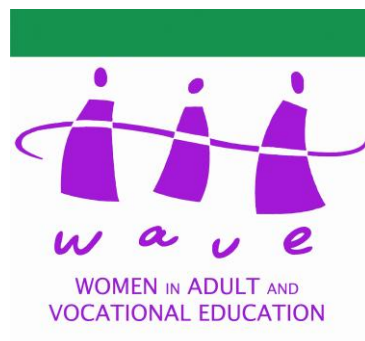




WOMEN AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING: STRATEGIES FOR GENDER INCLUSIVE VET REFORM

A Policy Background Paper

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Women and VET: Strategies for Gender Inclusive VET Reform

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Glossary

AQTC	Australian Qualifications Training Council
AQTF	Australian Quality Training Framework
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NEAC	National Equity Advisory Council
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WAVE	Women in Adult and Vocational Education
WWDA	Women With Disabilities Australia

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy paper was commissioned by Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE) and funded by Security for Women (S4W) to update WAVE/S4Ws previous policy document *Towards a Sustainable Economic Future: Women and Vocational Education and Training* and to ensure that a gender inclusive vocational education and training system is achieved.

There is a significant reform agenda being driven by the Council of Australian Government (COAG) and the Rudd Government's commitment to the Education Revolution. Also of critical importance nationally are the economic stimulus programs being implemented in response to the global financial crisis and the green skills programs developed in response to climate change.

An aim of this research was to:

analyse the gendered nature of these programs;
consider their impact on women and VET provision; and
recommend strategies for making VET more gender inclusive.

Background

Vocational education and training in Australia provides skills training to approximately 1.7 million people each year (1,696,400 across all states and territories in 2008). This represents 11.3 per cent of Australians aged between 15 to 64 years. Of these 52.3 per cent were male and 47.6 were female (887.500 men and 806.700 women).¹

Since the mid 1970's government and jurisdictions around Australia have developed and implemented a range of strategies and interventions to inject gender balance in to the vocational education and training system. Historically the domain of male dominated trade training, with a heavily male, blue collar worker image, VET has struggled over time to offer programs that appeal to women and, more importantly, enable them to gain sustainable employment outcomes commensurate with their skill and qualification.

Women remain underemployed in spite of considerable investment by governments, and providers to educate and train women. Women's entry in to the workforce has been the single greatest shift in the Australian labour market in the last 30 years. However, women continue to be clustered in traditionally female occupational areas and are over represented in part time employment. They are more likely than men to have significant breaks in employment due to their caring roles in families. When they are out of the workforce they are less likely to access government services that lead to an under-reporting of the true level of women's unemployment.²

Gender equality is a major international policy platform. In Australia, women are identified as one of the equity target groups for VET under the auspices of national

1 NCVER (2009) *Vocational Education and Training Statistics Students and Courses 2008* Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations pp. 8-9

2 Richardson, David (2009) *Exits and Entrances: the impact of the recession on women* (Draft in Confidence) The Australian Institute

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policy frameworks including *Shaping Our Future*. The current VET national policy for women, *Women: shaping our future* is due to expire in 2010. WAVE seeks a commitment to a new strategic framework for women with a clear set of priorities and targets with performance accountability mechanisms for VET. This framework must be set in the context of key initiatives of the COAG Reforms and the Education Revolution.

Of critical concern to WAVE is the continuing disadvantage experienced by women in the workplace and the VET sector. The gap between the investment of public moneys in education and training and benefits from this investment, including improved employment outcomes from VET for women and girls, needs to be closed.

Key Findings

This report highlights the gender differences present in access, participation and outcomes of vocational education and training and identifies domains of change for policy makers and government. The following section summarises the main findings of the research and outlines a number of recommendations for achieving gender equality in the VET sector.

COAG Reform Agenda

The Council of Australian Government (COAG) has acknowledged that 'the global economic crisis underscores the importance of further microeconomic reform, including in relation to regulatory reform'. COAG has recently agreed to a work plan for further major reforms to the Vocational Education and Training system. The work plan will address a number of major reform areas including the development of models for a national regulatory body for vocational education and training³.

This progressive approach offers an opportunity to ensure programs are gender inclusive. The Australian Government's response to the global financial crisis and the policy challenges posed by global warming offer further opportunities to frame initiatives that address women's needs.

This paper makes a range of recommendations targeting action by Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and their advisory, regulatory and reporting bodies including the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education & Employment (MCTEE), National Industry Skills Council, the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF), the Australian Qualifications Training Council (AQTC), the National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC) and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), State Training Authorities, Registered Training Organisations, Job Network Providers, Industry, Unions and other relevant agencies and stakeholders.

WAVE believes the COAG Reform Agenda offers an opportunity for all tiers of government and advocates for gender equality to review VET outcomes for women and girls, to identify priorities and integrate them into VET system. To address fundamental issues of equity, the COAG reforms must incorporate a gender dimension.

⁴COAG Communiqué July 2009, accessed 28 July 2009 from www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/index.cfm

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The VET system

Funding for the VET system is provided by the Australian Government, state and territory governments, industry bodies, employers and individual students through fees.⁴ The shift over the last decade to a contestable training market has resulted in restricting access. Recent NCVET research highlights the conflict between the policy of increased competition between training providers and ensuring affordability of VET courses for people from disadvantaged backgrounds.^{5 6}

WAVE's contention is that there is a clear link between women's long-term economic security and equitable access to, participation in, and outcomes from vocational education and training. Vocational education and training offers a pathway to employment to unemployed and underemployed Australians and up-skilling or career progression for existing workers. Research demonstrates that targeted women's programs within VET lead to increased individual agency, well being and overall levels of community capacity.

Workforce Participation

As at 30 March 2008, Australia's female population was 10,700,779, representing 50.3 per cent of the total population. Of these approximately half, just over 5 million Australian women, are in the labour force. This represents 57.8 per cent of all women aged 15 years and over and means that women comprise 45.3 per cent of Australia's total labour force. Of these employed women nearly 2.2 million work part-time, representing 44.5 per cent of all employed women and 71.9 per cent of the part-time workforce. Part-time work is the dominant form of employment for women in lower skilled occupations such as clerical, sales and service workers, although part-time work is also common among female Professionals.

Women's entry in to the workforce has been the single greatest shift in the Australian labour market in the last 30 years. Women remain underemployed. They are more likely than men to have significant breaks in employment due to their caring roles in families. When they are out of the workforce they are less likely to access government services which lead to an under-reporting of the true level of women's unemployment (7).

VET Participation

In 2007, 794,200 women enrolled in vocational education and training (VET) courses, representing 47.7 per cent of all VET students. 136,850 of these women were enrolled in apprentices and traineeships, which represents 33.0 per cent of all apprentices and trainees in-training. Despite these encouraging figures, data just released highlight falling female enrolments in apprenticeship courses.

4 *ibid* pp. 4

5 Karmel, T, Beddie, F & Dawe, S (Eds.) (March 2009), *Competition in the Training Market*, Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

6 This is highlighted by the recent announcement of the South Australian government to remove low uptake courses in rural and regional areas including women's studies. Where markets are thin, the needs of disadvantaged students are vulnerable to profit based VET provision.

7 Richardson, David (2009) *Exits and Entrances: the impact of the recession on women* (Draft in Confidence) The Australian Institute

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The link between higher levels of qualifications and labour force participation is clear and the VET sector can play a critical role in lifting women's labour force participation and thereby their life long economic security. COAG has emphasized the importance of increased qualification levels for young Australians under its ***Earn or Learn program*** to ensure that young Australians are able to meet their full potential as productive citizens.

WAVE's Priorities

WAVE promotes gender-based analyses and approaches to reform in the VET sector to ensure that women's learning needs are met. WAVE argues for informed and proactive gender inclusive provision of VET, including teaching and learning, through the establishment and maintenance of women-friendly and safe VET learning environments and strengthened links to women friendly employers and enterprises.

International best practice in gender inclusiveness demonstrates that a comprehensive reform framework will:

- increase women's qualification level in line with government priorities;
- achieve secure employment for women with adequate training made available irrespective of the pattern of employment (full time, part time or casual/contract work);
- gain full value for women from Nation Building activities and the economic stimulus packages to successfully negotiate the recession and fully benefit from the ensuing recovery phase;
- enable women to work flexibly to meet family and carer responsibilities, while maintaining access to future career opportunities and fairer remuneration;⁸
- have access to the full range of new employment opportunities based on green skills training for a low carbon economy; and
- build lasting skills that will enable them to leave behind poverty and fight discrimination.

⁸ The Australian Government will introduce a comprehensive Paid Parental Leave (PPL) scheme for new parents who are the primary carers of a child born or adopted on or after 1 January 2011. This positive innovation will support both women and men to meet their family responsibilities and provide opportunities to share care for young children and work more flexibly throughout their life.

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Recommendations

WAVE & S4W make the following recommendations for inclusion in the VET reform agenda. That COAG and MCTEE:

The National VET Context

Recommendation 1

Develop a strategic framework for women in VET with a clear set of priorities and targets with performance accountability mechanisms for VET. (Commonwealth Government)

Recommendation 2

Link VET funding arrangements to key performance indicators for women. (Commonwealth Government)

Recommendation 3

Ensure there is gender expertise on each/all national VET equity advisory committees and relevant working groups. (Commonwealth Government)

Recommendation 4

Embark upon a national consultation with women's organizations, community groups, industry bodies, training providers, and other stakeholders on the diverse needs of women as part of the COAG VET reform agenda. (Commonwealth Government)

Recommendation 5

Collect, analyse and publish performance and outcome data, that include trends over time and are disaggregated by gender and demographic characteristics, such as Indigenous, Disability, CALD backgrounds, age, employment status: Participation - enrolments by course level and field of study: Outcomes - completions by level and field of study: Employment outcomes of graduates. (Commonwealth Government and NCVET)

Recommendation 6

Ensure that employment creation programs and employer based incentives designed in response to the global recession and pressures of climate change target initiatives that benefit women and girls. (Commonwealth Government)

Recommendation 7

Monitor the review and the development of new training packages to ensure their relevance and appropriateness for women from diverse backgrounds, especially to include entry level, literacy and numeracy and employability skills development. (Industry Skills Council and the Australian Qualifications Training Council)

Recommendation 8

Review accreditation standards and auditing processes for registered training organizations to ensure workforce expertise, facilities and services are appropriate for the needs of women, especially those from diverse backgrounds. (Commonwealth, States and Territories Governments and the AQTF)

Recommendation 9

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Strengthen the VET sector links with secondary schools including gender inclusive policy development, gender sensitive career counselling and course selection, and data collection and disaggregation by gender and location. (State and Territory Governments)

Recommendation 10

Develop informed and gender sensitive career advice for girls and young women in secondary schools. (State and Territory Governments)

Industry Support for Gender Equality

Recommendation 11

Expand existing government incentives to employers to promote equal employment practices that are supportive of women. (Commonwealth Government)

Recommendation 12

Establish in-trade mentoring system for female apprenticeships in male dominated trade areas. (Commonwealth Government)

Unlocking the Potential of Women from Diverse Backgrounds

Recommendation 13

Ensure that data on the participation in and outcomes from VET for people from specific groups such as Aboriginal peoples and people with a disability are disaggregated by gender and that trends are analysed and published on a regular basis. (Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, NCVET and RTOs)

Recommendation 14

Establish, implement & monitor guidelines for the affordability and accessibility of all VET programs, to enhance engagement of women from diverse backgrounds and circumstances with VET. This includes culturally inclusive design for and delivery to Aboriginal women and women from culturally diverse backgrounds as well as strategies to resolve issues of accessibility, cost recovery and implementation of reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of women learners with a disability. (Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments, RTOs)

Recommendation 15

Provide government incentives and performance measures for the provision of flexible, e-learning and work based VET options that are customised to women learners from diverse backgrounds and in varied circumstances and include women-only programs. (Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments, RTOs)

Recommendation 16

Strengthen the links of the VET sector with community and government agencies to harness coordinated support for women from diverse backgrounds experiencing barriers

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to benefiting from VET, and to document models of success. (RTOs)

Recommendation 17

RTOs, employment agencies and industry to develop collaborative strategies to assist in achieving improved employment outcomes for women with disabilities. (RTOs, Job Network Providers and Industry)

Recommendation 18

Invest in promoting VET to women, including marketing to segments of different groups of women from diverse backgrounds, utilising informal and formal channels of communication. (RTOs and Industry)

Recommendation 19

Make recognition processes user-friendly and appropriate for women and highlight the links from informal and lifelong learning to formal skills recognition. (RTOs)

Recommendation 20

Promote and customise VET training to women who are unemployed, underemployed or are returning to the workforce from family responsibilities. (RTOs)

Recommendation 21

Utilise and expand industry links to facilitate the transition to employment and improve employment outcomes for women in VET, e.g. foster industry sponsorships and work experience support. (RTOs and Industry)

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The Impact of the Global Recession and Recovery on Women and VET

Recommendation 22

Invest in training places for women in government initiatives for skills shortage and growth areas with links to performance targets for women. Promote and monitor women's participation. (Commonwealth and State and Territory Government)

Recommendation 23

Develop innovative strategies to engage existing female workers in VET, especially those working in low paid female dominated sectors, e.g. retail, social services, hospitality, CTF manufacturing and women in micro and small businesses: e.g. government incentives for employers and VET, negotiated arrangements with union assistance and customised, flexibly delivered VET provision. (Government, Industry and Unions)

Recommendation 24

Ensure that incentives and industry programs designed to stimulate economic growth target industries that will impact on women's employment growth such as public sector services in education including childcare, health including aged care and in the retail and hospitality sectors. (Commonwealth Government)

Skilling Women for a Low Carbon Economy

Recommendation 25

Invest in training places for women in government initiatives for green skills with links to performance targets for women including the 'greening' of traditionally female occupations and industries. Promote and monitor women's participation. (Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments and Industry)

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2. INTRODUCTION

This policy paper has been developed Through the auspices of Security4Women (S4W) and managed by Women in Adult & Vocational Education (WAVE), to support the primary goal of a vocational education and training (VET) system including adult and community education (ACE) which is equitable for all women. It is based upon a revision of existing policies and research undertaken by WAVE (2005 and 2007)⁹ including a review of major policy trends and key documents, consultation with WAVE National Executive and a number of key informants.

