

18 December 2023



Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE)

# **RESPONSE TO DISCUSSION PAPER ON SUPPORTING WOMEN TO ACHIEVE VET BASED CAREERS**



## **Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE)**

Response to Discussion Paper on Supporting Women to achieve VET Based Careers (DRAFT)

### 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 & Recommendation

In this submission, WAVE reinforces previous advice provided to the Australian Government across the last 12 months.

That is, to improve the outcome for women in Australia's vocational education and training sector so they can achieve careers that are based on VET skills development, Government Policy *must* take a strategic and systemic approach with attention to medium- and long-term gender sensitive outcomes not jeopardised by focus on short term initiatives to 'fix' the problem/s.

Our submission has but one recommendation.

WAVE recommends that to support women to achieve Improved outcomes through Australia's Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, the Australian Government *MUST* address systemic and structural inequity that exists within VET and meet the practical support needs of women.

To do this the Government, through its policy direction, must look to *and* apply the body of practice and evidence found in gender equality and intersectionality work and develop an overarching strategy for equity in VET. A strategy that addresses *all* the drivers of inequity and supports a program of work that meets the practical needs of all students, most especially women.

In putting forward this one recommendation our submission also:

1. Highlights the persistent evidence of inequity – the gender pay gap – across Australia and describes why this indicator of inequity needs to be addressed in VET policy.
2. Summarises the last 12 months of submissions by WAVE to the Australian Government including the recommendations and advice that we have put forward that all lead to the single recommendation in this response.
3. Presents further evidence on the entrenched inequity in labour markets, with reference to skills and learning as well as gender segregation.
4. Puts forward a practical solution – one that demonstrates how the recommendation can be implemented.

Our recommendation for this discussion paper is based on the following realities that our experience in engaging with Australian policy on VET and gender shows to be provocative:

1. The targeting of women to increase their participation and address skills shortages (for instance in male dominated trades), is not good enough as a strategy to address inequality. Related solutions are short term, expensive, and seek to "fix women" rather than the causes of inequity and, in fact, evidence suggests are not delivering outcomes.
2. Based on the evidence a long-term view and vision with accompanying multi-pronged strategies are required. Strategies aimed at identifying and changing policy drivers and cultures that reinforce gender inequality in VET, addressing the key indicators of inequity and improving the capacity of the system to enable a gender equal VET system. We see this as the ONLY way forward for VET. This is not new. It comes from a decade long, globally practiced body of evidence called gender mainstreaming and intersectionality put in place to address inequity, such as that faced by women in Australia's VET system.

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3. Given the significant policy ambitions reflected in economic policy and social statements, VET must take itself seriously, and ask itself fully and with integrity what it can do to address inequity. WAVE contends that in spite of consistent evidence from both ourselves, and others, the Australia Government is yet to heed and listen to this advice from national peak bodies, such as ours, whose purpose is national equity in and for an inclusive VET.

### **Submission Recognition**

*In putting this submission forward, WAVE also recognises submissions provided by other organisations advocating for systemic and structural approach to addressing inequity, and improving gender equality across our VET system.*

### **Key Contact:**

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## **Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE)**

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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 also provides input into T/VET and adult education regionally and 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 in all their diversity 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.

SUPPORT FOR WOMEN MEANS VET  
TRANSFORMING STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS  
THAT DRIVE PERSISTENT AND ONGOING  
GENDER INEQUITY



## Context for this Consultation

We note that this public consultation is the first with a specific focus on ‘women’ in the run of the many consultations taking place in the context of skills reform being implemented to ‘transform’ the Australian vocational education and training (VET) system/sector, viz:

Public consultation is an opportunity to work together on options to inform **initiatives that support women to achieve higher-paying careers via vocational education and training (VET) pathways.**<sup>1</sup>

The consultation process for “Supporting women to achieve VET Based careers” (or *Women in VET* as it is becoming known) seeks feedback to “guide policy and program design to assist women to achieve higher-paying careers via VET pathways.” WAVE commends and supports the integrated focus on gender equality by the Australian Government as a national priority and is committed to working with Government to advance this agenda, especially in the area of work-related education and training, skill development, decent work and careers that advance women’s economic and social wellbeing.

The consultation is based upon the clear policy position of the Australian Government that “*women’s equality is essential for strengthening our economy, our society and our nation*”, and that the Australian Government “...has committed to advancing gender equality as a national priority and placed this at the centre of much of the Government’s work.”<sup>2</sup> The Discussion Paper provides a range of evidence from significant government policy statements to highlight the work that it is doing to explore this from a broad economic and social perspective and rightly recognises the reflection of Australia’s gender segregated workforce.

WAVE notes the utilisation of outcomes from recent events and reports utilised to inform policy development and design including centering gender equality, and appreciates that information collected from this consultation will be shared across Government and further. That said, we anticipate that this strategy (if not already in place) be normalised to progress gender equality.

While noting the designation of three main categories to shape consultation (design of initiatives, use of tailored support, inclusive VET environments and workplaces), this submission takes an holistic approach. Our difficulty with this particular consultation is the parameter in which it is located (confined) along with some of the underlying assumptions. For women “to achieve higher-paying careers via VET pathways” a number of complex interrelated factors must be addressed; factors that result in systemic and structural inequities including those embedded within the VET system as a whole. This is especially important given the current and future rapid changes in the nature of work, emergent industries and careers and shifting labour market dynamics. Old familiar structures and approaches have neither the efficacy nor capacity to ‘support women to achieve higher-paying careers’ via existing VET pathways.

The Discussion Paper asks for submissions against content that briefly highlights the gendered nature of women’s participation in skills development pipelines with a suggestion that policies such as the *Australian Skills Guarantee* are a way to address the low participation of women in trades. At this point we also note that the main strategy of the Guarantee is to use government investment to “encourage businesses to train the next generation of skilled workers by providing a guaranteed stream of demand

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Government (2023). *Discussion Paper: Supporting women to achieve VET-based careers. November 2023.*, p.4 Department of Employment & Workplace Relations (DEWR), Australian Government. <https://consultations.dewr.gov.au/supporting-women-to-achieve-vet-based-careers>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

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for apprentices, trainees and paid cadets”<sup>3</sup>. For women, this appears to be setting targets for suppliers of government – through procurement policy – for recruitment only. This in itself is insufficient.

In this submission, we highlight evidence from years of pay gap data along with evidence from peak government agencies and others, that approaches that only focus on women – or specifically to increase the volume of women in an industry – are not on their own successful. While there is a gender problem, women themselves are not the problem.

### Why highlight the Gender Pay Gap at the start of this submission?

We contend that despite rhetoric to the contrary, VET does have an active role to play in addressing the gender pay gap. Often, the drivers of the gender pay gap are wrongly represented. There is the view that the pay gap is comparing “like salaries” with “like salaries” and that the pay gap is addressed through awards and “salary banding”.

However, as we know, this is not the case.

The gender pay gap is an indicator of cumulative factors that impact a person through their work, career and life, and when taken together, realistically demonstrate the result – in take home pay – that these factors give rise to. Specifically, the pay gap demonstrates the gendered nature of work in Australia and the intersecting barriers facing some workers, including barriers to work arising from an individual’s sex, gender, language, First Nation’s status, ability or disability, socio-economic status and location. It highlights how these barriers – implicit and explicit, structural, and systemic – denude and rob people of income. In turn, this is clearly evidenced in results in poorer health, economic and social outcomes.

The cumulative factors have already been spoken to by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) – discrimination, care burden, occupational and industrial segregation<sup>4</sup>.

We will go into it in more detail.

The Victorian Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector<sup>5</sup> measures equity in workplaces on a number of factors – and these factors (or indicators) come together to influence take home pay. They include vertical and horizontal composition; leave taken – paid and unpaid; flexible work arrangements; part time, casual and full time work; promotion; sexual harassment, and, for the purposes of our response to the Women in VET discussion paper – education and learning.

To reiterate, access to education and learning that directly benefits career choice, take up and progression is a powerful way to close the gender pay gap.

But as we shall see later, **there are powerful drivers against this occurring – especially for women.**

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Government (2022). *Australian Skills Guarantee Discussion Paper November 2022*. Department of Employment & Workplace Relations (DEWR), Australian Government <https://www.dewr.gov.au/australian-skills-guarantee/resources/australian-skills-guarantee-consultation>

<sup>4</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) (2023). *Australia’s Gender Pay Gap. WGEA Fact Sheet*. WGEA/Australian Government. [https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Fact%20Sheet\\_The%20Gender%20Pay%20Gap\\_270823.pdf](https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Fact%20Sheet_The%20Gender%20Pay%20Gap_270823.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/>

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WGEA has explicated the conditions and requirements that need to be in place to close the gender pay gap, including provision of policies that directly address the barriers to ensuring that women have access to learning, that parental leave is taken by all parents (not just women) and that family violence and its impact is recognized and addressed<sup>6</sup>.

### Why does the gender pay gap matter to VET?

The gender pay gap matters to and in VET as it links directly with VET's aims and the core reason of skilling pathways for employment, for a positive work experience, for one's skills to be utilised, for one's skills to be appropriately compensated.

The Productivity Commission summarises the objectives for vocational education and training (VET) as:

*The VET system aims to deliver a productive and highly skilled workforce through enabling all working age Australians to develop and use the skills required to effectively participate in the labour market and contribute to Australia's economic future.<sup>7</sup>*

Having quoted the Productivity Commission it is important that WAVE draws attention here to the persistent regularity with which the Commission reports on VET data without a gender lens. The Commission's practice is a prime example of what happens when a gender lens is not applied to data analysis. We are left with the sense that "one size fits all" – when plainly, based upon the evidence in this submission and previous ones - it doesn't.

At this juncture, it is important to highlight the persistent neglect of national VET reporting - including NCVER - in regularly utilising disaggregated data despite WAVEs advocating for its adoption for decades.. Most recently NCVER released its "Government-funded students and courses - January to June 2023" report, which summarises data relating to domestic government-funded VET activity delivered in Australia. While the report quotes growth in enrollments and government funding program it – and similar reports – failed to describe the gendered reality of VET participation. To discover this, interested parties need to drill into the data builder or VOCED plus where they will find persistent low commencements and completions of women in vocational education and training – particularly apprenticeships and traineeships since 2018.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. See also: <https://www.wgea.gov.au/the-gender-pay-gap>

<sup>7</sup> Productivity Commission (2023). *Report on Government Services 2023. Part B, Section 5: Latest update: 6 June 2023*. Australian Government/Productivity Commission. <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2023/child-care-education-and-training/vocational-education-and-training>

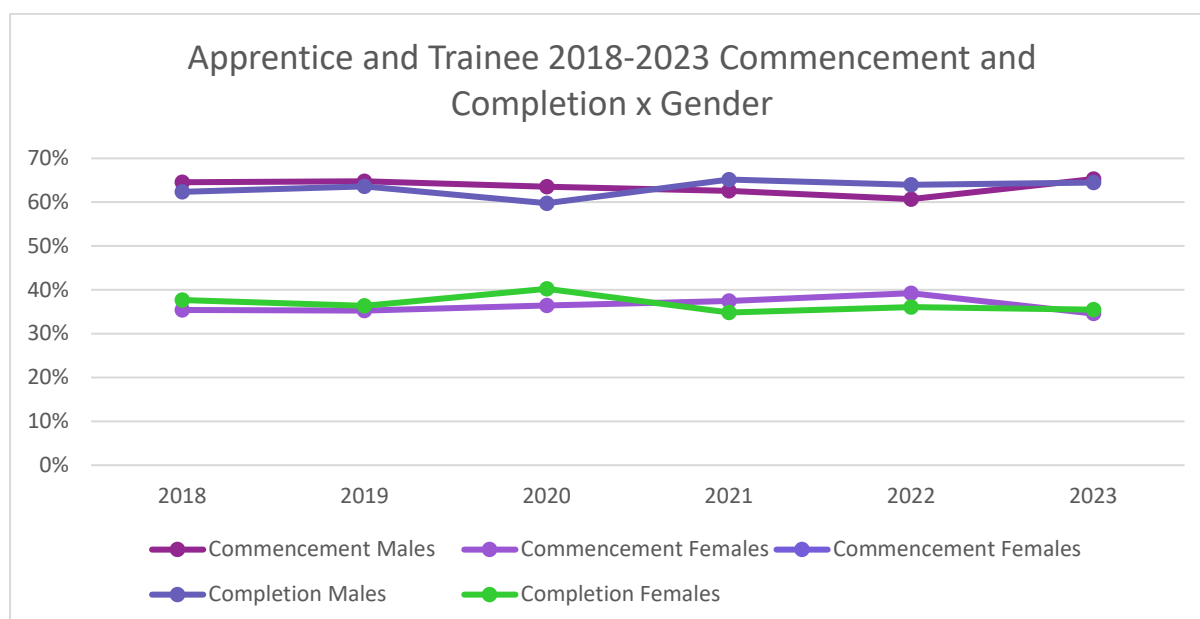


FIGURE 1 ADAPTED FROM NCVET 2023, APPRENTICES AND TRAINEES 2023 - MARCH QUARTER DATABUILDER, CONTRACT STATUS, FOE 4-DIGIT BY YEAR, BY GENDER<sup>8</sup>

Going to another policy area – the *National Skills Agreement* (the Agreement) – we can elicit more information about the goals of VET and why using the gender pay gap as an indicator of the effectiveness or otherwise of VET is helpful. The Agreement between Australian, State and Territory Governments seeks to strengthen the VET sector so that cumulatively it will<sup>9</sup>:

*deliver a national VET system that provides high quality, responsive and accessible education and training to boost productivity*

*support Australians to obtain the skills and capabilities they need to obtain well-paid, secure jobs*

*ensure Australia has the skilled workforce it needs now and into the future, with TAFE at the heart of the VET sector.*

Evidence supports the claim that the persistent gender pay gap shows that the VET system is not delivering for women; it is not enabling them to effectively participate in the labour market and contribute further to Australia’s economic future and is certainly not enabling women to obtain well-paid, secure jobs.

