

ERA Submission to VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING REVIEW

25 January 2019

Equality Rights Alliance (ERA) is Australia's largest network advocating for women's equality, women's leadership and recognition of women's diversity. We bring together 64 non-government organisations and social enterprises with a focus on the impact of policy or service delivery on women. We are one of six National Women's Alliances, funded by the Commonwealth Office for Women.

We thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

ERA's Education Working Group led development of this submission. Members of this group include:

- WAVE – Women and Girls in Vocational Education and Training
- Australian Federation of Graduate Women
- National Council of Women of Australia

This submission highlights key issues which are elaborated in more detailed submissions from both WAVE and NCWA.

This submission draws attention to the following areas:

- **VET is critical to gender equality**
- **Funding models and the marketisation of VET**
- **Women's access to apprenticeships**
- **Reinstating equity objectives in VET policy**

VET is critical to gender equality

Australia's commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) serve as obligations to reform the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system to ensure it meets the needs of women and can advance gender equality objectives.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 sets out a blueprint for inclusive and equitable education and lifelong learning *for all*. To this end, targets 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 call for Government action to:

- ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education;
- substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship; and,
- eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.

In accordance with these targets, the commensurate indicators require Governments to report on gender, disability, regional, race and wealth quintile disaggregated data on vocational education participation and outcomes.

Since Australia's ratification of the CEDAW in 1983, VET has been deeply embedded in the Government's gender equality commitments. Articles 10 and 11 of CEDAW require that Governments ensure equal rights to:

- the same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training;
- free choice of profession and employment, the right to promotion, job security and all benefits and conditions of service and the right to receive vocational training and retraining, including apprenticeships, advanced vocational training and recurrent training;

Finally, international frameworks and policy development continue to draw the critical links between gender equality and VET. Australia's commitment to the 2011 Agreed Conclusions from the Commission on the Status of Women reiterate this obligation to ensure equal access to and participation of women and girls in education, training and Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM). The UNESCO Strategy for Technical and Vocational Education (TVET) 2016-2021 promotes gender equity and equality as one of the top three priority areas for Government action, alongside fostering youth employment and transitioning to green economies.¹

There is a history of inadequate attention to matters of equitable access and inclusion in Australia's VET system, especially in relation to gender.² This inequity has continued and persists in the present system where women are less likely to be VET students, are less likely to be apprentices and have fewer options available within the VET system.³ Further, the gendered links between women's participation in VET and other areas, such as access to decent work and social security need to be better recognised in policy.

Data from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research show a decline in the participation of several equity groups in VET in recent years. They include people from remote and very remote areas, those in the most socio-economically disadvantaged group, female students and students in the youngest age group (15 to 19).⁴

According to 2018 NCVET data on student outcomes:

¹ Strategy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), (2016-2021) – UNESCO Digital Library. (2016). Retrieved 21 January, 2019, from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245239>

² Butler, E. (2018) 'Leave No One Behind' The case to re/enact a national equity policy agenda in and for Vocational Education & Training (VET) in Australia. Presentation to AVETRA Research Forum 2018 New VET Research Perspectives: Issues, practices, insights. Canberra Institute of Technology.

³ Polesel quoted in Wade, M. (2018, December 15). Rosy picture for girls' achievement is not as it seems. Retrieved 23 January, 2019, from <https://www.smh.com.au/business/the-economy/rosy-picture-for-girls-achievement-is-not-as-it-seems-20181214-p50md3.htm>

⁴ VET needs support to rebuild its role in getting disadvantaged groups into education and work. (8 October 2018). Retrieved January 25, 2019, from <https://theconversation.com/vet-needs-support-to-rebuild-its-role-in-getting-disadvantaged-groups-into-education-and-work-101390>



- Women are less likely than men to be *not employed before training, but employed after* (men 50.4% and women 46.9%). For TAFE specifically, this figure is 46.5% for men and 40.8% for women.⁵
- Women are also less likely to report an improved employment status after training (61.3% for men and 56.9% for women). For TAFE specifically this is 61.2% for men and 52.9% for women).⁶
- There is a marked gender difference in the annual median incomes for graduates employed in their first full time job after training with men paid \$49 400 and women \$41 000.⁷

Gender disaggregated data and gender analysis is thus critical in the development of VET policy. Rigorous data collection which is disaggregated and responsive to diverse populations must also be a focus for improvement. Gender data collected by NCVET should be published and made available as a matter of course.