Of critical concern to WAVE is the lack of consideration given to the specific learning needs and life experience of women at the macro level of the VET system. Data points to the continuing disadvantage of women in the workplace and the VET sector. In a recent paper from S4W the author notes that

*[There is] a chronic tendency for women to already do badly in the labour force. Women are over represented among the hidden unemployed and, even when they are included among the officially recorded unemployed, they are less likely to seek benefits or otherwise stay in touch with the government. They are paid less, have interruptions in their working lives and have much lower superannuation balances and, in turn, lower retirement income. Women are also much over-represented among the underemployed. ...*¹⁰

Individual jurisdictions, training providers, teachers, enterprises and community groups are doing remarkable work to meet the needs of individual women and groups of women at the local level, but at the level of policy reform and planning gender is not considered or integrated.

By calling attention to gender within the VET system WAVE does not seek to homogenize the experience of women. Rather, WAVE's agenda is to reinstate the value of a gender based analysis in VET policy and planning and to ensure that any barriers faced by girls and women in accessing, participating and gaining positive outcomes from VET are removed.

It is the responsibility of the VET system to ensure that the needs of specific groups of women who may experience multiple and complex disadvantage in accessing education and training – including Aboriginal women, women with a disability, refugee and other newly arrived migrant women, older women, young women at risk of disengaging from education and women in custody – are acknowledged and met.

It is crucial that the gap between the investment in education and training for women and girls and their outcomes, which continue to be poorer than for men and boys across a range of indicators explored in greater detail below, be bridged. A recent Dusseldorp Skills Forum paper notes *'the Commonwealth Government has identified improving the*

9 Taylor, J. in assoc. with Butler, E. and Woolley R. for Security4Women, (2005) *Policy Directions: Lifelong Learning: Work Related Education and Training for Women.* and Butler, E. for Security4Women, (Nov 2007) *Towards a Sustainable Economic Future: Women and Vocational Education and Training.*

10 Coleman, M (2009) unpublished draft paper for S4W

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skills of Australian workforce as a key priority area for the 2007-10 term of office.¹¹ This priority is also pivotal to its overall economic strategy and Rudd's *education revolution*. Women's centrality to Australia's economic recovery and the government's nation building agenda is unquestionable.

*...over the last 20 years, women's increasing presence in the workforce has been one of the key contributors to economic growth and development in Australia, and around the world... In fact, research has shown that the increase in female employment in the world's richer countries has been the main driving force behind growth in the past couple of decades. The women in these countries have contributed more to global growth than either new technologies or the new giants of China and India.*¹²

Vocational education and training in Australia provides skills training to approximately 1.7 million people each year (1,696,400 across all states and territories in 2008). This represents 11.3 per cent of Australians aged between 15 to 64 years. Of these 52.3 per cent were male and 47.6 were female (887.500 men and 806.700 women).¹³The number of women apprentices fell in 2008.

It is delivered by a mix of providers including 'technical and further education (TAFE) institutes, but also universities, secondary schools, industry organisations, private enterprises, agricultural colleges, community education providers and other government providers'.¹⁴ Training is in a wide variety of subject areas and offered in classrooms, workplaces, online through blended delivery and other forms of flexible delivery. Qualifications are in modular or unit of competency form and can be long or short depending on the needs of each learner and requirements of the industry they are employed, or seeking employment, in. Learners can undertake short skill sets or full Associate Diploma level qualifications. Training is also provided as subsidized employment and training programs through the national apprenticeship and traineeship system.

The VET system is regulated by the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). The AQTF recognizes providers who receive registration based upon audits against the standards of the AQTF. Providers in turn deliver nationally recognised qualifications based upon Training Packages which set out levels of competency required for effective performance by employees, or aspirants, in each industry. Training Packages are endorsed by the Australian Qualifications Framework Council (AQFC) with delivery standards and course provision monitored through the AQTF audit process. Training solutions are locally customized to meet the needs of individual, communities and local enterprises.

11 *Facing up to Australia's Skills Challenge Setting Priorities and Delivering Results*. A National Skills Policy Collaboration Dusseldorp Skills Forum April 2008.

12 Broderick, E. (March 2009) *Women on the Verge of Recession*. Media Release, Australian Human Rights Commission 18 March 2009.

13 NCVER (2009) *Vocational Education and Training Statistics Students and Courses 2008* Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations pp. 8-9

14 *ibid* pp. 4

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Funding is provided by the Australian Government, state and territory governments, industry bodies, employers and individual students through fees.¹⁵ This reflects a move over the last decade towards a contestable training market. Recent NCVET research has highlighted the tension between increased contestability and competition between training providers and the continued affordability of VET provision for people from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹⁶ This is highlighted by the recent announcement of the South Australian government's decision to remove low uptake courses in rural and regional areas, including women's studies. Where markets are thin, the needs of disadvantaged students are vulnerable to profit based VET provision.

From this example there is a broader criticism to be made in relation to commercialization of the VET sector and inadequacy of funding support. If profit is the driver, then disadvantaged or vulnerable groups are unlikely to gain access to training unless they have adequate income and other support. Hence, this is not an argument about supply *per se*, but funding the needs. If there is demand from *supported* students, then courses will be provided.

Method

The development of this policy paper involved a revision of existing policies and research undertaken by WAVE including (2005 and 2007)¹⁷ and scoping and analysis of existing international and national research, policy directions and data trends relevant to women and vocational education and training. Furthermore it incorporates responses to an email survey (see Appendix) distributed throughout the four national women's alliances, to various stakeholders, practitioners and women's networks. Undertaken between May and August 2009, the project focused on an analysis of the shifts in the international and national context for VET provision and, in particular, the Rudd Government's shift in approach towards VET reform, skills development, nation building in response to the global recession and green skills for a low carbon economy.

15 *ibid* pp. 4

16 Karmel, T, Beddie, F & Dawe, S (Eds.) (March 2009), *Competition in the Training Market*, Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

17 Taylor, J. in assoc. with Butler, E. and Woolley R. for Secutiry4Women, (2005) *Policy Directions: Lifelong Learning: Work Related Education and Training for Women*. and Butler, E. for Secutiry4Women, (Nov 2007) *Towards a Sustainable Economic Future: Women and Vocational Education and Training*.

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3. THE CONTEXT

The goal of this policy review is to ensure that women reap the benefits of current and future investments in training and other economic stimulus so that they can gain an equitable position in relation to sustainable social, economic and cultural aspects of Australian society. In previous research WAVE has identified that:

Although the number of women and girls studying in VET continues to increase, research demonstrates that the VET system is still not equitable, especially for disadvantaged women and girls. Nor does participation in VET lead to equitable employment outcomes for many women. Publicly funded, accessible and relevant VET for women is essential.¹⁸

In order for VET policy and provision to deliver skills for a competitive Australian labour market, it must engage women from diverse communities successfully in VET training. The current Federal government, while introducing many progressive initiatives, appears to have a blind spot when it comes to specific strategies for women in VET. If left unaddressed this could have dire consequences not only for women, but for Australian society and economy as a whole.

There is compelling evidence that a gender perspective needs to be brought to VET, as gender is both a measure of equity and factor of disadvantage. Despite gains of the last few decades, women are still disadvantaged in Australian society and labour market, and this is reflected in the VET sector.

Women in Australia – a snap shot

- **Women are concentrated in feminised fields of work and training.¹⁹**
- **Women are underrepresented in emerging and growth areas with better than average remuneration opportunities, such as green industries, mining industries.²⁰**
- **Women are concentrated in casual and part-time labour, which makes them most vulnerable in times of economic downturn and gives them less opportunities for work based training and career progression.²¹**
- **Women's earnings are significantly below those of men.**
- **Women carry a disproportional share of the burden of childcare, domestic work and other family caring responsibilities.**
- **Women are by far more at risk than men to be subjected to harassment in the workplace and to domestic violence.**
- **Significantly more women than men live in poverty and below the poverty line.**
- **While women and girls outperform boys and men in education and training completion, this does not translate into equal, let alone better (meaning higher pay or larger number of) employment destinations for graduates.**

18 *op cit*

19 See appendix, figures 1.1 and 1.2; tables 1.1 to 1.4

20 See appendix, figures 1.3 & 1.4

21 See appendix, figures 1.5 to 1.7; table 1.4

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- **Women who face multiple factors of disadvantage are particularly vulnerable at times of economic downturn.**

Women have yet to enjoy equity in the VET sector. The World Economic Forum has released its most recent *Global Gender Gap Report*. The report covers a total of 128 countries, representing over 90 percent of the world's population. The report shows that Australia sits in the group of countries that are number one on women's educational attainment but only number forty on women's workforce participation.²²

Despite much effort and years of stalled 'initiatives' in non-traditional areas, women's enrolments in VET remain clustered in narrow and traditional fields of study, while they are underrepresented in trades, such as building, automotive and engineering.²³ In addition, while educational completion levels are better for women and girls, the number of women and girls undertaking apprenticeship and traineeship training is falling and the level of employment for women after completion is lower than that for men.²⁴ According to data from NCVER women's participation in Australian Apprenticeships and Traineeships has decreased in recent years. Women VET graduates are experiencing more difficulty in gaining employment appropriate to their levels of qualification compared with their male counterparts.

It is argued that women and girls are well represented in education *per se*. However, they continue to be clustered in 'feminised' areas of study and work – with unmatched employment outcomes to those of boys and men. WAVE recognizes that these entrenched patterns are not only about 'disadvantage', but encompass a complex set of factors, including 'choice' and perhaps realism about employment prospects of women, along with enduring masculinised cultures in many male dominated trades, industries and workplaces. This poses a challenge for VET, and also the opportunity to identify and generalize models of success.

However, a recent ACER report on post school outcomes identifies *a positive message for education and training*. In general, post-school education and training leads to higher status occupations and, in particular, higher earnings compared to not doing any further study or training. These benefits are 'stronger for young women than young men, especially for those who enroll in bachelor degrees. However, and as highlighted in part above, it points out that the gender effect works in the other direction for apprenticeships'²⁵.

The repositioning of a VET policy agenda for women is timely, as it is set against a backdrop of significant change, both nationally and internationally. These changes offer significant opportunity to promote a broader range of education and training options to women and girls with the potential to strengthen their employment, life long earnings and financial security; all in accordance with the focus from the Commonwealth Office for Women on reducing the gender pay equity gap.

22 Hausmann, R. Tyson, L.D & Zahidi, S. (2008) *The Global Gender Gap Report* World Economic Forum

23 NCVER (2009), as above

24 NCVER (2009), as above

25 Holden, Steve. 'Post school pays off' in *Professional Educator* Vol. 8, No. 2 June 2009 p. 24-25

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3.1 *The International Context*

The requirement for gender inclusive policy in VET in Australia rests on both international and national platforms for gender equality. Gender equality and the elimination of discrimination against women remain central to the international policy context surrounding work and training. Australia has been obligated under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) since 1984. 'CEDAW is an international human rights law treaty which aims to remove discrimination against women in all areas of life. This includes treating women equally and creating laws, policies and government and community structures to remove any discrimination'²⁶. Education and employment are the focus of two of the ten articles of the convention. CEDAW continues to promote education and skills development as a key feature in ending discrimination against women; raising them from poverty, supporting migrant women and, at its most recent session (43rd), the impact of the current global financial crisis on women. It is noted, for example, that women migrants *may also suffer the consequences of restricted access to education, training and reliable information on migration, which may lead to increased vulnerability in relation to employers.*²⁷

In Australia the Sex Discrimination Act, passed by the Australian Parliament in 1984, was created to make CEDAW part of Australian national law. The objectives of the Sex Discrimination Act are to ensure equality for women and to eradicate sex discrimination in Australia. Next year, 2010, is the 25th anniversary of the Sex Discrimination Act.

The Non-Government Organisation sector in Australia in its report on the implementation of CEDAW in Australia has identified that:

*Accessible, affordable and relevant vocational education and training, along with personcentred career counseling, is of high significance for women seeking to enter or reenter the paid workforce. This is especially so for those with limited qualifications, work experience and labour force attachment, and/or training that has resulted in accredited recognition.*²⁸

They go on to recommend that the Australian Government and State and Territory governments update and implement a national vocational education and training policy for women including quantifiable key performance indicators and targeted interventions for disadvantaged groups of women, and associated employment outcomes. This is recommended as a matter of urgency; no later than 2010, and prior to the expiry date of the current policy *Women: Shaping Our Future*.

26 *Working Together for Equality Beijing +15 Caravan Information Kit* Jeta International pp. 44 2009

27 CEDAW – 43rd Session Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights 2009.

28 *NGO Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in Australia* July 2009 Prepared by YWCA Australia and Women's Legal Services Australia pp. 56

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In addition they recommend that the Australian Government work to improve the analysis and reporting of publicly accessible gender-disaggregated data on the performance of the national VET system as a matter of urgency and that the national VET equity advisory mechanism include an active and specific focus on women and girls in its mandate and core business.

Fees and costs associated with VET that can impede women's access to education and training are a core concern within CEDAW. Vocational education and training is seen as an important enabler for women living in poverty, experiencing economic hardship or without direct access to personal finances to upgrade their skills to enter or re-enter employment. The NGO report concludes that the Australian Government needs to monitor and evaluate the impact of fees for vocational and education training courses, especially those offered through TAFE, giving consideration to the impact of such fees on women and girls and that the Australian Government should consider budgetary and policy mechanisms to reduce the structural financial pressures of vocational and education training studies.²⁹

The 2009 meeting of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women highlighted many matters pertinent to women in VET and this policy framework, including:

- the detrimental impact of the global economic crisis on women's equality
- calls for ratification of relevant ILO standards;
- recognition of the importance of gender budgeting and mainstreaming gender into government policies in the context of equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men;
- the establishment of goals and benchmarks and the adoption of positive actions and temporary special measures to achieve the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men; and
- recognition of the underlying impact of violence against women on a range of issues.³⁰

Education and training programs that promote women's individual agency and community capacity building are recognized internationally as playing a key role in women's overall 'health' and well being. The World Health Organisation (WHO) also identifies women's health as an indicator of community health. When women are healthy whole communities benefit through the flow on effects to children and families. Community based initiatives in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean region have established women's vocational training centres as part of their gender in health and development activities. The aim of this work is to promote women's capacity-building in the community through literacy, vocational and life-skills training, health skills and health education training, and women's empowerment training.³¹ This provides an excellent platform from which to envision and enact gender inclusive VET in Australia.