Well at least, not as much as men are, **and that is a problem.**

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/databuilder>

<sup>9</sup> Australian Government (2023), *National Skills Agreement*. October 2023. Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), Australian Government.

<https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/sites/federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/files/2023-12/national-skills-agreement.pdf>

<https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform/national-skills-agreement>

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### The Gender Pay Gap

When releasing the annual update on the state of workplace gender equality on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 2023, Mary Woolridge, CEO of WGEA in a LinkedIn live stream<sup>10</sup> noted that the drivers of this entrenched and systemic bias against women have not changed in at least the last four years WGEA has been publishing the report *She's Price(d)less*. In summary, these drivers continue to be:<sup>11</sup>

- Gender Discrimination.
- Care burden placed on women and the consequence on workforce participation patterns.
- Occupational structure and the types of jobs that women work in.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 2023, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) released sets of statistics about employed persons, their income, by sex, across Australia, in different industries and age cohorts.

The release – entitled *Jobs in Australia*<sup>12</sup> - puts forward “*information about the number and nature of filled jobs and the people who hold them*” from 2016 to 2021.

Analysis of this data both shows again and reinforces the WGEA’s November 2023 findings - that there is an enduring and deep-seated bias and set of barriers to women across our workforce that is reflected in the entrenched gender pay gap.

The data show that the pay gap is across all age cohorts and favours men. Further, analysis of mean vs median pay gap for each cohort shows that at around the age of 35 years, the mean pay gap for women becomes more pronounced (as opposed to the median) right up to the age of 65.

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<sup>10</sup> [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/workplace-gender-equality-agency\\_release-of-the-2022-23-gender-equality-scorecard-activity-7133707746511646720-p7eg?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=member\\_desktop](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/workplace-gender-equality-agency_release-of-the-2022-23-gender-equality-scorecard-activity-7133707746511646720-p7eg?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/fourth-edition-of-the-shes-pricedless-report-released>

KPMG (2022), *She's Price(d)less: The Economics of the Gender Pay Gap*, Prepared with Diversity Council Australia (DCA) and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA), Sydney, KPMG.

[https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/FINAL%20VERSION\\_She%27s%20Pricedless\\_2022.pdf](https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/FINAL%20VERSION_She%27s%20Pricedless_2022.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2023). *Jobs in Australia*. 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/jobs/jobs-australia/2020-21-financial-year>

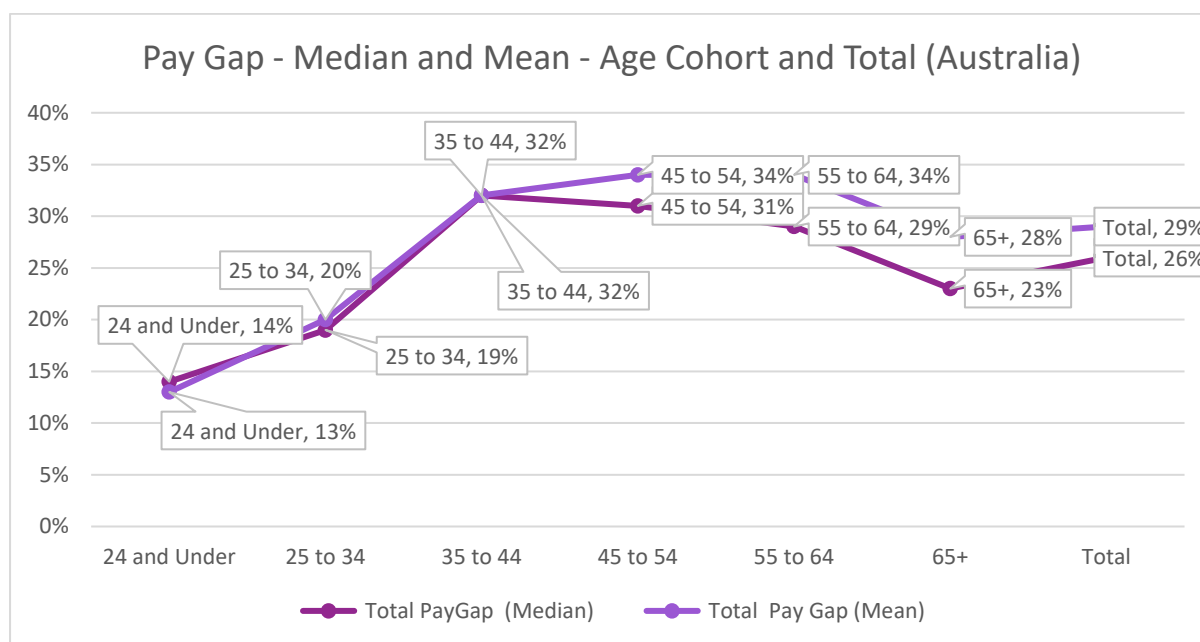


FIGURE 2: ABS, 6 DEC 2023. *JOBS IN AUSTRALIA: PERSONAL INCOME IN AUSTRALIA: TABLE 4. EMPLOYEE INCOME, EARNERS AND SUMMARY STATISTICS BY AGE GROUP, SEX AND GEOGRAPHY, 2016-17 TO 2020-21 TABLE 4.2*

What this suggests – given that mean average better controls for outliers – is that when we do not account for outliers, women’s participation in work is significantly impacted by the care burden they carry, and for the jobs that they hold. Once again this reinforces WGEA’s reporting.

The data also show that gender segregation is persistent and:

- Even when it is shown that **women work more than men, there is still a pay gap**. ABS show that since 2016, more women than men hold multiple jobs but despite this they still tend to take home 20% less income than men who similarly hold multiple jobs.<sup>13</sup>
- The pay gap endures since 2016 across industries including those industries that are feminized and – **even in the industries that are dominated by women, the pay gap is significant** (such as health care, social assistance and education and training).<sup>14</sup>
- For those **industries that do provide their workers with larger incomes**, (e.g. mining where some of the highest incomes are recorded) **women are not getting access to these** and the pay gap favours men.<sup>15</sup>

To demonstrate.

In construction – a male dominated sector where women have occupied some 16 to 17% of *all job roles* in the sector since 2016, the pay gap has dropped from 26% in 2016 to 20% in 2021.

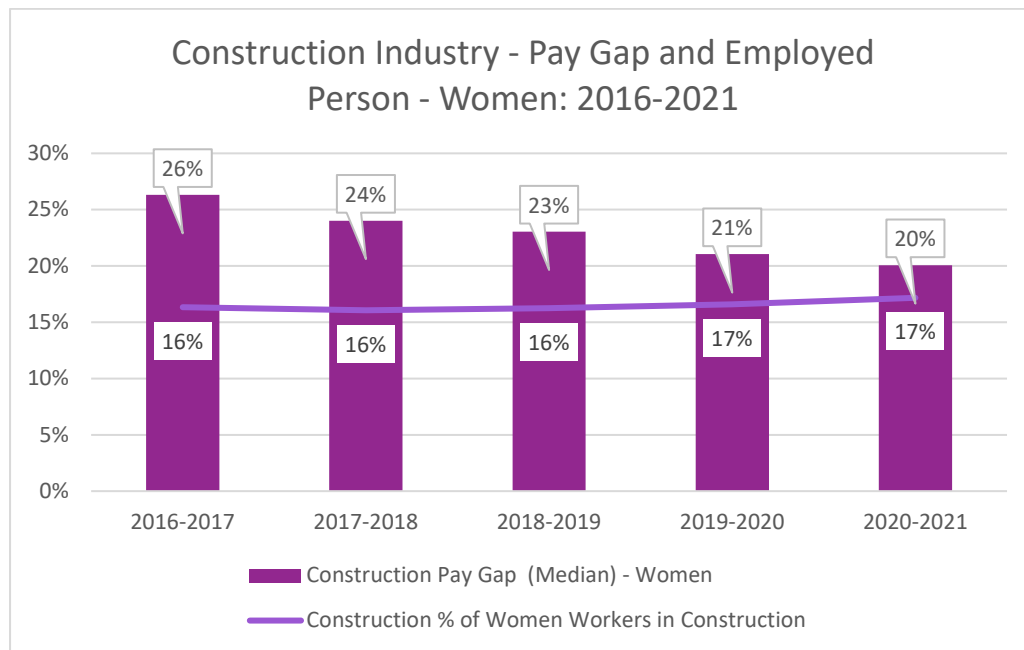
<sup>13</sup> ABS (2023). *Jobs in Australia: Table 6. Employed persons and employment income by sex, age, occupation, job holding characteristics and geography, 2016-17 to 2020-21 Table 6.1 Employed persons and median employment income, by sex, age group, occupation, industry, employment status in all jobs, total jobs held, and multiple job holding status, 2016-17 to 2020-21*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*

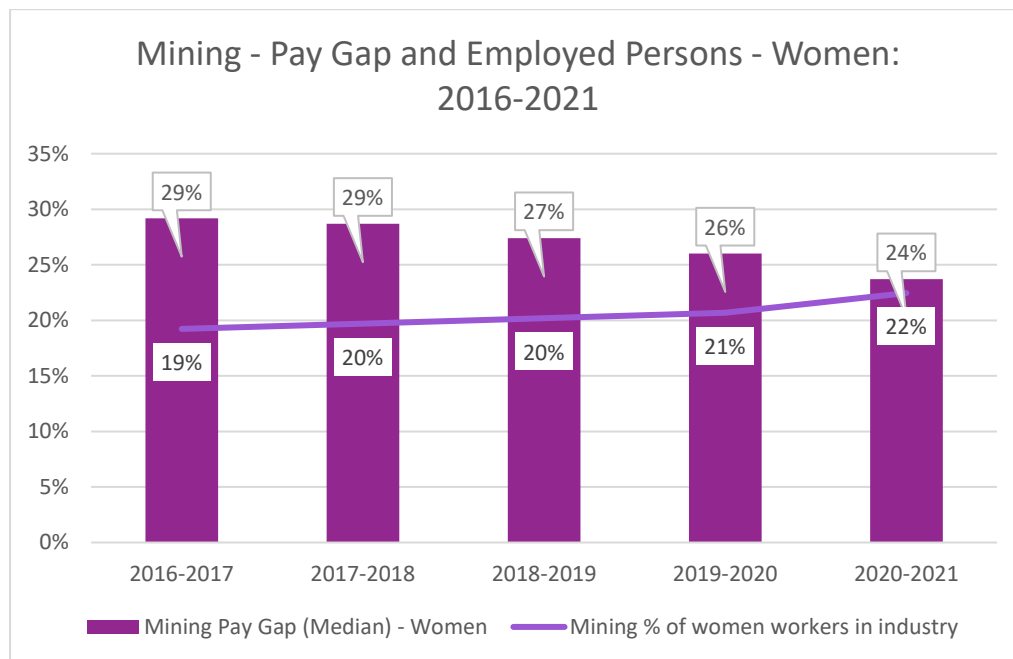
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**FIGURE 3: ABS 6 DECEMBER 2023. JOBS IN AUSTRALIA: TABLE 6. EMPLOYED PERSONS AND EMPLOYMENT INCOME BY SEX, AGE, OCCUPATION, JOB HOLDING CHARACTERISTICS AND GEOGRAPHY, 2016-17 TO 2020-21 WHERE CONSTRUCTION IS THE INDUSTRY OF EARNER'S MAIN JOB**

For mining, also male dominated, but providing more lucrative income for workers, women's participation in all jobs (so including administration etc.) is climbing and the pay gap slowly dropping but only to be a pay gap of 24% in favour of men, and women are around 22% of the mining workforce.



