

## Inquiry into vocational education and training in New South Wales

Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE) is an NGO, the only national organisation with a single focus on women and post compulsory education and training. WAVE represents the interests of women and girls in the broad areas of adult, vocational and work-related education and training, and the links between these, employment outcomes and labour market positions.

We are a member of economicSecurity4women (eS4W) and Equality Rights Alliance (ERA). WAVE collaborates with Adult Learning Australia (ALA), and is a voting member of Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult education (ASPBAE).

WAVE's research and consultation for the last decade and a half highlights the need for updating, resourcing and implementation and evaluation of specific policies for women and girls in vocational and work related education and training, along with improved employment outcomes.

WAVE welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the NSW Upper House Inquiry, and will focus specifically on the Terms of Reference that refer most closely to women and girls undertaking VET courses or hoping to. These are b), d) and f).

### Why is it critical that VET provides programs for women and girls?

#### 1. Productivity

In our previous submissions to the recent Federal Inquiries into TAFE and VET more generally, WAVE strongly pursued the argument being made by the Federal Government, the Grattan Institute and many others, that growth in productivity can be greatly assisted by supporting women into full employment and into a greater range of careers than has traditionally been the case. The figures below from the ABS clearly demonstrate the existing issues around female underemployment in Australia.

As demonstrated in the table, women had higher underemployment rates than men across all eight occupations, with the highest rates in labouring (18.7%) and sales workers (17.8%).

## Workforce participation

**Table 1: Workforce participation by gender, fulltime/part-time status and occupation**

Occupation	Female/Male		Total (%)	Full-time (%)	Part-time (%)	Total (%)
	Full-time (%)	Part-time (%)				
clerical and	42.6	31.4	<b>74.0</b>	22.0	4.0	<b>26.0</b>

administrative workers						
community and personal service workers	26.7	42.0	<b>68.7</b>	20.7	10.6	<b>31.3</b>
sales workers	21.2	41.1	<b>62.3</b>	22.4	15.3	<b>37.7</b>
professionals	34.0	19.3	<b>53.3</b>	40.8	5.9	<b>46.7</b>
managers	26.7	8.4	<b>35.1</b>	60.1	4.8	<b>64.9</b>
labourers	11.5	21.8	<b>33.3</b>	43.2	23.5	<b>66.7</b>
technicians and trades workers	8.6	5.8	<b>14.4</b>	77.6	8.0	<b>85.6</b>
machinery operators and drivers	6.7	3.1	<b>9.8</b>	78.3	11.9	<b>90.2</b>
overall <sup>iii</sup>	24.6	21.1	<b>45.7</b>	45.0	9.3	<b>54.3</b>

**Figure 1: Comparison of underemployment rates between females and males by occupation**

Source: ABS (2013) *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly*, cat no 6291.0.55.003, viewed 20 June 2013, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6291.0.55.003?OpenDocument>

Note: Occupations are ranked by the underemployment rate for women, from highest to lowest.

## 2. International Policies

The focus of the 2015 59<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 59) was that of Beijing +20, a review of the progress of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which is considered the global agenda for women's empowerment to promote equality, development, and peace for all women. The **Beijing Declaration** and Platform for Action was adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. The Platform for Action reaffirms the fundamental principle that the rights of women and girls are an "inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights." CSW 59 expressed concern that 20 years after the Fourth World Conference on Women, no country has fully achieved equality and empowerment for women and girls.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals call on Governments to:

*“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (SDG 4) & “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” (SDG 5) – Open Working Group (2014)*

The G20 countries in Australia in November 2014 [made a commitment](#) to reduce the gender gap in workforce participation by 25% by 2025.

The summit acknowledged that one of the world's most significant barriers to global economic growth is the persistently low level of women's participation in the workforce compared with men's.

[G20 leaders announced](#) that by increasing female labour participation by 25% over the next 15 years, they would bring 100 million women into the workforce – thereby allowing the G20 countries to reach their goal to increase global economic growth by 2.1% by 2018.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott said the target is a "clear aspiration".

