

26 June 2023



Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE)

RESPONSE TO DRAFT NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR CARE AND SUPPORT ECONOMY



Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE)

Submission to the Australian Government – Draft Strategy on Care and Support Economy Strategy (June 2023)

Acknowledgement

Women in Vocational and Adult Education (WAVE) acknowledge the traditional owners of our lands and waters – the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples – who are the first educators and the first teachers of this land.

We pay our respects to elders, past present and emerging and recognise that these lands and waters have never been ceded.

We support truth, treaty and reconciliation and the Uluru Statement of the Heart.

Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

WAVE warmly welcomes both the Government on its discussion paper and draft National Care and Support Strategy and the opportunity made available for consultation and feedback. We commend the intent of the Vision Statement and significance of the three high level goals – Quality care and support; Decent jobs and a productive and sustainable care and support economy (p.2).

Our submission highlights that we:

- I. Welcome recognition of the ‘care and support economy’.
- II. Acknowledge and welcome that the Strategy is a formal ‘the start of a conversation’, albeit a conversation that is decades in the making.
 - a. Contend that what is central to the success of the Strategy is how the care and support economy and all it embodies is valued across the scope of the ‘care & support economy’.
 - b. While recognising that this Strategy is limited by its immediate focus on aged care, disability support, veterans’ care & ECEC, encourage the Government to commit to taking account of the care and support economy holistically in the near future, as a priority for economic transformation to an ‘economy connected to equality and inclusivity’ (p.9).
 - c. Advise that WAVE will continue our efforts to seek a shift towards an economy that quantifies and counts and so fully values care work across its broad spectrum.
- III. Welcome the recognition that care and support are undervalued and workforce development has continually fallen short. While many previous studies have highlighted these factors, necessary reforms to adequately remedy this enduring inequity have not eventuated.
- IV. Agree that the sector is feminized with a high proportion of migrant and refugee workers.
- V. Agree that the sector is characterized by entry level work having no qualification or credential requirements

While we do not comment on the information on the size and contribution to the sector, nor the forecast growth in the draft Strategy, we do refer to studies in which we played an active part, in the scoping and quantifying of care work and the care economy over a decade ago.

We welcome the Government’s recognition that the sector is both an enabler of participation in our labour force for women and also key to addressing enduring gender inequity – both through the vital services it provides (e.g. child care, aged care, disability care, community and social work et al) and the employment it provides as well as reinforcing inequity though the enduring low value ascribed to such work economically and socially.

In this submission, WAVE will limit comment on all aspects of the draft strategy and instead at this time speaks directly to the areas related to skills and adult education. We highlight for the strategy further evidence of perpetuation of inequity in our VET system that needs to be addressed if the goals of the strategy are to be realized.

Our recommendations and calls for action are to the Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) and Jobs and Skills Councils (JSC) regarding the creation and implementation of the Priority Workforce Initiatives Action

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Plan. The evidence that we provide shows that the VET system perpetuates and reinforces inequity through:

- Gender segregation of courses and programs
- Low levels ascribed to courses and programs (traineeships vs apprenticeships)
- Inequitable resourcing and funding of feminized skill pathways
- Qualification and credential design
- Not centering the lived experience of women in policy design which is key to address higher opportunity cost that women face to educate themselves

Recommendations provided in this submission are for government to:

1. *Address* inequitable resources and funding of female dominated skills pathways and ensure that funding for training does not suffer from assumptions and bias that perpetuate discriminatory gender stereotypes around skills and occupations.
2. *Create* vocational education and adult training programs specifically for the care and support economy that provide career paths in keeping with the lived experience of this feminized workforce. The JSC should take responsibility for developing and implementing these training programs in a way that supports women's caregiving responsibilities and avoids adding more disadvantages to the majority of workers in the care and support sector. Additionally, the JSC, together with the JSA (, can collaborate with partners and stakeholders to actively change attitudes towards men participating in care work.
3. *Address* the barriers that stop women in the care and support economy from learning while they work. This means making sure that vocational training programs are funded and made a priority. We also need to address unfair ideas about how care and support skills are taught and tested, which discriminate against these skills. Additionally, we should provide better working conditions and higher wages as rewards for training at all levels of the care and support workforce. The main job of the governance function that is being created is to oversee and coordinate workforce planning, with a focus on these issues

At a strategic and systemic level, we ask the Australian Government through its proposed Priority Workforce Initiatives Action Plan, to build the capacity and capability of our VET system about intersectional gender inequity and put in place actions to address it in our adult and vocational education system.

We are asking that in implementing the Action Plan the government:

- **Ensure that equity is a central focus** of all Australian VET policy work and resource our VET and Adult Education and training systems accordingly.
- **Challenge gender stereotypes across our systems and structures.** Our education and training system often perpetuates and reinforces gender stereotypes through qualification design and delivery. This includes competency-based skills frameworks which if left to be delivered in the absence of any other systemic change plan, will be a key enabler of ongoing inequity.
- **Address funding inequities.** Feminized skill pathways, such as those in health and education, are often funded less than male-dominated pathways, such as those in engineering and construction.
- **Account for the higher costs of participation for women.** Women often face higher costs of participation in VET and adult education than men. For example, they may have to pay for childcare or transportation, which can make it difficult for them to afford to attend classes.

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VET and adult education must be more affordable for women by providing financial assistance and other supports.

- **Ensure gender-segregated data is used for all reporting** gender-segregated data as a matter of course.
- **Put the lived experience of all learners** particularly women, at the centre of decision-making in VET and adult education.
- **Measure the success of our VET and Adult Education system** by its positive impact on our economy and society. Use gender-segregated data to plan, monitor, and evaluate all Australians' participation in skills and employment programs.

PREVIOUS RELEVANT SUBMISSIONS

WAVE and other interested organisations have previously shared evidence and information about gender barriers to participation in recent investigations and submissions to the Federal Government including:

- Australian Government's Consultation on the [Employment White Paper](#)
- Response to the Australian Government's Discussion Paper on [Future Delivery of Foundation Skills in Remote Australia](#)
- Response to [Australian Apprenticeship and Supports Discussion Paper](#)
- Submission to Federal Government on new [skills and employment agency Jobs and Skills Australia](#)
- Response to Australia's development of [a new migration strategy](#)
- Submission to the [House Inquiry into the Perceptions and Status of VET](#)
- WAVE and Xellence Pathways Submission to [JSA Clean Energy Workforce Discussion Paper](#)

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WHO IS WAVE?

