

JULY 2020

# PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION - INTERIM REPORT SUBMISSION

Skills and Workforce  
Development  
Agreement

## **SUBMITTED BY**

Gender Equity Victoria  
WAVE - Women in Adult & Vocational Education  
Gender Equity Accredited Training Project (WHV)

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# Who are we?

## Gender Equity Victoria

Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC) is the Victorian peak body for gender equity, women's health and the prevention of violence against women. We evolved from the Women's Health Association of Victoria (WHAV), which was formed in 1994 as a peak body for the women's health sector. Our purpose is to advocate, influence and collaborate to improve outcomes in gender equity, women's health and in the prevention of violence against women.



Now, GEN VIC works with a broad array of organisations across Victoria – including government, peak bodies and public, community and private organisations – to advance a shared vision of gender equality, health and freedom from violence for every woman and girl in every community across Victoria.

## WAVE – Women in Adult and Vocational Education

WAVE is a national network of women involved in VET, adult education and the broad field of work-related education and training. WAVE provides seminars & workshops, research, policy advocacy and advice, as well as networking on an international, national and state basis. We are supported within each state by local representation that in turn contributes collaboratively to national events and governance. WAVE was formed in 1985, the first and only national and autonomous non-government organisation for Australian women in the adult, community and vocational education and training sector.



## Gender Equity Accredited Training Project (WHV)

In July 2018, Women's Health Victoria was funded by the Victorian Government to develop an accredited course in Gender Equity.

In conjunction with RMIT, Monash University, Knox City Council, Women with Disabilities Victoria, ACEVic and two adult community education providers Coonara Community House and Yarrowonga Neighbourhood House, the project to date has produced:



**Knowledge • Skills • Solutions**

- Eight accredited units of competency which form the Course in Gender Equity 22521VIC which is registered on the VRQA list of accredited courses
- A research report by Monash University on the pedagogical approaches required to teach the gender equity units of competency
- A Teaching Toolkit supporting the delivery of the gender equity units of competency
- Pilot of the accredited course and development of six Microcredentials and a Virtual Workplace to support workplace context of gender equity.

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# Introduction

As part of its review of the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development (NASWD) the Australian Government requested that the Productivity Commission consider a number of issues in its terms of reference.

Our submission responds to matters raised in the interim report released on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June 2020, and speaks to issues in relation to item 5 in the scope of work which asks the Commission to consider:

*options to ensure government investment in VET encourages increased participation in training by all Australians and is commensurate with the outcomes and benefits derived by individuals, business, industry, the local and national economy and society more generally*

Further, in making this submission we note the interim report points out that:

*Targets through the National Agreement have not been met and the performance indicators have proved to be deficient.*

*There is a manifest capacity to better allocate the \$6.1 billion in governments' spending on VET to improve outcomes.*

This submission provides evidence to support our recommendations - that in order for the next NASWD to deliver the intended outcomes for all Australians, gender equality needs to be a long term national target and measures of progress to this target need to be defined and tracked in the COAG performance dashboard.

This submission also outlines the evidence that shows the significant gendered barriers to skills and the workforce that currently exist.

Gender equality is a real driver of prosperity and conversely gender inequality underpins many of the issues highlighted in the interim report.

Australia has a unique workforce – it is uniquely segregated by gender. Further, gender segregated labour markets are reflected in gender segregated skills and education systems where pedagogy, structures, culture and attitudes to gender and work are entrenched at the start of a person's post-secondary school educational journey and working life. This entrenches pay gaps, reduces living standards for many, reinforces gender stereotypes and limits the ability for all Australian's to reach their full potential.

We argue that for any future NASWD to achieve its objectives, VET must situate itself within an economic and social policy framework that not only seeks to deliver a highly skilled workforce but also ensures all working age Australians are able to develop the skills they need for work. This can be achieved by implementing a range of enablers and drivers of productivity and social inclusion that break down this gender segregation in education and through that the labour markets.

The drivers of this segregation are complex. To unleash the potential that years of evidence show is available to all Australians, to enable greater levels of participation by women in VET and the workforce, a specifically designed gender equity framework for VET is required. This framework needs to address inequity in the VET workforce, cultural barriers to women's participation in a range of priority workforces, and improvements to pedagogy and teaching practices.

Our research shows that women have different levels of participation in different learning settings and highlights that there are programs which we believe provide a clear opportunity for VET to learn and understand more about how it can create more equitable learning environments.

By applying a gender equity lens to VET provision and addressing the gender inequalities that currently exist in Australia's skills system we strongly believe that the Government will see significantly improved outcomes for the \$6.1 billion currently invested into VET.

# Context

Economic security means having a stable income, affordable shelter and income for food and basic living expenses. It also means having opportunities to thrive through education, training and employment. A gender equal economy is a human right, but it is also essential for prosperity.

Research from across the world has shown gender equity delivers greater productivity, higher profits and economic growth. It prevents violence against women and girls and diminishes corruption. Societies that value women and men as equal are safer and healthier.<sup>1</sup>

By making these recommendations to the Commission, our submission recognises that one size does not fit all, and that the skills system – educators, training providers, policy owners, funders, leaders, industry partnerships, schools and strategy – has a role to create prosperity by creating skilled workers who can create both social and economic change, and supports those that live with the daily reality of inequality and inequity to become part of a prosperous and equitable society. This reality is acknowledged in the VET Reform Roadmap<sup>2</sup> (Skills Senior Officials Network February 2020) that seeks, as part of a broader set of goals, a VET system where “All learners access and thrive in training that is right for them”.

Our view, and the evidence that is presented, is that achieving a VET system that *supports all learners, provides meaningful work experience and benefits from a sufficient supply of workers with the right skills to meet industry needs, and provides access to education and training that meets (the) learning, up-skilling and re-skilling needs*<sup>3</sup> at all stages of a learner’s life will require a significant step-change in how VET is structured and measured – for us, this will be about addressing significant gender inequity in the VET sector.

The evidence from the Commissions own review, and that of the COAG Dashboard shows that VET only delivers modern high-skill high-wage outcomes for some. The role of VET, in particular through the TAFE network, has been narrowed in recent years as a result of the creation of a system that

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<sup>1</sup> Please see WGEA The Business Case - <https://www.wgea.gov.au/topics/workplace-gender-equality/the-business-case>,

International Monetary Fund “Economic Gains from Gender Inclusion: New Mechanisms New Evidence) October 2018 Victorian Government “The benefit of gender equality” December 2019 <https://www.vic.gov.au/benefits-gender-equality>

World Health Organisation Gender Equity and Human Rights <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/health-topics/gender-equity-and-human-rights>

Goldman and Sachs & JBWere (2009), Australia’s hidden resource: the economic case for increasing Female Participation, viewed 17 September 2018, [https://www.asx.com.au/documents/about/gsjbw\\_economic\\_case\\_for\\_increasing\\_female\\_participation.pdf](https://www.asx.com.au/documents/about/gsjbw_economic_case_for_increasing_female_participation.pdf)

Noland, M., Moran, T., & Kotschwar, B. R. (2016), Is Gender Diversity Profitable? Evidence from a Global Survey. Peterson Institute for International Economics Working Paper,

Gratton, L, Kelan, E, Voigt, A, Walker, L and Wolfram H-J (2007), Innovative Potential: Men and Women in Teams, Executive Summary; Credit Suisse (2012), Gender Diversity and Corporate Performance, Credit Suisse Research Institute.

<sup>2</sup> <https://docs.employment.gov.au/documents/vocational-education-and-training-vet-reform-roadmap-consultation-draft>

<sup>3</sup> VET Reform Roadmap Feb 2020 Skills Senior Officials Network

focuses on the economic drivers and barriers for education rather than the whole context of learning – the social *and* economic factors.

