Review of Skills base in NSW and the Future Challenges for Vocational Education and Training
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal
PO Box Q290
QVB Post Office
NSW 1230

24 February 2006-02-22
Dear Madam/Sir

Response to Review of Skills base in NSW and the Future Challenges for Vocational Education and Training

Please find enclosed the response of the NSW members of Women in Adult and Vocational Education Inc. (WAVE) to the Review of Skills base in NSW and the Future Challenges for Vocational Education and Training.

WAVE as a national not-for profit organisation of women teachers, managers and students involved in Vocational Education and Training and Community Education very much appreciates this opportunity to comment on the review.

For your background information on issues and strategies for women in vocational and technical education please find also attached the Commonwealth document Policy Direction: Lifelong Learning: work related education and training.

WAVE would be happy to be involved in further consultations on the issues raised. For any further discussions please contact me on 9448 4429, or info@converse.com.au.

Yours sincerely,

Robyn Woolley
National Co-Convenor
Women in Adult and Vocational Education
Submission from Women in Adult and Vocational Education Inc (WAVE)

As part of the Review of the Skills Base in NSW and the Future Challenges for Vocational Education and Training, the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) has invited views on a range of issues including:

4.1 Forecast supply and demand for skills in NSW over the next 20 years
4.2 The likely demand for VET if policies for increasing labour force participation to eliminate the potential problems posed by an ageing population were to be successful including the implications for males and females
4.4 The factors that will affect the take-up of VET (4.4) including impact of pay structures and IR, casualisation and part time employment, factors preventing mature workers from increasing their skills and undertaking additional training

In relation to these three areas (4.1, 4.2 and 4.4), WAVE would like to highlight specific issues relating to women's participation in the workforce and in training and propose specific strategies targeting women which will address some of the issues raised by the Tribunal.

Increasing women's participation in the workforce

Women represent approximately half of the population in NSW, yet are under-represented in the NSW workforce. Women in the NSW labour market of 3 227 300 people employed in paid work, had a 44.7% share (1 441 200), while men's share was 55.3% (1 786 100) in March 2005. This is despite the fact that the labour force participation rate for females has been steadily increasing over the last 25 years and is at 55% in 2005 compared to males at 71% (see Table 2.1 IPART Issues Paper p.5).

There is clearly capacity to increase the participation of women in the workforce. There are a number of barriers, which currently prevent women from fully participating. Some of the key factors in overcoming these barriers include:

- Create family friendly and flexible work practices
- Address industry image and work culture
- Provide affordable childcare
- Examine taxation regimes for women
- Consider skills shortages arising from ageing workforce
- Counteract under-representation of women in full time employment
- Address income earning gap for women
- Focus on young and on mature aged women
- Engage women from disadvantaged backgrounds

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· Redress under representation of women in emerging technologies.

Create family friendly and flexible work practices

Research\(^3\) suggests that women seek out those industries, occupations and levels of employment that provide family friendly and flexible work practices, as this allows women to balance work and family commitments. In order to engage women into some of the skills shortages training areas new strategies and policies need to be developed to create family friendly and flexible work practices.

At this point in time, it is difficult to predict the impact of Commonwealth policy shifts in industrial relations, welfare to work, family payments and retirement and superannuation on the labour market. Suffice it to say, that the combined effect of these policies and increasing casualisation and competency based pay in the workforce is likely to inhibit women's training opportunities, participation and remuneration.

Address industry image and work culture

Some of the industries with skills shortages do not offer a women-friendly work culture and/or do not present an attractive image to women considering employment. Strategies for creating a more inclusive and women-friendly work culture and promoting a positive image of the industry to women could improve women's participation.

Provide affordable childcare

Vocational skills wastage can be the result of the lack of accessible and affordable childcare places when qualified and experienced women workers remain at home to care for their children or choose part time work.

