



About WAVE

WAVE is a national network of women involved in VET, ACE and the broad field of work-related education and training (see <http://www.wave.org.au/>). WAVE provides seminars & workshops, research, policy advocacy and advice, as well as networking on a national and state basis. We are supported within each state by local representation that in turn contributes collaboratively to national events and governance.

WAVE was formed in 1987, the first and only national and autonomous organisation for Australian women in the adult, community and vocational education and training sector. WAVE is an active member of Economic Security4Women, one of six Federal Government women's Alliances (see <http://www.security4women.org.au/>).

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.

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.

We refer you to findings in the recent policy paper *Women and Vocational Education and Training: Strategies for Gender Inclusive VET Reform* , developed by WAVE for eS4W and endorsed by all members of eS4W, that recognises that:

- The national policy "Women: Shaping our Future" (albeit never properly implemented) is due to expire 2010.
- Without national policy guidelines for women and girls, especially those most at risk, there is no platform from which to advocate for and argue that any consideration should be directed towards girls and women in this major portfolio area, at national or state/territory levels.
- Vocational training is a key central tool in federal and state 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.

The Report recommends strategies for making VET more gender inclusive. It is accompanied by an Overview paper and a Recommendations paper.

Link: <http://www.security4women.org.au/projects/vet>

Context

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.

(Miles & Rickert, 2009¹)

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.

Women in Australia – a snap shot

- Women are concentrated in feminised fields of work and training
- Women are underrepresented in emerging and growth areas with better than average remuneration opportunities, such as green industries, mining industries
- 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
- 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.
- Women who face multiple factors of disadvantage are particularly vulnerable at times of economic downturn.

¹ Miles R & Ricket M, 2009, *Women and Vocational Education and Training: Strategies for Gender Inclusive VET Reform* URL: <http://www.security4women.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Women-and-VET-Strat.pdf>

The Sex Discrimination Act was passed into law by the Australian Parliament in 1984, reinforcing Australia's signing on to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)² 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.

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

*Accessible, affordable and relevant vocational education and training, along with person-centred career counseling, is of high significance for women seeking to enter or re-enter 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.*³

This Review:

To meet the future educational needs of Australian women and girls this submission by WAVE welcomes the opportunity to contribute a vital perspective to enhance the quality of the VET workforce required in 2 areas, viz:

1. Need for gender expertise in relation to appropriate mix of skills and knowledge required to deliver on the outcomes in the COAG

While the number of women in employment in Australia continues to increase, Australia continues to have one of the most gendered workforces (horizontal and vertical segregation) in OECD countries. While the ongoing trend has been for many women to work in part time &/or casual employment, the (slow) shift to 'family friendly' 'flexible' workplace arrangements are critical for both women and their partners in the 21st century. Patterns of delivery for VET must follow suit.

Old patterns of provision that rest on gendered (masculinist) assumptions of 'men's work' and 'womens work' (e.g. the status differentiation between apprenticeships and traineeships) continue to perpetuate and so reproduce gendered patterns of training and employment outcomes in VET. There are implications for workforce planning across the sectors for integrated service delivery for Australian women and girls. Study (training) and employment related pathways for women and girls across all education sectors, require a gender perspective to reduce segmented occupation, industry and workplace outcomes and thereby build women's life long economic sustainability.

² See: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

³ YWCA Australia and Women's Legal Services Australia, July 2009, *NGO Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in Australia* p. 56]

The 2009 Policy Report cited earlier includes examples of successful employment programs and organisations that include factors necessary for best practice in the delivery of gender sensitive VET. These include:

- ☒ targeted and integrated training;
- ☒ 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.

Ongoing (rather than project-based short term) adequate funding of such initiatives is a central requirement for sustained success, as is program implementation by skilled and supported staff.

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 freely access the full range of career and VET choices available, and so make informed choices . Given that the emphasis on school based Trade Training Centres focuses on predominantly male trades and occupations this point is critical.

It is necessary that the resourcing and implementation of informed and gender sensitive career advice for girls and young women in secondary schools be made available as a matter of urgency. (State and Territory Governments)

2 Ongoing data collection to establish a robust evidence base, provide for future workforce planning and development and meet reporting requirements

WAVE strongly recommends that a new VET policy for women beyond 2010 be implemented and 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.

The disaggregation of data by gender and rigorous analysis of same is critical to understanding trends over time, and so implementing strategies to enhance choices of and outcomes for Australian women, whether already in the workforce, seeking to change occupations, or to enter or reenter the paid workforce.

This includes 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 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

It is most important that these options be promoted to young women and girls, ensuring that they have the knowledge required to broaden their future employment and career options. This is critically important in areas of occupational growth and economic wellbeing for future generations of Australian women workers.

VET and VET related data on women and girls engaged 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 must be collected, analysed and made publically available. The level of detail in the classifications and the frequency of data analysis could be clarified in consultation with stakeholders. The level of detail in the classifications and the frequency of data analysis could be clarified in consultation with stakeholders.

In Sum

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 recovery.

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.