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Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE)

SUBMISSION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A BLUEPRINT FOR AUSTRALIA'S VET WORKFORCE



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Response to Discussion Paper on VET Workforce Blueprint

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

If the goals of the VET Workforce Blueprint are to be realized then the final strategy must address the negative impacts of gender inequality that are prevalent across the sector.

As our submission points out, gender inequality is antithetical to any future VET Workforce Blueprint growing the VET workforce. Unless the very real impact of gender inequality is addressed then the capacity of a Blueprint to change the perceptions of the sector, attract, and retain staff and also, respond to the growing challenges and opportunities of digital capability, rapidly changing labour markets and work practices that shape pedagogies and change teaching practices along with diversification of students will not occur.

Furthermore, without addressing the conditions of inequity the Blueprint will not be able to:

- Promote entry pathways to and ongoing opportunities within the VET workforce that attract a broad range of applicants.
- Sustain the strong partnerships required to drive flexible pathways and appointments that enable education and training for all.
- Promote the image of the workforce as an equitable and diverse working environment.
- Facilitate and support what will be a growing cross-sectoral workforce between VET, schools (VET in school), community-based learning (ACE) & universities, in light of current reform processes and the need for lifelong learning pathways and provision in an holistic Australian education and training system.
- Facilitate continuing professional development and progression for everyone across the sector.
- Ensure you have a good understanding and plan for a workforce that lasts by improving how you collect and report data. This way, you can better show the diverse backgrounds of the sector using detailed gender information and data divided by gender for all jobs related to VET delivery.

Our Recommendations to the Australian Government are that:

1. To support women to achieve Improved outcomes through Australia's Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, the Australian Government **MUST** address systemic and structural inequity that exists within VET and meet the practical support needs along with the aspirations and potential of women. This includes those that are prevalent through the VET workforce and its industry structures.
2. A VET Workforce Blueprint is best built on utilising an holistic definition of 'workforce'; an understanding of the complete workforce – one that is inclusive of educators/assessors and trainers as well as the wide and growing range of other roles across the VET Ecosystem within and outside of Registered Training Organisations as well as TAFE.
3. For the VET Workforce Blueprint to provide itself with a comprehensive foundational knowledge of the existing VET workforce to inform and develop strategies that will create a long-term sustainable VET workforce the evidence and data analysis (as per that to be undertaken by Jobs and Skills Australia) must at least analysed with a gender lens with intersectional barriers in mind.
4. A VET Workforce Blueprint should align to the expectations and drivers emerging from broader policy evolution currently occurring across Australia, to advance gender equality,

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women's economic empowerment and improving wellbeing in the workplace particularly preventing workplace gendered violence.

5. Future workforce plans and development strategies for the Australian VET sector must be based on gender equal and gender mainstreaming methodologies to ensure that the needs of the VET sector, and through their work, all Australian industries, are met, and that it is done in a way that is in keeping with community expectations and government policy.
6. The VET Workforce Blueprint recognises that a gender equal VET workforce is vital for an equitable VET and Skills system.
7. When developing the VET Workforce Blueprint the evidence of gender inequality and its impact on creating a sector that will attract and retain the talent and workers needed is included and strategies to address the evidence of gender inequality in the sector drawn up.
8. The VET Workforce Blueprint should contain a Gender Equality Action Plan to address the drivers of gender inequality that characterize the workforce.

Further WAVE recommends specific changes to VET policy and practice to remove barriers to women being employed in the VET sector including as educators and assessors.

9. To address the inequity inherent in training package policy and RTO standards for industry and education currency that:
 - a. The next policy on Training Package developed by DEWR recognise both the barriers that are in place for women to developing industry currency currently encoded by regulation and training package frameworks along with the inequities inherent in existing training packages.
 - b. That the RTO Standards and training package policy change so that vocational and industry currency can reflect partnership approaches. Current policy situates education and industry currency in one person/a worker which, significantly eliminates those potential workers that (for instance) need to take time out of the workforce due to care responsibilities.
 - c. That the national and state regulators and training package developers have their capacity and capability developed to ensure that the implementation of these revised Training Package processes is done in the spirit of equity – gender equality, disability and social inclusion.
10. To increase the diversity of potential workers in VET, recognise that women's capacity to build their skills to be educators, trainers and assessors (and other emergent occupations) requires changes to address economic barriers in place (the higher opportunity cost) for women to participate in skill opportunities.

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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.

CONTEXT FOR THIS SUBMISSION – VET IS INEQUITABLE AND THE WORKFORCE IS INEQUITABLE

WAVE is on record across a range of submissions detailing the evidence and reality that Australia's Vocational Education and Training sector contributes to and enables inequitable outcomes.

Most recently, we provided a detailed submission to the Department of Education and Workplace Relations consultation on *Supporting Women to achieve VET Based Careers*. That submission put forward a range of data and evidence that underpinned our **central recommendation** which WAVE also adds to this review. That 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 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's submission on *Supporting Women to achieve VET Based Careers* 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 on the reality of and how to address gender inequity in Australian VET policy.
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.

To that end, this submission will similarly highlight the structural inequity within the VET policy and workforce itself, that like the services it delivers to the Australian public and community reinforces inequitable practices and behaviors which limit the sectors capacity to grow and diversify its workforce

We commend the intent inherent in the focal points identified as central to a forward looking and inclusive VET Workforce Blueprint. While we recognize that the VET Workforce Blueprint scope asked for feedback in relation to:

- **Growing and diversifying the workforce** – projecting workforce supply and demand, including regional distribution, the shortage of specialist roles and encouraging workforce diversity.

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- **Attraction** – how to attract a high-quality VET workforce, including industry-experienced professionals, dual professionals and adult educators, as well as examining the barriers in place for entry to the VET workforce, and avenues to promote becoming a VET practitioner.
- **Retention** – identifying effective retention strategies, including examining the barriers to retention.
- **Capability and career development** – mapping career pathways and strategies to support career development and career progression, including support for building capability for a high-quality VET workforce, noting the diverse range of registered training organisations (RTOs) in the sector as well as the dynamic nature of employment in the VET workforce and the range of potential entry and exit points.
- **Succession planning** – support for the sector in the context of an ageing workforce, including methods to provide, and improve, continued opportunities for experienced industry professionals to enter and move between the VET workforce as a second or co-career, and potential changes in labour market needs.

