

GENDER EQUALITY FINALLY TAKES CENTRE STAGE IN SKILLS & TRAINING BUDGET



Media Release

10th May 2023

Budget 2023-2024

Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE), Australia's only national organisation dedicated to gender equality in the nation's education and training sector and system, welcomes the key initiatives in the Federal Budget on skills and training that bring gender equality to the centre of work for a stronger economy.

Kit McMahon, National Co-Convenor of WAVE said "It is a powerful statement and point of leadership for the government, to recognise need to address inequity in our skills and training system and we congratulate this government on its commitment to put equality at the heart of the National Skills Agreement – something which we know at WAVE will be central to the reform of our national education and training system."

"We also welcome the Government's recognition to redress inequity in our apprenticeship system through a set of – what we see – as interconnected initiatives," said Kit. "The deliberate and targeted support and guidance for women apprentices, together with the national standards for employers of apprentices and the Australian Skills Guarantee on major construction projects which sets targets for the employment of women on tools and in the industry more broadly, can be brought together to really transform our system."

Therese Nolan, National Co-Convenor of WAVE also said, "We also want to thank the Government for recognising the need to overhaul our national Foundation Skills policy and system. It is well overdue."

"Making sure that we support with respect, the huge number of Australians who have low literacy numeracy and digital skills, and uncoupling this from Jobseeker will go a long way to providing a skills and education system that really is for all Australians," said Therese.

"We also note and thank the government for the pilot which expands the eligibility for skills assessment for secondary entrants of skilled visa holders – this will be very important to capture the skills of partners of skilled visa holders who are often women, and often highly educated" said Therese

"We also welcome the inclusion of this in the National Skills Agreement that aims for a 'no wrong door' approach to Foundation Skills and, of vital importance a specific stream that is First Nations led for First Nations people who experience higher levels of low literacy, numeracy and digital skills," said Therese.



Welcome initiatives that must be implemented well

“While WAVE commends this budget for skills and training, we know that its success will only be as good as its implementation, and we are keen to work with Government to be a part of the solution as we know many in our education and training sector will be,” said Kit McMahon.

“What our experience has told us, and the evidence from similar policies and reforms, is that implementation will require embracing and using the range of equity and gender equality practices, strategies and tools to make sure that the goals of this budget are as successful as we need them to be,” said Kit.

“For WAVE, this means capacity and capability building of the whole sector in intersectional gender equity, centring lived experience of all users in the advice and governance structures of our decision making bodies on skills system so that we truly understand the barriers that are present for so many – but especially women and those facing additional intersective barriers to work and learning. Policy design and practice must address this. Also, we must use disaggregated data and targets to drive performance across the sector,” said Therese Nolan.

“This requires an understanding of the breadth and depth of inequity and how it presents itself systemically and practically across our system. In this regard, we welcome the recent comments from Minister O’Connor. who recognised that this work is as much about addressing gender inequity in male dominated trades as much as the inequity of our care sectors” said Therese. (See Media Release, The Hon Brendan O’Connor MP Minister for Skills and Training 6 March 2023 “Gender imbalance in workforce contributing to skills shortages”)

“We also need to address the inequity in our skills system itself – such as the gender segregated composition of the skills and training workforce and the pay gap – so that our national system can really “walk the talk”,” said Therese.

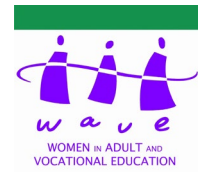
“The evidence to do this, and the experience and practice to achieve this already exists – it will take time, but social change does. This should not be an excuse to not do this and the broader work that we know is needed to ensure that our national education and training system is delivering a skilled and productive workforce for all Australians and all industries,” said Kit McMahon.

Media Contact:

Kit McMahon – Co-Convenor WAVE 0408250272

Key Highlight for WAVE at this 2023-2024 Budget include:

- \$3.7 billion upon striking a five-year National Skills Agreement with states and territories to ensure more access to vocational education and training, with TAFE at the centre.



National Cabinet has agreed that gender equality and women's participation in labour markets will be a focus of the National Skills Agreement.

- National targets for apprentices, trainees and paid cadets working on Australian Government funded major infrastructure and ICT projects through \$8.6million to deliver the Australian Skills Guarantee. This includes responsible sub targets to boost women's participation in apprenticeships.
- \$54.3 million in critical Australian Apprenticeship supports to improve completion rates. Improving the quality of services and better targeted support will be particularly crucial to supporting women.
- \$5 million funding to better support women in male dominated industries by providing appropriate expertise to support them in workplaces. This includes work to address workplace challenges and support businesses to attract and retain women.
- \$436.4 million over four years for a redesigned Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program.
- Skills Assessment Opportunities for Migrants which offers onshore migrants who reside in Australia on a family, partner, humanitarian, or refugee visa with a free, fast-tracked skills assessment pilot will expand eligibility to include secondary entrants of skilled visa holders.