



# **TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC FUTURE**

## **WOMEN AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

**Summary of Research Findings and Recommendations**

**November 2007**

# **Towards a sustainable economic future:**

## **Women and vocational education and training**

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For more information please go to:  
S4W Website: <http://www.security4women.com>  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australia's Vocational Education and Training (VET) system makes a significant contribution to the country's economic success. As the system charged with the responsibility to provide citizens with the employability skills and knowledge required by industry and the workforce, it is of significant importance to Australian women.

This report is based on research conducted for Security4Women (S4W) by WAVE that focuses on women and girls to identify priority areas and accommodate diverse perspectives and needs of women in VET, rather than generalize for all women.

Since 2004, the approach to ensuring equity for women in the Australian VET system has been a mainstreaming strategy named as "integration with visibility". 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. Particularly needed are expanded opportunities for technical and trade training for girls and women in areas of skills shortages, increased funding for training opportunities for Indigenous women and more training places targeting women in low paid casualised jobs.

Gender specific policy and practices to guide VET in schools and work experience programs will encourage young women to achieve their potential and re-dress current and continuing poor labour market outcomes, improving women's long-term economic security. Broad based studies are required to uncover the specific elements of disadvantage experienced by women from low socio-economic backgrounds, migrant, refugee and indigenous women, women with disabilities and lone mothers, and to explore the links between lack of VET and employment opportunities and intergenerational poverty

The implementation of the women's national policy framework (*Women: Shaping our Future*) and all it promised has been disappointing on a national level. The Strategies outlined in, and so potential of *Women: Shaping Our Future* (ANTA 2004) have not been resourced,

implemented nor evaluated, and so have not been realised. Women as a group have all but disappeared, cloaked by broad-based statistics that fail to illuminate the real picture that lies beneath such aggregates.

It is necessary, to review and build a new focus on women as a broad and significant client group of VET. Such positioning, built on a strong foundation of research and consultation, will enhance the opportunity of Australian women, in all their diversity, to take their place as contributors to the national economy. It will also enhance the potential for active engagement in the labour market to contribute meaningfully to the future economic well being for individual women, and groups of Australian women.

This paper recommends the implementation of women-centred principles for an updated VET policy for women, a set of Key Performance Indicators, and a series of recommendations for implementation.

Women-centred policy initiatives, supported by consultation, research and evaluation will ensure enhanced positive returns for women, their families and the nation. A whole-of-government approach that enabled VET to address interdepartmental and cross sectoral issues around the inter-related issues of training, employment and labour market participation, and welfare policies could improve the economic sustainability of women

The design features of a women-centred policy framework should be flexible, for implementation at local level while conforming to national requirements and guidelines, as well as international agreements.

Policy measures that aim to strengthen the economic outcomes from education and training for women under a rubric of continuous improvement will not only assist in diminishing entrenched and systemic disadvantage experienced by some women, but will also enhance the potential for sustainable economic futures for many. Finally, such measures will sustain claims that Australia's national VET system is indeed world class.

## **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **The endorsement and implementation of VET equity related principles for women:**

- Making equity and inclusiveness a principle of the National VET system;
- Providing a national focus for and implementing targeted interventions that result in relevant and useful programs and support for groups of women who are currently poorly served by the VET system and are experiencing disadvantage in the community;
- Working with States and Territories to improve the collection and reporting of data on the performance of the National VET system, to measure key outcomes and to inform future policy and planning directions for women.

### **The endorsement and implementation of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for women in Vocational Education and Training**

1. The level of women's participation and achievement in vocational education and training.
2. The level of women's employment outcomes and benefits after training and their satisfaction with their training program.
3. The level of employer adoption of, and satisfaction with, vocational education and training in meeting the skill needs of their workforce.
4. The extent to which Indigenous Australian women engage with and achieve positive outcomes from vocational education and training.

### **Data Collection and Reporting**

All data for VET, including VET in schools, to be gender disaggregated as a matter of course.

DEST report on to the position of women in VET annually, measured against set targets, and require states/territories to do the same, using 5 and 10 year trend data.

The following data be collected and maintained for use at both national and state/territory levels:

1. Participation by women in VET, and for women in equity groups, according to age, family and language background, socio-economic status, disability, Indigenous status and geographic location.

2. VET completions and outcomes for women and for women in equity groups according to age, family and language background, socio-economic status, disability, Indigenous status and geographic location.
3. Satisfaction among women with their access to information about careers and VET courses, with their access to training opportunities and with their VET experience, according to age, family and language background, socio-economic status, disability, Indigenous status and geographic location.
4. The level of employer adoption of, and satisfaction with, vocational education and training in meeting the skill needs of their workforce, with a specific focus on women and girls (female workforce).