29 *ibid*

30 Lambert, C. (2009) *Report to the Community Sector from the Commission of the Status of Women*

31 *Gender in Health and Development*, WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, 2009.

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3.2 The National Context

Given the complexity of the current context it is more important than ever that a new national policy for women and VET be developed and integrated into a whole-of-government response, rather than being left to languish on the margins of the educational services policy framework with attempts to fit inclusiveness onto a pre-existing framework. At the recent *Big Skills Conference*, hosted by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), John Buchanan highlighted this need when he noted '[that] *it is critical to move the skills debate out of the education services policy space and into the heart of the overall policy mix*'.³² For gender inclusive VET, we need coordinated national action.

The Commonwealth Government has announced a number of targets which are relevant to vocational education and training and set the context for this policy discussion. These targets aim to lift participation in vocational education in the following ways:

- halve the proportion of Australians aged 20 to 64 without qualifications at Certificate III and above;
- double the number of higher qualification completions (diploma and advanced diploma) between 2009 and 2020; and
- lift school retention from 74 to 90 per cent by 2020.³³

While acknowledging these targets, we also pose the question: *What proportion of each of the above targets should be women?*

In addition, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed, at its most recent meeting in July 2009, to develop a workplan for further reforms to the Vocational Education and Training system. The workplan will address a number of major reform areas including:

- developing models for a national regulatory body for vocational education and training;
- ensuring the Australian Apprenticeship system is responsive to the needs of individuals and enterprises, especially during the downturn and into recovery;
- increasing the level of investment in nationally-accredited training;
- providing timely, relevant and easy to navigate information to individuals and enterprises; and
- ensuring the training system, and the products of the training system, are responsive to the needs of individuals, businesses and industry.³⁴

While there has been no real commitment from the Commonwealth Government towards women and VET, this climate of change offers an opportunity for all tiers of government and advocates for gender equality to re-vision the future of VET with women's needs prioritized. The COAG reforms must include a gender dimension to ensure that women's needs are incorporated into any future action plan, and that the training system and its products are responsive to the needs of women students, women providers and women in industry.

32 Buchanan, J. *Nurturing Sustainable Approaches to Workforce Development*. Big Skills Conference. March, 2009.

33 DEEWR (2008) *Agency Overview and Resources*. DEEWR, Australian Government

34 COAG *Communiqué July 2009*, accessed 28 July 2009 from www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/index.cfm

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The delivery of such a comprehensive reform framework will ensure that Australian women will be skilled to:

- increase their qualification level in line with government priorities;
- work in secure employment with adequate training available irrespective of their pattern of employment (full time, part time or casual/contract work);
- gain full value from nation building activities and economic stimulus packages that enable them to successfully negotiate the recession and fully benefit from the ensuing recovery phase;
- work flexibly to meet family and carer responsibilities, while maintaining access to future career opportunities and competitive levels remuneration;³⁵
- have access to the full range of new employment opportunities based on green skills training for a low carbon economy; and
- build lasting skills and agency that will enable them to leave behind poverty and discrimination.

3.2.1 New VET funding arrangements

Vocational education and training remains central to the government's response to the dramatic changes in the global economy. The Rudd Labor Government has restructured the federal financial arrangements under the *Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations*. The new *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development* has replaced *Skilling Australia's Workforce*. Under this new arrangement States and Territories now receive VET specific purpose payments (SPPs) to support the delivery of their VET systems. Under these agreements states will deliver up to 1.15 million course completions over the four to five year funding period.³⁶

In addition there are a number of other sources of funding for VET administered by the Commonwealth that focus on support for the unemployed, re-skilling mature workers, boosting higher level qualifications and infrastructure spending as part of the government's nation-building package.³⁷ These programs include:

- the Productivity Places Program;
- the Australian Apprenticeship Program;
- Earn or Learn; and
- School based Trade Training Centres.

Again, the question is put: *What proportion of each of the above programs should be targeted towards girls and women?*

Productivity Places Program

The Productivity Places Program will deliver 711,000 training places over five years in areas of skills shortage to assist workers develop the skills they need. Of the places,

³⁵ The Australian Government will introduce a comprehensive Paid Parental Leave (PPL) scheme for new parents who are the primary carers of a child born or adopted on or after 1 January 2011. This positive innovation will support both women and men to meet their family responsibilities and provide opportunities to share care for young children and work more flexibly throughout their life.

³⁶ Kempner, C. (2009) *Budget review 2009-20: Educational Vocational Education and Training* Parliamentary Library, Parliament of Australia

³⁷ *ibid.*

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392,000 training places will be allocated to existing workers wanting to gain or upgrade their skills, and 319,000 (including 20,000 structural adjustment places) will be allocated to job seekers through the Job Network system.

As with all labour market programs and initiatives the ability of women to access them is complicated by their often marginal position in relation to employment. As pointed out by Richardson in his draft paper *Exits and Entrances: Impact of the Recession on Women*:

*Labour market programs need to reflect the diversity of experience in Australia at the moment and in the future. As noted, many women take the option of dropping out of the labour market altogether, including the large numbers of women in hidden unemployment for example. Women are likely to be 80 per cent of the hidden unemployed of the important age groups from 25 to 44 years old. Women with care responsibilities cannot start work next week—this is both a statistical definition problem as well as evidence of the need to provide good child care for women participating in labour market programs as well as when they return to work.*³⁸

To move beyond description to outcomes for women, the question is put (again): *What proportion of each of the above programs should be targeted towards girls and women? Are any equity requirements in place for these programs? What initiatives are required to support women? Should a certain number of places be allocated for women's training?*

Australian Apprenticeship Program

Some changes have also been made to the Australian Apprenticeship Program including a proposal to review the traineeship component of the program. Given the emphasis of traditional apprenticeships on trade and agricultural occupational areas and the success of traineeships in drawing women into subsidized employment based training programs, it is critical that any restructure pay attention to the gendered patterns of training and employment that result from employer subsidized programs. According to NCVET statistical data there were 415 500 apprentices and trainees in-training as at 31 December 2008, an increase of 3% from the previous year. Of these 277 300 were males and 138 300 were females: a ratio of slightly less than 2:1.³⁹

Disaggregating the data by gender and field of study and employment would enable greater insight and allow policy and planners to better tackle deficits in the employment outcomes of women and girls.

For vulnerable young women changes to the Australian Apprenticeships Access Program (the Access Program) including an additional 3650 pre-vocational training places will be welcome. The Access Program provides a pathway into an apprenticeship or further training and includes pre-vocational training and other supports to help job seekers who may need some extra assistance to prepare them for an apprenticeship. It provides participants with individualised support to achieve successful transitions into training and skilled employment. All participants in the program receive:

- a minimum of 150 hours pre-vocational training;
- up to 13 weeks job search support; and

38 Richardson, David. (2009) *Exits and Entrances: The Impact of the Recession on Women* pp. 33

39 NCVET (2009), as above

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- together with the employer, 13 weeks post-placement support in an apprenticeship, further training or employment.⁴⁰

Earn or Learn and Trade Training Centres in Schools

Earn or Learn and increased funding for the provision of VET in high schools are also central to the Rudd government's economic recovery program or nation building and support improved educational attainment for young people. The *National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions* (commonly known as *Earn or Learn*) stipulates that young people 17 years or under should either be still at school, in training or employment and that any unemployed young person 25 years or under needs to be in full time training to receive the Youth Allowance. The Council of Australian Government (COAG) established this agreement to lift the national Year 12 or equivalent retention rate to 90 per cent by the year 2015, something it sees as 'critical' especially during the downturn, young people should be supported to attain qualifications in order to be competitive in the labour market both now and when the economy recovers.⁴¹

The *Trade Training Centres in Schools Program* forms part of the Commonwealth's Education Revolution. \$2.5 billion over 10 years is being spent to enable secondary schools to establish Trade Training Centres. The aim of these centres is to increase the proportion of students achieving Year 12 or an equivalent qualification and help address skill shortages in traditional trades and emerging industries. The funding guidelines highlight the fact that '*Trade Training Centres* are being established to help increase the proportion of students achieving Year 12 or an equivalent qualification to 85% by 2015 and 90% by 2020'.⁴² The funding will enable schools to build new, or upgrade existing, trade or vocational education and training facilities.

Alarming, only one of the fifty-seven occupations listed on the *National Skills Needs List Occupations* list in the program guidelines, hairdressing, has traditionally female patterns of employment. Training in occupations on the *National Skills Needs List Occupations* needs to be strongly promoted to young women and girls if they are to fully benefit from this program and gender stereotypic patterns of training and employment are to be broken down.

Contestable Funding

Many of the Commonwealth's programs, including *Trade Training Centres*, are predicated on contestable funding. This aligns with the overall trend for increasing the contestable nature of the VET training market, often at the expense of the public TAFE provider. This raises concerns, as it is the public provider that has a strong profile in providing for students from equity groups, including women. The final report of the National Vocational Equity Advisory Taskforce (NVEAT) found that TAFE institutes in capital cities have higher proportions of the most socio-economically disadvantaged

40 DEEWR *Employment Extra Pre-vocational Support Places for Vulnerable Young Job Seekers*. Australian Government.

41 Council of Australian Governments Communiqué, *National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions* 2 July, 2009, accessed on 3 July 2009 from <http://www.dewr.gov.au/>

42 DEEWR *Trade Training Centres in Schools Programs – Interim Guidelines*. March, 2008. p.4. Australian Government, accessed on 3 July 2009 from <http://www.dewr.gov.au/>

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students, with most disadvantaged students having highest enrolments in Certificate I and II courses.⁴³

In Rudd's election policy document *Skilling Australia for the Future* it is asserted that; *'Industry badly needs a training system that is demand driven, provides incentives for training providers to better meet the needs of employers and encourages competition between and within the public and private training provider sectors.'*⁴⁴

This contention, promoted by industry groups such as Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), sees the continuance of the previous Australian Coalition Government's shift away from publicly funded VET through TAFE. From previous experience contestability of funding adversely impacts on resource intensive students - the very people who are currently the most excluded from participating in the community and employment.

The key findings of the *TAFE Futures Report* notes that the *'squeezes on resources has eroded TAFE's commitment to access, equity and social justice and is effecting course delivery in areas such as basic English courses and is corroding TAFE's capability to develop long term partnerships with industry and the community.'*⁴⁵

The continued move to fully contestable funding may have a significant impact on the continued provision of programs to the most socially disadvantaged, including women experiencing the compound effects of multiple disadvantage, through publicly provided VET. A recent NCVER-led discussion on different models of a contestable training market reflects a diversity of views in relation to the balance between competition and central Government regulation.⁴⁶ Pat Forward, one of the discussant, argues for placing students in the centre of VET and that the Australian VET sector needs to move from a low trust to a high trust level.

*This high trust world of consultation and negotiated positions is very different from market mechanisms that emphasise individual preference and choice.*⁴⁷

We argue that any recipient of public moneys for training must comply with contractual equity related obligations and measurable outcomes, tied to funding agreements, and that consideration for disadvantage must be factored in to such agreements.

43 *Final Report of the National VET Equity Advisory Taskforce*. NVEAT. Chairs; Davidson, J. & Rankin, C. 2007.

44 Rudd, K. Swan, W. Smith, S. and Wong, P. (2007) *Skilling Australia for the Future*. Election Policy Document. p. 8 November 2007

45 Kell, Dr, P. (2007). *TAFE Futures: an inquiry into the future of technical and further education in Australia*, Accessed on 12 July 2009 from <http://www.voced.edu.au/td/lmr> 85.688

46 Karmel, T, Beddie, F & Dawe, S (Eds.) (March 2009), *Competition in the Training Market*, Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

⁴⁷ Karmel, T, Beddie, F & Dawe, S, as above, P16

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3.3 VET Equity Advisory Mechanisms

As at 4 May 2009 WAVE has been advised that the *National VET Equity Advisory Council* (NVEAC) is to provide high-level advice on matters relevant to improving the participation in VET and achievement of students from equity groups' in VET, and the performance of the national VET system in support of such students'. It is most timely and urgent to raise the profile of women and girls in education in relation to the new nation-building agenda, training for work and future work including women's role in a low carbon economy. However, the *National VET Equity Advisory Council* currently has no gender expertise upon which to draw. Furthermore, at the time of writing this report and of great concern, it is noted that the 'Equity Timeline' 1996- 2009 does not include any mention at all of women, nor the many policy initiatives, activities and indeed national women's policies that have occurred over this timespan⁴⁸.

WAVE strongly suggests that the current agenda for reform in VET involves extensive consultation on the diverse needs of women with government and non-government agencies, community groups, training providers and other stakeholders.⁴⁹

3.3.1 National VET policy for women

Women: Shaping our Future remains the major national policy document for women and girls in vocational education and training (VET).⁵⁰ It aims to provide leverage and accountability for progressing women's issues via mainstream VET policy and planning processes, and to provide a framework for reporting on women in VET and women's access to VET. A Coalition government initiative, it was based upon the notion of *integration with visibility* and a companion document or enabling strategy for the broader VET policy framework *Shaping Our Future*. Both policies had a seven year timeframe from 2004 - 2010 and are due to expire in 2010. The DEEWR website currently states that:

*One of the nationally agreed objectives of the vocational education and training system is to achieve equitable outcomes for disadvantaged groups including women. Women: Shaping our Future ... sets out plans to advance the agenda for women nationally. It is designed to work with Shaping our Future, Australia's national strategy for VET 2004-2010 and the forward plan for VET in general, to help Australian women get more and better skills and jobs.*⁵¹

However, these general goals are not supported by specific national requirements for performance indicators, data collection and reporting on women in VET.

