

Lifelong Learning and Work Related Education and Training

for

women returning to work
and retraining

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For more information please go to
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This project researched the needs of women returning to work (women returners) and entering training, as well as women seeking or engaging in retraining. It forms a stand-alone small scale investigation that is part of a larger project with a focus on women, work and lifelong learning.

The research consisted of;

- i. a literature search,
- ii. focus groups
- iii. a national survey.

The research investigated the views and experiences of women returners and women retraining, what their aspirations are, how they view education and training, what their experiences have been, and what policy directions and programs would best suit education and training for women, especially that associated with vocational education and training (VET).

The research project was successful in gaining the views of women, including issues relating to:

- Career Counselling.
- Childcare.
- Finance.
- Flexibility of course times and content.
- Tutoring and support services.
- Information on courses.
- Course content and practical application.

This research confirms the significance women place on education and training; that they perceive it an important foundation for economic well being through improved labour market outcomes. Programs offered through the adult and community education (ACE) sector receive favourable comment, including a suggestion that ACE offers a good model for delivery of VET related courses. Women returning to paid work, or seeking retraining embrace the concept of lifelong learning, but it does not always provide the anticipated benefits. A major theme throughout the research is the lack of appropriateness of the VET system to the needs of these women users and the negative impact of withdrawal of services that offer support for their participation. Lack of focus on women in general, and especially on older women seeking VET is noted. It is evident that the vocational sector needs to better cater and improve service delivery for women to enable their engagement with the VET.

Recommendations for improving VET training for such women include:

Provide quality advice and information about training pathways for women.

Establish pre-enrolment recognition of prior learning that is accessible, relevant, not expensive or cumbersome and is well understood or publicised by VET. This is especially significant for older women, women returning to work and retraining.

Include in training, where appropriate, work placements for women and taster courses for older women re entering training.

Offer training that is appropriately timed, flexible and appropriate for women, taking into account their career cycles.

Include access to on the job training for women to support their skills development and transfer.

Establish support services such as childcare, entry advice, course selection and career guidance services as part of regular operations.

This report presents a snapshot of the views and perspectives of women returning to work and women returning to study taking into consideration their;

- career aspirations,
- training needs,
- value and relevance of education and training to their future direction and experiences.

The project sought to elicit information about the following umbrella questions:

- How do women talk about their aspirations for paid work?
- How do they see education and training contributing to their plans?
- What are their experiences in this regard?
- What policy directions and programs would best support women, in the area of education and training for work and paid employment?

The project used three methods of data collection; a literature search, an online survey and focus groups. Information was combined to establish themes and issues for women returning to work or study, in the vocational education and training sector.

The project involved over 200 women across a diverse range of backgrounds from around Australia. The research reinforces the need for VET sector providers to review present policy and delivery of services regarding return to work and retraining women. The work identifies barriers in the vocational training area such as lack of access to suitable childcare services, provision of career counselling, and higher fees and the cost of living. Limitations and the impact of the adoption of the industry focused framework for VET, and the sector movement away from socially inclusive and equity policies specifically for women, are discussed and are seen to be underpinning constraints for women. Consequences of these policies are evident through the narrow range of programmes that target women returners and retrainers, offered by VET providers since 2003.

The research also found evidence of short falls in the VET in course and programme pathways, structure, format, modes and flexibility. In particular lack of appropriate information, career development and learning support service programmes and strategies that specifically targeted women returners and retrainers to effectively and efficiently support their return to the workforce, upskilling or retraining. The research also makes recommendations regarding the relevance, appropriateness and currency of career guidance services and career development information for women's career cycles and paths.

The project concludes that overall the vocational education and training sector shows a disregard for the needs of women returners and women retraining and there is clearly potential to better cater and improve service delivery for this group whilst supporting life long learning in the vocational sector.

3.1 Key Issues

- Women follow different career development and career paths according to their stage of life, age, education and desire for a balanced family and type of occupation.

- Women's participation in vocational education and training is currently around 48%.
- Within the vocational education and training system there is limited research on the women returning to work group in terms of information and training needs, re entry pathways, targeted entry programmes and service delivery.
- There has been little change in the distribution of women across fields of study and the way women select courses in vocational education, despite structural change in occupations, industries and the workforce.
- Women still experience poorer labour market outcomes in relation to employment, unemployment and earnings.

3.2 Overview

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a national and international context for women returning to work, women requiring re-entry training and women in the workforce requiring up-skilling for career change. The material has been selected with a view to shedding light on key issues associated with women returning to work and study, within a broader theme of how lifelong economic wellbeing for women may be promoted.

3.3 Government Policy

Jonung and Thordarson state that

" the steps and measures taken in a country to facilitate women's re entry and retention into the workforce depend upon how the authority perceive the role of women in society by government" (in Yohalem 1980, page 107).

Most of the work in response to women re entrants to training and work, by governments worldwide commenced in the late 1970's in Sweden and in the mid 1980's it reached Australia. It sought to increase the possibilities for part time work, paid leave and the provision of economic support for mothers. The reviewed literature identified that during the 1980's the Australian government made considerable progress recognising that women's pathways were different from those of men. Most of the strategies proposed in Australia during the 1980's did not actively come into place until the 1990's. It is evident that approaches in the development of specific women's strategies were reduced significantly after this period. At first thought, one could assume the reduction in targeted women's policy was in response to significant progress of women's position in education, training and employment; however research would indicate that what shifted was policy direction and the treatment of women's roles (Watts, Law, Killeen, Kidd, & Hawthorne (1996), and Still (2001).

Research by Yohalem (1980), Watts, Law, Killeen, Kidd, & Hawthorne (1996), and Still (2001), indicates that in industrialised nations, attitudes to women have undergone rapid change. In the 1960's researchers referred to three typical phases that women move through, these were:

1. a period of work before the first child
2. a period for intensive work at home and with the children

3. return to the labour market. (Jonung & Thordarson in Yohalem 1980, p 40)

The 1970's movement for equality of men and women gave some women the possibility of economic independence and self support. For others, having the choice to work gave rise to a conflict between domestic and work roles, while others were able to choose one or both roles without severe economic consequence. These changing roles seemed to have opened doors to a new world for women, particularly in 1980's. The 1980s are also considered as a time of introducing women to the concepts of unemployment and being untrained (Bourke & Redmond 2002). For the vocational sector, it meant a new focus on women at entry level, re entrants, and retrainers and as an important target market. The effects of more equitable policy towards women began to wane in the late 1990s, as the focus of new policy changed.

3.4 Vocational Education Policy

Vocational education providers' policy mirrors the government's with a significant policy shift in 2000, deeming women as a non equity need due to their levels of participation in training, employment and education. Dickie and Fitzgerald (Quay, 2003) reported to the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) that women were doing well in VET. Although not achieving good employment outcomes compared to males, they were identified as participating well in VET. The report helped to clear ANTA and so the government of responsibilities of dealing with women as an equity group, through specific policy and research initiatives apart from a focus on marketing VET to women and undertaking consultation with women at key decision making points through their life cycle. The report advocated support and respect for the choices women make rather than suggesting new fields of study, industry and occupations. As a consequence of this report and others, a major withdrawal and redirection of resources was undertaken in the VET sector. This shift was toward a broad inclusive approach to women, while equity policies refocused on two specified groups, the indigenous and the disabled.

