



WOMEN IN VET

Electrotechnology Industry Submission



Overview

2% According to Labour Market Insights, women make up 2% of the electrical workforce.

This is equivalent to 3,788 female workers of the total of 189,400 electricians in Australia.

Despite efforts to increase female participation in trades, frustration remains that progress toward gender equality has been marginal at best.

Not only is gender equality a fundamental human right, but having a more diverse, inclusive industry is important to meeting resourcing challenges and skills shortages the sector faces, both now and for the foreseeable future.

The Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA) are leading a range of initiatives that bring together governments, industry groups and business leaders to discuss broadening opportunities, developing pathways to economic security, removing barriers, and increasing the appeal for women to work in electrotechnology.

The electrical sector is suffering unprecedented skills shortages which are

predicted to intensify as the federal and state governments lean on the industry to realise the move towards Clean Energy and a Net Zero economy.

The Australian Government's Working Future White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities, identifies that Australia will need 43,000 more electricians in the next ten years.

Women make up over 50% of Australia's population and currently the industry is missing out on a huge talent pool.

The challenge in this male-dominated sector lies in the attraction, recruitment, training and retention of more women.

The industry supports workplace initiatives that remove cultural barriers, break down discriminatory practices, and make the electrotechnology sector a better place to work for everyone.

Women in electrotechnology face a range of roadblocks, such as:

- inadequate provision of accessible, well-maintained, gendered amenities
- inadequate provision of gender-appropriate, well-fitting PPE for women
- An Australian Apprenticeship Support Network that fails to offer industry specificity, hands-on mentoring,

and meaningful workplace support

- insecure, inconsistent, and inflexible working arrangements, particularly in construction

- insufficient access to women-only pre-apprenticeship pathway programs
- lack of outreach and promotion of trade-related skills and career pathways targeting primary and high-school aged girls
- unaccommodating and hypermasculine workplace cultures
- apprenticeships that are financially challenging employers and women over the age of 21.

ETU and NECA are pleased to make this joint submission to inform the work of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations on industry informed initiatives in an effort to assist women in achieving high-paying careers via VET pathways.

This industry submission outlines recommendations for good policy and program design, how tailored assistance could be provided to specific cohorts of women in VET, and how to develop more supportive training environments, inclusive workplaces and flexible work arrangements to better support women.

Acknowledgement

In the spirit of reconciliation, both the ETU and NECA acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all First Nations peoples today.



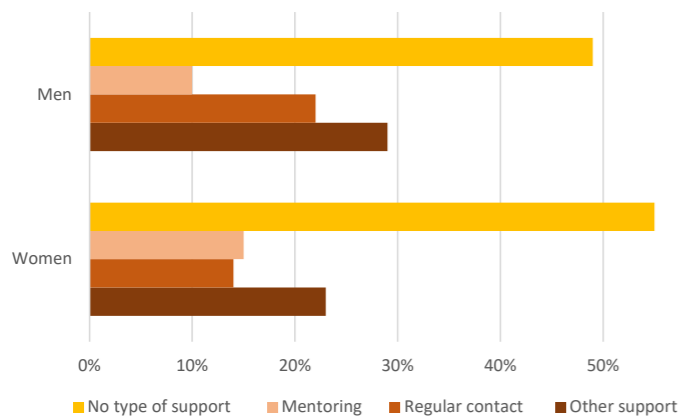
Design of Initiatives

AASN System Reform

The Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) System is failing apprentices, particularly women.

As highlighted in a survey conducted by the ETU in 2022, men were almost 50% more likely to have regular contact with their AASN than women.

Women were 10% more likely to have never received any support from their AASN.



There is a clear lack of designated role models for recruitment, education, mentoring, and support which has created a significant handbrake for recruitment and retention in electrical trades over the last decade.

The AASN system is in urgent need of reform from its current state into a model with industry specificity and genuine

industry backing that enables the provision of industry specialist female mentors able to offer personalised advice and support on workplace issues, career choices, and study-related questions.

Revitalised AASNs would be empowered to take on more responsibility for recruitment programs like school outreach and pre-apprenticeship program facilitation, as well as undertaking anonymised exit surveys to generate reliable data around where industry still needs to improve in retaining women.

The industry is in a position to work with the government in engaging suitably skilled and experienced female representatives to implement initiatives focused on increasing female participation and retention in trade-based occupations.

Many past mentoring initiatives have been too generic and, as a result, have missed the mark.