WAVE is a national network of women involved in Vocational Education and Training (VET) and adult education. WAVE provides research, policy advice and advocacy to Australian and State/ Territory Governments on gender equity in skills and adult education policy and provides input into VET and adult education internationally. We are supported within each state by local representatives who, in turn, contribute collaboratively to national events and governance. Formed in 1985 WAVE is the first and only national independent, non-government organisation for Australian women and girls in the adult, community and vocational education and training sector/s.

Our mission is to advocate so that Australia's vocational education and training and adult education systems are equitable for all women and girls. Our vision is for a future where women and girls can participate fully in all aspects of work and democratic society, through equitable and transformative vocational and adult education.

Our Way of Working

WAVE undertakes its work within a feminist framework recognising that intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalisation can impact a person's capacity to access and benefit from Australia's vocational and adult education system/s. As such, WAVE is keenly aware of the importance of centering lived experience in our work. We advocate for the vocational and adult education system to enhance its inclusivity, relevance and affordability for those who may be left behind to provide a coherent voice for under-represented, vulnerable and marginalised groups.

The transformative power of inclusive education, training and lifelong learning that centre gender equity is at the core of WAVE's values.

As leaders in the areas of gender equity and vocational and adult education, WAVE is uniquely placed to provide expert advice to Australian and State/Territory Governments on ways that these systems can be equitable for all Australians. We can provide partners, members and stakeholders with deep understanding of the last 40 years of evidence in VET and adult education and gender equity from Theory of Change to Theory of Action and monitoring and evaluation of results.

We work in collaboration and in partnership with organisations, leaders and communities that share an appreciation of the breadth of challenges associated with gender inequity, especially as they relate to Australia's national adult education and skills system/s.

WAVE's mission is to partner with organisations and individuals with a shared commitment to social justice in the co-production of sound research and advocacy.

INTRODUCTION

WAVE welcomes the opportunity to provide this response to the Draft National Care and Support Economy strategy.

BACKGROUND

WAVE has a history & record of engagement in advocacy over more than two decades now relating to the contested definition/s that set the scope of what is recognised as ‘care work’ as well as instigating and guiding research seeking recognition and so the measuring & valuing of the care economy¹ (See: Adams, 2010; Hoenig & Page/AECgroup, 2012)². This has included challenging the highly gendered (sexist) deficit approach that has resulted in the low value assigned to care work across of feminised occupational areas in terms of:

- recognition that skills required are far from low level ascribed to them.
 - Many of the skills associated with care work are now those listed as critical core skills;
- that the work is skilled and should be valued as such, rather than perpetuating the assumption that ‘anyone can do this work’;
- based on the above assumption, the (grievous) channeling of people regardless of their career preferences or suitability into care work to meet skill shortages over time³;
- the lack of implementation from comparable worth studies the valuing of the skills⁴;
- the lack of attention to the quality, conditions and remuneration of work in the care economy;
- the lack of well -defined career paths for those in the care economy.

We refer to both detail and findings including those of Adams (2010) & Hoenig & page/AECgroup (2012) that remain current in 2023, as evidenced key findings (See Attachments One & Two).

¹ WAVE was a long-standing member of Security4Women (S4W), later economicSecurity4Women (eS4W) – previously one of the Australian Government’s National Women’s Alliances. WAVE was the instigator of the research scoping the care economy, supported by Graduate Women Australia & BPW, & actively involved in all stages of the 2 projects cited below. This was informed by the ground-breaking work of feminist economist, Nancy Folbre, (e.g. Folbre, Nancy (2006) ‘Measuring care: gender, empowerment and the care economy’ in *Journal of Human Development*. Vol 7, No.2, July 2006, pp.183-199). Recognising the lack of any such work in Australia, the scoping study (Adams 2010) set the foundation for the quantification work we commissioned through AECgroup. The AECgroup study (Hoenig & Page 2012) was the first comprehensive quantification of the Australian care sector, paid and unpaid, using both replacement and opportunity cost methods

² Adams, Valerie (2010), *Scoping the Australian care economy: a gender equity perspective*. Security4Women, North Sydney

Hoenig, S.A., and Page. A.R.E., (2012), *Counting on Care Work in Australia*. Report prepared by AECgroup Limited for economic Security4Women, Australia.

³ This has been the case in meeting skills shortages in the aged care industry especially in the early 2000s.

⁴ While subsequent work has been undertaken by WGEA et al, including a number of studies that focus specifically on childcare, undervaluing of feminised work & skills covers a wide range of occupations. e.g. see Healy, Joshua & Kidd, Michael P. (2013) , ‘Gender-based undervaluation and the equal remuneration powers of Fair Work Australia’ in *Journal of Industrial Relations* November 2013.

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Awareness of the significant value and critical necessity of care work and so the care economy was thrust into the foreground by the COVID19 pandemic, with important lessons to be learned based on previous shortcomings in approaches to and attitudes about care-related occupations. This is highlighted in the recent report by Davy & Vromen (2023). Their findings relating to attitudes⁵ towards care work resonate with our understanding, viz:

Most Australians (3 out of 5) believe paid care work is fulfilling or rewarding work. Women and people with existing informal care roles were even more likely to rate care work as meaningful in this way

A quarter of survey respondents indicated that they might consider working in the care services sector in the future, and this proportion rose to 30% amongst those aged 35 – 49 and 35% of those aged 18 – 34. Men were also more likely to indicate that they would consider care work in the future.

In contrast, very few people have favourable impressions of the pay and employment conditions within the care services sector, with less than four in ten respondents believing paid care work provided employment security for the future, less than three in 10 believing paid care work provided fair work conditions, and only one in five believing paid care work provides good pay

Approach

The scope of our submission will centre around aspects of Goal 2 – Decent Jobs – and in particular those components relating to vocational and adult education as well as the translation of education into the workplace.

We will also provide advice and feedback on the proposed roadmap, specifically the envisaged Priority Workforce Initiatives Action Plan due to start this year, and the role that the advisory and industry engagement mechanisms – the newly established Jobs and Skills Councils - should take in its work.

Our review of the Strategy

WAVE does not comment on the Government’s presentation of the largesse, breadth and significance of the care and support economy for this country, nor do we question the forecasted growth of the sector. The evidence presented is in line with our appreciation of the industry, its workforce and the needs placed on it now and in the future.