Disappointingly, the final report of the previous national body charged with the oversight of equity in VET the National VET Equity Advisory Taskforce contained no specific recommendations relating to gender equality in VET and it did not attend to or detail the needs of women learners in the vocational education and training environment. This is in

⁴⁸ 'Background. A Brief History of NVEAC & Equity Reform'; National VET Advisory Council (NVEAC) <http://www.nveac.tvetaustralia.com.au/background>

⁴⁹ Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) Meeting (July 2009) *Communiqué*, Darwin.

⁵⁰ Australian National Training Organisation (2004), *Women: Shaping our Future*. Brisbane

⁵¹ Women – Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations website, accessed on 12 July 2009 from www.deewr.gov.au

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spite of having it as part of its charter to oversee the integration of the goals and principles of *Women: Shaping our Future*.

The *Women's Budget Statement 2009* highlights two areas in the Budget that focus on skills development and training needs of women, expanding the role of the nurse practitioner and the Textile, Clothing and Footwear (TCF) Building Innovative Capability Package. Both of these programs will provide support to these female dominated industry areas.⁵²

WAVE strongly recommends that a new VET policy for women beyond 2010 include accountability mechanisms for the VET sector to measure its performance for women and ensure it is effective in meeting national and international goals for gender equality.

3.3.2 Review and development of gender inclusive training packages

Training packages are a critical tool to ensure nationally consistent quality of VET training. It is strongly advised that Training Packages be reviewed in relation to their inclusiveness of the needs of women, especially of those from diverse backgrounds experiencing barriers to VET. To achieve appropriateness and depth of skills development, entry level skills, literacy and numeracy and employability skills should form integral components of training packages. Much work has been invested in this area, from the beginning of the 1990s National Training Reform Agenda, along with guidelines and best practice models. The challenge now is to implement what so much research has well demonstrated over almost two decades, in terms of gender inclusiveness and so best practice.

3.3.3 Data collection and analysis on women in VET and trends over time

The data on women in VET is not collected in a consistent and comprehensive manner across the States and Territories and across the private and public Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). In order to monitor the VET sector's performance in relation to women, data on women's participation in and outcomes from VET should be collected and analysed. The level of detail in the classifications and the frequency of data analysis could be clarified in consultation with stakeholders.

3.3.4 Review of accreditation standards and auditing processes for Registered Training Organizations (RTOs)

The accreditation standards and audits for RTOs do not include specific performance indicators for women in VET. WAVE proposes that standards and RTO audits be reviewed to ensure that teaching and administrative and other support staff have developed professional practice that are inclusive of women. The review also may take into account the provision of other facilities and services appropriate for women and girls from diverse backgrounds, such as toilets and prayer rooms.

3.3.5 Improved links with VET in schools

With its increased emphasis on school retention and VET programs delivered in schools the Commonwealth government must address gendered patterns of subject and course selection to ensure that young women and girls are freely accessing the full range of career and VET choices available. Given the earlier discussion of the emphasis in

⁵² Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FACSIA), 2009 *Women's Budget Statement*. accessed on 3 July 2009 from www.facs.gov.au

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school based Trade Training Centres on predominantly male trades and occupations this point is critical.

A recent study by NCVER on VET in Schools reported that in 2006, there were 171 700 VET in Schools students, representing 33.6 percent of students undertaking a senior secondary certificate. Of these, 12 900 were in school-based apprentices and trainees, representing 7.5 percent of all VET in Schools students and 158 700 students were enrolled in other VET in Schools programs, representing 92.5 percent of all VET in Schools students. Interestingly the report finds that more young women and girls in the 15 to 19 year old age group are studying VET in Schools than in a TAFE setting. Female 15 to 19-year-old students comprised a higher proportion (49.0 percent) of VET in Schools students, compared with the proportion of female 15 to 19-year-old students enrolled in publicly funded VET (44.3 per cent).⁵³

Unfortunately there is no breakdown of data in the report by gender and program of study or qualification in VET in schools programs. However, clearly VET in Schools provides some young women with a viable alternative to early school leaving. A report by TAFE NSW on choices young women make, noted that

*the participation of young women in VET in Schools and in TAFE delivered VET (TVET) is emerging as a complex area. While young women's subject selection seems to reflect the gender segmentation of women's enrolment patterns in TAFE NSW, some young women are trying non-traditional pre-trade courses at school. However, this exploration into trade areas does not seem to create pathways to similar fields in young women's post school employment and training.*⁵⁴

A study from the United Kingdom of occupational choices in 14 to 16 year olds found that:

- although young women in the study had broad occupational aspirations, many girls had very little knowledge of the qualifications required in order to embark on that occupational path;
- there is a tendency for girls to avoid jobs that involve scientific and technical skills perceiving them as masculine; and
- gender impacts more than ability on the occupational choices made by secondary students.⁵⁵

The disaggregation of data by gender and rigorous analysis is critical to understanding trends over time, and so implementing strategies to enhance choices of and outcomes for young women who engage in VET in schools. Career counsellors, teachers and parents require gender sensitive and forward looking information to enhance the potential for young women to make informed subject and qualification choices are in line with shifts in employment, areas of skill shortage. The authors of *Facing up to Australia's*

53 NCVER (2006), *VET in Schools: Australian Vocational Education and Training Statistics*. National Centre for Vocational Education and Training Research. 2006

54 McCarthy, M. (2005) *Transitions and Choices: Young Women in TAFE NSW* (a discussion paper) TAFE Women's Programs Unit NSW Department of Education and Training, September 2005.

55 Francis, B. *Is the Future really Female? - the impact and implications of gender on 14-16 year olds career choices* Journal of Education and Work, Vol. 15, No. 1, March 2002 pp 75-88.

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Skills Challenge note that there is a serious skills shortage in traditionally male subject areas of sciences and mathematics with an estimated shortfall of 19,000 scientists and engineers by 2012.⁵⁶

Equally important is promoting these options to young women and girls and ensuring that they have the knowledge required to broaden their future employment and career options. This is critically important in areas of occupational growth ('green skills') for the low carbon economy.

3.4 National Social Inclusion Approach to Women in VET

The Commonwealth Government's *Social Inclusion Agenda* is driven by the goal of closing the gap which has widened in the last decade between those who benefit from being socially included and those who do not. A recent paper published by the Government notes that the *concepts of social inclusion and social exclusion are closely related*.⁵⁷ People's experience of social exclusion can result from unemployment or underemployment: *'low incomes, poor housing, crime, poor health and disability and family breakdown. In combination, these problems can create cycles of poverty, spanning generations and geographical regions.'*⁵⁸

Vocational education and training leading to skilled work is pivotal to the Commonwealth Government's approach to social inclusion. The Government's social inclusion agenda states that *work, along with family and community, gives meaning to life. Workforce participation is a foundation of social inclusion*.⁵⁹ Education and skills training as a vehicle for people and communities to overcome poverty is equally central to State and Territory plans such as the NSW Government policy under the *NSW State Plan*, which sets priorities and targets for training.⁶⁰

How can those who are 'unsuccessful' in meeting the goals of this agenda and fail to gain employment and become socially 'included' be ensured equality of services including vocational education and training?

Underpinning the social inclusion framework is a dominant, and often unquestioned, assumption that paid employment for all is the route to inclusion and therefore the solution to achieving greater equality.⁶¹ Given women's more precarious lifetime engagement with paid work, it is critical that this relationship between paid employment and social inclusion be questioned and more holistically considered.

56 National Skills Policy Collaboration Facing up to Australia's Skills Challenge: Setting Priorities and Delivering Results, Australian Industry Group, Australian Council of Trade Unions, Australian Education Union, Group Training Australia, Dusseldorp Skills Forum April 2008

57 Hayes, A, Gray, M & Edwards, B (2008), *Social Inclusion: Origins, concepts and key themes*, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

58 Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations 2008a, p. 1.

59 Gillard, J & Wong, P 2007, p. 3. Gillard, J. & Wong, P. (2007), *An Australian social inclusion agenda*, Accessed on 220 June 2009 from <http://www.alp.org.au>

60 NSW State Government 2006, pp. 69–70, 71–75, 99–101, 105–107.

61 Goodwin, S et al, (2009) *Social Theory in Australia*, Unpublished paper

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The Commonwealth Government, unlike its predecessor, has identified training as a viable activity for clients of Job Network providers. The shift from a work first to a work ready or work capacity perspective for disadvantaged unemployed people enables them to undertake part time training as part of their activity test under the Job Network contract. It is seen an important way out of unemployment and intergenerational poverty if it enables socially excluded individuals to gain employment. There is also a healthier long term commitment from this government to 'sustainable' employment outcomes for unemployed people instead of pressure to take the first job available.

In a recent TAFE NSW publication *Social Inclusion Case Studies (2009)*⁶² the authors note that:

.... [the Commonwealth's] *social inclusion agenda, together with its policy on skills formation, puts new emphasis on higher level qualifications at Certificate III and above.*⁶³

The Government has tendered for providers to deliver 'productivity places', which identify courses at Certificate II and above, with the majority of qualifications to be funded at Certificate III. Yet the connecting themes across the client groups described in the 'people' section of the case studies are stark: low levels of self-esteem and confidence, mental health problems and depression, negative experiences of education, especially schooling, and frequent low levels of literacy and numeracy. Even highly-educated skilled migrants begin to lack confidence in their capacity to adapt to Australian workplaces when they experience unemployment or remain in poor quality, casual jobs.

These programs remain a vital part of the VET mix as they are able to:

- meet participants' foundation education needs, with strong links to workplaces, employer engagement, employment and further training outcomes
- provide excellent support for people who are socially excluded to move into skilled work and into higher-level training and qualifications.⁶⁴

As the Australian Council of Social Services observes, such programs are preferable to foundational skills being *delivered separately or in strict sequence.*⁶⁵

However, we have already noted that women's increased education attainment does not lead, necessarily, to employment. How or what should we be doing to lessen the gap between investment and realization of women's potential for those deeply disadvantaged?

Women continue to remain under-represented in full time employment and over-represented in unpaid care-giver roles, as sole parents and on income support; they also remain over-represented in VET programs (including girls in VET in schools programs) in occupational areas that lead to lower paid and less secure employment such as service industries, retail and other highly casualised fields of employment. All of these

62 TAFE NSW - NSW Department of Education and Training (2009) *Social Inclusion Case Studies*.

63 Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations. 2008b, p. 2.

64 op cit.

65 Australian Council of Social Services 2008, p. 3.

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factors make it more difficult for women to ever be fully 'socially included' against the indicator of 'economic independence'.

For social inclusion to work to support improved sustained outcomes for women it must be made explicit that both social inclusion discourse and VET policy must have:

- a reinstatement, or re-commitment to, the value of pre-vocational or 'stepping stone' programs for women returning to work after raising children, caring or from income support;
- an acknowledgement from the government that increased qualifications for women do not necessitate improved employment outcomes and that structural reforms are needed;
- promotion of broader subject selection by girls and women in schools and VET; and
- promotion of industry or employment based training programs aimed at recruiting women directly into industries that value ongoing flexible work practices for men and women to enable caring responsibilities to be met.

In the section below, *Unlocking the Potential of Women from Diverse Backgrounds*, further issues and strategies are discussed to effectively engage women from diverse backgrounds who may be 'excluded' from VET by factors such as: Aboriginality, disability, age; cultural background, sexuality, language, literacy and numeracy, cost, unemployment, imprisonment and isolation.

Recommendations

In light of the above discussion, and as part of the current VET reform agenda, a number of recommendations are proposed to improve women's outcomes from VET.

The National VET Context

Recommendation 1

- Develop a strategic framework for women in VET with a clear set of priorities and targets with performance accountability mechanisms for VET. (Commonwealth Government)

Recommendation 2

- Link VET funding arrangements to key performance indicators for women. (Commonwealth Government)

Recommendation 3

- Ensure there is gender expertise on each/all national VET equity advisory committees and relevant working groups. (Commonwealth Government)

Recommendation 4

- Embark upon a national consultation with women's organizations, community groups, industry bodies, training providers, and other stakeholders on the diverse needs of women as part of the COAG VET reform agenda. (Commonwealth Government)

Recommendation 5

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- Collect, analyse and publish performance and outcome data, that include trends over time and are disaggregated by gender and demographic characteristics, such as Indigenous, Disability, CALD backgrounds, age, employment status: Participation - enrolments by course level and field of study: Outcomes - completions by level and field of study: Employment outcomes of graduates. (Commonwealth Government and NCVET)

Recommendation 6

- Ensure that employment creation programs and employer based incentives designed in response to the global recession and pressures of climate change target initiatives that benefit women and girls. (Commonwealth Government)

Recommendation 7

- Monitor the review and the development of new training packages to make these relevant and appropriate for women from diverse backgrounds, especially to include entry level, literacy and numeracy and employability skills development. (Industry Skills Council and the Australian Qualifications Training Council)

Recommendation 8

- Review accreditation standards and auditing processes for registered training organizations to ensure workforce expertise, facilities and services are appropriate for the needs of women, especially those from diverse backgrounds. (Commonwealth, States and Territories Governments and the AQTF)

Recommendation 9

- Strengthen the VET sector links with secondary schools including gender inclusive policy development, gender sensitive career counselling and course selection, and data collection and disaggregation by gender and location. (State and Territory Governments)

Recommendation 10

- Develop informed and gender sensitive career advice for girls and young women in secondary schools. (State and Territory Governments)

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3.5 Industry Support for Gender Equality

It is important to acknowledge that employment outcomes are not determined solely through demand driven quality training inputs. Employers are ultimately the determiners of employment outcomes and any policy discussion of equity in VET needs to acknowledge and work within this context. Furthermore, 'industry' occupies a privileged position in determining VET policy nationally, and is considered the major stakeholder as well as driver of the VET system. Such a position embeds a high degree of responsibility, including social responsibility, for the well being of *all* present, potential and futures Australian workers.

Employers determine who they will engage. While most employers want the 'best' possible person for the job there is also research which suggests that for some job seekers factors such as gender, disability, ethnicity, and religion can impact adversely on their employment outcomes. Current employer-based initiatives through Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) to support women's employment, such as the *Employer of Choice for Women Award*, could be further promoted and implemented on a wider scale.⁶⁶ The current review by the Commonwealth Government of EOWA is an opportunity to reinforce linkages between workplace programs for women and vocational education and training for women; both on and off-the-job.