Such initiatives have failed to offer assistance with specific trade or technical questions, focussing predominantly on emotional or business mentoring instead.

The ETU and NECA will work with the government on a reform and revitalisation of AASN services.

Better procurement

The aspiration for businesses to employ more women in non-traditional roles has been strong for many years, but the incentive for women to join the sector remains unchanged.

Work practices and cultural norms that characterise the building and construction industry need to be addressed.

Industry and government can drive change through contracts, however such policy changes need to be developed in close consultation with the industry to ensure these revised policies are genuinely achievable, successful and effective in driving change in the sector.

Procurement credit should be awarded for contracts of sites that roster flexibility, are committed to building female facilities, conduct regular auditing and achieve gender pay equity.

Employee amenities (such as on site or nearby childcare) will need to be subsidised and should be considered in all government procurement contracts as part of their evaluation criteria.

The federal government is a significant purchaser of goods and services, and needs to ensure its purchasing power supports

value for money while growing economies and job opportunities.

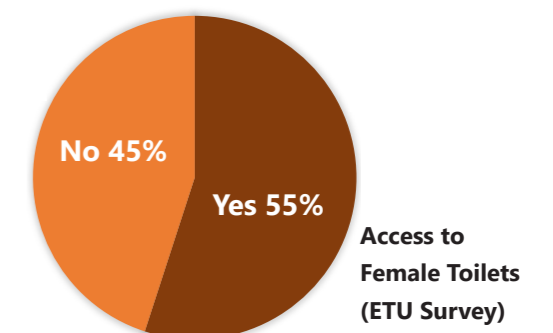
Commonwealth procurement policies need to demonstrate a commitment to providing appropriate amenities for women, gender pay equity, and flexible working arrangements.

These minimum procurement requirements should also incorporate the provision of well-fitting, gender-appropriate PPE for women: women are not small men.

Members report both comfort and safety issues stemming from a systemic failure to offer uniforms and PPE that is designed to fit women's bodies.

The current regulatory framework for defining and enforcing employer obligations to offer gender-inclusive amenities and PPE is also letting women down.

Women in electrical trades don't have access to gendered amenities at work; only half report access to sanitary bins.





The survey further found that:

- 1 in 2 workers don't have amenities that are always cleaned regularly.
- 1 in 4 workers don't always have access to toilet paper.
- 1 in 5 workers don't always have running water in their amenities.
- 1 in 6 workers don't have access to any on-site amenities.
- Manufacturing and mining are the best performing industries at providing appropriate amenities, whilst the power, lift, and domestic electrical sector all performed poorly.
- The NT and WA were the best performing states, whilst ACT was the only state to significantly underperform against the national average.
- Even when controlling for state and industry, women were less likely to have access to a gendered and/or permanent bathroom.
- Nearly half of all female respondents claimed to have raised issues around amenities in their workplace, compared with less than 30% of men.

In order to fully address the existing gaps in workplace conditions for women in trades, these requirements need to be made enforceable economy-wide through legislating them into the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*, as well as relevant State and Territory legislation.

We also note the consultation from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations on the Trade Specific Apprentice Target for Women under the Australian Skills Guarantee (<https://www.dewr.gov.au/australian-skills-guarantee>).

It is important to consider that while these proposed changes would be welcomed (although the industry would like to see much higher targets set), Commonwealth procurement policies will only apply to a specific segment of job sites around the country.

Through the *Buy Australian Plan* the government also needs to introduce procurement best practice principles to maximise opportunities for engagement of female workforces particularly in male-dominated industries such as construction.

Cohorts

The ETU and NECA encourage the Government to work closely with the industry and engage in genuine consultation with women currently working in skilled trade occupations.

Initiatives that enable opportunities for women to get into high-skilled pathways with high transferability should be targeted, as well as opportunities that provide continuous development and long-term career progression in areas of high future demand, such as clean energy and renewables.

With one in four female apprentices reporting they have considered quitting due to work culture, as well as low apprentice wages in a cost of living crisis, those women already in trade apprenticeships will need targeted support and mentoring to lift completion rates.

Furthermore, initiatives are required to target young women by lifting the profile of apprenticeships as a viable career pathway and break down gender stereotypes that currently prevent them from considering trade careers at an early age.

Groups and initiatives such as the ETU's Sparkettes and NECA's Women in Power,

have experienced success through school visits to discuss the advantages of electrical careers, hands-on practical opportunities and pre-apprenticeship programs.