### **VET Policy for Women and Girls**

A new policy be devised for women and girls in VET exclusively, including VET in schools, grounded in adequate funding, resources and evaluation using measurable targets.

All VET related legislation be accompanied by a women's impact statement to ensure that the rights of women are adequately addressed.

### **National Research**

Gender sensitive national research and analysis be resourced to inform and shape VET related policies to promote sustainable systemic change leading to positive outcomes for women in the workplace and business.

### **Women, Poverty and VET**

A whole of government response be devised to support women in poverty to improve their opportunities. This approach will position VET to address interdepartmental/cross sectoral issues around the inter-related issues of training, employment and labour market participation, and welfare policies – all of which impact on women.

### **Women and Girls, Career Guidance, Employment and VET**

Career planning information for girls and women to be actively informed by current labour market analysis and future trends within a framework of recognizing and proactively redressing gendered workplace implications

Increase the provision of and access to recognition of prior learning services to improve options for women and girls in the assessment of employability skills

Widely devised, and locally responsive initiatives be promoted, resourced and evaluated to incorporate young women and girls' involvement and participation through to successful completion in training and skills shortage measures.

Strategies be trialled and applied to courses across the VET sector to improve links between training, employability skills and employment outcomes for women

### **Incentives for women in VET**

Incentives be developed to encourage women into education and training that supports employment.

Improvements be made to the current RPL policy that encourage equitable use and accessibility.

Flexible delivery options in VET be expanded to meet the diverse needs of women students

### **Women and Leadership in VET**

Women from member organisations of the National Secretariats be promoted onto National Advisory Groups, National Action Groups and Roundtables and Boards that inform VET, to ensure high level accountability to Australian women.

Women be supported by VET and VET related policy, financial and other resources to join business and professional networks.

Boards and Councils of Australian Technical Colleges (ATCs) to include representation to advocate for women and girls participation, and relevant pedagogies, to encourage critical mass of women and girls in trades areas and at ATCs

## INTRODUCTION

As a result of extensive research and consultation, a national policy paper “ *Women: Shaping our future*”<sup>1</sup> was developed around the four objectives of *Shaping our future: Australia’s National Strategy for vocational education and training (VET) 2004 – 2010*<sup>2</sup> and agreed to by Australian, State and Territory Ministers for vocational education and training in July 2003. Ministers agreed to women in VET being addressed in an “ integrated way through annual VET planning and reporting processes”<sup>3</sup>.

The impetus for the 2004 ANTA Policy Paper was the evaluation of previous equity based VET policies for women, and specifically *Transforming VET transforming women ... Evaluation report of the National Women’s Vocational Education and Training Strategy 1996 – 2000 (April 2001)*. In turn, the latter 2001 document rested on decades of research, demonstrating the entrenched nature of many of the issues facing Australian women in VET. The argument remains that:

VET can do more to achieve its full potential to deliver benefits for women and that women’s issues in VET have not been fully addressed as yet, especially in training leading to good employment outcomes. Women’s participation in the workforce compared to men’s, shows that there is still much to be achieved<sup>4</sup>.

The 2004 Policy Paper advises that:

The purpose of vocational education and training (VET) is to provide skills and knowledge for work, enhance employability and assist learning throughout life. Women enjoying accessible and quality training is essential to achieving these purposes and making progress in shifting the balance ....For the VET system to deliver on its promises of inclusiveness and having ‘a client driven culture’, it will need to acknowledge and value the diversity of women’s lives and experiences. 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<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> ANTA, 2004, *Women: Shaping our future*. Brisbane, ANTA

<sup>2</sup> ANTA, 2003, *The National Strategy for vocational education and training 2004 – 2010* Brisbane, ANTA

<sup>3</sup> Clyne, L, 2004, Preface’ in ANTA 2004, Op cit

<sup>4</sup> ANTA, 2004 p1

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

As research conducted for S4W by WAVE indicates<sup>6</sup>, the above issues remain unresolved; the promised unfulfilled. As demonstrated in this paper, which draws on the WAVE research, the 2004 statements above remain as highly relevant in late 2007, as they were in and prior to 2003. Even more worrying, interest in and strategies relating to women and girls in the Australian national VET are now 'off the agenda'. The climate is one in which 'women have been done'. It would appear that "integration with visibility" has not worked as a (mainstreaming) equity strategy to advance the case for women and girls in Australian VET: rather, they have become invisible. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, "*Women: Shaping our future*" has never been properly resourced and implemented, let alone evaluated and updated. This paper makes the case that Australian women and girls are still waiting for the potential of the 2004 Policy document to be realised.