**FIGURE 4: ABS 6 DECEMBER 2023. JOBS IN AUSTRALIA: TABLE 6. EMPLOYED PERSONS AND EMPLOYMENT INCOME BY SEX, AGE, OCCUPATION, JOB HOLDING CHARACTERISTICS AND GEOGRAPHY, 2016-17 TO 2020-21 WHERE MINING IS THE INDUSTRY OF EARNER'S MAIN JOB**

And while the assumption from just these two sectors may be that the concentration of women is the driver of change in the pay gap, the two most highly feminised sectors prove that this is not the case. Let's look at Health Care and Social Assistance and Education and Training.

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For Health Care and Social Assistance, where the concentration of women is treble that of men's participation, the pay gap in favour of men is around 28%.

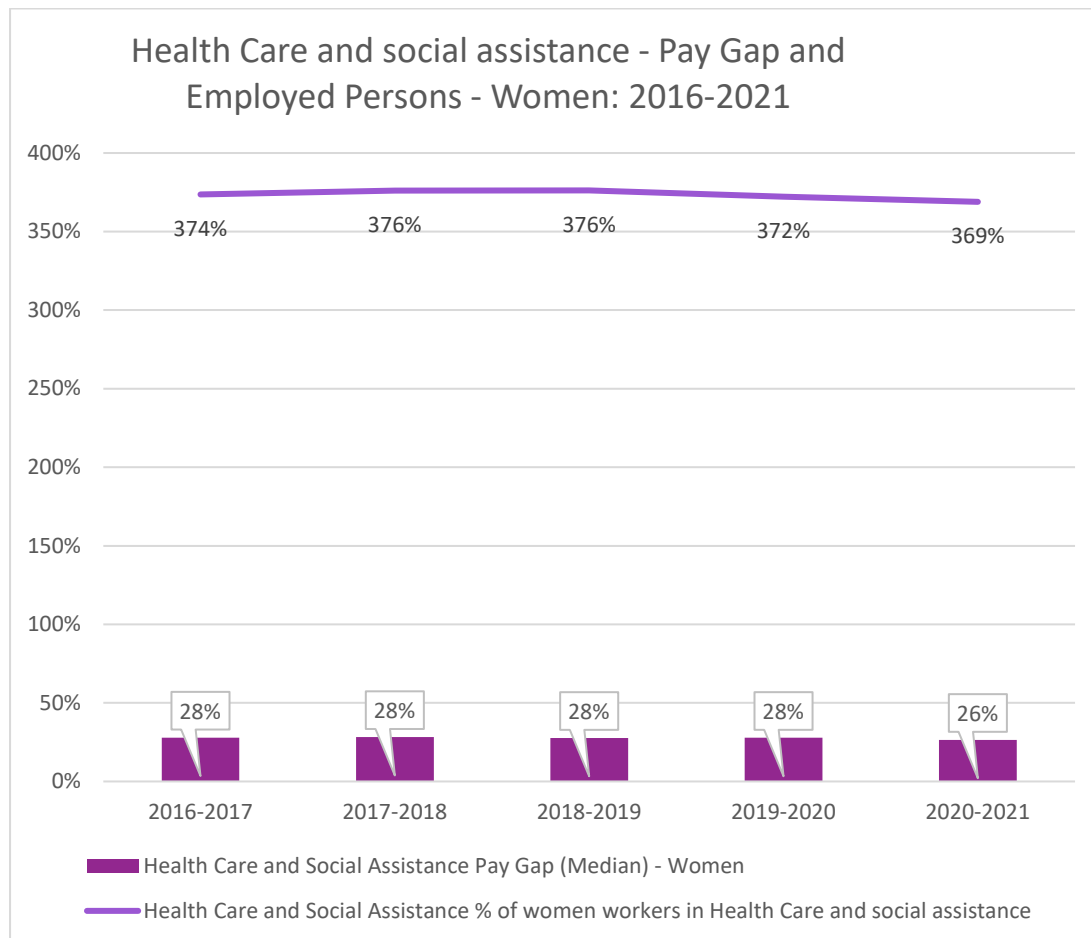


FIGURE 5: ABS 6 DECEMBER 2023. *JOBS IN AUSTRALIA*: TABLE 6. EMPLOYED PERSONS AND EMPLOYMENT INCOME BY SEX, AGE, OCCUPATION, JOB HOLDING CHARACTERISTICS AND GEOGRAPHY, 2016-17 TO 2020-21 FOR HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IS THE INDUSTRY EARNER'S OF MAIN JOB

For Education and Training, where women's participation is more than double, the pay gap ranges from 23% to 19% across the years (and in 2021, it is 20%).



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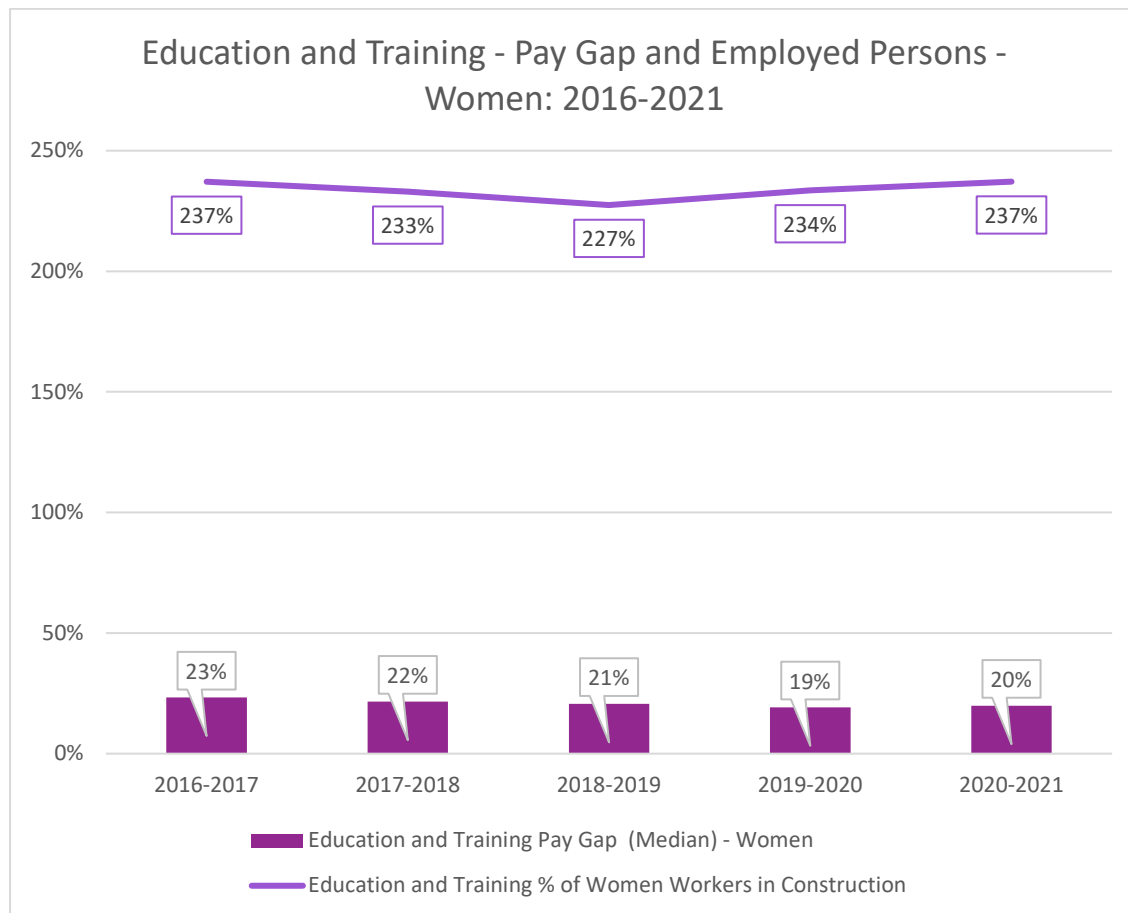


FIGURE 6: ABS 6 DECEMBER 2023. JOBS IN AUSTRALIA: TABLE 6. EMPLOYED PERSONS AND EMPLOYMENT INCOME BY SEX, AGE, OCCUPATION, JOB HOLDING CHARACTERISTICS AND GEOGRAPHY, 2016-17 TO 2020-21 WHERE EDUCATION AND TRAINING IS INDUSTRY OF EARNER'S MAIN JOB

What this tells us – even at a summary glance – is that the composition alone of an industry or a workforce (or the number of women in a sector) **cannot** change the core conditions of a worker's take home pay.

Why does WAVE mention this?

For so long the main strategy employed across Australia's vocational sector is to:

- a) encourage women to enter male dominated trades, by funding "women in trade" programs, but
- b) not do significant work to do the same for feminised learning pathways and sectors.

Moreover, based on this evidence – in the absence of any other evaluation report – we can see that this approach **has not** worked to address gender inequality.

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### The Australian skills system is inequitable and has been for decades.

Participation in VET skills development and training is gendered both across the type of training that occurs (fee paying, apprenticeship/traineeship, delivery), the industry segment (construction/aged care) and also the level of qualification achieved (across the AQF spectrum where higher numbers of women go into university than VET). (ABS, *Education and Work, Australia May 2023*)<sup>16</sup>

The experience of VET is gendered as evident with close reading of non-completion data that shows that women leave VET learning for “personal reasons” whereas for men, it is because they have achieved the skills or have a job. (NCVER *Total VET Student Outcomes 2016-2021 Gender x Main Reason Discontinued Training* via VOCSTATS)

The outcomes of skills system differ and deliver different returns depending upon gender where more men go into higher paying roles, and women into lower paying, more casualised jobs (ABS, *Education and Work, Australia May 2022*)

The Australian skills system reflects, reinforces and reproduces Australia’s gendered workforce.