Further, employment and/or sustained employment outcomes for many new entrants are impacted by employers and in particular small business owners' limited capacity to provide mentoring and other support on-the-job. Employers and 'industry' have the potential to model best practice relating to gender inclusivity, both in their workplace practices and in relation to VET, acknowledging and enjoying the mutual advantage that would follow.

If disadvantaged job seekers are to gain and sustain employment the role and support and training needs of employers needs to be given greater policy attention.

Recommendations ***Industry Support for Gender Equality***

Recommendation 11

- Expand existing government incentives to employers to promote equal employment practices which are supportive of women. (Commonwealth Government)

Recommendation 12

- Establish in-trade mentoring system for female apprenticeships in male dominated trade areas. (Commonwealth Government)

⁶⁶ EOWA (2009) *Employer of Choice for Women*, accessed on 2 July 2009 from www.eowa.gov.au/EOWA_Employer_Of_Choice_For_Women.asp

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4. UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF WOMEN FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

WAVE recognizes and takes as its starting point that women are not an homogenous group and supports the finding of the NGO report on CEDAW that there is a need to:

*recognise that discrimination does not only happen in discrete categories, but that the intersections of race and gender or disability and gender present particular challenges in securing women's human rights.*⁶⁷

This includes the right of women from diverse backgrounds to have equitable access to, participation in, and outcomes from vocational education and training.

In addition to facing disadvantage on the grounds of gender, women share in other factors of disadvantage in Australian society. The current Australian VET policy for women recognises the diversity of women's needs. It states:

*Consider the diversity – women face barriers due to disability, age, gender, cultural difference, language, literacy, numeracy, cost, unemployment, imprisonment or isolation and have particular needs, with these varying from person to person. VET needs to better respond to the multiple and diverse needs of women...*⁶⁸

Is VET engaging these groups? The research commissioned by Security4Women (2007) found that many of these groups are currently not well served by the VET sector. It summarises that:

*... those who have a disability are from non-English speaking or Indigenous backgrounds, who are from low socioeconomic backgrounds, or who have been incarcerated or institutionalized, are not served well by current VET policy.*⁶⁹

This study highlights that many Indigenous women, especially those living in remote locations, do not fully benefit from vocational training.⁷⁰ In addition, it identifies the following groups of women who face barriers in accessing and benefiting from VET:

- girls and young women;
- women living in poverty;
- women in micro and small business; and
- women returning to work and retraining.

67 NGO Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in Australia July 2009 Prepared by YWCA Australia and Women's Legal Services Australia, p14

68 Australian National Training Authority (2004) *Women – Shaping our future*, Brisbane, p4.

69 Butler, E. for Security4Women, (Nov 2007) *Towards a Sustainable Economic Future: Women and Vocational Education and Training* accessed on 20 June 2009 from <http://www.wave.org.au/>

70 Lawrence Kate (Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation (Waltja)/WAVE) (2005) *Helping People to Help Themselves: a study of training issues for Aboriginal women and their remote communities in Central Australia*. Security4Women. Accessed on 2 July 2009 from Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation, www.waltja.org.au/default/home

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The 2005 WAVE study identifies groups of women from low socio-economic backgrounds who experience disadvantage in social and economic terms and need to be considered in VET provision. These include unemployed women, the working poor, lone mothers, early school leavers and refugee and migrant women.

The final report of the National Vocational Equity Advisory Taskforce (NEVAT) reported the need to *'re-conceptualise' the notion of disadvantage which has informed VET policy-making* and goes on to state that *there are major shortcomings in viewing disadvantage in terms of abstract 'client groups'*.⁷¹ This clearly reflects WAVE's approach of identifying and working with the multiple needs of women from diverse backgrounds and unpacking the compound nature of disadvantage experienced by some groups of women. The report goes on to say that *...for individuals who face multiple disadvantages, the pursuit of social outcomes should be recognised as an important stepping stone to the achievement of economic outcomes.*

Future strategies in VET reform, including performance targets and funding, should recognise diversity within equity groups as well as the effects of cumulative disadvantage. There are multiple examples over time of best practice, of successful gender sensitive programs and strategies that work, within VET, most of which have never been followed through, nor received ongoing funding, let alone mainstreamed. A VET strategic framework for women with a clear set of priorities and targets with performance accountability mechanisms for VET and the linking of VET funding arrangements to key performance indicators for women is a necessity for sustained applications of policies, programs and practices to unlock the potential of women through VET.

4.1 Indigenous Women

The Australian Government has recently signed the International Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and is committed to closing the gap between the opportunities and levels of well being experienced by Indigenous people and other Australians.⁷²

Indigenous Australians are under-represented in the workforce, have lower household incomes than other Australians, have higher unemployment rates and are more likely to live on welfare payments.⁷³ Indigenous job-seekers face multiple barriers such as poor health, low levels of education and a lack of opportunities in areas of limited economies.

Successful employment programs and organisations have common factors to successful practice that include:

- targeted and integrated training;

⁷¹ *National VET Equity Advisory Taskforce Final Report*, Chaired by Davidson, J & Rankin, C. prepared to assist the National Senior Officials Committee (NSOC) and the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education (MCVTE) to consider issues associated with the national training system. Its publication on the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)

⁷² United Nations, *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, accessed on 9 July from <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/drip.html>

⁷³ Giddy, K. Lopez, J & Redman, A. (2009) *Brokering Successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Outcomes* NCVER, p 6.

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- knowledge of client group and its context;
- provision of mentoring and support;
- partnerships and connections;
- community involvement;
- skilled and dedicated staff;
- specialist strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- innovation; and
- promotion of success.

Sustained adequate funding of such initiatives is central to sustained success.

Moreover, while acknowledging the urgency of sustained attention to improving VET and employment outcomes for indigenous Australians, including Aboriginal women and girls, we contend that the above principles and practices are those that should underpin all VET provision, and especially for women experiencing intersectional disadvantage in their daily lives.

The NCVET report goes to identify factors that impede employment differ from region to region and between communities. These factors include:

- level of job opportunities in areas of limited economies;
- job availability;
- low levels of education and relevant training;
- lack of experience;
- poor health;
- problems with alcohol, drugs and gambling;
- aspirations to work and role models;
- workplace culture and level of support for employees;
- geographical isolation, transport and reluctance to leave the community for employment;
- limited understanding by corporate sector of how socioeconomic disadvantage impacts on the;
- recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees;
- the challenges involved in balancing family and community obligations with the demands of work; and
- access to organised childcare.⁷⁴

Education and training opportunities remain a barrier even though the educational outcomes of Indigenous Australians have improved over recent decades.⁷⁵

Despite some gains, Indigenous Australians are yet to achieve equitable outcomes. Many Indigenous students continue to 'drop out' at or before Year 10 and far too few remain at school to complete Year 11 and Year 12, or its vocational equivalent. Of those who do complete Year 12, few obtain the scores needed to gain entry into university. Most Indigenous students, regardless of their completion year, leave school poorly prepared relative to their non-

74 *ibid* p. 9

75 AESOC Senior Officials Working Party on Indigenous Education (2005), *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008*, MCEETYA

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*Indigenous counterparts. These outcomes limit the post-school options and life choices of Indigenous students, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of social and economic disadvantage.*⁷⁶

The Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, during the *Apology to the Stolen Generations*, committed to closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Of the *Closing the Gap* targets which have been endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), DEEWR has key responsibility for the following:

1. to ensure all Indigenous four years olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years;
2. to halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for Indigenous children within a decade;
3. to halve the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020; and
4. to halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.

The integration of vocational education and training, social inclusion and Closing the Gap targets for Indigenous Australians under the one portfolio gives governments a clear opportunity to streamline processes and target pathway programs that not only move individuals in to employment but importantly lay the ground work in communities that will lead to employment in the future. This last point was an element of successful employment programs identified in the Giddy, Lopez and Redman research:

*[Successful employment programs] may also produce social, personal or community outcomes that lead to employment some time in the future, if not immediately. For example, outcomes such as greater social harmony are not strictly employment outcomes, but increase the likelihood of employment in the future.*⁷⁷

What works?

An example of the development of social harmony through engaging and promoting women's skills is the Waltja/WAVE Minmaku Palyantja Palya (Value Women's Good Work) Project. This project is a collaboration between the Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation and Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE). The project was funded by the Women's Leadership and Development Fund of the Commonwealth Office for Women. It focuses on the recognition, acknowledgement and promotion of senior Aboriginal women who have been instrumental in the development of children's services and youth programs on their remote communities in Central Australia. These women are leaders in their own communities and were also involved in the development of Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation (Waltja). Waltja ("Doing Good Work for Families) is an Aboriginal women's organisation which provides services and support across the Central Australia region. Waltja's goals include helping people learn new ways to do things, working together, better help for families and good

⁷⁶ *ibid* p. iii

⁷⁷ *op cit.* p. 10

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ways to do things.⁷⁸ Organisations such as Waltja can proffer advice as to what is required; what works; what doesn't, and why.

Ensuring that the needs and aspirations of Indigenous women are built in to plans and performance indicators for Closing the Gap programs and initiatives to support skills training and workforce development for Indigenous Australians is critical. Women's wellbeing and their centrality to community development and social harmony offer significant opportunities for lasting change to overall community outcomes.

4.2 Women with a Disability

Australia is a signatory to the *International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD), thus bound by its intent and purpose of providing equal rights for people with a disability.⁷⁹ The United Nations recognize that *women with disabilities are especially disadvantaged, experiencing exclusion on account of their gender and their disability*.⁸⁰ Article 6 of the *Convention* states:

1. *States Parties recognize that women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple discrimination, and in this regard shall take measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by them of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.*⁸¹

Consequently, Australia has adopted the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1992 to make discrimination on the grounds of disability unlawful.⁸² Furthermore, the Disability Discrimination Act Standards 1992 oblige service providers, including schools, universities and registered training organizations to provide equal access for people with a disability.⁸³ The previous *Commonwealth and State Skilling Australia's Workforce 2005-2008 Agreement* and the current *Skilling Australia for the Future* are providing the broad policy and funding contexts for VET, including the goal of equal access for people with a disability. More specifically, the Commonwealth government is presently developing the *National Disability Strategy for Australia (NDS)* and the *National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy (NMHDES)*. The picture that emerges from recent consultations for the development of these strategies with communities and stakeholders on the situation of women with disabilities shows that there is still a long way to go to achieve the goal of equal access and outcomes. In their feedback *Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)* commented:

78 Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation, as above accessed from <http://www.waltja.org.au/default/home.html>

79 United Nations, *International Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities*, accessed on 26 July 2009 from <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/convtexte.htm>

80 Some facts about persons with disabilities, accessed on 26 July 2009 from <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/facts.shtml>

81 International Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities, accessed on 26 July 2009 from <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/convtexte.htm>

82 Disability Discrimination Act (1992), accessed on 26 July 2009 from http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_act/dda1992264/

83 Disability Discrimination Act Standards (1992), accessed on 26 July 2009 from www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/standards/standards.html

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*There are more than 2 million women with disabilities in Australia and they continue to be one of the most excluded, neglected and isolated groups in our society, experiencing widespread and serious violations of their human rights, as well as failures to promote and fulfill their rights. ...*⁸⁴

People with disabilities experience disadvantages in the Australian labour market as well as in education and training. According to Powers, Australians with a disability reach lower levels of employment and income on completion of vocational education and training, when compared with their able bodied counterparts.⁸⁵ WWDA argue that women with disabilities are experiencing additional disadvantage: they are less likely to be in paid employment than men with disabilities and than women without disabilities. Their income levels are also lower than those of men with disabilities. The WWDA reports that *women with disabilities are less likely to be in paid work than other women, men with disabilities or the population as a whole.*⁸⁶ The YWCA and Women's Legal Services NGO shadow report to CEDAW comments on the employment situation for women with disabilities in more detail:

*Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that working-age women with disability who are in the labour force are half as likely to find full-time employment (20%) as men with disability (42%); twice as likely to be in part-time employment (24%) as men with disability (12%); and regardless of full-time or part-time status, are likely to be in lower paid jobs than men with disability.*⁸⁷

The 2008 WWDA submission to the *Parliamentary Inquiry into pay equity* highlights challenges for VET in order to achieve equal services to women with disabilities. The submission raises concerns about continuing lack of access to education and training programs, affordability of rising VET course fees and *lack of means to meet disability-related education costs such as specialized transport and carer support.*⁸⁸ The submission flags the *disparity between government funding of private education and funding of disability programs in education.*⁸⁹ WWDA also quotes Powers on poor employment outcomes for VET graduates with disabilities.⁹⁰

The National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy recognizes the increase and complexity of mental health issues in Australia. Many Australians experience mental

84 Women With Disabilities Australia (December 2008) *Submission in response to the Australian Government's Discussion Paper: 'Developing a National Disability Strategy for Australia'*, p 12, accessed on 26 July 2009 from <http://www.wwda.org.au/subs2006.htm>

85 Powers, T (2008) *Recognizing ability: the skills and productivity of persons with disabilities. Literature review.* Employment Working Paper No 3. International Labour Organisation, Geneva

86 Women with Disabilities Australia, as above, p 12

87 YWCA Australia and Women's Legal Services Australia (July 2009) *NGO Shadow Report on the implementation of CEDAW in Australia*, accessed on 28 July 2009 from www.pwd.org.au/.../CEDAW%20NGO%20Report%20

88 Women with Disabilities Australia (August 2008) *Submission from Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) to the Parliamentary Inquiry into pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce*, p11, accessed on 26 July 2009 from <http://www.wwda.org.au/subs2006.htm>

89 NSW Department for Women (2004) *Profile of Women in NSW in Education, Training and Transition to Work*, accessed at http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/profile/profile_printable.pdf, as quoted in Women with Disabilities Australia (August 2008), as above

90 Women with Disabilities Australia (August 2008), as above, p12

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health issues at some stage in their lives, which may prevent them from participating fully in VET and employment, unless special support mechanisms are available to them.⁹¹ Women with disabilities may also develop at times mental health issues, particularly considering the many difficult challenges that they may be faced with.

