

SUBMISSION

STRATEGIC REVIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN APPRENTICESHIP INCENTIVE SYSTEM



13th May 2024

Acknowledgement

The authors acknowledge the traditional owners of our lands and waters – the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples – who are the first educators and the first teachers of this land.

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

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

Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

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Executive Summary and Strategic Recommendations

This submission, prepared by a consortium of organizations - WAVE, NAWIC, TWA Group, and EWIT – who share a common mission to address persistent structural inequity in Australian adult education (VET) and trade sectors.

Our submission presents the case for the urgent need to address the deep-rooted gender inequities in the Australian Apprenticeship Systems including incentive structure. Through our combined experience we seek to highlight the necessity of a transformational approach to gender equity in apprenticeships, particularly those that are male dominated. Our submission asks for reform that goes beyond mere gender responsiveness or neutrality, to one that actively seeks to dismantle the systemic barriers that hinder the participation and advancement of women and other marginalized communities in apprenticeship programs.

The submission draws upon the clear call to action from various Australian Government policies, which collectively provide an unassailable mandate for creating a gender-equitable future for the country. These policies underscore the critical role of education and training in achieving gender equity and emphasize the need for a focused and systemic approach to address the persistent gender disparities in apprenticeships.

The submission presents our experience of the structural barriers, cultural norms, and best practices that impact women's participation in male-dominated trades. It argues that current approaches often fail to address the root causes of gender inequity, instead placing the burden of change on women themselves. The submission calls for a paradigm shift that places the onus of change on the systems and structures that enable discrimination, recognizing that achieving true gender equity requires a fundamental transformation of workplace cultures, challenging deep-seated biases and stereotypes, and fostering environments that actively promote inclusion, respect, and equal opportunities for all genders.

To enact this transformational change, the submission presents a suite of strategic recommendations that aim to dismantle the systemic obstacles hindering gender equity in apprenticeships. These recommendations span across various domains, including:

1. Establishing comprehensive anti-discrimination and safety protocols to ensure a safe and equitable apprenticeship environment.
2. Implementing systemic reforms in recruitment and workplace practices to foster an inclusive culture and eliminate gender bias.
3. Strengthening the legislative and policy framework to integrate gender equity goals into all aspects of vocational education and training.
4. Providing financial incentives linked to equity outcomes to actively promote and reward gender equity practices.
5. Expanding access to mentorship and peer networks to foster a sense of belonging and provide role models for underrepresented groups.
6. Innovating through technology and infrastructure to create more accessible and inclusive training environments.
7. Mandating gender impact assessments for all apprenticeship policies and programs to ensure they do not perpetuate inequities.
8. Committing to ongoing research and engagement to understand and address the intersectional barriers affecting various underrepresented groups.

By embracing these strategic recommendations and committing to a transformational approach to gender equity, Australian Apprenticeships policy and programs, can effectively address the deep-rooted systemic barriers that hinder the participation and advancement of women and other marginalized communities.

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This submission presents a powerful call to action, urging stakeholders across the apprenticeship system to recognize the urgent need for change and to work collaboratively towards creating a truly inclusive and equitable environment for all apprentices. Only by dismantling the structures that perpetuate inequity and actively promoting gender equality can we unlock the full potential of Australia's diverse workforce and build a stronger, more resilient economy for the future.

How this submission contributes to the work of the Review: Alignment to the Terms of Reference

Our recommendations put forward in this submission align closely with several key aspects of the Terms of Reference for the Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System.

Firstly, the recommendations directly address the effectiveness of the Incentive System in encouraging take-up and completion of apprenticeships and traineeships by women and people who face additional barriers to undertaking training (Item 4 in the Terms of Reference). The proposed measures, such as establishing comprehensive anti-discrimination and safety protocols, implementing systemic reforms in recruitment and workplace practices, and expanding access to mentorship and peer networks, are designed to create training environments that are more inclusive and supportive of underrepresented groups.

Secondly, the recommendations take a holistic view of the apprenticeship system (Item 3), considering not only financial incentives but also non-financial supports, workplace conditions, and the role of employers in fostering quality apprenticeships. The submission emphasizes the need for a transformational approach to gender equity that goes beyond mere responsiveness and actively seeks to dismantle systemic barriers.

Thirdly, the recommendations explore alignment between the Incentive System and the Government's broader economic objectives, including the promotion of lifelong learning (Item 5). The proposed measures, such as strengthening the legislative and policy framework to integrate gender equity goals, providing financial incentives linked to equity outcomes, and committing to ongoing research and engagement, aim to create a more inclusive and equitable apprenticeship system that supports the development of a diverse and skilled workforce.

