

## GENDER LENS ON THE 2024 BUDGET

<b>Key policy in discussion</b>	<b>Vocational Education and Training</b>
<b>Portfolio and or agency</b>	<b>Employment and Workplace Relations</b>
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### Key Portfolio Issues

Two key issues are identified in the 2024-25 Budget which could benefit women in undertaking vocational education and training (VET):

- attracting students to VET/TAFE through increasing delivery of strategic communications to increase the appeal of VET for students, parents and teachers, and extending community awareness of Fee-Free TAFE courses in areas of high skills needs ([Budget Paper No 2](#), p. 95, 2024)
- harmonisation of the VET and higher education sectors that will break down barriers between the two sectors ([2024-25 Education Portfolio Budget Statements](#), p. 14).

The end goal of the VET measures in the Budget is to increase the number of students in vocational education with a special emphasis on building and construction courses and courses relating to green energy.

Support for the Government's [Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality](#) which outlines its vision of "an Australia where people are safe, treated with respect, have choices and have access to resources and equal outcomes no matter their gender" is implied in the Budget measures addressing VET. However, achieving gender equality requires that gender be explicitly considered in all policy areas.

## Budget Measures

Budget measures relating to VET are divided between the Cross Portfolio section and Employment and Workplace Relations, with some additional specific measures in other portfolio areas.

Under Cross Portfolio measures, the Budget papers announce expenditure of:

“\$27.7 million over four years from 2024–25 (and an additional \$32.8 million from 2028–29 to 2034–35) to develop initiatives that break down artificial barriers and harmonise regulatory, governance and qualification arrangements between the higher education and vocational education and training sectors.” ([Budget Paper No 2](#), p. 63, 2024).

Addressing amendments to the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011, Budget Paper 2 announces that the Government will provide \$1.0 million over four years from 2024–25 (and \$0.3 million per year ongoing) to ensure compliance with and enforcement of recent amendments to the *National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011* (NVETR Act). The amendments give effect to measures that respond to integrity risks in the VET sector and improve ASQA’s practices and processes ([Budget Paper No 2](#), p. 6, 2024).

These changes link to the intersection of the [Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency’s](#) (TEQSA) regulatory work with that of [the Australian Skills Quality Authority](#) (ASQA), the vocational education regulator. The Government sees reducing the regulatory burden on dual sector providers as a priority ([2024-25 Education Portfolio Budget Statements](#), p. 165).

VET is mentioned specifically in relation to the Skills Training portfolio within the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations.

### Further Support for the Vocational Education and Training System

Payments (\$m)

	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
Department of Employment and Workplace Relations	-	25.0	0.8	0.4	..

([Budget Paper No 2](#), p. 94, 2024).

The Government will provide \$26.1 million over four years from 2024–25 to strengthen VET, continue structural reforms, and maximise returns on previous skills and training investments and commitments. Funding includes:

- \$10.6 million over four years from 2024–25 (and \$1.0 million per year ongoing) for the implementation of a reporting solution for the Australian Skills Guarantee
- \$9.5 million in 2024–25 in additional funding for Jobs and Skills Australia’s continued provision of advice on Australia’s labour market, skills and training needs
- \$6.1 million in 2024–25 in additional funding for the National Careers Institute to continue its role in supporting Australians to access targeted careers information

- \$2.9 million in 2024–25 in reprofiled funding for continued implementation work with the states and territories on the 5-year National Skills Agreement that commenced on 1 January 2024 ([Budget Paper No 2](#), p. 94, 2024).

In addition, the Government will provide \$27.7 million over four years to support better student pathways between VET and higher education and enhance tertiary data collection to provide better insights into how students interact with the tertiary education system ([2024-25 Education Portfolio Budget Statements](#), p. 14). (See Higher Education).

### Promoting TAFE and VET Pathways

Payments (\$m)

	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
Department of Employment and Workplace Relations	-	4.4	-	-	-

([Budget Paper No 2](#), p. 95, 2024).

The Government will provide \$4.4 million in 2024–25 to drive demand for VET in support of delivering the workforce required to meet Australia’s future skills needs (See [Future Made in Australia](#)). This measure will include delivering strategic communications to increase the appeal of VET for students, parents and teachers, and extending community awareness of Fee-Free TAFE courses in areas of high skills needs which has ensured strong uptake of Fee-Free TAFE places to date.

The Government will provide \$14.6 million over four years to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, and \$1.3 million to the ASQA, to help create a more joined-up tertiary education sector and lay the foundation for broader tertiary education reforms in the future. This includes immediate measures that focus on improving student experience and pathways through better credit recognition, enabling regulatory alignment and improving the evidence base of student movements between sectors through better data collection ([Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio Budget Statement](#), p. 32).