Recent statistics indicate that women participate in VET at a level of around 48% (ABS 2006). Participation levels, although significant, are not seen to be a sound approach to measuring the effectiveness of VET for women according to Bowman (2004) because women are not obtaining the same benefits form education and training as males. Graduate data contained in the 'Women in VET 2000' report indicated that female graduates achieve poorer outcomes than their male counterparts (NCVER 2000). In 2001, Dumbrell, de Monfort and Finnegan reported that, 70% of female VET graduates were employed compared to 77% of males.

Many researchers agree VET policy direction has shortcomings by failing to recognize diversity among women. Bowman (2004) concludes that while there is no single ideal policy direction, a combined approach of managing diversity and equity groups is required in VET. Bowman (2004) states the need for a return to focus on women and the need for specific strategies catering for different user groups amongst women. She suggests that the approach include integration of equity into core planning, design and delivery of VET programs (Bowman 2004).

3.5 Women and Lifelong Learning

Dumbrell et al (2001), suggest that the concept of lifelong learning arises from learning through life, with a continuous process of adapting to and participating in learning. Lifelong learning is considered as an essential for adults to support or maintain employability (Kalantzis 2003). It is described as a feature of knowledge economies, requiring people to upgrade their skills and knowledge as part of a continual process to maintain competitiveness and keep pace with change. For this reason, lifelong learning is seen as crucial for people who are out of the workforce, as their skills and knowledge levels are considered to depreciate. Life long learning offers women ways of updating or maintaining knowledge, confidence, self esteem and currency of skill, especially when supported by educational and vocational sectors that have strategies and programmes in place to support them. Researchers also consider lifelong learning as part of social inclusion (Kearns 2004, Winch 2000).

Lifelong learning for women is particularly important as through their life cycle they are more likely to take breaks from the workforce as part of their caring responsibilities. Consequently, they are also seen to change employment more regularly and are often required to undertake transitions of one kind or another as part of their return to work (Jenkins 2004). Throughout these breaks in employment, they are expected to maintain or acquire skills for their eventual return to work.

An important aspect of research regarding women and lifelong learning includes; what affect does obtaining qualifications have in relation to their return; and will qualifications support a more successful return? Work by Jenkins (2004) is of particular significance, undertaken in Britain, the research sought to track transitions of women in and out of the workforce and the effects of qualifications on this. The study concluded that there were several factors which support a successful return to work; attitudes of women, educational levels, previous work experience, participation in learning and the attainment of a qualification before return. This identifies that qualifications alone will not lead to a more successful return. Thomson, Dawe, Anlezark and Bowman (2005) report that literature shows older workers who engage in skills development activities have better labour outcomes including greater pay and employment rates, especially for women, and those who have been unemployed.

3.6 Profile of women returning to work.

Yohalem (1980) described women's decision to leave and re enter work as being one of choice or interest and concludes that those interrupting work for education reasons are not likely to encounter difficulties in returning to employment. Yohalem describes those who are currently studying as more likely to secure employment after some mediation with the labour market and become deemed as successful. For women returners and women retrainers, there are unique issues, problems and pathways; the longer the break from the workforce, the greater the problems encountered in returning to work (p41).

Yohalem identified factors in 1980 that made return to work or training for women more difficult, which are still relevant today. These are summarized below:

- Factors that cause women to lose skills because they lack necessary vocational experience.

- Factors based in economic and technological development which lead to change or lack of demand for former qualifications and activities so that women can no longer meet the requirements of the market without retraining
- Factors which, with increasing duration of absence from employment, lead to strong psychological remoteness and alienation from the working world
- Factors and burdens lying in the personal and family spheres, be they children or family members. (Yohalem 1980, p41)

3.7 Issues in the Vocational Education Sector for Women

A major theme throughout the research is the lack of appropriateness of the VET system to the needs of women users. Bowman (2004) summarises key issues in describing the engagement of women during their life cycle in vocational education. In summary, the discussion paper raises such points as

- the **quality of advice and information** about pathways into training is inconsistent and women have expressed a need for individual, customized advice and information.
- the **recognition of prior learning (RPL)** is a crucial element of the VET system which is often very expensive, cumbersome and not well understood or publicized by VET. Overall the uptake of RPL by women is very low.
- the **need for work placements** for women and **taster courses** for older women re entering are important.
- the **structure and timing of training** in vocational education is described as inflexible and inappropriate for women. This includes the ability to mix components from different training packages.
- **access to on the job training** for women to support their skill development and enable them to gain transferable qualifications is unavailable or non existent for most courses.
- **support** services such as child care, entry advice and course selection and career guidance are services that should be integral to the operations of most providers however access to such services varies considerably between states and campuses.

Warner-Smith, Mishra & Dobson (2000) point out that women are not seen as a separate user group in VET and this inevitably results in limited accountability. The review identified that TAFE colleges undertake little research into women's training needs. There are few profiles or data available on women's preferences, levels of satisfaction and learning styles.

Reflection of occupational segregation. A significant reflection of the response to women in vocational training is the context of vocational delivery. Throughout the literature, VET is described as reflecting occupational segregation, present in many industries with most women being in part time and casual positions. Additionally, statistics indicate that gender segmentation of the workforce is strongly reflected in training (Golding 2002).

Lack of access to relevant advice and information. Work by Dickie and Fitzgerald (2003) states that women are not well informed about the range of learning that VET offers, describing VET as having poorly articulated pathways. A major limitation of the present system is the high number of women participating in entry level training which research indicates is not a selection pool for employers. Work placements are not available in most courses; especially those selected by women. Researchers highlight that often information is not provided at key decision making points and what advice and information is available is often inadequate and inaccurate. Dickie and Fitzgerald recommended that women receive information at critical points or decision making points (2003). To apply this recommendation to women returners it is of critical importance to understand just what and when these points are, presumably only to be found through consultation with women wishing to return or re train.

Limited awareness of the range of courses to be selected. Work by Dickie and Fitzgerald (2003) also identified that there has been little change in the distribution of women across fields of study and the way women select courses in vocational education. They are described as selecting courses based on the type of life an occupation can offer and most importantly, how it may fit around their family needs or work life balance (Golding 2002, Bowman 2004).

3.8 Women's Life Cycles and Careers

Women's career paths have only existed recently. According to Still (2001) it has only been in the last 30 years that women have been able to develop careers, prior to this they have largely been thought of as working for "pin money", until they married or were required to earn money due to circumstances such as spousal death or divorce. Women were also expected to retire as soon as their financial needs were met. The work identifies that the concept of career has grown and women are now seen to be pursuing a career, however this concept is largely based upon traditional male career models.

Linear models of career paths and limited recognition of women's life cycles. The review identified that a much broader approach needs to be taken to women's careers than classic models have allowed (Pringle and Dixon 2003). Consideration of the interaction of multiple factors including parenthood, elder care, family responsibilities, household chores and career stages of partners upon a women's life cycle easily identifies impact. Research recognizes the nature of women's multifaceted lives and yet it conveys women's paths as linear along some sort of continuum when planning for their careers (Patton & Mc Mahon 2001).

Tendency for women to be portrayed as one homogenous group. The work of Still and Timms (2000) concludes that homogenous models of women's career development or career paths are problematic; women follow different paths according to their stage of life, the interaction of age, education and desire for a balanced family and work life and type of occupation/industry. Still (2001) emphasizes that career is a series of life experiences, and it is career age that counts, not chronological age, as well as skills, learning, transitions and identity. In the workforce of today, people require new competencies to progress in careers. Individuals need to develop self-knowledge and adaptability. Work by Hall and Richter (1988) describes how the future career paths of employees will be different, with new roles and types of functional work,

most without promotional prospects, simply lateral moves across, rather than vertical progression.