This Policy document was to be supported by and implemented through the work of the General Equity National Taskforce that was an outcome of the Commonwealth Government's National Client and Student Voice Action Group (NC&SVAG) consultations in 2006. An underlying assumption of the NC&SVAG consultations was that the needs and voices of all individual learners were paramount and that targeting specific disadvantaged groups who are experiencing common issues and barriers to vocational education and training, except for Aboriginal learners and those with a disability, was no longer required<sup>7</sup>. Our research contradicts this position. To date the General Equity Group that has been charged with responsibility for women (as one grouping within "all students and clients"<sup>8</sup>) has yet to meet and it would appear that activity on a national level is virtually non-existent. It is clear that the needs of many women are still not being met. The time to put this right is now.

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<sup>6</sup> Please refer to Appendix A for full list of reports from research carried out under the umbrella project '*Lifelong Learning: work related education and training for women*' project (Security4Women/WAVE).

<sup>7</sup> National Client and Student Voice Action Group (NC&SVAG) General Equity Sub-group, January 2006, *Consultation Paper: A consultation with stakeholders of the National Training System on new national Client Advisory Arrangements*

<sup>8</sup> Ibid p3

Australia's Vocational Education and Training (VET) system makes a significant contribution to the country's economic success. VET aims to provide people with the skills and knowledge they require to:

- enter the workforce for the first time
- re-enter the workforce after absences
- train or retrain for a new job
- upgrade their skills
- move into further study in VET or university.<sup>9</sup>

As such, VET is highly relevant to all Australian women.

The Commonwealth Government has established an agenda for VET, stating that in order to meet the challenges that confront Australia's economy and its VET system, more appropriate governance, accountability and operational arrangements are needed<sup>10</sup>. Women comprise over 50 per cent of Australia's population. It is now taken for granted that women will engage in paid work, possibly for substantial periods of their adult lives. However, Australian women come from diverse backgrounds. Given this, it is imperative that, to be inclusive and equitable as well as efficient in ensuring the skills needs of the nation's labour force are met, the Australian VET system take into account specific requirements of women and girls, to optimize their engagement both in vocationally oriented education and training, and also as lifelong learners.

Despite an increasing enrolment rate of women in VET, Australian women are still concentrated in highly gender segmented career pathways and experience higher levels of contingent employment, low paid employment in 'feminised' industries, lower levels of employment in professional or para-professional positions, even with high qualification levels. Women also experience limited support from employers for ongoing training and also lack access to apprenticeships that can lead to secure employment.

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<sup>9</sup> NCVER, 2007, *Did you know? A guide to vocational education and training in Australia*. Adelaide, NCVER. P1

<sup>10</sup> DEST, 2005, *Skilling Australia: new directions for vocational education and training*, DEST, Canberra

It is important to determine why, despite high levels of participation and successful course completions, girls' and women's involvement in VET does not lead to improved labour market outcomes, and thus enhanced potential for their economic security.

It is also important to note that women from specific (and often overlapping) sub-groups do not participate in VET in the same way as women generally. For example, Indigenous 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.

Internationally, in advanced and less advanced economies, there is broad support for policy directives that confirm equity for women within national policy development frameworks. As a signatory, Australia is required to report to The Convention for the Status of Women (CSW) annually. The inter-relationships of education and training, health and work as central components of an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and advancement of women are recurring themes.

Key messages presented at the 49<sup>th</sup> Session of CSW were: women and girls should be kept on the education policy agenda; access to education, skills development and training for all women at all stages of life must be ensured; links between education for girls and women, and labour market opportunities and outcomes need to be improved; and marginalised groups of women and girls require full access to education and training. Research demonstrates these issues are highly relevant for Australian women<sup>11</sup>.

UNESCO, and the European Union recognise the need for and have gender specific policies and provision for VET. Conclusions of Agora XXVI, *Building a European VET area*, in its recent considerations of challenges facing Europe in relation to VET have identified 'Combining efficiency and equity' (with no trade off between these two objectives) as an area for particular

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<sup>11</sup> Doughney J, McDonald F, Pyke J, Lyon A, Leahy M & Rea J (2004) *Lifelong Economic Wellbeing for Women: What Women Want*. Security4Women. <http://security4women.com.au>

attention over the next two years (CEDEFOP 2007)<sup>12</sup>. This challenge is equally relevant for Australian VET policy.

Furthermore, a fully implemented and ongoing Australian VET policy for women would support the export of VET through internationalisation. In addition, it would enhance and help standardise the quality of the Gender and Development (GAD) requirements for all VET related activities implemented through AusAID.

