



Submission to the Department of
Employment and Workplace
Relations | Supporting women to
achieve VET-based careers.
(November 2023)



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Preamble

The National Rural Women's Coalition

The National Rural Women's Coalition (the NRWC) is a grass roots organisation, established in 2002, that works to support and grow vibrant rural, remote, and regional communities throughout Australia. We are a coalition of five rural alliances - the Australian Local Government Women's Association, Australian Women in Agriculture, National Rural Health Alliance, Women in Seafood Australasia and Transport Women Australia Limited.

For over twenty years, we have worked to ensure better social, economic, and environmental outcomes for women in rural townships, in rural communities and in primary production throughout Australia.

The NRWC provides a collaborative, powerful national voice for women living in Rural, remote, and regional Australia through:

- Representing the diverse views and voices of women in rural, remote, and regional Australia;
- Providing advice to the Australian Government on policy issues relevant to the views, circumstances and needs of rural women; and
- Contributing to building a positive profile of rural women, their achievements, and their issues.

We believe it is important that the unique views of rural women who reside in the numerous rural, remote, and regional communities throughout Australia as farmers,

businesswomen, community leaders and volunteers, have substantial input into consultations about their communities, industries, needs and issues, including any matters relating to women's rights, gender equality and discrimination.

Following a referral from the Minister for Skills and Training Hon. Brendan O'Connor MP, on 30 November 2022, the House of Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training commenced an inquiry into the perceptions and status of Vocational Education and Training. (VET) Particularly the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training will inquire into and report on the perceptions and status of Vocational Education and Training (VET) available to students and how they impact education and training choices of students and particularly those who lack the necessary foundational skills or experience other disadvantages and employer views and practices in relation to engagement with Vocational Education and Training. (VET)

In late 2023, the Department of Workplace, Employment and Training (DWET) engaged with stakeholders to understand what is most effective in attracting and retaining women in VET-based occupations with low levels of women's participation. The time and insights of stakeholders has already helped to inform settings for the Australian Skills Guarantee and increased support for women in apprenticeships and traineeships. It has also informed the development of the National Skills Agreement and Fee-Free TAFE. The Department of Workplace, Employment and Training (DWET) were keen to build on this advice.

The National Rural Women's Coalition (NRWC) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission specifically informing the department on initiatives that would support rural,

remote, and regional women to achieve higher-paying careers via vocational educational and training (VET) pathways. Not limited to higher-paying careers, VET pathways assist rural, remote, and regional women to upskill, reskill and importantly change careers.

Introduction

The United Nations Secretary General ‘*Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General*’¹ provided two principals to member states firstly an expanded vision of the right to education throughout life (lifelong learning) and secondly a commitment to education as a public, societal endeavour and as a common good. The right to lifelong learning significantly contributes to peace, stability, and productivity in the form of social contract.²

‘No meaningful social contract is possible without the active and equal participation of women and girls. Women’s equal leadership, economic inclusion and gender balanced decision making are simply better for everyone, men, and women alike.’³

The United Nations Secretary General further urged member States and other stakeholders to consider five related and transformative measures:

¹ United Nations Secretary General. ‘*Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General.*’ (2021) A/75/982 United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organisation, International Commission on the Futures of Education by the UNESCO. A/75/982.

² Ibid 1; and United Nations General Assembly, ‘Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015. (21 October 2015) 70/1. ‘Transforming our world, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.’ Seventieth session. Agenda Item 15 & 16. A/Res/70/1.

³ Ibid 1.

- (1) The full realisation of equal rights, through the repeal of all gender-discriminatory laws (target 5.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) ⁴);
- (2) Measures to promote gender parity in all spheres and all levels of decision making, including quotas and special measures;
- (3) Facilitating women's economic inclusion through large-scale investment in the care economy and more support for women entrepreneurs;
- (4) Greater inclusion of younger women; and ⁵
- (5) An emergency response plan to accelerate the eradication of violence against women and girls, as a priority, which the United Nations will support, backed by a global campaign to eliminate any social norms that tolerates, excuses, or overlooks violence against women and girls. (target 5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) ⁶)⁷

'Our Common Agenda' articulates the way forward for member States, for inclusion of women in the 'new green economy' and 'digital economy,' labour guarantees, macroeconomic and industrial policies to boost labour demand, reducing barriers to advance education and labour market participation, including due to gender or other forms of discrimination, expanding apprenticeship schemes and technical and vocational training.⁸

⁴ United Nations General Assembly, 'Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015. (21 October 2015) 70/1. 'Transforming our world, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' Seventieth session. Agenda Item 15 & 16. A/Res/70/1.

⁵ Ibid 1.

⁶ United Nations General Assembly, 'Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015. (21 October 2015) 70/1. 'Transforming our world, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' Seventieth session. Agenda Item 15 & 16. A/Res/70/1

⁷ United Nations Secretary General. 'Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General.' (2021) A/75/982 United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organisation, International Commission on the Futures of Education by the UNESCO. A/75/982.

⁸ United Nations Secretary General. 'Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General.' (2021) A/75/982 United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organisation, International Commission on the Futures of Education by the UNESCO. A/75/982.

Building on this, the National Rural Women's Coalition seeks to have the voices of rural, remote, and regional women strengthened through policy to amplify rural, remote, and regional women's access to lifelong learning. Importantly, the inclusion of rural women's voices would raise the visibility of our Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander sisters, older and younger women; culturally and linguistic diverse women and women who live with a disability in rural, remote, and regional communities of Australia.

National Rural Women's Coalition would advocate that policy and implementation of policy, take an intersectional approach by understanding the lives of these rural women, when implementing any support packages for rural women's lifelong learning and education.

Further, Sustainable Developmental Goals 2030 Agenda (SDG) ⁹ is fast approaching, Australia will have to report back to the United Nations on the implementation of the SDG, the National Rural Women's Coalition advocates with this fast approaching, rural, remote, and regional women should not be left behind.

These opportunities must be seen to be inclusive for rural, remote, and regional women with actionable initiatives in VET based careers such as: -

- (1) safe and respected work and training places;
- (2) the opportunity for women to be entrepreneurs;
- (3) to be offered leadership roles and continued opportunity in VET based careers;

⁹ United Nations General Assembly, 'Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015. (21 October 2015) 70/1. 'Transforming our world, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' Seventieth session. Agenda Item 15 & 16. A/Res/70/1. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

(4) to have access to economic wealth in key growth areas, such as ‘the new green economy’¹⁰ and ‘digital economy’;¹¹ and

(5) be supported to capitalise on growth industries, which will benefit the entire rural community.

We know internationally approximately 44 million jobs will be created in these two sectors alone, rural women need to be a part of these growth industries.¹²

Rural, remote, and regional women should not only be seen to fill the ‘key priority skills’ (KPS)¹³ and job shortages in rural Australia, but be given equal opportunity to be valued and recognised for all they bring to the workplace and communities, such as increased safety¹⁴ and asked, what would they like to do and what career do they aspire to?

Rural, remote, and regional women are integral to the sustainability of rural Australia and must have career pathways congruent to rural parts of Australia. This should include genuine offers of transparent access to lifelong learning. Rural, remote, and regional women of all ages should be seen and listened too, as the cornerstone of the

¹⁰ Queensland Government. (2022) *70 % renewables energy target by 2032, as part of a 62 billion dollars jobs and employment strategy*; and <https://www.qld.gov.au/about/newsroom/queensland-energy-and-jobs-plan> ; Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). (27 November 2023) Hughenden-Biloela powerline proposed to connect Western Queensland to the national electricity grid. <https://reneweconomy.com.au/regions-lead-plan-for-huge-new-transmission-link-and-4-2-gw-of-solar-and-storage/>

¹¹ Australian Government, Australia Trade and Investment Commission. (2023) *Why Australia? Digital Technology. Australia’s A\$167 billion tech sector creates amazing opportunities* <https://reneweconomy.com.au/regions-lead-plan-for-huge-new-transmission-link-and-4-2-gw-of-solar-and-storage/>

¹² United Nations Secretary General. ‘*Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General.*’ (2021) A/75/982 United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organisation, International Commission on the Futures of Education by the UNESCO. A/75/982.