We know, through our research and advocacy work, that to answer these questions - questions about workforce management and workforce capability and capacity, it is necessary to understand and address the inequality present in the current environment and apply a gender lens to any workforce blueprint being developed.

To that end we have outlined a number of recommendations, which if implemented, will enable the VET Workforce Blueprint to address this inequality and achieve the outcomes it is seeking for all of the VET Workforce.

A note on the definition of the VET Workforce

WAVE notes that the underlying definition of the VET workforce appears to be limited to trainers, educators and assessors. Further it is clear that the need to address shortages in VET trainers and assessors is part of the drive behind this consultation. Noting this, WAVE would also highlight that the VET sector comprises a range of roles and responsibilities that we recommend are considered as part of any envisaged blueprint. These include but are not limited to CEOs and Leaders of RTOs, Finance Managers and Administrators, Compliance Officers and Supervisors, those that work in industry planning and development (eg Jobs and Skills Councils) and those that work in policy design, development and implementation (such as in governments). These individuals and the organisations that employ them comprise the VET ecosystem and by not including the needs of these important workers in any blueprint, the consultation risks:

- The solutions for current workforce challenged being positioned as being “done” to educators/assessors rather than supporting the environment that they work in through an understanding of the systemic and structural challenges that they face.
- Not creating realistic career pathways and promotion opportunities for educators/trainers that are already in place.
- Possibly mischaracterizing and understanding the impact and breadth of the workforce and the range of existing and emergent professional and other roles.

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- Not being able to engage with the full range of opportunities and solutions that are available to grow the workforce and improve data collection.

WAVE appreciates that Jobs and Skills Australia will shortly be releasing a VET workforce study on this matter and we look forward to understanding and seeing how this will impact any workforce blueprint for VET.

Recommendation:

A VET workforce blueprint is best built on an understanding of the complete workforce – one that is inclusive of educators/assessors and trainers as well as the range of other roles across the VET ecosystem within and outside of Registered Training Organisations.

A note on data

It is the position of WAVE that all of VET planning must be made on the firm foundation of disaggregated data that is able to reflect the diversity of our community and economy, and the intersecting barriers faced by current and potential students.

This is currently not the case. While steps have been made to include sex-disaggregated data in apprenticeships, traineeships and student participation data through collections such as VOCSTATS and the ABS, this is not consistently done. Neither are current and best practice approaches that reflect compounding barriers faced by people with a disability, first nations people, new arrivals, people from culturally & linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who are living and working in regional or rural Australia, people living in poverty, and those who are a self-identified gender.

We also note that while some elements of workforce planning are starting to recognise the experience of workers has a sex based characteristics (eg Jobs and Skills Australia Labour Market Insights on industries recognised % of female participation in the workforce) it is not done consistently enough for any meaningful gender responsive planning or even budgeting for skills investment to be undertaken. (e.g. Labour Market Dashboards and forecasts).

Recommendation

For the VET Workforce Blueprint to provide itself with a comprehensive foundational knowledge of the existing VET workforce to inform and develop strategies that will create a long term sustainable VET workforce the evidence and data analysis (as per that to be undertaken by Jobs and Skills Australia) needs to be at least analysed with a gender lens and as much as possible with intersectional barriers in mind.

Policy alignment

WAVE appreciates how important – even central – supporting the development of the Australian VET workforce is. In our view, it is a “key stone” industry to ensuring that the challenges faced by other workforces across Australia are addressed.

To further highlight this, WAVE notes and highlights the following policy reforms and strategic initiatives which we believe this review needs to align with and also, be in keeping with when final recommendations are determined:

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1. **Universities Accord: Ensuring a high quality student experience** – the recommendations made around this element which is core to the outcomes of the *Universities Accord* will impact the VET workforce. With the Accord’s clear intention to bring more closely together the VET and Higher Education sectors the recommendations that seek to improve teaching and learning practice for students will need to be encompassed by any VET Workforce Blueprint. This is particularly the case when it comes to the drive to improve teaching modalities, the evidence base for pedagogical/andragogical practice and the metrics that will be used to drive outcomes.
2. **Australian Government: Working for Women (A Strategy for Gender Equality)**: This strategy – a first for Australia – focuses efforts of government over the next decade to see an “..an Australia where people are safe, treated with respect, have choices, and have access to resources and equal outcomes no matter their gender.”¹ The role that skills and education has to play in achieving is throughout the strategy – key to this, is our education and training system providing equitable access to career and learning pathways. The strategy calls out a number of initiatives to achieve this and WAVE notes that core to these goals being achieved is a workforce in the VET sector that is itself equitable and able to deliver equitable services.
3. **Respect@Work/Positive Duty**: Throughout a range of policies and strategies from the Australian Government, the need to provide safe and well workplaces – particularly those that are free from workplace gendered violence – is key. The Accord Report on Universities centers the need for student wellbeing and calls out the caustic and devastating impact of poor workplace practices and learning environments that do not centre safety and wellbeing. It recognises that a lack of safety, and one that does not manage well the strategies to prevent workplace gendered violence including sexual harassment is detrimental to the achievement of our nation’s goals for skills development. WAVE holds that core to this is the capacity of education and skills workforces to create these environments - for students and their staff.
4. **National Skills Agreement**: Signed in January 2024, the National Skills Agreement sets gender equality as a priority. *Working for Women* recognises the role of this agreement and the role and impact that the priority is already having on government policy including, the new Apprenticeship service delivery model and the Australian Skills Guarantee which will drive equity through procurement. WAVE also notes that the Australian Government’s own new advisory infrastructure comprising Jobs and Skills Australia and Jobs and Skills Council are turning their mind on their role to address gender inequality. Through all of this we would advise the Australian Government that without an equitable VET workforce these policy reforms will have limited success because workers who are delivering the services will be exposed to the same barriers in their work, that these reforms are seeking to change.

Recommendation

A VET workforce blueprint should align to the expectations and drivers emerging from broader policy evolution currently occurring across Australia (and internationally) to advance gender equality,

¹ Australian Government *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality* 2024 p 4.

women's economic empowerment and improving wellbeing in the workplace particularly preventing workplace gendered violence.