Capital investment in VET is gendered. Higher resources and funding is provided to male dominated skill pathways than to female dominated skills pathways. (WAVE *Response to Call for Submission to Terms of Reference for Australian Government Employment White Paper 27 November 2022*)<sup>17</sup>

We also know that the psychosocial risks faced by workers in the gender minority (for instance women in male dominated trades) drive risks to their safety when learning, with persistent reports of workplace sexual harassment on the job and off the job.<sup>18</sup>

### The VET sector itself is inequitable.

While the gender pay gap in education and training is in favour of women up to the age of 30 (it “...crosses thereafter as men start to earn more on average than women, resulting in a gender pay gap that touches 20 per cent by the age of 55.” (BCEC/WGEA *Gender Equity Insights 2022*)<sup>19</sup>

WGEA advises that for the tertiary education sector – the most representative of education organisations delivering skills programs including vocational education and training – that while the majority of employees are women, the majority of those in leadership are male, and the pay gap is 7.5% (Workplace Gender Equality Agency –Education and Training (All Subdivisions) of any size. As at 18/12/2023).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023. *Education and Work, Australia*. Reference period May 2023. [Education and Work, Australia, May 2023 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/education-and-work-australia-may-2023)

<sup>17</sup> WAVE (2022). *Response to Call for Submission to Terms of Reference for Australian Government Employment White Paper 27 November 2022*. <https://wave.org.au/news/>

<sup>18</sup> See Holdsworth, S., Turner, M., Scott-Young, C.M., & Sandri, K. (2020). *Women in Construction: Exploring the Barriers and Supportive Enablers of Wellbeing in the Workplace*. RMIT University, Melbourne. Jobs Queensland, *Apprenticeship, women and workplace culture* A Literature Review October 2021. 2021 *National Student Safety Survey* <https://ministers.education.gov.au/clare/expert-appointed-support-safer-university-campuses> and Australian Human Rights Commission *Respect@Work Nature and Prevalence of workplace sexual harassment* <https://www.respectatwork.gov.au/individual/understanding-workplace-sexual-harassment/nature-and-prevalence-workplace-sexual-harassment#:~:text=Who%20is%20being%20sexually%20harassed,in%20the%20previous%20five%20years>

<sup>19</sup> Duncan AS, Mavisakalyan A and Salazar S (2022), *Gender Equity Insights 2022: The State of Inequality in Australia*, BCEC|WGEA Gender Equity Series, Issue #7, October 2022. [https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/BCEC\\_WGEA\\_Gender\\_Equity\\_Insights\\_Report\\_2022\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/BCEC_WGEA_Gender_Equity_Insights_Report_2022_WEB.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.wgea.gov.au/data-statistics/data-explorer>

## Provocations for the Australian Government – a Single Recommendation

Our recommendation for the *Discussion Paper: Supporting women to achieve VET-based careers. November 2023* is based on the following realities which our experience in engaging with Australian policy on VET and gender, shows to be provocative:

4. The targeting of women to increase their participation and address skills shortages (for instance in male dominated trades), is not good enough as a strategy to address inequality. Related solutions are short term, expensive, and seek to “fix women” rather than the causes of inequity<sup>21</sup> and, in fact, evidence suggests are not delivering outcomes.
5. Based on the evidence a long-term view and vision with accompanying multi-pronged strategies are required. Strategies aimed at identifying and changing policy drivers and cultures that reinforce gender inequality in VET, addressing the key indicators of inequity and improving the capacity of the system to enable a gender equal VET system. We see this as the ONLY way forward for VET. This is not new. It comes from a decade long, globally practiced body of evidence called gender mainstreaming and intersectionality put in place to address inequity, such as that faced by women in Australia’s VET system.
6. Given the significant policy ambitions reflected in economic policy and social statements, VET must take itself seriously, and ask itself fully and with integrity what it can do to address inequity. WAVE contends that in spite of consistent evidence from both ourselves, and others, the Australia Government is still to heed and listen to this advice from national peak bodies, such as ours, whose purpose is national equity in VET.

Our **only** recommendation to the Australian Government in this submission is that to support women to achieve improved outcomes through Australia’s Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, the Australian Government *MUST* address systemic and structural inequity that exists within VET and meet the practical support needs of women.

To do this the Government, through its policy direction, must look to *and* apply the body of practice and evidence found in gender equality and intersectionality work and develop an overarching strategy for equity in VET. A strategy which addresses all the drivers of inequity and supports a program of work that meets the practical needs of all students, most especially women.

Our submission will now go onto:

- I. Highlight and reiterate the advice that WAVE has already provided to Government through the last 12 months of activity.
- II. Put forward further key evidence about the systemic inequity that needs to be addressed to change the participation patterns of women in VET and drive equity – some of this has already been put to the Australian Government.

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<sup>21</sup> Please refer to the statements from the Australian Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) cited above.

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- III. Put forward a practical translation of our one recommendation to demonstrate how a strategic gender lens and approach to VET can result in transformational change.

## HIGHLIGHT AND REITERATE: SUMMARY OF WAVE'S PREVIOUS ADVICE

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*Over the last 12 months, WAVE has put forward a range of submissions to the Australian Government that outline and provide evidence against our key recommendation above.*

Consistently through these submissions, and in face-to-face meetings, consultations and round tables, WAVE has put recommendations to the Australian Government to address inequity, including gender inequity, that comprise the following elements as key components of a whole stratagem for equity:

- **Ensure that equity is a central focus** of all Australian VET policy work and resource our VET and Adult Education and training systems accordingly. Equity is an investment, not a cost.
- **Challenge gender stereotypes across VET systems and structures.** Australia's education and training system perpetuates and reinforces gender stereotypes through qualification design, training packages and delivery. This includes the competency-based skills framework that if left as is and the central 'packaging mechanism' in the absence of any other systemic change plan, will be a key enabler of ongoing inequity.
- **Address funding inequities.** Feminised 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. VET and adult education must be more affordable for women by providing financial assistance and other supports, recognising their social and familial commitments. Although not counted in the GDP, such care work contributes significantly to and indeed supports the official economy.
- **Put the lived experience of all learners** particularly women, at the centre of decision-making in VET and adult education. Co-design is critical, as are place based approaches.
- **Ensure gender-segregated data is used for all reporting.** Gender-segregated data is the baseline.
- **Measure the success of the 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.

WAVE, and its partners, have also advised the Australian Government that to address the systemic bias and gender inequality in our VET sector, an intersectional and gender responsive approach that involves VET as a whole system needs to be applied as part of a strategy utilising the following steps:

- Understand and know the prevalence of gender inequity in the VET system, as well as how the VET system and structures themselves continue to reinforce this inequity within the skills system and contribute to inequity in our labour markets.
- Undertake root and branch reform of the VET system.
- Put equity at the centre of the reforms and the reformed VET system, rather than adding equity/equity policies as an "afterthought".

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- Define and develop policy using gender-based disaggregated data that enables the Australian Government to understand the gendered drivers of inequity present in the VET system as well as measuring the impact that VET has in addressing gender inequity.
- Build the capability and capacity of the VET systems and people to address intersectional gender inequity within their own practices. This requires and investment into gender equity workforce capacity building.

## Specific Advice offered by WAVE – A Summary of Our Submissions

For the purposes of this submission, we offer a summary of the recommendations and advice that we have previously put to the Australian Government on inequity in our VET and skills system and what can be done about it. The advice is all based on decades of global evidence and practice, and is required to improve outcomes for women in our VET sector.

November 2022

**For the Australian Government’s Consultation on the [Employment White Paper](#)** - WAVE called for a change to the terms of reference to ensure an intersectional lens was placed on the work to develop the White Paper, and that a new body be created within the VET architecture to drive “an intersectional approach across the vocational and adult education sector with the capacity to apply gender lens in its work”. The submission also advised VET could take a strong role in addressing the drivers that lead to the Australian labour market being highly gender segregated.

December 2022

**In our response to [Australian Apprenticeship and Supports Discussion Paper](#)**, again WAVE put forward a range of evidence about the consequences of gender segregated work environments, advising that these need to be addressed systemically and structurally if a redesigned Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) is going to be able to increase completion rates and improve the participation of women in trades. WAVE put forward advice and evidence of the detrimental impacts of discrimination and bias against women in Australian Apprenticeships, the cultural barrier to women’s equal participation in trades and, further, put forward evidence-based strategies to change this *including* building the capacity and capability of the AASN to understand gender inequality. Our submission also noted and described the significant occupational health and safety risks faced by women in male dominated workplaces, the prevalence of workplace gendered violence, and the role that AASN’s have to help prevent these behaviours – all part of the work to ensure that our VET system is equitable.

**Our response to Australia’s development of [a new migration strategy](#)**, highlighted the gendered nature of what constitutes “skill” particularly those skills that are codified by the Skills Migration policy that are more favourable to males than females. Once again WAVE drew upon evidence from Australia and globally that shows the propensity for skilled migration systems to “forget” female skills and consequently discriminate and disadvantage female applicants.

February 2023

**For our response to the Australian Government’s Discussion Paper on [Future Delivery of Foundation Skills in Remote Australia](#)**, WAVE called for a strategic and systemic review of Foundation Skills as part of a high level review of VET and strongly advocated that “*Complex equity issues such as low literacy, numeracy, digital and employability skills in remote areas cannot be resolved with reform of one government program. Rather, the entire adult education and vocational training system needs to*

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*be reviewed with equity at its heart*". WAVE also highlighted the gendered nature of the Adult and Community Education sector as well as the fact that education and training sector across Australia is a significant contributor to the pay gap in favour of men. WAVE made recommendations again for the use of gender mainstreaming analysis and tools (such as gender impact assessments) to ensure that outcomes for Foundation Skills are promoting equity.

WAVE's submission to **Federal Government on new [skills and employment agency Jobs and Skills Australia \(JSA\) with Equality Rights Alliance \(ERA\)](#)** advocated yet again for the take up and use of gender mainstreaming techniques and evidence to drive change across the VET sector. Once again we provided evidence of the persistent and systemic inequity in VET. Again, on the basis of global evidence, we put forward advice that to drive the work to address inequity, JSA needed to set up specific components and architecture across its structure, governance and functions. This included a high level advice committee that centres lived experience, and roles and resources to ensure data and reporting is gender disaggregated, that the VET system has its capacity built to address the drivers of inequity and that there is a high-level coordinating strategy/document to provide a pathway for gender equality across Australian VET.

WAVE's submission to the **[House Inquiry into the Perceptions and Status of VET](#)**, again used the global body of evidence to demonstrate the gendered nature of VET. Both through its submission, and through the presentation of a hearing for the House Committee, we demonstrated how the gendered systems and structures of VET (in areas such as career advice, policy, funding, the structure of the skills system and ingrained stereotypes, norms and attitudes) discriminate and disadvantage those who face intersective and compounding barriers in our economy and society. Our recommendations to the House Committee spoke to similar advice given and especially that *"...an intersectional lens and gender-responsive measures to be applied to VET, so women (and therefore all sex and genders, given visible and invisible biases) can access secure and well-paid jobs, education, and training systems."*

May 2023

The **combined submission from WAVE and Xellence Pathways to [JSA Clean Energy Workforce Discussion Paper](#)**, again used the range of evidence to demonstrate the inequity and discrimination faced by women in industry and employment, and the role that VET plays in contributing to this. Again, it also put forward – with specific reference to the Clean Energy Workforce – strategies that have been proven across the globe to change this. Our submission again advocated that equity needs to be at the core of government's mandate to sustainably address the needs of the Australian workforce over the next 10, 20 and 30 years, and better plan for the education pathways and address barriers to that education pathway. In amongst other recommendations the submission also highlighted that (in response to specific questions about women's participation in the sector) *"...barriers and 'equity issues' to be investigated by JSA are in fact known and as we contend well researched. This justifies the need for JSA to embed equity related aspects across the whole study from an early stage, rather than rely on more work on barriers to suffice as accounting for equity requirements."*

June 2023

For WAVE's **submission to Australian Government's [Draft Strategy for the Care and Support Economy](#)**, we welcomed the Government's focus on this highly feminized sector and recommended that Government *"..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"; "Create vocational education and adult training programs specifically for the care and support economy that provide career paths in*



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*keeping with the lived experience of this feminized workforce". WAVE also recommended that Government "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."*

July 2023

Our submission to [Jobs and Skills Australia on their Annual Work Plan](#) recommended that JSA's annual workplan development process include an additional element of intersectional gender equity in the workplan concepts to ensure equity is embedded as an organising principle. WAVE put forward a structure and approach that JSA could implement that would realise and implement a range of recommendations that we have previously submitted. Noting that at the time of submission, equity and any of the mechanisms required to ensure its implementation, monitoring and evaluation were nowhere to be found, WAVE highlighted that this reality runs counter to the *National Skills Agreement* due to commence in January 2024 that makes explicit statements about equity including women's participation.

### A NOTE ON PROMISING PRACTICE – VET APPROACHES THAT ADDRESS INEQUITY BY RECOGNIZING ECOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL DETERMINANTS

*With regard to this model we highlight the work of organisations that provide the type of support for the economic and social context that many VET learners facing inequity and disadvantage need. In effect they recognise the ecological context of learners in VET:*

- *The MEGT Foundation who work to provide practical support required for women experiencing disadvantage – a sadly normal part of our society and economy. The [MEGT Foundation](#) has designed a program that wrap around support such as child care, coaching, support to enable women to manage any social and medical appointments around their education program all the while taking a trauma informed approach*
- *Brotherhood of St Laurence – [Ag Futures Project](#) – which addresses three interconnected problems - An agricultural and production horticulture workforce crisis , sustained disengagement and youth un/under-employment rates among disadvantaged young people in the region , declining uptake and completion of entry level agricultural programs among young workforce entrants.*

***Importantly, the work to address the systemic and structural drivers of VET is still required to ensure that outcomes of these projects are sustainable.***

# STRUCTURAL AND SYSTEMIC GENDER INEQUALITY IN VET: ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Drawing on the overview of WAVE's previous submissions highlighted in the previous section and reiterating important considerations for any VET reform, the following comment is presented to augment the case for consideration of the one recommendation given in this submission.

