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Submission

by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)

To

The Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee

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Gender segregation in the workplace and its impact on women's economic equality

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ABOUT NCVER

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) is an independent body responsible for collecting, managing, analysing and communicating research and statistics about vocational education and training. This submission provides data from the National VET Provider Collection and National Apprentice and Trainee Collection and research findings relevant to the inquiry into gender segregation in the workplace and its impact on women's economic equality.

RESPONSE TO TERMS OF REFERENCE

The nature and extent of industrial and occupational gender segregation in Australian workplaces relative to comparable jurisdictions, including gender segregation in tertiary education courses.

Many of the gendered patterns evident in tertiary education courses (vocational education and training and higher education courses) are repeated in the Australian labour market (Clarke & Simon, 2015, p26).

This phenomenon, the authors state, is not only bad for gender equality, it also undermines Australia's economy and makes attracting and retaining underutilised sources of talent, including women, essential to economic growth and prosperity (2015, p26).

Data from the National VET Provider Collection, published in [Total VET students and courses 2015 \(table 5\)](#), show that of the 4.5 million students enrolled in vocational

education and training (VET) in Australia in 2015, 53.5% were male students compared with 43.2% female students.

Before Total VET activity¹ data was collected and published by NCVER, data on government-funded training activity was available and it shows the difference in enrolment numbers for females and males has remained largely unchanged at least for the last 10 years, as table 1 shows.

Table 1 Participation in government-funded VET by gender, 2006-2015 (%)

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Male	52.8	52.6	52.7	52.8	52.6	51.9	51.7	52.1	52.1	52.7
Female	47.0	47.3	47.2	46.9	47.2	47.9	48.1	47.7	47.7	47.1
Not known	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2

Source: 2006-2015 National VET Provider Collection

In terms of training qualifications, female students tend to study higher level qualifications. Data from 2015 show 24.6% of all females undertaking training enrolled in a diploma or higher qualification compared with 12.9% of all males [Total VET students and courses 2015 \(table 7\)](#). Three key messages stand out:

1. Looking at the VET courses, it is clear there is a gender divide in course choice. In 2015, 27.4% of female students enrolled in management and commerce related courses compared with 16.6% of males. On the other hand, the most popular field of education for males was engineering and related technologies with 24.6% of male enrolments compared with 2.8% of female enrolments; see [Total VET students and courses 2015 \(table 7\)](#).
2. Within apprenticeships and traineeships gender continues to influence occupational pathways. NCVER data show that from 1995 to 2016 the proportion of females commencing an apprenticeship or traineeship in the technician and trade occupations has fluctuated between 10% and 25% of all trade commencements; currently it is 13.5% (NCVER, 2016b). Over this same period, similar proportions of females have completed a trade apprenticeship; these women are almost wholly concentrated in the lower-paid trades of hairdressing and food (ABS, 2016). This contrasts sharply with the approximately 55% of women making up the commencements in the non-trade occupations, such as those in community and personal services, clerical and administrative, and retail and sales.
3. The fact that more females enrol in higher level VET qualifications (diploma and above) may explain why females are more likely to access income contingent loans, such as the former VET FEE-HELP, a key finding in *A preliminary analysis of the outcomes of students assisted by VET FEE-HELP*. It is worth noting that gender pay gaps and the fact that women tend to work in lower-paid occupations in health care and social assistance industries, for example in child care and age care, (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2016), could be factors affecting compulsory repayments for income contingent loans.

Current gender disaggregated data is available from NCVER reports and from data tools including the [Total VET students and courses by equity group](#) data visualisation tool.

¹ Total VET activity (TVA) data, which provides more complete picture of training because it includes training activity from public and private training providers, was published for the first time in 2015. Further information about TVA data is available from [NCVER's website](#).