THE BENEFITS OF APPLYING A GENDER LENS TO THE VET WORKFORCE BLUEPRINT

WAVE advocates that future workforce plans and development strategies for the VET sector are based on gender equal and gender mainstreaming methodologies. These methodologies ask planners and developers of the VET (and indeed any workforce) to integrate gender equal principles at every stage of policy making, project planning, implementation and evaluation. This approach ensures that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities. In the context of workforce shortages and recruitment challenges, this approach can be particularly effective for a range of reasons, each of which are key to this review:

- **Expands the Talent Pool:** By promoting gender equality and actively working to remove barriers for women entering various sectors, the VET sector can significantly expand the number of potential workers that they can recruit from. This is particularly important in industries – such as the VET sector – that are experiencing workforce shortages, as it opens up recruitment to groups that are alienated or because of barriers, are not able to even engage in the sector's recruitment opportunities. Gender equity enables VET to expand the number of potential applicants who can be teachers/trainers and support staff.
- **Enhances Innovation and Creativity:** Gender-diverse teams have been shown to be more innovative and creative. By employing a workforce that is diverse in terms of gender, VET can foster different perspectives, ideas, and solutions, which is crucial for problem-solving and innovation. The sector and VET policy often speaks to the need to be more adaptable and responsive. This is only possible when diverse workforces are in place and the lived experience of the community is involved in the work of industry. Gender diverse teams can help VET to address the complex recruitment challenges and workforce planning issues it currently faces.
- **Improves Retention Rates:** Gender equal workplaces tend to have higher job satisfaction and lower turnover rates. By implementing policies that support work-life balance, parental leave, and career progression for all genders, VET can improve employee retention. This directly addresses workforce shortages by reducing the need for constant recruitment to replace staff who leave.
- **Boosts the Reputation and Attractiveness of Employers/Business:** Companies that are known for their commitment to gender equality and diversity are more attractive to job seekers. A reputation for gender-inclusive policies and practices can enhance VET's image as a desirable industry to work in, attracting a wider range of applicants and helping to alleviate recruitment challenges.
- **Addresses Structural Barriers:** Gender mainstreaming in workforce planning helps identify and dismantle structural barriers to employment and career advancement faced by women and other marginalized genders. By addressing these issues, VET can ensure that all

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employees have equal opportunities to contribute to and benefit from economic growth, which in turn can mitigate workforce shortages by fully utilizing the available talent.

- **Improves Economic Participation:** Gender mainstreaming strategies contribute to a more equitable distribution of paid and unpaid work between genders. For the VET sector, this can lead to an increase in women's participation in the industry, particularly in those parts of the sector where they have been historically underrepresented. By encouraging more balanced participation, VET can tap into new labor markets to address workforce shortages.
- **Fosters a Supportive Work Environment:** Workplaces that actively address gender equality are more likely to be supportive and inclusive. For VET, positive work environment can enhance employee engagement and motivation, which is critical for attracting and retaining talent, especially in competitive job markets.

By focusing on gender equality and mainstreaming, the VET sector operates in a way that is in line with Australian Government VET policy, the National Skills Agreement, the significant reforms underway for gender equitable workforces, and also, expectations of our community and society. This holistic perspective ensures that workforce planning and development are more responsive, inclusive, and effective in meeting the needs of a diverse society.

Recommendation

Future workforce plans and development strategies for the Australian VET sector must be based on gender equal and gender mainstreaming methodologies to ensure that the needs of the VET sector, and all Australian industry are met, and that it is done in a way that is in keeping with community expectations and government policy.

The impact of gender stereotypes on women's participation in on job learning and training

An inequitable VET sector not only limits growth of the VET workforce, it also enables and contributes to inequitable outcomes for women and the systems and structures of inequality are not addressed. This is particularly the case in the perpetration of gendered constructions of workplace learning, dropout rates/completions and discrimination that impacts women's learning pathways.

Recommendation

That a future VET Workforce Blueprint recognise that a gender equal VET workforce is vital for an equitable VET and skills system.

THE BARRIERS OF GENDERED CONSTRUCTIONS OF WORKPLACE LEARNING

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.

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- If there is a partner in the household – it has a positive and significant effect on training².

Research from 2021³ 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 study⁴ 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 in 2023⁵ 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

²Massing, 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>

³ Sjöberg Forssberg, 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>

⁴ 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>

⁵ 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

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A further and related study from 2015⁶ in the United States sought to set up a statistical model to predict and prove the impact of “pollution theory”⁷ on workplaces. Using statistics and collections from across the decades starting in the 1940s to 2010s, this study found that:

- 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 2015⁸ 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 segregation⁹

GENDERED STEREOTYPES, SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION AND STEM RELATED ISSUES

It is worth noting that many jobs within VET are classified as technical or professional roles, and as we have seen, these roles are often characterised by not employing women.

The ongoing focus on technical and science related skills (STEM) which is a core part of the skills that the VET system develops across workforces, 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

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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

⁹ Ibid

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far. To show that if we are going to change the story when it comes to gender equality in jobs that utilise STEM skills, 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 discrimination in this industry sector¹⁰. 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 industries¹¹. 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.*¹²

Also concerning is research by Alysson Light, Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of Sciences¹³ 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*¹⁴.

¹⁰ Harvey-Smith, Lisa (2022). More women are studying STEM, but there are still stubborn workplace barriers'. *The Conversation*, September 21st, 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>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid

¹³ 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>.

¹⁴ <https://theconversation.com/more-women-in-a-stem-field-leads-people-to-label-it-as-a-soft-science-according-to-new-research-173724>

THE INDICATORS OF INEQUITY IN AUSTRALIAN VET AND EDUCATION SECTOR

To help it in its work, range of indicators that globally are used to demonstrate the equity and equality that is or, is not prevalent, in industry.