Furthermore, the recommendations consider the effectiveness and efficiency of the Incentive System (Item 1) in terms of encouraging take-up and completion of apprenticeships and traineeships. By addressing systemic barriers and creating a more supportive environment for underrepresented groups, the proposed measures have the potential to improve completion rates and optimize the outcomes of the Incentive System.

Overall, the strategic recommendations presented in the submission are well-aligned with the Terms of Reference for the Strategic Review. They provide a comprehensive and transformational approach to addressing gender inequities in the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System, with the ultimate goal of building a more inclusive, skilled, and resilient workforce to support Australia's growing economy.

About us

WAVE

Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE) is a national network of women involved in Vocational Education and Training (VET) and adult education, formed in 1985. It is the first and only independent, non-government organisation for Australian women and girls in these sectors. WAVE's mission is to advocate for equitable vocational and adult education systems for all women and girls in Australia, with a vision of enabling their full participation in work and democratic society.

WAVE undertakes its work within a feminist framework, recognizing the impact of intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization on access and benefit from Australia's vocational and adult education systems. It advocates for enhancing the inclusivity, relevance, and affordability of these systems for under-represented, vulnerable, and marginalised groups, centring lived experiences.

As leaders in gender equity and vocational and adult education, WAVE provides expert advice to Australian and State/Territory Governments on making these systems equitable for all Australians. It collaborates with organisations, leaders, and communities that share an appreciation of the challenges associated with gender inequity, especially in relation to the national adult education and skills systems.

WAVE's mission is to partner with organisations and individuals committed to social justice in co-producing sound research and advocacy, leveraging its deep understanding of the last 40 years of evidence in VET, adult education, and gender equity, from Theory of Change to Theory of Action and monitoring and evaluation of results.

NAWIC

The National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) is an Australian, not-for-profit organisation formed in 1995.

NAWIC is led by a team of passionate employees and volunteers who all strive to help champion and empower women in the construction and related industries to reach their full potential. With Chapters in every state and territory, we are also part of a global network of NAWIC organisations, including those in the United States, New Zealand and Canada.

NAWIC provides a forum for its members to meet and exchange information, ideas and solutions. We also offer our members an opportunity to expand personal and business networks, maintain awareness of industry developments, improve skills and knowledge and make a contribution to other women in the construction industry.

TWA Group

Tradeswomen Australia Group (TWA) is a non-profit organisation working to increase the representation of women in skilled trade roles and create safe workplaces for everyone.

We aim for gender equality and empowerment for all women to access, participate and succeed in trades.

Since the founding of Tradeswomen Australia Group in 2019, we've been working hard to increase female representation to more than 2% of Australia's trade industry workforce. While the challenge is considerable, with many barriers in place, we're getting closer every day thanks to the help of our community partners, our qualified employers and supporters. If we work together, we believe all women from all backgrounds can succeed in trades careers.

EWIT

Empowered Women in Trades (EWIT) is a registered charity organisation and a social enterprise that supports organisations to encourage women to see skilled trades as a viable career path and guide them into employment within the industry. All our programs are co-designed with our clients to ensure they meets organisational needs and provide an authentic experience for our participants. We run programs for school students and school leavers, allowing us to tailor the demographic attending the programs to you're the needs of all involved.

To drive Australia's economic recovery, increase diversity and engage the tradespeople we need, EWIT has designed game-changing initiatives to spark the interest in women's minds about pathways into skilled trade careers through our strong industry and educational partnerships, we guide our program participants on the next step to gain meaningful and rewarding employment within skilled trade based industries.

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Introduction

Scope of our submission

Our consortium of organisations come together for this Strategic Review into the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System based on a shared experience.

Our submission draws upon our combined significant deep and extensive understanding and know-how, in addressing gender inequity in our education and training system and, our practical know-how of what is required to finally address the persistent and entrenched inequity in our trades.

Our submission will focus on responding to the following parts of the Review's terms of reference:

- consider the effectiveness of the Incentive System and associated services and support in creating training environments that encourage the take-up and completion of apprenticeships and traineeships by women and people who face additional barriers to undertaking training (including people in rural, regional and remote areas and First Nations peoples); and
- explore alignment between the Incentive System and priorities in the 2023 Employment White Paper and the Government's broader economic objectives, including the promotion of lifelong learning; opportunities, levers and initiatives beyond the Incentive System to encourage employers to take on more apprentices and encourage them to provide people who are underrepresented and lack opportunities, with more experience in the workplace at both pre-apprentice or apprentice/trainee level, particularly in areas of high and emerging skills needs.