The following evidence argues that:

- I. Macro policy for VET, skilling and our economy disadvantages women and does not recognise the forces that discriminate and result in barriers to women's education, skilling and employment. There is a persistent bias in labour market frameworks against women.
- II. Structural and systemic stereotypes are embedded in the VET system, a system that is deeply gendered. As such solutions cannot be *just about* women or *only* focus on increasing numbers of women through training pipelines – to do so sets women up to fail and in some cases, risks their safety.

### Macro policy barriers to equality and equity

There are two key realities that represent underpinning challenges that any policy on equity in VET needs to address:

1. That macro policy settings on labour and workforce are not equitable.
2. That gendered stereotypes are structural and result in systemic forms of discrimination.

National policy that addresses both is essential. Unless these factors are addressed through demand side strategies and supply side options, the Government will limited its ability to ensure sustainable equitable outcomes from VET.

Our experience working with women across Australia is that carer roles plus additional barriers in the form of access to affordable childcare, poverty, lack of flexible employment, domestic violence and English language skills also impact on women's economic participation. Increasingly we are seeing that single mothers and older women face even greater barriers, particularly in regional areas, in accessing suitable work that fits their circumstances<sup>22</sup>.

Across Victoria we have evidenced the reality that access to meaningful, well-paying work, and the skills pathways that lead to it is a key social determinant for all women, impacting not only their wellbeing but also the wellbeing of their community and health of our economy.<sup>23</sup>

WAVE's approach in this submission will be to frame the strategy through the social determinants with an intersectional and gender lens.

Our core argument is that the barriers preventing equality in our workforces are not to be found in women *per se*, but in the social forces, structures and systems that present barriers to inequity.

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<sup>22</sup> Global Sisters, 2019. *Social Impact Report 2019*. Viewed 30 March 2022, <<https://impact.globalsisters.org/our-impact-2019/>>

<sup>23</sup> Please refer to the current and previous Victorian Gender Equality Strategy *Safe and Strong* and its focus on economic security <https://www.vic.gov.au/safe-and-strong-victorian-gender-equality#work-and-economic-security> and the current (2023-2027) Gender Equality Strategy *Our Equal State* <https://www.vic.gov.au/our-equal-state-victorias-gender-equality-strategy-and-action-plan-2023-2027> which measures impact across 5 domains including health, culture and economic security. <https://www.vic.gov.au/our-equal-state-victorias-gender-equality-strategy-and-action-plan-2023-2027/measuring-our-impact>

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We welcome the regular recognition from the Australian Government that strategies are needed to boost women's workforce participation particularly in male dominated sectors. We also welcome the recognition of the significant challenges that women – the minority in the gender-atypical industries such as construction and mining – face in not only entering these workforces, but also in staying in them.

We also agree that:

- Industry specific initiatives are needed to address issues unique to each sector, and
- Momentum built through other similar work should be drawn upon to inform inter-related VET strategies.

On this last point we advocate that any evaluation of initiatives such as the *Women in Construction Strategy*<sup>24</sup>, *Women in Transport Initiative*<sup>25</sup> and initiatives in STEM education<sup>26</sup> should be shared as part of this consultation and critically reviewed so that we can learn from these significant government investments and not repeat mistakes of the past.

Policy work undertaken by the Australian Government to address inequity of women, should not so much be about targeting women, but rather:

- Addressing the systemic norms, behaviours and systems that drive gender inequity in these industries.
- Targeted support to establish protective factors for those companies, workers, and agencies that are addressing inequity.
- Take an intersectional approach to designing specific programs and support systems for women moving into these sectors.

At a strategic level, we advise the Australian Government that equity in VET can be enhanced by utilising synergies such as those between two industry sectors undergoing reform – manufacturing and energy – to address the inherent challenges. Together the evidence and practice of industry policy and workforce utilisation along with gender mainstreaming and intersectionality (as illustrated below) provide an opportunity to address the systemic and structural drivers that impact on workforce participation and expand the strategies and measures available to government to drive equality.

Moreover, the current reform agendas underway in the VET sector offer a timely opportunity to apply such evidence (including lessons learned) along with strategies utilising gender mainstreaming and intersectionality in emergent and new groups industries as pilots, to enhance VET informed and supported pathways into viable career paths for women.

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example: <https://womeninconstruction.com.au> ; <https://www.vic.gov.au/victorias-women-construction-strategy> ; <https://www.nsw.gov.au/employment/women-construction>

<sup>25</sup> See, for example: <https://www.womenintransport.gov.au> ; <https://www.vic.gov.au/women-transport>

<sup>26</sup> See, for example: <https://www.industry.gov.au/science-technology-and-innovation/women-and-girls-stem>

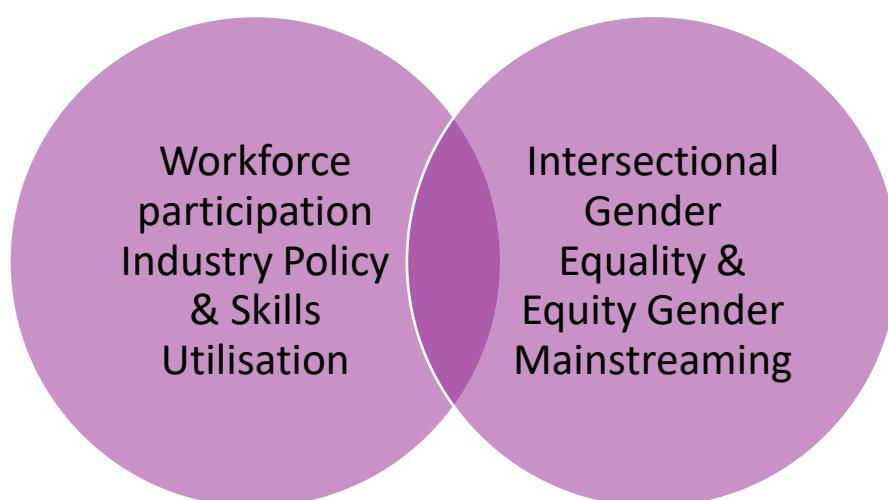


FIGURE 7. VENN DIAGRAM OF INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS AND THEORIES.

Australia is also in a strong position both to link such initiatives with/in VET to ensure synergies with a range of policy leadership in gender equality such as the forthcoming *National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality*<sup>27</sup> along with consideration of how to use government procurement policy, and industry approaches (e.g. the Clean Economy Workforce Plan from Jobs and Skills Australia<sup>28</sup>) as well as the nascent work on equality and diversity emerging from Jobs and Skills Councils.

### An ecological approach to address systemic and structural barriers

Through WAVE's engagement with the Australian Government we are often asked for feedback on how VET can support and create safe work environments for women, and occasionally recognition is given that some groups of women face additional barriers to participation. We wish to highlight that there are groups that face additional barriers - First Nations women, women with disability, women from migrant, refugee and cultural, racial and linguistically diverse backgrounds, LGBTIQ+ women, single parents, women in regional and rural areas, mature-aged and older women, and women who have caring responsibilities.

VET policy has a history of targeting specific “cohorts” of the population<sup>29</sup>. While a valuable tool, it does not always deliver strong outcomes either for government especially in relation to equality nor long term solutions for the women themselves. Cohort approaches can:

- Ignore intersectionality, treating groups as homogenous leading to oversimplification and ignoring a range of other barriers in our society and economy preventing individuals from being equal.

<sup>27</sup> See: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/national-strategy-achieve-gender-equality>

<sup>28</sup> Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) (2023), *The Clean Energy Generation. Workforce needs for a net zero economy*. JSA/Australian Government. <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/reports/the-clean-energy-generation>

<sup>29</sup> Butler, Elaine & Ferrier, Fran (2023), *A fair go for all? Equity frameworks and landmark documents in Australian vocational education and training*, Op Cit. <https://www.voced.edu.au/vet-knowledge-bank-landmark-documents-equity-access-historical-overview>

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- Be limited in its scope as it tends to focus on specific time periods, preventing the ability to capture broader social and economic trends that have (and do) embed inequality such as gender.
- Risk confirmation bias hindering objective analysis in the development of policies and interventions.
- Suffer from the results of incomplete data resulting in biased conclusions particularly in those areas that suffer from less visible forms of discrimination and inequity.
- Risk a tendency for
  - cohorts needing to 'compete' for (limited) resources, and
  - establishing a hierarchy of needs between cohorts.

We recommend that to achieve meaningful progress in in VET, the Australian Government adopt intersectional approaches as a basis to address long-term structural issues that have led to the current inequity in VET (including industry) and to avoid bias and data limitations.

### An ecological approach

WAVE has repeatedly advised that the Australian Government cannot improve equity in VET by simply focusing on increasing the number of females enrolling in trade courses or increasing the number of female applications to jobs in these sectors alone. Similarly, an over reliance on STEM initiatives (and indeed some approaches to STEM) require further consideration.

Addressing gender inequity and the resultant workforce under-utilisation as well as segregation require an ecological approach that combines both the body of knowledge of gender equality/gender mainstreaming and skills utilisation/workforce development that sees the social determinants of inequality and their role in preventing workforce participation addressed.

The following model puts forward an ecological framework for how the intersecting barriers effect women's workforce participation. The model describes how barriers come together to prevent optimising the status and outcomes for women in VET and their skills development. This includes women's safety (at home and in the workplace), the burden of domestic labour and the care penalty, the mental load that is carried together with low investment in training of feminised skills, significantly poor gender disaggregated data, the higher cost that women carry to increase their skills and the ongoing discrimination and disadvantage faced due to their gender as reflected in the pay gap, in resistance to change and segregation of labour markets.

To that extent, the model shows that increasing the volume of women in VET learning alone will not address the issue. An holistic strategy is required that accommodates the reality of women's lived

experience.



Figure 8 AN ECOLOGICAL MODEL FOR SKILLS UTILISATION AND WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN.

### A note on skills utilisation and the gendered bias in labour market frameworks

In tight labour and skills markets, policy makers often reach for increasing the utilisation of skills and development of skills. While development is often concerned about the increased levels of supply of skilled workers, (often in the form of increasing the number of people already in and coming into the labour market with qualifications), utilisation tends to focus on demand side issues.<sup>30</sup> Both are of importance to policy makers for if not understood well, there is the risk of decreased productivity and poor outcomes for taxpayers due to wasted funding.

From an industry perspective, increasing productivity can be seen as a result of poor “skills utilisation”. The need for increasing workers, including the distribution and use of their skills, is one of the policy levers often called upon – more recently this has included attracting those workers in the minority (e.g. women) into industry to increase activity.

We note that a key part and driver of much of national VET policy activity is the need to address shortage of workers and activity. Therefore, in this regard – and certainly not limited to this submission – women are seen as commodities, a source, a supply of skills to be utilised.

<sup>30</sup> Buchanan, J. et al., 2010. Skills Demand and Utilisation: An International Review of Approaches to Measurement and Policy Development. *OECD Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Working Papers*, No. 2010/04, Paris: OECD Publishing.

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A 2010 literature review by Buchanan and colleagues<sup>31</sup> for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shows that typically, utilisation is measured in three ways:

1. Individual's perception of how skills are used.
2. Employer measures, which are usually based on data collected from both the worker and the employer, and
3. Population-wide measures through state managed labour statistics.

When seeking to increase the utilisation of skills, tactics and strategies often encompass:<sup>32</sup>

- Improving the behavioural skills of workers to make use of worker's capabilities. For example, high performing teams and increasing competencies associated with teamwork.
- Strengthening alignment between the skills that are developed and what industry is seeking, which is seen to be becoming more "sophisticated" (p. 8).
- Supporting the development of a skills-ecosystem (shaping the social political and economic settings for jobs). This work is often supported by "formation of stakeholder groups to help define and own the problem, in addition to the appointment of brokers to help nurture agreement" (p. 9).