Other initiatives like developing picture books for primary schoolers, sponsoring engineering and construction based challenges for school-aged children, and adjusting STEM curriculums to introduce more trade-relevant and hands-on lessons would also be valuable at lifting participation rates for women in trades.

Mature-aged apprentices

Women are also more likely to apply for apprenticeships as mature aged candidates, owing largely to the social conditioning that excludes them from even considering trade careers until after the age of 21.

Mature-aged apprentices are likely to have different motivations to taking up an apprenticeship, as well as different barriers that may prevent them completing one.

Targeted initiatives are required and must consider and address these specific factors.

The cost to hire a mature age apprentice is a challenge for all businesses.



On average, the cost of a mature age apprentice is 44% greater in the first year than that of a junior apprentice (under 21 years of age), 33% in the second year, 24% in year three before gradually decreasing to only 6% difference in the fourth year.

Addressing this wage barrier for employers to take on mature-aged apprentices due to the increased additional cost when compared to junior apprentices is required as it carries gendered implications on the industry, with most women in electrical trades entering as mature aged apprentices.

Mature aged apprentices, including young people over 21, offer great benefits as potential tradespeople due to their life and work experience, commitment to work and training, desire to achieve a qualification, and appreciation of safety protocols.

The current disincentive to hire mature age candidates particularly disadvantages women, who are more likely to apply for an apprenticeship when over 21.

The federal government has an immediate opportunity to design a scheme to support mature aged apprenticeships and address skills shortages in the broader sector.

The industry recommends the federal government enter bilateral agreements with

state governments to institute a capped and temporary subsidy scheme to remove wage barriers for Australian businesses seeking to engage mature age female apprentices.

Under the subsidy scheme it is proposed that employers of mature age apprentices claim the difference (or portion of the difference depending on employer eligibility), as a government rebate, between wage costs of a junior apprentice and those of a mature age apprentice.

The scheme is proposed to act as a temporary measure only to help attract more mature aged women to trades and address skills shortages in the building and construction sector.

As obligations to engage female workers increase across the sector and businesses begin to recognise the benefits of female and mature age apprentices, the need for government subsidies will subsequently decrease and diminish over time.

The subsidy is one incentive to level the playing field and more needs to be done to also effectively address the cost of living pressures that apprentices face.

One of the most significant barriers to women over 21 taking up an apprenticeship is the question of income, and believes that

the government should consider stronger reforms, in consultation with industry, to make apprenticeships financially accessible to women at any age. Blue collar industries like construction are also structurally designed around young apprentices and a male workforce.

Mature-aged apprentices that may have family obligations face additional barriers to a successful career in construction trades from low apprentice pay and inflexible working arrangements.

Electrical and energy trades are projected to face major shortfalls in the coming years without a major boost to the supply of skilled workers. The Government's objectives around renewable energy and new housing may not be realised unless the industry taps into the half of the labourforce that is currently underutilised.

Employers of all sizes need to be engaged, with additional support and assistance afforded to those without a history of employing women or training apprentices.

GTOs, RTOs, and AASNs are touchstone institutions that employers of all sizes interact with, and they have the capability to centralise recruitment, support, and retention initiatives for women on behalf of industry.

Female Engagement Officers

NECA currently employs a Project Officer - Female Engagement in NSW and ACT to:

- engage with NSW secondary schools with a view to conducting webinars or visits to engage with female students about careers in the Electrical Industry;
- engage with NSW employers and supervisors with a view to designing and implementing strategies to create more respectful, inclusive and safe workplaces;
- provide toolbox talks for industry employers and supervisors;
- liaise with the NECA RTO in regard to the delivery of two pre-apprenticeship programs;
- liaise with the NECA GTO and industry in regard to apprenticeship opportunities for females seeking to enter the industry;
- provide advice and support to existing female apprentices and tradeswomen in the industry with a view to improving retention rates.

The Federal Government can fund this type of initiative across the country, as this project is completely scalable, either in its entirety or in terms of its component parts.

Each component of the project could be



relatively easily delivered in any area of the country, pending the availability of adequate facilities (ie; for the pre-apprenticeship program) and resourcing.