WAVE welcomes the government recognition that “work in the care and support economy has often be undervalued and workforce development has fallen short”⁶ and further, the strategy’s acknowledgement that the workforce is “predominantly female (with a) high proportion of workers

⁵ Davy, Laura and Vromen, Ariadne (2023), *Care in Context: Australian Perspectives on Caregiving and Care Work During COVID-19*. Canberra: Australian National University. <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/292087>

⁶ Australian Government, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet *Draft National Care and Support Economy Strategy 2023 (Care and Support Economy Taskforce) Discussion Paper* p6

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from migrant and refugee backgrounds”⁷ and that “Most entry level jobs have nor or low qualification requirements”.⁸

WAVE also strongly supports the strategies intention to provide a “holistic view across the care and support economy” as this has been a **key part of our many recommendations to government in its reform of the adult and vocational education system**. We agree that only through a holistic approach will the challenges facing the care and support economy be truly addressed. As the strategy says “when policies are made in silos there can be unintended consequences for the service user and other sectors”.⁹

One of those key challenges – a challenge that we hold underpins much of the issues facing the sector – is the prevalence, predominance and continued perpetration of gender inequity in our national economy and society.

WAVE further welcomes the government’s recognition that “care and support economy matters for gender equality, socio-economic equality, poverty reduction, inclusive growth and sustainable development”¹⁰ and that the supply of quality affordable and accessible care and support services has a significant and long lasting impact on household, the burden of care carried by women and relief from intersectional inequity. The draft’s strategy reflection of the demands and hopes placed on the sectors to emancipate workforce participation by women is well illustrated.

We note the strategies reference to “**encourage more male participation and (help) address skill shortages**” and on this we would highlight in our submission the key challenges that need to be addressed to deliver this.

⁷ ibid

⁸ ibid

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ Op cit p9

INTERSECTIONAL GENDER INEQUITY IN OUR VET SYSTEM

The Australian Government’s commitment to equality and its work to redress inequity is warmly welcomed by WAVE. As a peak organisation, WAVE seeks to do all it can to inform, advise and advocate to government on how to redress inequity, with particular reference to skills, training and workforce development policy.

What we know, and what is evident through research, is that the inequity, present across our society and economy, is well entrenched in our skills and training system.

Across a range of submissions (previously referenced), WAVE has highlighted that the national vocational education and training system reinforces and reflects the gender and intersectional inequity in our labour market. We have further advised that addressing the inequity in our VET and Adult Education system can make a considerable difference to addressing gender and intersectional inequity in our broader economy and society.

The VET system reflects and reinforces inequity in our labour markets

The national vocational and education system reflects the feminised nature of the care and support economy.

Using NCVER Figures we can see that men overwhelmingly occupy ‘trade’ qualifications:

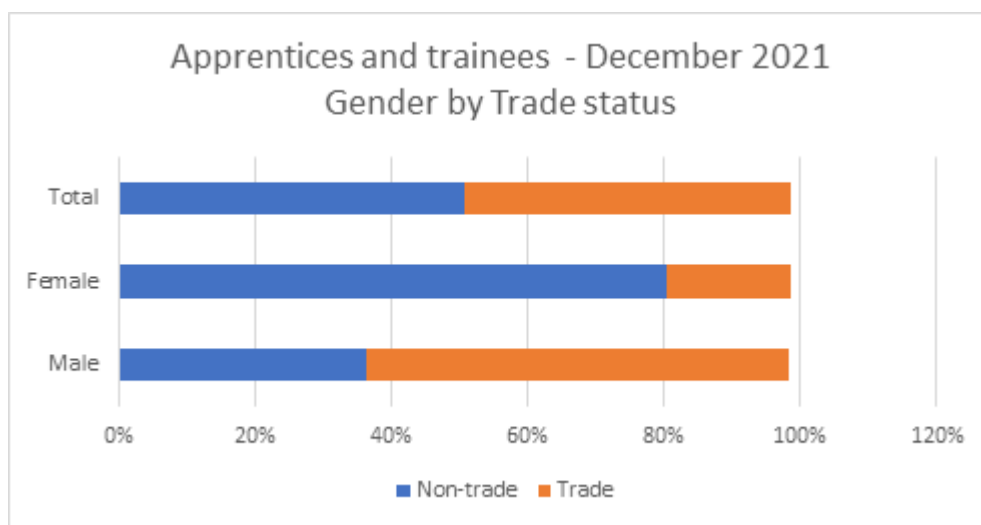


FIGURE 1 NCVER APPRENTICES AND TRAINEES - DECEMBER 2021 x GENDER x VOCSTATS

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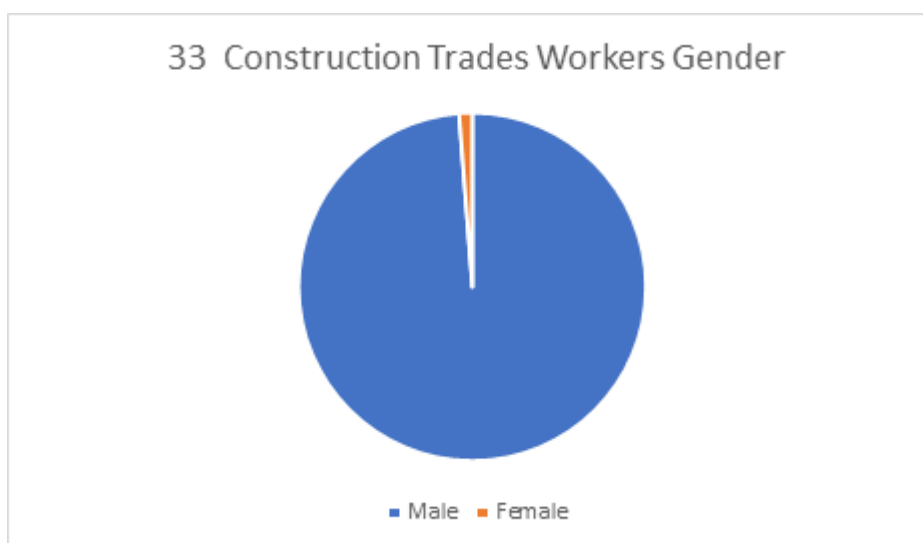


FIGURE 2 NCVER APPRENTICES AND TRAINEES - DECEMBER 2021 (OCCUPATION (ANZSCO - NTIS) GROUP BY GENDER - 33 CONSTRUCTION TRADES VIA VOCSTATS

And women in the Carer and Aide courses:

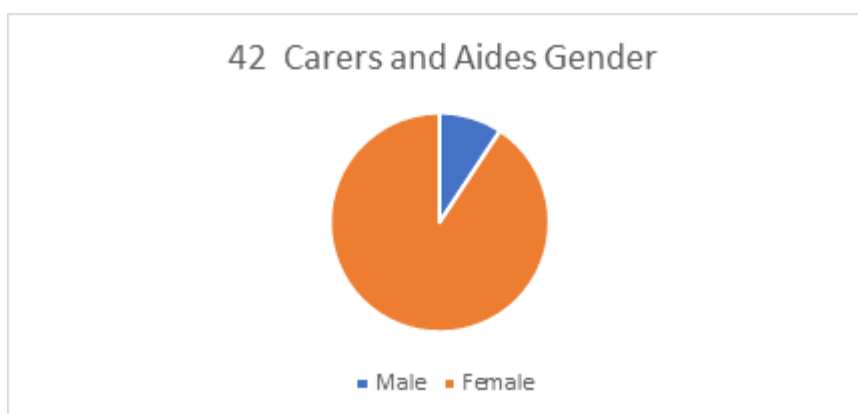


FIGURE 3 NCVER APPRENTICES AND TRAINEES - DECEMBER 2021 OCCUPATION (ANZSCO - NTIS) GROUP BY GENDER 42 CARERS AND AIDES

These both reflect the prevailing industry and occupational job segregation as reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics where Health care and social assistance had the highest proportion of women (77.9%) whereas Construction had the highest proportion of men (87.3%).¹¹ In addition the following graph shows the **percentage of women and men employed in two of the most gendered industries** – Health care and social assistance (feminised) and Construction (male-dominated) over the last 5 years.

How training is funded reinforces gender inequity

The strategy makes references to appropriate funding of services.

For WAVE this also needs to be applied to the skilling pathways for the care and support economy. Our reading of data published through the National Skills Commission (NSC) pricing and subsidy project (2021 VET average price benchmarks: Findings from the national VET average price

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (current), Gender indicators, Canberra: ABS website. [Gender indicators | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/australian-bureau-of-statistics)

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benchmark database)¹² shows that the price that governments pay or fund VET qualifications for skill pathways dominated by women, are less than those dominated by men.

When one compares female commencements across all the qualifications that the NSC have analysed in their pricing report. When we look at what the data says, women are represented in apprenticeship enrolments with the lower price per qualification, whereas men are significantly represented (often above 80%) in those qualifications that attract a higher price. We can also see that even from the point of view of funding, there is inequity in the resourcing of courses/skills that have more commencements by males than females.

This funding inequity is unacceptable and is driven – we argue – by gender stereotypes that the skills developed for feminised industries is of less value, therefore requires less resources, than those skills developed for male dominated pathways. This needs to be redressed.

Often the arguments for less funding to feminised skill pathways lie in “resources” – that the resources required for male dominated skill pathways are more expensive. This view is erroneous as it therefore means that the skills and education that we provide to people who look after our children, our aged, our ill and infirm are less than those required to build a house, or fix plumbing.

Our analysis follows.

¹² National Skills Commission (NSC) (2021) *Average Price Benchmarks. Findings from the national VET average price benchmark database*. 26 March 2021 Australian Government National Skills Commission <https://www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/publications/average-price-benchmarking-report>

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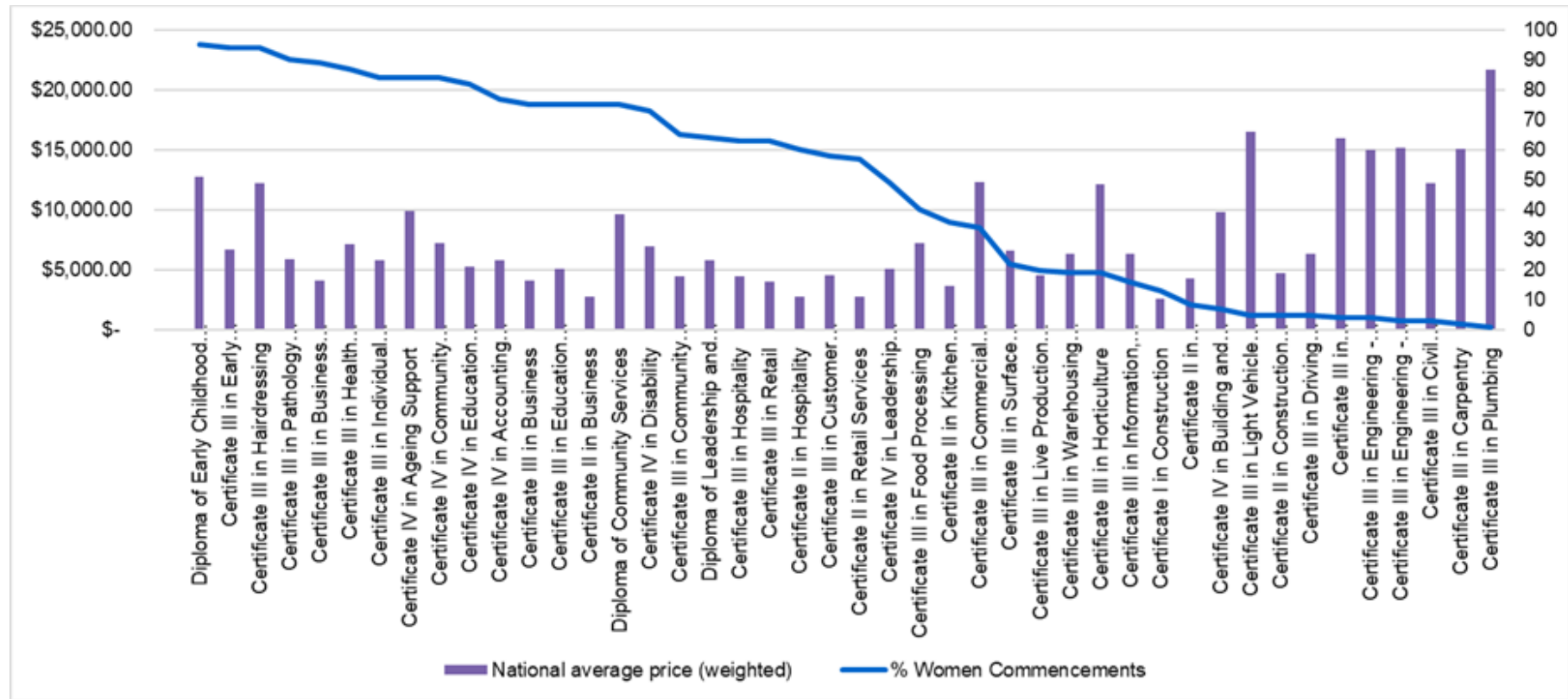


FIGURE 5 NATIONAL AVERAGE PRICE BY FEMALE COMMENCEMENTS. ADAPTED FROM NATIONAL SKILLS COMMISSION (2021) VET AVERAGE PRICE BENCHMARKS (TABLE C1, P.18) COMBINED WITH NCVER DATA.