Efficiency for the VET market should be measured in both social and economic outcomes where job attainment through vocational pathways is examined within the context of how the education investment breaks down barriers to labour market participation. This would provide a complete picture of system performance and should comprise:

- Measures of total VET activity x gender participation
- Measures of VET to develop foundation skills x gender
- Evaluation of longer term labour market outcomes x gender

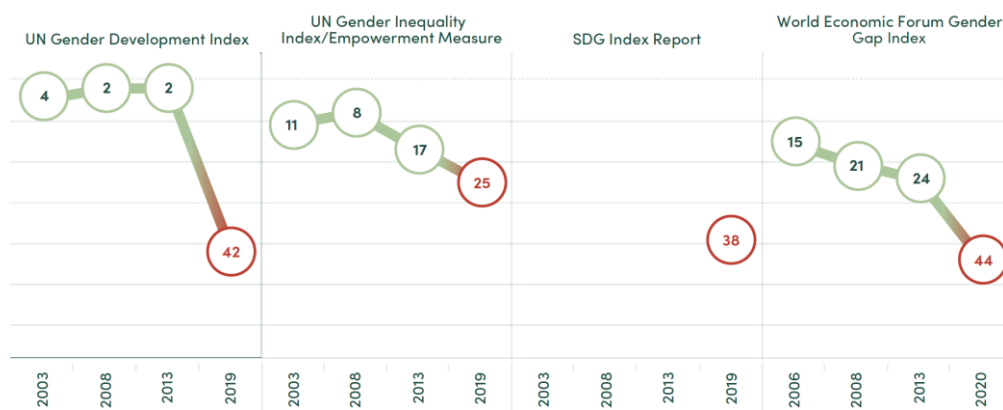
# The reality of inequality

Our recommendations are built on our communities' expectation that a social contract exists with its training and education providers. This expectation is regularly highlighted – through such things as significant concern and outrage at poor quality providers, to disquiet about our nation's inability to deliver the skills that we need for our future. The ongoing concern about the efficacy of our VET system is also shown in the innumerate number of reviews and reforms of VET.<sup>4</sup> We would argue that what is lacking in all the analysis that is being conducted is the naming and responding to the hope and trust that is held in our community, that education does deliver to both economic growth, and social cohesion needs. We contend that this social contract has been broken to a point where current policy and practice, including that in education and training, entrenches inequality. Particularly gender inequality.

We can see this in the following reality:

- Women are over-represented as part-time workers in low-paid industries and in insecure work, and continue to be underrepresented in leadership roles in the private and public sectors<sup>5</sup>
- Women are more likely to be in casual employment than men: 25.5 percent of all female employees in Australia are casual compared to 19.7 percent of male employees.<sup>6</sup>
- Employees in female-dominated industries such as health care and social assistance are paid significantly less than employees in male-dominated industries<sup>7</sup>
- Australia's current gender pay gap for full-time work is 15.3 percent. Women earn on average \$253.70 a week less than men<sup>8</sup>

In addition to this, a snapshot of Australia using international gender equality markers and tools shows that rather than maintaining or even improving gender equity in our community, we are actually falling behind.



<sup>4</sup> We acknowledge recent work through COAG's VET reform roadmap and note that one aspect is to see that (destination 4) "All learners access and thrive in training that is right for them". (Skills Senior Officials Network Vocational Education and Training Reform Roadmap: Consultation Copy 21 Feb 2020)

<sup>5</sup> [www.humanrights.gov.au/education/face-facts/face-facts-gender-equality-2018](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/education/face-facts/face-facts-gender-equality-2018)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.actu.org.au/media/349417/lives\\_on\\_hold.pdf](https://www.actu.org.au/media/349417/lives_on_hold.pdf)

<sup>7</sup>

<https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/BCEC%20WGEA%20Gender%20Pay%20Equity%20Insights%202017%20Report.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/gender-pay-gap-statistics.pdf>



A snapshot of Australia's Current gender inequality performance as provided in Dawson, Kovac and Lewis  
*Measure for Measure: Gender Equality in Australia Per Capita* March 2020

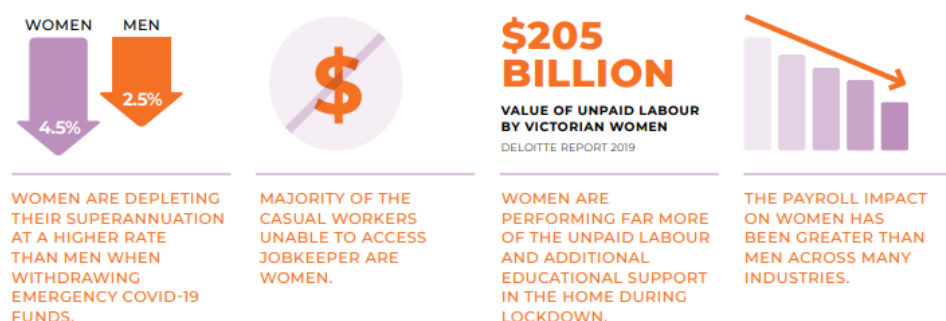
### Impact of COVID-19 on Women's Economic Participation

Further, evidence from the current COVID-19 pandemic shows how at risk any gains in equality are.

Evidence summarised by Gender Equality Victoria shows us that women have been hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic with higher unemployment rates, less access to JobKeeper, greater responsibility for caring and unpaid work and significantly poorer mental health outcomes, specifically:

- More women than men have become unemployed. Overrepresented in part-time and casual roles, and in low-paid sectors such as hospitality, tourism and the arts, 55% of people in the unemployment line because of the COVID-19 pandemic are women.
- For those still in paid work, 11.5% of women have reduced their hours compared to 7.5% of men. More women than men work as casuals with less than 12 months continuous employment making them ineligible for JobKeeper payments.
- Casual women workers are missing out on Job Keeper payments. Most of the workers with less than 12 months continuous employment are women returning to work after child-raising. Without government support, businesses relying on the casual labour of women are unlikely to survive the COVID-19 pandemic, creating indefinite job loss.
- Women are disproportionately represented on the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic in the health, aged and disability care, early childhood, education and food retailing industries. Despite keeping the country running in essential service workforces, women in these industries are poorly paid because of gendered attitudes towards feminized work.

55% of job losses due to COVID-19 are women.



Gender Equity Victoria *Gender Disaster and Resilience: Towards a Gender Equal Recovery* "Factsheet Gender Equity and COVID-19 2020"<sup>9</sup>

Not only have women been most affected by the COVID-19 crisis, but current Federal Government programs and plans do not seek to address this inequity, including the recently announced JobTrainer. Increased funding for industries such as construction appear to be created without considering the need to build greater opportunities for women and girls in the workforce. VET has the capability to play a significant role in developing programs that meet the needs of many women and enable them to take up job opportunities.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.genvic.org.au/resources/covid-19-resources/>

Getting women back into the workforce (and sustained meaningful work) will require deliberate and targeted investment by Governments – and those decisions and investment will need to occur immediately. Existing policy and programs could include additional incentives to enrol women in qualifications and short courses in specific industries. We would also highlight that given the gendered impact of COVID-19 on the economy, the VET system, through funding policy, can also play a role in incentivising and maximising the engagement of women and girls in VET to assist in stimulating workforce capacity in our recovery from the pandemic.

Equitable access to VET needs to recognise that the learner or potential learner has a range of barriers and enablers to being a consumer of VET. Any new principles based agreement needs to measure success within the context of those barriers/enablers recognising that gender is a key barrier/enabler for Australians to access VET as is represented through the current pandemic.

Reform of VET needs to be facilitated by recognising the diverse pathways that learners need to take to education and employment – accountability for addressing barriers can be recognised in the next NASWD through targets for both student uptake and completions that encourage gender equity.

# Why gender equality matters

Gender inequality is any structure, social norm, behaviour, attitude, cultural setting or otherwise that results in different rights and dignity for women and men. This is reflected in unequal access to an enjoyment of human results. It is driven by deeply ingrained systemic attitudes, values and beliefs that together with unequal structures and practices emphasise stereotypes of femininity and masculinity, supports poor and negative attitudes towards women, and perpetuates poor “rules” about how all genders should behave and what their place in society is. Gender inequality starts at birth and runs through to death – it covers all classes, all cultures and all language groups. It limits potential, stifles wellbeing and aspirations, curtails economic growth, perpetuates violence and prevents all of us living up to our full potential.

## *It matters to the Australian Government*

The Australian Government champions the advancement of women across a number of policy areas – economically the Government’s Towards 2025 seeks to close the gap of women’s participation in the workforce. In addition to this, the Australian Government has specific programs to encourage more women to work in STEM, and internationally the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has its own investment strategy to create gender equality and empower women to contribute to growth, development, stability and security. The strategy recognised the value of better educated women in community.

## *Economically it matters*

The 2019 update to KPMG and Diversity Council’s *She’s Price(d)less*<sup>10</sup> takes the drivers of gender inequality and ascribes them with a contribution to the hourly rate pay gap. Overall the economic value of addressing the pay gap is significant;

...Closing the primary drivers of the gender pay gap is equivalent to \$445 million per week, or almost \$23 billion per year. ...

