



18 December 2023

By website: [Consultation hub | Provide your feedback - Supporting women to achieve VET-based careers - DEWR Consult hub](#)

DCA submission in response to Discussion Paper: Supporting women to achieve VET-based careers

Dear Secretary, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Natalie James

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on your Discussion paper: *Supporting women to achieve VET-based careers*, November 2023.

Diversity Council Australia (DCA) is the independent not-for-profit peak body leading diversity and inclusion in the workplace. We have over 1,300 member organisations, reaching approximately 20% of the Australian labour market.

A note on language:

DCA recognises that a diversity of terms is used to describe people's lived experience. We recognise and respect an individual's right to identify with terms that they feel most comfortable with. We also recognise the limitations of binary language. However, sometimes binary categories have very real effects on peoples' experiences and may be necessary to convey the gendered nature and dynamics of our society.

DCA recognises that language is socially constructed and constantly evolving and our intention is always to be inclusive and to be open to change.

A note on intersectionality:


DCA recommends an intersectional approach when developing and implementing policy and programs. Intersectionality refers to how some people experience compounded discrimination due to multiple marginalising and interlinked characteristics.ⁱ An intersectional lens on the lived experience of the diversity of women will add significant value to inform the development of policies and programs to support women achieve in VET-based occupations.

DCA research and resources relevant to this discussion:

Women's economic inequality:

- [She's Price\(d\)less - 2022 update report - Diversity Council Australia \(dca.org.au\)](#)

This report is the fourth in a series of reports prepared in conjunction with the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) based on econometric modelling applied to data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey. The report also used data from WGEAs workplace survey and ABS data.



DCA has also made a number of submissions calling on the government to address women's economic inequality through reforms to provide universal childcare, enable a more equal share of unpaid care and domestic work through improvements in paid parental leave, improve workplace flexibility – all factors contributing to the persistent gender pay gap between men and women in Australia:

- [Paid Parental Leave Amendment \(More Support for Working Families\) Bill 2023](#)
- [ACCC Childcare Inquiry - Diversity Council Australia](#)
- [Early Childhood education inquiry - Diversity Council Australia \(dca.org.au\)](#)
- [Paid Parental Leave Amendment Bill 2022 - Diversity Council Australia \(dca.org.au\)](#)
- [National Gender Equality Strategy - Diversity Council Australia \(dca.org.au\)](#)
- [Work and Care Inquiry Submission - Diversity Council Australia](#)
- [Employment White Paper Response - Diversity Council Australia \(dca.org.au\)](#)

Inclusive workplaces:

- [The Case for Inclusion@Work - Diversity Council Australia \(dca.org.au\)](#)

This report is based on the latest findings, yet to be published, from the Inclusion@Work Index and explores key reasons why inclusion at work is beneficial for both people and business.

- [Inclusive Recruitment Tools - Diversity Council Australia \(dca.org.au\)](#)
- [Inclusive Recruitment At Work - Diversity Council Australia \(dca.org.au\)](#)
- [Racism at Work - Diversity Council Australia \(dca.org.au\)](#)

DCA's research with people who experience racism and an expert panel, as well as over 1,500 Australian workers, informs this evidence-based organisational framework for anti-racism action within the workplace.

- [Gari Yala \(Speak the Truth\) Gendered Insights - Diversity Council \(dca.org.au\)](#)

The Gari Yala project documented the workplace experiences of over 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers. This report analyses the results by gender and found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who are carers experience 'triple jeopardy' – they are more likely to feel unsafe at work, more likely to carry extra expectations to make their workplace culturally sensitive and engaged and less supported when they encounter racism and unfair treatment.

- [The State of Flex in the Australian Workforce - Diversity Council \(dca.org.au\)](#)

This report highlighted a positive link between flexible work and workplace inclusion. It also showed that stigma around care, gender and flexible work continues and there remains a significant gap between the uptake of flexible working between men and women.