3.9 Benefits of Career Guidance

Access to good quality career guidance is important. Government has in the past recognized that career guidance provides economic and social benefits and hence access to career guidance is thought to have a direct benefit to unemployment. A flow on effect is attributed towards increasing the efficiency of the search for work by:

- Reducing the time and delay involved in the return process and thereby filling vacancies more quickly.
- Re-stimulating discouraged workers
- Addressing the mismatch affects of the unemployed by improving the alignment between industries and occupations and actual patterns of labour supply.

(Watts, Law, Killen Kidd, Hawthorne 1996, p82)

Recognition of different needs from services. Literature indicates that career guidance services are significant for women. Women have very different priorities depending upon their career decisions about integrating work and family, and they view success differently (Watts, Law, Killen Kidd, Hawthorne 1996). In contrast Sullivan (1999) states careers are no longer relevant and this field is in a state of flux with many practices and mindsets no longer relevant as globalization and other factors come into play.

Non traditional areas of work. More recently, there has been acceptance that redirecting women into non traditional areas has only achieved limited success as women quite often did not remain in these fields and faced cultural difficulties that could not be overcome. Dickie and Fitzgerald (2003) contribute to some of the arguments around why this has occurred ranging from stereotyping to resistance due to sexual identity. A major area of agreement is that programmes should avoid forcing women into areas detached and without the support of other women, instead the focus needs to develop student's understanding of why their choices are so limited and the career needs of today's workers. All agree an essential element is to better inform and encourage women to choose their position (Still 2001, Dickie & Fitzgerald 2003, Patton & McMahon 2001).

3.10 Career Development

Patton and Mc Mahon's (2001) work argues strongly that women's career behaviour has changed and more work needs to be done to understand this. They also identify that meaningful work is more important to women's lives and acknowledge that there are several factors which operate internally and externally to facilitate or inhibit women's career behaviour.

The participation of women in the labour force and the limitations women face in relation to career development are often discussed in the literature and conclude that many factors ranging from discrimination to processes associated with gender socialisation, contributed to gender patterns of education and occupational choices. Patton and Mc Mahon (2001) argue that despite growth in the field of career development there has been limited change to women's career development.

4.1 Methodology

The research methodology for this project included:

- Conduct literature search to identify issues, trends and possible best practice.
- Distribute promotional material and invite opportunities to distribute surveys and raise awareness of the project to regional and metropolitan areas.
- Undertake four focus groups.
- Electronic copy and hardcopy distribution of survey via TAFE networks and ACE (adult and community education) based groups including student associations and specific target groups such as industry based forums. Compile final data.
- Review and write up of data and report.

4.2 Approach

The literature search provided the current environment in which return to work and retraining women are provided for by government and vocational sector policy. It also identified key issues and trends in relation to vocational provision for women, lifelong learning, career guidance and career information. Focus groups conducted in Western Australia were held first, and assisted to dispel or confirm themes and issues identified in the literature search. The combination of focus groups and literature search then assisted in the development of the national survey. A total of 62 women participated in the focus groups and 192 in the national survey.

The focus groups involved women from different backgrounds and represented a cross section of the community; women currently in training, both community based and vocational; women in the workforce and women who had been successful in achieving employment (having completed studies); and women who had not yet ventured back into formalised training.

Following the collection and analysis of the survey and focus groups, a review of themes and issues was conducted and compared with the literature review to guide findings and policy implications.

Focus Groups

The process followed during the focus group sessions is included in Appendix I.

Survey Response

There were no requirements to identify respondents on the survey. The questionnaire was divided into a series of forty questions which enabled skips, simple tick box responses and written responses. The layout of the questionnaire covered 7 sections including:

1. Background data.
2. Education and qualifications.
3. Present training.
4. Employment
5. Impact of training and education.
6. Career
7. Aspirations and recommendations

5.1 Background data

A total number of 192 responses were received for the survey and these form the profile below.

| Section One Personal Details | | |
|---|--------|------------|
| Characteristics | Number | Percentage |
| Age | | |
| 0- 25 years | 17 | 8.8% |
| 25-35 years | 21 | 10.9% |
| 35-44 years | 51 | 26.4% |
| 45-54 years | 61 | 31.6% |
| 55-64 years | 14 | 7.3% |
| 65+years | 2 | 1.0% |
| No answer | 27 | 14.0% |
| Postcode | | |
| Regional | 92 | 60% |
| Metropolitan | 62 | 40% |
| No Answer | | |
| Where do you reside? | | |
| ACT | 21 | 11.9% |
| QLD | 3 | 1.7% |
| SA | 35 | 19.8% |
| WA | 74 | 41.8% |
| VIC | 44 | 24.9% |
| TAS | 0 | 0.0% |
| NT | 0 | 0.0% |
| NSW | 1 | 0.6% |
| No answer | 30 | |
| Where you born in Australia? | | |
| Yes | 122 | 63.5% |
| No | 40 | 20.8% |
| No answer | 30 | 15.6% |
| Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait islander origin? | | |
| Yes | 4 | 2.1% |
| No | 153 | 79.7% |
| No answer | 35 | 18.2% |
| Main language spoken at home | | |
| English | 157 | 81.8% |
| Thai | 1 | 0.5% |
| Laotian | 1 | 0.5% |
| No answer | 33 | 17.2% |
| Do you have permanent residence? | | |
| Yes | 153 | 79.7% |
| No | 7 | 3.6% |
| No response | 32 | 16.7% |
| Do you have a disability, impairment or long term condition? | | |
| Yes | 40 | 20.8% |
| No | 113 | 58.9% |

| Characteristics | Number | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|--------|----------------|
| No response | 39 | 20.3% |
| Medical condition | 18 | * 0.9% |
| Hearing /deaf | 1 | 0.5% |
| Mental Illness | 11 | *5.7% |
| Physical | 3 | 1.6% |
| Vision | 4 | 2.0% |
| Physical and medical | 3 | 1.6% |
| Mental, physical, vision and hearing | 4 | *combined 2.0% |
| Learning Difficulty | 1 | 0.5% |
| Deep Anxiety | 1 | 0.5% |
| Diabetes | 1 | 0.5% |
| Pulmonary Fibrosis | 3 | 1.5% |

5.2 Qualifications

- Level of education.** 32.6% of women returners' highest qualification was Year 10, the second highest 15.2%, were those who had completed Year 12. A smaller percentage 11.4%, held Vocational Certificates and 9.8% held University qualifications. 1.1% of respondents had completed only primary schooling and a further 4.3% indicated 'other'.
- Highest qualification.** 2.8% held a Masters Degree, the highest qualification attained, 15.5.% held a Bachelor of Education, whilst most respondents indicated they held Certificate level qualifications and one held nil.

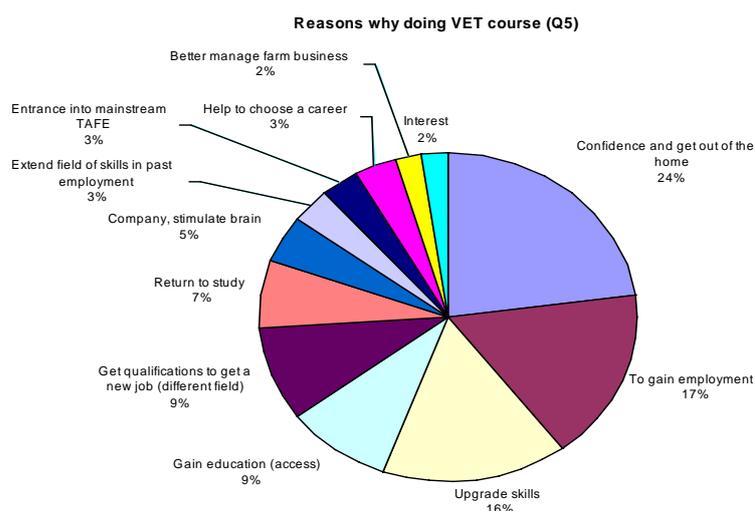
5.3 Training

There were 109 respondents currently involved in vocational education courses around Australia, of those, 79.8% were attending some form of women's return to work strategy, a further 10.1% were completing Certificate in General Education with 6.5% studying Certificate level (I-IV) and 1.8% were involved in Diploma level study.