KPMG and Diversity Council of Australia *She’s Price(d)less* 2019 Update<sup>11</sup>

Using data from the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey we can see this inequality. In 2019 the survey identified that the hourly gender pay gap in Australia has reduced from 3.05AUD/p/hr to 2.43AUD/p/hr. Noting however, that the drivers of this discrimination persist – gender discrimination, care family and workforce participation and finally, occupational and industrial segregation. On this last point KPMG estimate that this segregation contributes some 17% to the gender pay gap.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> KPMG Diversity Council of Australia *She’s Price(d)less: The economics of the gender pay gap 2019*  
[https://www.dca.org.au/research/project/shes-pricedless-2019-update-report#:~:text=She's%20Price\(d\)less%20is,to%20the%20gender%20pay%20gap.](https://www.dca.org.au/research/project/shes-pricedless-2019-update-report#:~:text=She's%20Price(d)less%20is,to%20the%20gender%20pay%20gap.)

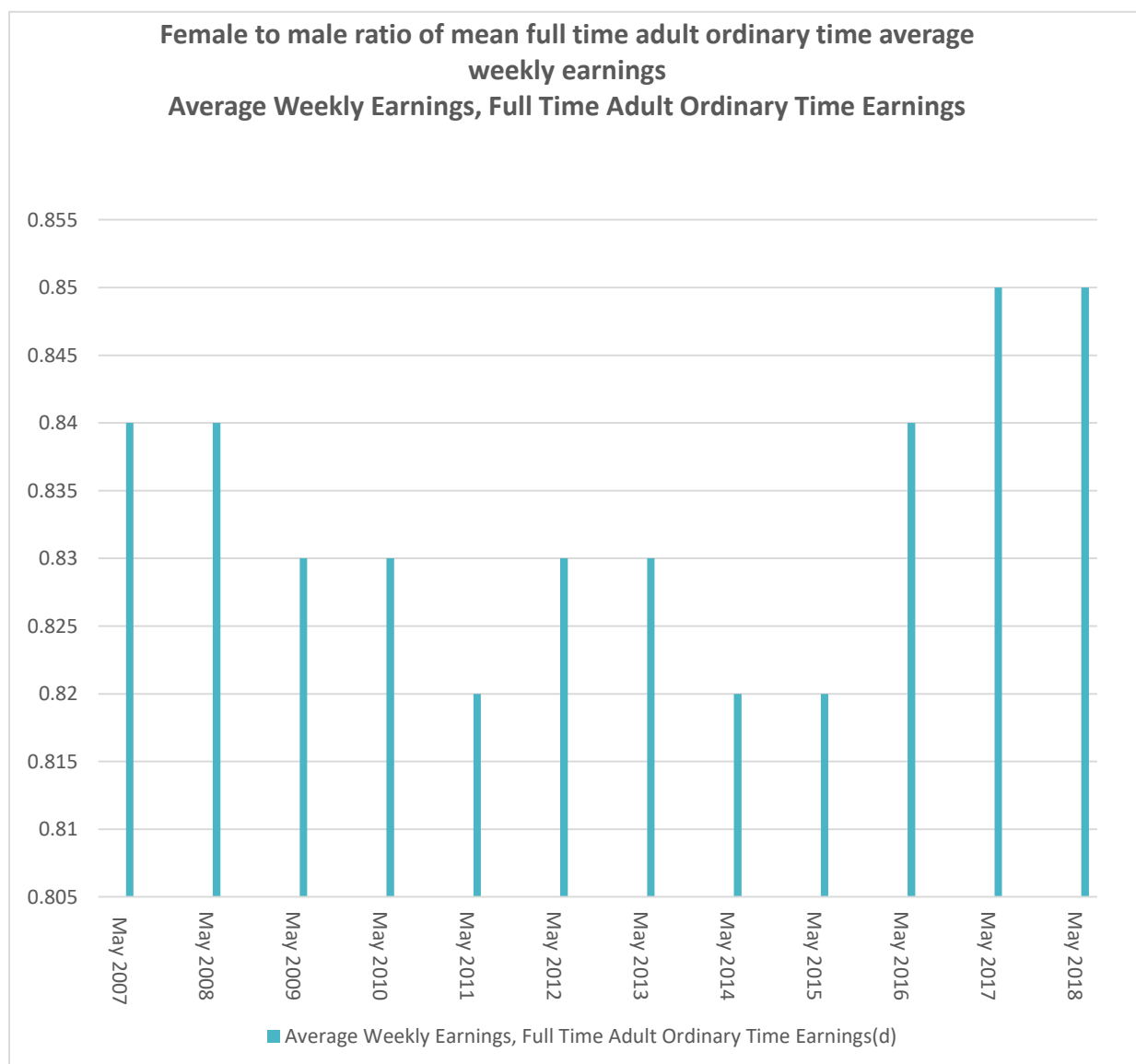
<sup>11</sup> <https://www.dca.org.au/research/project/shes-pricedless-2019-update-report>

<sup>12</sup> <sup>12</sup> KPMG Diversity Council of Australia *She’s Price(d)less: The economics of the gender pay gap 2019*  
[https://www.dca.org.au/research/project/shes-pricedless-2019-update-report#:~:text=She's%20Price\(d\)less%20is,to%20the%20gender%20pay%20gap.](https://www.dca.org.au/research/project/shes-pricedless-2019-update-report#:~:text=She's%20Price(d)less%20is,to%20the%20gender%20pay%20gap.)

Where data and research do recognise the impacts of gender equality on our economy, rarely are the connections with education and training, particularly VET, also made.

In addition to this, research just released by the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (BCEC) and the Workforce Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) found that “an increase in the share of female ‘top-tier’ managers by 10 percentage points or more led to a 6.6 per cent increase in the market value of Australian ASX-listed companies, worth the equivalent of AUD\$104.7 million.”

Further, the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018 Gender Indicators data shows that from 2007 to 2018 women’s average weekly earnings, full time adult (ordinary) were persistently below that of men.



(a) The rate ratio is calculated by dividing female earnings for each respective year and industry by male earnings for the same year and industry. A rate ratio of 1.0 indicates parity between female and male earnings, whereas a rate ratio greater than 1.0 indicates an earnings inequity in favour of females, and a rate ratio less than 1.0 indicates an earnings inequity in favour of males.

## Socially it matters

Women are just over half the population, and yet<sup>13</sup>:

- Family violence is the most pervasive and common form of men's violence against women in Australia. It is the leading cause of death and disability in women aged 15-45 years and is the biggest contributor to women's ill-health including poor mental health.
- Family violence is the single largest driver of homelessness for women, a common factor in child protection notifications, and results in a police call-out on average once every two minutes across Australia.
- In 2015, the perception of safety average for women was only 44.0% compared with 78.8% for men.
- On average, 1 in 3 Australian women and 1 in 5 men will experience an anxiety disorder at some stage in their life. The Victorian Population Health Survey in 2017, reported 29% of Victorian adults reported ever being diagnosed with anxiety or depression by a doctor (average of all local government areas). - an average of 33.6% of women and 21.0% of men reported having ever been diagnosed with depression or anxiety.
- In 2017 the Victorian Admitted Episodes Dataset recorded 6,347 self-harm admissions of which 4,282 were for females and 2,065 were for males. Compared with 2016, female admissions increased by 170 (up from 4,112) and male admissions increased by 8 (up from 2,053).

Research has outlined many benefits to the wellbeing of women through specific VET programs, including the South Australian TAFE-run women's courses. Such courses ensure strategies and pedagogy are applied that meet the diverse needs of women and girls. VET plays an important role in the wellbeing of Australians, and we would add, that to enable gender-sensitive pedagogy to occur, systemic change across the VET system including capability building of the VET workforce needs to occur.

The same drivers that negatively impact women, impact men. We know from recent research undertaken by Jesuit Social Services through the Man Box project that:<sup>14</sup>

- Living up to the pressures of male stereotypes causes harm to young men and those around them, particularly women.
- Young men who most strongly agree stereotypes of male behaviour, report poorer levels of mental health, engage in risky drinking, are more likely to be in car accidents and to report committing acts of violence, online bullying and sexual harassment including perpetuating verbal bullying, online bullying and physical bullying.
- Men with strong alignment to male gender stereotypes are also likely to report feeling depressed and hopeless and having thoughts of suicide.

Our submission highlights a real and urgent need for Australia's VET system to have a strong and transparent gender lens applied to policy and practice to reduce the impact of gender inequality on all Australians. The next NASWD needs to contain measures on gender equality for the VET system.