"An extraordinary achievement if we can deliver on this, but it is a clear aspiration and it is an achievable accountable goal," [he told ABC News.](#)

In 2015, Senator Michaelia Cash, Minister assisting the Prime Minister for Women, in a media release entitled 'Women at the forefront of a productive Australia', said: "If Australia could match Canada with six percent more women in the paid workforce, the Australian economy would increase by about \$25 billion each year. And raising women's workforce participation to the same level as men's would boost the Australian economy by \$195 billion.... More women in the workforce will strengthen our country's economic resilience, increase family incomes, and ultimately boost Australia's economic growth.... We are partnering with industry and key organisations to improve incentives, remove barriers, enhance skills and support women's leadership aspirations through education and mentoring."

She also supported the political declaration from CSW59, welcoming the commitments to achieving gender equality and empowerment of women and girls and said Australia would continue to work towards implementing the called-for concrete actions.

Despite the rhetoric of our Federal Government and commitment to these important compacts, the funding for women's programs in vocational education and training continues to be cut. The impact of the marketization of the VET sector on women and girls is quite significant, with access courses cut and no funding made available to ensure Australia can meet these targets.

### **3. Women and girls in the workforce**

There are a number of barriers that women and girls face in embarking on productive careers in the workforce, that need to be part of the thinking and funding of vocational education and training. The first is that the Australian labour market is one of the most highly gender-segregated amongst the OECD countries. (OECD, 2015) Women have traditionally clustered in a small number of industries including health and community services, education, clerical and sales, and hospitality, with a small number working in the traditionally male dominated areas of mining, construction and manufacturing.

In its 2012 report on “Closing the Gender Gap”, the OECD says that whilst many countries have made significant progress towards gender equality in education and that girls outperform boys in many areas of education, “women continue to earn less than men, are less likely to make it to the top of the career ladder, and are more likely to spend their final years in poverty... Gender inequality means not only foregoing the important contributions that women make to the economy, but also wasting years of investment in educating girls and young women.”

“Governments and social partners have not so far shown themselves to be sensitive enough to the question of upgrading of female-dominated occupations, though they do recognise that occupational segregation is a major factor behind women’s disadvantaged position in employment. The measures taken thus far have been designed more to reduce segregation than to tackle its root causes. Some equal opportunity programmes of the 1980s have worked quite well, particularly those that sought to make working and family life more compatible and allowing women to participate fully in the work force. But more has to be done in specific areas. Upgrading of female occupations, opening up new career prospects, updating skills, work reorganisation and wage equality – action on all these fronts would improve women’s prospects in employment, as well as improving equality between the sexes. - Providing opportunities through education and employment for women to expand their labour force participation, continues to remain a challenge.” (OECD, 2015)

The second is that women continue to occupy many of the casual and lowly paid jobs. An article in *The Conversation* by Veronica Sheen from Monash University, *Eviction from the middle class: how tenuous jobs penalise women* (March 7, 2014), discusses how loss of jobs due to family care issues can lead women to financial challenges later in life. This is surely a serious economic and social issue and one that Smart and Skilled in NSW is exacerbating by not ensuring that there is funding for women’s programs.

Economic security4Women (eS4W), one of the six women’s alliances, funded a project in 2009 undertaken by (WAVE) and called “Women and VET: Strategies for Gender Inclusive VET Reform”. The researchers, Miles and Rickert wrote of the male dominated VET system, and the struggle that VET had undertaken to “offer programs that appealed to women and, more importantly, enable them to gain sustainable employment outcomes commensurate with their skill and qualification.” (Miles and Rickert, 2009, p. 5) More importantly they went on to say that there was a “link between women’s long-term economic security and equitable access to, participation in, and outcomes from vocational education and training.

### **Impact of Smart and Skilled**

Women in general leave and re-enter the workforce more often than men, related to family and care reasons. This can often lead to deskilling and a need to gain new qualifications in order to re-enter the workforce in fulfilling jobs with full

employment or with flexible working conditions as required. TAFE has for many years played a significant role in running courses specifically aimed at women and in supporting them to re-enter the workforce. Outreach in NSW has to-date run courses in communities meeting the cultural and social needs of many women. Unfortunately the economic returns from such courses are not recognised.

Such women's courses have suffered cuts under the marketization of vocational education and training generally, and specifically in NSW through the implementation of Smart and Skilled. Despite their critical role in connecting vocational education and training with communities, TAFE Outreach units have been drastically cut in most TAFE Institutes, and Outreach co-ordinators with years of knowledge and expertise in their local communities have taken redundancies. There are few Outreach co-ordinators left at South-Western Sydney Institute of TAFE for example, despite the fact that it covers some of the most disadvantaged and volatile areas in Sydney. Consider the social costs of not continuing to run courses for Moslem women in their communities.