Typically, indicators include:

- **Gender Pay Gap:** This measures the difference in average earnings between women and men. It's often expressed as a percentage of men's earnings and highlights inequalities in pay for the same or similar work.
- **Occupational Segregation:** This involves analyzing the distribution of genders across different industries and occupations. A high level of segregation may indicate gender stereotypes and discrimination in certain fields.
- **Leadership and Management Positions:** The representation of women in leadership roles, including managerial positions and seats on corporate boards, serves as an indicator of gender inequality. Lower percentages of women in these roles reflect barriers to female advancement.
- **Access to Education and Training:** Educational attainment and access to vocational training are crucial for equipping individuals with the skills needed for employment. Disparities in education levels between genders can affect employment opportunities and earning potential.
- **Work-Life Balance Policies:** The availability and utilization of policies that allow for a balance between work and personal life, such as parental leave and flexible working arrangements, can impact gender equality in the workforce. Inequities in the uptake of these policies can indicate gender norms and expectations affecting career progression.
- **Health and Safety:** particularly around the prevalence and perpetration of workplace gendered violence including sexual harassment

These indicators, among others, are used by various organizations, such as the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA), the Victorian Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector and internationally, the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Labour Organization. They are regularly used to monitor and report on gender inequality and serve as benchmarks to evaluate progress towards gender equality in workforces around the world.

Recommendation

That when developing the VET Workforce Blueprint the evidence of gender inequality and its impact on creating a sector that will attract and retain the talent and workers needed, is included and strategies to address the evidence of gender inequality in the sector drawn up.

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WAVE would now like to highlight the evidence of inequality against a few of these indicators. The pay gap, composition, leadership, segregation and safety (workplace gendered violence).

This data shows that over all the education and training sector in itself is inequitable. While there are some exceptions overall there is persistent evidence of pay gaps, leadership inequity, and occupational segregation.

Gender Pay Gap

The education and training sector has a pay gap. In comparison to other sectors, it is not as large however, the significance of the gap is dependent upon a number of factors such as rurality, the type of education and training institution and, as we will see, the extent of horizontal and vertical composition of the VET sectors.

Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) tells us that for the education and training division, Average Total Remuneration¹⁵ Pay gap is 7.5%.

WGEA also tells us that for organisations that are classified within the Adult Community and Other Employers subdivision the pay gap is negative (that is favorable to women) and for the Tertiary Education there is a pay gap in favor of men 6.2% for average total remuneration. For pre-school and school education the average total remuneration gap is at 5.9% in favour of men.

However, the WGEA portal now lets us examine specific organisations with the division of education and training – for these employer reports WGEA collects on median¹⁶ (not average) total remuneration gender pay gap. For instance, we know that the gap differs markedly between different training institutions who identify as being in the VET sector.

For instance, if we focus in on the Tertiary Education sub division (the category containing most of the VET employers) and look at a range of employers we find that the median total remuneration gap is¹⁷:

- Edith Cowen College 42%
- Kaplan Australia Pty Ltd 25.4%
- ERGT Australia 21.9%
- MEGT 13.3%

¹⁵ Average (Mean) Total Remuneration Gender Pay Gap: This is calculated by determining the average total earnings of men and the average total earnings of women and then calculating the difference between these averages as a percentage of men's average earnings. The mean is the total sum of all earnings divided by the number of earners and can be heavily influenced by extreme values at either end of the earnings spectrum. Thus, if a small number of men have very high earnings compared to the rest of the population, the average pay for men could be significantly higher than the median, potentially exaggerating the gender pay gap when compared to median calculations.

¹⁶ Median Total Remuneration Gender Pay Gap: This is the difference between the median total earnings of men and the median total earnings of women, expressed as a percentage of the median total earnings of men. The median represents the middle point in a data set, meaning that half of the population earns above this point and half earns below. This measure is less affected by outliers, such as extremely high or low earners, and therefore can provide a more typical example of the pay gap experienced by the majority of workers. It gives a clear picture of the central tendency of the gender pay gap in total earnings, which includes wages, bonuses, overtime pay, and other forms of compensation.

¹⁷ Exacted from WGEA Data Explorer Employer Results on the 19th of March 2024

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- Macarthur Group Training Limited 3.4%
- Adelaide Training and Employment Centre Inc (–)78.1%

While the WGEA data portal has individual employer reports for private providers and organisations in VET we can discover the pay gap in the public provider by examining the pay gap data via Victoria's Commission for Gender equality in the Public Sector that asks all public entities in Victoria to report against a range of indicators (including those described in this submission) in accordance with the Gender Equality Act.

The Commission data tells us that there is a gender pay gap of 15.5% (Total Median remuneration) and 16.5% for those that self-describe their gender. (That is other than a woman or a man).¹⁸

Composition, Leadership, Occupational Segregation and Leave

Similarly, we can discover how composition vertically and horizontally is reflected in our VET workforce.

WGEA tells us that 65% of the Education and Training workforce (in that division) are women. In the Adult Community and Other Education sub division 61% of employees are women, and for the Tertiary Education division, 58% are women.

WGEA data also shows us that for all the organisations under the education and training division, 63% of CEOs are men, 55% of Heads of Business are men with the number of women increasing in Executives and General Managers, Senior Managers and then all managers.

In addition to this 78% of clerical workers are women, 73% are community and personal services 75% are sales workers with men making up the majority of Laborers, Technicians and Trade Workers and Machinery Operators. This in spite of overall the division comprising 65% of women. For the same division the 69% of Men are Chairs of Boards and 58% of the Directors are men.

For those training organisations that we described before:

¹⁸ Exacted from the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector's Insights Portal on the 19th of March 2024 <https://insights.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/application-dashboard>

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| Entity | Pay Gap | %Women overall in entity | % Women in roles classified as technical and trades | % Women in Administration and Clerical | % Women as CEO | Governance/ Board Composition | % Primary Care Parental leave taken by women (non-managers) | % of women promoted |
|--|----------------|---------------------------------|--|---|-----------------------|---|--|----------------------------|
| Edith Cowen College | 42% | 69% | Not recorded | 100% | 100% | Male Chair 67% of Directors Male | Not recorded | 100% |
| Kaplan Australia Pty Ltd | 25.4% | 57% | Not recorded | 82% | 0% | Male Chair 100% of Directors Male | 91% | 56% |
| ERGT Australia Pty Ltd | 21.9% | 40% | 0% | Not Recorded | 0% | Male Chair 75% of Directors Male | 100% | 0% |
| MEGT | 13.3% | 73% | Not recorded | 83% | 0% | Male Chair 67% of Directors Male | 100% | 81% |
| Macarthur Group Training Limited | 3.4% | 26% | 8% | 75% | 100% | Male Chair 75% of Directors Male | 100% | 27% |
| Adelaide Training and Employment Centre Inc | -78.1 | 15% | 0% | 77% | 0% | Male Chair 100% of Directors Male | 100% | 33% |

This table includes various indicators selected by WAVE to highlight the different types of evidence we can use to understand why and how gender inequality happens in the VET workforce. These indicators show us how jobs are divided by gender in organizations, especially the usual roles men and women are found in. Looking at leadership positions, like executives and board members, helps us see gender distribution. Another indicator is how leave and promotions are handled, which shows us how effectively organizations are working towards gender equity.