4.3 Women and Poverty

The cumulative effect of a number of factors of disadvantage poses serious hardship on many women, their families and communities and requires urgent attention by all stakeholders in society, including the VET sector. The recent ACOSS report, *Who is missing out*, confirms previous research findings and identifies specific groups in Australia who are experiencing poverty and hardship.⁹² These include Indigenous people, sole parent families, unemployed people, people with a disability, groups of young people, especially those on social benefits and mature and single persons renting their accommodation. Survey responses from stakeholders have confirmed these findings. In addition, offenders and ex-offenders and recently arrived and emerging refugees and women with mental health issues have been identified as groups of women who currently do not fully engage in VET.

Women continue to be at risk of poverty in Australia. Elderly single women and female sole parents are over-represented in groups living on low incomes. A 2004 Senate Committee report *A Hand Up not a Hand out: Renewing the Fight against Poverty* found that *of all household types in Australia, single elderly female households are at the greatest risk of persistent poverty.*⁹³ Recent research indicates that while the poverty rate for men and woman is very similar (12 per cent for women and 12.5 per cent for men), there are still considerably more poor women in sole parent families than there are men (104,000 compared with 34,000) and there are 106,000 poor single women over 65 as compared with 40,000 men in this group in 2000.⁹⁴

The key causes of poverty among women, particularly female sole parents, are:

1. the continuing inequality of wage levels, with women's wages still being generally lower than those of males;
2. the nature of the work that women are more inclined than males to do, which is more likely to be part-time or casual or precarious in nature;
3. the high costs of child care;

91 National Mental Health Strategy, accessed on 26 July 2009 from

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-strat>

92 The key findings are that: · Indigenous people, sole parent families, unemployed people, people with disabilities and renters stood out as groups most likely to lack the essentials of life. · On average, young people were more likely to be deprived of essentials than middle aged or mature aged people. · Among mature age people, those renting their housing stood out as the group most likely to lack essential items. Also, single mature age people were more likely than couples to lack essential items. · Among social security recipients, those on Newstart Allowance (for unemployed people), Parenting Payment (mainly sole parents), and Disability Support Pension, were the most likely to experience deprivation. ACOSS, Davidson, P (Dec 2008) *Who is missing out? Hardship among low income earners in Australia*, Strawberry Hills: ACOSS, P 4 Accessed on 22 June 2009 from <http://www.acoss.org.au/Publications>.

93 Senate Committee Report (2004) *A Hand up Not a Hand Out: Renewing the Fight against Poverty* Chapter 10 p. 211 Commonwealth of Australia

94 *ibid* p. 211

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4. the high costs of education;
5. lack of access to affordable housing;
6. insufficient income support for the needs of many sole parent families; and
7. lack of wealth accumulation during working life to support retirement incomes. Current superannuation payouts for women are approximately half of those of men.

Other factors that impact on a woman's economic independence over her lifetime can include: her Aboriginality, disability including mental health, ethnicity; problems with substance abuse, incarceration, sexuality and experience of domestic violence. Perhaps the most significant factor for poverty is that it is women who provide unpaid caring roles in the community for both dependent children and care of the elderly or family members with a disability. The Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick suggests that we need to ask ourselves as a nation, '*Is poverty to be the reward for a lifetime spent caring?*'⁹⁵ Commissioner Broderick goes on to assert that if we are to reinvent the way we work and care:

- we need to stop under-utilising the skills and talents of women;
- we need to evaluate our current approaches to integrating paid work and care giving;
- we need to start creating mechanisms to provide a more secure economic future for those people who have spent a significant part of their life caring.⁹⁶

Women continue to comprise the majority of sole parents living in poverty and those on income support, without any corresponding reflection of this in the public policy domain – no addressing of their needs in relation to access to PPP and no position that would move them towards greater 'inclusion' through structural change to the workplace, such as

- greater protection for part time casual workers,
- greater access for part time casual workers to work based training opportunities,
- greater access to quality child care
- greater access to flexible work practices that do not damage their long term career prospects and remuneration and
- greater numbers of women promoted to senior management and boards. For example, in 2007 ASX200 Companies, women held a tiny percentage of Board Directorships and only four Chief Executive Officer positions while only 5.9 per cent of senior line managers are female, and that is significant reduction from two years earlier.⁹⁷

What works?

It is evident from the above discussion, that given the important role VET plays in enabling people to overcome poverty and gain sustainable employment, affordable VET programs are vitally important. Affordable, accessible VET remains critical for women from low socio-economic backgrounds who may suffer from a lack of visibility within the community and may also suffer detrimental effects of the global financial crisis.

⁹⁵ *Women on the Verge of Recession: Confronting Gender Issues in Turbulent Times* Speech by Elizabeth Broderick Sex Discrimination Commissioner and Commissioner responsible for Age Discrimination Australian Human Rights Commission National Press Club, Canberra, 12.30 Wednesday 29 April 2009

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

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Other critical factors to ensure accessibility for a diverse range of women learners include:

- accessibility issues and reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of women learners with a disability;
- adequate training assessment and recognition of overseas qualifications for women learners who are new entrants under skilled migration programs;⁹⁸
- appropriate English language and literacy programs for refugee and other migrant women learners;
- culturally sensitive and appropriate teaching and learning environments which support access for Indigenous women; and
- inclusive teaching and learning environments that value and support the life experience of women.

4.4 Promotion of VET to Young and Older Women from Diverse Backgrounds

Given the poorer post school outcomes for young women and older women's higher access of VET at low qualification levels, it is important that the VET sector take a high profile in promoting VET programs and services to young and older women and to market segments of different groups of women from diverse backgrounds.

Promotion channels could include conventional commercial ones, as well as informal and community based communication avenues.

4.5 Recognition for Women

Recognition of prior learning and existing life skills remains a potent tool in accelerating pathways to higher qualifications and skill levels for women. Current recognition processes in the VET sector are often complex and bureaucratic. Recognition processes could be made more relevant to women, transparent and user friendly. They should highlight the links from informal and life long learning to formal skills recognition.

An excellent example of customization is the Women's Skills Valuing your Experience resource and website developed by TAFE NSW to support women learners identify their existing informal and life skills and promote recognition pathways, if appropriate. The website is currently available as a resource to teachers and students of TAFE NSW and the hard copy resource available through TAFE NSW libraries and Outreach coordinators.

⁹⁸ Research suggests that skilled migrants from the main English speaking countries are far more successful than those from non-English speaking countries in finding professional or managerial jobs consistent with their qualifications from Birrell, Bob, Healy, Ernest and Smith, Fred T (2008) *Labor's education and training strategy: building on false assumptions*, "People and Place", vol. 16 no 1, pp 40-54.

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4.6 Transition to Employment for Women

Many job seekers who face multiple and complex disadvantage are often 'a long way from skilled work'. With current government programs predicated on an increased demand for vocational education and training at the higher levels attention needs to be given to the link between social inclusion, pre-vocational or 'pathway' programs and higher level qualifications and long term sustainable employment. Certificates IV and above are often not appropriate entry points for many disadvantaged job seekers. For those such as women with limited formal schooling, vocational pathways are much longer and rarely occur in a linear progression.

If the *Social Inclusion Agenda* is to effectively engage and support job seekers facing multiple and complex disadvantage, greater flexibility needs to be built into the *Skilling Australia for the future* policy. Models that support case based approaches, assessment, tailored vocational education and training programs at the lower AQF levels (i.e. AQF levels I and II) and provision and support at critical transition points e.g. from training to employment through mentoring support, need to be reinforced. It is proposed that stronger partnerships be developed between the VET sector, industry, government and work place agencies to monitor and support women graduates' transitions to employment.

Recommendations

From this discussion the following recommendations are proposed to meet the needs of diverse groups of women.

Unlocking the Potential of Women from Diverse Backgrounds

Recommendation 13

Ensure that data on the participation in and outcomes from VET for people from specific groups such as Aboriginal peoples and people with a disability are disaggregated by gender and that trends are analysed and published on a regular basis. (Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, NCVET and RTOs)

Recommendation 14

Monitor the affordability and accessibility of all VET programs, so that women from diverse backgrounds and circumstances can fully engage with VET. This includes culturally inclusive design for and delivery to Aboriginal women and women from culturally diverse backgrounds as well as strategies to resolve issues of accessibility, cost recovery and implementation of reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of women learners with a disability. (Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments, RTOs)

Recommendation 15

Provide government incentives and performance measures for the provision of flexible, e-learning and work based VET options that are customised to women learners from diverse backgrounds and in varied circumstances and include women-only programs. (Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments, RTOs)

Recommendation 16

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Strengthen the links of the VET sector with community and government agencies to harness coordinated support for women from diverse backgrounds experiencing barriers to benefiting from VET. (RTOs)

Recommendation 17

RTOs, employment agencies and industry to develop collaborative strategies to assist in achieving improved employment outcomes for women with disabilities. (RTOs, Job Network Providers and Industry)

Recommendation 18

Invest in promoting VET to women, including marketing to segments of different groups of women from diverse background, utilising informal and formal channels of communication. (RTOs and Industry)

Recommendation 19

Make recognition processes user-friendly and appropriate for women and highlight the links from informal and lifelong learning to formal skills recognition. (RTOs)

Recommendation 20

Promote and customise VET training to women who are unemployed, underemployed or are returning to the workforce from family responsibilities. (RTOs)

Recommendation 21

Utilise and expand industry links to facilitate the transition to employment and improve employment outcomes for women in VET, e.g. foster industry sponsorships and work experience support. (RTOs and Industry)

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5. THE IMPACT OF THE GLOBAL RECESSION AND RECOVERY ON WOMEN AND VET

Vocational training is a key tool in the Government's economic policies, strategies and economic stimulus packages to address the global economic downturn, and specifically to stimulate the economy; to link training with paid employment; to decrease unemployment of youth and other welfare recipients, as well as to 'deepen' Australia's skills base. In her press release to announce the latest VET Infrastructure Funding, Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard highlighted the role of the VET system including TAFE in nation building in response to the global recession.

In order to maximise return on investment into priority skills training, government agencies and the VET sector need to focus on women's participation in such training.

WAVE strongly recommends setting performance targets for, monitoring and reporting on the federal and state government initiatives related to skills development in terms of participation by and outcomes for girls and women in Australia, for example:

- Education Revolution
- Productivity Places Programs
- Economic Stimulus Packages
- Australian Apprenticeships and Traineeships.

Richardson argues that employment creation schemes which result from economic stimulus tend to be blokey in nature:

*'. . . public employment schemes . . . tend to be "blokey". They tend to be construction or other outdoors activities that are traditionally associated with male employment. . . . The blokey nature of employment creation schemes reflects their concentration on such things as construction projects or infrastructure maintenance and restoration projects.'*⁹⁹

He goes on to argue that a more gender balanced approach to employment creation would be to target programs in education and health which are traditionally associated with female employment and would, therefore support more equitable employment outcomes for women from economic stimulus packages.¹⁰⁰

As a result of the GFC there are a number of additional factors which impact, and will continue to do so, on VET provision in Australia including:

- Rising unemployment: both full time and part time job losses;
 - re-entry skills training required,
 - greater reliance on social security system – access required to PPP and other prevocational programs with strong equity requirements,
 - less discretionary money to access high cost training opportunities,
 - greater reliance, therefore, on publicly provided VET and training.

99 op cit pp. 32

100 ibid pp 34

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- Increase in graduates returning to study degree courses in 'recession proof' occupational areas – education, health and law enforcement.¹⁰¹
- Increase in part time employment for men;
- Reduction in access to work based training;
- Decrease in hours of work;
- Potential increase in job loss for women working part time.

As at August 2008, nearly 2.2 million women worked part-time, representing 44.5 per cent of all employed women and 71.9 per cent of the part-time workforce. The experience of women part time workers can tell us a great deal about the anticipated experience of males moving to part time employment as a result of the recession, including loss of access to in-house or work related training options.

Training in Economic Downturns, a briefing note by the City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development, identifies that the assumption that work based training investment will go down as a result of recession is incorrect. The impact is more on the type of training offered and includes the following:

- training courses become shorter;
- in house training replaces external training;
- greater reliance on e-learning, one-on-one coaching and mentoring;
- responsibility for training shifted to production units from central training departments; and
- training is refocused on managers and others positioned to have the greatest impact on company performance.¹⁰²

The briefing note argues that small and medium sized enterprises are particularly vulnerable to a reduction in training during recession. Given the number of women who are small business owners and the high number of women employed in these often service related sectors the impact here could be considerable. On the other hand, there is the experience of anti-cyclic training patterns whereby VET enrolments increase as a direct result of rising unemployment. Given the complexity of the jobs environment, it would appear that an industry-by-industry analysis would benefit understanding, and comparisons between advanced economics.

There has been considerable discussion about the impact of the global recession of women given their more precarious engagement with full time employment over their lifetime. The International Trade Union Confederation Report, *Gender (In)equality in the Labour Market*, draws together available research and case study evidence to consider the impact of the GFC on women. It cites a recently published United Nations report on the current financial crisis which states that:

Women bear the brunt of the crisis because of the paradigm of the male breadwinner that prevails all over the world across cultural divide. . . . When job retrenchment takes place, the tendency is to protect employment for men and compromise on women's jobs. But women's incomes are essential for family

101 City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development, *Training in Economic Downturns*, a briefing note by the CGCSD March 2009.