The highly successful Career Education and Employment for Women (CEEW) course targets women seeking to return to education and the workforce and unclear of their career direction. The complexity of Smart and Skilled eligibility, concessions, exemptions, entitlements and non-entitlements act as a disincentive to study. The subsidised fee is prohibitive for many women. Enrolments are dropping and courses cut, despite the continued need for these women to update and increase skills to become a productive part of the workforce. Due to the restrictions placed by entitlements, many women who undertook initial qualifications overseas or a number of years ago, now find that they are unable to access subsidised training and are opting not to enrol rather than pay high fees or place a huge debt burden on their families.

The same problems are occurring in language, literacy and numeracy courses, where typically, prospective students have technical qualifications from overseas which are not recognised here or they cannot obtain work in the field. They want to improve their language, literacy or numeracy to get a better job or return to their field of training, but find they are not eligible for subsidised training due to an irrelevant and often obsolete prior qualification from overseas. Paying full fees is not a possibility, so they are excluded from training and forced to remain in unskilled work. This applies to many women and once again surely does not meet with Australia's commitments under the G20.

The greatest "skills shortages" in Australian industries are generic skills. According to the 2006/7 ABS Adult Literacy and Life skills Survey around 46% of the adult population lack the literacy skills required to function effectively in a modern society and economy.

A further 53% have insufficient numeracy skills. (ABS 2007) This is not including the many Indigenous adults living in remote communities who were not included in the ABS research but who we know are in desperate need of English language, literacy and numeracy support to engage with the Australian economy and break out of poverty.

The overwhelming body of research into adult literacy and numeracy suggests that these are social practices largely developed through purposeful engagement with other literate adults. The type of high quality VET education which was prior to Smart and Skilled, practised in public TAFE institutions and in the not for profit ACE sector, by its very nature, was likely to build these essential generic skills.

So-called “soft skills,” (reading, writing, communication, team work etc.) assessed and taught independently or embedded into a vocational context are critical. However the development of these skills is notoriously hard to measure, and as a result, can’t be easily quantified, cut up, quality controlled and sold on an open market in a drive for efficiency. It is these skills that employers continue to assert as being most important and it is these skills that TAFE as an educational provider, not focused primarily on profits, but rather educational and vocational outcomes for students, must be able to continue to teach.

WAVE is most concerned that one of the consequences of Smart and Skilled has been the focus by RTOs on courses that have short-term financial returns, rather than meeting the continuing educational needs of our communities and industries. Without sufficient funding allocated to TAFE, one would have to consider whether it is able to continue to meet its commitments under the TAFE Commission Act, specifically Objectives 1 a) and e) that:

## 6 Objectives of the TAFE Commission Act

- (1) In exercising its functions, the [TAFE Commission](#) must:
- (a) ensure that it provides [technical and further education](#) services to meet the needs of individuals and the skill needs of the workforce and, in particular, ensure that it provides basic and pre-vocational education as well as vocational education and training, and
  - (b) provide adults and young persons with a range of [technical and further education](#) services that recognise the changing nature of the working environment and the need for new skills and re-training, and
  - (c) provide, through formal arrangements and after consultation, [technical and further education](#) services that are relevant to the needs of industry, business, students and other client groups, and
  - (d) provide students with the maximum opportunity for progression by the linking or other articulation of courses and programs provided by the [TAFE Commission](#) and

between those courses and programs and those provided by other education and training providers, and

(e) provide educationally or vocationally disadvantaged groups (such as women, Aborigines, persons of non-English speaking background, persons with disabilities and persons in rural areas) with access to [technical and further education](#) services, including a range of appropriate specialised services, and

(f) consult with relevant agencies to promote the effective and efficient use of resources and co-operation between [TAFE establishments](#) and other educational institutions.