### **An Australian VET Policy Framework for women?**

“*Women: Shaping our future*: (ANTA 2004)<sup>13</sup> remains the major national policy document written specifically for women and girls in vocational education and training (VET) and 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. Federal and state/territory Ministers associated with VET agreed that women’s VET issues were to be addressed in an integrated way through annual VET planning and reporting processes” (ANTA 2004: Preface).

In April 2007, WAVE received correspondence from Hon. Andrew Robb<sup>14</sup>, Federal Minister for Vocational and Further Education reaffirming the implementation and perceived success of the policy framework *Women: Shaping our Future*, citing the approach to women in VET that was named as ‘integration with visibility’. We contend that this form of mainstreaming is not working for women in VET. This paper submits various mechanisms to reinsert a women-centred policy in VET.

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<sup>12</sup> CEDEFOP, 2007, “The challenges facing Europe” in *cedefopinfo, Vocational training in Europe 2/07*, pp 1,3.

<sup>13</sup> ANTA 2004, Op cit

<sup>14</sup> Correspondence from Hon. A Robb, Minister for Vocational and Further Education to WAVE 17 Apr 2007

### **Equity related principles for women:**

Based on research and consultation, this paper seeks the endorsement of the following equity related principles for women:

- Making equity and inclusiveness a principle of the National VET system;
- Providing a national focus for and implementing targeted interventions that result in relevant and useful programs and support for groups of women who are currently poorly served by the VET system and are experiencing disadvantage in the community;
- Working with States and Territories to improve the collection and reporting of data on the performance of the National VET system, to measure key outcomes and to inform future policy and planning directions for women.

### **Key Performance Measures for Women in Vocational Education and Training**

Although women are participating increasingly in VET, this goal of 'integration with visibility' is not being met, as women's outcomes from VET are still neither equal nor adequate. WAVE contends that one method of ensuring the successful application of this policy is the integration and implementation of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), to assist in the delivery, measurement and evaluation of women's position in VET. Again, it is important that such KPIs link with those specified in the overall policy for VET in Australia, viz: *Skilling Australia: new directions for vocational education and training* (2005)<sup>15</sup>.

The following are proffered: -

#### **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for women in VET**

- **The level of women's participation and achievement in vocational education and training.**

The number of Australian women who do vocational education and training each year and the number of qualifications, competencies and modules they attain (including through recognition processes).

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<sup>15</sup> DEST, 2005, *Skilling Australia: new directions for vocational education and training*, DEST, Canberra

- **The level of women’s employment outcomes and benefits after training and their satisfaction with their training program.**

The proportion of Australian vocational education and training women students who improve their employment circumstances or continue on to further study, after completing training, or who perceive they have gained benefits from completing their training.

The proportion of Australian vocational education and training women students who are satisfied with their vocational education and training program.

- **The level of employer adoption of, and satisfaction with, vocational education and training in meeting the skill needs of their workforce.**

The proportion of Australian employers who are aware of, and who have adopted vocational education and training to meet the skill needs of their female workforce.

The proportion of Australian employers who are satisfied with vocational education and training in meeting the skill needs of their female workforce.

- **The extent to which Indigenous Australian women engage with and achieve positive outcomes from vocational education and training.**

The number of Indigenous Australian women who do vocational education and training each year and the number of qualifications, competencies and modules they attain.

The proportion of Indigenous vocational education and training women students who improve their employment circumstances or continue on to further study, after completing training, or who perceive that they have gained benefits from completing their training.

The proportion of the vocational education and training workforce who identify as Indigenous women.

## **Research Undertaken by Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE)**

Research undertaken by WAVE in 2004/2005 for Security4Women, under the broad umbrella of *Lifelong Learning: work related education and training for women*<sup>16</sup> indicates that current VET policy reinforces the advantages of those who already participate in VET, progress easily through their qualification and go on to achieve good employment outcomes. This group is identified as those who have successfully completed high school, who are aged 25-45, in secure employment and living in secure housing in a metropolitan area.

In contrast, 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.

### **The key messages<sup>17</sup> of the research are:**

- Women and young girls are not visible in the VET system and the interlinking area of employment, thus they are not being catered for on an equitable level. Enhancing the visibility of women and girls under a specific women-centred policy framework that is flexible and so has the capacity to cater for the diversity of needs that exist within category 'women' is required as a matter of urgency.
- There is a serious lack of appropriate information provided to women in all stages of their interactions with VET providers and career decision making. Information is difficult to find, made more so by the environment and life stages of women and the information that is accessed most often recommends traditional career, education and work areas that are highly feminized, poorly paid and require low skills. Information given is not based on predicted trends in the labour market, employment trends and areas of potential skills shortages and the economy. Those living in remote areas or those with

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<sup>16</sup> Please refer to Appendix One for full list of reports from research carried out under the umbrella project '*Lifelong Learning: work related education and training for women* project (Security4Women/WAVE).