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From the WGEA data we cannot tell what the gender breakdown of part time work is but we do know that for the Education and Training Division, that of those that took parental leave as the primary carer:

- 91% of Managers that took the leave were women.
- 96% of non-managers that took the leave were women.

Of those that took secondary carers leave:

- 94% of managers that took this leave were men.
- 94% of non-managers that took this leave were men.

For the public provider, again going to the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public sector, we know that for the public provider:

- 59% of the workforce are women, and of that:
- 75% of part time roles are taken by women and 58% of casual roles employ women.

Looking at the occupation classification shows us how composition is segregated horizontally. From the data we learn that 77% of clerical and administrative workers are occupied by women, 73% of community and personal service workers are women, whereas 69% of Technicians and trades workers are male and 70% of laborers and 78% of machinery operators and drivers are male.

It is also worth noting that given the pay gap data for the public provider Victoria 55% of “Managers” and 54% of “Professionals” are women. Further 55% of the public providers Boards are women.

Wellbeing and Safety – Workplace Gendered Violence

We know that the majority of workers in Australia’s Education and Training sector are women.

The Australian Human Rights Commission report “Respect at Work” the following characteristics increase risk of exposure to workplace gendered violence including sexual harassment. Evidence from the OHS Regulators¹⁹ tells us that:

- Women are more likely to experience sexual harassment in the workplace than men (one Victorian survey showed over 60% of women had experienced gendered violence at work).
- People who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or people with another gender or sexual identity have compounding risks of being victims of sexual harassment
- People under 40 years of age (almost two thirds of sexual harassment victims are under 40 years of age).
- Those who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience higher rates compared with those who do not (53% and 32%, respectively).
- People with a disability are more likely to experience sexual harassment than those without (44% and 32%, respectively).

¹⁹ WorkSafe Victoria Psychosocial hazard fact sheet: Work-related gendered violence including sexual harassment <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/psychosocial-hazard-fact-sheet-work-related-gendered-violence-including-sexual-harassment>

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Prevalence in Education and Training Settings

Detailed public information on the prevalence of workplace gendered violence is limited however, WorkSafe has identified Education and Training as a high risk industry area for workplace gendered violence including sexual harassment.

We also can learn from a range of data and peer reviewed evidence directly illustrating prevalence and impact in education and training (particularly VET) settings.

Sexual Harassment in Victorian TAFEs – Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector

Recent workplace audit data from the 2021 Victorian Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector (CGEPS) reveals that 4% of women and 3% of men in TAFE and other education workplaces reported experiencing sexual harassment through the organisations formal reporting systems. For those employees in TAFE that completed the People Matters Survey, we know that sexual harassment was experienced by up to 10% of female employees and less than 5% of male employees from 11 TAFE and other education institutions.

Australian Human Rights Commission

The 4th National Survey on Sexual Harassment from the Australian Human Rights Commission. (AHRC) reported that “close to half of all sexual harassment perpetrated in the workplace in the last five years occurred within four industry groups: health care and social assistance, retail trade, education and training and accommodation and food services”.

For this survey, 10,272 Australians aged 15+ surveyed about experiences of sexual harassment over the course of their lifetime and within last 5 years and the following patterns on prevalence were revealed:

Of the 33% experienced workplace sexual harassment in last 5 years.

- 39% of women
- 26% of men
- 45% of people aged 18-29
- 52% of sexually diverse*
- 53% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- 44% of people with a disability
- 65% had been harassed on more than one occasion (69% of women, 58% of men)

Of the 20% of respondents who reported experienced workplace sexual harassment in last 12 months:

- 23% of women
- 16% men
- 55% had been harassed on more than one occasion (60% of women, 48% of men)

With specific reference to the **Education and Training Industry**, the national survey the AHRC found that in the past 5 years, 39% of people who worked in education and training industry had experienced workplace sexual harassment. In the AHRC’s overall findings for the national survey, they also found that 10% of victims of sexual harassment work in the education and training industry – making the sector comprise the third highest proportion of victims work (after healthcare and

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social assistance, and retail trade), of note the survey found that men more likely than women (46% of men vs 35% of women) to experience sexual harassment.

According to the **5th National Survey on sexual harassment in Australian Workplaces**²⁰, the education and training sector accounts for almost half of all reported incidents across Australia. Despite representing only 8% of the workforce, the sector contributes to 9% of the incidents surveyed. Notably, the education sector reports an equal distribution of harassment incidents from both men and women.

Other Evidence about Workplace Gendered Violence in Training/Vocational Education Settings

Studies emphasize that learning environments in RTOs, both in classrooms and on the job, normalize gender inequality and perpetuate harmful behaviors leading to gender harassment^{21 & 22}. This harmful environment creates significant barriers, particularly in male-dominated learning pathways and industries, hindering the participation of women and gender-diverse individuals in ongoing learning. Consequently, this perpetuates gender segregation in the labor market.

There is a consistent and explicit concern about the prevalence of sexual harassment and gender-based violence against female apprentices in male-dominated training programs, such as construction and plumbing, especially during on-the-job learning^{23 & 24 & 25}. Studies of the Australian adult education environment reveal that women's experiences of sexualized behavior in the classroom are often not framed as harassment²⁶.

²⁰ Australian Human Rights Commission Time for respect: Fifth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces 2022

²¹ Donna Bridges, Elizabeth Wulff, Branka Krivokapic-Skoko & Larissa Bamberly (2022): Girls in trades: tokenism and sexual harassment inside the VET classroom, *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, DOI: 10.1080/13636820.2022.2084768

²² Niemeyer, B., and H. Colley. 2015. "Why Do We Need (Another) Special Issue on Gender and VET?" *Journal of Vocational Education & Training* 67 (1): 1–10. doi:10.1080/13636820.2014.971498.