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<sup>13</sup> Women's Health Atlas, 2020 Women's Health Victoria

<sup>14</sup> Jesuit Social Services, *The Men's Project* <https://jss.org.au/what-we-do/the-mens-project/research/>

# Gender segregated labour markets

A 2017 Commonwealth Senate inquiry into gender segregation in the workplace sought to identify and address the causes of gender segregation in the workplace and its impact on women's economic equality. It found that despite increased participation in the workforce, women have been concentrated into particular jobs and sectors – where they do work side by side, “they are likely to be working for (men) as women find themselves restricted to more junior or poorly paid roles”<sup>15</sup> Not only this but the inquiry found entrenched forms of horizontal<sup>16</sup> and vertical<sup>17</sup> gender segregation, noting that horizontal segregation is more entrenched “because it plays to our basic understandings of gender roles”<sup>18</sup>

WGEA data shows that the “majority of Australian employees continue to work in industries dominated by one gender” with “only 46.5% of employed Australian's work(ing) in gender mixed organisations”.<sup>19</sup> Further, the same analysis also shows that “Female employees are paid less than male employees across all gender dominant classifications” and that “Employees in female-dominated organisations have lower salaries on average, for base salary and total remuneration, when compared to male-dominated organisations.” We also know that while gender pay gaps across female – dominated, male-dominated, and mixed organisations vary, these gaps consistently favour men.<sup>20</sup>

The data from WGEA also tells us that gender segregated labour is persistent in Australia, noting that between 1998 and 2018:

- The Health Care and Social Assistance and Education and Training industries are increasingly dominated by women.
- Many of the male-dominated industries, including Wholesale Trade, Manufacturing, Electricity, Gas and Water and Waste Services and Mining have seen an improvement in female representation.
- Declines in female representation are recorded in two male-dominated industries: Construction and Transport, Postal and Warehousing, Information Media and Telecommunications and the mixed industry: Financial and Insurance Services.

If we look specifically at trades, this persistent segregation becomes more pronounced. Women comprise 51.4% of all non-manager roles they comprise 14.6% of technicians and trade workers and 12.6% of machinery operators and drivers. (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, November 2018)

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<sup>15</sup> Senate Standing Committees on Finance and Public Administration *Gender Segregation in the workplace and its impact on women's economic equality* 7 June 2017

<sup>16</sup> Horizontal segregation is under- or over-representation of women and men in certain occupations or industries

<sup>17</sup> Vertical segregation is the imbalance between women and men in leadership categories (occupational hierarchies)... men dominate leadership categories while women are concentrated in non-management roles

<sup>18</sup> Senate Standing Committees on Finance and Public Administration, 2017 2.9

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.wgea.gov.au/data/fact-sheets/gender-segregation-in-australias-workforce#:~:text=The%20data%20shows%20that%20the,work%20in%20gender%20mixed%20organisations.>

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*

Further, WGEA research shows of those that are in construction, 12.1% are managers, up from 10.8% in 2013-14.<sup>21</sup> The agency concludes that women are least represented in Construction and Mining (however mining is one of two industries where women are not under-represented in management). In addition to this, the pay gap between women and men in the construction industry is 29.4% and is increasing. This is unique across all industries.<sup>22</sup>

By way of contribution, a 2013 report by the NSW Office for Women highlights that income distribution in trades is gendered with “men (being) over-represented at the top end of the income spectrum.. (and) women over represented ..” at the lower end of the income spectrum.<sup>23</sup> It is worth noting that the NSW analysis includes hairdressing trade, but even when this is removed the gendered pay gap is not eliminated.

The Australian Human Rights Commission in February 2017 put forward reasons and rationale for addressing gender segregation in workforces.

*An increased focus on increasing gender balance in male-dominated industries, as well as improving pay and conditions in female dominated industries, will be a key to addressing the negative impacts on women, the community and the economy in the long term. ... The motivation for change in those industries (supported by authoritative research) has been recognition of business benefits for those organisations, whether through:*

- *the diversity and increased talent in their employee and management pool,*
- *improved performance and innovation in key business areas, and/or*
- *enhanced capability to meet customer and community wants and needs.*

They also sought to specifically address the case for improving gender balance in female-dominated industries. The AHRC highlighted the reality that care work is not valued by society despite its significant contribution to the economy and society. The Commission highlights that:

*There are ... some very significant consequences for those industries/sectors where women have disproportionately high representation, and this can have an impact on the broader economy and community. For example: the paid parental leave ‘burden’ falls disproportionately on those sectors and is relatively light in businesses that mainly employ men; and female-dominated businesses are more likely to have their workers taking leave to care for children.*<sup>24</sup>

The AHRC’s own research showed that there are positive stories about men becoming aware and keen to improve balance of caring responsibility but noted that there has not been a significant shift

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<sup>21</sup> This is in comparison to Public Administration and Safety who have seen an increase of women in management roles from 16.9% in 2013-14 to 20.3% in 2017-18 and, Mining who have increased women in management from 14% in 2013-2014 to 17.02% in 2017-18.

<sup>22</sup> Australia's gender equality scorecard: Key findings from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2017-18 reporting data, November 2018)

<sup>23</sup> Women in Trades: the missing 48 percent (Women NSW Occasional Paper), Women NSW, March 2013

<sup>24</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *Gender Segregation in the workplace and its impact on women’s economic equality* February 2017

in caring responsibility resulting in the maintenance of the “man as breadwinner” stereotype. Their evidence shows that gender segregation in skills and work causes other social impacts:

*Female-dominated industries often create or perpetuate vulnerability of female workers and are prone to intersectional disadvantage and sexualisation.*

*Industries with male-dominated management and executive leadership can be prone to sexual harassment and sex discrimination.*<sup>25</sup>

## Changing workforce and Labour Market Dynamics

Australia has a rapidly changing labour market with growth in the caring sectors (nursing and aged care, childhood education and disability services). These workforces, as well as sales assistants are highlighted as needing more training in 2020, with other sectors being identified as having significant growth and short-term skill needs.

Noting the previous advice provided we would highlight that women make up the overwhelming majority of workers in **aged care**:

**Figure 3.4: Gender distribution of the residential aged care workforce: 2016 (per cent)**



Australian Government, Department of Health *The Aged Care Workforce 2016* (March 2017)<sup>26</sup>

88.7% of generally registered **nurses** in Australia are women and 91% of non-practicing registration are from women<sup>27</sup>.

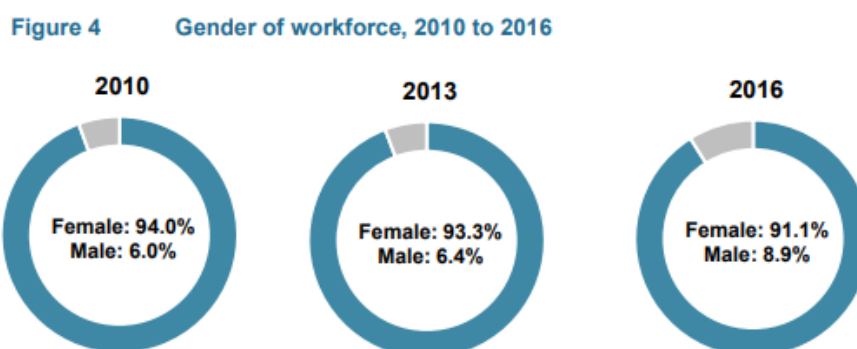
With regard to **childcare**, 1 in 5 workers in outside school hours care and vacation care were male, nearly all workers in home care and occasional care and long day care services were female.

<sup>25</sup> ibid

<sup>26</sup> [https://www.gen-agedcaredata.gov.au/www\\_ahwgen/media/Workforce/The-Aged-Care-Workforce-2016.pdf](https://www.gen-agedcaredata.gov.au/www_ahwgen/media/Workforce/The-Aged-Care-Workforce-2016.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> AHPRA Nursing and Midwifery Board Registrant Data 01 Jan 2020 to 31 March 2020





Social Research Centre, ANU *2016 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census* (September 2017) <sup>28</sup>.

The Australian Retail Association report that women make up some 57.7% of the industry<sup>29</sup>.

Our submission highlights the gendered nature of Australian workforces. We seek for the Commission to include in its final recommendations the implementation of gender equitable strategies to address inequity that is entrenched in workforce positioning and through this, assist in changing our labour markets.

## Career aspiration and VET positioning

As highlighted above Australia has a gender segregated workforce. However, we believe that it is within the power of the next NSAWD to either perpetuate or disrupt this.

A NASWD that supports gender equality needs to provide incentives for change across the system but also the policy and practice.