¹³ Australian Government. (September 2023). *Jobs and Skills Australia, 2023 Skills Priority List, Key Findings Report.*

¹⁴ Safe Work Australia, *Key Work Health and Safety Statistics Australia, 2023.* <https://data.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/insights/key-whs-stats-2023> ; United Nations Security Council. 31 October 2023. *United Nations Resolution 1325 (2000); S/R/1325 (2000).* <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement>

collective wealth of the Australian rural communities. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is one way to measure the health of the economy, however, ***we can measure the wealth of a community in ways such as System of Environmental and Economic Accounting (SEEA), which validate the care and informal economy that women predominantly work in, specifically measuring human wellbeing, planetary sustainability, non-market services and care, and the distribution of economic activity.***¹⁵ The National Rural Women's Coalition advocates that alternate forms of measuring alongside GDP, would capture the informal economy and assist in providing gender parity across the economic measures of indicators of wealth.

Further, Australia has ratified the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, Article 13 of the ICESCR states *'Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education.'*¹⁶ Australia has ratified the International Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women, Article 10 (a) of CEDAW explicitly states *'Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure: 'The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas.'*¹⁷ These International Human Rights Instruments that Australia has ratified,

¹⁵ United Nations Secretary General. *'Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General.'* (2021) A/75/982 United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organisation, International Commission on the Futures of Education by the UNESCO. A/75/982.

¹⁶ *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, New York, 16 December 1966. [UNTS Vol. 1993.p3.] Entered into Force 3 January 1976 with accordance with Article 27. Australia became a signatory on 18 December 1972 and ratified on 10 December 1975.

¹⁷ *International Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women*, New York, 18 December 1979. [UNTS. Vol. 1249. P 13.] Entered into Force 3 September 1981, in accordance with Article 27 (1). Australia became a signatory on 17 July 1980 and ratified on 28 July 1983.

further reiterate the enshrined human rights of rural women to have equal rights and access to lifelong education.

Design of Initiatives

- 1. What experiences and lessons can we learn from current or former policies and programs, to inform initiatives to support women to achieve careers via VET pathways?**

Further to the above International Human Rights Instruments guiding principles, and policies informing initiatives to support women to achieve VET pathways, The National Rural Women's Coalition would draw strength from several current Australian policies, legislation and plans that are in place as follows:

Higher Education Support Amendment (Response to the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report) Bill 2023 (Cth) in particular, the passing of this amendment has: -

- Uncapped numbers of ATSI students who can enrol in Commonwealth supported places;
- Removed unnecessarily harsh pass rates leading to removal from higher education; and

- Put the onus on the higher education provider to support students who may be at risk of falling behind and support to complete their studies, in the form of ‘support for students’ policy.¹⁸

Women’s Economic Equality Taskforce, (22 October 2023). *A 10-year plan to unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian Economy*

23-33.¹⁹ In particular: -

- The seven recommendations and immediate actions; and
- The \$128,000,000,000 value to the Australian Economy that can be realised by purposely removing the persistent and pervasive barriers to women’s full and equal participation in economic activity.

The 2023 Intergenerational Report 2023: *Australia’s Future to 2063*,²⁰ In particular: -

- Greater recognition and validation of the care and informal economy that is dominated by women;
- Specifically acknowledging that gender inequality does cause major economic losses as women cannot participate fully in the economy;
- Rural, remote, and regional (including Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander) communities are likely to be significantly impacted by climate change, in

¹⁸ Australian Parliament, Bills Digest No. 12, 2023-24. (1 September 2023) *Higher Education Support Amendment (Response to the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report) Bill 2023* (Cth). https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/bd/bd2324a/24bd12

¹⁹ Department of the Prime minister and Cabinet. Women’s Economic Equality Taskforce, (22 October 2023). *A 10-year plan to unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian Economy* 23-33. <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/womens-economic-equality-taskforce-final-report.pdf>

²⁰ Australian Government (2023). *Intergenerational Report 2023. Australia’s future to 2063*. <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/p2023-435150.pdf>

particular rising temperatures, this will have a direct impact on industry, labour and communities; and

- Women's participation is impacted by gender inequality, caring roles and responsibilities, domestic family sexual violence and unpaid labour.

2. **How can we ensure Initiatives address key concerns regarding women's economic equality and support Australia's productivity?**

The National Rural Women's Coalition would advocate that the key priorities to address rural, remote, and regional women's economic equality and support rural women to participate fully in the Australian economy should include:

- (1) safe, respectful, and supportive workplaces and training centres;
- (2) women of all ages have accessibility and choice regardless of their location in Australia to lifelong learning and education, as per 'Our Common Agenda'²¹;
- (3) Increased quality research into why rural, remote, and regional women in Australia experience under employment despite these women being skilled. Further, increased quality research into the recognition of transferable skills to enable a pathway to a VET based career²² ;
- (4) Rural women having access to decent work and training that sets them up to be workplace ready;

²¹ United Nations Secretary General. 'Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General.' (2021) A/75/982 United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organisation, International Commission on the Futures of Education by the UNESCO. A/75/982.

²² Ray, S., & Zarestky, J. (2022). Gender in vocational education and training: an integrative review. *European Journal of Training and Development*, 46(9), 876-893; Webb, S. (2015). The feminisation of migration and the migrants VET policy neglects: the case of skilled women secondary migrants in Australia. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 67(1), 26-46; Boese, M. (2023). Migrant and Refugee Retention in Regional Australia at the Intersection of Structure and Agency. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 1-22; and Faaliyat, N., Ressia, S., and Peetz, D. (2021). Employment incongruity and gender among Middle Eastern and North African skilled migrants in Australia. *Labour & Industry: a journal of the social and economic relations of work*. 31(1), 46-65.

- (5) Discourse around the inherent value of VET- based careers transforming to be equally valued and not compared to university as a lesser career. Further all rural, remote, and regional young women should be offered transparent choices around VET careers, including trades, health, education, and traditionally male dominated industries. ***This should be done without measuring ‘successes’ for women on whether or not they obtained admission into university.*** The VET-sector should be elevated and valued to allow for rural women to increasingly consider VET careers ²³;
- (6) Volunteer aspects of VET- career pathways need to be more supportive for rural women to participate in the mandatory training or education requirements that enable the formal qualifications to be ascertained;
- (7) Permanent part time work should be made readily available to rural, remote, and regional women, to rebut casualisation of labour work force;
- (8) Individualised tailored support for rural, remote, and regional women;
- (9) Rural women having equal access to training, education, employment, and leadership opportunities in the ‘new green economy’ and ‘digital economy’ ²⁴;

²³ Tran, C.T.T.D (2021). Efficiency of the teaching-industry linkage in the Australian vocational education and training. *Empirical Research in Vocational Education and Training*. 13(1), 11; Gore, J., Ellis, H., Fray., L., Smith, M., Llyod, A., Berrigan, C., Lyell, A, Weaver, N., and Holmes, K. (2017). *Choosing VET: investigating the VET aspirations of school students: Research Report*. National Centre for Vocational Education and Research; Flower, C., (2017). *The boundaries and connections between the VET and higher education sectors: ‘confused, contested and collaborative.’* National Centre for Vocational Educational Research; and Billet, S., Choy, S., and Hodge, S. (2020). Enhancing the standing of vocational education and the occupations it serves: Australia. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*. 72(2), 270-296.

