

Key Policy in discussion	Education - Vocational Education and Training
Portfolio and or agency	Employment and Workplace Relations
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Key authors:	Jozefa Sobski AM, National Convenor, Women’s Electoral Lobby Linda Simon, Charles Sturt University

Key Portfolio Issues

The Budget contains initiatives aimed at achieving a more equal distribution of women’s participation in Vocational Education and Training (VET) across areas of study and in apprenticeships and traineeships. The Budget does not include any major initiatives for the training needs of workers in the care economy, that is, the Health, Aged Care and Disability Services Sector. The majority of these workers are women, and the Budget focus for these workers is on increasing wages.

Budget Measures

There are two central planks in the 2023-24 Budget allocations for VET which appear in Table 2.5 of [Budget Paper No 3](#). These allocations are specific-purpose payments under a new **National Agreement** with states and territories and a **National Partnership payment: Fee-free TAFE, 12-month Skills Agreement** including the TAFE Technology Fund and the **Fee-free TAFE and vocational education places from 2024**.

Table 2.5: Payments to support state skills and workforce development services

\$million	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
National Skills and Workforce Development SPP	1,607.8	1,669.8	1,724.1	1,763.9	1,797.8
National Partnership payments					
Energising Tasmania	4.7	-	-	-	-
Fee-free TAFE					
12-Month Skills Agreement (including TAFE Technology Fund)	376.0	163.3	10.8	-	-
Fee-free TAFE from 2024	-	66.9	136.7	139.8	70.7
JobTrainer Fund	268.7	-	-	-	-
Resources Centre of Excellence	2.0	-	-	-	-
Revitalising TAFE campuses across Australia	4.5	-	-	-	-
Total National Partnership payments	655.9	230.2	147.4	139.8	70.7
Total	2,263.7	1,900.1	1,871.6	1,903.7	1,868.4

Source: Budget Paper No 3, p.46

The funding for the new **National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development (NASWD)** is \$1.7 billion in this financial year. Agreement on the targets have not yet been reached and it is proposed that the agreement will be in place in 2024. The **12 Month Skills Agreement for Fee-free TAFE** and TAFE Technology Fund is to improve workshops, laboratories and IT facilities across the country. This is \$550 million over three years from 2022-23. It is augmented by a further \$414 million to states to fund 300,000 TAFE and vocational education places to become fee-free from 2024 (2023-24 Budget Paper No. 3, pp. 47-48).

The Employment and Workplace Relations portfolio will deliver a redesigned **Foundation Skills Program** and pilot extension for \$12.9 million. An additional \$3.5 million over two years will be allocated for the Foundation Skills for Your Future Remote Community Pilots to 30 June, 2024 (2023-24 [Budget Paper No. 2](#), p.107). A [Ministerial media release](#) makes reference to the Government's having delivered \$436 million over four years to reform the way the Commonwealth delivers Foundation Skills programs, but that figure appears to refer to old money. According to Budget Paper No 2, the cost of this measure will be met from within the existing resourcing of the Foundation Skills for Your Future program and the Skills for Education and Employment program (p. 107).

The Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) Program was initially designed to help participants build their reading, writing, maths and basic computer skills across Australia, from metropolitan and regional areas, right through to remote communities. Its remit was to cater to various groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, youth, people with disabilities, mature aged people, and job seekers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The redesigned program is to be expanded to include job seekers who are not registered, with “a specific focus on First Nations people with place-based, whole of community projects designed to meet community language, literacy, numeracy and digital needs, and delivered through First Nations organisations in partnership with TAFEs and other Registered Training Organisations or Adult and Community Education sector providers.” According to the [Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2023-24 Portfolio Budget Statement](#), commencing on 1 July 2024, the program will be delivered through a mix of national and local place-based solutions to improve access and delivery (p. 15).

Targeted Support for Apprenticeships has been allocated \$54 million over five years from 2022-23 (2023-24 Budget Paper No. 2. p.109). This is a grants program which appears to be replacing the **Australian Apprenticeship Support Network**. The new program aims “to increase apprenticeship completion rates and the diversity of the apprentice workforce.” Grants of \$5 million over three years to 2024-25 are to be offered to organisations to support women in the workplace, as well as in male-dominated trade apprenticeships. It will also extend support to women who commenced their non-traditional trade apprenticeship prior to 1 July 2024.

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The **Australian Skills Guarantee** has been allocated \$8.6 million over four years, \$2.8 million in 2023-24. This program is designed to ensure that one in 10 workers on major Australian Government-funded projects is an apprentice, trainee or cadet. Contracts worth over \$10 million or more in construction and the ICT sectors will include sub-targets for women.

Background

A statistical analysis of women's representation in vocational education and training including apprenticeships and traineeships is provided in the [Women's Budget Statement 2023-24](#) (see pp. 37-40). The occupational and industrial gender segregation in the workplace that results from the differences in VET enrolment choices by men and women is detailed as well as women's lower representation – 31 per cent – among all apprentices and trainees. The predominance of women in shorter apprenticeships and traineeships in non-traditional occupations such as early childhood education and care, administration and hospitality is also noted.

Gender implications of Budget Measures

The Government's commitment to gender responsive budgeting and gender impact statements for key VET budget measures provides the opportunity for shifting VET program enrolments through the mechanism of the **National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development**. Its [guiding principles](#) include: "ensuring that all Australians, particularly women, First Nations Australians, young people, mature age Australians, those experiencing unemployment, people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people with disability and regional and remote learners, have access to education, training and support needed to obtain well-paid, secure jobs." Much hinges on the conditions in the Agreements and the granularity of reporting data that is imposed on states and territories and, in turn, on systems and providers.

The gathering of gender disaggregated data across the breadth of National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) collections can provide an important evidence base for effective policy development and program design and delivery as well as identifying systems and providers which are achieving gender targets.

Through the [Skills Guarantee's](#) rigorous reporting requirements and culturally appropriate support for female apprentices and trainees working on Government-funded construction projects, women's participation and successful completion could substantially improve.

These two Budget Measures, in conjunction with **Targeted Support for Apprenticeships**, have the potential to move the dial on participation by women in non-traditional trade areas. The capacity and determination of the whole system, public TAFE and private VET providers, as well as workplaces, will need to embrace the reforms required by funding agreements.

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Importantly, these Budget Measures need to be underpinned by data to assist with better targeting of interventions to remove barriers and to improve accessibility to VET programs across Australia. Organisations selected to receive grant funding under this program need to demonstrate expertise in supporting women in potentially hostile workplaces and in identifying and dealing with cultural and discriminatory barriers to women's effective learning on the job.

Recommendations

The **National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development** should set long term objectives for reforming the VET system so that it promotes gender equity at all intersections of disadvantage or difference.

The allocation of funds to TAFE and VET providers for fee-free places should be conditional on achieving gender equity targets at all intersections of disadvantage or difference.

Gender impact assessments should be mandatory for all Commonwealth-funded VET programs.

The reinvigoration of Foundations Skills training for vulnerable Australians should include measures to enhance women's re-entry to the workforce with support tailored to meet the identified needs of women at all intersections of disadvantage – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse women, and LGBTIQ+ groups.

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