



**TAFE  
DIRECTORS  
AUSTRALIA**

## **SUBMISSION**

Department of Employment and Workplace  
Relations

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## **AUSTRALIAN SKILLS GUARANTEE**

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December 2022

### **About TAFE Directors Australia**

[TAFE Directors Australia \(TDA\)](#) is the national peak body that represents Australia's network of state and territory publicly owned Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes and university TAFE divisions. All TAFE institutes and TAFE divisions of dual sector universities across Australia are [members of TDA](#). TDA members range from the largest registered training provider in Australia, TAFE NSW to regional TAFEs with significant geographical coverage such as North Regional TAFE (WA). The primary business of TDA members is vocational education and training focusing on nationally accredited qualifications and skill sets, non-accredited training for bespoke employer purposes, and foundation skills. Over half of TDA members also deliver higher education.

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## Introduction

TAFEs dominate the market in the delivery of apprenticeships, partner extensively with secondary schools for delivery of vocational education and training and prioritise support for vulnerable and less advantaged Australians, including women.

TAFEs' unique profile(s) make them well placed to engage with issues around skill shortages and workforce participation, providing relevant insight into training delivery issues and approaches, sector leading expertise and experience, as well as deep connections with industry partners and local communities.

Given the number of parallel consultation processes in the skills and education sectors running in December, and the level of detail and number of questions posed as part of the consultation on the Australian Skills Guarantee, a longer consultation period, or further opportunities to provide feedback would be greatly appreciated.

TDA is broadly supportive of the aims of the Australian Skills Guarantee and at this stage has provided some high level commentary for consideration as part of this consultation. TDA would be happy to engage further with the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) on the Australian Skills Guarantee in 2023. Many of our [TDA members](#) encourage and promote the participation of women in traditionally male dominated fields and would be a valuable source of input for this project, perhaps through some targeted meetings which TDA could facilitate.

## TAFE apprenticeships and traineeships

TDA members have a large percentage of the apprenticeship market. The delivery of apprenticeships should be subject to local conditions and an industry lens. It is the collaboration between employer, union, State/Territory government, TAFE and student that will deliver capable employees more quickly. It is important to acknowledge that an apprenticeship now takes many forms, including Diploma qualifications in emerging industries, culturally specific apprenticeships for different regions and increased recognition of current competence. Support for the role TAFE can play in this tripartite relationship which is largely place based will improve outcomes.

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research ([NCVER](#)) [Total VET Students and Courses 2021](#) dataset combines apprenticeships and traineeships and covers in-training, commencements, completions and withdrawals/cancellations. The data can be broken down by **trade occupations** and **non-trade occupations**.

The clear focus of TAFE apprenticeships/traineeships is in trade occupations rather than non-trade occupations. For private providers, the majority of their apprentices/trainees are in non-trade occupations.

### **In-training apprentices/trainees, at 31 December 2021**

- TAFEs had 152,835 trainees and apprentices in training; 135,430 (89%) in trade occupations and 17,350 (11%) in non-trade occupations
- In comparison, private providers had 165,155 trainees and apprentices in training; 65,305 (40%) in trade occupations and 99,850 (60%) in non-trade occupations

## Opportunities for women

Skills and qualifications generally allow entry to better-paying careers. TDA has welcomed the additional fee-free TAFE places for 2023 which are important for improving access to study, including for women.

The NCVER 2021 dataset shows that in 2021, 48.5 per cent of all students at TAFE were female while 50.9 per cent were male.

51 per cent of students at TAFE were aged between 15 and 24 years, while 49 per cent were aged 25 years and over reflecting TAFE's importance to Australians at all stages of their careers.

The 2021 data shows that women in particular use TAFE later in their career/life to get a qualification or re-train, more so than men:

- 26% of TAFE students are aged between **15 to 19 years old**; with 59% of those male and 40% female
- 21% of TAFE students are aged between **20 to 24 years old**; with 59% of those male and 41% female
- 19% of TAFE students are aged between **30 to 39 years old**; with 44% of those male and 55% female
- 12% (just over) of TAFE students are aged between **40 to 49 years old**; with 29% of those male and 61% female

The issues associated with apprenticeships including completions and gender balance continue to be critical in the discussions. Trades are generally undertaken by those under 30 years of age and female enrolments in trades apprenticeships remain low.

