trainer and micro credentials are band-aid solutions to current economic problems and do not contribute to longer-term opportunities for decent work. A lack of person-centred training that enables women and girls to secure well-paid and sustainable careers and decent work has significant personal economic and social impacts.

WAVE's proposals:

VET qualifications require educational knowledge as well as technical and vocational skills.

Vocational education and training courses must recognise the importance of underpinning skills and knowledge as a base to build qualifications. Short-term training that addresses the need for language, literacy and numeracy, employability skills and basic vocational skills, *together* with skills-based training linked to real jobs to build the qualification levels of women and girls leading to decent work is required.

Issue 2: The VET system is losing women and girls and under-serving younger and older women, and those in regional Australia

VET courses must be accessible, affordable, relevant & of high quality, linked with the emergent as well as current worlds of work. There are decreasing numbers of women and girls undertaking vocational education and training qualifications. Vocational pathways appear to be more limited with restricted

¹ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> (access date 20 March 2020).

² <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm> (access date 20 March 2020).

opportunities for progression to build on current skills levels leading to higher tertiary and vocational qualifications and decent work.

WAVE's proposals:

Recognition for increased skills levels and qualifications in female dominated industries such as the care industries, is critical. Supported opportunities to undertake further education should be made available to women, including childcare and allowances, with wage justice at the end.

VET programs and courses must be flexible and adaptable to cater for specific student needs and place-based opportunities with links to real jobs. Specific programs need to be funded and part of the scope of delivery undertaken by RTOs, especially those meeting the needs of young women, older women and those living in rural and remote communities.

Issue 3: The current structure of apprenticeships and traineeships is not supporting the sustainable participation and completion of employment based training by women and girls.

Current apprenticeship and traineeship approaches are limited in their impact on driving diversification in male dominated occupations and in supporting sustainable career outcomes and access to decent work for women and girls after training completion. Networks established to provide support for women and girls in industries have rarely been sustainable.

WAVE's proposals:

Build sustainable solutions for partnerships between schools/TAFE/industry/community that are long term. Draw on the significant research in this area, including WAVE's own research to identify and implement sustainable solutions - especially those that are place-based and incorporate co-design.

Australia's ongoing record of disasters and associated reparation work offers the opportunity to design and incorporate ongoing measures into apprenticeship programs including infrastructure projects to address the high level of gender segregation in almost all of the associated trade areas.

Issue 4: Systemic gender inequity in workplaces and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) are multi-layered and impact negatively on women and girls' access to vocational education and training and decent work.

Gender inequality provides the underlying conditions for violence against women and girls (VAWG). Violence against women is both a symptom and a cause of gender inequality, and a barrier to its achievement. VAWG is also extremely costly to the whole of Australian society³. Addressing systemic gender inequity associated with violence against women including in work places is complex and multi-layered. However one of those layers must be increased education and understanding of all forms of gender-based violence as part of all VET courses.

WAVE's proposals:

Combatting gender inequity and VAWG requires systematic integration of specific training programs mainstreamed across all VET drawing on existing best practice. This is consistent with Sustainable Development Goals 4, 5 and 8.

Training packages are well recognised as being too restrictive and stifling of innovative vocational education and training. Their review and future application must include and embed attention to understand and combat gender inequity, including all forms of violence against women and girls.

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³ Our Watch <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/the-issue/> (access date 20 March 2022).