



## **SUBMISSION: Women in Adult & Vocational Education (WAVE)<sup>1</sup>**

### **THE 55TH SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW) COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The key theme of CSW 55, viz: *Access and participation of women and girls to education and training, science and technology, including the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work* is closely linked with Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3: *Promote gender equality and empower women*. Moreover, success in this MDG underpins the potential for achievement of all 8 MDGs by 2015,<sup>2</sup> a goal that was reaffirmed at the UN Summit September 2010.<sup>3</sup> Although much has been achieved, serious challenges remain (Rudd 2010)<sup>4</sup>

CSW 55 through its priority theme provides an opportunity for Australia to reflect on and recommit to efforts in this significant area for gender equality, both in our own country and by assisting others. WAVE acknowledges the opportunity made available through the Australian Government's Office for Women to submit comment in preparation for CSW 55.

While recognising achievements to date, WAVE encourages the Australian Government to strive for world best practice in gender inclusive education, training, science and technology, including the promotion of women's access to full employment and decent work through continuous and rigorous improvement in national policies and outcomes as well as those in our overseas Aid program (e.g. see Aust. Govt., 2010)<sup>5</sup>. As a CSW signatory, Australia is obligated under the Convention to both account for and monitor systems to track progress on gender equality, and to eliminate gender disparities in all levels of education and training in Australia by 2015.

WAVE requests that this Consultation direct attention to CEDAW<sup>6</sup> documentation; specifically Article 24 that delineates the need for equity considerations in education and Articles 4, 9 and 21 with specific mention of the need for equitable access to information in appropriate formats, assistive equipment and technologies. The Concluding Comments of the CEDAW Committee to the Australian Government (August 2010) note:

... with concern that, despite a large number of policies and programmes adopted by the State party to address under-representation of certain vulnerable groups of women, including Indigenous women, women with disabilities, migrant women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and women from remote or rural communities, there has been slow progress in ensuring their equal participation in leadership and decision-making positions, in public and political life as well as their equal access to education, employment and health. The Committee continues to be concerned that the State party does not favour adoption of temporary special measures in the form of compulsory targets and quotas to address the under-representation of women in decision-making bodies, in political and public life and the persistent inequality of their access to education, employment opportunities and health care services.<sup>7</sup>

The Committee makes specific mention of the current disadvantage experienced by women in the field of education, stating concern that information provided:<sup>8</sup>

does not always allow for a full understanding of ways in which multiple forms of discrimination impact outcomes for specific groups such as Indigenous women and girls. The Committee is also concerned with segregation of fields of study in higher education and vocational training which ultimately results in occupational sex segregation of the

<sup>1</sup> Refer to Attachment One for Overview of WAVE and Attachment One (a) for Statements of support for this submission

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.undp.org/mdg/basics.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.un.org/en/mdg/summit2010/>

<sup>4</sup> Rudd, K, 2010, Foreword' in *Achieving the millennium development goals: Australia's support 2000-2010* Australian Government <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/pdf/mdg.pdf> Accessed 30/10/10

<sup>5</sup> Australian Government Ibid Towards 2015 pp 24-25

<sup>6</sup> Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women

<sup>7</sup> CEDAW/C/AUS/CO/7, Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Temporary Special Measures, Australia, Paragraph 26, 45<sup>th</sup> Session, 12-30 July 2010

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Education Paragraph 36,37.

labour market.

37. The Committee recommends that data related to school retention, completion and achievement in literacy and numeracy be disaggregated and cross-tabulated on the basis of sex, ethnicity and geographical location to ensure that the needs of specific groups can be identified and appropriate interventions applied to eliminate sex-based disparities. The Committee urges the State party to allocate resources to encourage females to pursue programmes of study and professional development in areas which are traditionally dominated by men.

Similar concerns are expressed about the gender-segregated nature of Australia's labour force, and barriers to women's equal pay and participation in the workforce, urging that concrete measures be implemented to eliminate occupational segregation.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the CEDAW Committee repeatedly recommends that Australia adopt and implement targeted measures, including temporary special measures, and pay particular attention to ensuring access to quality education, including vocational training, especially with respect to disadvantaged groups of women, in particular Indigenous women and women with disabilities.

WAVE recommends that the above comment from CEDAW be acted on in preparation for CSW55<sup>10</sup>.