The objectives of these Female Engagement Project Officers are broadly to:

- Increase the levels of industry employer and supervisor engagement and participation in toolbox talks and conversations around improving workplace culture, specifically in regard to creating more diverse, inclusive, respectful and safe workplaces.
- Increase levels of secondary school female student engagement with, and participation in, webinars and visits to discuss career pathways in the Electrical industry.
- Encourage growth in the number of females entering industry as a result of the advice and support provided, and the networks created.
- Encourage growth in the number of females remaining in the industry as a result of the advice and support provided and the creation of more diverse, inclusive, respectful and safe workplaces.
- Ensure fully subscribed pre-apprenticeship programs successfully

delivered, with students transitioning from the pre-apprenticeship programs into electrical or construction industry apprenticeships.

The design of this project has been informed by the learnings of previous projects that have seen female participation in one NECA Centre of Excellence rise to above 15%.

Similarly, the most recent female-only pre-apprenticeship program delivered in NSW saw four females commence Electrical Apprenticeships with Ausgrid at the beginning of 2023, one of whom was 41 years of age.

NECA has also partnered directly with industry to deliver standalone female-only pre-apprenticeship programs.

Successful 'Women in Power' projects have been provided and have resulted in employment opportunities for women in a range of electrical supply industry and electrical contracting organisations.

Women-only pre-apprenticeship pathways have shown promise in attracting women into trades and boosting their completion rates, but only a few such programs exist.

These programs need to become more mainstream through more permanent government funding arrangements.

The industry has found that whilst women-only pre-apprenticeships are beneficial, it can be detrimental to continue gender segregated pathways once the full apprenticeship commences.

That said, retention is higher in classes that include two or more female apprentices, which is a recommendation for all RTOs moving forward.

To properly evaluate what's working and what isn't, changes in women's participation should be measured against a range of variables:

- Growth in both nominal and proportional terms
- Growth by qualification - at pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship and post-apprenticeship trade levels.
- Growth by industry of employment

Progress on making VET pathways more supportive and enjoyable environments for women should be measured by monitoring completion rates, as well as gathering quantitative and qualitative data through surveys and exit interviews.

CASE STUDY

'EmPower' Indigenous Pre-Apprenticeship Program

This NECA program has resulted in:

- *upskilling of close to 200 of NSW's most disadvantaged indigenous youth*
- *63% of graduates have secured employment*
- *20% returning to school or further education.*

NECA is now seeing participants from this program in our graduating Certificate III in Electrotechnology – Electrician cohorts.

Women-in-Trades Pre-Apprenticeship Program

This program has more than doubled the number of female apprentices now working with NECA, with an apprentice cohort attending the NECA ACT Centre of Excellence exceeding 15%; 12% higher than the national industry average.

Over 500 women have engaged with this initiative which is further underpinned by NECA's NSW Government funded 'Women in Construction Industry Innovation Program'.



Tailored Support

Support and Mentoring

Electrical Pre-Apprenticeship Program

NECA has also provided open-access pre-apprenticeship programs to over 500 male, female and Indigenous youth.

These programs have provided participants with the necessary entry-level knowledge and skills to work effectively and remain safe on industry worksites as a first year Apprentice in the electrical, or broader construction, industries.

In the ACT specifically, three rounds of Future Skills for Future Jobs Projects have provided entry level electrical industry training to close to 200 Year 9-12 (15-18 year old) students from the ACT and surrounding region.

This program has resulted in over 50 new construction industry Apprentices, including male, female and indigenous youth, with another 20 expected to commence apprenticeships in the next two years following completion of their secondary school studies.

Michelle Ellis
NECA Manager, Projects and Governance

As the industry's peak bodies, ETU and NECA, are committed to assisting women overcome the range of barriers they face. In their traditional industrial roles, they are able to negotiate wages, advocate for more flexible rostering, and highlight obligations to provide non-hostile working environments.

Many peak bodies also offer women's networks and committees to provide an inclusive social outlet and coordinate support initiatives (e.g. ETU Sparkettes).

WIMDOI (Women in Male Dominated Occupations) is a collective initiative of the trade union movement to further coordinate and encourage the recruitment and retention of women into male dominated industries.

ETU Victoria's training facility, **The Centre for U**, has successfully run the Women in Apprenticeships Victoria Electrical (WAVE) program in collaboration with Holmesglen Institute, Victorian Trades Hall Council, Australian Women in Solar Energy, and the Victorian Department of Education and Training.

WAVE seeks to attract women to targeted information events, recruit them into women-only pre-apprenticeships, and support them with mentoring through the first year of an electrical apprenticeship.