The Allen Consulting Group undertook a report for the National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC) in 2011 to consider the impact of competitive tendering and contestable funding on access and equity. As part of their report they detailed what concerns representatives of some equity groups expressed with contestable funding models:

- \* *the risk that in market based systems, those with the most intensive and costly learning needs, and those in geographic areas where provision was not economic, would face reduced access as providers concentrated on the profitable end of the market*
- \* *that competition would focus on price efficiency, volume and easily measurable outcomes, and not on harder to measure outcomes such as initial learner engagement and engagement with local communities. Furthermore, reduced prices from increased competition would compromise intensive learner support and limit providers capacity to flexibly use resources to meet learner needs*
- \* *that cooperation and collaboration rather than competition between providers would deliver more effective outcomes*
- \* *that learners with major learning needs and with significant and multiple disadvantages would not be in a position to make informed choices*
- \* *the risk of loss of continuity of provision and expertise as well as local capacity – so that RTOs will not invest in long term capabilities to deal with complex needs of disadvantaged learners*

From information provided to WAVE by students and teachers alike, it appears that Smart and Skilled is having this impact on the vocational education and training system in NSW. There is a serious loss of continuity of provision and expertise as well as local capacity in many RTOs including TAFE, and there have been significant cuts to support services for students, many of which women and girls need, including Counsellors, Multicultural co-ordinators, Disability co-ordinators and Outreach co-ordinators, all experts in ensuring that students have the best opportunities to succeed in their studies. There is significant cost to the community in many ways if students do not enrol, do not update their skills or fail due to lack of specialist support. The idea that it is possible to increase the proportion of adults with higher- level vocational qualifications, but at the same time remove the social capital, general

education and lower level access and pathways steps that have to-date been provided by public TAFE institutions is a nonsense.

In a document prepared for the WAVE 2015 National Conference, NCVET provided the following data, showing that:

- \* the proportion of women participating in VET remained at around 48%
- \* the number of women commencing an apprenticeship in 2013 is 38.5% compared to 61.5% for men
- \* the proportion of women commencing an apprenticeship or traineeship in the trades has remained a steady 15%, with a similar proportion completing
- \* in trades apprenticeships women are almost wholly concentrated in the lower- paid trades of hairdressing and food (NCVET 2014: Australian vocational education and training statistics)
- \* while employment and training outcomes for women after training are generally favourable, about one quarter are not employed after training
- \* average income after training for VET graduates employed full-time, females on average earn less than males (NCVET 2014, Australian vocational education and training statistics: Student outcomes 2014)

Many specialist women's programs in TAFE have been cut or cancelled over the last year or so as a result of the impact of Smart and Skilled. Career Education and Employment for Women (CEEW) has been referred to. Another casualty is the Work Wise Women program which has run successfully for nearly ten years. Smart and Skilled does not allow educational institutions the flexibility to subsidise such courses and to provide the students with fee exemptions as was previously the case. This course served to enable women to update their technical skills, especially if they have been out of the workforce in caring for family. Many of these women, prior to the course, were unable to find employment due to their lack of current skills and/or their lack of confidence. Yet as a result of this course, many went on to retrain in a new field completing diplomas or using it as a pathway to higher education. Smart and Skilled claimed that it was going to provide greater flexibility and choice for students. It appears to us in WAVE that the opposite is the case. Yet our research demonstrates that targeted women's programs within VET lead to increased individual agency, well-being and overall levels of community capacity." (Miles and Rickert 2009, p. 7)

Educational programs that provide the skills women and girls need to assist them to enter a wide range of careers including male dominated industries, are being lost in the marketised VET system.

In her speech that launched the Australian Human Rights Commission's program 'Women in male-dominated industries: A toolkit of strategies' on 21 May 2013, Elizabeth Broderick the Sex Discrimination Commissioner said: "On the whole, in 2013 we have not fully harnessed the invaluable contribution women can make – particularly in industries such as mining, construction and utilities. These industries