In addition to these, the utilisation of skills can be improved through better use of data and improved program design<sup>33</sup>.

Similarly, the definitions of "skill and workforce development" are mixed and varied<sup>34</sup>. Rarely, if ever, and despite decades of literature including that related to previous VET reform agendas, is the gendered nature of the definition of "skill" a consideration<sup>35</sup>. Further, the concept in skills policy is typically more aligned to the supply side of individual workers or potential workers (students) – how and when they are trained, to what extent, and to what end. The body of knowledge tends to be buffeted by sectorial and industry views on priority of these questions. This is mainly because there is constant tension through the history of the literature on the *a priori* settings of occupation/sectorial experience versus education/concepts of skill. Aligned to this are potential tensions between employer-led decision-making and learning pathways.

Factors of deployment, testing and assessment, and accurate support of skills are evident in the body of knowledge of workforce development and skills development. The body of knowledge also includes how strategies (including just-in-time delivery to the required standards) to accommodate diverse learning needs, effective labour forecasting, and more recently, training markets are believed to adapt more rapidly to the skill demands of the economy.

This analysis notes that this body of knowledge does not delve into the structural or systemic realities of inequity faced by many in the labour market, nor what alignment

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<sup>31</sup> Buchanan, J. et al., 2010. Skills Demand and Utilisation: An International Review of Approaches to Measurement and Policy Development. *OECD Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Papers*, No. 2010/04, Paris: OECD Publishing.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*

<sup>34</sup> Bretherton, T., 2011. *The role of VET in workforce development: a story of conflicting expectations*. Adelaide: NCVER.

<sup>35</sup> Butler E & Ferrier F, 202-2023, Op Cit; Butler, Elaine & Ferrier, Fran (2000), 'Don't be too polite, girls!' *Women, work and vocational education and training: A critical review of the literature*. NCVER/ANTA. Leabrook <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/dont-be-too-polite-girls!-women-work-and-vocational-education-and-training-a-critical-review-of-the-literature> ; Butler, Elaine and Brown, Mike (Eds.) (1993), *A-gendering skill: Conversations around women, work and skill: An Australian Perspective*. Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria.



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and strategies can be employed to address these. It does not recognise the role of discrimination in recruitment, the reality of workplace gendered violence, the impact of family violence on community and women’s ability to participate in labour force, nor the reality of the gender pay gap and gender segregated workforces.

Taking an ecological view of intersecting barriers facing women entering these types of workforces is necessary if we are to move away from both problematising women both as a cohort to target and attract to these sectors and as the supply side solution.

### Defining available labour – gendered limitations

In tight (and not-so-tight) labour economics, government indicators what proportion “working age population” (age 15 to 64) is employed<sup>36</sup>. It is worthwhile clarifying who is counted in the “labour force” and how the population’s participation is measured to understand gender inequity.

In Australia, the Labour Force Framework is defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and is built on “detailed rules” and based on “three mutually exclusive categories”<sup>37</sup>.

People contributing to economic activity are referred to as employed persons, while those who want to contribute to economic activity (or work) are known as ‘unemployed’. Together, employed and unemployed make up the total labour forms which gives us a measure of the number of people who are contributing to work, or actively looking for work and are available. There is also a third category called ‘economically inactive’<sup>38 39 40</sup>.

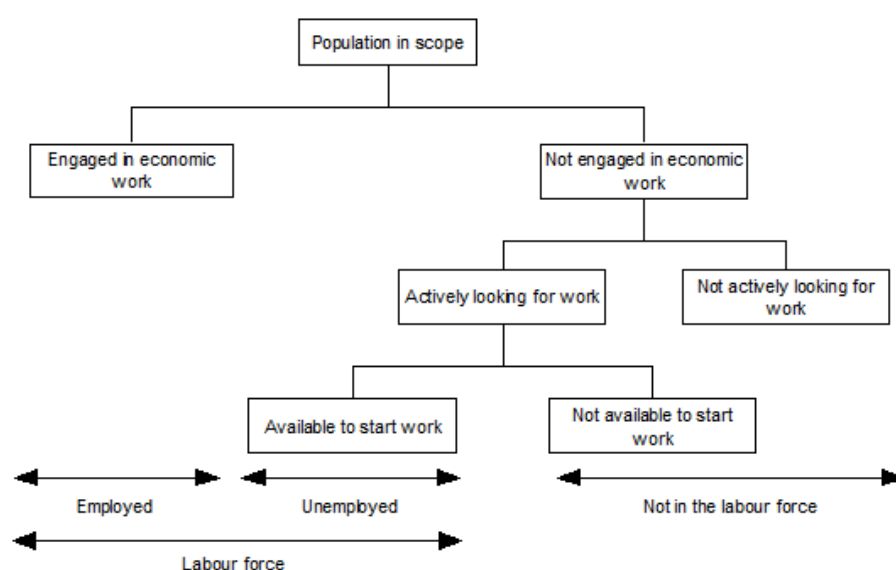


FIGURE 9. THE LABOUR FORCE FRAMEWORK.

<sup>36</sup> OECD, 2022. *Labour force participation rate*. Viewed 30 March 2022, <<https://data.oecd.org/emp/labour-force-participation-rate.htm>>

<sup>37</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020, *Labour Statistics: Concepts, Sources and Methods, Feb 2018*, cat. no. 6102.0.55.001, ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/6102.0.55.001~Feb%202018~Main%20Features~The%20Labour%20Force%20Framework~3>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> People not in employment who have not been seeking work within the last 4 weeks and/or are unable to start work within the next 2 weeks.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

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This submission notes that the **definitions of this model are highly gendered** – for instance what constitutes economic work does not include the unpaid care work that is mainly undertaken by women. Further, it does not recognise the multitude of reasons why people in our community may not be able to be employed or not be looking for work, such as those described in the ecological model above (see Figure 7).

This framework results in ongoing gendered assumptions about what constitutes work and the best strategies required to address underutilisation of skills in our nation. Further, it shapes a bias in our thinking that the solutions lie on the supply side of industry. We argue that the solutions lie in the employer/demand side of industry as well as supply side (workers).

With an understanding of how the mechanism ‘labour force’ applies to all working age people in Australia, one can comprehend better the work of a range of markers, including under-utilised labour capacity, youth unemployment rate and underemployment.

Having said this, the labour market is not static as it is constantly moving and changing. A key goal of policy makers is to put in place strategies and measures that manage this dynamic relationship between the different components of the labour force and, increase productivity (labour and multifactor that combines labour and capital)<sup>41</sup> – an important input to overall economic growth or GDP.<sup>42</sup>

However, there are underpinning structural barriers and systemic inequities in place to women and those with intersectional experiences even getting to the point of having capital, being employed and increasing their skill base. These need to be addressed as part of any industry plan or strategy.

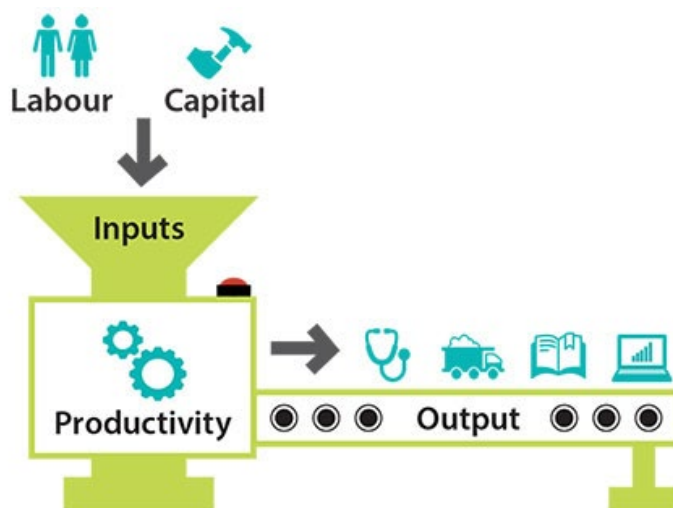


FIGURE 10. RESERVE BANK OF AUSTRALIA PRODUCTIVITY EXPLAINER.

<sup>41</sup> Reserve Bank of Australia, *Productivity Explainer*. Viewed 30 March 2022, <<https://www.rba.gov.au/education/resources/explainers/productivity.html>>

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*

## Structural gendered stereotypes result in systemic discrimination.

The Jobs and Skills Australia *2023 Skills Priority List Key Findings Report* found that “that occupations that have a strong gender imbalance were more likely to be in shortage. Some 54% of occupations where males make up at least 80% of the workforce were found to be in shortage... 40% of occupations where females make up at least 80% of the workforce were found to be in shortage”<sup>43</sup>.

Further, the report finds that:

Looking across 2021 to 2023 SPLs, gender imbalance appears entrenched with a high percentage of occupations with a workforce that was at least 80% males or at least 80% of females. Further the likelihood of a skills shortage for both male and female-dominated occupations has grown over the past three years<sup>44</sup>.

Australia has acknowledged the entrenched reality of gender segregation for sometime. The 2017 report by the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration *Gender Segregation in the workplace and its impact on women’s economic equality* found that “60 per cent of Australian workers don’t know what it is like to work in an industry with balanced gender representation. These figures have remained relatively constant over the last twenty years”<sup>45</sup>.

The resulting segregation is one of the major sources of the gender pay gap. Taken together, occupational and industrial gender segregation are the second most significant contributors to the pay gap between men and women, after sex discrimination. As the ratio of male to female employees in an industry increases so, too, does the average wage. KPMG found that, for every 10 per cent increase in the ratio of men to women in an industry, the average wage increases by 1.9 per cent. For every 10 per cent increase in this ratio in an occupation, the average wage increases by 0.8 per cent<sup>46</sup>.

The drivers of this segregation which directly impacts manufacturing and energy sectors, are structural and systemic so require remedial structural and systemic responses.

The symptoms of this are global and research shows that any strategy should address:

### The barriers of care

A 2017 global study that drew from Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) data from 12 countries found that:

- If members of society have a job – it increases their chances of participating in training but
- Women with young children have lower chances to participate in training compared with men who have young children.
- If there is a partner in the household – it has a positive and significant effect on training<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) (2023). *2023 Skills Priority List: Key Findings Report (September 2023)* Australian Government/JSA. [https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-09/2023%20SPL%20Key%20Findings%20Report\\_0.pdf](https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-09/2023%20SPL%20Key%20Findings%20Report_0.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p.18

<sup>45</sup> The Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee, *Gender segregation in the workplace and its impact on women’s economic equality* June 2017, Commonwealth of Australia, Executive Summary p. xv

<sup>46</sup> KPMG, *She’s Price(d)less, The Economics of the Gender Pay Gap*, Update report prepared for Diversity Council Australia and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, October 2016, p. 11; Diversity Council Australia, Submission 18.1. in *Gender segregation in the workplace and its impact on women’s economic equality* June 2017.

<sup>47</sup> 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>

## The barriers of gendered constructions of workplace learning

Research from 2021<sup>48</sup> demonstrated that social constructions of gender affect the conditions for workplace learning. This study found that:

- Male dominated workplaces are characterised by working conditions and a learning environment that enables workplace learning.
- Female dominated workplaces are characterised by poor working conditions and a learning environment that constrains workplace learning.

## The gendered reality that increased training does not benefit all women

Another study<sup>49</sup> investigated if workplace training delivered different returns between men and women across wages levels. The study demonstrates the compounding effect of lower remuneration in female dominated occupations constraining the payoff that workplace training may provide. It found that at the lower end of the wage spectrum training may reduce wage differentials – but it is the opposite at higher wage levels. In fact, despite investing more than men in training, women are not rewarded to the same extent.

## That drop out behaviour from apprenticeship programs is gendered

A study from Germany this year<sup>50</sup> investigated the drop out behaviour of apprentices in “gender atypical training occupations” – that is occupations that are highly segregated in their gender. The study used data from Germany’s National Educational Panel Study from 2010 to 2017 based on interviews and analysis of over 7000 individuals.