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Women’s experience of vocational skilling differs to men – reasons why they leave

The participation in and completion of learning in our VET and adult education system is also gendered.

While there is overall equitable positive experience about the learning itself (based only on NCVER data) gender stereotypes and other barriers that impact women and their participation in work and learning are seen in reasons for leaving.

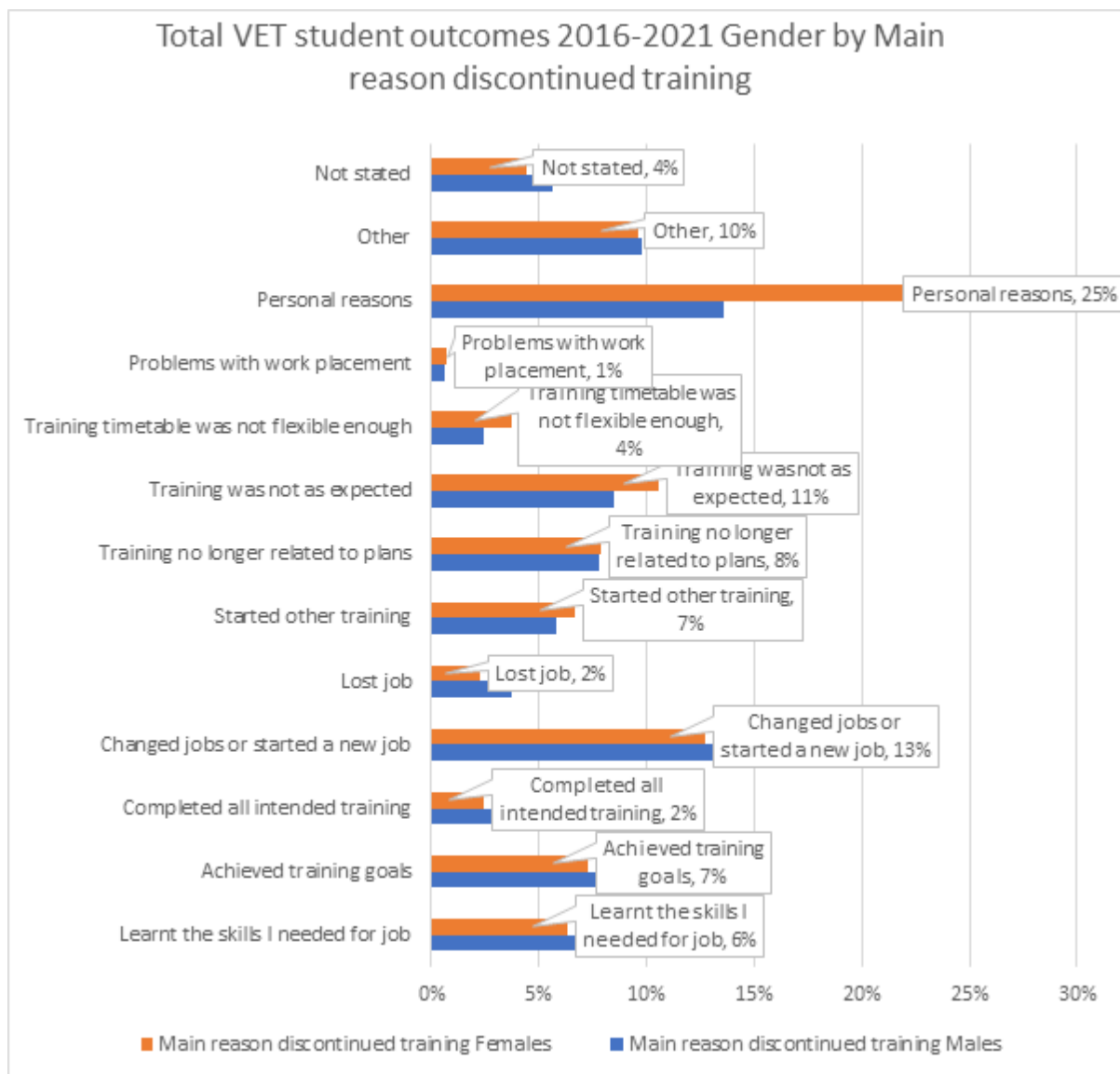


FIGURE 6 NCVER TOTAL VET STUDENT OUTCOMES 2016-2021 GENDER BY MAIN REASON DISCONTINUED TRAINING VIA VOCSTATS

Overwhelmingly women leave training for “personal reasons” and lack of flexibility, whereas men for employment and because the goals of the training were achieved.

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To add to this, we also know that reasons for leaving are tied to gender segregated skills systems.

Evidence across 12 similar economies who use the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIACC) show that while being employed has a favourable effect on training participation, “women with young children have lower chances to participate in training compared with men with young children”. Further, in some states “the presence of a partner in the household has a positive and significant effect on participation in training”¹³. Overall it is women’s reporting of family responsibilities that impact training decisions and the conclusions which is significantly compounded if they have other intersectional barriers – for instance they are single mothers.

Research from 2022 that investigated the dropout behaviour in German vocational education students (Apprentices) and found that non-completions of those training programs are linked to gender minority status. Specifically, apprentices that are female will leave male dominated occupations due to poor social relationships and poor social integration. Male apprenticeships in female dominated occupations tend to drop out due to “unfulfilled aspirations than their opposite sex peers”¹⁴ Further, on this last point, there is strong evidence that males drop out of feminized skill pathways due to “devaluation” of the skill – that is the reality that the social status of skills and work drops when women increase their participation in that skill.

Investment in Training – Lower Returns for Women

There is evidence of the lower impact that training has, in terms of return to wages, for feminized occupations.