102 *ibid.*

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*survival, especially when they are heads of households and/or in poor families. They cannot afford to stop working so they end up in jobs with much worse and often unacceptable conditions.*¹⁰³

The report also points out that, in many countries, a woman is still responsible for the largest share, if not all, of the care responsibilities in the household. This means that there is less time available for them to take up paid work in the market economy. However it clearly highlights that there are differences in the impact of the recession on women and men in developing and developed nations. It notes that the impacts of the current recession may be more keenly felt by women in developing countries as . . . *In many semi industrial countries, however, women tend to be employed in labour-intensive manufactured export industries which are more prone to fluctuations.*¹⁰⁴ Developing nations may also have larger number of women who are under-educated and unskilled and have cultural roles that are more starkly gender segregated and highlight men as the bread winner of the household.¹⁰⁵

According to Elizabeth Broderick:

*Since the mid 1980s, the proportion of women who have entered the Australian workforce has risen from 48% to 58%, a significant increase by anyone's account. At the same time, women make up the majority of the casual and part-time workforce. In a downturn, the easiest (not the smartest) way for businesses to downsize and cut costs is to let its part-time and casual staff go, as well as those who are working flexibly, or differently. And in a great many situations, let's face it, this primarily means women. This approach is already a worldwide trend. For example, in Britain, women are already being retrenched at twice the rate of men.*¹⁰⁶

Women are a significant player in the solution to the economic crisis. In a media release on the impact of the GFC on women the President of the ACTU Sharon Burrow noted that:

*The impact of the crisis could result in Australian women losing important pay equity gains and following in the footsteps of other countries, already in deep recession unless measures were put in place to improve pay equity... Women are over-represented in the most precarious employment, particularly low-paid and part-time work, and are vulnerable to losing their jobs in short-sighted business decisions, like that of Pacific Brands.*¹⁰⁷

Investment in training of existing workforce is considered one of the key strategies to build the capacity of the Australian economy to recover from this economic downturn.¹⁰⁸

103 Gender (In)equality in the Labour Market, International Trade Union Confederation Report p. 35 March 2009

104 *ibid.* p.33

105 *ibid.*

106 Broderick, E. Women on the Verge of a Recession. Opinion Piece, Australian Human Rights Commission. March, 2009.

107 Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) Press Release International Women's Day 2009: *pay gap may widen because of GFC*, Friday, 6 March 2009.

108 Facing up to Australia's skills challenge, as above

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Women employed in low paid and casual jobs, such as in cleaning, childcare, retail, hospitality, clothing, textile and footwear manufacturing, are vulnerable during this time of global financial crisis. Studies show that these groups of existing workers can be classified as the working poor with little access to VET.¹⁰⁹ Suggested government incentives for employers to train existing staff need to include a focus on training existing female workers in these low paid positions with often casual and part-time conditions in female dominated sectors. To this end, partnerships between industry, unions, government and the VET sector should be strengthened. It is strongly recommended that the government develop incentives for employers and the VET sector to facilitate the provision of cost-effective and flexible training that is customised for women in micro and small businesses, including home based workers.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) noted, at its most recent session early this year, its concern about the current global financial crisis and its impact upon the realization of human rights of women and girls worldwide.

While the scale of the current crisis is still largely unmeasured, it is expected that women and girls in both developed and developing countries will be particularly affected by the potential social and economic consequences, such as unemployment, increase of responsibilities both at work and at home, decrease of income and potential increase in societal and domestic violence.¹¹⁰

Recommendations

From this discussion the following recommendations are proposed.

The Impact of the Global Recession and Recovery on Women and VET

Recommendation 22

Invest in training places for women in government initiatives for skills shortage and growth areas with links to performance targets for women. Promote and monitor women's participation. (Commonwealth and State and Territory Government)

Recommendation 23

Develop innovative strategies to engage existing female workers in VET, especially those working in low paid female dominated sectors, e.g. retail, social services, hospitality, CTF manufacturing and women in micro and small businesses: e.g. government incentives for employers and VET, negotiated arrangements with union assistance and customised, flexibly delivered VET provision. (Government, Industry and Unions)

Recommendation 24

Ensure that incentives and industry programs designed to stimulate economic growth target industries that will impact on women's employment growth such as public sector services in education including childcare, health including aged care and in the retail and hospitality sectors. (Commonwealth Government)

109 Masterman-Smith, H & Pocock, B (2008) *Living Low Paid – the dark side of Prosperous Australia*. Melbourne: Allen & Unwin Publishers

110 CEDAW 43rd Session Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

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6. SKILLING WOMEN FOR A LOW CARBON ECONOMY

With much of the government funding for growing the new green or low carbon, economy going to traditionally male occupational areas such as primary industries (energy/coal and agriculture) and building and construction (insulation, building and related 'green innovations'), it is important to ask the question, where are women in the new green economy.

As an area of growth in an international recession, VET training for women in green industry areas need to be prioritized to ensure equity and that the green future does not maintain current gender segmentation but promotes equity through sustainability.

Oona Nielsen, Executive Director of the Dusseldorp Skills Forum, states that climate change presents Australia with its greatest economic risk, but opportunities also exist to create an estimated 3.25 million new *green collar* jobs by 2025. She also advises that the acceptance of the need for new, environmentally sustainable 'green collar jobs' - and the new skills to go with them - has been slow: *The positive economic opportunities from climate change will only come to fruition if the Australian workforce is properly skilled and resourced to underpin truly sustainable industries and workplaces.*¹¹¹

Without national policy guidelines and programs for women and girls, especially those most at risk, there is no platform from which to advocate that any effort should be directed towards girls and women in this major portfolio area, at national or state/territory levels - climate change and sustainability policies included. The predicted growth areas of employment in the new green economy are traditionally highly masculinised. A CSIRO/Dusseldorp report *Growing the Green Collar Economy* predicts *...(g)reen job requirements will range from trade skills (green plumbing, construction and retrofitting of energy efficient buildings, renewable energy, and low input horticulture) to planning, management and leadership skills (procurement, fleet management, and innovative practice) and assessment (energy auditing, water efficiency, meeting of environmental specifications).*¹¹²

It is crucial that women, including marginalised women, are given a more equitable opportunity to enter these new industries, especially given the low profile of women in the 'old' economy for these types of jobs. A cross-sectoral, whole of government approach to targeting women for green skills training needs to include women-focused promotions campaigns, customised programs and work placement support.¹¹³ At this stage, no data are available to illustrate the picture of participation of women in new and/or 'green' industries.

Recommendations

Skilling Women for a Low Carbon Economy

Recommendation 25

Invest in training places for women in government initiatives for green skills with links to performance targets for women including the 'greening' of traditionally female

111 Dusseldorp Skills Forum www.dsf.org.au

112 CSIRO/Dusseldorp (2008) report *Growing the Green Collar Economy*

113 *Facing up to Australia's skills challenge*, as above

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occupations and industries. Promote and monitor women's participation.
(Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments and Industry)

7. CONCLUSION

From this overview of the current context and issues for women and VET, critical issues have been identified and discussed. VET policy and resources must to be directed to key domains of change, in order to fully engage and benefit Australian women, especially during times of economic downturn and through to recovery.

While a stand alone policy targeting specific goals and strategies for women learners in VET is a key recommendation of this paper, perhaps more important is WAVE's call for the need to re-emphasise a gender based analysis and a gender balanced approach to VET reforms through COAG and the regulatory and advisory mechanisms of the VET system including the National VET Equity Advisory Council, the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) and the Australian Qualification Training Council (AQTC).

Of particular note is the potential of women to benefit from employment creation schemes and new skills for the low carbon economy.

WAVE with S4W is proposing a number of specific strategies for an invigorated focus on women and VET and the development of stronger alliances and collaborations with industry, unions, and government and community agencies to support improved VET programs for women. After two decades of 'lessons learned', the national VET system in Australia has the capacity to move to maturity, through flexible, innovative, equitable and inclusive provision. Given imminent major reforms in VET, Australia has the opportunity to embrace a socially inclusive agenda for VET by adopting a gender inclusive approach. Such an act of political and social good will indeed position Australia's VET system amongst international best practice.

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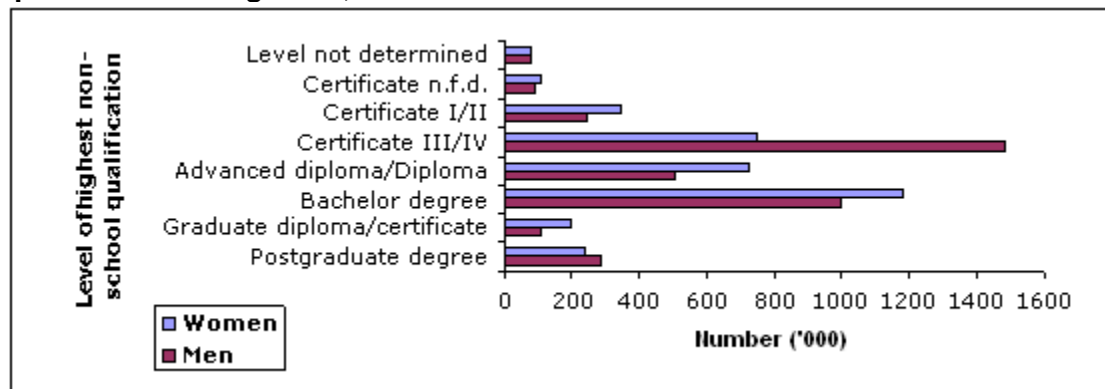
APPENDIX

Level of highest non-school qualification

In May 2008, 7.47 million Australians had a non-school qualification. This included 3.65 million women, accounting for 52.6 per cent of all Australian women aged 15 to 64 years. The proportion of Australian women with a non-school qualification has increased from 50.6 per cent in 2007.

As shown by Figure 1.1, a Bachelor degree is the most common form of non-school qualification for women, whereas a Certificate III or IV is the most common qualification among men. The number of women is equal to or exceeds the number of men across all qualification levels, except among those with Certificate III or IV and Postgraduate qualifications.

Figure 1.1: Population aged 15-64 years by level of highest non-school qualification and gender, 2007

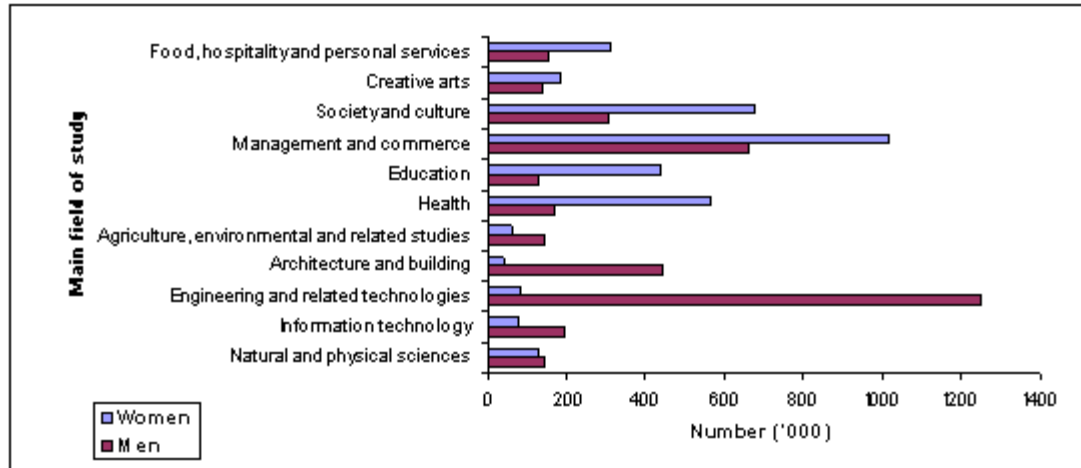


Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008, Education and Work, May 2008, Catalogue No. 6227.0, ABS, Canberra, Table 9.

Figure 1.2 shows clear gender differences in the main fields of study among those with a non-school qualification. Management and commerce was the main field of study for about one-third of all women with a non-school qualification. Society and culture, Health and Education were also common main fields of study for women. Men's qualifications were clustered in the Engineering and related technologies and Management and commerce fields of study. Men were also more likely than women to hold qualifications in the fields of Agriculture, environment and related studies, Architecture and building, and Information technology.

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Figure 1.2: Population aged 15-64 years by main field of highest non-school qualification and gender, 2007



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008, Education and Work, May 2008, Catalogue No. 6227.0, ABS, Canberra, Table 9.

Vocational education and training

In 2007, 47.7 per cent of all students enrolled in vocational education and training (VET) courses were women (794,200). In 2007, there were differences between men and women in chosen fields of study for vocational education and training (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Vocational education and training students by field of education and gender, 2007

	Women	Men
Natural and physical sciences	0.4	0.3
Information technology	1.4	2.9
Engineering and related technologies	3.4	29.0
Architecture and building	1.0	11.9
Agriculture, environmental and related studies	2.2	6.1
Health	6.6	3.8
Education	3.8	2.5
Management and commerce	27.1	14.1
Society and culture	15.2	4.7
Creative arts	3.3	2.0
Food, hospitality and personal services	13.1	7.4
Mixed field programmes	14.1	9.9
Not known	8.3	5.3
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2008, Australian vocational education and training statistics: Students and Courses, 2007, NCVET, Adelaide, Table 5.

The most common courses undertaken by men were in the fields of Engineering and related technologies, Architecture and building, and Management and commerce. Women were concentrated in the fields of management and commerce, society and culture, food, hospitality and personal services, and mixed field programmes.

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Australian apprenticeships and traineeships

Commencements

The number of women who commenced a new apprenticeship or traineeship in the 12 months to 31 August 2008 was 115,800, 5 per cent higher than the 110,300 commencements recorded for women in the 12 months prior to 31 August 2007.

In-training

In 2007, there were 136,850 women in apprentices and traineeships, representing 33.0 per cent of all apprentices and trainees in-training.

Table 1.2 shows the number of men and women in apprenticeships and traineeships in 2007 by occupation group. Just over 61 per cent of all male apprenticeships and traineeships were in the Tradespersons and related workers occupation group, compared to 16.5 per cent of female apprenticeships and traineeships. Women's apprenticeships and traineeships were concentrated in the Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers occupation group.

Table 1.2: Apprenticeships and traineeships in-training by occupation group and gender, 2007

Occupation	Women	Men	Total
Managers and administrators	1,060	2,250	3,300
Professionals	1,950	2,860	4,810
Associate professionals	16,190	15,140	31,330
Tradespersons and related workers	22,620	169,840	192,460
Advanced clerical and service workers	4,990	1,880	6,870
Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers	64,710	27,500	92,210
Intermediate production and transport workers	5,160	33,410	38,560
Elementary clerical, sales and service workers	12,850	7,260	20,110
Labourers and related workers	7,330	17,400	24,730
Total	136,850	277,540	414,390

Source: National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2008, *Atlas of Australian public VET – Australia data, 2007*, NCVET, Adelaide, Table 2.2.

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Education and labour force participation

Table 1.3 shows a relationship between education level and labour force participation for Australian women. In 2006, women with a postgraduate qualification had the highest labour force participation rate. The labour force participation rate for women with a Bachelor degree was 14 percentage points higher than for women whose highest level of qualification was a Year 12 secondary education.