With our collective expertise, we can leverage comprehensive research, stakeholder insights, and global best practices to develop a suite of transformative reforms. These recommendations are strategically designed to dismantle the systemic obstacles that hinder the participation and advancement of women and other marginalised communities in apprenticeship programs. By directly addressing these deep-rooted barriers, our proposed reforms align seamlessly with the overarching objectives outlined in the Employment White Paper and the government's unwavering dedication to cultivating a highly skilled, adaptable, and inclusive workforce that reflects the rich diversity of our nation.

Our Strategic Call To Action

That is:

- A. It is imperative to integrate a transformational gender equity (not responsive, not neutral) lens into all aspects of the apprenticeship system reforms.** This review presents a critical juncture to address longstanding disparities and ensure that our apprenticeship system not only meets the current economic demands but also fosters an inclusive and equitable environment for all Australians.
- B. It is clear that despite existing measures, significant gender disparities persist, which hinder the participation and completion rates of women in apprenticeships. The need for a focused and systemic approach to gender equity is not only a matter of fairness but also a strategic imperative to enhance our national workforce capabilities.** As stakeholders in this system, we recognize the profound influence that policy frameworks have on shaping the accessibility and outcomes of apprenticeships.

Context and Background

The Strategic Policy Environment

The Australian Government has put forward a set of strategic policy mechanisms and pillars that on their own provide a clear signal that the government seeks to create policies and programs that are gender equitable. However, when combined, they provide an unassailable call to action for our economy and our society that this government is driven to forging a gender equitable future for our country. In doing this the Government also has a set of specific calls to action for Australia's vocational training and adult education sectors.

These items and their key components comprise:

Women Economic Equality Taskforce – 10 Year Plan to Unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian economy comprises 7 Recommendations that identify and address barriers that women face in the Australian economy including recommendation 4 which states that ***“The Australian Government must provide women in Australia with lifelong, accessible, flexible and affordable education and skill building. They must also remove existing disincentives and inequities that perpetuate industry and occupational segregation and sustained pay and wealth gaps.”***

The National Gender Equality Strategy *Working for Women* puts forward a set of 5 priorities for action underpinned by a need to address gendered attitudes and stereotypes that are prevalent and embedded across our national systems and structures. Priority 3 speaks to education and training's role in gender equity and mirroring the WEET 10 Year plan states that, ***“To achieve gender equality, there needs to be a sustained reduction in the gender gaps in pay and retirement incomes. The Government can use its levers to create safe, secure and flexible workplaces; support equitable access to education and skills building; and remove disincentives and inequities that perpetuate occupational and industrial gender segregation and sustained pay and wealth gaps.”***

The Jobs and Skills Australia Act 2022 sets out a suite of functions for the agency including their role ***to remove barriers to achieving gender equality in the provision of training and in the labour market, and opportunities to improve gender equality outcomes***¹; and examine the impact of workplace arrangements, including insecure work, on economic and social outcomes;”

Jobs and Skills Australia's own roadmap (2023) goes on to state that ***“...more will need to be done across all pillars of the national skills system to better understand the barriers that lead to gendered outcomes across training and education pathways and in occupations, industries and workplaces – from gender norms, perceptions and culture, to access and participation issues.”***

The National Skills Agreement is based on a vision and set of principles that speak to gender equality and recognises the reality of inequity in workforce development and transition. Principle 3 states that the Australian VET system should ***“...ensure that all Australians — particularly women, First Nations Australians, young people, mature age Australians, those experiencing long-term unemployment, people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people with disability, and regional and remote learners — have access to the education, training and support needed to obtain well-paid, secure jobs”***

In addition to the clear call to action in the Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities *Working Future* which accepts the multifaceted nature of the barriers to women's full economic

¹ JOBS AND SKILLS AUSTRALIA ACT 2022 - SECT 9 Functions of Jobs and Skills Australia

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participation and forecasts the implementation of a broad range of policies to promote gender equality in the workforce including tackling gender segregation in education and careers by . by setting targets to increase women's participation in sectors like technology and construction.

Our experience on barriers to women in male dominated industries.