A practice that is worth highlighting and in need of a gender lens is the positioning of VET providers (both public and private) in their advertising to recruit students. Advertising by the VET providers <sup>30</sup> continues to support gender segregated pathways which have the potential to restrict career aspirations for all young Australians. The VET system needs to transform its approaches to career pathways and VET engagement dialogue in order to disrupt these long held gendered perceptions that maintain and reinforce a gender segregated workforce. This could be achieved through VET agreements which motivate signatories to address gender segregated workforces in such things as advertising and marketing<sup>31</sup>. The same policy settings could also motivate signatories to evolve their

<sup>28</sup> [https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/2016\\_ecec\\_nwc\\_national\\_report\\_sep\\_2017\\_0.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/2016_ecec_nwc_national_report_sep_2017_0.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.australian-retailers-association.com/women-in-retail-series>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7-lr1saM9s>,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmnIFtzyLtM>,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2304m9Z6Ll> and  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FzSUVrl81c>

<sup>31</sup> The authors to this submission would highlight the current gendered advertising that TAFE use in their marketing and advertising to recruit students. Many of these campaigns use images that further entrenched ideas about gender stereotypes in work and skills.

career advice and pathway information so that it is not gendered, is accessible for all Australians, and is supported by programs that develop the capacity of providers to understand and recognise the drivers of gender inequality and its impact. As well as supporting the building of equity in VET itself, this would be a strong framework for change.

Immediate changes are needed to disrupt this gendered view of careers and workforces and maximise economic participation by all in the future workforce.

A gender informed NASWD has the power to influence the transformational change required.

Despite a number of reports highlighting strategies that can enable and encourage women and girls into a wider variety of careers<sup>32</sup>, little appears to have changed. There remains a need for early and staged career exploration opportunities in schools, taster opportunities for girls in a variety of job roles, industry engagement and more role models including VET teachers.

This submission highlights the role that VET policy can play in perpetuating or disrupting gendered workforce. We position that it is the role of government to disrupt such patterns of behaviour which further limit girls and women's career aspirations and pathways to employment.

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<sup>32</sup> Butler E, Clarke K & Simon L 2014, *Hard Hats, Robots and Lab Coats: Broadening the career options of young women* eS4W/WAVE

# Gender in VET

We know that men persistently have higher numbers of enrolments and participation in VET than women.

*Amongst all VET qualification holders, the share of men having a VET qualification has been higher than women in the past three decades. By 2016, the share of females with a VET qualification was 44 per cent.* <sup>33</sup>

Addressing this entrenched segregation will require strong gender equity strategies to be developed and implemented, especially as it relates to attracting and retaining women into non-traditional careers where women's participation in VET is substantially lower. The evidence from enrolments tells us that gendered segregation in skills development is a longstanding issue which requires systemic change. It will also require VET funding to support women wishing to engage in what has historically been seen as 'non-traditional' career pathways, for example, through specific incentives to fund support programs so that providers can offer women specific programs.

## A note on Higher Education

It is worth noting that what is often mentioned alongside the unequal enrolments in VET are the unequal enrolments in Higher Education – that more women than men enrol in higher education (university). However, this reality does not mean that it results in pay equity. The latest Graduate Outcomes Survey National Report tells us that “Female undergraduates continue to earn less than male undergraduates in 2019, \$61,500 compared with \$64,700 respectively, a difference of \$3,200. This equates to a gender pay gap of 4.9 per cent, increasing slightly from 4.8 per cent in 2018.” The gender pay gap of graduate salaries is even more marked – women who graduate with postgraduate coursework degrees are reported to be \$13,700.00 (14.4%) worse off than their male peers. The pay gap has persisted since 2009.<sup>34</sup>

With many in the TAFE network being dual sector providers it is important for this shared inequality to be acknowledged and ultimately addressed.

## Gender segregation in skills development

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Gender disparity in education is well documented. It is particularly discussed in relation to gender equality in secondary schools and higher education where, women and girl's participation in STEM subjects is readily discussed. This submission has already suggested that VET system policies can perpetuate this gendered approach to VET engagement through its positioning of career pathways, and the impact of this can be readily seen in enrolment data.

*This submission highlights the often-overlooked gender inequity in VET specifically with regard to gendered enrolments in VET.*

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<sup>33</sup> Victorian Department of Education and Training *Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration Inquiry into gender segregation in the workplace and its economic impact on women's economic equality*, February 2017

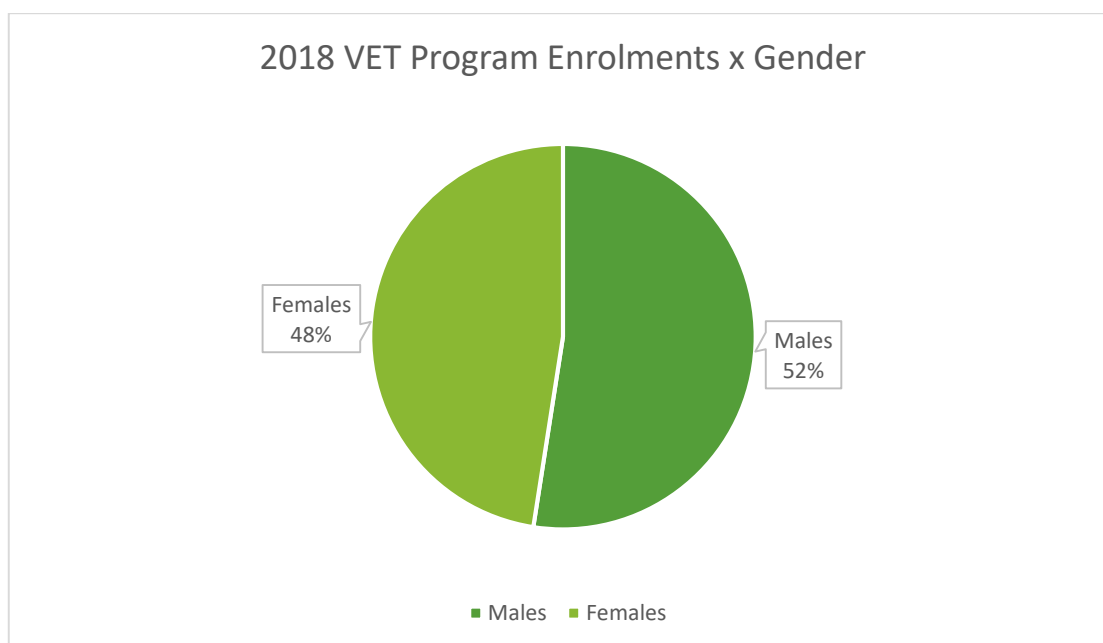
<sup>34</sup> Australian Government, Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching Graduate outcomes Survey October 2019

We further highlight that this entrenched gender-disaggregated participation in training mirrors the recognised labour market gender segregation.

According to 2018 NCVER data on student outcomes:

- Women are less likely than men to be not employed before training but employed after (men 50.4% and women 46.9%). For TAFE specifically, this figure is 46.5% for men and 40.8% for women.<sup>35</sup>
- Women are also less likely to report an improved employment status after training (61.3% for men and 56.9% for women). For TAFE specifically this is 61.2% for men and 52.9% for women).<sup>36</sup>
- There is a marked gender difference in the annual median incomes for graduates employed in their first full time job after training with men paid \$49 400 and women \$41 000.<sup>37</sup>

We know that more males than females enrol in VET across Australia.



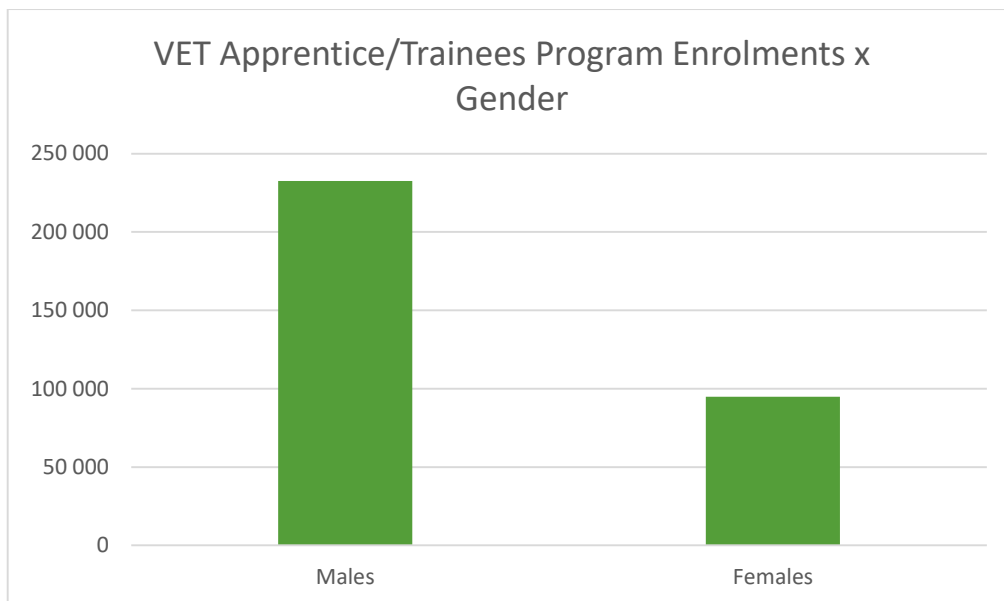
NCVER , Data Slicer TVA Students and Courses 2018 – Gender x Total Program Enrolments

We also know that more males than females enrol in apprentice/traineeship programs.