Current Courses

| Qualification | Number | Percentage |
|--|--------|------------|
| NOW + Access | 87 | 79.8% |
| Certificate in General Education Attainment? | 11 | 10.1% |
| Women's Studies Cert 1,2,4 | 4 | 3.7% |
| Women's Education Cert 1 | 3 | 2.8% |
| Advanced Diploma | 2 | 1.8% |
| Women's Health | 1 | 0.9% |
| Women Working Well | 1 | 0.9% |

Responses to the reason for undertaking VET training



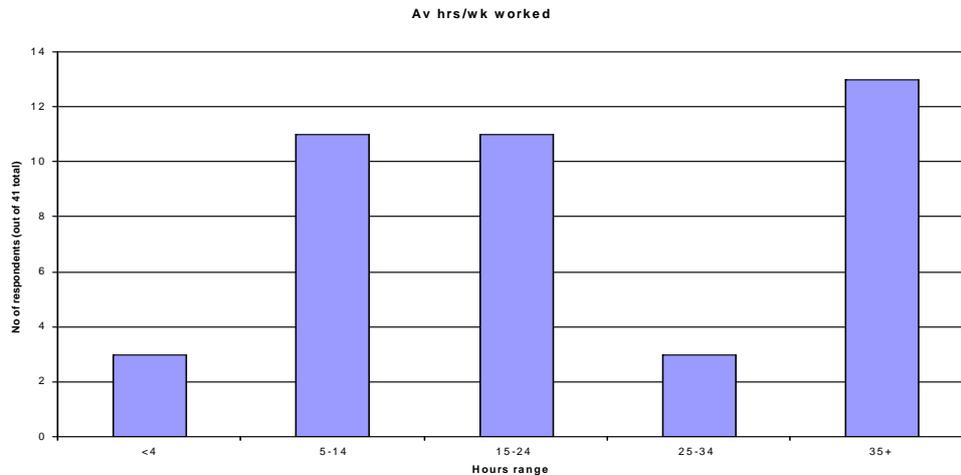
- **Reasons for studying.** 31% of women were undertaking studies for personal development, confidence and self esteem, 23% undertake training to upskill or update skills in their current employment or field, 19% undertake study to gain an educational level to access further education, and 17% to gain employment.
- **Type of Provider.** 59% of the women who participated in the survey were studying in a TAFE college, a further 2% were undertaking study at university and 1% in an ACE setting. It can be assumed that those who gave no answer to this question are not studying.
- **Future training.** 48.9% indicated they intended to undertake training in the future and 9.9% indicated they did not.

5.4 Employment

| Job Title | Number | Percentage |
|--|--------|------------|
| Admin, bookkeeping, clerical, receptionist | 10 | 27.8% |
| Teacher /lecturer | 8 | 22.2% |
| Cleaning | 4 | 11.1% |
| Waitress & kitchen hand | 4 | 11.1% |
| Manage a business& retail | 3 | 8.3% |
| Aged care & nursing | 2 | 5.6% |
| Truck driver | 2 | 5.6% |
| Coordinator /Quality Prog | 2 | 5.6% |
| Volunteers | 1 | 2.8% |
| | | |

- **Areas of employment.** The survey confirmed that areas of employment reflected the stereotypical sectors associated with women’s employment; largely service sector; broadly these were secretarial administration, education and hospitality service sector. However, there was a low response rate to this question, 151 “no answer” to this question. This does not enable a reflection of the respondent’s employment areas.

- **Type of employment.** 21.4% of respondents were in paid employment. Of those in paid employment 27% were full time, 34% part-time and 29% were casual. 5 respondents did not indicate.



- **Hours worked.** About one third of respondents who were working, were full time and the remaining two thirds were part time.
- **Paid and unpaid work.** Of the 182 responses, 43.7% indicated that they were in unpaid work. Of the 43.7% in unpaid work, 25.5% undertook mothering responsibilities, 18.2 % were in voluntary work and 2.1% were carers.
- **Working life.** Of the 21.9% of women who were or had been in the workforce the average years in the workforce was 14.3, and a median of 10 years, with a range of 1-48 years.
- **Work break.** For those who had participated in the workforce, the average response was a break of 15 years.

5.5 Lifelong learning

- **Undertaking Training.** 66.1% of respondents intended undertaking some form of training or education to improve employment prospects and 11.5% did not. Of those who were undertaking education or training, 63.1% thought this would change their present situation.
- **Trainings contribution to future plans.** 62.5% of respondents saw training contributing to their future plans while 3.6% did not.
- **Significance of training.** The mode response was 5 - 'high'. 62.5% rated training and education with 'high' significance. Only 11.9% rated it 'low'.
- **Impact of Education and Training.** 63.1% indicated that training and education will change their situation and 13.5% indicated that it would not. However, 77.1% responded "3+" and above in significance and 65.5% giving a 'high' rating.

*"I will be able to further my career, hopefully receive a higher rate of pay and continue to work in a field that inspires me",
 "...Administration procedures have changed dramatically since I worked in that field, this training will bring me up to date in administration duties".*

“I do not need any more training at present. Am well qualified to do what I want and the market is there. I just don't have the supports and access in the community to achieve this”.

5.6 Career

- **Career identified.** Only 39.1% of respondents have decided upon their career, of those, 31.2% had sought information regarding job availability in their careers.
- **Type of career.** Data below reflects the career areas that respondents are pursuing or intending to pursue. 5.9% have indicated rural management, reflective of the expansion of women’s roles and entrepreneurship across the regional and remote areas.

| Type | Number | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|--------|------------|
| Lecturing /Teaching | 11 | 21.6% |
| Administration/ Clerical | 9 | 17.6% |
| Other | 9 | 17.6% |
| Two or more -different areas | 4 | 7.8% |
| Rural Bus /Management | 3 | 5.9% |
| Child Services /Social worker | 3 | 5.9% |
| Medical, hospital, Natural therapies | 3 | 5.9% |
| Government Policy admin | 2 | 3.9% |
| Tourism hospitality | 2 | 3.9% |
| Counselling | 2 | 3.9% |
| Communications | 1 | 2.0% |
| Civil Celebrant | 1 | 2.0% |
| Real Estate | 1 | 2.0% |
| VET Nurse | 1 | 2.0% |

5.7 Information sought

Information sort. Of the 39% of women who had sought career information, only 31% of women enquired about job availability information before selecting, 34% did not. Of further concern, is the low rate, 14.1 % who sought pay rate and salary information.

Access to Information. A series of questions contained in the survey set out to identify how information, or lack of it, would impact on career decisions, specifically job availability, and pay rates. Women in regional areas indicated that this information was difficult to get and so it was of little relevance. They *'take whatever they can get'* and feel that there are not many opportunities. Regional respondents also indicated that distance of employment and access to childcare impacts upon employment.

Relevance of Information to career decision

“It is very hard in a country area to choose a career, you have to fit into a field available locally. If you have to travel long distances to work then who is looking after the kids?”
“Vague suggestions not sure what I will do”.