While the current focus may be on attracting younger women to commence their career in a trade, there may be opportunities to target women who are looking to re-train later in their career e.g. should there be consideration of incentives for women over 30 to be able to access women-only apprenticeships or traineeships? This may be worth further exploration.

An excellent example of innovation in the apprenticeship and traineeship space is the [BHP FutureFit Academy](#). This is a partnership between BHP, Central Queensland University and North Metropolitan TAFE in Perth. The BHP FutureFit Academy is a training facility offering paid training pathways into mining for those without any previous mining experience at any stage of their life. Members of the Academies are permanent BHP employees from their first day.

The Academies provide immersive learning experiences for students using the most current teaching methods and education technology and with all learning conducted in the centres, rather than through traditional 'on-the-job training' at BHP's mining operations.

The BHP FutureFit Academy is also supporting and promoting BHP's inclusion and diversity agenda. They are providing fast tracked trade apprenticeships and traineeships designed with new-to-industry individuals in mind. 80% of FutureFit students are female, 20% are Indigenous, the average age is 30 years old, and retention is at 83.4%.

A further example of collaborative partnerships is [The NSW Institute of Applied Technology for Construction](#). It is a flagship educational centre with state-of-the-art simulated workplace

environments and maker spaces delivering specialist, industry-embedded training in disciplines that are critical to future jobs.

The purpose of the NSW Institute of Applied Technology for Construction, which will transform the current approach to education, is to establish clear pathways between schools, VET and higher education, with partnerships across industries such as construction, carpentry, plumbing and electrical. The approach will ensure students are provided with holistic skillsets to take advantage of the employment opportunities created by the strong infrastructure pipeline and ongoing industry demands.

TDA acknowledges that there is significant further scope for TAFEs to develop programs and initiatives that support female training access and completion in key economic sectors, particularly where women are under-represented, as well as designing training models that address barriers to study for women. However, the issue of low numbers of women in trades and equal opportunities for women cannot be addressed by TAFEs alone. It is a challenge shared by both TAFEs and trade employers and solutions need to be developed together.

Reducing barriers and disincentives to work, including the role of childcare, social security settings and employment services are also important considerations for increasing women's participation in male dominated industries.

### **Flexibility required in training system**

The national frameworks for the design and application of VET qualifications, including apprenticeships and traineeships remain too rigid, restricting responsiveness to a rapidly evolving economy. Previous and current national frameworks (the AQF and VET qualification design framework) have focused on regulatory compliance, rather than flexibility and agility to respond to changes in the economy, including in the traditional trades as well as emerging industries like renewable energy. To date, the current process of training package development has not encouraged (or funded) involvement by those with deep education capability, nor local employer knowledge, to enable tailored outcomes. The proposed improvements to the qualification design process must be sufficient to enable agile responsiveness for employers.

It is important that decision makers are aware of the complex eco-system within which TAFEs operate. In the current national training system, TAFEs have limited autonomy. TAFEs for the last decade have been at the receiving end of the supply chain rather than at the table for the creation of appropriate training solutions for industry needs. To receive funding, TAFEs must use the national training packages that have been developed by industry sub-committees. TDA supports the work being done on qualification reform but is concerned that these reforms may not go far enough in terms of enabling innovation.

Self-accreditation for TAFEs (similar to universities which create their own curriculum) would go a long way in providing better responsiveness and relevance of vocational education and training to Australian industry. TAFEs as public institutions could work with industry and unions directly to create contemporary course content and design and produce job ready graduates at scale. A strong and autonomous TAFE sector can help meet Australia's short-term skills shortages, boost productivity of the workforce and better prepare Australians for the jobs of the future.

## **Expansion of the Guarantee**

TDA is supportive of the notion of expanding the Guarantee further on a project-by-project basis, particularly in fast growing areas like clean and renewable energy. TDA sees significant scope to target and attract women into these industries from the outset. TAFEs are indeed already active in providing skills and qualifications for the clean and renewable energy sectors and would be happy to provide further information on TAFE activity in this regard.

## **Conclusion**

TDA is very prepared to work together with the government to survey members and to seek ideas that might address some of these matters. When looking at the long history of addressing gender bias in certain industries, little has been done over the years to replicate learnings from overseas. Bold initiatives might be needed if there is to be substantive change.

TAFEs would be pleased to be part of this future work. However, it is industry which substantially must lead diversity and inclusion practice.