Comment:

The Australian government has made it clear that addressing the economic inequality of women is a national priority. In September 2023, [Working Future. The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities](#) was released, declaring a vision for a dynamic and inclusive labour market in which everyone has the opportunity for secure, fairly paid work. However, to achieve this vision, a number of systemic and social barriers must be addressed. Access to affordable early childhood education and care, the unequal distribution of unpaid care between men and women, discriminatory attitudes, occupational segregation and gender-based violence are some of the key barriers identified for women.

DCA welcome's the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations invitation to consult on policy and program development to address systemic barriers for women in vocational education and training (VET) pathways. Increasing the participation and achievement of women within the VET system will greatly improve the likelihood of the government's vision being realised.

Design of initiatives:

Essential to the design of good policy and programs in VET is centring the voices of all women, including women who are marginalised. DCA's [research](#) over the last six years has shown that culturally and racially marginalised (CARM) women experience a range of entrenched systemic barriers at work. One of the key factors identified as 'locking' CARM women out of leadership roles for example,



is ignoring their voices. The same can be said of 'locking' marginalised women out of opportunities in VET, particularly access to higher-paying careers via VET pathways. Good program and policy design must consider the lived experience of all women, including those with multiple marginalised identities such as cultural and racial diversity, being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, LGBTIQ+ or having a disability. Given the nature of this lived experience, it is also critical that policy and programs are designed with a trauma informed approach if they are to be sensitive to the particular needs of marginalised and disadvantaged women.

Communication and information need to be targeted and specific to enable access for all women. The VET system is complex. Communicating the system in plain English and translations, ensuring accessibility audit reviews and promoting programs and initiatives to younger women – at school – are suggested strategies to improve access and to create career pathways much earlier.

Programs need to be designed to take into account the unequal care load of many women whether they are caring for children or other family members. [Research](#) suggests that women disproportionately take on this care load which may act as a barrier to accessing VET pathways. By ensuring flexibility in program design, women who juggle caring responsibilities with education and paid work, are more likely to be attracted to VET and have a greater chance of progressing towards employment and advancing in their career.

Use of tailored support:

DCA recognises that tailored approaches for different groups of women are necessary. This is particularly true for women experiencing disadvantage and multiple disadvantage. As mentioned earlier, a trauma informed approach will ensure appropriate support is provided.

DCA's submissions to government on the need for urgent reforms to provide universal childcare, enable a more equal share of unpaid care and domestic work through improvements in paid parental leave, and improved workplace flexibility all speak to key considerations that should be taken into account. These mechanisms all contribute to a supportive environment for women to enter and progress within a VET pathway.

Inclusive VET environments and workplaces:

The provision of childcare services close by and the use of flexible working arrangements and training opportunities are essential contextual factors to support inclusivity. DCA's research and evidence-based resources assisting workplaces to be more inclusive of women (and other diverse groups) are referenced earlier and provide useful guidance for policy and program design.

Training and workplace environments that are culturally and racially safe, where providers understand the impacts of discrimination and racism on women in training and at work, will be more inclusive and supportive for all women involved.

There needs to be a greater level of accountability of providers within the VET system to ensure environments are inclusive and safe. DCA suggests that the Department consider the potential for an accreditation scheme which can identify women-friendly, culturally and racially safe workplaces, including those deemed safe for LGBTIQ+ women and women with disability.

Building the cultural and racial literacy of program providers as well as building the resilience of women participating through support initiatives are both important. The physical environment in education and at work should also better accommodate the needs of women such as ensuring worksites have bathrooms for women.

Hybrid and flexible programs will encourage more women to participate if they can accommodate other responsibilities into their daily routine. This will also benefit more mature aged women.

Please feel free to contact myself or Jacqueline Braw, Senior Advocacy and Government Relations Manager, on jacqueline@dca.org.au should you require any further information about



this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Annese', written in a cursive style.

Lisa Annese
Chief Executive Office

ⁱ Diversity Council Australia (V. Mapedzahama, F. Laffernis, A. Barhoum, and J. O'Leary). *Culturally and Racially Marginalised Women in Leadership: A framework for (intersectional) organisational action*, Diversity Council Australia, 2023.