Funding models and the marketisation of VET

VET plays an important role in building the skills and capabilities of the workforce and in driving economic productivity. A comprehensive and coherent workforce framework is required underpinned by a full assessment of Australia's long term labour market needs, to assist VET in meeting industry and community requirements. The importance of VET educational qualifications and opportunities needs to be better understood by school leavers in assessing career progression.

The Global Campaign for Education (GCE) has recognised the problems relating to a marketised approach to education, as in the current policy framework for vocational education and training in Australia. GCE recognises that 'creating a market for outcomes contributes to the commercialisation and commodification of education that undermines the right to education', and that 'the provision of basic & second chance education should not be reliant/based on for-profit provision'.⁸

Amongst key recommendations on VET endorsed at the Fourth Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education (APMED4) that link Australia with Asia Pacific region progress on SDG targets 4.3 and 4.4, are the following:

- Establish and implement realistic quotas and targets to increase and maintain enrolments for job-related training for women and girls, especially in emergent and non-traditional jobs, occupations and industries.
- Develop appropriate policies, programmes and communication strategies to provide women, girls, youth and persons with disabilities, with equal opportunities to learn, develop and strengthen their knowledge, skills and competencies.

These are particularly appropriate to Australian education sectors.

⁵ NCVET (2018, December 6). VET student outcomes 2018: data slicer. Retrieved 22 January, 2019, from <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/all-data/vet-student-outcomes-2018-data-slicer>

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

⁷ NCVET (2015). Women in vocational education and training: participation and outcomes. Document prepared by NCVET for the *Women in Adult and Vocational Education 2015 National Conference*.

⁸ Global Campaign for Education (n.d.). Privatisation. Retrieved 23 October, 2019, from <https://www.campaignforeducation.org/en/what-we-do/campaigns/education-financing/privatization/>

Funding for vocational education and training 2015/16 was 4.7% below its level in 2005-06, according to the Mitchell Institute.⁹ Current federal funding is in the main delivered through the National Partnership Agreement of the Skilling Australians Fund, \$1.2 billion from 2018-2022.¹⁰ This funding is prioritised towards apprenticeships and traineeships across a range of industry areas including tourism, hospitality, health, ageing and community services, engineering, manufacturing, construction, digital technologies and agriculture.

The increasing cost of VET courses resulting from marketisation is causing problems in terms of participation, as some VET courses will cost more than university courses, without necessarily leading to the same monetary returns through employment. VET and adult education should be accessible to all students without leading to high levels of debt. VET providers including TAFE, which has traditionally provided programs to meet the specific needs of disadvantaged groups, including women, have increasingly cut access and Certificate I and II courses. It is these entry level courses that can provide the initial skills and confidence needed to enter the workforce or to progress to an industry-recognised qualification or to higher education. There is evidence to suggest that these funding cuts and the concomitant increases in fees disproportionately impact women. Research into the Victorian VET system in 2012 found that funding cuts were disproportionately targeted at courses with high female enrolment. Gendered analysis of the Commonwealth changes to employer subsidies for apprentices and trainees in 2011 and 2013 also indicates a disproportionate impact on female dominated industries.¹¹

Women's access to apprenticeships

Research from Simon and Clarke shows that "far fewer young women than young men are entering post-school studies in industry areas underpinned by an employment-based model of training" and on this basis "apprenticeships as currently configured are not working for women and girls".¹² A 2015 gender analysis report of NCVET data concludes that "women are almost wholly concentrated in the lower-paid trades of hairdressing and food."¹³ There appears to be no recognition by the Federal Government of the need for funding for specific strategies to support women and girls in either many of the current male dominated trades or those industry areas where the need for more highly skilled workers, such as aged care, has been recently identified. By a slight margin, women are the majority of apprentices and trainees in non-trade occupations. Simon and Clarke also highlight the fact that "women and girls are more highly represented in traineeships which include lower paid industries such as retail and hospitality."¹⁴