Related to occupational segregation, and noting WAVE’s key point that our VET system reflects inequity in our labour market, reviews of literature on study and workplace training returns of similar market driven economies, show that participation in training and its rewards may reduce wage differences between men and women but *only* at the lower end of the spectrum. At middle and higher levels of employment, women receive consistently lower wage returns for training than men: “In fact participation in training may not lead to a narrower gender wage gap if...women are rewarded less than men”.¹⁵

Women benefit less from specific vocational skilling

There is consistent evidence that due to the care burden and gender stereotypes faced by women, specific skilling regimes (such as Australia’s competency based system) do *not* favour women. The drivers of this lie in three “uncertainties” that men typically do not face in their career:¹⁶

1. Risk of dismissal due to pregnancy, care and other family related contingencies

¹³ Massing, N., & Gauly, B. (2017). Training Participation and Gender: Analyzing Individual Barriers Across Different Welfare State Regimes. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 67(4), 266–285. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713617715706>

¹⁴ Janina Beckmann (2023) Why do they leave? Examining dropout behaviour in gender-atypical vocational education and training in Germany, *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, DOI: [10.1080/13636820.2023.2211546](https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2023.2211546)

¹⁵ Icardi, R. (2021). Returns to Workplace Training for Male and Female Employees and Implications for the Gender Wage gap: A Quantile Regression Analysis. *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training*, 8(1), 21–45. <https://doi.org/10.13152/IJRVET.8.1.2>

¹⁶ Margarita Estévez-Abe, (2005) Gender Bias in Skills and Social Policies: The Varieties of Capitalism Perspective on Sex Segregation, *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, Volume 12, Issue 2, Summer, Pages 180–215, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxi011>

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2. Risk of income loss due to work interruptions (childrearing)
3. Skill depreciation and missed opportunities for skill formation during work interruptions.

Vocational skilling policies that encourage specific competencies at entry have higher value for male dominated occupations. In this way, specific skills are more biased against women than general skills because these vocational competency based pathways do not recognise and accommodate women's lived experience. Further, evidence shows that systems of vocational education and skills development that are more firm—specific can *enhance* training gaps for women.¹⁷ The evidence shows that large demand from employers of vocational skills can lead to “suppressed demand for female labour” especially in the private sector.¹⁸

Gender Divide in Workplace Learning

To add to the above, we know from research undertaken in Europe, that the social constructions of gender affect the environment in which workplace learning occurs. Different opportunities for workplace learning are driven by social constructions and expressions of gender and power relations. This also presents itself to how learning expresses itself in the workplace and for women, this means that opportunities to learn in the workplace (crucial to vocational skilling) are constrained.¹⁹ On the whole research finds that those workplaces dominated by males have established environments that enables workplace learning, but for feminized workplaces, this is not the case: “*an expression of gendered power relations and values which creates a foundation for constraining learning environment*”²⁰

The pollution effect and gender segregation

As previously said, WAVE has advised and advocated to Federal Government that the national skills and education system is a reflection of our gender segregated labour markets.

Understanding the drivers of this further and assist this strategy, particularly the government's expressed hope (as per the discussion paper) to “encourage a move away from a highly gender segregated workforce, thus encouraging more male participation and helping address skills shortages”.²¹

The discriminating effect of gender in our industries is pervasive and entrenched. It is in our systems and structures because of the norms, attitudes and assumptions that are perpetuated through our community and economy.

A range of reasons why this segregation occurs has been discussed globally and includes:

- Men working in industries with stronger hierarchical models require a premium to work with women who may have higher occupational status
- That workplaces where women and men work reduce productivity because of communication barriers or otherwise²²

¹⁷ Icardi, R (2021)

¹⁸ Margarita Estévez-Abe (2005)

¹⁹ Karin Sjöberg Forssberg, Parding, K., & Vänje, A. (2021). Conditions for workplace learning: A gender divide? *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 33(4), 302-314. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1108/JWL-08-2020-0134>

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ Australian Government, Prime Minister and Cabinet 2023 p13

²² Lang, Kevin. 1986. “A Language Theory of Discrimination.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 101 (May): 363–82.

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- Sex based characteristics and gender stereotypes about sex result in real or tacit characteristics and stereotypes
- Visibility of workers can reinforce discrimination if the understanding about the skill they deploy is not known²³

Statistical models around gender segregation have found that segregated workforces are greater when required skills to undertake work are above that which average woman/female has available to them – that is gender segregation increases dependent upon women’s access to skills required for the work. This challenge is not only compounded by previous evidence of barriers to participation in training but also models that demonstrate resistance and backlash to integration will occur in the absence of “verifiable information regarding qualifications” or transparency and credible information about the value of the skills that women are bringing into that workforce.²⁴ Resistance also comes from male dominated workplaces, where women are hired a “lower skill” and, also for males entering feminized workplaces where the resistance occurs because those feminized workplaces are considered (wrongly) to have lower skills.

If men infer the median of the female characteristic, rather than knowing it, from the distribution of occupations containing women, adjustment lags—caused by preexisting norms, barriers, and slow informational flows—will lead to an underestimate of the new median for women. This underestimate will lead a greater proportion of men to be hostile to female entrants. Programs and policies that make highly educated and successful women, of the present and past, more visible, serve to counteract the effect²⁵

Further, analysis of data from the United States from 1940 to 1980 using General Social Survey attitudinal data and equivalent industry data, shows that there is a “tipping point” to integrate genders into workforces. Evidence shows that it is the movement of men, into sectors and out of sectors that generates the segregation rather than women, and further, that integration of men and women in workforces is driven by male prejudice towards women.²⁶

In summary for women:

- there are barriers to participation in training including funding and resourcing the training appropriately,
- our training system does not recognise and accommodate the “uncertainties” and “care burden” that women carry,
- Women’s training opportunities are constrained by social constructions of gender, and
- if they do get into industries for work they will face resistance if they are in the gender minority or, if they are in the majority, their work will be judged as “less than” skills utilized in male dominated sectors

²³ Milgrom, Paul, and Sharon Oster. 1987. “Job Discrimination, Market Forces, and the Invisibility Hypothesis.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 102 (August): 453– 76.

²⁴ Goldin C. [A Pollution Theory of Discrimination: Male and Female Differences in Occupations and Earnings](#). In: *Human Capital in History: The American Record*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press ; 2015. pp. 313-348.

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ Pan, J. (2015). Gender Segregation in Occupations: The Role of Tipping and Social Interactions. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 33(2), 365–408. <https://doi.org/10.1086/678518>

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Negative Perceptions of Men in Care Work

As per WAVE's submission to the House Committee inquiry into the *Perceptions of VET*, men's participation in early education and care work, is impacted by gender inequity. A 2019 study²⁰ found the perpetration of two key stereotypes that men in these care settings are subject to: "the possible perpetrator" or "the fun guy". This examination of gender specific stereotypes as applied to men found that when men work in non-traditional jobs, negative gender stereotypes get activated.