²³ McFarlane, A, D. Bridges, and R. Townsend 4 December 2020. "A Culture of Retribution", *Sex Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying – The Undue Costs of Women Working in Ambulance Services in Australia*. The Women's Agenda. <https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/a-culture-of-retribution-sex-discrimination-harassment-and-bullying-the-unduecosts-of-women-working-in-ambulance-services-in-australia/>

²⁴ Menches, C., and D. M. Abraham. 2007. "Women in Construction: Tapping the Untapped Resource to Meet Future Demands." *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management* 133 (9): 701–707. doi:10.1061/(ASCE)0733-9364(2007)133:9(701).

²⁵ Francis, V., Chugh, R., Yang, W., Tivendale, L., & Cunningham, E. (July 2021). *The Evaluation of the Victorian Women in Construction Strategy Program*. The Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, The University of Melbourne.

²⁶ Rommes, E., W. Faulkner, and I. van Slooten. 2005. "Changing Lives: The Case for Women-Only Vocational Technology Training Revisited." *Journal of Vocational Education & Training* 57 (3): 293–317. doi:10.1080/13636820500200288.

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Furthermore, evidence indicates that inappropriate behaviors are not solely perpetrated by classmates but also by educators who make sexualized comments or implicitly or explicitly permit poor behaviors in the learning environment.^{27 & 28 & 29}.

While this submission focuses in on Australia's VET sector, WAVE also note the overwhelming evidence of workplace gendered violence as reported through the work of the Universities Accord process. In making this note we highlight the reality that many universities across Australia are dual sector providers.

Impact

Research indicates that gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, can have profound and distressing effects, leading to feelings of shame, humiliation, and powerlessness.

As previously stated, women, in particular, are more likely to experience sexual harassment, which correlates with higher rates of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Beyond the individual, these negative impacts can extend to organizational culture, causing vicarious trauma. If left unaddressed, gender-based violence can result in decreased morale, reduced job satisfaction, and increased turnover, exacerbating mental health issues among workers.

More strategically, workplace gendered violence reinforces sexist stereotypes, limits the careers of women drives environments that encourage gender segregated workforces. and as such can contribute to skills shortages³⁰.

Women in Trades

The learning and workplace experience for those people whose gender is the minority of a sector/industry perpetuates inequality.

For instance – women in male dominated trades do not experience safe, equitable workplaces or learning pathways. We can understand this not only from evidence about workplace gendered violence perpetrated against those in gender minority but also from emerging evidence about the learning experience of those most at risk to workplace gendered violence.

Mistreatment of Female Apprentices

Similarly, discrimination and harassment of female apprentices is prevalent.

Not only do significant number of women in male dominated trades experience harassment but also, young women. The Fifth National survey on Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces tells us that disproportionately young people experience harassment at rates significantly higher than the total

²⁷ Rochelle Banks (2023) Culture, complaint and confidentiality: an autoethnographic exploration of sexual harassment, *Gender and Education*, 35:4, 315-9, DOI:[10.1080/09540253.2023.2167945](https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2023.2167945)

²⁸ Nisbet, L., Halse, G., van Esbroek, E., Heywood, W., Powell, A. & Myers, P. (2022). National Student Safety Survey: Qualitative research on experiences of sexual harassment and sexual assault among university students in 2021. Melbourne: The Social Research Centre.

²⁹ Stolk, J., Gross, M., & Zastaavker, Y. (2021). Motivation, pedagogy, and gender: Examining the multifaceted and dynamic situational responses of women and men in college STEM courses. *International Journal of STEM Education*, 8.

³⁰ Jobs and Skills Australia News Item *Is gender inequality impacting fill rates?* November 29 2023 <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/news/gender-inequality-impacting-fill-rates>

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population. Whereas 33% of the total population experiences harassment for those 15-17- 47% have experience sexual harassment – and 18-29 - 46%³¹.

RMIT's report identifies a consistent theme in its research that the persistence of consequence free behaviour results in the mistreatment of female apprentices ³² and cites research from 2017 that demonstrates the connection between "male dominated industries" and "tolerance of bullying, particularly apprentices"³³ and from 2009 that spoke of the need to improve support and "responsiveness to complaints about workplace discrimination are considered essential for enabling tradeswomen to succeed in their careers"³⁴.

We know from feedback to TWA, that there is a need to make the workplace/site safer for apprentices, particularly women³⁵. Key stakeholders and members advise that, apprentices do not feel safe in their work due to:

- Risk to losing job if they have to take extended time off – particularly for parental or care requirements (a particular risk to women). It was noted that construction industry and project plans are often based on a minimum of 50 to 60 hours of work per resource per week. This expectation and norm of work hours alienates 51% of the potential workforce to this sector.
- Poor behaviours on the worksite where, often, bullying and harassment is more than common, it is condoned and encouraged through unconscious bias.
- Persistent sexual harassment in the workplace and poor recognition that a healthy respectful environment is good for all workers.

In January 2022, the Queensland Training Ombudsman provided a report to the States' Minister for Employment and Small Business and, Minister for Training and Skills Development *on support provided Apprentices and Trainees, with a focus on female apprentices in male dominated occupations*. This review included an analysis of existing literature on the matter and found that "trade occupations are traditionally the domain of males" and, "the percentage of women in these occupations has remained relatively unchanged since 1988"³⁶ further, the analysis identified a set of key challenges consistent with symptoms of gendered drivers of inequity driven by gendered stereotypes of work and skill. These include:³⁷

- overcoming societal and cultural norms
- lack of female role models
- lack of engagement through familial and social networks

³¹ Australian Human Rights Commission 2022 *Time for respect: Fifth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces*

³² Holdsworth, S 2020 p7

³³ Jones et al 2017 in Holdsworth, S. 2020 p 14

³⁴ Shewing 2009 in Holdsworth, S. 2020 p18

³⁵ Feedback to Consultation undertaken by Tradeswomen Australia and National Association for Women in Construction (NAWIC) in preparation for their submission to the Australian Government, for "Australian Apprenticeship Support Services".