⁹ Pilcher, S. & Torii K. (2017). Expenditure on education and training in Australia: Update and analysis, Mitchell Institute policy paper No. 05/2017. Melbourne: Mitchell Institute

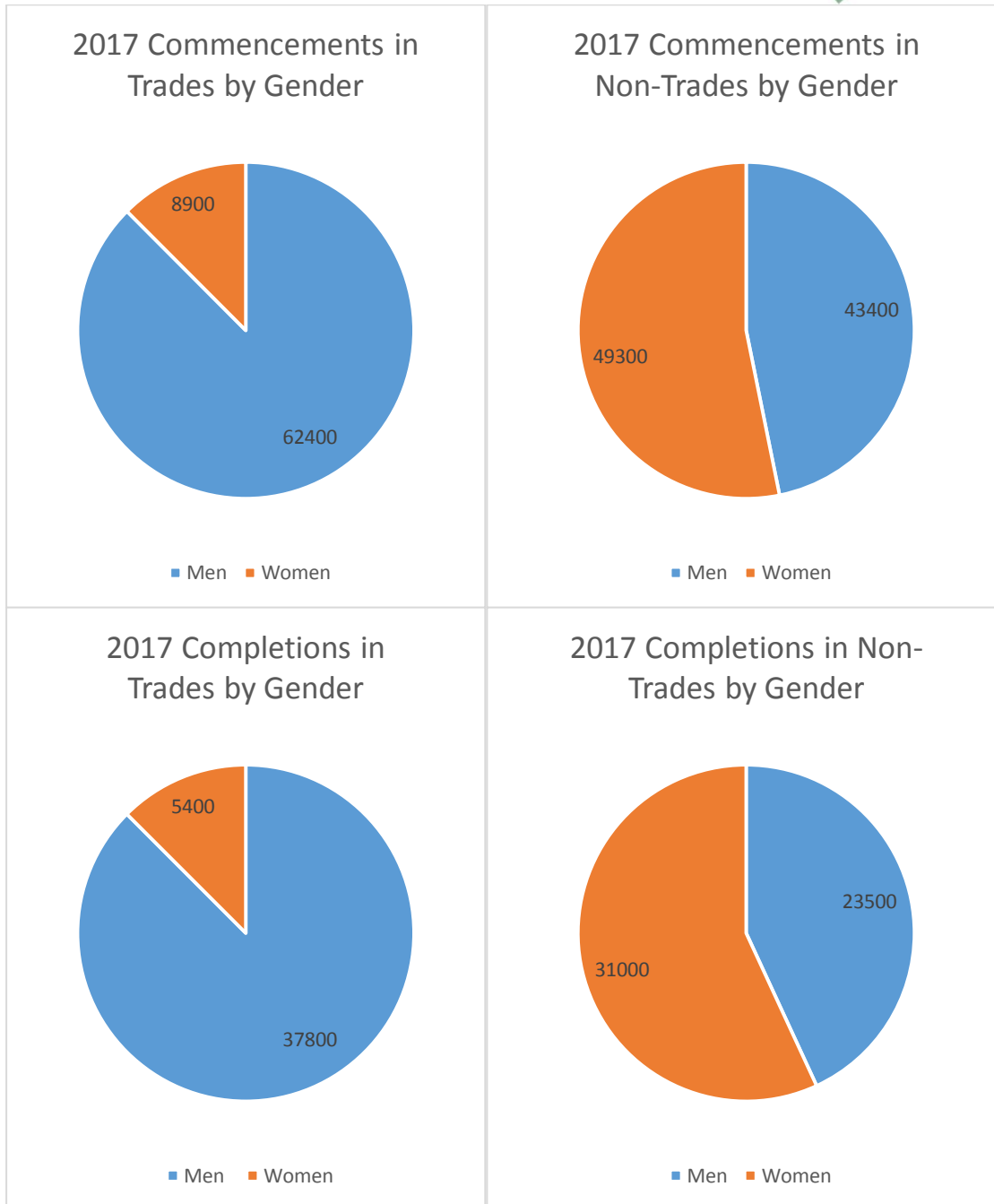
¹⁰ Department of Education and Training. (2018). *Skilling Australians Fund*. Retrieved from: <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/43741>

¹¹ Thompson, S. (2015) "Women, work and poor pay" [online]. Australian TAFE Teacher, Vol. 49, No. 3, 2015: 24-26. Availability: <<https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=906691771965071;res=IELHSS>> ISSN: 0815-3701.

