

Submission to IPART – Part 2 Pricing VET under Smart and Skilled

August 2013

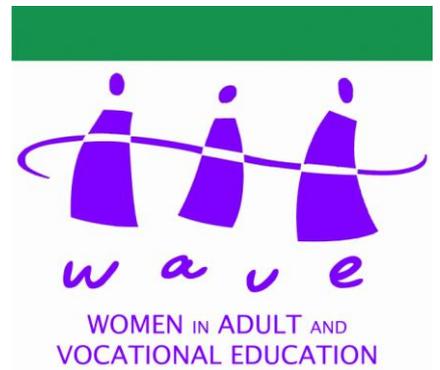
Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE) is an NGO, the only national organisation with a focus on women and post compulsory education and training. WAVE represents the interests of women and girls in the broad areas of adult, vocational and work-related education and training, and the links between these, employment outcomes and labour market positions. We are a member of economicSecurity4women (eS4W), and well understand how costs around gaining a VET qualification can impact on the economic security of women.

WAVE is disappointed that the proposed recommendations from IPART ignored the concerns we raised about women and girls in VET, and the need to ensure there was funding to address a range of access and equity concerns.

We are concerned, along with many other industry and community groups, with the proposed fee increases for students that are included in your report. We believe that the government has a responsibility to properly fund vocational education and training, and that it must maintain funding levels as required through the National Partnership Agreement. It is not reasonable to cut costs and shift the responsibility for funding education further on to students, because the State Government has decided to cut the VET budget. It is fundamental that there be a quality VET system in NSW, of which TAFE is the major provider.

WAVE is aware that many groups have expressed the view that the base price is too low and that education in many industries cannot be offered for that price. WAVE has already made the point that there should be equity in pricing between traditional male and female industries, and that there should be additional funding to support women and girls entering male dominated trades.

The issue of co-enrolment in Foundation studies courses is very unclear. How does this occur and who pays? Many women re-entering the workforce or from countries where their main language is not English, will need the additional support of Foundation skills. Does this mean they will have to pay more? Surely if the State Government is concerned that students complete courses, progress to higher level qualifications and attain access to employment and career progression, they will want to ensure that these students have access to the support they need whilst undertaking vocational courses. This co-enrolment should be free to students who require this additional support, and the Government should provide RTOs with subsidies to ensure that professional teaching is involved.



WAVE also expresses concerns around the definition of thin markets. There needs to be clearer transparent criteria around a thin market and what is expected of an RTO delivering in a thin market. Currently TAFE is the preferred provider in a thin market and WAVE believes this remains an appropriate expectation of a public provider.

WAVE does not support student fees being set as a maximum, as we believe this will encourage undercutting by for-profit providers in a competitive market, and quality will suffer. We are already aware that some RTOs set out to target disadvantaged groups in order to win tenders and pick up subsidies. A fee set as a maximum has the potential to exacerbate such behaviours. Instead we support a flat fee with additions to cater for various special requirements.

WAVE does not agree with the proposal that students should pay 40% of the base price for the initial qualification and 45% for the subsequent qualification. We have already made the point about many women undertaking a number of qualifications as they gain confidence and move into studying for a vocational career. This is a well-publicised matter, and should be recognised within the IPART proposals. Consequently we believe a higher fee for a subsequent qualification will act to prevent this type of qualification progression, and overall act as a disincentive to the development of a learning culture. It would be far more reasonable and acceptable for student fees to be 20-30% of the base price, and for Certificate I and II courses to be fully subsidised by the Government as they are in South Australia.

WAVE also understands that modelling of current Foundation Skills courses has shown that a 10% student fee, can in many cases be a very high fee. We are aware of learner support being provided in WA for 20c a Unit per year, and this works out as a far more appropriate fee level.

In the impact statement you make the point that 84% of students will face a fee increase and that 85% of CII and CIII students will face a fee increase. These are large increases that would not be allowed in other industries. We believe that such fee increases will act as a disincentive for many women and girls, which has the capacity to increase the levels of unemployment and under-employment in the state.

WAVE again rejects any further moves to deregulate student fees in the future, and supports an annual review of the impact of fees and charges in VET.

Linda Simon
National Convenor WAVE