“Lack of information causes people to waste time in education areas.”

Responses have been categorised below, since some responses fell into more than one category results cannot be given in percentage terms.

A total of 66 responded to an enquiry about information or lack of it and how this would impact on their career decision

- i. Respondents felt that the information was important and significant to their career decision. (27)
 - ii. Respondents indicated the information wasn't important. Essentially you need to work and this information wouldn't change their minds about their career. (28)
 - iii. Respondents indicated that in rural areas it is difficult to obtain career information and one has to accept what opportunities there are locally. (4)
 - iv. Respondents indicated that sole parents have difficulty choosing a career with work/life balance. (5)
 - v. This group of respondents felt they had no idea and no career. (4)
- **Types of information considered important:** 20% of respondents wanted information covering future employment opportunities, vacancy areas, statistics on how many jobs are available and where, areas of job growth and related courses. 18.5% wanted pay rates and conditions, and a further 9.2% wanted more resources and guides about careers. 7.7% wanted training related options and assistance about fast tracking and course options.
 - **Information accessed for current position.** The responses to this question highlighted the need for greater awareness of the relevance, meaning and significance of information, with 27% indicating no advice had been accessed, 16.4% indicated TAFE courses; in particular NOW programmes, 12.3 % indicated career centres and advisers including CentreLink and Commonwealth Referral Service (CRS).
 - **Where and what format of information.** Interestingly this survey confirmed women's preference for face to face and one on one information provision. 27.3% preferred a TAFE course, ACCESS and NOW, 16.4% career choice, employment service 12.3%, experience in work area 9.7%, career resource 6.8%, friend 6.8%, trial and error 4.2%, a pamphlet 2.8%.
 - **Intend to study for career.** 53.1% indicated they wanted to do more studies in the future and of those, 36.9% indicated 'TAFE', 10.9% responded 'university' and 15.6% indicated 'other'.

5.8 Aspirations

Responses to how the women expect education and training will impact on their future goals can be summarised as follows: (no order as some indicated two or three responses.)

- Career Broadening
- Confidence and Self esteem
- Employability
- A specific job or job outcome
- Skills

- Future viability or sustainability

Vocational sector. 77.1% responded very positively to the vocational sector rating their experiences between 4 and 5. Those who rated the experience highly did so mostly because of:

“Everyone was very supportive and I’m now getting my confidence back and my skills updated.”

“Because I have enjoyed studying after 45 years not doing it. I have learnt many new skills.”

“Helps people like myself with disabilities to access the training and therefore enabling disadvantaged people the chance to gain employment.”

Those who rated the experience low did so because of the following reasons:

- No experience
- Thought it was for younger people
- No knowledge of courses
- Lack of help CRS
- Lecturers don’t seem to have enough real life experiences-poor advice.

5.9 What supports would you like to see for women in returning to training?

Primarily responses to this question could be grouped into the following categories:

1. **Planning: study/career.** Development of a personal plan which set career goals based upon individual strengths, weaknesses and needs. This was the most mentioned category.
2. **Counselling.** Respondents felt they lacked necessary career counselling advice and guidance about how best to find suitable paths to achieve either employment or education outcomes; this included financial counselling about fees.
3. **Childcare.** Childcare was mentioned often (in 36% of responses), including after hours childcare and access to childcare services preferred on site or close to ensure standards and quality of delivery. Women currently working also indicated that access to childcare was important.
4. **Financial.** Many respondents felt that course fees were very high, particularly for university. There were issues raised with regard to the Pension Education Supplement (PES). The PES was seen as too complicated and did not support students enough; forcing them to undertake long hours of study to gain support. This placed sole parents under stress to study and balance caring for their children. The cost of books, fees, travel and stationary were indicated as areas where financial support was required. Suggestions included supplements and scholarships as ways of supporting women in training, there was a strong indication that women can’t afford to return to study and that this is an increasing concern.
5. **Flexibility of course times and content.** Flexible course times were an issue, respondents recommended setting course times within school hours ie. similar to the NOW course (9.30 -2.30), part time courses which reduced the need to extend childcare, and also enables those women who are working part time or casually, the opportunity to improve their skills via training.

6. **Entry course.** There was general consensus that the Access and NOW programs were very supportive and offered a good model for women who were returning to work or study, many felt that these types of courses should be expanded out to other areas and fields. The use of workshop formats, discussion and extension through exposure and awareness of individual's skills and strengths were seen as highly useful as was encouraging women into local learning networks, forming links within their community and amongst each other.
7. **Tutoring and support services** - Tutors were mentioned as a possible course support for women who had been away from study for a while or who had a second language or literacy issues.
8. **Information** -More current and up to date information required. Improved information in relation to possible pathways through the VET sector, more media advertising and improved information of what is available, where, at what cost and how you can access the different courses through cheaper fees or grants and support. Newsletters were also suggested as a means of keeping return to work women informed and networked. The delivery of talks and information to mothers in school community environments and more workshops to support confidence building and self esteem while bringing women together to share ideas and support.
9. **Course content.** More hands on, increased on the job training and applied training, with access to female mentors for women in male dominated professions. Reduce the length of course time to attain qualifications.

Respondents were asked in less than 50 words to describe what changes would they like to see in VET training courses to support women in training:

- Mother friendly times and dates.
- Childcare and day care for children with disabilities
- Closer communication with CentreLink and government departments and TAFE Colleges to improve financial support for students.
- Flexibility of times, modules, materials should be made more accessible
- HECs to be available for vocational courses, financial support
- Learning hours and homework to be negotiated between students and teachers/lecturers
- More hands on approach and work experience
- More social support for women entering training/employment situations
- Courses aimed at individual's previous employment to update their skills
- More publicity about TAFE- information on the courses that are available, how long it takes and how much they cost

When respondents were asked in less than 50 words to describe if VET supported their career plans.

37 % of respondents indicated VET does support their career plans and 12% did not, 51% did not answer the question. When asked to, describe why they have this view, the following response was generally provided.

- *Since starting the course I have gained confidence and I am becoming more clear on which path I may follow career wise in the future*

Those who indicated "No" stated the following:

- *It does not address the return to work needs of older, tertiary qualified people with a long work history who is out of work for family reasons.*

There were 17 written responses to this question. There were five responses that indicated that more support, information and direction was required in their vocational courses.

Respondents were asked to indicate in less than 50 words how they saw training and education contributing to their longer term plans.

The responses to this question were very positive.

- *Education is important and I need to be experienced enough to re enter the work force.*
- *Learning gives me knowledge and confidence.*
- *Very important particularly for women. It is the only way to remain competitive.*
- *I see education and training being a vital part of my learning process, keeping me abreast of my profession and in touch with my peers.*
- *As a mature aged student, this course keeps me active mentally and creates a more confident attitude.*

The focus groups operated through various networks to capture a diverse range of women's experiences including those who were yet to enter formalised training, those who were currently in TAFE or ACE programmes and those who had completed studies or were currently employed. There were four focus groups conducted, two in regional and two in metropolitan areas, with a total number of 62 participants taking part. In all groups there were consistently one or two individuals who had no experience in the workforce and no high school experience or qualifications. The focus groups aimed to test some of the issues found in the literature review with key focus upon the following:

In returning to work do you intend undertaking training in the vocational sector?