This reality is further supported by research into male participation into broader feminized workforces where the discriminating effect of bias and stereotypes result in:²¹

- Hiring managers discriminating against men in feminized workforces;
- Men discriminating against themselves from working in roles that they consider feminized;
- The lower pay provided to women's workforces reinforcing this gendered discrimination; and
- Creating the "glass elevator/escalator effect" whereby men have noticeably faster career advancement in feminized workforces but also are impacted by stigma due to gender stereotypes for undertaking frontline roles (see the discussion on the glass escalator effect later in this analysis).
- To be clear, these symptoms of inequality, and gendered stereotyping are strongly influencing the public's perception of VET pathways.

Australia's highly segregated labour and skills systems put in place structures and systems that punish learners for working in jobs that are counter to the prevailing gender stereotypes.

DECENT JOBS AND SKILLS

WAVE make the following observations and provides the following feedback to the Australian Government on the Draft Strategy.

Addressing inequity in the vocational and adult education system

We note the intention of the Strategy to establish a governance function to coordinate workforce planning across the care and support economy. This includes leveraging the work of the relevant Jobs and Skills Council; developing and overseeing a data strategy; identifying workforce gaps and work across governments to develop targeted policy responses; monitoring and evaluating actions; and disseminating ongoing learnings.

WAVE has regularly advised the Federal Government that under its new skills advisory structures, there is an opportunity for gender inequity of our skills system, and also our workforce to be addressed. Specifically, the Jobs and Skills Councils, with Jobs and Skills Australia need to – as this strategy does – take a holistic review of the system from an equity and equality perspective to address the many barriers that exist. Like this strategy we have advised the Federal Government through its skills and labour departments to refrain from making policy reform “in silos (as) there can be unintended consequences for the service user and other sectors”.²⁷

Based on the evidence, we have and continue to argue that addressing gender and intersectional inequity on our skills and education system is vital. To do this requires government to draw upon the evidence and research on workplace and vocational education as well as gender mainstreaming and intersectional inequity.

In this submission we have provided evidence of some of the challenges that the VET sector needs to face including:

- Addressing pervasive and entrenched norms attitudes and behaviours that drive gender inequity in the VET system
- Addressing the systems and structures that perpetuate intersectional inequity

To address the barriers to quality skills pathways for our care and support economy the Priority Workforce Initiatives Action Plan needs to build the capacity and capability of our VET system to understand the reality of intersectional gender inequity and know how to address it.

We request that in implementing the strategy, Government will:

- Ensure that equity is a central focus of all Australian VET policy work and resource our VET and Adult Education and training system accordingly.
- Address funding inequities. Feminized skill pathways, such as those in health and education, are often funded less than male-dominated pathways, such as those in engineering and construction.
- Challenge gender stereotypes across our systems and structures. Our education and training system often perpetuates and reinforces gender stereotypes through qualification design and delivery. This includes competency-based skills frameworks which if left to be delivered in the absence of any other systemic change plan, will be a key enabler of ongoing inequity.

²⁷ ibid

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- Account for the higher costs of participation for women. Women often face higher costs of participation in VET and adult education than men. For example, they may have to pay for childcare or transportation, which can make it difficult for them to afford to attend classes. We need to make VET and adult education more affordable for women by providing financial assistance and other supports.
- Put the lived experience of all learners particularly women, at the centre of decision-making in VET and adult education.
- Measure the success of our VET and Adult Education system by its positive impact on our economy and society. Use gender-segregated data to plan, monitor, and evaluate all Australians' participation in skills and employment programs.

Mandatory and Minimum Qualifications

WAVE notes regularly commentary in the strategy to “mandatory” and minimum level of skills for the sector.

We recognise the direct link between stronger educational pathways, qualifications and credentialing to strengthen the quality of services and productivity of industry as well as the quality of workplaces.

We ask the federal government to consider that in developing skills plans to increase the credentialing and skills of the care and support economy it:

- Recognise the opportunity cost faced by women in increasing their skills²⁸ as the burden that they carry for care along with intersectional inequity contributes to “creating a complex set of barriers preventing women from attaining and advancing personal stability and financial security”.²⁹
- Understand that access to education and training is limited due to barriers re-entering workforce and having time for education and training.

Any implementation of required skill levels/qualifications needs to be done carefully and with care centring the lived experience of women in its work. This is to account for:

- Barriers to re-enter the workforce due to care leave can prevent women from participating in our national vocational education and training system because our system emphasises recognition of competency on current workplace experience.
- Lack of access to child care and caring support can prevent women from having the time, and resources to participate in learning programs.

We strongly support the recognition in the strategy that government’s can “support suitably skilled workforce by examining the funding arrangements that either incentivize or discourage workforce training”. The alignment of these opportunities is welcome.

²⁸ LEAP Pecaut Centre for Social Impact *The Equity Opportunity: Advancing Women’s Economic Well-Being 2022-2026* <https://leap-pecautcentre.ca/the-equity-opportunity#:~:text=In%202022%20LEAP%20launched%20a,those%20from%20equity%2Ddeserving%20group>

²⁹ *ibid*

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Our recommendation for the implementation of mandatory qualifications and credentialing for this strategy, and in particular the Priority Workforce Initiatives Action Plan is to:

- Centre the lived experience of women in its work – ensuring that it listens to the diverse voices of all women especially those that carry intersectional burdens and barriers to workforce participation and skill development. On this point we welcome the strategy’s recognition that there are specific barriers that “First Nations care and support workforce” face including “completing training away from Country”.³⁰
- Ensure that the design of any qualifications and credentialing (as well as skills pathways) is fit for purpose including the lived experience of women with care burdens – ensure that the requirements for industry experience do not result in perverse outcomes for women
- Consider cost and accessibility – with women across Australia already having less take home pay than men, and already bearing opportunity cost for caring, learning programs for this sector need to be funded. Further the whole learning process needs to be funded – that is, funding should include the overheads required to set up and support quality and appropriate on job learning that is accessible to the lived experience of women. Women should not have to pay for their vocational placement.³¹

³⁰ Australian Government, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2023, p.20

³¹ This point was highlighted by the Equality Rights Alliance in its 2 minute intervention at the 2022 Jobs and Skills Summit : “Let’s take workplace-based training. If you’re training or studying in a female dominated industry, you will pay your institution for the privilege of completing your placement. But if you’re in a male dominated industry, you’ll be paid to complete your workplace training.”

https://www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au/media_release/era-at-the-jobs-and-skills-summit/

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CONCLUSION

WAVE wants a VET and adult education system that provides high-quality learning opportunities for all women and girls, helps to grow our economy, and empowers all Australians to live well and contribute to the well-being of others and the planet.

