



Seen But Not Heard: Underemployed Women and VET Policy Today

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About WAVE

WAVE is a national network of women involved in VET, ACE and the broad field of work-related education and training. WAVE provides seminars & workshops, research, policy advocacy and advice, as well as networking on a national and state basis.

Wave is a Council member and Board member of Economic Security4Women Inc (S4W)

<http://www.security4women.org.au>



Women and Vocational Education & Training: Key Priorities for gender Inclusive VET Participation.

- VET in Australia provides skills training to approximately 1.7 million people each year. This represents 11.3% of Australians aged between 15 to 64 years. Of these, 52.3% were male and 47.6% were female. (ref)
- The current VET national policy for women, *Women shaping our future* is due to expire in 2010. WAVE is keen to secure a commitment to a new strategic framework with a clear set of priorities and targets.
- Of critical concern to WAVE is the continuing disadvantage experienced by women in the workplace and the VET sector. The gap between the investment in education and training for women and girls needs to be closed. The poorer outcomes need to be targeted and addressed.



COAG Reform Agenda

The Council of Australian Government (COAG) has acknowledged that 'the global economic crisis underscores the importance of further microeconomic reform, including in relation to regulatory reform'. COAG has recently agreed to a workplan for further major reforms to the Vocational Education and Training system.

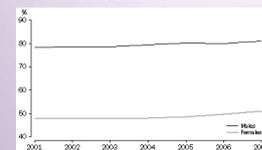


Table 1.1: Women aged 15 years and over, labour force participation rate by highest level of educational attainment, 2006

Highest level of educational attainment	Labour force participation rate (%)
Postgraduate	83.0
Graduate diploma/Certificate	82.3
Bachelor degree	79.1
Advanced diploma/Diploma	71.1
Certificate level	73.7
Year 12	64.9
Year 11	59.5
Year 10	50.6
Year 9	33.3
Year 8 or below	14.6



Persons fully engaged in education and training and, or work (a) by gender



(a) All persons 15-64 years engaged in full-time education and training; or full-time work; or part-time education and training, and part-time work.

Source: *Education and Work, Australia, May 2007*, cat no. 6277.0 (Data Cubes)



Carers

- **Women were more likely than men to be carers** (17% of women and 14% of men).
- Of parents aged 35–54 years, 22% of mothers and 15% of fathers were carers. About half of these carers were caring for a child with a disability. The other half were combining raising young children with care of another relative or friend.
- For all age groups, carers were more likely to have a disability themselves (35% of all carers had a disability compared with 22% of all people).



Key findings from the 2003 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers include:

- 2.6 million carers who provided some assistance to others who need help because of disability or age. Just over half (54%) of all carers were women. **Women were also more likely to be primary carers (71%)**, that is people who provided the majority of informal help to a person with a disability.
- **Primary carers had a lower labour force participation rate (39%) than people who were not carers (68%).**



Green Skills

- Climate change presents Australia with its greatest economic risk but opportunities also existed to create an estimated 3.25 million new 'green collar' jobs by 2025. (www.dsf.org)
- Green work - 'green skills and emerging green jobs' is also characterised by an apparent lack of engagement by women to date.
- Without national policy guidelines for women and girls, especially those most at risk, there is no platform from which to advocate for and argue that any effort should be directed towards girls and women in this major portfolio area, at national or state/territory levels - climate change and sustainability policies included. The predicted growth areas of employment in the new green economy are traditionally highly masculinised.



The VET System

- Funding for the VET system is provided by the Australian Government, state and territory governments, industry bodies, employers and individual students through fees.
- The shift over the last decade to a contestable training market has resulted in restricting access.
- Recent NCVET research highlights the conflict between the policy of increased competition between training providers and ensuring affordability of VET courses for people from disadvantaged backgrounds s.

5 Kammel, T, Beddie, F & Dawe, S (Eds.) (March 2009), Competition in the Training Market, Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
6 This is highlighted by the recent announcement of the South Australian government to remove low uptake courses in rural and regional areas including women's studies. Where markets are thin, the needs of disadvantaged students are vulnerable to profit based VET provision.



Workforce Participation in the Labour Force

- Australia's female population is 50.3% of the total population. Of these, approximately half are in the labour force.
- Women comprise 45.3% of Australia's total labour force. 2.2 million work part-time, representing 44.5% of all employed women and 71.9% of the part-time workforce.
- Part-time work is the dominant form of employment for women in lower skilled occupations such as clerical, sales and service workers, although part-time work is also common among female Professionals.
- Women remain underemployed.
- They are more likely than men to have significant breaks in employment due to their caring roles in families.



VET Participation

- In 2007, 794,200 women enrolled in vocational education and training (VET) courses, representing 47.7% of all VET students.
- 136,850 of these women were enrolled in apprentices and traineeships, which represents 33.0% of all apprentices and trainees in-training.
- Despite these encouraging figures, data just released highlight falling female enrolments in apprenticeship courses.



WAVE & S4W make the following recommendations for inclusion in the VET reform agenda.

1. Develop a VET strategic framework for women with a clear set of priorities and targets with performance accountability mechanisms for VET.
2. Link VET funding arrangements to key performance indicators for women.
3. Ensure there is gender expertise on each/all national VET equity advisory committees and relevant working groups



4. Embark upon a national consultation with women's organizations, community groups, industry bodies, training providers, and other stakeholders on the diverse needs of women as part of the COAG VET reform agenda.
5. Collect, analyse and publish performance and outcome data, that include trends over time and are disaggregated by gender and demographic characteristics, such as Indigenous, Disability, CALD backgrounds, age, employment status: Participation - enrolments by course level and field of study: Outcomes - completions by level and field of study: Employment outcomes of graduates.
6. Ensure that employment creation programs and employer based incentives designed in response to the global recession and pressures of climate change target initiatives that benefit women and girls.