Discussion indicates that the majority of women do not consider the vocational sector as an option and tend to look beyond this sector to the Adult Community Sector (ACE) for initial support and then go on to women's networks or university. This view was confirmed for women returning and women retraining as in most instances participants viewed VET as relevant for those who are younger or working in a trade or technical area. Vocational education was viewed as a way of up-skilling, if established in your career and needing to gain further qualifications within a specific range of occupations such as hairdressing and social work. This view seems to be partially connected to the image participants held of TAFE and partially because of the range and format of courses that TAFE are seen to provide for women. This is captured in the following statements:

"It took me a long time to establish confidence to go into TAFE as I didn't have a job and thought it was when you really knew what job you wanted or skills you needed for work".

"TAFE is a main college and is viewed as a proper provider. You have to get together enough money to make the commitment to pay for a course and then you don't really know what you're taking on"

What is your view or experience in returning to training and work?

All women expressed a lack of confidence, uncertainty and reluctance towards the return to work or retraining and this could be linked towards the length of time they had been away from work or study and in some instances the reason for leaving their previous employment. There were distinct groups of women within the focus groups; those who seemed to consider retraining or re entry experiences as different and refreshing and those who were unsure of the outcome and feared the consequences and who seemed disappointed and angry about their future.

Many women returners had utilised some form of community based network or support group through local agencies and through meeting other women via their children's school or hobby groups, many acknowledge the adult community education (ACE) area. The ACE field provides an extensive support network for women through community based programmes and it was through this provider that many women were able to source forms of support and guidance. Focus groups spoke highly of the format and range of support this network offers such as work placement, work exposure, mentoring, coaching, networking and a range of options like childcare, as it is offered on site or linked to local pre primary, primary schools and play groups. This was seen as a good model for the vocational sector and specific industries to adopt to attract women.

Those who had returned as part of up-skilling indicated that the length and times of the courses were an inhibiting factor. Some had returned to TAFE after graduating with a university degree as they had not been able to access employment, to gain more self confidence and employability, but found programmes lengthy and inflexible.

What career information did they access?

The focus groups indicated that limited information was accessed because it was often unavailable. However, many women became better informed through their roles as parents, while trying to locate information for their children's career needs. ACE providers were major links in accessing information for returners while retraining women indicated that they often found the search for information daunting and confusing. Many expressed the view that information was largely targeting younger people.

"Difficult, lack of information, skills and up to date difficulties. I feel like I have been living in isolation as I couldn't source information, was unsure about information on internet if you don't know the programs and how to use the computer."

"Assumption made that you have a computer, know how to use it" Really our computer is basic and we have it for our children's school needs, we can't afford internet and I haven't a clue how to use it"

What career information have they accessed and found useful?

Views varied considerably regarding pre course information. It appears many women are directed toward New Opportunities for Women (NOW), Access and Work Preparation courses without appropriate consideration of suitability or an individual's preparedness. There are few other course options available to women upon return and re entry in the college/institute profiles and these are often conducted without links to other training, without work placement or taster course components. Women with university degrees are directed to NOW courses. This is of concern as it is effectively delaying their return or exposure to key career information.

This focus group research concludes the entry point for women occurs via direction that is not underpinned by quality advice or information. There is no recognition of broadening their awareness of choices and the range of pathways that may be suitable prior to vocational entry. There were issues around computer access to online career information services. Women also expressed how restricting this on line policy was, as they needed computer skills and reasonable levels of literacy to access this important first step information.

Focus groups identified the following;

The limited range of courses that exist and the non existence of recognition of prior learning in the entry process. There were no entry processes that supported an individual's determination of pathways or range of learning options. With limited awareness of what was available or new areas of growth the women relied upon their contact with other women however informed it was. Participants indicated more effort could be focused toward a process designed around the needs of individual women; based on awareness of training and work options, this is something that they must effectively seek out themselves. A potential training plan or pathway is not initiated or mapped out for consideration and review.

- *Many younger women lacked adequate literacy and numeracy skills to enable them to reach their potential.* This is of major concern as these basic competencies are necessary for lifelong learning and participation in today's society.
- *Women continued to display a lack of confidence and self esteem, issues that are not realised and overcome within one course.*
- *lack of redirection into opportunities for up-skilling or skill enhancement and tendency to reinforce occupational segmentation via current courses*

7.1 Themes, issues and integrating literature

There are several issues that the research project identified that are critical and require attention to assist in the outcomes for women returners and retrainers. The following discussion identifies the value women give to education and training, seeing it as an opportunity for personal, social and economic growth. The work draws attention to sector policy issues and the need for more research to identify the impact of shifts in accessibility of courses and pathways for women in VET. Reference is made to the lack of recognition of the career life cycle that women progress through and lack of action by VET to embrace this. The research draws attention to access to career advice and information and how this impacts upon the selection of courses, progress and participation in the sector. The work concludes that most women are limited in their vision of where their training may lead them apart from immediate anticipated personal development or employment. It is evident from the research that women returners rely too heavily upon the process of training and education as a mechanism of increasing their economic wellbeing, as it is yet to prove successful.

7.2 The significance of lifelong learning and economic benefits.

This research confirms that as a group, women value learning. The respondents generally rated education and training of high significance and related potential gains and benefits personally, socially and economically. Women had a range of views on the impact of training upon their present situation but the general response was that

it would change their situation and they felt it was significant to their lives. Education was seen to have a both a short term immediate impact and a longer term difference to their quality of life. The research can confirm that women who take up training or education reflect a strong sense of interest in lifelong learning and do so for a range of reasons including skills, educational attainment and employment. Women are also driven to study as part of stimulating their creativity and also respite from other unpaid work.

The responses convey and confirm women's awareness of social and economic benefits that education can provide for them in both the short and longer term. However, the sector needs to develop a broad range of learning programmes and strategies that recognise the need for life long learning, in particular for women, that is responsive and in tune with their career paths and life cycles.

7.3 The significance of literacy and numeracy

Literacy and numeracy concerns were raised throughout the research. Focus groups identified learning issues that restrict some of their retraining and return to work progress. Relatively low educational levels indicate potential issues that may arise, with this research identifying 32% having a Year 10 Certificate or less.

7.4 Economic significance of training and employment.

The importance of training for women in relation to economic sustainability, advocated in most research, cannot be conclusive as qualifications alone do not necessarily lead to greater self sufficiency or economic independence. The research found that women were completing education and training but were still experiencing difficulty accessing employment. Focus groups highlighted the attainment of qualifications that were not significant or relevant to employment or valued by employers, even at higher levels.

7.5 VET Policy and framework

Impact of the shift in vocational education policy. VET policy shifted away from women as an identified equity group in 2003, including numerous changes to service delivery, data collection and resource allocations since. The review identified that under the shift in focus, TAFE was encouraged to adopt strategies including specific marketing to women and designing courses to take into account women's working lives and life cycles. This research cannot confirm that this has occurred and recommends further research into this issue. The responses in the survey and during focus groups indicate that women are often not aware of TAFE as a training or education option.

VET policy for a diverse range of women. Women want to participate in vocational education and training for many different reasons including return to work, to retrain and upgrade their skills. Reasons may vary from improving their chances of employment, to upgrading current qualifications, meeting personal and social goals as part of their long term career plans, and gaining educational qualifications. For the most part vocational education appears to provide a large amount of courses at entry level for women with limited articulation beyond into new technologies or learning pathways above certificate level. There is limited evidence of women specific strategies in the structure of programmes, formats and modes of delivery of training. Throughout this research, women have expressed a lack of perception or knowledge

of TAFE as a place for older women to gain education and training, yet the literature review provides evidence that older women benefit from better labour market outcomes by engaging in VET. VET providers should thus be encouraged to target marketing at older women workers and those in need of upskilling, as well as ensuring inclusive pedagogical practices are in place.