From our experience in the field and, working with the research we know that there are multiple drivers and barriers that prevent more women entering male dominated trade pathways, (including apprenticeships) and being retained within industry.

Gender inequity in male-dominated trades persists due to deeply entrenched systemic barriers that impede women's entry, retention, and completion of training pathways. The pervasive stereotypes and biases that discourage women from pursuing these fields create an unwelcoming culture perpetuating their underrepresentation. The scarcity of female role models and mentors exacerbates the sense of isolation, depriving women of vital guidance and support networks.

“...Boys generally start their apprenticeships in Queensland while doing Year 11 and 12, and girls fight very hard to get noticed or a place. We put them in placements, make cases for them with individual employers and support them with their apprenticeship course at school, yet time and again they face an invisible barrier....”

Apprenticeship in Schools Coordinator, Queensland

The male-dominated workplace environments fostering harassment, discrimination, and exclusionary norms significantly undermine women's training experiences. The failure to accommodate work-life balance needs, particularly concerning family responsibilities, presents additional obstacles. Curricula and pedagogies that lack inclusive perspectives relevant to women further alienate them from effective learning and skill development.

Compounding these challenges, women often grapple with diminished self-efficacy and confidence, stemming from a dearth of positive reinforcement and an abundance of negative feedback loops within male-centric training settings. Institutional policies and practices ingrained with inherent biases towards male students exacerbate structural barriers, hindering equal access to critical resources, equitable scheduling, and fair assessment methods.

Dismantling these multifaceted, deeply rooted impediments demands a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach. We urge concerted efforts to promote inclusive practices within educational institutions, bolstered by robust support systems and stringent enforcement of anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies. Initiatives to increase the visibility and accessibility of female mentors and role models are imperative to inspire and empower aspiring tradeswomen.

Furthermore, we advocate for a critical examination and restructuring of curricula and pedagogical approaches to foster an inclusive, supportive learning environment that resonates with diverse perspectives and learning styles. Addressing the systemic biases ingrained within institutional policies and practices is crucial to level the playing field and ensure equitable access to opportunities.

By confronting these interlocking barriers through a holistic, gender-responsive approach, we can pave the way for women to thrive in male-dominated trades, enriching these fields with diverse talents and perspectives while advancing gender equity and economic empowerment.

Structural Barriers:

Research and feedback from organisations such as Women in Vocational and Adult Education (WAVE) and the Tradeswomen Australia Group (TWA) have consistently pointed to entrenched structural barriers that women face in the apprenticeship system. The WAVE submission highlights that women in male-dominated trades experience persistent risks to their safety and wellbeing, exacerbated by cultural norms

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within these workplaces. These issues are not isolated but are part of a broader pattern of gender inequity that includes lower pay, fewer opportunities for advancement, and a higher risk of sexual harassment.

Evidence suggests that the inequity is systemic, supported by data showing that completion rates for women are significantly lower than those for their male counterparts. For example, in male-dominated fields such as construction and engineering, female apprentices constitute a small fraction of the workforce, with completion rates lagging behind due to the unsupportive work environment and lack of targeted support.

Cultural Norms:

The submissions from TWA and NAWIC (National Association of Women in Construction) have shed light on the pervasive cultural norms that deter women from entering or completing apprenticeships. These include gender stereotypes about the suitability of certain trades for women and the male-dominated culture that prevails in many training and work environments. This culture is often characterized by discriminatory practices and a lack of respect for women's contributions, which not only hampers their ability to succeed but also affects their mental health and job satisfaction.

A poignant example shared in the TWA/NAWIC submission details the commonality of poor behaviours on worksites, including bullying and harassment, which are not only condoned but sometimes encouraged. Such environments create significant obstacles to women's retention and success in apprenticeship programs.

Similar a number of submissions from WAVE have demonstrated consistently through evidence, that these cultural norms are reinforced through systems and structures across organisations and industry, where gendered stereotypes become embedded and reinforced over time unless deliberate action is taken to identify and change them.

Best Practices and Opportunities:

However, there are also positive examples and best practices from within Australia and comparable economies that can guide our reform efforts. For instance, some leading organisations have implemented comprehensive policies to support gender diversity, including flexible working arrangements, robust harassment prevention strategies, and targeted recruitment drives to increase female apprenticeship uptake. These measures not only improve the workplace culture but also contribute to higher completion rates and greater job satisfaction among female apprentices.