<sup>35</sup> NCVER (2018, December 6). VET student outcomes 2018: data slicer. Retrieved 22 January, 2019, from <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/all-data/vet-student-outcomes-2018-data-slicer>

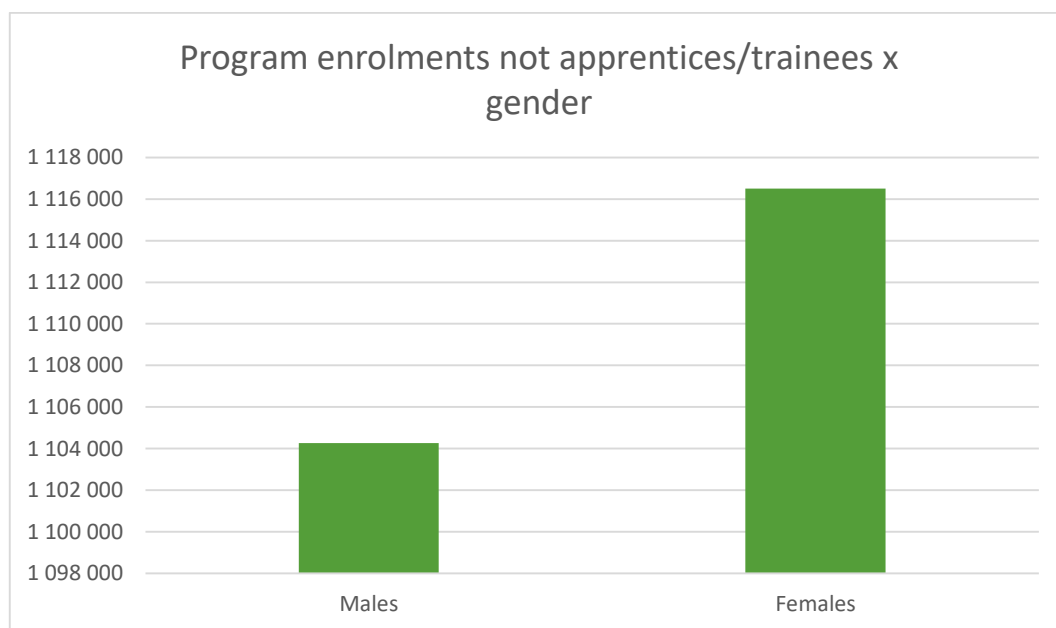
<sup>36</sup> NCVER (2018, December 6). VET student outcomes 2018: data slicer. Retrieved 22 January, 2019, from <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/all-data/vet-student-outcomes-2018-data-slicer>

<sup>37</sup> NCVER (2015). Women in vocational education and training: participation and outcomes. Document prepared by NCVER for the Women in Adult and Vocational Education 2015 National Conference.



NCVER , Data Slicer TVA Students and Courses 2018 – Gender x VET Apprentice/Trainee Program enrolments

Yet more females than males enrol in VET programs not linked to an apprentice/trainee.

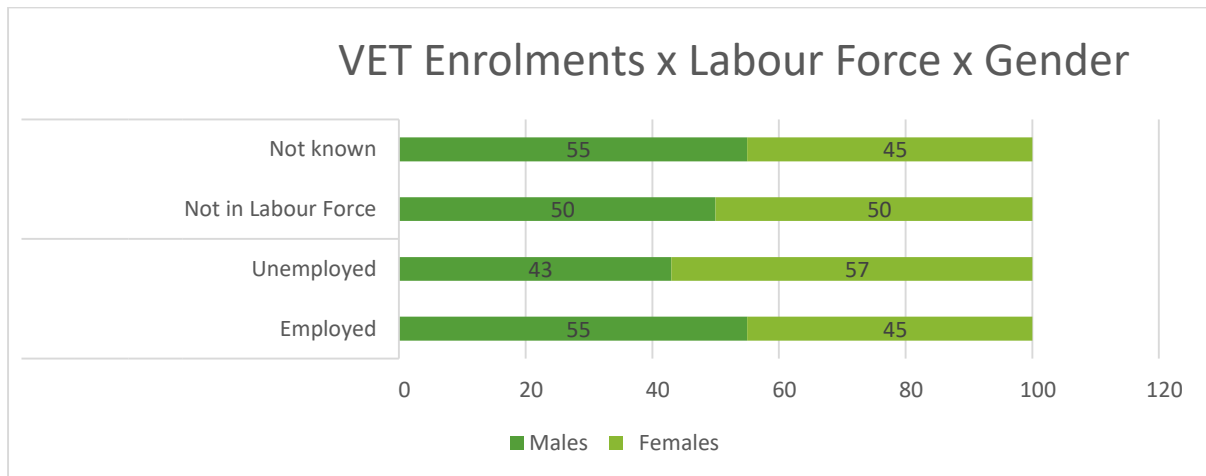


NCVER, Data Slicer TVA Students and Courses 2018 – Gender x program enrolments *not* apprentice/trainees

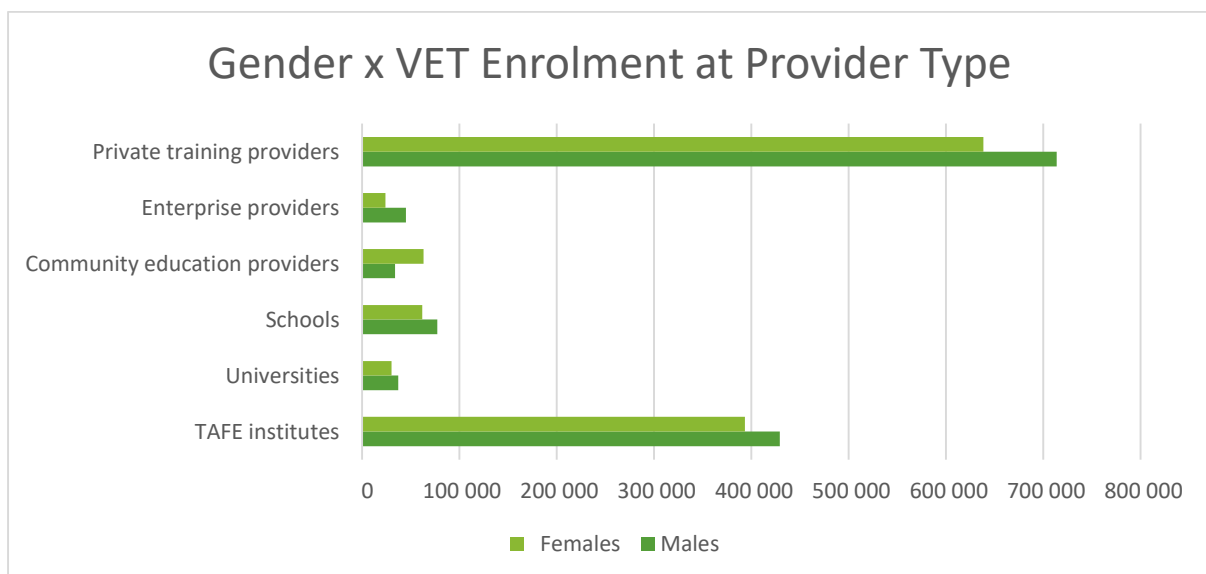
In addition to this around 47% of women in 2018 enrolled in training package qualifications, 53% of women enrolled in accredited qualifications and 54% in accredited courses across Australia. NCVER’s 2018 analysis of government-funded students and courses tells us that in 2018, 50.8% of students were males and 49% were females.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> NCVER, Australian Vocational Education and Training Statistics, Government Funded students and courses 2018 <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/government-funded-students-and-courses-2018>

Depending upon labour force type we also know that more women than men who are employed will participate in VET, whereas more men than women will participate in VET if they are unemployed with those not in the labour force equal participation.



Further there is evidence based on 2018 participation and enrolment data that more women prefer to learn vocational skills outside of the public provider with higher participation rates in community education providers. Overall though, there is less participation in education (VET) by women than men across all provider types.