7.6 Women face different barriers in their access to education and training.

The research identified five key areas where the sector had failed to address the engagement of women in vocational education. These areas have been clearly identified throughout the research as lacking in development. They are as follows:

- provision of quality advice and information about pathways into training for women;
- recognition of prior learning that is not expensive or cumbersome and is well understood or publicized by VET;
- the inclusion of training, where appropriate, that includes work placements and work exposure for women and taster courses for older women re entering;
- the provision of a structure and offering of training that is appropriately timed and is also flexible and appropriate for women considering their career and life cycles;
- the inclusion of access to on the job training for women to support their skill development and transfer;
- the establishment of support services such as childcare, entry advice and course selection and career guidance services as part of regular operations.

The research confirmed that women experience barriers that reduce their ability to participate in training or retraining such as family constraints, financial limitations and work commitments. There were clear indications in the survey of issues around regional women and women with disabilities. There are also implications in the lack of participation of indigenous women and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) in this survey. The vocational sector needs to consider this in the design and construction of programmes and services.

Women have limited time to access training and education. The research identified that access to VET courses is an issue. Time was raised relating to the length of courses, timing of courses, ability to fit education or training into their busy schedule, the need for greater flexibility and opportunity to select courses or specific skills knowledge or expertise as required. The research confirms that many women had difficulty in creating the time to obtain information and access services. The VET sector needs to consider the implications of time in the construction of programmes such as delivery during school hours, shorter courses, workplace training and on the job models.

7.7 Significant time spent in unpaid work.

The survey captured responses to unpaid work with 43.7% respondents indicating that they were in unpaid work. This is significant when considering the range of skills women obtain informally and the need to enable recognition of these skills without fees, expense or time, all resources they have already invested. This research

confirms women are not necessarily returning to work or education without having continued their learning and development through voluntary work, yet education and training systems still resist recognition of the acquisition of such skills either in the process of an individual's entry or through RPL services despite being formally in place.

7.8 Career information and services

Many researchers agree that women's career guidance and development are offered on an ad hoc basis or not at all, and certainly not in the format preferred by women. This was confirmed by the research project. About one third indicated "no advice" has been accessed, of concern as the decision to return to study and select courses should be made on an informed basis. The research confirmed that women do not know where and how to locate career-based information with issues around access to relevant, appropriate and current information, particularly for regionally based women. The research suggests that women are not aware of the type of questions they need to ask and information that is useful to guide their decision-making and occupational choice or training. Respondents had selected occupations based on their perceptions of ability to work around the needs of family, without considering longer term potential and economic benefits.

7.9 Quality of advice provided to women in particular in VET.

It is evident from the research that women returners rely too heavily upon the process of training and education as a mechanism of assisting them to become informed about employment and careers. They also rely upon incidental opportunities that may arise between CentreLink, CSR or the TAFE system to assist them.

The research project confirms that access to career education is thought to have a direct benefit to employment, specifically increasing the efficiency of the search and encouraging people to consider opportunities. This research suggests that through access to better timed and appropriate career counselling there would be a reduction in the time taken to secure employment and improved selection of training pathways and options. This is of particular relevance to women entering training. Respondents indicated that they are often confused about which networks to access information through.

The focus groups and surveys indicated that most returners and retraining women were not empowered nor prepared for employment conditions or work based practices. Their level of knowledge about new and emerging occupations, new technology and innovations, the conditions of the labour market, negotiation skill for contracts, expectations relating to family friendly work practices and legal rights and responsibilities was low. This issue needs to be addressed during short courses, workshops and return to work programmes.

7.10 Value of current women's entry courses

This research can conclude that a high value was placed on women's entry programmes by most respondents. Entry programs have been constructed over time for women, to suit women's needs. This is an indicator and possible future framework for women learners. The model could be transferred to other providers.

The following suggestions have been formulated through a literature search, focus groups and analysis of survey findings. Key policy direction is given and their implications presented, directed at VET, TAFE and other vocational service providers in constructing training strategies and improved provision of career information and career services for women.

Government to improve the relevance and suitability of the VET sector for women returning to work and retraining through the following:

1. Reviewing the suitability of the current VET governance and accountability framework to ensure features are flexible and responsive to the needs of women.
2. The adoption of a combined policy approach that utilises diversity and targets to improve the provision of services and strategies for women.
3. Ensure women have a "voice" in the VET system through representation on action groups, engagement in leading women's organisations and peak bodies to address critical issues in the training system to ensure system accountability, effectiveness and responsiveness.

Vocational training systems to develop more appropriate and relevant delivery for women re turners and retrainers through the following:

1. Promote the priority of more flexible (time, mode and content) training qualifications to meet the needs of women preparing to return to work and those retraining.
2. Improve the provision and relevance of information about vocational education and employment for the target group.
3. More appropriately market the vocational sector to target women returners and older women.
4. Develop and improve access to appropriate counselling and student support services across the vocational sector.
5. Good quality childcare and after school care are instrumental for women in their return to work and return to learning.
6. Expanding the range of financial support provided to women and to keep such costs from being prohibitive.
7. Improve the quality of career breaks for women returners by increasing the range of courses and access to flexible formats for training and support.
8. Make available more hands on and practically orientated courses, such as taster and refresher courses.

9. Increase the provision of work placement and work experience in courses for women returners and older women to better prepare them for the workforce and new occupations.
10. Increase the provision and access to recognition of prior learning so women have more options regarding employability skills assessment.
11. Construct workshops and courses that increase women's awareness of new and emerging technologies and developments.
12. Improve and increase the quality of, and accessibility of, career advice and information.
13. Improve the availability and flexibility of services for women in regional areas.

This small study confirms recent literature that women who are wanting to return to work or training are not accessing information upon which to make an informed decisions regarding their future careers. Together with few support services, a lack of vocational courses that give practical, current information in formats that are appropriate for women's life cycles and commitments, has meant women are not receiving the opportunities for education and training they so desire, and thus access to lifelong learning. The lack of support services and targeted marketing towards women has created a pathway to entry level, and often inappropriate education and training that does not increase their labour market outcomes or financial independence. The adoption of policy by both government and vocational education and training providers that covers these needs, with consideration of the greater overall needs of women, as discussed throughout this report, is the way forward.

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11.1 Appendix I

Focus Group Outline

Introduce the project

Part 1. Questionnaire

Part 2 Workshop and Focus Group Discussion

Part 3 Focus and Discussions.

See the coloured sheets - Select Questions-3,4,5 (&7 if time)

- What has been experience employment, training and education?
- Talk about what your thoughts and feelings are about returning to the workforce?
- Do your future plans include some form of education of training? If yes, what, when and where?
- If no, why not?
- What has been your experience?
- What factors impact on your decision to pursue a particular job and why?
- What plans do you have for your future work?

NOW course focus group 1

PERTH NOW COURSE FOCUS GROUP

February 2005

Question

Discuss briefly when you last worked and what type of work that you did?

- *"8 years ago, secretarial work, stopped to be a full time mum."*
- *"2 years ago. Retail, stopped due to injury."*
- *"2001, on a property with grapes etc."*
- *"Storeperson in wholesale warehouse."*
- *"Full time mum, part time as sterilizer."*
- *"Woolworths check-out."*
- *"Never stayed at home "*
- *"Did school and had my children"*

Question

Talk about what your thoughts and feelings are about returning to the workforce?