The analysis points to a clear need for a dual approach that addresses both the structural reforms and the cultural transformations necessary to foster gender equity in the apprenticeship system. By learning from best practices and listening to the voices of those affected by the current system's shortcomings, we can develop targeted interventions that significantly improve the experiences and outcomes of female apprentices.

Current approaches make this a problem for women, but its not a women's problem

While efforts have been made to increase women's representation in male-dominated trades like construction and plumbing, a significant flaw persists in the approach taken by many initiatives. Too often, the strategies employed seek to "fix women" by providing targeted support and guidance, rather than directly challenging and transforming the discriminatory systems and cultural norms that drive gender inequity in these fields.

The fact that women make up only about 2% of construction and plumbing apprentices in Australia, as reported by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), is a glaring symptom of deep-rooted, systemic issues. Yet, many of the current initiatives focus on equipping women with the tools to navigate and overcome barriers, inadvertently placing the burden of change on those facing discrimination rather than the root causes themselves.

Mentorship programs, for instance, while valuable in providing guidance and support, often operate within the confines of existing structures and cultures that marginalise women. Rather than dismantling the patriarchal norms and biases that permeate these male-dominated industries, such programs aim to help women adapt to environments that inherently disadvantage them.

Similarly, while apprenticeship services play a crucial role in supporting apprentices and trainees, addressing the systemic and structural barriers to women's participation requires a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach.

It is essential to recognize the limits of apprenticeship services' circle of influence and to identify areas where they can contribute to positive change through their own actions. These services can play a vital role in creating more inclusive and supportive environments for women in male-dominated trades by providing tailored support, challenging gender stereotypes, and advocating for gender-responsive policies and practices within their sphere of influence.

However, the scale of change required to dismantle the deeply entrenched barriers to women's participation in these fields necessitates a coordinated, cross-sectoral response. This response should involve government agencies, educational institutions, industry bodies, employers, and unions working together to develop and implement policies that promote gender equality and address the root causes of discrimination and exclusion. Similarly, educational campaigns and career counselling efforts that encourage women to pursue opportunities in these fields, while well-intentioned, fail to address the underlying societal stereotypes and gender roles that steer women away from these paths in the first place. These initiatives attempt to increase women's participation without fundamentally challenging the cultural paradigms that perpetuate their underrepresentation.

Moreover, while anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies are crucial, their implementation alone does not necessarily dismantle the entrenched attitudes, behaviours, and power dynamics that enable hostile work environments for women in male-dominated trades.

To achieve true gender equity across industries, a paradigm shift is required – one that places the onus of change on the systems and structures that perpetuate discrimination, rather than on the individuals facing its consequences. This necessitates a comprehensive overhaul of workplace cultures, challenging deep-seated biases and stereotypes, and fostering environments that actively promote inclusion, respect, and equal opportunities for all genders.

While support and guidance for women are important, they must be complemented by a concerted effort to dismantle the systemic biases, cultural norms, and structural barriers that perpetuate gender inequity in these fields. Until these underlying issues are confronted and transformed, initiatives aimed solely at "fixing women" will fall short in achieving lasting and meaningful change.

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Instead of solely providing women with tools to navigate barriers, efforts must be focused on dismantling those barriers themselves. This includes implementing comprehensive policy reforms, fostering inclusive leadership, and actively engaging men as allies in the pursuit of gender equity. Only by addressing the root causes of discrimination and transforming the systems that propagate inequity can we create truly equal and welcoming environments for women in male-dominated trades.

It is crucial to emphasize that the onus of overcoming these barriers should not fall on the shoulders of female apprentices and trainees. Expecting women to "tough it out" or navigate hostile work environments without adequate support is not only unfair but also perpetuates the very issues we seek to address. Instead, we must recognize the gendered nature of these barriers and the ways in which they intersect with other forms of discrimination, such as racism and ableism.

By explicitly acknowledging the connection between gendered issues in the workplace and discrimination, we can begin to develop targeted strategies to create safer, more inclusive spaces for women in male-dominated trades. This involves challenging the cultural norms and practices that enable discrimination, harassment, and violence, and holding individuals and organisations accountable for creating and maintaining equitable work environments.

Ultimately, achieving meaningful change requires a sustained, collaborative effort that involves all stakeholders. By working together to dismantle the systemic and structural barriers to women's participation in male-dominated trade apprenticeships, we can create a more diverse, skilled, and resilient workforce that benefits individuals, communities, and the economy.