We thank the Australian Government for considering our submission. As with all our submissions and advice to government, WAVE will work with government, providers, industry, and the community to put learners' needs first in VET and adult education. This is essential because learners are currently not being adequately served, and our VET and adult education systems are not equitable.

-END

WAVE GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<i>When we say...</i>	<i>What we mean is...</i>	<i>What we don't mean is...</i>
<i>Vocational and Adult Education</i>	<p>The products, services and policies that underpin vocational skilling of people in Australia through education and/or training. This is inclusive of vocational education that occurs in secondary schools, the vocational education that is delivered in universities, adult education that occurs in community settings and also foundation skills, literacy and numeracy education for adults.</p> <p>What draws this together is the enabling effect that these pathways of learning have on jobs and employment of women</p>	<p>We do not include in our definition university degrees or vocational pathways delivered by training providers in locations outside of Australia.</p>
<i>The national vocational education & training system</i>	<p>1) “The national training system is the Australian system for Vocational Education and Training (VET). It provides people with work-ready skills and qualifications...” https://www.australianindustrystandards.org.au/national-vet-system/</p> <p>2) “The extent to which state and territories and the Commonwealth of Australia governments come together to agree on policies and programs to deliver and fund vocational and adult education. It is inclusive of state/territory and commonwealth funding programs, regulatory frameworks and policies and nationally agreed policy structures such as training packages, industry advisory mechanisms, and agreements”. https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2022/child-care-education-and-training/vocational-education-and-training</p>	
<i>Technical Vocational Education & Training (TVET, VET)</i>	<p>Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is understood as comprising education, training and skills development relating to a wide range of occupational fields, production, services and livelihoods. TVET, as part of lifelong learning, can take place at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels and includes work-based learning and continuing training and professional development, which may lead to qualifications. TVET also includes a wide range of skills development opportunities attuned to national and local contexts. Learning to learn, the development of literacy and numeracy skills, transversal skills and citizenship skills are integral components of TVET (UNESCO: 2016, 2022)⁴.</p>	

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<p>Gender Equity and Gender Equality</p>	<p>WAVE uses these two terms - deliberately and not interchangeably</p> <p>Drawing from the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) we recognise that:</p> <p>Equality between women, men and gender diverse peoples (gender equality): refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of all genders. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that human rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men and gender diverse people, are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men and gender diverse people. Gender equality is not a women’s issue but should concern and fully engage men, gender diverse people, as well as women. Equality between people of all genders is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.</p> <p>While the term gender equity was determined by the CEDAW committee in its General Recommendation 28 that all parties will use the term “equality”, in Australia the term “equity” has gained some traction with gender mainstreaming professionals for its recognition that people have different needs and power and that these differences should be identified and addressed in a manner that rectifies the imbalances between genders WAVE uses this term in the full recognition that in the past it has been used to perpetuate stereotypes.</p>	
<p>Gender</p>	<p>Drawing upon the definition of UN Women, WAVE defines gender as:</p> <p>The social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/ time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities.</p>	

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	Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context. Other important criteria for socio-cultural analysis include class, race, poverty level, ethnic group and age.	
Empowerment of women	The empowerment of women concerns women gaining power and control over their own lives. It involves awareness-raising, building self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources and actions to transform the structures and institutions which reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality. The process of empowerment is as important as the goal. Empowerment comes from within; women empower themselves. Inputs to promote the empowerment of women should facilitate women’s articulation of their needs and priorities and a more active role in promoting these interests and needs. Empowerment of women cannot be achieved in a vacuum; men must be brought along in the process of change. Empowerment should not be seen as a zero-sum game where gains for women automatically imply losses for men. Increasing women’s power in empowerment strategies does not refer to power over, or controlling forms of power, but rather to alternative forms of power: power to; power with and power from within which focus on utilizing individual and collective strengths to work towards common goals without coercion or domination. Drawn from the European Institute for Gender Equality.	
Intersectionality	Intersectionality is a way of seeing or analysing the dynamics of power and social inequality in our society. It can be described in different ways: as a theory, an approach, a lens, a framework and so on. What is essential to the idea of intersectionality is the recognition that inequalities are never the result of any single or distinct factor such as race, class or gender. Rather, ‘they are the outcome of different social locations, power relations and experiences’ (Hankivsky, 2014 in Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health <i>Intersectionality Matters: A guide to engaging immigrant and refugee communities in Australia</i> . 2017	
Gender transformative	When we are gender transformative, we are addressing the “causes of gender-based inequalities and work to transform harmful gender roles, norms and relations. They challenge both normative and structural inequality.” Drawn from Our Watch <i>A guide to help you work out how gender transformative your initiative is</i> https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/a-guide-to-help-you-work-out-how-gender-transformative-your-initiative-is	

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Gender Specific	<p>“...Approaches acknowledge gender inequalities and consider women’s specific needs, but do not transform norms and practices. .”</p> <p>Drawn from Our Watch <i>A guide to help you work out how gender transformative your initiative is</i> https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/a-guide-to-help-you-work-out-how-gender-transformative-your-initiative-is</p>	
Gender sensitive	<p>These approaches acknowledge but do not address gender inequalities.</p> <p>They are not harmful, but they don’t make sustainable changes to society that lead to long-term and significant reductions gender inequality</p> <p>Drawn from Our Watch <i>A guide to help you work out how gender transformative your initiative is</i> https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/a-guide-to-help-you-work-out-how-gender-transformative-your-initiative-is</p>	
Gender insensitive	<p>These approaches ignore gender norms and inequalities, can minimise efforts to address gender inequality, and risk contributing to the gendered drivers of violence through implicit support of existing norms.</p> <p>Drawn from Our Watch <i>A guide to help you work out how gender transformative your initiative is</i> https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/a-guide-to-help-you-work-out-how-gender-transformative-your-initiative-is</p>	
Traineeship	<p>A traineeship is a formal training arrangement between an employer and a person who undertakes structured on-the-job training in health, care, support work, infrastructure, engineering, business, IT, digital marketing, hospitality and events for a period of 12 months to two years full or part time. The trainee is paid while they train, with set base rates, including full allowances and entitlements. The qualification can vary from a Certificate II to an Advanced Diploma.</p>	
Apprenticeship	<p>An apprenticeship is a formal training arrangement between an employer and a person who undertakes structured, on-the-job training focused on trades in automotive, electrical, mechanical, bricklaying, plumbing, and carpentry for a period of three to four years, full or part time. The apprentice is paid while they train, with set base rates, including full allowances and entitlements. The qualification can vary from a Certificate II to an Advanced Diploma.</p>	