The WAVE project won a Gold Industry Collaboration Award at the Australian Training Awards in 2023.

The Project uses the KommunityLabs Engine (KLE) to enable rapid yet controlled communities of practice around industry expertise and verticals. It is built around the premise that trusted peer-to-peer learning makes up nearly 80% of total knowledge and support with 20% being from formal learning institutions.

Informal networks using free comms tools and social media groups have great value in access, but are often advertising-based and on-sell data and content.

The app holds resources, forums, chats around our specific area of interest and record the mentor/mentee meetings.

Any discussion, post or interaction belongs to the community and individual members and is searchable ongoing even when parties leave.

The "Community of Practice" realises that the value gained by the group is both what trusted parties "put in" but the ease and relevant of what is "learned and taken out" from all.

Hands-on mentoring programs using mentors with industry experience who can offer technical and academic advice.

With an apprentice completion rate of well above the national average, the expertise of the NECA group network shows apprentice mentoring programs when utilised correctly and with best practice delivers superior outcomes in completion rates and retention.

NECA's targeted actions, quality pre-employment programs and good support for female apprentices are changing women's lives.

NECA firmly believes that:

- quality education, skills and training initiatives are critical for the development of the electrical trade;
- governments must ensure there are adequate opportunities, initiatives and funding to support a diverse workforce, and that the small business sector is incentivised as the major employer of the next generation of tradespeople;
- governments have a critical role to play in informing school students of potential career pathways and opportunities, especially for opportunities within the trades sector;
- initiatives are required to ensure a more gender and age diverse workforce;
- benefits of a career pathway into the electrotechnology industry need to be promoted more broadly.

Ecosystem

Boosting female participation

OBJECTIVES



Where we are today.

Where we are going.

Where we belong.

STRATEGIES



KEY ENABLERS



INFLUENCERS



KEY CHALLENGES



Ongoing engagement, monitoring & improvement

The industry recommends that a tripartite and government funded Female Apprentice Mentoring Program is developed and rolled out nationally to intervene early in the process of assisting female apprentices and their employers that are in the electrical and communications industry.

ETU and NECA are committed to actively driving evidence based and genuine change, changing laws, making people accountable for their behaviour, improving workplace culture and ensuring that government leads by example in making women feel valued, safe and welcome in all sectors of the nation's economy.

Only through a holistic approach will industry and government be able to collectively influence the complete ecosystem of women entering the workforce from early education to longer-term career planning in the sector.

CASE STUDY

Mentoring

"Informally, in my workplace I've been lucky enough to have a good group of tradesmen who have taken me under their wing and treated me like a sister.

They have been genuine and willing to share their skills and knowledge.

When you're shown what good work and good work practices look like, you want to rise to that standard and make them proud of your work as well.

A good mentoring program should be built around someone going with you through the whole apprenticeship, they should know you personally and be more than just a phone number to text or call when something comes up.

A good mentor is one that sets a good example as a role model for what it is to be a professional tradesperson across all aspects of the job."

Zahn Anthony

ETU Apprentice of the Year 2023



Inclusive VET environments and workplaces

CASE STUDY

Social Barriers

“While there are many barriers to break down to make male dominated industries more accessible to women, the very first obstacle a woman will face on their journey is a lack of awareness of the opportunities available to them.

Encouraging participation in the industry really needs to start with young girls.

I know a multitude of women who only started their apprenticeship as an adult because the field was never presented to them by schools or parents as a viable option to consider.

The absence of exposure for young girls to these workplaces makes the industry and a massive potential workforce completely invisible to each other.

Targeted education programs for kids and their families could really help parents and young people better understand what’s available.

I pursued an apprenticeship as an electrician for several reasons - I had an interest in STEM and math but as a person in my mid 20’s did not want to return to university.

An electrical apprenticeship resulted in many well-paying career options and with no HECS debt.

I knew I wanted to do something mentally stimulating and challenging so this ticked all of those boxes for me.

I think it’s important to note that while many people get into this industry because they are ‘good with their hands’, electrotechnology is such a diverse field that there can be something for everyone.

I particularly have an interest control circuits and programming. It’s incredibly rewarding to come up with solutions.”

Tessa McLaughlin
CEPU Tasmania Member

Pilot programs

We have seen significant culture change in corporate environments and boardrooms where female voices are heard, and it is time to break down barriers preventing women from having construction industry careers.

