



Supporting Women to achieve VET- based careers.

Discussion Paper
December 2023



IntoWork Australia is a leading national provider of employment, skills and support services that enable educational, economic and workforce participation. IntoWork has 40 years' experience in the delivery of workforce participation solutions and community support programs. IntoWork delivers services through its national Group of 19 businesses and delivery partners, employing over 1,800 staff in more than 140 locations across the country. Each business in the Group shares a common goal of creating 'Vibrant Futures' through quality services delivered in local communities.

IntoWork Australia offers a range of services linked to VET based careers for women, this includes Group Training, Registered Training, Australian Apprenticeship Support Network, Government Employment Services, and funded cohort specific programs. Each IntoWork Australia business has strong representation of females at all staffing levels, including support staff, trainers and field mentors, mid-tier, senior leadership, and board membership.

IntoWork Australia's National Group Training Services (Delivered by AGA, Kestrel, HTN, MRAEL, Skill Hire and Work & Training) has seen 1,100+ females successfully complete their traineeship or apprenticeship since 2018. This equates to 45.95% of total completions of that period. The current active female Apprentices / Trainees exceeds 640 females with the IntoWork GTO network.

IntoWork Australia's National AASN services (Delivered by Mas National and the Mas Experience) currently supports more than 18,500 female apprentices, representing 33+% of total active apprentices. Mas has supported over 17,000 females complete their Apprenticeship or Traineeship since Feb 2020.

IntoWork Australia's AASN, Registered Training Organisations and Group Training Organisations have representation of females at all staffing levels, including support roles, trainers, mid-tier, and senior leadership staff. This representation ensures that as an organisation we walk the walk and talk the talk.

Examples of programs for women considering, or currently completing VET careers include:

- Delivery of Women in Solar (Funded by Solar Vic) – A specific program in which AGA places women with host employers to work either as plumbers or electricians in the Solar Industry (Clean Energy sector)
- Delivery of female only Multi-industry Pre-Employment programs. These 2–8-week programs include White Card, Introduction to construction, electrical, carpentry, plumbing and welding as industry tasters.
- Mas Mates – National Women in Non-Traditional Trade Career Advice Team providing consultations to Women to discover what trade opportunities are available to women.
- Mas Career Advice – Supporting Australia with general career advice across all sectors and supporting education and awareness of Apprenticeship / Traineeship pathways.
- Female only VDSS Building and construction classes for female & nonbinary students in Yrs 11 and 12

IntoWork continues to work with local and national employers in ensuring VET pathways are available irrespective of gender. IntoWork has supported employers in workplace inclusivity. Examples include supporting a Queensland mining employer to install female shower blocks and amenities, ensuring that women have the right environmental supports to succeed. IntoWork's GTO stream has seen the support of multiple employers when an Apprentice has commenced their qualification then requires time off due to parental leave. Providing support in the lead up, within and post the leave period, these apprentices have thrived in their careers and created a legacy for the women who will join the workforce after them. IntoWork is proud to demonstrate how its services work with local employers to support women to succeed in a VET career, as demonstrated: AGA carpentry apprentice Casey on following her passion to pursue a career in construction:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJ9NOUV4ebA>

This discussion paper encompasses the views of the IntoWork Group of businesses, using the lens from training, employment and support services that are delivered, supporting more women to achieve long term and sustainable VET- based careers.

For more information on the work IntoWork Australia, please visit www.IntoWork.com.au

Supporting women to achieve VET-based careers.

IntoWork Australia supports the Government's commitment to advancing gender equality as a national priority and welcomes the opportunity to respond to this discussion paper. The 2022 NCVET data demonstrates the positive impact VET pathways has with high employment rates of 91.8% post completion of training.

This report shows insights and opportunities for consideration in driving more attraction, engagement, and ultimate career longevity for women undertaking VET-based careers. An awareness of what VET career options are available to women is the critical first step in their career journey.

Design of initiatives

IntoWork Australia commits to continued support of initiatives to drive higher female participation and success in VET-based careers. For any initiative to be effective, measurement of outcomes is fundamental. Examples where initiatives have clear measurements and resulted in positive success include the Victorian Government's procurement strategy where 10% of the total workforce need to be Apprentices / Trainees and 4 of every 10 Apprentices / Trainees need to be female. Measured commitments drive the engagement and promotion of opportunity to women. While research shows that quotas can have a significant impact on gender diversity in workplaces, there must also be a commitment to building a safe and inclusive workplace after women are recruited. This will increase retention rates of women in VET careers. The following elements collectively aim to create a more inclusive, supportive, and responsive environment for women pursuing and thriving in VET-based careers.

Early Engagement and continued education are critical influencers on career choice. Implementation of Year 9 and 10 programs including immersion days to highlight the breadth of opportunities available and foster enthusiasm early on. These would also engage and educate their male counterparts to drive allyship, education and a culture of inclusivity. Early engagement, from primary school age, will broaden rather than narrow each female student's horizons.

IntoWork supports the need to sustain federally funded initiatives for Women in Trade career consultations, this funding has proven to increase the likelihood of women pursuing trade pathways. Career consultations at schools need to continue to have a balanced focus on all options available, rather than the traditional tertiary pathway. Research shows that VET programs are proven to increase student engagement rates in schools.