Australian women value education and training highly, continually ranking it as an area of high significance<sup>11</sup>. For well over a decade now there has been little or no policy attention focused on education and training for women and girls in this nation. While the position of women in Australia has improved markedly, the assumption that women 'have been done'; that all is well for women in education is premature despite achievements, as evidenced by closer analysis of disaggregated data. Within the broad sweep encompassed by 'women and girls' and acknowledging the diversity and complexity captured by that categorisation, WAVE affirms the need to address the circumstances and requirements of specific groups of women and girls through gender analyses and proactive gender sensitive policies and programs. It is also important to 'think forward', to take into account Australia's changing demographic, economic, climatic and socio-cultural circumstances in the context of the highly globalised and ever technologising world. The World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index 2010 rankings show a continuing decline in Australia's ranking status from 15 in 2006 to 23 in 2010, now between Mozambique (22) and Cuba (24)<sup>12</sup>. Action in gender sensitive policies and initiatives for women and girls, including education and training, science and technology, and employment outcomes is well overdue.

WAVE recognises the interrelationship between entrenched gendered patterns in education and especially vocational training, and the gendered patterns and employment outcomes discussed in the CEDAW documentation. While Australian women's education status is ranked highly, inequities continue, especially in VET and employment outcomes for women. This submission will focus on education and training in the post compulsory sector. We acknowledge the synergy between the various sectors, and the need for proactive and equitable policies that work together across the domains and 'boundaries' of the sectors covered by the focus of CSW 55, for the benefit of Australian women, and especially those most disadvantaged<sup>13</sup>.

## VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET): OVERVIEW & ISSUES

Education is one of Australia's best strategies to achieve social, economic and environmental sustainability. Vocational education and training (VET) is 'education and training for work' and part of a broader educational network in Australia that includes schools, universities and adult and community education<sup>14</sup>.

Vocational education and training in Australia provides skills training to approximately 1.7 million people each year<sup>15</sup> (47.6% female, 52.3 % male), through a mix of public and private providers under the umbrella of a highly complex and ever changing system, well illustrated by ABS (Ref Att. Four):

There are almost 5,000 registered training organisations in Australia. While there are around 3,700 private training providers of VET, most VET students are engaged with publicly-funded training providers. These are predominantly government administered TAFE colleges or institutes. Other publicly-funded VET can be provided by higher education institutions, secondary schools and colleges,

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, Employment Paragraph 38, 39

<sup>10</sup> COAG Reform Council *National Education Agreement: Performance Report for 2009* was released 22/10/10. Yet again, no gender dissections of data appear in this significant report. <http://www.coagreformcouncil.gov.au/reports/education.cfm> Accessed 2/11/10.

<sup>11</sup> Research conducted by WAVE & S4W refers. See Attachment Two

<sup>12</sup> World Economic Forum (WEF) Gender Gap Report

<http://www.weforum.org/en/Communities/Women%20Leaders%20and%20Gender%20Parity/GenderGapNetwork/index.htm> Accessed 3/11/10 See Attachments Three (a) & (b)

<sup>13</sup> CEDAW Op Cit paragraphs 40 - 45

<sup>14</sup> training.com.au. <http://www.training.com.au/Pages/menuitem34755cb3fd32de15af17bfae17a62dbc.aspx> Accessed 31/10/10

<sup>15</sup> Students and courses 2009 preliminary data released 25<sup>th</sup> May 2010 *News & Events* NCVET

[http://www.ncver.edu.au/newsevents/mediareleases/mr\\_45.html](http://www.ncver.edu.au/newsevents/mediareleases/mr_45.html) Accessed 31/10/10

agricultural and technical colleges, and adult and community organisations. Private providers of VET can include private training organisations, business colleges, industry associations, adult and community organisations and employers. VET providers offer a wide range of subjects and programs including traditional trades, advanced technical training, para-professional and professional studies as well as basic employment and educational preparation. While formal VET study provides skills and nationally recognised qualifications for employment, students may complete only one or two subjects to gain specific skills, without completing a full qualification, if that is their choice<sup>16</sup>.

VET is intimately linked with all sectors of education and industry, as well as those of employment and welfare, as it is with workplace learning<sup>17</sup>. As well as providing a public good, VET is both an institution of the state and a significant industry. While there is much to commend in Australia's national training system, it is also acknowledged that there are significant issues requiring urgent attention for our individual and collective future economic prosperity and well being; for Australia to continue to position itself favourably regionally and globally<sup>18</sup>. This moment provides the opportunity to ensure that upcoming reforms are gender sensitive and demonstrate best practice in relation to equity provisions.