²⁴ United Nations Secretary General. ‘*Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General.*’ (2021) A/75/982 United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organisation, International Commission on the Futures of Education by the UNESCO; A/75/982 & Australian Government (2023). *Intergenerational Report 2023. Australia’s future to 2063.* <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/p2023-435150.pdf>; and Australian Government. Australian Trade and Investment Commission. (2023). *Why Australia. Digital Technology.* https://www.globalaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-03/Why_Australia_Digital_Technology_2023.pdf

- (10) **Greater recognition and validation of the care and informal economy that is dominated by women, including considering measuring alongside GDP with methods such as SEEA** ²⁵;
- (11) **Acknowledging covert systemic barriers continue to prevent women's full participation, including but not limited to gender inequality, caring roles and responsibilities, domestic family sexual violence and unpaid labour** ²⁶; and
- (12) The impacts of climate change should be incorporated into rural women's initiatives. There will be opportunity, such as the 'new green economy' ²⁷and there will be challenges, such as increased natural disasters for example:

*'As temperature increases approach 2°C, the risk of crossing thresholds which cause nonlinear tipping points in the Earth system, with potentially abrupt and not yet well understood impacts, also increases.'*²⁸

For the above reasons the National Rural Women's Coalition advocates for more rural, remote, and regional women to be trained in Emergency Disaster Co-ordination and response and be offered upskilling and support to form

²⁵ Australian Government (2023). *Intergenerational Report 2023. Australia's future to 2063.*

<https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/p2023-435150.pdf>; & Smith, E. (2023). The narrative of a VET workforce shortage in Australia: reality, myth, or opportunity. *Education and Training*; & Department of the Prime minister and Cabinet. Women's Economic Equality Taskforce, (22 October 2023). *A 10-year plan to unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian Economy* 23-33.

<https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/womens-economic-equality-taskforce-final-report.pdf>

²⁶ Ibid 23.

²⁷ Australian Government (2023). *Intergenerational Report 2023. Australia's future to 2063.*

<https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/p2023-435150.pdf>

²⁸ United Nations Secretary General. *'Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General.'* (2021) A/75/982 United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organisation, International Commission on the Futures of Education by the UNESCO; and A/75/982 & Australian Government (2023). *Intergenerational Report 2023. Australia's future to 2063.* <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/p2023-435150.pdf>

initiatives and solutions to climate change, specific to rural Australia and specific to rural women prospering from the 'new green economy' for example recycling initiatives, environmental initiatives, food security and water security initiatives.

Safe, Respectful and Supportive Workplaces for Rural Women

For example, women in male dominated fields such as energy sector, mechanical and mining, still have a culture that is not respectful or adjusting towards women, for example, no toilets on work sites. If you are in an urban setting, public toilets are everywhere, women in a regional remote area, must hop in a car and drive offsite to find an area that is suitable to go to the toilet, men do not have this problem. Women then have the experience of men, commenting on this, for example saying, *"Can you go for me too?"* To which the female worker replies, *"Do you want to change my tampon too?"* The male colleague then had no further comments. No one comments on men, who use the back tyre of a truck to go to the toilet, as one woman said *"you can't just go behind the truck, as the wheels are so high, you can see straight through and they tried a portable toilet, but it was so hot, you nearly passed out when you went to go to the toilet, then you had to empty the thing before you left site."*

Another rural female working, who was one of fifteen (15) males in fly in fly out work, stated that she went to her supervisor, who refused to accommodate a vehicle for the female worker to drive and locate a safe and discrete place to go to the toilet, this worker had to go above her supervisor to management to gain support. Higher management were very supportive and assisted this to be rectified immediately.

Further, ***some tradeswomen report in labour intensive vocations avoiding drinking water, so that they avoid needing to go to the toilet, this can lead to heat exhaustion and health issues***, and in rural remote regional Australia, the heat is at times above 45 degrees.

These are the ***crucial elements, that need to be addressed to have safe, respectful, and supportive workplaces for Rural, remote, and regional women. There is a distinctly different set of workplace barriers for women that requires specific initiatives to address for rural women to participate in these vocations.***

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Another example are women who work in rural male dominated vocations, reporting continued denigrating language towards them, including swearing and abuse, ***'that younger tradeswomen coming into apprenticeships at first laugh it off to fit in, however, cannot tolerate this over time, and leave the apprenticeship.'*** Rural tradeswomen refer to being *'worn down' and 'depressed' or 'anxious'* over time about going to work, as they *'will be in that group, with that person'* who ***makes remarks, abuses, and comments in a derogatory and denigrating way, because you are a female in a male dominated vocation.*** For example, some men comment *'I would never have women in my crew, you shouldn't be here.'*

Other examples are tradeswomen who identify as LGTBIQA+ in VET based careers and male dominated work environments, telling us *'you are having to put up with gay jokes and slang,'*

"You just learn not to take these comments to heart."

²⁹ Struthers, K., & Strachan, G (2019). Attracting women into male dominated trades: Views of young women in Australia. *International Journal for research in vocational education and training*. 6(1), 1-19.

Rural, remote, and regional women in traineeships state some supervisors are more supportive than others. Rural tradeswomen state that support from male supervisors, really helps tradeswomen to continue to work in these environments, for example *'Once I put my complaint forward to my resource manager, after he became aware I was relocated immediately and put somewhere else, which was a great outcome, I am really happy where I am now.'*

Rural tradeswomen tell us that *'men do not listen to their ideas, and they are excluded from having a voice.'* Rural tradeswomen tell us *'That it's a different mentality and way of doing things, that rural women's contributions or ideas are not really acknowledged still on site.'* However, other rural women stated, *'I was invited to do some training in oil spills on the roads, at the training, the men said, 'it was good to hear women's ideas and opinions and that we had solutions they had not really thought of.'*

Rural, remote, and regional tradeswomen describe that, *'as a tradeswoman you are put to the test, you have to tread water a lot'* for your right to belong in workplaces traditionally dominated and that continue to be dominated by men. For example, the belief, *'girls don't belong here'* is the main narrative and these narratives are difficult to change. ***Rural tradeswomen describe the difficulties of facing constant negativity and abruptness from male colleagues.***

These tradeswomen employees deny any positive duty training or conversations about the recent legislative changes of the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)* in December 2022 for PCBU (Person's Carrying on a Business) have occurred at their workplaces.

³⁰ However, some tradeswomen stated there is compulsory training over three (3) days annually, which covers mates in construction, sexual harassment, and other diversity and inclusion training.

Rural women in health raise that workplace violence and cultures are a critical issue as bullying is systemic in health care settings. This impacts the psychological and cognitive safety of women in health vocations. Health is an area in critical skills shortage in Australia,³¹ ***National Rural Women’s Coalition would advocate for the systemic poor workplace culture, behaviours, and ‘bullying’ cultures to be addressed in all policy to truly support rural, remote, and regional women to have sustainable safe workplaces, free from workplace bullying.***³²

Accessibility and Choice

Women in rural, remote, and regional Australia tell us that an important initiative would be to remove the ‘predetermined’ aspects of women’s career pathways. For example, young girls in regional remote centres who are deemed of higher intelligence are told at school “*you’ll be going to Uni*” when they ask about VET vocations or what options

³⁰ Respect at Work, (22 December 2022) New positive duty on employers to prevent workplace sexual harassment, sex discrimination and victimisation. <https://www.respectatwork.gov.au/new-positive-duty-employers-prevent-workplace-sexual-harassment-sex-discrimination-and-victimisation>

³¹ Australian Government. (2023) *Jobs and Skills Australia 2023 Skills Priority List. Key findings Report*. September 2023. [Skills Priority List | Jobs and Skills Australia](#)

³² Aebersold, M., & Schoville, R. (2020). How to prevent the next generation of nurses from “eating their young”. *Clinical Simulation in Nursing*, 38, 27-34; Alshawush, K., Hallett, N., & Bradbury-Jones, C. (2022). The impact of transition programmes on workplace bullying, violence, stress and resilience for students and new graduate nurses: A scoping review. *Journal of clinical nursing*, 31(17-18), 2398-2417; Wilson, J. L. (2016). An exploration of bullying behaviours in nursing: A review of the literature. *British Journal of Nursing*, 25(6), 303-306; Maben, J., Auger, J. A., Abrams, R., Wright, J. M., Pearson, M., Westbrook, J. I., Jones, A., & Mannion, R. (2023). Interventions to address unprofessional behaviours between staff in acute care: what works for whom and why? A realist review. *BMC medicine*, 21(1), 403; Hallett, N., Wagstaff, C., & Barlow, T. (2021). Nursing students' experiences of violence and aggression: a mixed-methods study. *Nurse education today*, 105, 105024; and Logan, T. R., & Michael Malone, D. (2018). Nurses’ perceptions of teamwork and workplace bullying. *Journal of nursing management*, 26(4), 411-419. Karatuna, I., Jönsson, S., & Muhonen, T. (2020). Workplace bullying in the nursing profession: A cross-cultural scoping review. *International journal of nursing studies*, 111, 103628

they have, they say those options are shut down. Similarly, are only offered stereotypical options such as “*you can do hair dressing if you want an apprenticeship,*” women report being told “*what’s your goal to have kids and stay at home?*” if you have children and “*that’s not a girl’s job.*”³³

Rural women tell us, ‘*even if they are registrars in hospital, the practice students, will go to the male registrars as Dr’s, assuming the female registrar is the nurse.*’ Rural women tell us they drop out of medicine courses, not only because of the study and work demand, but because of the way they are treated. These are examples of what impact rural women’s ability to sustain vocations and participate fully in upskilling, vocational education training and lifelong learning.

