



Media Release/Statement

WA Government free training announcement not enough to assist women to return to work

ALA and WAVE, two of Australia's peak organisations representing equity and equality in adult learning, VET, and community education, have called on the WA Government to do a lot more to break down barriers to women's access to education and training than make one low-level course free.

The [WA Government announced](#) on Monday that it was adding the Certificate I in New Opportunities for Women (NOW) to its fee-free training list. However, Jenny Macaffer, Chief Executive Officer of Adult Learning Australia, pointed out, 'The Government has recognised in its announcement the significant barriers faced by women who want to enter or re-enter the workforce, but the cost of the course is only one of the barriers.'

While Ms Macaffer congratulated WA on the new initiative, she questioned how this program fits into a comprehensive equity strategy aimed at addressing all the barriers and inequities faced by women in the education and training system. She emphasised that women struggle to return to the workplace due to societal stereotypes about care responsibilities, existing systems that explicitly or implicitly hinder their return (such as the lack of childcare), and the inflexibility of workplaces in supporting the transition back to work.

Kit McMahon, National Co-Convenor of WAVE, added, 'It is less about the skills of the individual than it is about the culture, norms, and structures of our industry and workplace.' Ms McMahon also highlighted that homelessness and family violence are significant barriers to workforce participation, emphasising the need to address these issues beyond just boosting women's confidence by providing housing and other practical support for women to recover and rebuild their lives.

Ms Macaffer further stated, 'Without a gender and equality strategy, the investment in these courses does not address the drivers of real inequality.'

Both WAVE and ALA have consistently advised governments, particularly the Federal Government, on the strategies needed to tackle inequality. They argue that investing in this work will address low completion rates, enhance workplace safety, tackle inequities in the

education and training system, and build the capability of the sector for more effective decision-making over the long term.

Ms McMahon concluded, 'It's time to listen to the lived experience of women and of those that are facing compounding forms of discrimination and disadvantage when we make these decisions. It is time to connect with and learn from the range of evidence that is available to education and skill policy makers to do this work properly.'

Further Information

Who is WAVE?

WAVE is a national network of women involved in Vocational Education and Training (VET) and adult education. WAVE provides research, policy advice and advocacy to Australian and State/ Territory Governments on gender equity in skills and adult education policy, and provides input into VET and adult education internationally.

For full submissions go to <https://wave.org.au/news/>

Who is ALA?

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) is the largest national peak body for adult and community education (ACE). We are a not-for-profit entity that has been in operation for more than 60 years, with both organisational and individual members in all states and territories who reflect the diversity of adult and community education.

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