VET is highly significant for Australian women and girls. It bridges informal and formal education and training; it incorporates many aspects of science and technology; it offers pathways to employment as well as opportunities for the potential to transform their educational, social and economic wellbeing. It links girls from secondary schooling through VET in schools programs with career options and pathways; it links women seeking to engage in education and training to compensate for negative or inadequate experiences in education with a way back into formal education &/or training; it provides opportunities for women to re-skill to enter or re-enter the workforce; for them to 'up-skill' as a mechanism to help redress pay inequity, and, increasingly necessary, to 'future skill'. Finally, VET also provides viable pathways to improved employment opportunities and to higher education. In 2009, 34% of Australian workers, especially older workers, were still without a non-school qualification<sup>19</sup>. Quality VET training for women enhances personal and national workforce participation and productivity.

WAVE is concerned about the continuing inequities experienced by many women in work and in or seeking to enter the VET sector. Recent data confirm our recommendations for direct intervention through policies and related initiatives are necessary for women and girls in VET. ABS confirms that:

Overall, the number of students in publicly-funded VET in 2008 declined by 1.5% from 2000. Over this period, male student numbers increased by 2.6% while female student numbers decreased by 3.5%. ... All age groups showed an increase in enrolments from 2007 to 2008 for both sexes with the exception of females in the 40-49 age group. In 2008, 58% of male students and 48% of female students were under 30 years of age<sup>20</sup>.

The gendered patterns in enrolment referred to above are graphically illustrated (See Attachment Four).

Despite calling on contemporary Government discourses of 'social inclusion', VET policies (including equity initiatives and policies), like many other Government policies<sup>21</sup>, continue to be gender neutral. This is out of step with world thinking. There is an assumption that women (and girls) will be 'captured' by a fluid variety of named groupings, with no recognition that women and girls make up 50% (or more) of such groups. As WWDA remind us<sup>22</sup>,

at the time of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, gender mainstreaming was identified as a means of advancing women's rights by incorporating **gender impact analysis** into mainstream policies. Facets of this mainstreaming include targeted measures and specific research, as well as embedding a gender perspective in all

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<sup>16</sup> ABS *Extract from ABS Year Book 2009- 2010* (released on 6 June 2010) Vocational Education and Training (VET) (Att 4)

<sup>17</sup> ABS *Australian Social Trends* September 2010. Australia's workers: Education and workplace training. Catalogue 4102.0 [www.abs.gov.au/socialtrends](http://www.abs.gov.au/socialtrends) Accessed 3/11/10

<sup>18</sup> Skills Australia 2010 *Creating a future direction for Australian vocational education and training. A discussion paper on the future of the VET system*. October 2010 Skills Australia. Skills Australia Accessed 28/10/10

<sup>19</sup> ABS *Australian Social Trends* September 2010 op Cit p1

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Examples of the gender neutral 'social inclusion' approach in policy and related documents include NVEAC *Equity Blueprint: Creating potential through VET* August 2010 ([http://www.nveac.tvetaustralia.com.au/home/nveac\\_projects/equity\\_blueprint](http://www.nveac.tvetaustralia.com.au/home/nveac_projects/equity_blueprint)) and COAG Reform Council (Op Cit Ch. 6) to name but two of many.

<sup>22</sup> WWDA Submission to NVEAC 10 September 2010 (accessed 25/10/10) [http://www.nveac.tvetaustralia.com.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/54145/WWDA\\_Women\\_with\\_Disabilities\\_Australia.pdf](http://www.nveac.tvetaustralia.com.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/54145/WWDA_Women_with_Disabilities_Australia.pdf)

policies and programs<sup>23</sup>. These elements have been incorporated into Australian Aid philosophy and policies. It would be shameful if they failed to be part of Government policy within the country itself

Gender Impact Assessments (GIAs) are tools that can be used to inform and strengthen policies, so that any gender discriminatory effects are neutralised. These should be routinely included in the development of policies and programs as is currently done by many state departments.<sup>24</sup> Some form of Gender Analysis must be a primary performance measure embedded into the final VET Equity Plan.