NCVER , Data Slicer TVA Students and Courses 2018 – Gender x VET Enrolment at Provider Type

A 2019 analysis by NCVER on dynamics of qualifications showed that skilled pathways were gendered – the analysis somewhat wistfully concludes that “Even if an occupation is dominated by one gender or the other, the distribution of qualifications between each gender is usually similar”. We however would highlight how the entrenched inequities in our labour market and subsequent problems for our society, are reflected in our VET participation rates. For the reference of the review, we again highlight the key industry priority areas noting the significant number of women participating in VET in these sectors.

Distribution of gender with each qualification group within the 20 largest occupations (ANZSCO 4-digit), 2006 and 2016<sup>39</sup>



<sup>39</sup> Lisel O'Dwyer and Ian White, *The Dynamics of qualifications: implications for VET* NCVER 2019 <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/the-dynamics-of-qualifications-implications-for-vet>

This submission wishes to highlight the following points:

- There is gender segregation in skills development systems themselves. Labour market segregation is reflected in vocational pathways – gender inequality is evident in education and training
- While attention on gender and education has been focused on girls and women’s participation in science technology and mathematics education in secondary schools and higher education – it is missing from VET.
- Women are disadvantaged by current traineeship and apprenticeship policies. A gender analysis should be made to remove barriers to women enrolling in all VET pathways and ensuring positive strategies.
- A gender lens needs to be applied to the participation levels in different provider types of VET – for instance, how can we ensure the environment provided in Adult Community Education (ACE) settings that benefits women, is also available in TAFE.

## A note on Skill Shortages

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The relationship between gender and skill shortages is not directly discussed in vocational education and workforce development policy. However, it is regularly referred to as part of the overall complex set of dynamics that impact skills shortages. For instance in 2001, a skills assessment for the rural industry identified a “an ongoing need for replacement and improvement in the skill base because of the age and gender profile of the workforce” as the “*agricultural workforce is also characterised as a ‘relatively old, Australian-born male’* and combines the age and qualification profiles to warn of ‘*looming skill shortages*’.”<sup>40</sup> In 2002, the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs completed an inquiry into Nursing which included a chapter on skill shortages in that sector. The complexity of the worldwide shortage of nursing was recognised and specifically mentioned the gendered nature of the role “*Nursing was, in the past, seen as a traditional employment option for young women. Nursing has lost some of its attractiveness as greater career options have become available for young women and they become more aware of appropriate remuneration, conditions and career opportunities. Many nurses would not recommend nursing as a career choice.*”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Rural Industry Working Group, *SWkill needs now and in the future in the rural industry* February 2001

<sup>41</sup> Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *The Patient Profession: Report on the Inquiry into Nursing* June 2002 Commonwealth of Australia



Perhaps the most significant contribution to the thinking on skills shortages came out of commissioned work from the National Institute of Labour Studies who in 2011 and 2012 produced two reports on skills shortages.<sup>42</sup> Broadly the research concluded that identifying skills shortages was problematic due to uncertainty in forecasting, long-term demand, which was driven by a range of drivers. The research found that there is no one simple definition of a skills shortage – skill shortages comprise a “complex relationships surrounding the causes of skill shortages, employers’ responses to them and some of their economic consequences”. A very critical finding for any consideration on skill shortages is Healy et al.’s main finding which is that:

*skill shortages are a complex labour market phenomenon and that they give rise to complex responses by firms. Complexity, especially of the causes of skill shortages, has been a recurring theme in the empirical analysis and proves to be an essential element in understanding how skill shortages work and how they are linked to economic outcomes. The causes of skill shortages are very diverse. The dominant cause is a lack of specialist knowledge, but future-demand uncertainties, slow recruitment processes and high market wages are also involved. Lack of availability of adequate training is not reported to be a major cause of skill shortages<sup>43</sup>*

Healy et al.’s research data that supported the analyses on occupations affected by skills shortages was not split by gender, highlighting that the realities of the gender segregation of workforces was not even considered as part of skills shortage analysis. This is the case for both domestic and migrant workforces. Further, their analysis was based on the ABS Business Longitudinal Database which excludes health and education workforces – some of the biggest employers of women.

Our contention is that current analysis and forecasting of skill shortages will continue to not deliver outcomes for Australia’s future workforce if it does not recognise the variable nature of skills shortages in our workforce and in particular the gendered drivers of skill shortages. While much has been made of the opportunities to recruit women into traditionally male dominated trades (and we would argue more effort needs to be made for recruiting men into traditionally female dominated workforces) and the gendered nature of work and the barriers to recruitment and retention in Australia’s workforce remain. The role of VET in addressing this is not evidenced in current policy, and must be recognised and funded.

Research into the gendered nature of skill shortages by Lia Bryant and Katrina Jaworski (University of South Australia) demonstrated how in-built stereotypes of women and their needs for work are present and reinforce gendered workforce norms and in turn, skill requirements for jobs.

*Interview data demonstrated that understandings of skills shortages were influenced by the nature of work, and whether this work suited some workers more than others according to gender. In the food processing industry, HR personnel suggested that*

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<sup>42</sup> Healy, J., Mavromaras, K and Sloane Peter J. NLS Working Paper Series Working Paper no 171/2011 *Adjusting to Skills Shortages Complexity and consequences* Flinders University and Healy, J., Mavromaras, K and Sloane Peter J *Skills shortages: prevalence causes remedies and consequences for Australian business* NCVER Monograph Series 09/2012 Australian Government Dept. of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

<sup>43</sup> Healy, J., Mavromaras, K and Sloane Peter J *Skills shortages: prevalence causes remedies and consequences for Australian business* NCVER Monograph Series 09/2012 Australian Government Dept. of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

*‘women, unlike men are prepared to take work that is repetitive and paid less as they want work to fit in with looking after kids’.<sup>44</sup>*

Their research recognises the continued stereotypes for men and work, where they have associated undertaking work that is “dirty dangerous and not made for smaller people”. Similarly, the research supported that workplaces have gendered views of what it means to be an apprentice.

When considering what constitutes a skill shortage, measurement should include a gender lens to ensure that the stereotypes and norms of gender are not barriers to appropriately managing and mitigating Australia’s skills shortage risk and improve the ability to balance skills supply and demand. Approaches to forecast skills needs must be based upon an understanding of the drivers of gender inequality and balanced with strategies to respond to complexity in shortages and improved equality.

## Gender and Pedagogy

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Often conversations and narratives around gender and pedagogy (with regard to women) are solely centred around increasing the stream of women into STEM and trades learning and job roles. Yet the evidence of the value of broad education of women is internationally proven – returns to community, society and economy are well established when sovereign nations invest in the education of women.

In 2019 as part of a major project to develop an accredited course in Gender Equity, the *Gender Equity Accredited Training* Project, led by Women’s Health Victoria, commissioned Monash University to research the pedagogical approaches required to deliver the said course in gender equity. The course was thought so new, that trainer competency would need to be developed further to deliver this new course to a broad audience.<sup>45</sup> More particularly, the report sought to develop a framework for building skills in gender equity that seeks to transform practice and values. The research recognised that there are limitations to the current approaches to VET in order to use VET to deliver skills in gender equity:

*To achieve this within the current vocational education and training context, the report provides a brief background to the evolution of competency-based education in Vocational Education and Training in Australia so that the spaces for this rich understanding can be effectively located. This means it identifies where, according to*

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<sup>44</sup> Bryant, L. and Jaworski, K. “Gender, embodiment and place: The gendering of skills shortages in the Australian Mining and food and beverage industries” *Human Relations* 64 (10) pp 1345-1367

<sup>45</sup> Clemans A, Subban P, Gleeson J, Komarzynski L (2019) Supporting gender equity education: a research project to inform gender equity units of competency. Women's Health Victoria. Melbourne. (*Gender Equity Accredited Training Project Research Paper*)

*previous research, limitations to achieving this richer understanding may lie and where there are areas that offer potential.* <sup>46</sup>

The research found that Australia's predominant model of education practice in VET is – “focused on technical specific and generic skills. Gender equity relies on educational approaches that seek to transform learners understanding... “.

The new teaching model was developed on the basis that vocational education of gender equality requires educators with the ability to adapt to complex situations and tasks and requires educators to act with reflection and “to shift from performing habitually or subconsciously to being alert and aware to.. practice different behaviours or be open to transforming perspectives and behaviours”. The research emphasises the role of critical reflection as a core part of transformational practice.

The findings from this research into the pedagogical implications of gender equity force us to raise the reality of the transformational nature of gender equality in VET.

Research supports that the practice of educating others on gender equity requires that more VET educators change their education practice from functional to transformational pedagogy, therefore this submission proposes that the creation of a gender equitable VET system will require future national agreements to encourage change – across systems, culture and practices as well as structures.