³⁶ Queensland Training Ombudsman *Review of support provided to Queensland Apprentices and Trainees, with a focus on female apprentices in male dominated occupations 2022*

³⁷ *ibid*

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- despite numerous STEM programs on offer, there is a view that school curriculums do not encourage female participation in trade-based classes or work experience
- employers that are resistant to employing female tradespeople
- workplace cultures that support and condone workforce bullying
- lack of or ineffective human resource policies and practices to respond to workplace bullying
- lack of appropriate facilities on worksites

The report also goes onto identify the segregation of male and female apprentice completion rates across different sectors.

Recommendation

That the VET workforce blue print should contain a Gender Equality Action Plan to address the drivers of gender inequality that characterise the workforce.

The Image and the Perception of the VET Workforce: A reality of feminised sectors

Workforce gender segregation contributes to the gender pay gap, as men continue to dominate in industries and occupations with higher earnings and women in those with lower earnings, reflecting the historical undervaluing of feminised jobs. A highly gender-skewed workforce also increases the risk of workforce shortages

Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities September 2023

As already demonstrated, Australia's education and training sector is a workforce characterized by employing mainly women. It is one of Australia's feminised workforces. To that end, it suffers from the same perceptions and its consequences that "feminised work" in Australia faces.

The perception of feminised workforces varies widely across cultures and contexts. However, for Australia, the industries include healthcare, education, social work, and administrative roles. Despite the essential nature of many of these professions, the challenges that they face in retaining and attracting staff is largely due to societal attitudes and systemic issues.

- **Lower Pay:** One of the most significant challenges is the tendency for feminised industries to be lower paid compared to male-dominated fields, even when the level of skill, education, and responsibility is comparable. This wage gap can make it difficult to attract and retain talent, especially when individuals can earn more in other fields. As is seen, there is a pay gap.
- **Limited Career Progression:** There's often a perception that feminised professions offer fewer opportunities for advancement. This glass ceiling effect can discourage ambitious candidates from entering these fields and contribute to high turnover rates as employees leave in search of better opportunities. Noting this, WGEA data shows that the majority of promotions within the sector are for women, and this is similarly the case for the promotions secondments and career development opportunities offered in TAFE in Victoria.

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- **Undervaluation of Skills:** The skills required in many feminised professions, such as empathy, communication, and caregiving, are often undervalued in the broader labor market. This societal undervaluation can affect how these roles are viewed both internally and externally, impacting self-esteem and professional recognition.
- **Work Intensification and Burnout:** Many feminised sectors are characterized by high workloads, emotional labor, and stress, contributing to burnout and health issues among workers. This can lead to difficulties in retaining staff and necessitates constant recruitment efforts.
- **Gender Stereotypes and Discrimination:** Feminised workforces can reinforce gender stereotypes, suggesting certain jobs are "naturally" suited to women. This not only deters men from entering these professions, further entrenching the gender imbalance, but can also lead to discrimination and bias against women in leadership roles within these fields.
- **Lack of Flexibility:** While some feminised industries may offer relatively more flexibility in terms of part-time work, there's often a lack of higher-level flexible working options that allow for work-life balance, particularly for those with caregiving responsibilities. This can affect both attraction and retention. According to WGEA, 74% of employers in the Education and Training industry division have policies for flexible work with 70% of organisations having a business case for flexibility endorsed at leadership level. Of interest though, is that only 27% of organisations offer the more current and equitable universal carer leave while the majority still opt for the more inequitable primary/secondary leave policy.
- **Economic and Job Insecurity:** Given the lower pay and sometimes part-time or contractual nature of work, jobs in feminised sectors can be seen as less secure, making them less attractive to potential employees seeking stable employment.

The impact of Gender inequality on labour and skills shortages

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”³⁸.

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*³⁹.

Australia has acknowledged the entrenched reality of gender segregation for some time. The 2017 report by the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration *Gender Segregation*

³⁸ 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

³⁹ Ibid, p.18

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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"⁴⁰.

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 cent⁴¹.

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 these matters.

⁴⁰ 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

⁴¹ 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.

OTHER VET POLICY AND PRACTICE THAT CONTRIBUTES TO INEQUITY

To recap, we have provided evidence that the education and training sector – in particular VET Workforce – has a prevalence of risks to workplace safety from workplace gendered violence, is characterised by a pay gap, suffers similar negative perceptions as other feminised industries and, its composition is reflective of occupational gender segregation.

Our recommendations up to this point have centred around ways that the VET workforce blueprint can achieve its goals by applying an intersectional gender lens, and utilising gender mainstreaming approaches to address the barriers that are in place to creating an equitable workforce – one that will move significantly to resolving the challenges in the workforce as articulated in the consultation paper.

In addition to this WAVE also provides advice on other policies and practices in the VET ecosystem that contribute to the inequitable workforce.

Training Package Policy

One key reality for women is that they carry the burden of care – for their families, for having and raising children.

Currently training package policy holds that VET trainers and assessors must have both industry currency and education currency. Currency – usually described in industry Training Packages – can range in definition of time anywhere between 12 months to 3 years. Applying a gender lens to this definition shows up the barriers that this may present to women.

Given the care load that women typically take, and as many women take time out of the workplace and workforce to care for their children – often up to 2 years which is compounded through lack of childcare and support – the policy does present a significant barrier to women becoming VET educators and assessors.

We also reiterate previous evidence that shows that women’s capacity to undertake and develop industry skills that in current Training Package policy and RTO standards would equate to being “current” for a VET assessor/trainer is limited by the barriers put in place to workplace learning and professional development by the feminised workforces that they work in.

That is, that feminised workforces do not typically have the same on the job learning and development culture that male dominated workforces have and, further, if there is on the job learning, then it typically does not lead to an increase in wages to lessen the opportunity costs of progressing their career through further learning. (See next section).

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Recommendation

To address this WAVE strongly recommends a strategy and approach be applied where by:

- The next policy on Training Package developed by DEWR recognise the barriers that are in place for women to developing industry currency currently encoded by regulation and training package frameworks.
- That the RTO Standards and training package policy be evolved to ensure that VET currency can reflect partnership approaches so that industry and education currency is centred in the learning environment and not just in one individual
- That the national and state regulators and training package developers have their capacity and capability developed to ensure that the implementation of these revised Training Package processes are implemented in the spirit of equity.

