National Foundation for Australian Women
REAL WOMEN. VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

GENDER LENS ON THE OCTOBER 2022-23 BUDGET

Key Policy in discussion	**VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET)**
Portfolio and or agency	**Department of Employment and Workplace Relations**
Date Issued	**Date 27th October, 2022**
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Key Portfolio Issues

While the October 2022-23 Women's Budget Statement acknowledges the occupational and industrial segregation of the labour market, there are no specific portfolio budget initiatives to address these issues, insofar as this segregation is as a result of structural and systemic biases in the VET sector. There are no budgeted initiatives on how the sector might contribute to achieve a more equal distribution of women's participation across areas of study. There are no budget measures focused on the highly feminised care and health workforce even though components of this workforce may have little or no specialist or higher level vocational qualifications.

Budget Measures

A number of programs have ceased as a result of the Government's Spending Audit including Supporting Women's Mid-Career Transition into the Tech Workforce. This was a very minor program as part of the Digital Economy Strategy. The resulting savings will be applied to the establishment of ***Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA)*** to provide national leadership and advice on Australia's labour market and skills and training needs working in partnership with all governments, industry, employers, unions and training providers. Its role will include a national survey to assess adult foundation skills levels, with a focus on First Nations peoples at a cost of $12.3 million over 4 years. This study may well have implications for many women.

The *Jobs and Skills Australia Act 2022* which established JSA passed both Houses on 27th October with an amendment to its functions to require JSA to advise the Minister or Secretary in relation to '*opportunities to remove barriers to achieving gender equality in the provision of training and in the labour market, and opportunities to improve gender equality outcomes'* (s.9(1)(a)(vii)). It will prepare capacity studies, undertake workforce forecasting, assess workforce skill requirements and undertake research and analysis on the resourcing and funding requirements for registered training organisations.

The major program in this portfolio is **National Skills and Workforce Development SPP** with a $1.6 billion allocation matched by all Australian governments with long-term objectives under National Partnership agreements.

The Government is providing $550.1 million under a **12 Month Skills Agreement** for 2023, including $493.3 million for fee-free TAFE places to be matched by the states in an effort to revive its central role in VET. The

measure is aimed at delivering 480,000 fee-free TAFE and community-based vocational education places over four years. As a first step, the Government is entering a $1 billion agreement with the states and territories to provide 180,000 places in 2023. This agreement will prioritise training for students that traditionally face barriers to work and study, including women facing economic equality issues, and target industries with severe skill shortages Women's Budget Statement, p. 45). Care sector industries should certainly feature.

$million	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
National Skills and Workforce Development SPP	1,607.8	1,661.1	1,694.4	1,724.2
National Partnership payments				
Energising Tasmania	4.7	-	-	-
Fee-free TAFE				
12-Month Skills Agreement (including TAFE Technology Fund)	384.5	165.6	-	-
Fee-free TAFE from 2024	-	65.8	134.2	136.6
JobTrainer Fund	268.7	-	-	-
Resources Centre of Excellence	2.0	-	-	-
Revitalising TAFE campuses across Australia	4.5	-	-	-
Total National Partnership payments	664.4	231.5	134.2	136.6
Total	**2,272.2**	**1,892.6**	**1,828.6**	**1,860.8**

Source: Budget Paper No 3, Table 2.5: Payments to support state skills and workforce development services

The other significant allocation under National Partnership payments is the **Job Trainer Fund** which was designed to provide low fee and fee free training places for job seekers and young people, an initiative of the former government. Its allocation is for 2022/23 and it is assumed that any unspent funds will be transferred to the fee free TAFE initiative.

Policy issues and indicators

Policy issues in the portfolio include:

- the gender segregation of VET course participation.
- the dominance of men undertaking trade apprenticeships, and
- the concentration of women in the occupational area of Community and Personal services.

The critical data issue is the unavailability of gender disaggregated course enrolment and completion data at a level of granularity capturing Indigenous women, CALD women and women with a disability correlated to regions.

The Budget does not specifically address any of these issues; the **Women's Budget Statement**, however, comments on relevant work being undertaken by the Office for Women (**see separate paper on Gender-focused machinery of Government**).

Gender implications

VET course participation is highly gendered and reinforces occupational gender segregation across industries contributing to women's relative economic insecurity and perpetuating the gender pay gap.
The industry-led, user-pays training system has resulted in dramatic declines in apprentice and trainee numbers and done little to address the predominant gendered paradigm. There are no financial or program incentives for providers to address the decline or the gender segregation.

There is recognition of these issues in the **Women's Budget Statement**. Collaborative work is being undertaken by the Office for Women and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) to support the development of Jobs and Skills proposals in the Budget to ensure programs funded reduce gender segregations across industries.

The **Australian Skills Guarantee** will include targets for women and support the employment of women on major Commonwealth-funded government projects. The gender outcomes will need to be reported.

The critical initiative flagged among those reported in the **Women's Budget Statement** (p. 15) is the opportunity for the collection of a range of data and analysis to assist with better targeting of interventions to remove barriers and improve accessibility to training with the aim of achieving gender equity in non-traditional roles. The gathering of gender-disaggregated data across the breadth of National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) collections would assist in the analysis of issues and effective policy development, and program design and delivery. It will be vital to the evidence base for gender impact assessments and the National Strategy.

Recommendations

The functions of ***Jobs and Skills Australia*** should reflect the government's policy priorities for gender equality and enable work with the Office for Women on studies required to produce gender impact assessments. The brief for research priorities for ***Jobs and Skills Australia*** should include the identification of industry areas into which women may be attracted to assist in diversifying their occupational choices aiming for economic security and closing the gender pay gap.

National Partnership agreements should include gender impact assessments.

Gender Impact Assessments should be mandated for all government-funded VET programs.

The training needs of workers in the Care Economy should be reviewed by DEWR to provide the evidence base required to design programs for women workers in the Health, Aged Care and Disability Services sectors in order to secure appropriate career paths and better wages for the majority working in that sector.

The NCVER in its data published on VET enrolments should be obliged to collect, analyse and report upon women's enrolments and completions correlated with "equity" groups, that is: Indigenous, culturally and linguistically diverse people, language background and people with a disability.