

## Submission to NCVER

### Future topic areas for the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth - Y15 cohort

Thank you for the opportunity to inform the development of the LSAY topic map that provides data to inform youth transition policy.

This consultation process provides economic Security4Women with the opportunity to inform on a topic area to enhance the gender focus of this data set.

We recommend the data set include detail about the impact of school based career guidance and if and how young women are encouraged to explore all career options, especially those in the male dominated occupations and industries.

#### **About eS4W**

economic Security4Women (eS4W) is a national women's alliance, funded by the Australian Government through the Office for Women in the Commonwealth Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

eS4W is an alliance of women's organisations united in the belief that economic wellbeing and financial security are essential for women and will enable women of all ages to have an equal place in society.

The role of eS4W is to:

- bring together women's organisations and individuals from across Australia to share information, identify barriers to women's economic security and to identify solutions by prioritising the key issues for action to bring about change
- engage actively with the Australian Government on policy issues as part of a better more informed and representative dialogue between women and government.

The Alliance's members are concerned about the impact on women's lifetime earnings of the highly gender segregated labour force in Australia.

eS4W maintains a focus on measures required to boost women's workforce participation and particularly to increase the proportion of women in the non-traditional, male dominated occupations and industries.

Our members seek structural changes that will improve opportunities for women in these occupations and in emerging industries with a focus on challenging gender occupation stereotypes for girls.

We do this by engaging with our member organisations and external stakeholders - including individual women – in the identification and raised profile of gender specific career exploration projects, role models and mentors.

We also engage with government (federal, state and territory) and its agencies and promote to them the findings of the research we commissioned in 2013/14, a study of secondary school based Career Exploration strategies and the economic and social benefits of applying a gender lens to career guidance.

## **Topic area: school based career guidance and impact on young women**

As a result of research undertaken for the Alliance by WAVE, eS4W concluded that intervention in the career choices of young Australian women is crucial to achieving better employment outcomes and improved long-term financial security for individual women, as well as increasing women's workforce participation, especially in the non-traditional occupations and industries and improved gender equity in Australian workplaces.

### **Overview of research findings**

The research identified components of best-practice career guidance that can lead to expanded opportunities for the participation of women in the workforce and increased participation of women in high-income, in-demand Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) careers.

The research explored current models of careers' exploration available to young Australian women, particularly in relation to study and career choices in STEM and other non-traditional occupations and industries.

The findings included what we're doing well:

- Innovative careers' exploration practices in Australian schools have resulted in good outcomes for girls and young women in STEM. The research underpinning this report demonstrates the value of the following approaches:
- Industry-led schools' partnership strategies that invite and support career exploration by young women, as well as long-term female participation in STEM and non-traditional occupations, careers and industries
- Highly visible female role models and mentors from STEM and other non-traditional occupations and industries are crucial to broadening the career aspirations and expectations of young women
- Promotion of support networks for young women in STEM and non-traditional workplaces are important, whether workplace-based or via networks of women in STEM and non-traditional careers
- Provision of low-stakes' career exploration opportunities for girls and young women to 'taste' and experience non-traditional and STEM roles and occupations prior to and during their senior secondary years of schooling
- Staged career exploration opportunities early in girls' schooling that encourage reflection on their skills and interests, while exploring relevant options in a broad range of occupations, industries and workplaces. This will help young women make informed choices about their future
- Widespread partnerships between schools, educational institutions, industries and communities to assist girls and young women to access non-traditional and STEM study and work placement opportunities that advance their career aspirations.

The findings also identified what is holding young women back from STEM and non-traditional occupations.

Research undertaken for this report, in conjunction with research conducted elsewhere, indicates that a number of significant factors are limiting the subject and career choices of Australian girls and young women. These limitations impact negatively not only on the long-term future of individual women, but also on the Australian economy.

Employment options for young women are limited by factors that range from persistent stereotyping to negative perceptions about and experiences of young women in non-traditional occupations.

Key insights from the research include:

- Gender stereotyping and perceptions about subjects and career options 'suitable' for young women are often reinforced in schools and families. Such stereotyping

impacts negatively on the career choices of young women and creates barriers to increasing young women's participation in STEM and non-traditional occupations

- Negative experiences and/or perceptions of the adverse nature of male-dominated workplace cultures discourage young women from participating in STEM and non-traditional careers
- It is widely perceived by professionals in the careers' industry that current models of careers' guidance are 'gender blind'. In fact, the statistical reality is that discrimination is inherent in gender-blind careers' programs
- Careers' exploration activities cannot be successful when they fail to respond to existing interests and capabilities of young women.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this research we agree that the age of 15 is a critical age for young people in terms of choices they have to make regarding schooling, post-school study and career aspirations.

These choices do lead to various paths in the years that follow and we have found that for many young women their choices are limited by gender stereotypes and lack of information about and exposure to all career options.

We agree further that the social circumstances of young men and women will change as they gain greater independence, form relationship and have families of their own. How young people deal with these transitions is of great interest to policy makers, parents, teachers, career advisers and the young people themselves.

However we are very concerned that the social circumstances of women are often determined by gendered stereotypes that diminish their ability to gain greater independence and that this in turn influences the nature of the relationships that they form and the dynamics in the families they create.

We urge you to apply a gender lens to the LSAY topic map

While the choices young people make or that are available to them has become more complex over time, we would argue that the choices for young women are informed by stereotypes that are different to those of young men and result in less successful outcomes.

While the basics of schooling and post-school education remain similar to what they were thirty years ago, the options available to young women have become much more varied and the labour market and the broader social setting in which young women now find themselves has changed significantly.

## **Recommendations**

To gain a sophisticated understanding of the transitions of both young men and young women robust data evidence in the form of longitudinal surveys with data disaggregated by gender is required.

The longitudinal nature of LSAY allows for a more sophisticated and nuanced analysis of the data to answer important policy or research questions, especially about the impact of career guidance and about the impact of changes to that guidance that is not gender blind and understands that special measures may be required to ensure equitable outcomes for young women.

eS4W recommends the data set include such topics.

Attachment:

Link to eS4W project

<http://www.security4women.org.au/issuesandprojects/current-projects/women-into-non-traditional-industries-and-occupations>