Examine taxation regimes for women

Women's choices about work need to be seen in the context of the current tax system. According to Professor Patricia Apps "the effective rate structure can be expected to have significant and large negative effects on female labour supply, due to high effective rates on the second income, especially when combined with limited access to affordable child care"\(^4\).

Consider skills shortages arising from ageing workforce

At a recent DEWR JOB futures National Conference 2005, Malisa Golightly, Deputy Secretary – Employment DEWR, drew attention to age profiles, at a national level, which suggest that ageing may worsen skills shortages for nurses, midwives, medical imaging professionals, civil engineers, metal fitters and machinists\(^5\).

\(^5\) "Labour market trends and skills in-demand", 2005

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The opportunity presents for policy settings and a change in work practices and perceptions to encourage more women to participate. This could impact positively on some of the major workforce issues raised by an ageing population and the dramatic increase in part time work.

**Counteract under-representation of women in full time employment**

It is important to take steps to counteract the under-representation of women in full time employment. Women are already over represented in both part time and lower paid work.

Men participate in full time work at a rate of 84.8% (1515400) compared to their participation in part time work at 15.2% (270,700). While women are 44.7% of the total workforce they are only 34.7% (605,500) of full time workers and they represent 70.1% (635,700) of all part time workers.

**Address income earning gap for women**

The low level income earning capacities of many women can be a disincentive for women's participation in the NSW workforce.

The *Average Weekly Earnings, Australia* report published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) shows the income earnings gap between men and women in NSW. Women in NSW earn significantly lower wages than men. The average salary of men was $928 per week in 2004, whereas women's wages were only about 71 per cent of men's wages. Women are clustered in industries with lower average wages and are in the lower paid levels within industries.

**Focus on young and mature aged women**

The participation of young women in the NSW workforce needs particular attention. In a media release launching a recent research report on young people in Australia, Dr John Spierings from the Dusseldorp Skills Forum highlighted the fact that "more than 330,000 of the young Australians not engaged in full time learning or work are female. The difference between the sexes is the largest since 1989 and is markedly higher than in previous years." It can be expected that NSW mirrors this Australia-wide trend.

The data provided in the IPART Issues Paper for this review shows the declining trend in employment for mature aged women. Strategies need to be developed to encourage mature aged women, especially those with high levels of skills into the workforce.

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6 Average Weekly Earnings: Australia – 6302.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Perth, 24 February 2005

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Engage women from disadvantaged backgrounds

In order to engage more women into the NSW workforce particular attention needs to be given to supporting women from disadvantaged backgrounds, including Aboriginal women, women with a disability, rural and remote women, women in custody, women from non-English speaking backgrounds, women from low social-economic backgrounds, mature-aged women and young women at risk. In particular workforce strategies need to consider the diversity of women and factors of multiple disadvantage.

Redress under-representation of women in emerging technologies

The gender desegregation of industries is likely to be continued, and exacerbated, by short term moves to address skills shortages and to meet the needs of emerging technologies from a workforce pool which does not include women. In order to encourage women’s participation in the NSW workforce, it is imperative that long term strategies are put in place to redress the gender desegregation of industries (eg male domination of traditional trades and technological occupations and female domination of hairdressing and food trades). Training strategies which are particularly important in this context are outlined below.

It has been said of the new high-tech economy that it is leaving women behind. “It’s not that women are hitting a glass ceiling in the high-tech sector. It’s that they don’t have the keys to open the door”, according to Mary Ellen Smyth, President of the AAUW Educational Foundation. Only 29% of the technology workforce in the US is comprised of women and there is a lack of role models to encourage women to pursue careers in technology.

Increasing women’s participation in training

Vocational and technical education (VTE) can take a major part in addressing some of the barriers for women in employment and training. TAFE NSW as the public provider with a large range of training pathways and support services available to women is especially well placed to meet some of these challenges.