### Other portfolio areas

#### *Housing*

The Government has allocated \$1.8 million over two years from 2024–25 for the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations to deliver streamlined skills assessments for migrants from comparable countries who wish to work in Australia’s housing construction industry ([Budget Paper No 2](#), p. 75, 2024).

#### *Nuclear-Powered Submarine Program – workforce and supply chain investments*

The Government will provide \$101.8 million over seven years from 2024–25 to continue to build the Australian industrial workforce required to support the delivery of Australia’s conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarines. Funding includes:

- \$68.4 million over seven years from 2024–25 for initiatives delivered through the new Skills and Training Academy:
  - \$34.7 million over six years from 2024–25 for the Shipbuilding Employment Pathways initiative to deliver a pilot apprenticeship program in trades required to support the nuclear-powered submarine enterprise.
  - \$24.4 million over seven years from 2024–25 to deliver a training program on material testing.
  - \$4.7 million over four years from 2024–25 for customised bridging and aptitude testing programs for welders, to support the transition of new and existing workers into the nuclear-powered submarine enterprise.
  - \$3.9 million over four years from 2024–25 to train TAFE teachers to deliver courses relevant to key professions within the nuclear-powered submarine enterprise.
  - \$0.7 million over four years from 2024–25 to co-design training programs with industry relevant to the nuclear-powered submarine enterprise.
- \$33.5 million over six years from 2024–25 for initiatives to enhance domestic industry and workforce capacity (See [Future Made in Australia](#)):
  - \$17.2 million in 2024–25 to expand Australian industry participation in the nuclear-powered submarine supply chain.
  - \$16.3 million over six years from 2024–25 for 3,000 scholarships for students studying undergraduate STEM courses relevant to the nuclear-powered submarine enterprise. (See Higher Education).

### *Supporting Sports Participation*

\$34.2 million will be allocated over three years from 2024–25 towards the *Water and Snow Safety Program* to reduce water and snow-related injuries and deaths through research, vocational education and training ([Budget Paper No 2](#), p. 131, 2024).

### **Gender implications of these budget measures**

According to the Government’s [Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality](#), it has “prioritised action on gender segregation of the labour market by recruiting and retaining more women into trades and other occupations through apprenticeship supports, fee-free TAFE places and targets in the Australian Skills Guarantee”, yet women are largely invisible in any of the Budget measures relating to VET. There is substantial funding for VET, and a number of good initiatives, but there is no explicit mention of female students other than \$55.6 million over four years from 2024–25 to establish the *Building Women’s Careers* program (See *Future Made in Australia* for details).

Better access to careers information, advertising to promote VET, improving articulation between TAFE and higher education will benefit and pathways into STEM courses relevant to building nuclear submarines will all benefit some women, but older women needing to retrain, women from CALD backgrounds, women with disabilities and First Nations women appear to have been overlooked.

It is also worth noting that there is no mention of VET courses in childcare or aged care, which many women are likely to choose for personal and family reasons, even if there are opportunities in construction, engineering and shipbuilding. The Health and Aged Care section

does refer to an allocation of \$65.6 million over four years from 2024–25 to attract and retain aged care workers, as well as collecting more reliable data, and improve the outcomes for people receiving aged care services but does not elaborate on where those much needed aged care workers will come from.

The lack of focus on women is disappointing given the Government’s commitment to achieving economic equality and security. We hope that it will be addressed in the final report of the [consultation](#) undertaken recently with a range of stakeholders to guide policy and program design to assist women to achieve higher-paying careers via VET pathways.

## **Recommendations**

NFAW calls for:

- The Government to take a broader view of VET rather than concentrating on specific industries or trades. While we appreciate the Government’s position with regard to green energy and submarine construction, there are other industries and trades that also need support. The [2023 list of skills in shortage](#) includes technicians, human resources staff, truck drivers and community and personal service workers, as well as tradespeople.
- While we commend the Government’s endeavours [to include data and analysis](#) to demonstrate the outcomes experienced by different groups of women, including First Nations women, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, women with disability, women of different ages, and LGBTIQ+ people, we recommend that the Government prioritise the collection and publication of data on women’s participation in all areas of tertiary education and on student movements between sectors.
- Research to better understand how students use education to achieve personal and economic goals, and to identify different attitudes and patterns of behaviour among female and male students. A clear understanding of the choices students make, and the factors constraining those choices, will improve outcomes for individuals and the community.