<sup>17</sup> Key findings from the S4W/WAVE research are collated in Turner-Zeller Kimberley with Butler Elaine (Eds.) (2007c) *Lifelong Learning: Work Related Education and Training. Meeting the needs of Australian Women*. Security4Women<sup>17</sup>. <http://www.security4women.com.au> and <http://www.wave.org.au>

literacy or health issues, women of low socioeconomic status and older women are most at risk of not accessing appropriate information.

- Women are more likely to be underemployed and in casual work, because of this lack of information, and thus poor subject and career choices. Career and education pathways are generally chosen based on personal interest and likes.
- Women in general regard education and training highly and see it as a means to improved career and paid work outcomes, a way of increasing skills, building their confidence and interpersonal skills. Expectations for work outcomes are rarely met.
- The cost of education, the scheduling and length of courses, and currency of course material, prevent women from entering VET.
- Lack of recognition of prior learning to women in small business, women retraining or returning to work and those with extensive practical experience, prolongs unproductive education and drains limited resources.
- Support services such as widely available finance and affordable, good quality child care would make women's transition into education, training and employment more accessible.
- Work placements and on-the-job training are highly sort after by women engaging in VET.
- A national system of data collection and disaggregation about women and girls, VET and their move to employment (including employment outcomes) is not available, and as such reliability of data fueling current policy direction and evaluation is questionable.

## **Research findings for specific groups of women and girls**

### **Girls and young women**

The rapid growth in popularity of implementation and access to VET in schools, without adequate planning, has created an educational environment that is gender blind and is reinforcing old patterns of feminized course choices that are traditionally low paid and requiring little skill, potentially hampering career choice and economic security for girls and young women. Little research, planning and monitoring of girls' outcomes from VET in schools

programs has been done to date and must be implemented. Career advice for this group engaging in VET pathways to employment is patchy and inadequate in relation to labour market realities and so sustainable outcomes for this cohort<sup>18</sup>.

### **Indigenous women**

Indigenous women highly value education and training that is practical and relevant to them and their communities.

Many Indigenous women have limited or no access to information about VET or to opportunities to participate in VET. Remoteness and family/community commitments separate Aboriginal women from a system that could potentially supply the tools for greater economic and social security, particularly in remote communities.<sup>19</sup>

### **Women living in poverty**

Women living in poverty have less access to VET due to a lack of targeted information, family commitments, insecure financial and work environments, and lack of support from VET providers, the government and the community. These women see education and training not only as a means to better employment, but as a way of increasing confidence and personal skills. Those who do participate in VET also achieve poor or inadequate employment outcomes.

### **Women in micro and small business**

Women in home-based, small and micro businesses do not access VET at a high rate for themselves, and even less for training their staff. Cost, timing, lack of recognition of prior

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<sup>18</sup> Butler, Elaine and Woolley, Robyn (2005) *Getting Real? Young Women and Girls, Working Futures, VET, and VET in Schools*. Security4Women.

[http://www.security4women.com/Getting\\_Real\\_Executive\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.security4women.com/Getting_Real_Executive_Summary.pdf) and <http://www.wave.org.au>

<sup>19</sup> 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.

[http://www.security4women.com/HelpingPeopleToHelpThemselves\\_Waltjareport\\_July05.pdf](http://www.security4women.com/HelpingPeopleToHelpThemselves_Waltjareport_July05.pdf) and <http://www.wave.org.au>

learning and currency of courses, as well as family commitments and a lack of knowledge regarding VET, keep their participation low.<sup>20</sup>

### **Women returning to work and retraining**

Those women who are returning to and retraining for work, and who are participating in VET, see it as a means to enhanced paid work outcomes. However, their ability to achieve these outcomes is hampered by a lack of information and advice about careers and course choices, as well as cost, timing and recognition of prior learning. Thus their participation in VET may not meet their expectations<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Turner-Zeller, Kimberley (Feb 2006) *The Way Forward: The importance of VET to Australian women in poverty*. Security4Women<sup>20</sup>. [http://www.security4women.com/The\\_Way\\_Forward\\_Publication.pdf](http://www.security4women.com/The_Way_Forward_Publication.pdf) and <http://www.wave.org.au>

<sup>21</sup> Turner-Zeller Kimberley and Butler Elaine (Eds.) (2007b) *Lifelong Learning and Work Related Education and Training for Women Returning to Work and Retraining*. Security4Women. <http://www.security4women.com> and <http://www.wave.org.au>

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE RESEARCH: POLICY DIRECTIONS TO SUPPORT WOMEN IN THE INTERLINKING AREAS OF EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

While women's participation in VET has increased, some women and girls still experience difficulties in accessing VET that is appropriate to their needs and in securing good employment outcomes. Work related education and training, and employment are closely linked through the value and aspirations women place on them to provide economic security for themselves and very often their families. Irrespective of their participation and engagement with VET, women and young girls' employment outcomes are less advantageous than those for men and boys. Cross sectoral policies must be developed that can best support enhanced outcomes for women and girls through the interlinking areas of education, training and employment.