The study found that:

- Female apprentices in male-dominated occupations relate their decision to drop out more often to social conflicts with supervisors or colleagues than do their male peers (in the same industry).
- Male apprentices in female-dominated occupations drop out more often due to unfulfilled aspirations than their opposite-sex peers, with the suggestion that feminized industries are second-choice careers.

The tipping point for gender equality in industries is stubborn, cultural and linked to discrimination

A further and related study from 2015<sup>51</sup> in the United States sought to set up a statistical model to predict and prove the impact of “pollution theory”<sup>52</sup> on workplaces. Using statistics and collections from across the decades starting in the 1940s to 2010s, this study found that:

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<sup>48</sup> Sjöberg Forsberg, K., Parding, K., & Vänje, A. (2021). Conditions for workplace learning: a gender divide? *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 33(4), 302–314. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JWL-08-2020-0134>

<sup>49</sup> 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>

<sup>50</sup> Beckmann J. (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

<sup>51</sup> Goldin C. (2015) *A Pollution Theory of Discrimination: Male and Female Differences in Occupations and Earnings. Human Capital in History: The American Record*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press; pp. 313-348.

<sup>52</sup> For clarity the term “pollution theory” is coined from anthropology and used across academies extends from a belief that one needed to separate women from men during the menstrual cycle as it was thought that periods polluted men.

- When women move into jobs that are typically gendered for males, it signals to the public that the “job status” has been downgraded. This is often due to a technical shock, where the increase of female employees, ‘the event’, change the production function and value.
- Discrimination against women in male-dominated workplaces is influenced, to some extent, by males seeking to preserve their occupational status. Additionally, the research indicates that such discrimination is dependent on the presence of societal awareness regarding equity, including efforts to address discrimination. Essentially, women are cognisant of their own strengths and qualities, as are those responsible for hiring them. However, society and community members may not adequately appreciate or may be unaware of these attributes. Consequently, discriminatory behaviors are perpetuated.

Further, another 2015<sup>53</sup> study that used data from 1940 to 1990 US Census collections sought to understand the ‘tipping points’ of occupational segregation work, specifically, what the dynamics are in occupations when women enter labour forces. The study finds that there is a ‘tipping point’ where occupations and firms change in their segregation, but this ‘tipping point’ varies across industries and contexts. On average, occupations below the threshold (of the tipping point) experience above-average net male employment growth, while occupations above the threshold experience a smaller than average growth in net male employment.

Importantly for this submission, the study compares the trends in labour force with the US General Social Survey attitude data which measures male sexism – between 1940 and 1980. The results are suggestive of a link between sexism and where that ‘tipping point’ lies in occupations and regions.

The study finds:

The magnitude of the coefficient for the tipping point due to male attitudes remains largely unchanged – it is largely male prejudice towards women that matter....(and)...The location of the tipping is lower in regions where men hold more gender-prejudiced attitudes also suggesting a link between male gender attitudes and occupational segregation<sup>54</sup>.

## Gendered stereotypes, systemic discrimination and STEM related issues

The ongoing focus on STEM and the many related initiatives provide a contemporary example of bias, discrimination and gendered stereotypes. To examine the reality of equality in STEM sectors we do not need to look far. Many of the jobs in the Manufacturing and Energy sector are STEM based. To show that if we are going to change the story when it comes to gender equality in energy and manufacturing, we cannot just deal with the supply side of the sector’s workforce.

Australian Government Women in STEM Ambassador and Professor at UNSW, Lisa-Harvey Smith in her article discussing the Australian Government’s 2022 STEM Monitor highlights that although more women are studying STEM, ‘stubborn workplace barriers’ perpetuate the inequities and gender

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<sup>53</sup> Pan, Jessica (2015). Gender Segregation in Occupations: The Role of Tipping and Social Interactions. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 33(2), 365–408. DOI:10.1086/678518

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

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discrimination in this industry sector<sup>55</sup>. Smith argues for structural and cultural workplace changes to enhance diversity in STEM workplaces and industries, especially to improve opportunities to increase the female workforce in these gender- segregated industries<sup>56</sup>. The article shows that even though the number of women in STEM is increasing, “a whopping 24% between 2015 and 2020, compared with a 9% increase among men” the pay gap has not moved. “On average, women are paid 18% less than men across all STEM industries,” decreasing by 1%.

To illustrate the above points Smith states that:

Bias, discrimination, and sexual harassment are major factors that drive people from workplaces. Solving these issues receives too little funding and attention... Nothing short of strong, decisive, and coordinated action from governments and the business sector will shift this pattern.<sup>57</sup>

Also concerning is research by Alysson Light, Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of Sciences<sup>58</sup> who investigates the impact of women’s participation in STEM and how this factor influences perceptions of the work. Through a set of experiments the study shows that the industries and STEM disciplines that were believed to proportionately have more women employed were devalued and labelled in ways that described them as “less rigorous, less trustworthy and less deserving of federal research funding.” Light states that:

Our research suggests this may not be the case. Stereotypes about women and STEM persist, even in the face of evidence that women can and do productively participate in STEM fields. These stereotypes can lead people to simply devalue the fields in which women participate. In this way, even science and math can end up in the “pink collar” category of heavily female fields that are often devalued and underpaid<sup>59</sup>.

In summary, this section of WAVE’s submission has augmented claims in previous submissions with further evidence of issues including macro policy barriers, issues related to skills utilisation and gendered bias in labour market frameworks and structural gendered stereotypes that contribute to and underpin structural and systemic gender inequality in VET. This substantiates WAVE’s assertion expressed in our one recommendation, that **to support women to achieve Improved outcomes through Australia’s Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, the Australian Government MUST address systemic and structural inequity that exists within VET and meet the practical support needs of women.** The section also proffers the suggestion for consideration of utilising an ecological model to assist in remediating inequity. The final section now offers insight into how implementing a strategic approach that embeds a gender lens has the potential to enhance transformational change in and for VET.

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<sup>55</sup> Harvey-Smith, Lisa (2022). More women are studying STEM, but there are still stubborn workplace barriers’. *The Conversation*, September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022. <https://theconversation.com/more-women-are-studying-stem-but-there-are-still-stubborn-workplace-barriers-190839#:~:text=On%20average%2C%20women%20are%20paid,closed%20by%201%25%20last%20year.&text=Although%20we%20are%20doing%20a,going%20for%20vocational%20STEM%20education>

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> Alysson E. Light, Tessa M. Benson-Greenwald, Amanda B. Diekman, Gender representation cues labels of hard and soft sciences, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Volume 98, 2022, 104234, ISSN 0022-1031, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2021.104234>.

<sup>59</sup> <https://theconversation.com/more-women-in-a-stem-field-leads-people-to-label-it-as-a-soft-science-according-to-new-research-173724>

TRANSLATION OF THE WAVE  
RECOMMENDATION: HOW A STRATEGIC  
GENDER LENS AND APPROACH CAN RESULT IN  
TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE IN VET

## The Australian Government has a vision for gender equality.

The policy direction for the Australian Government is clear. Gender equality is a clear pathway to wellbeing, economic prosperity, and national productivity. To illustrate:

### **Working Future**

This White Paper puts forward a vision for a “a dynamic and inclusive labour market in which everyone has the opportunity for secure, fairly paid work and people, businesses and communities can be beneficiaries of change and thrive. We are working to create more opportunities for more people in more places”<sup>60</sup>. *Working Future* identifies the “ongoing challenge” of the gender pay gap stating that “The Government wants all workers to benefit from fair pay for the work that they do”<sup>61</sup> and also recognises that more needs to be done to address the barriers to gender equality.

### **Measuring What Matters**

This landmark report, speaks of the cross cutting dimensions of “Inclusion, equity and fairness... “ as key to ensuring “... that wellbeing outcomes are fairly shared amongst the population. The alternative – high inequality and entrenched disadvantage – affects social cohesion and may hinder economic growth by limiting access to education and perpetuating disadvantage within communities and across generations”<sup>62</sup>. The framework includes a number of indicators to demonstrate wellbeing from a gendered perspective including the gender pay gap, experience of family violence, homelessness, and unpaid care work.

### **Women’s Economic Equality Taskforce (WEET) Final 10 Year Plan**

The final report from the **WEET** identifies the challenge facing Australia:

Despite some progress over recent years, Australian women still face deep and broad-ranging gender inequality and continue to shoulder a disproportionate burden of unpaid labour across all spheres of life. From being caregivers, nurturers and educators to taking on professional roles and community leadership – women’s essential contributions are often undervalued and unpaid, perpetuating economic inequality <sup>63</sup>.

The report recognises the compounding forms of discrimination and disadvantage that face women in our employment and education systems:

Australian women are highly educated, yet the influence of gendered norms shape the educational pathways and career opportunities available to girls, boys, women and men. Meanwhile, women experience incomplete and disrupted learning across their lives as they juggle paid work, unpaid domestic labour, child-rearing and caring for others (e.g., ageing parents or grandparents)<sup>64</sup>.

Crucially, the report therefore recommends that:

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<sup>60</sup> Australian Government (2023) *Working Future. The Australian Government’s White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities*. September 2023 p. vii Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-09/p2023-447996-working-future.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. viii

<sup>62</sup> Australian Government (2023), *Measuring what matters. Australia’s first wellbeing framework*. July 2023, p.14. Commonwealth of Australia [https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-07/measuring-what-matters-statement020230721\\_0.pdf](https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-07/measuring-what-matters-statement020230721_0.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> Women’s Economic Equality Taskforce (WEET) (2023) *A 10-year plan to unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian economy 2023–2033*. P.7. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Commonwealth of Australia. <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/womens-economic-equality-taskforce-final-report.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p.12



Australian Government must provide women in Australia with lifelong, accessible, flexible and affordable education and skill building. They must also remove existing disincentives and inequities that perpetuate industry and occupational segregation and sustained pay and wealth gaps (Recommendation 4)<sup>65</sup>.

In addition to the forthcoming *National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality*<sup>66</sup> the Australian Government has also expanded its gender responsive budgeting approach now requiring all Australian Government departments to undertake gender analysis for all New Policy Proposals (NPPs) and Cabinet Submissions<sup>67</sup>.

## Skills Policy

### National Skills Agreement

The 25<sup>th</sup> of August *Skills and Workforce Ministerial Council Communique* following the meeting of Federal State and Territory Skills Ministers documents their agreement that the “SA will be the first to embed a model for shared national stewardship to provide national and State and Territory leadership on skills delivery shared priorities – including... gender equality”<sup>68</sup>.

### Jobs and Skills Australia – 2023 National Jobs and Skills Road Map

...more will need to be done across all pillars of the national skills system to better understand the barriers that lead to gendered outcomes across training and education pathways and in occupations, industries and workplaces – from gender norms, perceptions and culture, to access and participation issues<sup>69</sup>.

The recently released 2023 *Road Map* recognises the impact of gender inequality in the Australian labour market noting that “a heavily gender skewed workforce may constrain labour supply, increasing the likelihood of a skills shortage. Improving the gender balance of occupations may be a way to address skill shortages in areas of the labour market”<sup>70</sup>. The document also recognises the role of social cultural factors such as gender that can be barriers to meeting “future workforce needs and coordinated action should be taken to address these challenges”<sup>71</sup>.

## The solution – a structure to address inequity in our skills system

WAVE’s recommendation is that to support women to achieve VET based careers the solution needs to address inequity. Our solution establishes a foundation architecture within the Australian skills system that will collaborate with key stakeholders and partners, to identify and remove barriers to equitable skill development.

This structure will drive the work to address inequality in our skills system and support government to realise its policy goals on gender equality in the national VET system.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p.28

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/national-strategy-achieve-gender-equality>

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/gender-responsive-budgeting>

<sup>68</sup> DEWR. (2023). *Skills and Workforce Ministerial Council Communique-25 August 2023*. Retrieved from Department of Employment and Workplace Relations: <https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-commonwealth-state-relations/resources/skills-and-workforce-ministerial-council-communique-25-august-2023>

<sup>69</sup> Australian Government & Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) (2023), *Towards a National Jobs and skills roadmap. annual Jobs and skills Report 2023*, p.52. JSA/Australian Government. <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/reports/towards-a-national-jobs-and-skills-roadmap>

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p.51.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 144

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In this way VET system will be able to skill more parts of the economy for better outcomes for more Australian businesses and industry and increase national productivity.