Rural, remote, and regional women tell us they find out about opportunities informally, rarely was it a formal campaign that has alerted them to opportunities. One woman said, ‘*if it was not for knowing someone, I would never have applied for the career change or thought about an apprenticeship.*’ Rural women have stated ‘*My supervisor supports me 100 % in the workplace and gives me every opportunity, but if my supervisor does not pass on the opportunity, I wouldn’t know about it.*’

Rural, remote, and regional women tell us, they do not want their paths predetermined, they want more female role models, and they want more choice. Rural, remote, and regional women tell us, they ‘*want more awareness so that these career pathways are not just found out by informal ways of knowing.*’ Rural, remote, and regional women tell us that gender inequality permeates their work and education choices, saying ‘*men*

³³ Struthers, K., & Strachan, G. (2019). Attracting women into male-dominated trades: Views of young women in Australia. *International journal for research in vocational education and training*, 6(1), 1-19; Carnemolla, P., & Galea, N. (2021). Why Australian female high school students do not choose construction as a career: A qualitative investigation into value beliefs about the construction industry. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 110(4), 819-839.

*have so many options, women just don't have as much, and we don't even know half the time.'*³⁴

Decent Work and Training to be ready and skilled

Availability and sustainability of decent work and economic opportunities need to be the focus outcome of the VET- pathways for rural women.³⁵ For example, if rural women complete courses, at times they are deemed to not have the skills and qualifications, making the upskilling, study, or vocational education training redundant.

The National Rural Women's Coalition has three main reasons to strongly advocate for implementation of face-to-face VET training in Rural, remote, and regional communities:

- (1) Firstly, to strengthen the social contract in rural, remote, and regional communities;
- (2) Secondly face-to-face learning would be to improve practical skills, so that women learn the technical skills face to face, that cannot be taught online; and
- (3) Thirdly women are supported by their teachers, peers, role models and other women in the community.

In these safe spaces, rural women can problem solve issues such as '*where do I go to the toilet on the worksite?*' Further, rural women can discuss any safety concerns,

³⁴ Tang, L., Sohail, S., Shorthouse, E., Sullivan, L., & Williams, M. (2022). Put Gender on the Tender in Australian Public Projects. *World*, 3(3), 681-691; and King, B., Kalutara, P., O'Brien, D., Webber, R., & Poulter, S. (2019). Position of women in Australian construction industry. *43RD AUBEA*, 124.

³⁵ United Nations Secretary General. '*Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General.*' (2021) A/75/982 United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organisation, International Commission on the Futures of Education by the UNESCO. A/75/982.

for example if domestic family sexual violence is occurring.³⁶ Women are further isolated by online learning, the first part of the economic independence if they do not have access to their own finances due to financial abuse, is to leave the isolation in a safe way and start to see a future where they have financial independence to leave the domestic family sexual violence. Face to face learning allows for this to occur, in a safe supported way. This is particularly important in rural, remote, and regional Australian communities as they can be small, and women have less autonomy or safe places to go.

Cost of VET- pathway, upskilling, changing vocations, volunteer student placement

A barrier to upskilling, changing vocations and the VET- pathway is the cost of the course and unpaid volunteer student placement hours. For example, the cost of the course is one expense, however the cost of the unpaid student placement, means that the bills and cost of living is still required to continue while the 1000 hour, or 16 + (sixteen +) week unpaid placement is completed.³⁷ Most courses state, students must fund their own travel, accommodation, and daily living expenses, further the placement must be completed on a full-time basis, even if you are enrolled as a part time student.³⁸ This is almost impossible for a single parent or mother to afford or complete. To have full participation of rural women especially in the skills priority list

³⁶ Webstar, K., Ward., Diemer, K., Flood, M., Honey, N., Morgan, J., & Stubbs, J. (2021). How are gender inequality and violence against women related? Findings from a population-level community attitudes survey. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*. 56(3), 374-392; Australian Government (2023). *Intergenerational Report 2023. Australia's future to 2063*. <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/p2023-435150.pdf>

³⁷ Griffith University. (2023) Bachelor of Education. <https://www.griffith.edu.au/study/degrees/bachelor-of-education-1567> * general teaching requires 80 days, 37.50 hours across 16 weeks, totalling 600 hours, for early childhood, the hours are increased to 825 hours.

³⁸ Queensland University. (2023) Master of Social Work (Qualifying). <https://study.uq.edu.au/study-options/programs/master-social-work-qualifying-5767> * social work qualification requires 1000 clinical practice hours, to be completed on a full-time basis only, students are required to fund their travel, accommodation and daily living expenses while completing their unpaid practical requirement of the course.

of health, education, information technology, care sector, aged care, and other areas, which will continue to increase in demand, the mandatory placements must have increased flexibility, increase tailored support, and receive remuneration.

National Rural Women's Coalition advocates for free, reduced cost or payment plan availability for the cost of VET training and qualifications for rural, remote, and regional women, especially in the areas that are critical shortage in rural Australia.

Skills Priority List

According to the Skills Priority List, 332 occupations are in National shortage in Australia, 47 % were in health, engineering, information technology and service, 33 % were trades and technicians. Four out of five health care occupations are in shortage, including General Practitioners (GP), psychiatrist, speech pathologists and sonographers. Health includes enrolled nurses, registered nurses, Intensive Care Unit (ICU) nurses, ambulance, diversional therapists, residential carers, carers, aides, aged or disabled carers, childcare workers, personal care assistance, nursing support worker, out of school hours workers, which in some cases have been experiencing critical shortages since 2021.³⁹

There will continue to be increased demand on health care in rural Australia with an aging population, Covid 19 Pandemic, and the digital economy.⁴⁰ Importance should be placed on health, where the number of places offered are limited for those who want to enter health care. For example, for rural women who want to enter nursing, the training is all based in states and territories Capital cities, the three thousand

³⁹ Australian Government. (2023) *Jobs and Skills Australia 2023 Skills Priority List. Key findings Report*. September 2023. [Skills Priority List | Jobs and Skills Australia](#)

⁴⁰ Australian Government. (2023) *Jobs and Skills Australia 2023 Skills Priority List. Key findings Report*. September 2023. [Skills Priority List | Jobs and Skills Australia](#)

dollars (\$3,000.00) scholarship, assumes that women can travel from families and communities for extended time and complete their study. The training must consider training in local health care settings and how women can be supported to complete their studies in rural, remote, and regional Australia. Of particular importance should be strengthening the health sector to brace for the ongoing demand.

According to the Skills Priority List, Australia has a 100% shortage in construction trade workers and food trade workers. The 5 (five) largest employing non-construction trades in shortage are chef, motor mechanic, fitter, hairdresser, and metal fabrication. Acknowledging that VET is going to be the primary pathway to alleviating this shortage. The system must be more flexible, accessible and student led, with the onus of support being on the VET or training provider, to provide individual tailored support to rural, remote, and regional women.