A target of no less than 30% is required to achieve cultural change and effective work environments conducive to encouraging female participation.

Numerous studies have proven that with a critical mass of female trades and supervisors on exemplar sites, we are likely to see immediate, effective and genuine behavioural influence and culture shift.

If we are to make a meaningful impact on the number of women joining our industry, we need a change to how we approach the issue, a step change is required.

The industry is proposing a pilot program led by the federal government with major construction companies in each jurisdiction to include testing of:

- collaborative methods of setting shifts to balance personal needs and preferences with business output demands

- staggered start and finish times, on a rostered basis
- home-based work for desk-based roles
- empowering and encouraging site managers to make decisions about flexible working arrangements, within a broader company framework
- supported data collection to identify barriers to workforce participation within companies
- support for HR departments and site managers to respond effectively to that information.

The industry can support the federal government’s investments in exemplar sites, schemes and trials by utilising its large cohort of apprentices to direct female apprentices to specific sites and work collaboratively with RTOs and GTOs to deliver the same on such sites.

In collaboration with larger head contractors and subcontractors apprentices can be supported by female GTO field officers, supervisors, project engineers and project managers to create greater support and visibility of the female cohort on the site.



Key considerations

Exemplar sites under the pilot programs will form an important introductory point for female apprentices as they acclimatise to what can often be a confronting working environment.

Whilst the industry acknowledges there is a role for supervisors, project engineers, and project managers within this proposed quota, the industry proposes to work closely with the government to set trade-specific targets on these sites.

The government needs to thoroughly consider the way in which targets are developed, delivered and promoted to avoid unintended consequences.

Workforce gender imbalances and cultural issues are particularly pronounced in the trades and mismatches in skill-specific knowledge and workplace power may act as an impediment to non-trade workers being able to provide full support to tradeswomen in need of assistance or advice.

It is recommended a minimum target of 10% of apprentices on exemplar sites to be women, with specific conditions for hiring and training local women and targeting high-skill trade occupations.

However these targets need to be developed with and by the workforce to avoid negative consequences for women who can often be labelled as a 'token' apprentices or worse, accused of 'stealing a boy's job'.

Connecting pre-employment pathways to recruitment strategies will ensure:

- women have the opportunity to apply for apprenticeships on an equal footing to their male counterparts, and
- employers committing to draw from successful pools of graduate prevocational women is a more nuanced approach that will reduce the risk of unintended consequences.

These strategies must also be accompanied by strong workplace education strategies to remove stigma.

We would also support the implementation of a progressive increase to targets and expanding successfully trialled practices across the entire industry.

All strategies, including procurement criteria and expected working conditions for these recommended pilot projects, need to be developed in consultation with industry, particularly its tradeswomen and their unions.

Culture training

Failing to provide training will mean that poor behaviour continues, and failing to provide support will mean that it continues to go unaddressed.

There will remain a need for targeted cultural training, to ensure that males that struggle with the transition are educated to understand what behaviours are expected.

The federal government is encouraged to allocate funds to develop appropriate cultural training for all apprentices and workers inducted onsite, and support workers in developing respectful relationships through culture change.

The training is required to be targeted, informed and address all errant behaviours including coercive control, sexual harassment, discrimination and inappropriate workplace behaviour.

This training assists not only in the context of the work site but can continue into the domestic relationships of industry participants; culture of abuse and culture of silence must not be tolerated on work sites.

The industry is asking the government to support male-dominated sectors by enabling independent and confidential mechanisms for women to raise concerns in relation to inappropriate behaviour on sites.

The government and industry need to make sure female workers are aware of this service and related policies, and that raising a concern will not result in ramifications for them.

Further support networks need to be provided in the form of dedicated apprentice mentoring programs, female field officers, support services for mental health, domestic violence support network and culture training for males and females.

CASE STUDY

Workplace Culture

"My experiences have varied from being very positive to very challenging. I think that the older generation are usually the most unwilling for change to happen; it's not always the case, but there's a pattern.

I think the key to improving the experiences of women in trades is to keep pushing for diversity and to call out bad behaviour more. Our trade relies heavily on mateship and where there's mateship there's solidarity. The ETU have helped to pave the way in that regard."

Iyesha Paull
ETU Apprentice of the Year 2022



Female facilities and childcare

Facility upgrades are required on construction sites, to enable basic amenities for female workers, including changing facilities, designated lunch areas, toilets and showers, and maintain those to appropriate standards and expectations.