Funding of the competitive VET sector is highly problematic, with increased demands and reduced funding being a pattern of the last 11 years. Investment in accessible, affordable and relevant education and training for women and girls is necessary to ensure access by women in poverty. While men and women's overall rates of poverty are similar, women continue to be at risk of poverty in Australia. Aging single women and female sole parents are over-represented in groups living on low incomes<sup>25</sup>. The inter-related key causes of poverty among women, particularly female sole parents, are<sup>26</sup>:

1. the continuing inequality of wage levels, with women's wages still being generally lower than those of males;
2. the nature of the work that women are more inclined than males to do, which is more likely to be part-time or casual or precarious in nature;
3. the high costs of child care;
4. the high costs of education;
5. lack of access to affordable housing;
6. insufficient income support for the needs of many sole parent families; and
7. lack of wealth accumulation during working life to support retirement incomes. Current superannuation payouts for women are approximately half of those of men.

Historically the disadvantage faced by women in VET and employment has been addressed through national policy frameworks including the current VET national policy for women, *Women: Shaping our future*. This is due to expire this year.

In line with CSW 55 and international obligations, WAVE seeks Australian Government commitment to implement education, training and employment policies based on gender analyses, including a new strategic framework for Australian women with a clear set of priorities and targets that take account of their diverse backgrounds, locations, life stages and needs. The new framework must move beyond a gender-neutral stance to be based on gender analyses and be set in the context of key initiatives including the forthcoming COAG Reforms; the Skills Australia proposed reforms<sup>27</sup> and the work of the NVEAC<sup>28</sup>. The inter-related gap between VET and inequitable employment outcomes and pay inequity for women also requires urgent attention and structural change.

WAVE argues that:

- taking a gender neutral position is out of step with international human rights conventions and also with international Global Reporting Index (GRI) which has a committee addressing gender issues within its framework;
- taking a gender neutral position is out of step with the Australian Government's Office for Women, National Pay Equity Campaign and the considerable work being undertaken by the Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner;
- taking a gender neutral position is out of step with the numerous Australian women's organisations clustered under the National Women's Alliances, all of who express their concern regarding the status of women in Australia, women's economic sustainability and the relevance of education to this position;
- NVEAC is in a powerful position to counter many of the misconceptions that have gained currency about the irrelevance of gender to conditions of employment, under employment and hidden unemployment. There is substantial evidence that women are still disadvantaged in relation to pay equity, access to part time jobs of significance, that they are still disproportionately represented in low paid part time and

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<sup>23</sup> Association for Women's Rights in Development (2004) Gender Mainstreaming: Can it work for women's rights? *Spotlight*, Number 3, Nov. 2004 in Women With Disabilities Australia, Gendering the National Disability Care and Support Scheme, WWDA Submission to Stage One of the Productivity Commission National Disability Care and Support Inquiry August 2010

<sup>24</sup> The GIAs undertaken and made publicly available by Women's Health Victoria are one example.

<sup>25</sup> *A Hand up Not a Hand Out: Renewing the Fight against Poverty* Senate Committee Report Commonwealth of Australia 2004 Chapter 10 p. 211

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid* p 211

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>28</sup> National VET Equity Advisory Committee (NVEAC) See: <http://www.nveac.tvetaustralia.com.au/>

casual employment with poor conditions and fail to be counted as part of unemployment figures as they are in unpaid carer roles within the family. When they do choose to return to work TAFE and other adult education offers them a pathway into further study and employment;

- young women and other women still study in gender-segmented patterns in VET and VET in schools. This is reproduced in their patterns of employment and employment outcomes generally;
- a failure to acknowledge these structural flaws and address them prior to CSW 55 and through current reforms would be a wasted opportunity. Embedding indicators and building on existing capacity in relation to the provision of gender sensitive policies and programs for women and girls in VET is critical.

Improved sustainable outcomes for women and girls through reinvigorated gender sensitive education and VET policies (including those based on social inclusion discourses) require:

- a reinstatement and re-commitment to the value of pre-vocational programs for women returning to work after raising children, caring or moving from income support;
- recognition that increased qualifications for women do not necessarily result in improved employment outcomes or pay equity and that structural reforms are needed;
- promotion of broader subject selection (including science and technology) by women and by girls in schools to prevent the perpetuation of segmented fields of work and study; and
- promotion of industry or employment based training programs to women to address the skills shortages.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

In recognition of the key theme for CSW 55, WAVE recommends the following as necessary for VET policy and programs to achieve substantive equality between men and women in Australia.