The National Rural Women's Coalition would advocate support for Rural, remote, and regional women to upskill, change vocations and have clear career pathways aligning to the industries that are in demand for skilled workers.⁴¹

Further to the above, the below list consists of specific occupations that are currently experiencing and will continue to experience rural skills shortage across Australia.⁴²

(national rural shortages are in bold and italics):

Aeroplane Pilot (Queensland)

Agricultural & Horticultural Plant Operator (National)

⁴¹ Australian Government. (2023) *Jobs and Skills Australia 2023 Skills Priority List. Key findings Report*. September 2023. [Skills Priority List | Jobs and Skills Australia](#)

⁴² Australian Government. (2023) *Jobs and Skills Australia 2023 Skills Priority List. Key findings Report*. September 2023. [Skills Priority List | Jobs and Skills Australia](#)

Ambulance officer (QLD)

Aquaculture Farmer (NSW)

Audiologist (Queensland)

Construction Estimator (QLD)

Cotton Farmer Worker (NSW)

Cotton Farmer Grower (NSW)

Dairy Cattle Farmer (QLD & NSW)

Dental Technician (QLD)

Dental Therapist (QLD)

Dentist (QLD)

Dietician (QLD)

Diving Instructor (QLD)

Emergency Services Worker (SA & WA)

Environmental Health Officer (National)

Environmental Research Scientist (National)

Family Support Worker (QLD)

Flower Grower (NSW)

Gastroenterologist (NSW)

Grain, seed, pulse or pasture grower, field cap grower (NSW)

Health and welfare service managers (SA)

Health Practice Manager (SA)

Liaison Officer (National)

Livestock Farmers (NSW)

Logging plant operator (National)

Market Research Analyst (QLD)

Mixed Cattle & Sheep Farmer (SA)

Nursing support worker (SA)

Orthopaedic Surgeon (NSW)

Optometrist (SA)

Production Nursery Grower (NSW)

Radiation Oncologist (NSW)

Retail Manager (National)

Sugar Cane Grower (NSW)

Sugar Cane Worker (NSW)

Surveyor / Spatial Science Technician (QLD)

Urban and Regional Planner (National)

Vegetable Grower (NSW)

Vineyard Worker (NSW)

Waiter/ Waitress (National)

Workplace Relations Advisor (QLD)

The National Rural Women's Coalition advocates women should be given incentives (financial, support with housing, access to affordable childcare for children, flexible working hours, days, extra leave, and clear career pathways with permanent full time or part time positions) to be supported and encouraged to begin and complete training in the above rural occupations and skills priority list areas of shortage.

Further, rural women already in these occupations, should be given incentives (financial, support with housing, access to childcare for children, flexible working hours /days, extra leave, and clear career pathways with permanent full- time and part time positions) to continue to stay in the rural, remote, and regional communities where they are providing services in critical demand. Funding contracts, that are applied for each six (6) to twelve (12) months are barriers to offering of permanent full-time or part time positions to fill the rural skills shortage.

Other incentives could include wellbeing support such as gym, psychology / mindfulness, art or music vouchers, private health subsidies, travel allowances and

discounts on healthy food, knowing that food in rural, remote, and regional areas is more expensive and less available than in urban settings. One tradeswoman completing her traineeship as one of fifteen men in fly in fly out work in remote Australia stated *'some work sites women are just not sent too, its just not safe. Then, if you don't drink beer and are not having a pub meal each night and instead wanting the gym and to eat clean food, you are on the outer to start with. There is just nothing like this in remote areas, so in the end, I just took my own gym gear and brought my own healthy food for the ten days with me.'*

3. What cohorts of women should VET initiatives specifically target?

The National Rural Women's Coalition would advocate that lifelong learning and access to decent work should have an intersectionality lens, with diversity and consideration of women who feel invisible.

Particularly rural women tell us that as mature women, they feel invisible in policy and in VET-based careers, as they are deemed 'too old.' One 57-year-old rural tradeswoman, who completed a mature age apprenticeship in a male dominated industry, stated:

'I love what I am doing, I am happy doing what I am doing, not many women stay in the field, we get pushed into office jobs, but I am happy out in the field, I enjoy the physical aspects, being outdoors. I was a teacher before this, so I just love that I don't have to plan my lessons every night and weekend. The physical strength is a problem sometimes, I just think we need tools that are modified and to understand our limitations, but not be told it's a man's job and we don't

belong here. We just need more support and help to keep staying in the jobs we love and not being put into office roles as a way of moving up in the workplace.'

The Street university has come to regional Queensland, this allows for young women who are or are at risk of entering criminal justice systems, child protection systems and or youth justice systems, with complex need to be supported upskill and gain access to education to create the life they want. Young women in Rural, remote, and regional Australia face issues, such as drugs, crime, mental health, unemployment or homelessness,⁴³ they are invisible at times in policy, however ***the National Rural Women's Coalition would advocate any VET-based careers should include and give voice to all young women, aged 12 to 25 to live the life they want and have access to education and decent work, in a creative and face to face supportive environment.*** The Street University offers holistic support, from job support to hip hop, to music recording, to girl's groups and Indigenous groups, these programs have pathways to formal qualifications, give back to community and give hope in a creative safe space, to vulnerable women in rural communities who are at times forgotten in policy.⁴⁴

Culturally Safe and Inclusive support for our First Nations Women to be successful

The National Rural Women's Coalition represents the voices of women from Rural, remote, and regional Australia, there is a strong overlap with these areas of Australia and our First Nations women. The National Rural Women's Coalition strongly

⁴³ Street University – Established 2007. (2023) Programs, TSU (Townsville Street University), <https://streetuni.com.au/programs/>

⁴⁴ Street University – Established 2007. (2023) Programs, TSU (Townsville Street University), <https://streetuni.com.au/programs/>

advocate that culturally safe support is embedded in any VET initiatives, to create culturally safe workplaces for our First Nations Women. First Nations women want to be valued for their contributions, stating, *‘there are no other First Nations women in the workplace, further compounding cultural feelings of being ‘alone’ and ‘unsupported.’* First Nations women should always be offered First Nation supports, internal as supervisors, providers, trainers, other employees and employers. For example, employee assisted programs (EAP) should be offered with First Nation EAP support. The onus should not be on the First Nations women to advocate for these supports, the employer, provider, or trainer should embed this support for First Nations women to reach their full potential. First Nations women provide invaluable knowledge and insight to VET based careers and workplaces.

The National Rural Women’s Coalition, along with ‘Our Common Agenda’ states, that no women should be left behind and that the specific needs of Rural, remote, and regional women, should always be considered in policy and reform of VET-based careers.⁴⁵

4. What other areas could initiatives target?

Other targeted initiatives should include increased gender equality training across all VET based careers and professions. It begins with younger rural girls and women being pushed into vocations or assumed if they have children, they will not return to the workforce.

⁴⁵ United Nations Secretary General. *‘Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General.’* (2021) A/75/982 United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organisation, International Commission on the Futures of Education by the UNESCO. A/75/982.

Rural women tell us that there needs to be more female role models in the VET-based careers particularly in male dominated vocations. Rural women tell us that there needs to be more pathways to get back, ***‘to keep their foot in the door if they have children or a career break.’ Rural women tell us ‘there needs to be more movement and pathways for career change, especially for women.’***

Rural women tell us, they have limited awareness of what is available to them, they also say that the application process is difficult. Women tell us that when they do complete apprenticeships, traineeships, or qualifications, they are not told about any further career advancement, or offered this, however men in the same vocation are offered this readily. It would appear that women have to ask to gain knowledge of the same entitlements, one rural women stated *‘I did the extra training and tickets, for more qualifications, however did not know that I could then have a pay increase for this, I only found out because someone else told me they got this after completing the same tickets, I had to go and ask for my pay increase after doing exactly the same course.’*

Rural women tell us that VET-based careers require the need for training, and this means at times having to be away for four (4) to six (6) week blocks, away from children and as a single mother, this is very stressful. ***Rural women tell us they miss important milestones, that there is no flexibility or individual support to consider the impact of the compulsory training blocks for working mothers.*** One rural woman stated, *‘I had to be away from my 16-year-old daughter who was completing her final year of study, at home, mostly by herself. It was hard, I was a single parent and there was no flexibility, I don’t think anyone asked me how I was going. I had to do the training and I had to be at the regional training centre, which was a long way from our rural community.’*

Historically, NSW Health implemented a statewide project between NSW Health and TAFE to support the uptake of studying a Diploma of Nursing, as a pathway to Enrolled Nursing. Rural, remote, and regional women from NSW were expected to travel and stay in Sydney to complete the 'block' components of the Diploma of Nursing. This created a barrier for women to complete their Diploma, rural women dropped out of their studies. This is critical to address rural nursing and health care staff shortages in Australia, which will continue to be in strong demand due to Australia's degenerative population.⁴⁶ Rural women tell us that their needs to be interdisciplinary training, as in rural, remote, and regional settings, nurses are required to work across aged care, disability, maternal health, paediatrics, the qualifications should have the ability to be transferable and interdisciplinary in health care settings. The National Rural Women's Coalition would advocate that health and in particular nursing, should be a target and focus for these reasons.