Strategic Recommendations

To effectively address the structural and systemic barriers that hinder gender equity in the Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System, this submission proposes several strategic recommendations. These suggestions focus on transforming the apprenticeship environment to be more inclusive and equitable, rather than simply attempting to 'fix' the participation of women.

Each recommendation targets different aspects of systemic reform needed to promote genuine equity.

To commence our recommendations however, WAVE opens by advocating to the Australian Government that it support key and relevant recommendations from the House Standing Committee on Employment Education and Training on the perceptions and status of VET. Recommendation 18 in the Committee's final report *Shared Vision Equal Pathways* which states that:

The Committee recommends the Australian Government expressly recognise and address systemic barriers that hinder participation by women and by gender-diverse people in vocational education and training (VET), with a specific focus on lifting women's participation in male-dominated industries. This should include but not be limited to:

Investing in strategies delivered through the VET sector that support women in acquiring skills and entering male-dominated industries.

Addressing workplace discrimination and gender-based violence and ensuring equitable employment conditions.

Introducing additional apprenticeship pathways which specifically target women and gender-diverse people.

Implementing promotional and educational campaigns which challenge gender stereotypes and negative attitudes that perpetuate barriers for both women and men in non-traditional VET pathways.

1. Establish Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination and Safety Protocols:

Key to ensuring a safe and equitable apprenticeship environment is the strict enforcement of anti-discrimination and safety protocols:

- a) Implement robust anti-harassment policies that are actively enforced across all levels of apprenticeship programs.
- b) Create a transparent system for reporting and addressing grievances related to discrimination and harassment.
- c) Regular safety audits and gender sensitivity training for all employees, with a focus on creating safe workplaces for everyone.

2. Systemic Reforms in Recruitment and Workplace Practices:

Adopt systemic changes in recruitment and workplace practices to foster an inclusive culture:

- d) Revise recruitment strategies to eliminate gender bias, ensuring job postings and outreach efforts appeal equally to all genders.
- e) Implement workplace practices that support work-life balance, including flexible hours and comprehensive parental leave policies, recognizing the diverse needs of all apprentices.
- f) Regularly review and adjust workplace policies to ensure they support equitable opportunities and outcomes for all apprentices, regardless of gender.

3. Legislative and Policy Enhancements:

Strengthening the framework within which apprenticeships operate can help ensure gender equity is a foundational principle, not an afterthought:

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- g) Work with legislative bodies to integrate gender equity goals into all vocational education and training legislation.
- h) Condition public funding for apprenticeship programs on adherence to gender equity benchmarks.
- i) Develop and enforce a standardized gender impact assessment for all new policies and programs in the vocational training sector.

4. Financial Incentives Linked to Equity Outcomes:

Financial incentives should be structured to promote equity actively:

- j) Design funding models that reward organisations and employers who demonstrate effective implementation of gender equity practices.
- k) Provide financial incentives for programs that achieve high completion rates across genders in non-traditional and in-demand trades.
- l) Support initiatives that specifically aim to reduce the systemic barriers faced by underrepresented groups in apprenticeships.

5. Expand Access to Mentorship and Peer Networks:

Enhance the support system available to apprentices by leveraging relationships and networks:

- m) Establish mentorship programs that connect apprentices with mentors from similar backgrounds to foster a sense of belonging and provide role models.
- n) Support the formation and sustainability of peer networks that promote collaborative learning and mutual support among apprentices, emphasizing diversity and inclusion.

6. Innovate through Technology and Infrastructure:

Utilize technology to create more accessible and inclusive training environments:

- o) Invest in the development of virtual training tools and platforms that provide flexible learning opportunities for apprentices, especially in remote or underserved areas.
- p) Use technology to facilitate anonymous reporting and feedback on workplace issues, ensuring apprentices can voice concerns without fear of retaliation.

7. Gender Impact Assessments for All Apprenticeship Policies:

Regular gender impact assessments can ensure that apprenticeship policies and programs do not inadvertently perpetuate inequities:

- q) Introduce mandatory gender impact assessments for all existing and new apprenticeship programs and policies.
- r) Use the results to continuously refine and adapt strategies to better support gender equity in apprenticeships.

8. Commit to Ongoing Research and Engagement:

Understanding and addressing the barriers to gender equity in apprenticeships requires ongoing commitment to research and stakeholder engagement:

- s) Fund comprehensive studies to explore the intersectional barriers affecting various underrepresented groups within apprenticeships.
- t) Establish advisory panels consisting of apprentices, educators, employers, and policymakers to provide diverse perspectives and guidance on improving gender equity.

_END