¹² Simon, L and Clarke, K (2016). "Apprenticeships should work for women too!", Education + Training, Vol. 58 Iss 6 p. 579

¹³ Ibid 7, p2

¹⁴ Ibid 12, p584



(Data from tabs 11 and 15 in *Historical time series of apprenticeships and traineeships in Australia, from 1963* available: <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/all-data/historical-time-series-of-apprenticeships-and-traineeships-in-australia-from-1963-to-2018>)

Based on their research, Simon and Clarke recommend the following to lift the participation of girls and women in apprenticeships:

- Early and staged career exploration opportunities;
- Taster opportunities prior to and during secondary years of schooling;
- Highly visible women role models;
- Cultural change in male-dominated workplaces;



- Industry engagement; and
- Government policies that support successful programs and models (including existing networks of women in male dominated fields) through, for example sustainable funding.¹⁵

The specific needs of women and girls in undertaking apprenticeships and other training in rural and remote communities should also be taken into account through appropriate curriculum, funding and support mechanisms. Governments need to make these opportunities available and sustainable.

Governments must fund targeted programs for women and girls in vocational and adult education, including in skills shortage areas. Funding for such programs could be allocated through the Skilling Australians Fund, with a focus on new apprenticeships.

Reinstating equity objectives in VET policy

It has long been recognised that VET has a dual responsibility that is both economic and social. VET has the potential to enhance social inclusion and to facilitate access to decent work for marginalised and vulnerable populations.¹⁶ VET and adult education play a key role in providing opportunities for many women and girls to train and retrain, often commencing with access courses that develop confidence and foundation skills. When faced with tight funding restrictions, these courses are often the first to disappear. VET has an important social inclusion role that needs to be specifically funded and recognised. VET and adult education courses need to be accessible in terms of fees and locations, to ensure women and girls are able to attain initial skills and continuing education.

It is also important to take account of the fact that women from specific (and often overlapping) sub-groups do not participate in VET in the same way as women generally. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with a disability and women from language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE) experience VET differently; they do not achieve higher award level training at the same rate and do not attain program completion at the same level as women generally.

Despite some acknowledgement by state and territory governments in their annual planning documents that there is still a role for VET in meeting its obligation to achieving equity for the disadvantaged in our community, funding to meet community service obligations has not been adequate. When reorganisations and restructures of the VET system are imposed on the public TAFE Institutes and Colleges, and money is tight, equity programs are often the first on the chopping block. Governments must fund targeted programs for women and girls in vocational and adult education, including in skills shortage areas.

¹⁵ Ibid 12 and 14, pp. 591-592

¹⁶ Ibid 2

Recommendations:

- That government funding for vocational education and training be increased, with targeted funding to provide courses, gender appropriate curriculum, and support mechanisms for women and girls undertaking skill qualifications and access courses.
- That a comprehensive, independent review of the tertiary education sector be conducted, focusing on access and equity and putting an end to the increasing marketisation of education. The Federal Government should fund and support an institute or unit that is focused on access, equity and social inclusion in VET. A National VET Policy that is gender-responsive and gender-informed is required. This should be linked with other Government policies, particularly employment to ensure VET as a pathway to decent work.
- The specific needs of women and girls in undertaking apprenticeships and other training in rural and remote communities should also be taken into account through appropriate curriculum, funding and support mechanisms. Governments need to make these opportunities available and sustainable. This should include budget allocations to support vocational and training opportunities for women and girls, particularly in skills shortage areas.
- There must be funding for and recognition of TAFE as a public provider with primary responsibility for a range of programs for women and girls. Women's and girls' diverse needs should be explicit in all VET policy, with all VET related legislation being accompanied by a women's impact statement to ensure that the rights of women are adequately addressed.