WAVE recommends the following policy direction.

### **1. Data collection and reporting**

A guiding principle in 'Skilling Australia'<sup>22</sup> is to improve the collection and reporting of data on the performance of the national system to inform future policy and planning directions. An opportunity is available to streamline data collection and reporting requirements, with the linking of VET in schools reporting to state/territory annual VET planning processes.

#### **Recommendations:**

1.1 The collection of data for VET including VET in schools must be gender disaggregated as a matter of course. Monitoring and data collection needs to provide information regarding access (self-funded, user choice, employer funded) participation (inc qualifications, levels, industry areas) and outcomes by gender, age, cultural background, (dis)ability and location.

1.2 It is also recommended that DEST report on achievements in relation to women annually, measured against set targets, and require states/territories to do the same, using 5 and 10 year trend data. This will enable national and state/territory governments to systematically evaluate the impact of current policy and strategic interventions and inform future policy development.

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<sup>22</sup> DEST (2005) *Skilling Australia: New directions for vocational education and training*. Canberra, DEST

1.3 WAVE recommends the collection and maintenance of longitudinal disaggregated data sets that centre women and girls, to measure and monitor women's position in VET on a regular basis and provide data that can be used to frame action to address areas of inadequacy. The following are suggested for use at both national and state/territory levels:

- Participation, by women in VET, and for women in equity groups, according to age, family and language background, socio-economic status, disability, Indigenous status and geographic location.
- VET completions and outcomes for women and for women in equity groups according to age, family and language background, socio-economic status, disability, Indigenous status and geographic location.
- Satisfaction among women with their access to information about careers and VET courses, with their access to training opportunities and with their VET experience, according to age, family and language background, socio-economic status, disability, Indigenous status and geographic location.
- The level of employer adoption of, and satisfaction with, vocational education and training in meeting the skill needs of their workforce, with a specific focus on women and girls (female workforce).

## **2. Systemic Change: Making Equity and Inclusiveness a Principal of the Australian National VET system.**

### **Recommendations:**

#### 2.1 Women's and girls' diverse needs to be explicit in all VET policy.

- Change from the present gender-neutral policy approach to recognition of women as a major client with diverse needs, to reduce the impact of poor labour market outcomes.
- A policy be devised for women and girls in VET exclusively, including VET in schools, grounded in adequate funding, resources and evaluation using measurable targets.

- Broad based training concerning gender at policymaking and managerial levels, also included in professional/staff development programs.
- All VET related legislation be accompanied by a women's impact statement to ensure that the rights of women are adequately addressed

## 2.2 Gender-sensitive research and analysis to support policy directives.

DEST (2005)<sup>23</sup> supports the need for national research and analysis, recognizing it has a critical role in policy development, setting future directions and evaluating performance.

Areas requiring further national research include:

- More broad based studies to uncover the specific issues and needs of specific groups of women and their links with intergenerational poverty.
- Broad based research into the knowledge base and practices of career advisor professionals, by VET providers and schools, government employment agencies and so on, including recommendations for how such professionals can enhance outcomes for women and girls.
- Broad based research into young women's career choices at school
- Innovative approaches linked with international best practice, to enhance the participation and retention of women in 'non-traditional' occupations and industries. This should include related studies into workplace practices and cultures.
- Longitudinal studies to track and link the pathways of girls and young women from school through further training and on into their labour market outcomes are essential to evaluate the impact of current policy.
- The practical education needs of Aboriginal women and longitudinal studies to evaluate medium and long term success.
- Longitudinal studies of all specific groups of women and girls to ensure current strategies are beneficial.

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<sup>23</sup> DEST (2005) Op Cit

National research and analysis be resourced to inform and shape policy to promote sustainable systemic change leading to positive outcomes for women in VET, in workplaces and business.

### **3. Breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty**

A national whole of government approach to poverty is needed, informed by a more sophisticated understanding of the nature of poverty and the impact of intersecting causes of disadvantage. National benchmarks for measuring poverty are vital, and an anti-poverty strategy that integrates local, state and national policies and demonstrates a commitment to achieving targets is required. Women of low socioeconomic status, migrants and refugees, indigenous and lone mothers, are groups that must be included in poverty legislation. The intergenerational cycle of poverty will take time, commitment and cooperation across all levels of government and across sectors to achieve, and the Commonwealth Government is well placed to provide leadership in this. Such policies and interventions will also act to protect new Australians and those new to poverty from creating their own generational poverty.