Such facilities need to be genuinely accessible and at no greater inconvenience than facilities offered as standard to male workers.

Another reason why women leave the building and construction industry is the long hours that are required by workers onsite.

The necessity of safety discussions, particularly toolbox talks commence early in the morning and engage all trades and site participants.

These outside the hours of childcare providers and out of school programs.

Childcare facilities and subsidy programmes designed for these sectors would encourage greater and more diverse participation for all cohorts.

Having onsite childcare and before/ afterschool care will ensure that parents are close to their children in the event of unforeseen issues and will reduce the

amount of travel time required to attend to their children's needs.

This alone would act as a significant incentive for women (and men) to not only join, but also remain in the industry during the early years of their children's lives.

These considerations should also extend to VET providers where female apprentices also face similar issues.

Many of the older VET facilities in Australia were constructed during a period where women's participation was actively excluded, let alone considered.

VET providers should be encouraged to consider childcare facilities on-site, as is occurring in the university sector.

CASE STUDY

Childcare and Flexible Scheduling

"As part of my apprenticeship I was required to travel over 1.5 hours from my home on the NSW Central Coast to Sydney in order to attend my TAFE.

There was no consideration of how this would affect how I was able to manage taking care of my children with the increased travel requirements to attend TAFE.

A lack of early morning childcare options had to be mitigated by changing my husband's roster to accommodate.

Even just allowing me to attend block release at TAFE would have made my life easier. If my husband wasn't able to change his shift to accommodate the lack of childcare I'm not sure how I would have made it work."

Raven Maris

ETU National Affirmative Action Officer



Australian Skills Guarantee

Using government procurement settings is one of the best tools that Governments have to encourage employers to create more opportunities for women in VET career pathways.

The Australian Skills Guarantee (ASG) will be a positive step, requiring Commonwealth contract recipients in the construction sector to meet training and gender-balance targets.

The ASG should be expanded to include a wider range of industries that will be receiving considerable government support in the coming decade such as the energy, infrastructure and manufacturing sectors.

Employer education and training initiatives, as well as ongoing support especially for those without experience hiring women will be necessary to help bridge the gap that currently exists.

Industry-led initiatives, such as the Apprentice Power AASN led by the ETU in 2023, that are able to serve as a conduit between the training system, industry, and workers are the best path for generating buy-in from employers and giving them the tools required to make workplaces safer, more inviting places for women.

Industrial relations reforms that give workers more power to negotiate favourable enterprise agreements and advocate for improved workplace conditions will be similarly impactful.

Such reforms enable workers to engage with employers on a more even footing to develop appropriate targets, plans, and management strategies for improving the participation and retention of tradeswomen.

Improving the VET system so that relevant training is more readily accessible in more places is a much needed first step to enable employers to embrace up-skilling women.

Establishing industry-led 'centres of excellence' for critical skills in the regions where they will be needed most will help encourage employers to buy-in to an ambitious skills and training agenda.

The full implementation of the ASG will necessarily encourage employers in the construction sector to improve their performance on female participation in skilled trade and apprenticeship roles.

This should be expanded at a minimum to the clean energy sector in the near future.

About us

The **ETU** is a division of the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU).

The ETU is the principal union for electrical and electrotechnology tradespeople and apprentices in Australia, representing over 60,000 workers around the country.

The CEPU represents over 100,000 workers nationally, making us amongst the largest trade unions in Australia.

The ETU's membership has significant concentrations in the resources, construction and power industries, although it is spread throughout the economy including the manufacturing, tourism, entertainment, business equipment and defence support industries.

A typical ETU member is a highly skilled electrotechnology worker who has completed at least a four-year apprenticeship and is subject to ongoing training, certification, licensing and development requirements

NECA is the peak body for Australia's electrical and communications industry and represents 6,700 businesses performing works including the design, installation, and maintenance of electrical and electronic equipment in the construction, mining, air conditioning, refrigeration, manufacturing, communications, and renewable energy sectors.

NECA also plays an integral role in the development of the next generation of Australia's electrical, energy and communications tradespeople and contractors.

Through its associated Group Training Organisations (GTOs) and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), NECA offers employment and trade training to some 4,800 apprentices nationally, with a 90% completion rate, compared to the national average of just 55%;

NECA's female participation in apprenticeships sits above 15% against an industry average of less than 5%.