IntoWork believes in the value of continuing to leverage corporate Australia's commitment to social responsibility including increasing diversity in the workplace. This has been successful in C Suite roles, however lower levels roles and supervisory roles tend to revert back to the gender stereotype of their sector. It is suggested that an education piece to supervisors is required to ensure that apprentices and trainees are placed in supportive environments.

Australia's aging workforce is a relatively untapped source for workforce solutions. A pilot initiative designed to adjust apprenticeship funding for older women, incentivising both candidates and employers, ensuring a more inclusive workforce. Further adjustments may also include reviewing full time study and/or work requirements in addition to the utilisation of lived experience. Models that don't hinder career progression may also be considered. Occupations requiring traditional university studies may consider traineeship pathways for those with lived experience and workforce experience to continue employment engagement whilst attaining further qualifications e.g.: A qualified Education Support staff person may do a teaching traineeship as opposed to requiring Full Time University completion of studies that may withdraw them from the workforce for a period of time.

Further to this, greater collaboration between the VET and tertiary sector would be beneficial to government and industry. One example of this could be that women who decide to discontinue university studies could be redirected towards VET instead of being lost to the education system. This initiative could recognise prior learning and transferable skills as a way of fast tracking the student through the VET pathway.

Tailored Support

IntoWork Australia's commitment to delivering effective solutions in supporting individuals with workforce solutions, particularly focusing on the National Stream of Group Training Organisation (GTO) services. The emphasis is on engaging host employers, linking candidate placements, and addressing issues related to the environment for women in male-dominated roles. GTOs play a crucial role in engaging host employers and facilitating candidate placements. IntoWork's skilled local field officers contribute to creating a supportive environment for women in their placements. Whilst this support is provided, it is noted that ongoing education is necessary for supervisors and employees to address challenges faced by female apprentices.

IntoWork Australia highlights challenges such as sexual harassment, inequality of employee supports, and a lack of understanding for women in non-traditional environments. Regular examples of females opting out of employment due to these challenges highlight the need for continued education and support. The emphasis needs to be on men developing understanding and empathy, which are crucial elements in retaining female apprentices in non-traditional roles.

Consideration is given to endorsing female-specific GTO services, recognising the unique challenges faced by women in the workforce. This could involve tailored support, education, and resources aimed specifically at addressing issues faced by female apprentices.

IntoWork Australia's network of RTOs continues to see the need for tailored support for females. Government funding currently supports and promotes Fee-Free training for both the private and public sector. IntoWork Australia encourages continued balanced funding for both the public and private sector to ensure consumer choice.

IntoWork proposes free preparatory training for women to undertake industry tasters in the industry they are interested in. These programs assist women to make informed decisions about their career paths and increase their confidence in pursuing non-traditional and traditional VET roles. IntoWork further advocates for funding programs that cover mental health, physical health, and job life skills. IntoWork recognises the importance of addressing these transitional elements to increase completion rates of apprenticeships and traineeships and ensure the right academic, physical, and mental environment is present.

The challenges faced by female apprentices suggests a multifaceted approach involving tailored education, specialised support services, and preparatory training to address these challenges and promote a more inclusive and supportive work environment for women in non-traditional roles.

Inclusive VET environments and workplaces

The following outlines challenges and potential solutions related to VET, specifically focusing on making both the employer and the training environment more inclusive for women. IntoWork recognised the complexity of VET ecosystems and that it requires the inclusivity from both employers and the training environment, making it more complex compared to single-environment jobs.

Learnings can continue to be taken from successful European models where the ecosystem around VET is well-thought-out, with employers and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) located in hubs with accessible public transport. These hubs often incorporate living labs or university research facilities, providing clear pathways beyond VET. In Australia, we see success evidenced of having childcare facilities on campus at the training environment, acknowledging the role this plays in supporting women in VET, with women often being the primary carer.

IntoWork proposes the idea of an endorsement system, like a 'Fair Trade' sticker on food, to identify organisations as safe and inclusive environments for women. This could serve as a recruitment strategy for employers, holding them to higher standards and placing responsibility on the employer to create a safe workplace. The inclusivity endorsement may also extend to the accommodation of women with childcare responsibilities and SME businesses can have ability to consider staggered working shifts to support early morning commencements onsite of which traditional childcare arrangements do not support.

A range of subconscious activities can cultivate the support and inclusiveness for women in the employment or training environments. In the trades space, uniform design is a known gender barrier in traditional trades. Uniforms are traditionally designed for men, making it uncomfortable or challenging for women to work in. IntoWork suggests encouragement to industry in the redesigning of uniforms as a straightforward solution to removing this barrier.

Further, IntoWork believes that the influence and role of female trainers in delivering VET is significant. Not only to female students but also to males. We recognise the importance of changing the normalisation of gender roles within industries by having diverse role models. In Victoria AGA provide year 11 and 12 female only VETIS classes. This has demonstrated higher engagement, psychologically safe learning environments and peer support to complete studies within the construction field.

In summary, the provided information highlights the multifaceted nature of challenges in making VET more inclusive for women. IntoWork suggests a range of solutions, including childcare support, endorsement systems for inclusive employers, flexibility in working hours, uniform redesign, and the importance of female trainers to create a more supportive and equal learning and working environment for women in traditionally male-dominated sectors. In doing these things, more women can thrive in long term careers through VET pathways and become the role models for future generations to consider these career options.