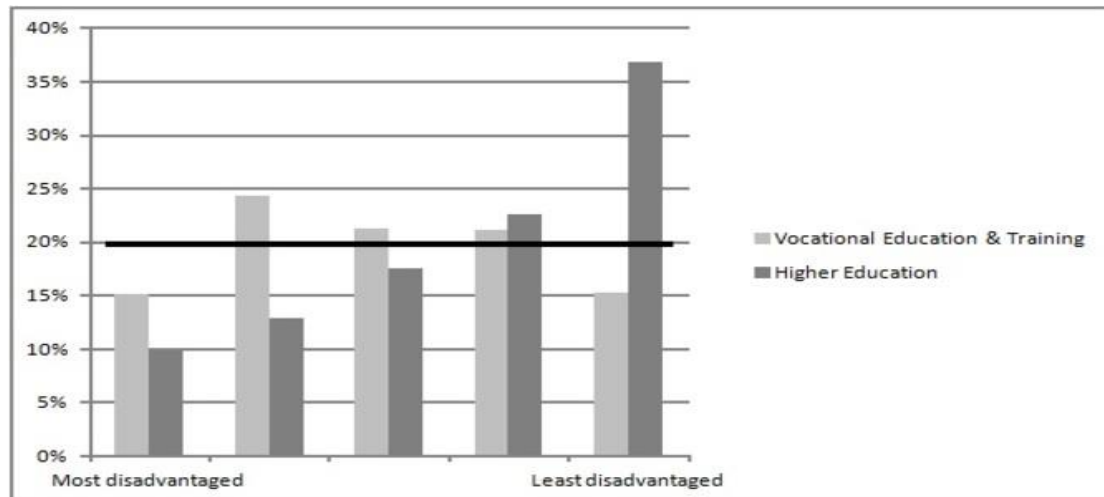


represent a thriving part of Australia’s economy, and as they continue to grow, both men and women can make an increasing contribution to their expansion and success.” WAVE supports sustainable funding being provided by governments to support the increased opportunities for women and girls through VET programs.

A marketised VET system in NSW, as in other states, has led to the proliferation of some aggressive marketing practices by some private providers or their brokers. Many women and girls have been targeted in this way. For some women who have not had previous opportunities to study for a career, the enticement of a Diploma (and maybe the promise of a job) would appear very attractive, especially if they were led to believe it would cost them nothing and could be achieved over a matter of months. WAVE believes that such marketing is a result of a market mentality being applied to education, where the dominant focus by education providers is making money not providing high quality educational opportunities for all.

Now is the time we should be strengthening not weakening TAFE, and should be looking for more comprehensive and sophisticated indicators of educational quality rather than investing precious training dollars cracking down on roting that has been allowed to flourish through poor public policy.

The challenge here is that the fundamental role of private providers is to make a profit. This does not augur well for students who have high level needs and a limited capacity to pay. These students are either excluded from participating as meeting their socio economic needs is too expensive or worse, participate in a program that is not designed to meet their particular educational/developmental needs due to costs. WAVE asserts that government funding needs to support disadvantaged groups, and this is best offered through the public provider, TAFE. VET has traditionally catered for many of the most disadvantaged adult students as demonstrated in the graph below, yet Smart and Skilled has not provided the funding that these students require for a successful educational experience.



Students by levels of disadvantage: Stone, 2012

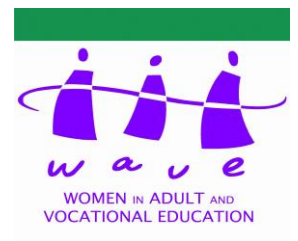
## Conclusion

As an organisation representing women and girls, WAVE is most concerned with the impact of the Smart and Skilled changes which have led to increased costs on students and less vocational education and training opportunities. It is important that this review in NSW recognise the impact on all student groups, including women and girls, and ensure that changes are put in place to redress the problems we have outlined in our submission.

We suggest that:

- there is a halt to Smart and Skilled and a recognition that a marketised VET system is not in the best interests of students and the community
- there be a rethink of any entitlement subsidy, as other states have done, and that all students have reasonable access to VET courses at affordable fees
- there be proper resourcing of TAFE NSW to continue to provide educational programs and student support services to those who are disadvantaged or have special needs, including many women and girls
- targeted programs for women and girls are funded and supported for all the reasons we have outlined in this submission.

WAVE is happy to address the Upper House review and to provide further information. For further information, contact Linda Simon, National WAVE Convenor at [wave@wave.org.au](mailto:wave@wave.org.au) or [lindasimon2@bigpond.com](mailto:lindasimon2@bigpond.com)



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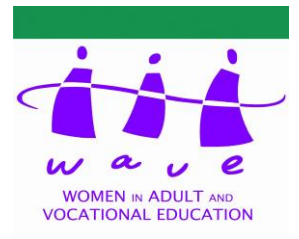
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