Access to information regarding employment services, employment needs and education opportunities are needed to steer women clear of repeating life cycle patterns in order to provide opportunities to choose education and career pathways out of poverty.

#### **Recommendation:**

A whole of government response be devised to support women in poverty to improve their opportunities. This approach is to position VET to address interdepartmental/cross sectoral issues around the inter-related issues of training, employment and labour market participation, and welfare policies – all impacting on women. The re-positioning of training is a means to improve the economic sustainability of women.

## **4 Targeted Strategies**

### **Recommendations:**

#### **4.1 Career guidance be informed by workplace trends**

Gender sensitive labour market training and professional development are of central importance for all educators or counsellors involved in career and subject selection advice, work experience

placements for women in VET, and/or the development and offering of vocational courses in schools. There is opportunity for cross-sectoral and cross-government collaboration in the critical area of career guidance, in order to provide quality, relevant, timely and appropriate career advice to and respond to career information needs of all groups of women. This includes making information and advice accessible to those in rural communities.

Career planning information to be actively informed by labour market analysis and trends within a framework of recognizing gendered workplace implications.

#### 4.2 Recognition of prior learning

Increase the provision and access to recognition of prior learning services so women have improved options for the assessment of employability skills without needing to attend courses, reducing unnecessary time in education, and maximizing time in paid employment.

Improvements need to be made to the current RPL policy that encourage equitable use and accessibility.

#### 4.3 VET delivery must be flexible to cater for women's needs

The delivery of more flexible (time, mode and content) training qualifications are required to meet the needs of women up skilling, preparing for return to work, those returning to study and those in business, building on models of good practice identified through national programs such as Learnscope and Reframing the Future.

Flexible delivery options be expanded to meet the diverse needs of women students.

#### 4.4 Clearer links between VET, employability and enhanced employment outcomes are needed

The following strategies could be applied to course provision across the VET sector and would help to improve flexibility and improved outcomes from training. This strategy list can address the need for community or locality responsiveness:

- Foster employability with greater practical application and work placements in VET and university courses
- Make available more hands on and practically oriented courses, such as taster and refresher courses, particularly in industry areas that currently have low participation levels of women, and are experiencing skill shortage.

- Training awareness and use of new and emerging technologies in the workplace are needed to increase participation, and enable certain groups of women to increase their employability.

#### 4.5 Incentives and support for women entering education and/or training or employment

Women to receive relief from financial disincentives to enter education and training. Various financial support services should be made available, with greater promotion, to cover: child care; tuition; additional course tools and travel costs.

Financial support to be given to those entering employment, possibly in the form of tax incentives for child care. Extra support and time for those leaving welfare payments should be provided. Additional strategy and funding is required to lessen caring responsibilities, inequitably placed on women, that is preventing their entrance into education, training and employment.

Incentives be developed to encourage women into education and training which supports employment.

#### 4.6 Unemployment and the working poor

All women are at risk of unemployment, with certain groups such as migrants, refugees, lone mothers, rural based, and Aboriginal women, more at risk of unemployment, and being part of the working poor. Increasing casualty of the workforce, and a policy environment that puts workers rights at risk, leaves women at risk of exploitation and with little chance of moving out of poverty.

A national policy and regulatory bodies must represent women and give them access to information in case of exploitation. Specific interventions include adequate resourcing of support agencies.

#### 4.7 Language and technology literacy

Access to immediate and ongoing language literacy for recent arrivals must be provided. Policy and funding to be directed at encouraging participation in literacy classes for those with low general literacy. Technological exposure and training be provided, particularly to indigenous women, women returning to work and retraining, older workers and women of low socio economic status.

Language and technology literacy be at the forefront of education policy and direction for those listed here as most requiring it.

#### 4.8 Leadership Directives and networks be strengthened for women

The Australian Federal Government made a commitment to capacity building for women and in particular, in supporting some initiatives to promote women in leadership<sup>24</sup>. The new national agenda for training involves the establishment of a number of Advisory groups, National Action groups, Roundtables and Committees and thus is an ideal opportunity to include representation from National Women's Secretariats including Security4Women to represent diverse women's needs in VET.

Policy must be directed towards increasing women's participation in business and professional networks. Women-only networks are preferred and participation should be encouraged through funding opportunities and targeted marketing.