Rural women say that the heart of sustaining and staying in Rural, remote, and regional communities is the face-to-face connections, this creates a support network, crucial to the sustained and completion of studies. ***Rural women say that they loved the social aspects of the regional remote communities, so much so, that this is why they mainly stay or return to rural Australia. The rural women describe a strong sense of community and belonging.*** Rural women could not emphasize enough the importance of the social events and coming together to form lifelong friendships and support. Rural women felt that the post covid 100 % online education system had removed this aspect of support in Rural, remote, and regional Australia

⁴⁶ Australian Government (2023). *Intergenerational Report 2023. Australia's future to 2063.*
<https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-08/p2023-435150.pdf>

and that it was vital it returned, as it was the 'heart' of regional Australia and would keep women sustained in demanding work and coming back to regional Australia.⁴⁷

Rural women stated that there must be an increased emphasis on incentives to do placements in Rural, remote, and regional communities, including men in care sector or traditionally women dominated roles.

Rural women stated that there must be a system to help with the rural shortages and then pathways to return to urban centres or support and incentives to stay in the rural, remote, and regional communities. Rural women stated rural, remote, and regional experience is not valued, '*creating less incentive to go out bush.*' Rural women stated that there needs to be more movement, for example, people finding a job that they retire in, however, this does not allow for movement in health and teaching for example, if you go out bush, you come back and there is no positions available in a more urban setting, because people don't leave and the experience from being out bush is not valued.

Rural women gave the example of if you work for five years in a Rural, remote, and regional community, in health care or education for example, that bonuses should occur each year and then if you work for five years or ten years, this should be further recognised. Rural women tell us if Rural, remote, and regional placement was mandatory, women would need extra assistance and support with essentials, for example such as safe, secure affordable housing, childcare if they had children, access to health care and local onsite support and connection.

⁴⁷ Sanchez-Marti, A., Ciraso-Cali, A., Fernandez-Sequi, H., & Pineda-Herrero, P. (2023). The school-life balance effect on acquiring cross-disciplinary competencies in VET: disruption or continuity during Covid 19?. *Vocations and Learning*. 16(2), 207-226.

5. How should we evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives?

Rural, remote, and regional women are integral to the sustainability of rural Australia and must have career pathways congruent to the remote parts of Australia. This should include genuine offers of transparent access to lifelong learning. Rural, remote, and regional women of all ages should be seen and listened too, as the cornerstone of the collective wealth of the Australian rural communities. ***Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is one way to measure the health of the economy, however, we can measure the wealth of a community in ways such as System of Environmental and Economic Accounting (SEEA), where we validate the care and informal economy that women predominantly working in, specifically measuring human wellbeing, planetary sustainability, non-market services and care, and the distribution of economic activity,***⁴⁸ the National Rural Women's Coalition advocates that alternate forms of measuring alongside GDP, would capture the informal economy and assist in providing gender parity across the economic measures of indicators of wealth.

Effectiveness must not be based on short term immediate gains '*at the expense of long-term human and planetary wellbeing, decisions made today will shape the course of the planet for centuries.*' Addressing long term outcomes and risks, including risks to our planet, according to 'Our Common Agenda,' '*needs to be in every part of every decision, every policy, and every budget.*'⁴⁹

⁴⁸ United Nations Secretary General. '*Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General.*' (2021) A/75/982 United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organisation, International Commission on the Futures of Education by the UNESCO. A/75/982.

⁴⁹ Ibid 47.

Evaluating effectiveness of any initiatives should include the feedback of those most impacted by the initiatives. Further the focus on evaluation should be effective transformation of systems so that rural, remote, and regional women of all ages can reach their full potential and long-term career goals.⁵⁰

6. What kinds of vocational and non-vocational assistance do women need to successfully undertake and achieve a VET qualification?

Rural, remote, and regional women successfully undertaking and completing VET qualifications require **flexibility, awareness, adaption, individualised support, and co-design** to be embedded in the vocation and non-vocational support.

Flexibility

Rural women tell us that more permanent part time roles starting from one (1) day per week should be made readily available for women with children. A full-time working week, (8-5pm) takes women away from their communities, their families, and children. Rural women say they would like more flexibility, such as starting early and being able to pick the children up from school, or if they could compress their working week into four days, without losing income, they would be able to have a day to do all the unpaid work and take the children to their extracurricular activities, or just spend time with

⁵⁰Jacobs, R. D. (2018). *Developing authenticity: a framework to enhance women's well-being in a male-dominated work environment* (Doctoral dissertation); Wilson, G. (2005). The experience of males entering nursing: A phenomenological analysis of professionally enhancing factors and barriers. *Contemporary Nurse*, 20(2), 221-233; Bridges, D., Bamberry, L., Wulff, E., & Krivokapic-Skoko, B. (2022). "A trade of one's own": The role of social and cultural capital in the success of women in male-dominated occupations. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 29(2), 371-387; Rotimi, F. E., Burfoot, M., Naismith, N., Mohaghegh, M., & Brauner, M. (2023). A systematic review of the mental health of women in construction: future research directions. *Building Research & Information*, 51(4), 459-480; and Ghanbaripour, A. N., Tumpa, R. J., Sunindijo, R. Y., Zhang, W., Yousefian, P., Camozzi, R. N., ... & Hemmati, M. (2023). Retention over Attraction: A Review of Women's Experiences in the Australian Construction Industry; Challenges and Solutions. *Buildings*, 13(2), 490.

their children. Rural women say that this would make training, studying and practical components of VET qualifications more likely to be successful, they said they would feel happier and less stressed.

Awareness

Rural women say that they are not aware of the opportunities available, that this usually occurs informally, because they know someone who completed an apprenticeship or trade. Rural women would like to have more awareness about application processes, about upskilling, about pay rises available for completing training and in general more awareness about all the VET career opportunities available to them in Rural, remote, and regional Australia. Rural women say that Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) needs to be easier, as the process is currently difficult and a barrier for women utilising their transferable skills into teaching, front line positions or nursing for example.

Adaption

Rural women who have successfully completed VET qualifications, say that in more physically demanding VET careers, such as energy, mechanics, construction, mines, and trades, more on site adaption needs to be implemented to support women in the male dominated fields.

Adaption for example would include tools that are easier for women to hold, lifting devices and men being educated on supporting women, not just *'if she wants to be here in a man's job, she can do it by herself.'* For example, this could include a tool that was for tradeswomen to use two hands, as a pose to men who may only need to use the tool with one hand. Another example, would be women lifting a ladder by

themselves, some men can lift a ladder by themselves, however, women state, *'it's hard for us to lift these on our own due to the physical strength required, men quite often will not help when you ask.'* Rural women state embedded gender inequality, diversity and safe and respectful workplace training would assist in successful retaining of tradeswomen in male dominated industries and VET careers.

Individualised Support

Rural women who have successfully completed VET qualifications and continue to work in their chosen vocation, tell us that they were not given any support and rarely asked how they were going. During formal six-monthly performance reviews or probation reviews by supervisors formal check ins occur, however rural women state they felt it was not genuine and that they were not offered the same support or opportunities as men in the same positions.