We call on the Australian Government to:

- make women's learning needs central to all VET strategies and policies, including the forthcoming National Equity Blueprint. This requires an explicit recognition of women *per se*, to adequately redress issues of intersectionality (Indigenous women, CALD women, low SES women, rural women and so on);
- implement strategies for VET based on gender analyses to inform a training framework able to provide opportunities for women at different stages of their life cycle and appropriate to their needs and circumstances. Again, such analyses must include attention to issues of intersectionality and related disadvantage;
- ensure gender expertise on all national VET equity advisory committees & working groups;
- implement a VET strategic framework for women with clear priorities & accountability mechanisms, including linking VET funding arrangements to key performance indicators for women, especially those most disadvantaged (Indigenous and women and girls with disability);
- collect, analyse and publish performance and outcome data that include trends over time and are disaggregated by gender and demographic characteristics. Such data will assist in the identification of trends and issues, development of strategies to address these, and ongoing monitoring;
- provide accessible gender sensitive career counselling (including for work experience and VET in schools) to broaden subject and course selection by girls and women in schools and VET, to enhance career pathways and meaningful employment outcomes for women and girls;
- reinstate and recommit to the value of pre-vocational or 'stepping stone' programs for women returning to work after raising children, caring or from income support;
- develop, implement and monitor programs that promote women into non-traditional trades and professions, with particular attention to addressing preconceived ideas about the capabilities and attributes of women and the workplace cultures and requirements of such trades and professions;
- ensure that employment creation programs and employer based incentives designed in response to skilling Australians for future employment opportunities, for skill shortages, emergent industries and occupations include initiatives that benefit women and girls;
- ensure provision of local, accessible, flexible and culturally sensitive training, at low or no cost, so that training-related initiatives and policies benefit all who are currently outside the workforce or seeking to improve their existing employment status and security;
- promote industry and employment based training programs aimed at recruiting women into industries that value flexible work practices for men and women to enable caring responsibilities to be met.

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## **SUPPORT FOR WAVE SUBMISSION: UN CSW 55 COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS- AUSTRALIA**

WAVE consulted widely for this UN CSW55 Community Consultation Process, including wide distribution of the WAVE Submission, in draft and subsequent stages, to gather perspectives and opinions from as diverse a population as possible within the time frame available.

This development of this submission draws on significant prior consultations, research and advocacy work WAVE has carried out (see Att. 2) and comment received.

Please refer to Attachment One (a) Support for WAVE CSW Submission, and subsequent attachments-

- (i) Damon Anderson- Monash University
- (ii) Erica Jolly - Education/health liaison AFUW-SA
- (iii) Dr. Sue North Research Fellow CEET Monash University
- (iv) Ms. Janette Riggs – Co-ordinator and QAG Convener Women’s Education Port Adelaide Campus
- (v) SACAL: South Australian Council for Adult Literacy Sub-Committee on the Interim SACAL Council 2010-2011
- (vi) Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation

We acknowledge these contributions, and commend the material contained in the above. It is included not only as expressions of support, but also and more importantly as further contributions for consideration in UN CSW 55 Consultations by the Australian Government. We also refer you to Attachments Five and Six (below) for further documentation relevant CSW55.

## ATTACHMENTS

- Att. One      About WAVE  
Att. One (a) Support for WAVE CSW Submission  
                Additional Statements Attached  
                (i) Damon Anderson- Monash University  
                (ii) Erica Jolly - Education/health liaison AFUW-SA  
                (iii) Dr. Sue North Research Fellow CEET Monash University  
                (iv) Ms. Janette Riggs – Co-ordinator and QAG Convener Women’s  
                Education Port Adelaide Campus  
                (v) SACAL: South Australian Council for Adult Literacy Sub-Committee on  
                the Interim SACAL Council 2010-2011  
                (vi) Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation
- Att. Two      Selected list of education & training related research by WAVE & S4W
- Att. Three     (a) *World Economic Forum (WEF) Gender Gap Report* Table 3A Global Gender Gap Index  
2010 Rankings: Comparisons with 2009, 2008, 2007 and 2006  
<http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/rankings2010.pdf>
- (b) *World Economic Forum (WEF) Gender Gap Report* Country Profiles and Highlights:  
Australia 2010 <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap2010/Australia.pdf>
- Att. Four     *ABS Extract from ABS Year Book 2009- 2010* (released on 6 June 2010) Vocational  
Education and Training (VET)
- Att. Five     *Women and Vocational Education and Training: Strategies for Gender Inclusive VET  
reform. A policy background paper.* August 2009.  
<http://www.security4women.org.au/projects/vet>
- Att. Six      *Women and Vocational Education & Training: NVEAC & gender Inclusive Policy Update.  
NVEAC & Gender Inclusive VET Policy Up-date* 2010