Women from member organisations of the National Secretariats be promoted into National Advisory Groups, National Action Groups and Roundtables which inform VET, to ensure high level accountability to Australian women. Women should also be targeted by policy and funding to join business and professional networks.

#### 4.9 Girls' education and training opportunities to be expanded and supported in the new Australian Technical Colleges (ATCs).

Given the low participation rates and high levels of non completion of girls and women in the traditional trade areas<sup>25</sup> and that girls have untapped potential in terms of participation in trades, the opportunity can be embraced to establish technical colleges which positively encourage young women's participation. Moreover, Boards and Councils of ATCs should include representation to advocate for women and girls.

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<sup>24</sup> Coalition, 2004, *A Stronger economy a stronger Australia. Australian Women – Opportunities for Life*, The Howard Government Election 2004 Policy B. Loughnane, Barton, ACT

<sup>25</sup> Karmel T & Ong K (2007) *Will we run out of young men? Implications of the ageing of the population for the trades in Australia*. Adelaide, NCVER pp 8-12

Widely devised, and locally responsive initiatives be promoted, resourced and evaluated to incorporate young women and girls' involvement – participation through to successful completion – in skills shortage measures.

Boards and Councils of Australian Technical Colleges (ATCs) to include representation to advocate for women and girls participation, and relevant pedagogies, to encourage critical mass of women and girls in trades areas and at ATCs.

## **CONCLUDING STATEMENT**

The implementation of the women's national policy framework (*Women: Shaping our Future*) and all it promised has been disappointing on a national level. Women as a group have all but disappeared, cloaked by broad-based statistics that fail to illuminate the real picture that lies beneath such aggregates. The mainstreaming approach of "integration with visibility" has not served women and girls well in the Australian VET system.

It is necessary to review and build a new focus on women as a broad and significant client group of VET. Such positioning, built on a strong foundation of research and consultation, will enhance the opportunity of Australian women, in all their diversity, to take their place as contributors to the national economy. It will also enhance the potential for active engagement in the labour market to contribute meaningfully to the future economic well-being for individual women, and groups of Australian women.

Women-centred policy initiatives, supported by consultation, research and evaluation will ensure enhanced positive returns for women, their families and the nation. The design features of a women-centred policy framework should be flexible, for implementation at local level while conforming to national requirements and guidelines.

Policy measures that aim to strengthen the economic outcomes from education and training for women under a rubric of continuous improvement will not only assist in diminishing entrenched and systemic disadvantage, but will also sustain claims that Australia's VET system is indeed world class.

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<sup>30</sup> Research conducted for WAVE in association with The Smith Family

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## **Appendix A**

### **Reports from Lifelong Learning: work related education and training for women project. (Security4Women/WAVE)**

The following reports are heavily drawn upon to inform this report.

#### **Young women and girls**

Butler, Elaine and Woolley, Robyn, 2005, *Getting Real? Young Women and Girls, Working Futures, VET, and VET in Schools*. Security4Women. <http://www.security4women.com> and <http://www.wave.org.au>

#### **Indigenous women**

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. [http://www.security4women.com/HelpingPeopleToHelpThemselves\\_Waltjareport\\_July05.pdf](http://www.security4women.com/HelpingPeopleToHelpThemselves_Waltjareport_July05.pdf) and <http://www.wave.org.au>

#### **Women from low socioeconomic backgrounds**

Turner-Zeller, Kimberley, 2006, *The Way Forward: The importance of VET to Australian women in poverty*. Security4Women<sup>30</sup>. [http://www.security4women.com/The\\_Way\\_Forward\\_Publication.pdf](http://www.security4women.com/The_Way_Forward_Publication.pdf) and <http://www.wave.org.au>

#### **Women in Micro and Small Business**

Turner-Zeller Kimberley and Butler Elaine (Eds.), 2007a, *Making it Work: a study of education and training issues for women in micro and small business* Security4Women<sup>31</sup>. <http://www.security4women.com> and <http://www.wave.org.au>

#### **Women Retraining and Returning to Work**

Turner-Zeller Kimberley and Butler Elaine (Eds.), 2007b, *Lifelong Learning and Work Related Education and Training for Women Returning to Work and Retraining*. Security4Women<sup>32</sup>. <http://www.security4women.com> and <http://www.wave.org.au>

#### **Collated report**

Turner-Zeller Kimberley with Butler Elaine, 2007c, *Lifelong Learning: Work Related Education and Training. Meeting the needs of Australian Women*. Security4Women. <http://www.security4women.com> and <http://www.wave.org.au>

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<sup>31</sup> Research conducted for WAVE by JobTactics, Perth W.A.

<sup>32</sup> Research conducted for WAVE by JobTactics, Perth WA