



Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

Via Email: ApprenticeshipsConsultations@dewr.gov.au

Consultation on A Revised Methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List

To the committee,

The Working with Women Alliance (WwWA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on a revised methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List. The insights provided are informed by our work on economic equality, with a particular lens on training and employment outcomes for women in Australia.

WwWA commends the intention to align the Priority List with strategies such as *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality*, and believe that this presents a significant opportunity to address gender equality in apprenticeship and traineeship pathways. Currently, there are more than twice as many males in training gateways compared to females.¹ Apprenticeships remain male-dominated overall, particularly in trades², whereas women are more likely to commence non-trade apprenticeships or traineeships.³ While we acknowledge that female participation is growing at a fast rate⁴, structural barriers persist that limit women's entry and completion.

¹ NCVER, 2023, *Apprentices and trainees 2022: December quarter*, <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/apprentices-and-trainees-2022-december-quarter>

² Callam Pickering, 2025, *Tools Down: Australia's Apprenticeship Boom Is Over*, Hiring Lab, <https://www.hiringlab.org/au/blog/2025/04/23/australias-apprenticeship-boom-is-over/#:~:text=Apprenticeship%20opportunities%20are%20often%20gender,%27tradies%27%20have%20gained%20momentum.>

³ Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive Review, 2024, *Final report – Fact sheet for Women Apprentices in male-dominated trades*, <https://www.dewr.gov.au/download/16802/strategic-review-australian-apprenticeship-incentive-system-fact-sheet-women-apprentices-male/39437/strategic-review-australian-apprenticeship-incentive-system-fact-sheet-women-apprentices-male/pdf>

⁴ NCVER, 2023, *Apprentices and trainees 2022: December quarter*, <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/apprentices-and-trainees-2022-december-quarter>

For that reason, we believe there are several areas where the *Recommendations to support a more targeted apprenticeship gateway* could go further to encourage women's participation in traineeships and apprenticeships.

- **Quality, retention, and workplace culture:** Poor working conditions are the leading reason women drop out of apprenticeships⁵, with female apprentices facing higher rates of bullying, harassment and discrimination.⁶ Evidence from industries such as construction and hospitality⁷ highlight that workplace culture reforms are critical to retention. We encourage the Department to ensure the Priority List methodology acknowledges the role of safe and inclusive workplaces in apprenticeship outcomes, possibly by tying eligibility for incentives to employer participation in gender responsive WHS training and safeguards.
- **Gender segregation and undervaluing of female-dominated sectors:** The discussion paper notes a higher weighting of incentives for trade apprenticeships compared to traineeships. We are concerned that this approach risks further entrenching gender segregation into skills and training. Female-dominated apprenticeships and traineeships, including those in care sectors, must be properly funded and recognised, as they are critical to both workforce needs and women's economic security.
- **Cost of participation and sustained incentives:** Many women seeking to move out of low-paid, insecure, or casual work – where they are overrepresented⁸ – will need to upskill or reskill, often through apprenticeship or traineeship pathways. However, undertaking such training, especially later in life, comes with significant financial pressures. Further, those in low-paid or insecure work are less likely to have access to employer-sponsored training⁹, making Government incentives even more critical. If incentive funding is not sustained for the full duration of the training, women may be discouraged or prevented from completing, limiting their ability to secure long-term economic stability. To close these gaps, financial assistance should be

⁵ Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive Review, 2024, *Final report – Fact sheet for Women Apprentices in male-dominated trades*, <https://www.dewr.gov.au/download/16802/strategic-review-australian-apprenticeship-incentive-system-fact-sheet-women-apprentices-male/39437/strategic-review-australian-apprenticeship-incentive-system-fact-sheet-women-apprentices-male/pdf>

⁶ Jobs Queensland, 2021, *Apprenticeship, women and workplace culture*, [Apprenticeship, women and workplace culture - A literature review](#)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2023, *A 10-year-plan to unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian economy 2023 – 2033*, Australian Government, <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/10-year-plan/current-state>

⁹ WGEA, 2020, *The future of work and gender*, https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/FoW_insight_paper.pdf

consistent and standardised across sectors for the entirety of the apprenticeship or traineeship.

- **Regional considerations:** The Priority List should incorporate a regional focus to recognise the distinct experiences of women living in rural and remote areas. Limited childcare options, long distances to training centres, housing pressures, and industry closures restrict both access to skills training and employment opportunities.¹⁰ These challenges mean women face higher costs, longer commutes, or the need to relocate to pursue training or secure work.¹¹ To advance the Government’s social objectives, the methodology should reflect these realities by aligning apprenticeship incentives with available local industries and supporting the expansion of flexible training models such as block release programs and mobile centres. Such measures would improve access to traineeships and apprenticeships and help retain skilled women in regional, rural, and remote communities – strengthening both local economies and essential services.

We also strongly encourage the establishment of a formal and ongoing consultation process with women’s organisations, priority populations, and community-based networks. Partnerships with groups such as WAVE and the GoGo Foundation would help ensure that the methodology is informed by lived experience, and that the Priority List reflects real community and industry needs. Resources such as the JSA Gender Economic Equality Study¹² should also guide the development and evaluation of the methodology.

We thank the Department for the opportunity to provide input and look forward to continued engagement on these important reforms.

Yours sincerely,

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¹⁰ Busy at Work, *We’re BUSY Supporting Regional and Remote Communities!*, <https://www.busyatwork.com.au/were-busy-supporting-regional-and-remote-communities/>

¹¹ Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System, 2024, *Final report – Regional and Remote apprentices fact sheet*, [Regional and remote apprentices Fact Sheet - Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Review_Acc.docx](#)

¹² Jobs and Skills Australia, 2025, *Gender Economic Equality Study*, <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/research/studies/gender-economic-equality-study>