

# Support for Equitable Vocational and Adult Education: Addressing Inequity in our skills system

A pre-budget submission from Women in Adult and Vocational Education



## The Issue

The Australian skills landscape is marred by deep-rooted inequities that persistently disadvantage women. Despite decades of progress, gender disparities in Vocational Education and Training (VET) continue to undermine our nation's quest for true equality. It's time to confront this issue head-on and pave the way for a fairer, more inclusive future.

## The Problem & Evidence - A systemic challenge not a women's problem

### 1 Unequal Participation

- Gender disparity is prevalent across all facets of VET, from the type of training undertaken to the industries pursued and qualifications achieved.
- 82% of architecture and building students are men, 73% of all students studying for a non-school qualification in health were women
- 297,00 people "aged 15-74 years were employed as apprentices or trainees (including school-based apprentices or trainees) 75% were male

### 2 Gendered Experience

- The learning and workplace experience for those people whose gender is the minority of a sector/industry perpetuates inequality.
- Women often exit VET programs due to personal reasons, while men typically discontinue training upon skill attainment or job acquisition.
- The broader evidence of women in male dominated trades constantly tells us of the "hostile environment" and prevailing culture that is a significant barrier to retention
- Gendered workplace violence is a major reason why women leave these male dominated sectors along with "targeting and victimising women who raise complaints about these incidents"
- There is inequity in the resourcing of learning - Feminised learning pathways are funded at lower levels than male dominated learning pathways

### 3 Divergent Outcomes

- Men predominantly secure higher-paying roles, while women are relegated to lower-paying, precarious positions, perpetuating the gender pay gap and reinforcing workforce segregation.
- Women with qualifications "below bachelor level (AQF 3 4 and 5 to 6) are much more likely to work part time than men (32.3% women to 11.2% men) and are much more likely to not be in the labour force (25.6% women to 17.3% men)
- Research into male participation into broader feminised workforces where the discriminating effect of bias and stereotypes result in discrimination of men in feminised roles
- There is a pay gap in Australia:
  - ABS Jan 2024 - 12%
  - WGEA Employer Census Data (Current) - 21.7%

# A vision for sustainable policy change: VET & Skills Commitment to Gender Equality

## The Authorising Environment

The Australian Government recognizes gender equality as pivotal to national prosperity and well-being. "Working Future" White Paper, and the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce underscore the imperative of dismantling barriers to women's economic empowerment. The forthcoming Gender Equality Strategy will emphasise the need to drive systemic and structural change, and Treasury's own commitment to Gender Equitable Budgeting underscores the need for changed VET policy and practice

## Skills Policy Governance

- The National Skills Agreement as per the 25.8/23 Communique agreed on shared priority for gender equality.
- Jobs and Skills Australia Roadmap recognises the impact of gender inequality in the Australian labour market
- The National VET Regulator is moving to lift RTO practice and improvements in the learning environment eg harassment

## The Strategy and its Components

### **Strategic Advisory Committee on Equity and Equality in VET:**

This committee will leverage diverse expertise to provide strategic guidance and ensure alignment with industry objectives.

### **Long-Term Blueprint for Equity and Equality:**

A visionary plan, developed and driven by Jobs and Skills Councils, will set clear goals, strategies, and indicators to drive equitable outcomes. JSCs will require support and capability building

### **Enhancement of Capacity and Capability:**

Strengthening the skills and education infrastructure will empower stakeholders to champion equity initiatives effectively.

### **Addressing Barriers through National Reporting and Data Systems:**

Improvements in data collection and reporting will facilitate evidence-based decision-making and targeted interventions.

# Budget Ask: \$24.85 million over five years



## Represents:

- 0.05% of the VET Budget in one year
- \$2.45 per woman to start to support better outcomes from our VET system

Recognizing the insights from the **Women's Economic Equality Taskforce (WEET)**, we acknowledge the pivotal role of gender-inclusive skills and educational pathways in maximizing women's contribution to the Australian economy.

With a comprehensive 10-year plan aimed at unleashing women's full capacity, WEET estimates a staggering return of \$128 billion.

By investing in reforms to the skills and education sector, we anticipate a return (social value) of at least 10% of WEET's projected value, amounting to \$12.8 billion over the next decade.

## Indicative Milestones and Timeline

### National Equity Advisory Committee and secretariat

- Establishment phase - to Nov 2024
- Commencement and ongoing - from April 2025

### Establish Equity Blueprint

- Needs analysis and consultation with JSC - From April 2024
- Drafting and refining/Identify Pilot - From Nov 2024
- Pilot site with evaluation and shared reporting - from April 2025

### Capacity and Capability Building

- Needs analysis across JSC and key VET policy structures - From April 2024
- Capacity development plan across JSC infrastructure - April to Nov 2024
- Design and development of resources and activity - Nov 24 - April 2025
- Ongoing implementation and monitoring - April 2025 onwards

### Research and Evidence

- Identify goals with NCVET, JSA and JSCs with reference to National Agreement; undertake analysis of current reporting/data collection - from Nov 2024
- Draft agree scope of work on AVETMISS standards with jurisdictions; identify work to strengthen JSA Skills Atlas - April 2025
- Finalise scope of work to implement - Nov 2025

## Implementation and Accountability: A Collaborative Endeavor

The success of this blueprint hinges on collaborative efforts between government, industry, academia, and community stakeholders. Through pilot programs, capacity building, and enhanced data systems, we aim to catalyze tangible progress towards gender equity in VET.



## WOMEN IN ADULT & VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

This is a summary of the key points and actions as put by WAVE in its Pre-budget submission for the Australian Governments 2024 Budget. The full submission can be found on the website [wave.org.au/news](https://wave.org.au/news)

### Sources quoted:

- NCVET Total VET Student Outcomes 2016-2021, Gender x Main Reason Discontinued Training via VOCSTATS
- 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.  
<https://researchrepository.rmit.edu.au/esploro/outputs/report/Women-in-ConstructionExploring-the-Barriers-and-Supportive-Enablers-of-Wellbeing-in-the-Workplace/9921970128201341>
- ABS, Education and Work, Australia (May 2022)  
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/educationand-work-australia/latest-release>
- Williams, C. L., 1992. The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the "Female" Professions. *Social Problems*, 39(3), pp. 253-267.
- National Skills Commission 2021, VET Average Price Benchmarks, Findings from the National VET Average Price
- Benchmarks Database, Student Fees and Subsidies x Proportion of Women in Enrolled in VET Commencements for same year (NCVER)WAVE submission to the Terms of Reference for the Federal Government's Employment White Paper )

### On Social Value Return evidence and practice includes:

- "SROI Value Map" Social Value International:<https://www.socialvalueint.org/sroi-value-map>
- "Social Impact Measurement" Australian Social Value Bank <https://asvb.com.au/social-impact-value/social-impact-measurement/>
- Wei, H. (2014). Measuring Economic Returns to Post-school Education in Australia: Evidence from the 1981-2011 Australian Censuses. Economic Analysis and Reporting Section, Australia Bureau of Statistics. [https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au//images/stories/PDF/Income\\_Mobility\\_ABS.pdf](https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au//images/stories/PDF/Income_Mobility_ABS.pdf).