Some rural tradeswomen felt that they had a predetermined path of leadership, it was assumed that if they wanted to progress that it would be a leadership role of full-time office worker, as they were female, even if they wanted to stay doing field work. Other rural tradeswomen stated that they have had supervisors that have supported them knowing they are trying to have a family, accommodating this by approving to stay in a regional centre, as a pose to fly in fly out remote work.

Other rural tradeswomen stated that they have been supported by wonderful insightful supervisors, who have given them *'incredible support'*, exposing them to multiple opportunities, including qualifications, praising, and wanting to see tradeswomen be successful in their trades. The challenges remained, such as *'I always had to prove I was qualified and prove I could do the work, the men just thought I couldn't do it, what*

they could, it was like they had to see it, then they could see you were just as qualified as them.' Other challenges remained for example, *'large cartons, putting them on the bench to process and the physical strength the role required at times.'* However, *'when you have good supervisors who support you as women, it makes all the difference to your success.'* Rural tradeswomen unanimously state that all their supervisors in their apprenticeships and traineeships have been male, they said it rare to have women as supervisors.

Rural women describe watching some women not cope with the intensity of VET work, the way they are treated in the workplace and given no encouragement, so they just leave. Some rural women say they start with twenty 20 women across all regional Queensland doing traineeships and end up with eight (8) by the second year. Individual tailored support is essential to the success of women in VET based careers and to complete qualifications. This includes having female mentors, and if you are an First Nations women, having access to a First Nations female mentor and support.

As previously stated, the support needs to start at the application point, continue with training blocks, the compulsory placement and continue until completion of the VET qualification. Ideally the individualised support should continue into the workplace to retain and sustain rural, remote, and regional women's participation in VET careers.

The National Rural Women's Coalition would advocate for individualised support which includes more female mentor roles to be widespread in Industry to support rural, remote, and regional women in VET- based careers.

Co-Design

Rural women who have successfully completed and continue to work in VET based careers, should be invited to co-design any future support, initiatives, and incentives as they understand the support that is needed for women to not just survive obtaining their VET qualification, and VET based career, but thrive.

Co-design would allow rural women to share their inspirational stories with women and displace predetermined pathways for younger or older rural women to enhance participation and increase economic prosperity for themselves and the Rural, remote, and regional towns and communities they call home.

Other

The following are important considerations to retain women in rural, remote, and regional communities, they are fundamental to women's safety, support, and success in VET careers:

- (a) Safe and affordable housing;
- (b) Access to childcare/ Out of School Hours Care (OOSHC);
- (c) Community connection and face to face support;
- (d) Transport or access to transport to leave site or leave remote area's;
- (e) Flexibility (especially if they have children or caring commitments);

- (f) Increased tailored individual support that is trauma informed and strengths based, with the onus having to be on the VET trainer or employer to provide this to all women;
- (g) Increased support for ATSI, women with disabilities, LGTBIQA+, CALD, younger and older women, more support for working mothers and single parents, migrant women;
- (h) Safe and respectful workplaces;
- (i) Visibility of older women in the workforce;
- (j) Sensitivity and understanding of issues specific to women, such as toilets for women on site in Rural, remote, and regional Australia, where public toilets are not accessible;
- (k) Supervisors and or mentors that are female;
- (l) External supervision from females provided by the VET provider, trainer or employer;
- (m) Awareness and freely informing women of their ability to upskill, have pay increases, transfer, apply for leadership roles;
- (n) Women do not want to be offered what is perceived as 'the women roles,' women want to be given a choice; and
- (o) Women want to be employed and or successful in VET-based careers based on their merits, for example, what they bring to the workplace, to the training. Rural women state that they feel they are at times chosen 'to fill a quota' and ATSI women

state the same, they are employed for the identified position, however they want to be recognised for the person they are, the attributes and skills they bring to the workplace.

7. Are there existing organisations that could assist women in VET with vocational and non-vocational barriers?

Existing organisations include employers, State and Territory apprentice coordinators, TAFE providers, VET providers, Trainers, and Not for Profit Organisations. Rural women state that the support needs to come to the women in Rural, remote, and regional Australia, to be holistic and individualised. Rural women state that they *'need to be listened to, that they are responded to with urgency when they reach out for support and that the existing or new organisations do not just complete a 'tick and flick' exercise.'* Rural women (including ATSI women) do not want to feel they are filling a company 'quota' or 'number,' rural women want to be valued for their individual attributes, skills, and contributions.

Some specific programs that would assist women with barriers to reaching their full potential are:

Young Mothers Pathways Program

Young Mothers Pathways Program is a program in Deception Bay Queensland, which is focused on disrupting the intergenerational patterns of unemployment, for young mothers. The individualised wrap around support, is offered for young mothers and children to complete their education, with the outcome of young mothers sustain employment. The model of care offered to the young mothers is a consortium strength-based model that addresses underlying structural barriers whilst focusing on the health and wellbeing (including economic wellbeing) of young mothers and children. The

Young Mothers Pathways Program is built on the SDG, of good health and wellbeing, quality education, decent work and economic growth and sustainable cities and communities.⁵¹

Malpa

Malpa's Young Doctors for Life is a unique, culturally derived, grass roots approach to train Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children 9–12-year-olds to become Young Doctors. This empowers the kids to take control of their health destiny and help shape the future in their family and community.⁵²

Broken to Brilliant

Broken to Brilliant is a program designed by domestic family sexual violence (DFSV) victim survivors, which focuses on recovering, healing, and rebuilding after DFSV. Broken to Brilliant has the goal of reducing the long-term impact of DFSV by increasing financial independence, increasing health and wellbeing, increasing education, upskilling, and linking participants with social supports. The outcomes for victim survivors are increased self-esteem, increased financial independence and stability and tangible outcomes such as purchasing their first home.⁵³

⁵¹ Cambell Page. (2023) Young Mothers Pathway Project. <https://campbellpage.com.au/youth-and-family/young-mothers-pathways-project/>; and United Nations General Assembly, 'Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015. (21 October 2015) 70/1. 'Transforming our world, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' Seventieth session. Agenda Item 15 & 16. A/Res/70/1

⁵² Malpa. (2023) *Malpa, using old ways new ways*. <https://www.malpa.org.au/>

⁵³ Broken to Brilliant. (2023) Broken to Brilliant. <https://www.brokentobrilliant.org/>

Women in Trade

Rural tradeswomen say that Industries have conferences for women in the industry such as Women in Trade Conference or Women in Construction Conferences,⁵⁴ the response on worksites from male colleagues are *'what about us, where's our conference? Rural women state they attend the Conferences, but nothing really changes you hear nothing about the support that we talked about, it is talked about but then the support for women is not implemented and is really needed.'*

Some women have said, *'the good which comes out of the Conferences is they exchange personal numbers and reach out to each other via text or social media and stay in touch,'* women who attend these conferences deny that any 'formal' mentor or groups are implemented by their employer's / trainer's post Conference.

8. What sorts of services and supports do TAFE and training providers offer to assist students, particularly women, to participate in VET? What services have proven most effective? What other services and supports could be provided?

Rural women tell us that the supports *'don't really exist,'* and that support needs to have an intersectionality lens, be trauma informed, strengths based and holistic, understanding the complex and unique supports that rural, remote, and regional

⁵⁴ VERTO. (2023). Women in Trades: Women Apprenticeships. <https://www.verto.org.au/apprenticeships/women-in-trades> ; SALT. (2023). Supporting and Linking Tradeswomen. <https://saltaustralia.org.au/> ; Tradeswomen Australia. (2023) Supporting Tradeswomen in Australia. <https://tradeswomenaus.com/> ; Empowered Women in Trades. (2023). Empowered Women in Trades. <https://ewitrades.com/> ; National Association of Women in Construction. (2023). <https://www.nawic.com.au/> ; and WinA. (2023). Women in Automotive. <https://www.womeninautomotive.com.au/>

women may need to return or sustain participation in VET, TAFE, or employment. This should not be limited to TAFE providers but extended to all organisations with Community Service Obligations (CSO) who provide provision of service.