### Gender and Teaching Practice

Great educators know that different people have different learning styles. The same research from Monash University and the Gender Equity Accredited Training Project puts forward the evidence around preferred learning styles that tend to be aligned to women. “There are suggestions that women possess a preference for subjective and affective methods, with others intimating that women opt for learning in a relational context”<sup>47</sup> Again research around the benefits of VET programs designed for women, has highlighted these preferred learning styles and opportunities.

The work also notes the evidence suggesting greater completion rates of female students participating in online education, compared to men noting that “would appear that the reflective nature of online learning acts as a better facilitator for female participants, as they believe they can manage the learning experience better”<sup>48</sup> Such suggestions tend to mirror evidence about preferred learning styles in boys/men whereby pedagogical research suggests that transitional classroom environments are contrary to the learning needs of girls.

While this submission will not go into the specifics and details of this debate, we only note that the following is worthy of consideration if the key driver for inequity, gender, is going to be addressed

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<sup>46</sup> *ibid*

<sup>47</sup> Hayes, E. (2001). A new look at women's learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 89, 35-42. in Clemans A, Subban P, Gleeson J, Komarzynski L (2019)

<sup>48</sup> Anderson, D. M., & Haddad, C. J. (2005). Gender, voice, and learning in online course environments. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Network*, 9(1), 3-14. in Clemans A, Subban P, Gleeson J, Komarzynski L (2019)

through a revitalised VET system that meets the expectations of a NASWD that is gender informed. Educator capability and capacity is key in this.

A recent piece of research undertaken by Sally Thompson, may provide some insight into some barriers that educators are faced with. The research focuses on a case study of a team of VET teachers, researchers and users of social services to develop a better qualification in the Health Care and Social Assistance industry. The research<sup>49</sup> articulates that:

- The experience of adapting and structuring learning to meet the needs of students is, while technically possibly, unrealistic given cost, regulatory and other practical barriers
- There is evidence, that, for low-paid workers, financial return on VET is limited or non-existent – *“training often made life harder for low paid workers by consuming time and money while raising unrealised expectations, particularly if that training ‘merely “ticks the box is not associated with genuine learning; is of poor quality; is not integrated into work processes; and creates new money and time strains, without generating rewards, in terms of new skills or better pay or prospects’*<sup>50</sup>
- There is a disconnect between the stated flexibility of training packages and the actual flexibility to customise learning to meet student needs

In summary, the “rigidity and complexity” of current structures in VET policy (Training Packages and regulatory regimes are named) “restrict teaching and assessment to narrow atomised, repetitive components”. Further Thompson concludes that:

*The case study also highlights the illusion of choice and flexibility of training package qualifications.. (and) that choices are limited by available funding, an administratively burdensome regulatory approach and by the complexity of the packages themselves.*<sup>51</sup>

While this submission does not seek to challenge the role of Training Packages, nor the value of nationally recognised qualification, what Thompson does highlight that we wish to highlight in this submission, is the effort required to customise and meet student needs and create VET programs that will lead to sustained economic participation. Current discussion in the VET sector has however reinforced the need for many VET qualifications to be developed to meet local industry and community needs, and the diverse requirements of students.

This submission wishes to highlight that within the current VET system, internal advocacy by teachers and students is still required to address inequality, and in particular gender inequality for students. Furthermore, that current funding models supporting VET delivery need to be reviewed to enable both the student and the workplace expectations to be met, and

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<sup>49</sup> Sally Thompson *A Vocational stream for social care workers: A case study* Australian Journal of Adult Learning Vol 60, Number 1 April 2020

<sup>50</sup> Pocock, B., Skinner, N., McMahon, C., & Pritchard, S. (2011). *Work, Life and VET Participation amongst Lower-Paid Workers*. NCVET Monograph Series 05/2011: ERIC.in Thompson, April 2020

<sup>51</sup> Thompson S April 2020

not just meet the training package rules for VET, to result in sustainable work outcomes for graduates.

## Gender Equality within VET as a Workplace

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Finally, it is important to highlight that the VET sector itself is still working towards becoming a gender equal workplace.

WGEA data tells us that within the category of Adult, Community and Other Education in 2019<sup>52</sup>:

- 34% of Directors and 21% of Board Chairs are women
- 33% of CEOs/Head of Business are females – positively 53% of key management personnel are women an increase of some 13% of previous years
- 81% of clerical staff are women, 67% of community and personal care wand women but 7% of machinery operators, drivers are women and 9.3% of Technicians and trade workers within Adult Community and Other education are women
- The gender pay gap (overall) is at -19% across all roles (base salary) with 31% of employers in the sector having a policy/strategy on remuneration containing specific gender pay equity objectives
- Interestingly, 80% of employers however report that they have an overall gender equality policy or strategy

The NASWD, through its defined expectations of states and territories, can play a large part in moving the VET sector towards becoming a gender equal workplace through influencing policy application at the state and territory level that speak to the workforce expectations supporting funded and public provision of VET.

It is our belief that applying a gender lens and creating gender equity within VET system starts with the VET workforce. A new National Agreement offers the perfect opportunity to address these inequities in the workforce.

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<sup>52</sup> [https://data.wgea.gov.au/industries/104#summary\\_content](https://data.wgea.gov.au/industries/104#summary_content) Adult, Community and Other Education has 12,762 employees within 35 organisations\* of any size

# Recommendations

Women are important to our economy.

Women are entering the workforce in record numbers. Women currently comprise 47.4% of all employed persons in Australia and are 37.7% of all full-time employees and 68.2% of all part-time employees.

While women's entry into the workforce is one of the greatest shifts in the last 30 years, women continue to be disadvantaged and segregated in both industry and sectors, and in the education settings.

If we are to address segregation and create prosperity, we must create a gender equal VET system – we must address the systems, structures, attitudes and norms that drive gender inequality in our workforce and skill system

Our recommendations ask for the future NASWD to include gender equality reform, reform that is needed for Australia's prosperity. Our recommendations are that the next NASWD needs to include measurements and targets that address the barriers to productivity due to gender inequality that is entrenched in our workforces, and which is exacerbated through our education and skills pathways.

## **We recommend that the next NASWD**

- a. Develop a strategic framework for women in VET with a clear set of priorities and targets with performance accountability mechanisms. We recommend that these align with the Australian Government's gender equity and prevention of violence policies and support the reform required to transform the Australian workforce in a post-COVID-19 environment.

The targets need to be based on a framework of long-term reform of inequality through the Australian VET sector and include:

- Targets for both retention and recruitment of women in male dominated VET courses *and* targets for retention and recruitment of men in female dominated VET courses
- An improved method for assessing skill shortages in the Australian workforce that, takes into account the prevalence of gender stereotypes and norms in Australian workforces
- A national approach to identify the barriers and enablers to women's participation in VET including in traineeships and apprenticeships, identifying what can be done to address the barriers and replicate enablers across the VET sector. (For instance, funding to support contextualisation of training package qualifications, or skills sets to enable better work opportunities.)
- An evaluation of the outcomes of VET policy from an equity perspective, including use of gender-disaggregated data. Collect, analyse and publish performance and outcome data on women's participation in VET, that include trends over time that are disaggregated by gender, and what steps have been taken to address shortcomings.

Include a requirement for the Australian VET system to address gender inequality by:

- Reforming VET funding models and policy that impact women's engagement and completion (retention rates),
- Improve VET funding to ensure funded training providers hold workforce expertise, facilities and services that are appropriate for the provision of gender equitable VET with structures and practices that support gender equality in VET and the VET Sector

*Note: these issues have currently been exacerbated due to COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the economy, society and labour markets, and we recognise that this impact may continue for some time into the future, this recommendation therefore speaks to the importance for VET reform to address women's participation as part of the COVID-19 recovery as a priority.*

We further make a set of **broader recommendations** for Australia's VET system to ensure it sustainably addresses gender inequality in our workforces and lifts national productivity. We advocate that the next NAWSD should include specified projects and reforms that include:

- b. With the Office for Women, and in consultation with the COAG Advisory Panel on Reducing Violence Against Women and their Children, create a social inclusion office either within the Department of Education and Training or as an independent unit, to coordinate reforms on gender equality across the VET sector. In some instances, leadership on this could also be exercised by State and Territory jurisdictions to assist in reforms.
- c. A VET Sector Workforce Development strategy to build the capacity and capability of the VET workforce to address the gender impact of skills development and the benefits of equitable approaches to promoting and building skills across communities.

*Note: the TAFE network/public providers are perfectly positioned to take a leadership role in modelling gender equitable education and training practices and the required infrastructure to achieve gender equity reform in VET, highlighting that workforce capacity building through for example, funding accredited gender equity training, may be required to achieve this.*