Key strategies for VTE and TAFE NSW to increase women’s participation need to include:

- Facilitate women’s participation in a wider range of industry training
- Provide prevocational training
- Encourage women into apprenticeships
- Provide customised programs for young and mature aged women
- Employ female VTE teachers as role models
- Provide pathways and support to women with multiple disadvantage
- Maintain range of VTE options by public VTE provider.

10 Women at Work, American Association of University Women (AAUW), Washington 2003

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Facilitate women's participation in a wider range of industry training

Strategies and resources to target an increase in women’s participation in training in a wider range of industries are critical to redressing the gender desegregation of industries.

Provide prevocational training for women

There is a need for targeted prevocational training to encourage women into apprenticeships, particularly in skills shortage areas. A successful example is the TAFE NSW Jumpstart program in partnership with NRMA to increase the number of young women training in the automotive field.

Encourage women into apprenticeships

Women's participation in apprenticeships in TAFE NSW has dropped from 17.8% (3734) in 2002 to 14.1% (2317) in 2004. This is particularly unfortunate at a time when efforts to increase the trade training rate\textsuperscript{11} are beginning to succeed. Apprenticeship approvals in NSW increased by nearly 30% from 15 036 in 2003 to 19 006 in 2004\textsuperscript{12}.

Provide customised programs for young women and for mature age women

There is a need to retain and extend existing programs for young women, such as Helping Young People at Risk programs, which are particularly targeted to young women. These programs provide pathways to further study and employment.

Mature age workers (45 years and over) are the fastest growing group of students in TAFE NSW a trend which could be directed to targeting women who want to increase their qualifications or to retrain. In 2004 mature age enrolments in TAFE NSW were 94,393 out of total enrolments of 506,930 (18.6%). This has increased from 2000 when it was 74,396 out of total enrolments of 460,908 (16.1%).

The percentage of women enrolled at Certificate III or above in TAFE NSW in 2004 was only 39.7% (94 792) of all women’s enrolments. Existing women only programs in TAFE such as Career Education and Employment for Women and Work Opportunities for Women need to be maintained to provide pathways for a wide range of higher level award vocational programs.

Facilitate pathways and support for disadvantaged women

TAFE NSW also has an impressive record in offering Outreach programs to women which provide employability and other generic skills leading to vocational pathways and higher qualifications. There is evidence to suggest that generic programs for women also contribute significantly to local community building. Preliminary findings for the TAFE NSW Well Women project indicate positive changes for students

\textsuperscript{11} Toner, P 2003 Declining apprentice training rates: causes, consequences and solutions, University of Western Sydney

\textsuperscript{12} Department of Education and Training Annual Report 2004, p.323

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included further study and employment outcomes as well as an increased engagement in the community.\textsuperscript{13}

There are strong equity considerations for sustaining the effort to train women with multiple disadvantage, such as Aboriginal, disabled or rural and remote women. The TAFE NSW program Behind the Label for migrant outworkers in the clothing industry has provided these women with the opportunity to gain qualifications and confidence in job seeking skills to enter the labour market on a better footing.

\textit{Employ female TAFE teachers across training areas as role models}

The demographics of vocational teachers with large numbers likely to retire in the next few years indicate a need for increased vocational teacher training. It is important to increase women's participation in vocational teaching to provide encouragement and role models for female students.

\textit{Maintain range of vocational training options by TAFE NSW as the public provider of VET}

As women are generally on lower incomes they are reliant on the public provision of vocational education to reduce the expense of their education. Disadvantaged women in particular are able to access training at TAFE NSW through fee exemptions, as well as additional support where needed (eg in literacy and numeracy). The competitive training market restricts training opportunities for disadvantaged women as private providers tend to operate in the most commercially lucrative fields of training, leaving the under-resourced public provider struggling to meet second chance and special support needs in a time of budgetary constraint.

\textbf{Attachment}

For background information and further suggested strategies for women in work related education and training please find also attached a research policy paper for the Australian Government Office for Women\textsuperscript{14}.


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