The architecture comprises:

### **1. Establishment of a Strategic Advisory Committee on Equity and Equality in VET:**

This proposal recommends the formation of a Strategic Advisory Committee dedicated to Equity and Equality. This committee, comprising social and community organisations, lived experience of intersectional and gendered barriers to participation in VET, intersectional and gender experts as well as VET and industry experts, will provide essential guidance and strategic insights to ensure that government initiatives align effectively with industry objectives, fostering a collaborative approach towards achieving equity and equality in VET.

### **2. Development of a Long term Blueprint for Equity and Equality in VET:**

A new comprehensive, long-term Equity Blueprint will be crafted to address equity and equality within our national skills system using the Jobs and Skills Councils (JSCs) as the key enabler to change. This Equity Blueprint will align with the national *Working Future* framework. It will define the pivotal role of JSC in driving equity and equality and establish key performance indicators to gauge the impact of their efforts in delivering the *National Skills Agreement*. The Equity Blueprint's implementation will commence with a pilot program involving up to four Jobs and Skills Councils, including rigorous evaluation and impact assessment before broader implementation across various industries and councils.

### **3. Enhancement of Capacity and Capability in National Skills and Education Infrastructure:**

This proposal advocates for the development of capacity and capability within the VET system for equity and equality, with a primary focus on strengthening Jobs and Skills Councils, their partners, members, and stakeholders. This initiative aims to empower these entities to play a more impactful role in promoting equity and equality within the national skills landscape by undertaking a needs analysis across the JSCs and their stakeholders, and developing a workforce development plan to develop sustainable skills, knowledge and systems in this national skills infrastructure.

### **4. Addressing Barriers to Equity through National Reporting and Data System:**

To gain comprehensive insights into the state of equity within the VET system, this proposal recommends improvements in national reporting and data collection systems. By enhancing data accuracy and transparency, the nation will be better equipped to assess and understand the current level of equity in VET, allowing for informed decision-making and targeted interventions.

The structure comprises...

A strategic advisory committee to centre lived experience, focus use of resources and elevate equality in skills system

The ongoing high-level advisory committee on equity and equality situated to provide strategic advice should also be applied across the broader education and training remit of JSA, will draw upon the

## Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE)

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model as devised and used by the National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC)<sup>72</sup>, but updated to incorporate new evidence relating to gender equality and intersectionality.

This committee would work with JSA and key partners to develop and oversee the implementation of, the long-term blueprint that drives the gender and intersectional equity/equality work across the national skills system.

The committee could comprise up to 12 members, plus a chair. Membership would:

- Centre the lived experience of those experiencing disadvantage and multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage (up to 4 representatives including roles tied to First Nations experience and CARM women).
- Speak clearly and represent the lived experience of learners including young people, first nations and migrant community with a focus on ensuring representation for current students<sup>73</sup> (as per representation suggested above).
- Speak for the range of adult education and training – including accredited and non-accredited, community based, schools based and VET education in workplaces and in training settings (2 representatives).
- Employers and employer representatives from male dominated workforces and female dominated workforces (up to 2 representatives).
- Union representation with specific focus on officers who represent women's and migrant labour issues in union movements (up to 2 representatives).
- Community and social organisations who work with those who experience discrimination and disadvantage in place-based settings, with a focus on skill and employment pathways (up to 2 representatives).
- Academic expertise in learning and education with a particular focus on learners and communities experiencing disadvantage and inequity (up to 1 representative).

### A new Equity Blueprint that tasks Jobs and Skills Councils (JSCs) to enact a strong strategic foundation for national stakeholders to address inequity in our skill system

To establish a truly equitable VET system in Australia, a strategic and long-term plan is imperative. This proposal advocates for the development of a comprehensive 10-year Equity Blueprint that delineates agreed-upon strategies, goals, and actions necessary to foster equity in the skills development and education system. This visionary plan aims to be spearheaded by the Jobs and Skills Councils (JSCs) in collaboration with Jobs and Skills Australia, overseen by a proposed strategic advisory committee.

Recognizing the pivotal role of JSCs within the national skills system, this proposal underscores their unique position in catalysing change and reform. Engaged in critical activities such as setting training standards, forecasting skill needs, and ensuring alignment with employer requirements, JSCs serve as transformative agents. With their four main functions—workforce planning, training program development, implementation promotion and monitoring, and industry oversight—JSCs are strategically positioned to champion industry-specific equity initiatives and contribute to the evolution of equitable skills development policies.

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<sup>72</sup> National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC) (2011), *Equity Blueprint 2011 – 2016: Creating futures: Achieving potential through VET*. 14 February 2011. NVEAC <http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/167334>

<sup>73</sup> Importantly these students should ideally not be taken from the National VET Awards system at state or federal level as these individuals represent the exceptional in the VET system rather than the normal experience.

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The proposal contends that the current system faces challenges in terms of equity and asserts the need for structural evolution. The envisioned 10-year blueprint aims to both rectify this disparity and position JSCs at the forefront of fostering equity. This initiative seeks to create a blueprint that not only addresses existing inequities but is also responsive to evolving societal needs and economic changes. By endorsing this proposal, the Federal Government would be instrumental in investing in a transformative vision for an equitable skills and education system that yields positive outcomes for both the economy and society at large.

The blueprint would need to be specifically resources and would broadly comprise:

- **Agreed Long-Term Equity Vision:** A defined a long-term vision for equity in skills development and education for the JSCs, that is set in the economic and productivity context of the JSCs as well as the evolving needs of society
- **Clear Goals:** Cross JSC goals that explicitly aim to reduce disparities, promote inclusivity, and ensure equal access to educational and skill development opportunities across the national skills system.
- **Strategies:** Broad initiatives that can be then tailored by each JSC for their own industries, that address intersecting barriers and challenges faced by marginalized or underrepresented groups developing their skills and the workforce
- **Indicators and Measurement:** A set of agreed high level indicators and metrics focused on assessing the impact of the work of JSCs and their stakeholders on equity, allowing for ongoing evaluation and adjustments to ensure progress towards inclusive educational outcomes.
- **Stakeholder Inclusivity:** Collaborative efforts involving key stakeholders, including government entities, educational institutions, industry partners, and community organisations, to ensure diverse perspectives and needs are considered in policy development.
- **Monitoring Evaluation and Impact:** Agreed mechanisms for continuous monitoring and evaluation to track the effectiveness of equity measures, enabling the JSCs their stakeholders and the broader system, to make informed decisions and learn from the strategies as needed.
- It is only by bringing together all components that we have in place the right foundations for sustainable change.

It is only by bringing together all components that we have in place the right foundations for sustainable change.

## SUMMARY

WAVE commends the Australian Government and its associated Departments for the activities and consultations it is undertaking to embed gender equality in all its operations, and in this case the conglomerate that comprises the Australian vocational education and training system. We remain committed to support the Government in these endeavours.

While noting the Discussion Paper's designation of three main categories to shape the particular consultation (design of initiatives, use of tailored support, inclusive VET environments and workplaces), WAVE's submission has instead taken holistic approach. For women "to achieve higher-paying careers via VET pathways" a number of complex interrelated factors must be addressed; factors that result in systemic and structural inequities including those embedded within the VET system as a whole. This is especially important given the current and future rapid changes in the nature of work, emergent industries and careers and shifting labour market dynamics. Old familiar structures and approaches have neither the efficacy nor capacity to 'support women to achieve higher-paying careers' via existing VET pathways.

In this submission, WAVE has reinforced previous advice provided to the Australian Government over the last year, that is, to improve the outcome for women in Australia's vocational education and training sector so they can achieve careers that are based on VET skills development, Government Policy *must* take a strategic and systemic approach with attention to medium and long term gender sensitive outcomes not jeopardised by focus on short term initiatives to 'fix' the problem/s.

This submission highlights the persistent evidence of inequity, presenting further evidence across a range of relevant and inter-related factors while also offering a practical solution to illustrate how the recommendation can be implemented.

Our submission rests on the evidence and argument provided to proffer one recommendation alone, viz:

WAVE recommends that to support women to achieve Improved outcomes through Australia's Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, the Australian Government *MUST* address systemic and structural inequity that exists within VET and meet the practical support needs of women.

To do this the Government, through its policy direction, must look to *and* apply the body of practice and evidence found in gender equality and intersectionality work and develop an overarching strategy for equity in VET. A strategy that addresses *all* the drivers of inequity and supports a program of work that meets the practical needs of all students, most especially women.

## WAVE GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<b>When we say...</b>	<b>What we mean is...</b>
<b>Vocational and Adult Education</b>	<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><i>What we don't mean is:</i> We do not include in our definition university degrees or vocational pathways delivered by training providers in locations outside of Australia.</p>
<b>The national vocational education &amp; training system</b>	<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..." <a href="https://www.australianindustrystandards.org.au/national-vet-system/">https://www.australianindustrystandards.org.au/national-vet-system/</a></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". <a href="https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2022/child-care-education-and-training/vocational-education-and-training">https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2022/child-care-education-and-training/vocational-education-and-training</a></p>
<b>Technical Vocational Education &amp; Training (TVET, VET)</b>	<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)<sup>4</sup>.</p>
<b>Gender Equity and Gender Equality</b>	<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,</p>

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	<p>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</p> <p>WAVE uses this term in the full recognition that in the past it has been used to perpetuate stereotypes.</p>
<b>Gender</b>	<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. 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.</p>
<b>Empowerment of women</b>	<p>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.</p> <p>Drawn from the European Institute for Gender Equality.</p>
<b>Intersectionality</b>	<p>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</p>

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	Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health <i>Intersectionality Matters: A guide to engaging immigrant and refugee communities in Australia.</i> 2017
<b>Gender transformative</b>	<p>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.”</p> <p>Drawn from Our Watch <i>A guide to help you work out how gender transformative your initiative is</i> <a href="https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/a-guide-to-help-you-work-out-how-gender-transformative-your-initiative-is">https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/a-guide-to-help-you-work-out-how-gender-transformative-your-initiative-is</a></p>
<b>Gender Specific</b>	<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> <a href="https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/a-guide-to-help-you-work-out-how-gender-transformative-your-initiative-is">https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/a-guide-to-help-you-work-out-how-gender-transformative-your-initiative-is</a></p>
<b>Gender sensitive</b>	<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> <a href="https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/a-guide-to-help-you-work-out-how-gender-transformative-your-initiative-is">https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/a-guide-to-help-you-work-out-how-gender-transformative-your-initiative-is</a></p>
<b>Gender insensitive</b>	<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> <a href="https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/a-guide-to-help-you-work-out-how-gender-transformative-your-initiative-is">https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/a-guide-to-help-you-work-out-how-gender-transformative-your-initiative-is</a></p>
<b>Traineeship</b>	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.
<b>Apprenticeship</b>	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.
<b>Lifelong learning</b>	Lifelong learning is rooted in the integration of learning and living, covering lifelong (cradle to grave) and life-wide learning for people of all ages, delivered and undertaken through a variety of modalities and meeting a wide range of learning needs and demands. ... Education systems which promote lifelong learning adopt a holistic and sector-wide approach involving all sub- sectors and levels to ensure the provision of learning opportunities for all individuals.



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	<p>UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) (n/d) <i>UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning Technical Note Lifelong Learning</i></p> <p><a href="https://uil.unesco.org/fileadmin/keydocuments/LifelongLearning/en/UNESCOTechNotesLLL.pdf">https://uil.unesco.org/fileadmin/keydocuments/LifelongLearning/en/UNESCOTechNotesLLL.pdf</a></p>
<b>Pathways</b>	<p>'Pathways' is a metaphor used to describe the range of different routes that learners follow as they move into, through and out of an education and training system.</p> <p><i>Australian Government (2018) Education Learning &amp; Development Module. DFAT Diplomatic Academy.</i> <a href="https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/foundation-education-pathways.pdf">https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/foundation-education-pathways.pdf</a></p> <p>The individual patterning of education-related transitions throughout the life course (Gorard et al., 1998, 2001; Pallas, 2003)</p> <p><i>Educational pathway: Work and Family Researchers Network (WFRN)</i> <a href="https://wfrn.org/glossary/educational-pathway-definition-of/">https://wfrn.org/glossary/educational-pathway-definition-of/</a></p>