Table 1.3: Women aged 15 years and over, labour force participation rate by highest level of educational attainment, 2006

Highest level of educational attainment	Labour force participation rate (%)
Postgraduate	83.0
Graduate diploma/Certificate	82.3
Bachelor degree	79.1
Advanced diploma/Diploma	71.1
Certificate level	73.7
Year 12	64.9
Year 11	59.5
Year 10	50.6
Year 9	33.3
Year 8 or below	14.6

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006, Census of Population and Housing, (data available upon request).

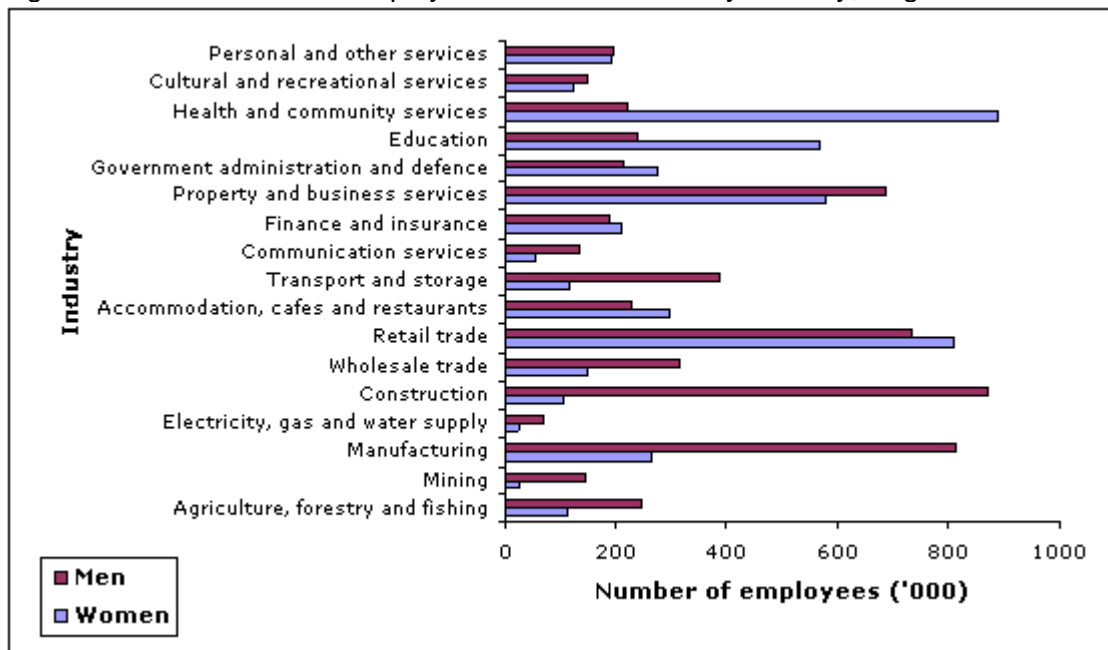
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Industries and occupations in which women work

Figure 1.3 shows that the labour force in Australia continues to be segmented according to gender. A greater number of women are employed in the Health and community services and Education industries, whereas men comprise the majority of employees in the Construction, Manufacturing, Mining, Transport and storage, and Wholesale trade industries.

The distributions of the male and female labour forces by occupation are shown in Figure 1.4. A greater number of women are employed as Elementary and Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers compared to men. Men comprise the majority of Labourers and related workers and Intermediate production and transport workers. The number of women and men employed as Associate professionals and Professionals are similar. However, men outnumber women employed as Managers and administrators and Tradespersons.

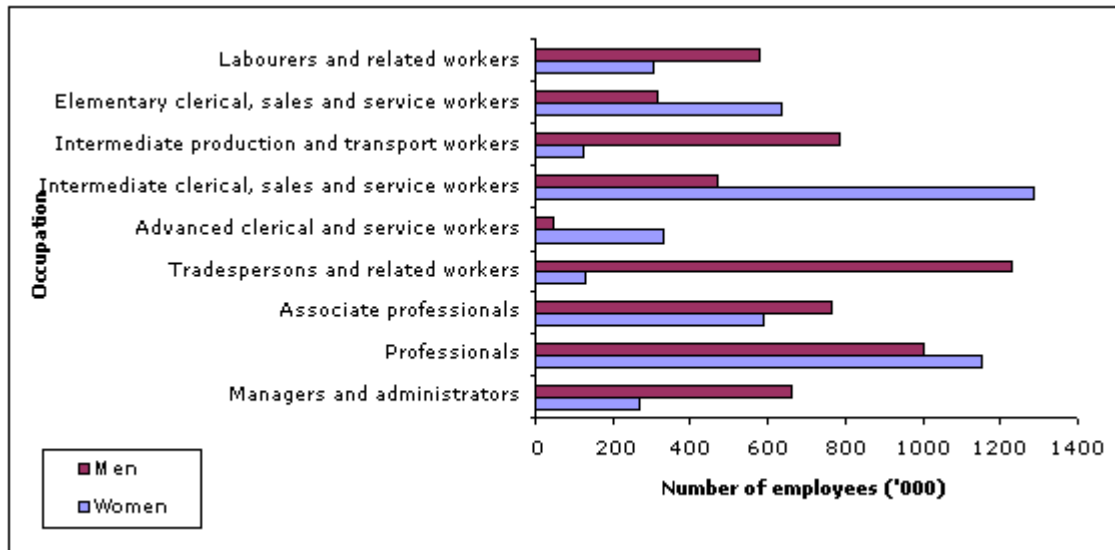
Figure 1.3: The number of employed men and women by industry, August 2008



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008, Australian Labour Market Statistics, October 2008, Catalogue No. 6105.0, ABS, Canberra, Table 2.4.

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Figure 1.4: The number of employed men and women by occupation, August 2008

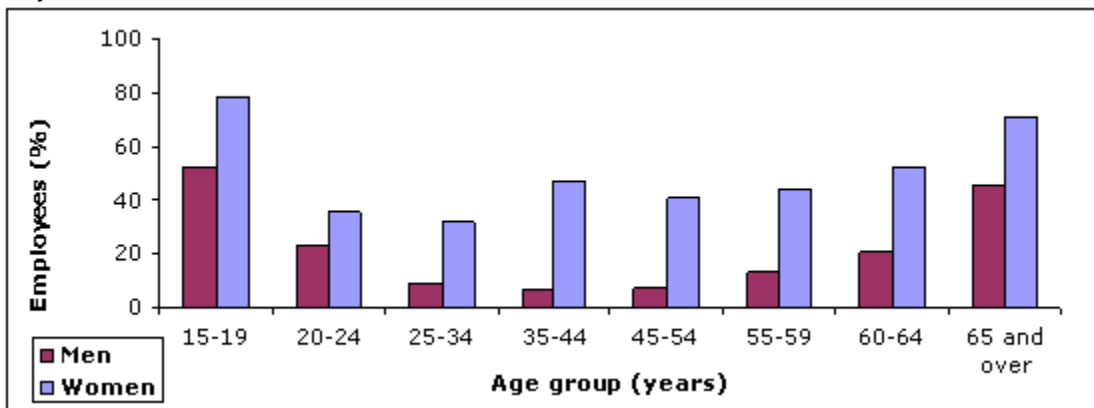


Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008, Australian Labour Market Statistics, October 2008, Catalogue No. 6105.0, ABS, Canberra, Table 2.4.

Women employed part time

As at August 2008, nearly 2.2 million women worked part-time, representing 44.5 per cent of all employed women and 71.9 per cent of the part-time workforce. Part-time work is based on hours worked: defined as those who usually worked less than 35 hours a week (in all jobs). It is not based on the type of work they are doing, e.g. there are “casuals” who are employed full-time. Figure 1.5 shows that the proportion of women employed part-time work is higher than the proportion of men employed part-time among all age groups, especially between the ages of 35 and 54 years.

Figure 1.5: Part-time employees as a proportion of all employed men and women by age group, July 2008

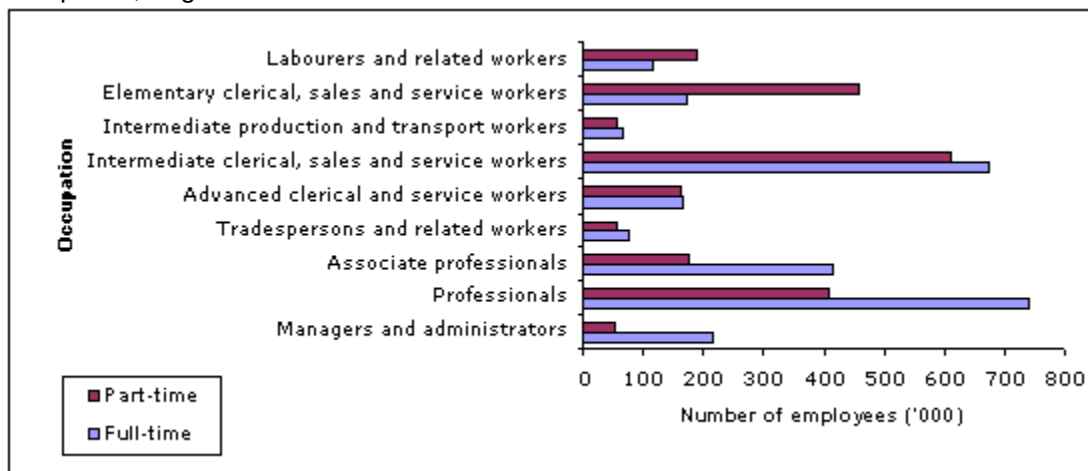


Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008, Labour Force Australia Detailed – Electronic Delivery, July 2008, Catalogue No. 6291.0.55.001, ABS, Canberra, Table 01.

Figure 1.6 demonstrates the mix of full-time and part-time employment for women within occupations. Part-time work is the dominant form of employment for women in lower skilled occupations such as Clerical, sales and service workers, although part-time work is also common among female Professionals.

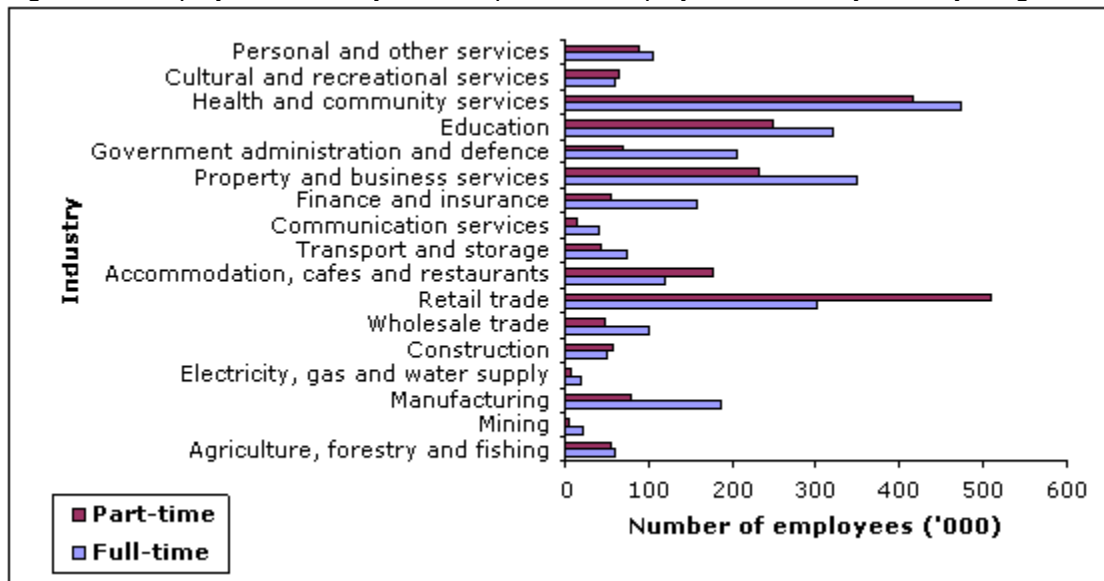
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Figure 1.6: The number of employed women by full-time/part-time employment status and occupation, August 2008



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008, Australian Labour Market Statistics, October 2008, Catalogue No. 6105.0, ABS, Canberra, Table 2.4.

Figure 1.7 shows the mix of full-time and part-time employment for women within industries. Within the Health and community services, Education, Property and business services, and Retail trade industries, more women are employed part-time than full-time. Figure 1.7: Employed women by full-time/part-time employment status by industry, August 2008



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008, Australian Labour Market Statistics, October 2008, Catalogue No. 6105.0, ABS, Canberra, Table 2.4.

The female full-time labour force

Table 1.4 shows the occupational distribution of men and women employed full-time. Nearly one-third (32.5 per cent) of male employees are concentrated in lower-skilled occupations compared to 38.9 per cent of female employees. Women are clearly clustered in the Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers field in the lower-skilled occupations. In the higher-skilled occupations, over half of women (51.1 per cent) are employed as Associate professionals, Professionals or Managers and administrators, which is a higher representation than the 43.9 per cent of men employed in those occupations. A larger proportion of men than women are employed full-time as Managers and administrators and Tradespersons.

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Table 3.4: Full-time labour force by occupation and gender, August 2008

Occupation	Labour force (%)	
	Women	Men
Managers and administrators	8.2	12.4
Professionals	28.0	17.7
Associate professionals	15.6	13.9
Tradespersons and related workers	2.9	22.7
Advanced clerical and service workers	6.3	0.7
Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers	25.5	7.6
Intermediate production and transport workers	2.5	13.2
Elementary clerical, sales and service workers	6.6	3.5
Labourers and related workers	4.4	8.2
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008, Australian Labour Market Statistics, October 2008, Catalogue No. 6105.0, ABS, Canberra, Table 2.4. Totals may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

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Survey tool

This survey tool was used to elicit feedback from critical stakeholders.

Fig 1.8 Survey tool

- 1. In your opinion what are the most critical issues currently impacting on women and VET?*
- 2. What new and emerging groups does WAVE need to highlight or target in the new policy (Please give any background and ideas if possible)*
- 3. What do you think should happen to improve outcomes for women in VET?*
- 4. What is needed to make these changes possible?*
- 5. Any other comments you'd like to offer?*