Remedies appropriate for Australia [to address gender segregation], including but not limited to:

a) Measures to encourage women's participation in male-dominated occupations and industries

While NCVER has not recently undertaken research in this area, it recommends the below approaches when considering ways to encourage women's participation in male-dominated occupations and industries. These approaches are outlined in the refereed paper by Kira Clarke, from the University of Melbourne, and Linda Simon from Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE) as presented at the 23rd National Vocational Education and Training Research Conference (NCVER, 2015). Clarke and Simon's research drew on a national survey of career exploration practitioners and industry and VET stakeholders.

The authors point out that there are a number of challenges for strengthening career exploration focused on young women, including: a lack of access to mentors and successful role models within science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and non-traditional occupations; the training and resources to support the work of career education practitioners in schools; and, the complex nature of school-industry relationships.

Approaches

- Modify advice and information provided by career practitioners that inadvertently reinforces social gender stereotypes in schools, particularly those related to specific industries and occupations. Gender stereotyping, the report says, was described as starting early in childhood, making non-gendered career exploration an important part of education in primary and secondary schools
- Tailor career exploration information for each young woman. Survey respondents described existing practices as not effectively responding to and reflecting the interests and needs of young women and this was particularly problematic for young women in regional, rural and remote areas, who often have limited exposure to career exploration opportunities. Respondents commonly endorsed programs that included a self-assessment element in which young women reflected on their skills and interests and matched these with career opportunities
- Develop career explorations programs that include hearing from role models and access to mentors. Respondents strongly endorsed the benefits of including successful women from STEM and traditional trades to speak to classes and career days, videos of successful women in resource kits and on websites, and providing access to female-led and female-friendly STEM and traditional trade workplaces
- Support 'taster', work experience and work-placement opportunities at carefully chosen sites. Respondents described a need for 'female friendly opportunities' to support exploration of STEM and traditional trade roles and occupations. Active experiential learning opportunities, enabled through work placement and through school-based strategies, were identified by respondents as an important component of effective career development approaches
- Involve intermediary and community organisations. Respondents, particularly those from industry and non-government organisations, emphasised the role these organisations play in developing and providing career development in school particularly in programs targeted at young women
- Foster partnership arrangements between schools and community, business and industry stakeholders as a way to promote and make relevant information readily accessible to young women and career guidance practitioners. These types of partnership arrangements were also described as enabling more focused and targeted career planning activities in response to skill shortage need in local economies.

Respondents also provided policy-level recommendations, including:

- integrate and embed career exploration curriculum in schools. Explicit integration with what schools teach is required with many respondents saying there should be a 'highly visible and mandatory career education curriculum'. One possible strategy is the adoption of school-wide personal learning plans for all students – not just those perceived to be struggling
- provide greater clarity and guidance on school priorities and allocating funding. Respondents emphasised the need for greater clarity on the best practice approaches and strategies to improve the current gendered post-school study and employment patterns. To strengthen young women's career exploration, respondents suggested that the coherent and mandated adoption of the Australian blueprint for career development was a possible step policymakers could take
- prioritise the provision of effective career exploration opportunities in all schools which include a wide range of career exploration activities and experiences to increase curiosity and awareness of careers, such as school talks, WorldSkills, taster, conference attendance, work experience, visits to local industries and work with local volunteer/ community groups
- introduce career exploration activities and strategies as early as possible in secondary school or in the latter years of primary school via a staged career exploration – a cycle of activities that promote an increasing depth and focus of exploration. For example, a staged approach may include initial broad personal reflection on interests and capabilities in primary and early secondary school before progressing to research on related industries and finally taster opportunities in roles and workplaces in a chosen industry in senior secondary school
- mandate the professionalisation of career guidance. Respondents considered the adoption of the Australian blueprint important in addressing the issue of accessibility, as the Blueprint recognises the need for specific qualifications for career advisers and the establishment and maintenance of ongoing professional development.

Clarke and Simon's refereed paper '*That's not a job for a lady': understanding the impact of gender on career exploration activities in schools*', was published by NCVER in [The 23rd National Vocational Education and Training Research Conference 'No Frills': refereed papers.](#)

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