- *"Looking forward to doing something for herself, worried about lack of experience and age."*
- *"Doesn't know what profession due to lack of confidence, and hard to choose a job & stick to it."*
- *"Nervous but excited as it means moving on, still got a lot of learning to do before that."*
- *"Too old."*
- *"Lack of motivation / direction (too many things to do at home etc.)"*
- *"Family commitments."*
- *"Lack of self esteem / confidence will I be good enough?"*
- *"Logistics of transport, parking, time spent travelling."*
- *"Course."*

Question

Do your future plans include some form of education or training? If yes, what, when and where? If no, why not?

- *"NOW, Stat test to get into university, complete uni."*
- *"Complete NOW Course."*
- *"NOW, finish year 12 and go onto university."*
- *"NOW lead up to year 12 TEE and university."*
- *"Haven't thought about this yet."*
- *"Just doing this for the moment "*

Question

What factors impact on your decision to pursue a particular job and why?

- *"Age, motivation, time prioritizing, family commitments, location, transport, availability at the course/training, job availability, market/industry availability, too much information and processes, peer pressure."*
- *"Not getting too overloaded by all the information."*
- *"Staying laid back about it all"*
- *It takes time, need more information and confidence."*

NOW course focus group 2

FREMANTLE TAFE NOW COURSE WORKSHOP
February 2005

Question 3

Are you going to change the type of work that you have done and how will this be different? If you have not thought about the type of work that you would do what work would you like to do if you could choose?

- *"I worked in the Medical field for ages and want something different... something to do with children"*
- *"When I was young I always worked with computers but I do not want to work in an office environment. I have been at home with my children who are now late teenagers.. So now what the hell at 50 I can do something different.. maybe work with children. I am not locked into my earlier roles. What would I like... I did not have a chosen career path just fell into existing pathway."*
- *"Parents influence "if you want to smoke ...go and get a job" ... and I left school especially to do that - I didn't even finish year 10."*
- *"I worked as a kitchen hand in a Hospital and would like to work with the patients via natural therapies. I am doing this NOW course to get my communication skills up and happening."*
- *"I worked in kitchens for others and would like to work with my partner in establishing our own business in catering. He is currently studying towards this."*
- What is your response if you have not been in work or employment?

- *"I dream to be a PSA - Patient Services Attendant. Not much work experience at all however I would like to work with the elderly" Found this out via work experience*
- *"People want to be in work that they enjoy"*

Question

What plans do you have for your future work?

- *"Don't know what I want but do know what I DON'T want. I do not want to work in a mindless job. I will have to study to activate my mind.. will need new ideas and a job where my mind is active. Really enjoy helping people and like to help and plan and organize things to help others".*
- *"I would like a Bachelor in Education however do not want to be a starving student with 3 children to support whilst studying".*
- *"I would like a Bachelor in Education for secondary with drama and communication. I started as a youth and would like to go back and redo".*
- *"Going back to education and training - is very tiring to begin with".*
- *"Work at getting computer skills up".*
- *"Kindy or pre-primary teacher I would like to be and art specialist".*

Now course focus group 3

CENTRAL WEST TAFE NOW COURSE and CERT III WORKSHOPS
5 April 2005

Question 1

Discuss briefly when you last worked and what type of work that you did?

Council - 8 months left

Cleaning - ongoing

Manicurist - 9yrs

Home Help - 28 yrs age

Tucker truck driver - ongoing

Chef - 2004

Office Administrator - 2003

Voluntary - disabled children - 2004

Cleaning - 2003

Newsagent - 1988

Reception - 1993

Tutoring - 2004

Question 2

Talk about what your thoughts and feelings are about returning to the workforce?

- *"Difficult, lack of information, skills and up to date difficult eg. Living in isolation, couldn't source information, was unsure information on the internet if you don't know the programs and how to use the computer."*

- *"Assumption made that you have a computer, know how to use it."*
- *"Geographic location some have to travel miles."*
- *"Confidence; don't know how to measure your skills compared to current labour market."*
- *"To establish confidence go into a course at TAFE."*
- *"When doing courses how do you know if they are accredited and you actually learning recognised and useful information."*
- *"TAFE is the main college and is viewed as a proper provider."*
- *"People who have to go to work - need to up-skill or learn new skills, and then they need the money to do the course - a vicious cycle."*
- *"Fear of the unknown."*
- *"Nervous, curious, exciting - being able to go out and learn something new."*

Money

Out of the house

Family left home

Social

Fear

Unsure

Excitement

Nervous

Curious

Difficult

Lack of info

Unsure

Nervous

Lack of confidence

Sell yourself

Lack of experience

Confidence in skills

Are you up to date

Money - driving force

Career satisfaction

Job perks / bonuses

Fear of unknown

Question 3

Are you going to change the type of work that you have done and how will this be different? If you have not thought about the type of work that you would do what work would you like to do if you could choose?

- *Would like to work in:*
- *Age Care, Community Services, Interior Decoration/horticulture, Community Services,*
- *Soft Furnishings, Officer.*
- *Yes - outside inside up-skilling expansion*
- *Self satisfaction*
- *Paid work*
- *Majority want to change*
Want to do something different
- *Hospitality - travel/animals*
- *Retrained*
- *Jobs were chef and now in admin*
- *Cleaner of aeroplanes*
- *Office administration - Carer to Hospitality*
- *Wanted appreciation*
- *Mutual respect*
- *Not a case of getting what you want but what you can get*

- *Going from a manual job to an office job*
- *Use voluntary work to get employment.*

Question 4

What plans do you have for you future work?

- *To finish study / course and apply for jobs*
- *Further study*
- *Office work*
- *Upskill to get a better job*
- *Expand home business and extra skills*
- *Professional presentations creates competition*
- *Part-time / full time*
- *Flexibility*

Question 5

What opportunities do you think exist for women in today's workforce?

- *Not enough*
- *Take what you can get*
- *Slim chance*
- *Improving climate for work*
- *Wide open - opportunities for young - prepared to more*
- *Concern over unfair dismissal law uncertainty for employment*
- *Whatever it is they wish to do*
- *Have the money to do it*
- *It is there if you want to go and get it*
- *Worried about the government getting rid of the unfair dismissal rule*
- *On the job training - so if you had skills or not then you would go and then trained and then put on the floor - Myer*
- *Why not in country areas - the cost of training*

Question 6

Do your future plans include some form of education of training? If yes, what, when and where? If no, why not?

Depends on work available

Training - yes

3 unsure

3 going on

Yes

Places like TAFE

External courses

Night training / flexi

Question 7

How do you feel and think about participating in education and training?

Good for moral

Confidence booster and empowering

Very good

Fun

Exciting

Fun

Exciting

Nervous

Curious

Stressed

Self doubt

Question 8

What factors impact on your decision to pursue a particular job and why?

money
experiences already gained
enjoyment
rewarding and satisfying
Travel
Money
Quality of child care

Pay
hours
Type of work
Flexibility
Who is your boss
Flexibility
Training in different fields and access

Question 9

What information do you access and require to help you decide if the job is of interest or right for you? Write the most important 5 factors.

High wage
Steady income
Hours available / shifts
Growth industry
Permanent
Working conditions

Job description
Pay
Hours
Childcare availability
Travel

Hours
Pay
Location
Flexibility availability
Interest

Hands up

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| Look at what the salary is before | 14 |
| Rate per hour | 16 |

- *"I look at the skills required and look at the money and wanted to do."*
- *"Looked at job, Promotion, Money"*
- *"Motivation - feel good about job and what I do."*
- *"Put the hourly rate against what you need to do to get it - things that were not originally on the list."*
- *"Money would be my prime motive and as a single parent to be able to provide for my son and his life and education is more important than if I enjoy the job or not."*