Further, rural women should be provided with clear pathways to employment with any study they undertake, this would be a motivating factor that would allow for clear pathways after study. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) should be easy to ascertain and recognised, to allow for lifelong learning and success in VET based careers.

The National Rural Women's Coalition suggests that a co-design model includes rural, remote, and regional women's voices to inform policy and inform effective services and support delivery.

- 9. How can we encourage and support more employers and training providers to provide more diversity in workforces, create culturally safe and inclusive workplaces, remove barriers to women and carers who want to work and or/upskill, implement more flexible work arrangements, and embed inclusivity into learning environments?**

Throughout this submission, the themes that arise that are important to Rural, remote, and regional women are:

- Creating Safe and Respectful workplaces;
- Intersectionality and Diversity Mandatory Training on induction, then renewed at least annually to raise awareness of inclusion (including positive duty training);
- Vocations not seen as 'a man's job', which results in excluding women from entry into male dominated vocations;

- More awareness around gender equality and what this means for rural women;
- 'No women left behind'⁵⁵ with women's increased accessibility to the 'new green economy,' 'the digital economy' and increased accessibility to VET based careers and higher paying vocations.⁵⁶ Including more awareness and opportunity around societies predetermined pathways for rural women of all ages;
- Recognition of the Informal care economy, for example, rural women's transferable skills of managing a farm, or parenting or teaching children remotely being formally upskilled and or qualified, to allow women to become qualified teachers or health care workers, to assist with the increased demand in these industries. Including support and flexibility to return permanent part time;
- Recognition and formal measuring of the Informal care economy that rural women predominantly provide and work in, currently significantly under paid and under recognised;
- Understanding the complex connection between climate change and the impact on women in Rural, remote, and regional communities, for example, increased in natural disasters, preparing for this; and
- Implementation of flexibility, awareness, workplace adaption (for example of workplace tools), individualised support, and co-design with rural women for increased access and opportunity to lifelong learning.

⁵⁵ United Nations Secretary General. *'Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General.'* (2021) A/75/982
United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organisation, International Commission on the Futures of Education by the UNESCO. A/75/982.

⁵⁶ Ibid 55.

9(a). What kind/s of assistance do employers need to actively support these types of initiatives?

Employers of Rural, remote, and regional women require ***flexibility, awareness, adaption, individualised support, and co-design*** to be embedded in the employer's vocation and non-vocational support. Please refer to above item 6. Further to this, workplace culture and behaviour, such as bullying and positive duty training need to be implemented immediately by workplaces and trainers to address the underlying factors for women leaving VET based vocations.

10. How can we assist and encourage employers to support women to upskill through VET qualifications?

Rural women deny that they are consistently given encouragement, transparent offers, and support to upskill, change qualifications or obtain pay rises. ***Rural women tell us that they find out opportunities for VET training and upskilling by informal sources, not from the employer, they also feel that their pathways are predetermined by the employer, so they are offered what the employer believes that women want.*** Rural tradeswomen tell us that filling out applications takes them three to four times and that this is a courageous step for them in male dominated fields, rural tradeswomen deny they have support to fill out the applications, be that for transfers to higher paying jobs or an application for an apprenticeship.

The National Rural Women's Coalition advocates for awareness to be raised for women across their lifespan to have access to lifelong learning and opportunity. For example, in schools offers of VET based careers to be discussed with young women and for the older women, to not be seen to be too old to upskill or change vocations.

Further the National Rural Women’s Coalition advocates for the VET based career system to be incorporated into existing workplaces, to decentralise the work-based system, providing immediate value to both women and employers.

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Recommendations

- 1. That any initiatives for women in VET based careers, be informed by International Law, for example ‘Our Common Agenda’ articulates the way forward for member States, for inclusion of women in the ‘new green economy’ and ‘digital economy,’ labour guarantees, macroeconomic and industrial policies to boost labour demand, reducing barriers to advance education and labour market participation, including due to gender or other forms of discrimination, expanding apprenticeship schemes and technical and vocational training;⁵⁸**
- 2. National Rural Women’s Coalition would advocate that policy and implementation of policy, take an intersectional approach by understanding the lives of all rural, remote, and regional women, when implementing any support packages for rural women’s access to lifelong learning and education;**
- 3. Measuring the wealth of a community in ways such as System of Environmental and Economic Accounting (SEEA), where we validate the care and informal economy that women predominantly work in, specifically measuring human wellbeing, planetary sustainability, non-**

⁵⁷ Maloni, M., Hiatt, M. S., & Campbell, S. (2019). Understanding the work values of Gen Z business students. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 17(3), 100320. Fleming, J., Becker, K., & Newton, C. (2017). Factors for successful e-learning: does age matter? *Education+ Training*, 59(1), 76-89;

Belaya, V. (2018). The Use of e-Learning in Vocational Education and Training (VET): Systematization of Existing Theoretical Approaches. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 7(5), 92-101; Nikou, S., & Maslov, I. (2021). An analysis of students' perspectives on e-learning participation—the case of COVID-19 pandemic. *The International Journal of Information and Learning Technology*, 38(3), 299-315.; and Lamb, S., Maire, Q., Walstab, A., Newman, G., Doecke, E., & Davies, M. (2018). Improving participation and success in VET for disadvantaged learners.

⁵⁸ United Nations Secretary General. ‘Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General.’ (2021) A/75/982 United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organisation, International Commission on the Futures of Education by the UNESCO. A/75/982.

*market services and care, and the distribution of economic activity is measured alongside GDP;*⁵⁹

- 4. safe, respectful, and supportive workplaces and training centres;**
- 5. Women of all ages have accessibility and choice regardless of their location in Australia to lifelong learning and education, as per 'Our Common Agenda'⁶⁰, including embedding flexibility, awareness, adaption and co design into any further initiatives;**
- 6. Increased support to complete training blocks, voluntary placements with the option to be able to complete training locally if possible and serious consideration of remuneration in vocations in critical skills shortage rurally (including Nursing, health care and teaching);**
- 7. Tailored individual support for rural, remote, and regional women completing VET based courses, including clear pathways to employment;**
- 8. That the dropout rates of women in VET based courses and training be less than 50 % of all courses by 2025 and work towards 85% by 2030;**
- 9. Incentives such as financial, support with housing, access to affordable childcare for children, flexible working hours, days, extra leave, and clear career pathways with permanent full time or part time positions (starting from one day) be embedded into all VET based career training and pathways in Rural, remote, and regional Australia;**

⁵⁹ United Nations Secretary General. 'Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General.' (2021) A/75/982 United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organisation, International Commission on the Futures of Education by the UNESCO. A/75/982.

⁶⁰ United Nations Secretary General. 'Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary General.' (2021) A/75/982 United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organisation, International Commission on the Futures of Education by the UNESCO. A/75/982.

- 10. Women's workforce participation in male dominated VET based careers double each year;**
- 11. That women are afforded access to private and discrete toilets on site at all times;**
- 12. That positive duty training for all providers and employers be rolled out nationally as a matter of urgency, with male dominated vocations being first;**
- 13. VET based career system to be incorporated into existing workplaces, to decentralise the work-based system, providing immediate value to both women and employers; and**
- 14. That at least 30 % of investment in the VET sector needs to go to rural, remote, and regional communities of Australia.**

We would like to leave you with the lived experience of rural tradeswomen:

'When I was younger living in a remote community, there was no day care, there was no home day care, there was nothing, I was lonely, I was isolated, work made me happy, I loved to work, but I couldn't. Now I am older, I have been able to change careers, I am so happy, my mindset is I am never old to change career, never give up and you won't know until you try. My mantra is keep learning, even when there are only 80 women compared to 2000 men at work, I just know that if I forge this path now, it will make it easier for the younger women and my daughters to have more choice.'

Please contact NRWC CEO Keli McDonald if you have any questions or require further information.

Yours Faithfully,

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"The National Rural Women's Coalition works to support and grow vibrant rural, remote and regional communities throughout Australia."