Cost of VET for Women

There is a higher opportunity cost for women to increase their skills, and invest in their education whether it is to enter an industry and/or develop a career. This opportunity cost is significantly influenced by systemic gender inequality. These factors elevate the barriers that women face to train themselves that are not as prevalent for men and include:

- **Care Responsibilities:** Women often bear the primary responsibility for caregiving in the family, including children, elderly parents, or other dependents. The time and energy required for these duties can limit the amount of time women have available for education, training, and skill development. The opportunity cost here includes not only the direct impact on their ability to participate in training but also the long-term impact on career advancement and earning potential.
- **Workplace Policies:** In some cases, workplace policies may not support or accommodate the need for flexible scheduling for those looking to pursue further education or training. Without the flexibility to adjust work hours, attend classes, or reduce job responsibilities temporarily, women may face a higher opportunity cost to pursue skill enhancement, as doing so could mean loss of income or even employment.
- **Societal Expectations and Norms:** Societal expectations regarding gender roles can influence women's decisions and opportunities for professional development. For instance, fields traditionally dominated by men might have fewer mentorship and networking opportunities for women, making it more challenging and costly for women to break into these areas and advance their skills.
- **Economic Barriers:** Women, on average, earn less than men, which can limit their ability to afford education and training opportunities. This economic disparity increases the opportunity cost for women, as the financial sacrifice to pursue further education or training is relatively greater.
- **Limited Representation:** In certain industries or leadership roles, the lack of female representation can deter women from seeking opportunities for skill development, fearing isolation, discrimination, or lack of support. The opportunity cost here includes not only the

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potential career advancement but also the personal and professional growth that comes from training and development.

- **Access to Resources:** In some regions or communities, women may have limited access to educational resources, training programs, or technology, increasing the opportunity cost of acquiring new skills. This can be due to factors like geographical location, socio-economic status, or cultural barriers.

In putting these points forward we refer the Australian Government to the gender data on the VET sector available through WGEA and the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector.

Recommendation

To increase the diversity of potential workers in VET, recognise that women's capacity to build their skills to be educators, trainers and assessors and develop their careers in VET, requires changes to address economic barriers in place for women to participate in skill and development opportunities.

SUMMARY

WAVE commends the Australian Government and its associated departments for the activities and work to develop a workforce development plan for this vital industry. An industry that is core to the capacity building of the whole Australian workforce.

Our full recommendations are listed in the executive summary of this submission.

In conclusion we highlight to the Australian Government that:

- Promoting entry pathways to the VET workforce will not be successful unless a gender equity lens is applied that recognises and responds to the barriers to women educating themselves, the opportunity costs for women, and the barriers within the sector that prevent equitable participation by women.
- Sustaining the strong partnerships required to drive flexible pathways and appointments will not occur unless a VET Workforce Blueprint centers the lived experience of women, the evidence of which tells us that their experience of work and learning is gendered *and* does something to demonstrate that this evidence and lived experience is being listened to.
- Promoting an inclusive and diverse image of the workforce can only be successful if that promotion responds to the reality that the experience of that workforce is dependent upon the gender of the worker, and the intersecting barriers that they face.
- Facilitating continuing professional development and progression is similarly dependent upon the gender of the worker and the level to which equitable policies and practices of employers, and leadership decision making, is considered and delivered with a gender lens.
- Responding to and centering the evidence of gender inequity in VET and, the lived experience of the women that work in the sector, and engage with the sector is central to creating an equal and diverse VET environment.

WAVE GLOSSARY OF TERMS

| When we say... | What we mean is... |
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| Vocational and Adult Education | <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> |
| The national vocational education & training system | <p>1) "The national training system is the Australian system for Vocational Education and Training (VET). It provides people with work-ready skills and qualifications..." https://www.australianindustrystandards.org.au/national-vet-system/</p> <p>2) "The extent to which state and territories and the Commonwealth of Australia governments come together to agree on policies and programs to deliver and fund vocational and adult education. It is inclusive of state/territory and commonwealth funding programs, regulatory frameworks and policies and nationally agreed policy structures such as training packages, industry advisory mechanisms, and agreements". https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2022/child-care-education-and-training/vocational-education-and-training</p> |
| Technical Vocational Education & Training (TVET, VET) | <p>Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is understood as comprising education, training and skills development relating to a wide range of occupational fields, production, services and livelihoods. TVET, as part of lifelong learning, can take place at secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels and includes work-based learning and continuing training and professional development, which may lead to qualifications. TVET also includes a wide range of skills development opportunities attuned to national and local contexts. Learning to learn, the development of literacy and numeracy skills, transversal skills and citizenship skills are integral components of TVET (UNESCO: 2016, 2022)⁴.</p> |
| Gender Equity and Gender Equality | <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> |
| Gender | <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> |
| Empowerment of women | <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> |
| Intersectionality | <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 |
| Gender transformative | <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> https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/a-guide-to-help-you-work-out-how-gender-transformative-your-initiative-is</p> |
| Gender Specific | <p>“...Approaches acknowledge gender inequalities and consider women’s specific needs, but do not transform norms and practices. .”</p> <p>Drawn from Our Watch <i>A guide to help you work out how gender transformative your initiative is</i> https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/a-guide-to-help-you-work-out-how-gender-transformative-your-initiative-is</p> |
| Gender sensitive | <p>These approaches acknowledge but do not address gender inequalities.</p> <p>They are not harmful, but they don’t make sustainable changes to society that lead to long-term and significant reductions gender inequality</p> <p>Drawn from Our Watch <i>A guide to help you work out how gender transformative your initiative is</i> https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/a-guide-to-help-you-work-out-how-gender-transformative-your-initiative-is</p> |
| Gender insensitive | <p>These approaches ignore gender norms and inequalities, can minimise efforts to address gender inequality, and risk contributing to the gendered drivers of violence through implicit support of existing norms.</p> <p>Drawn from Our Watch <i>A guide to help you work out how gender transformative your initiative is</i> https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/a-guide-to-help-you-work-out-how-gender-transformative-your-initiative-is</p> |
| Traineeship | 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. |
| Apprenticeship | 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. |
| Lifelong learning | 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>https://uil.unesco.org/fileadmin/keydocuments/LifelongLearning/en/UNESCOTechNotesLLL.pdf</p> |
| Pathways | <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 & Development Module. DFAT Diplomatic Academy.</i> https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/foundation-education-pathways.pdf</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> https://wfrn.org/glossary/educational-pathway-definition-of/</p> |