

Gender Equity in Adult Community Education: Position Statement

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Background story

The 2015 Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence identified that there was a shortage of trained, skilled professionals to meet the demand required to implement effective, wide-reaching prevention of violence against women initiatives across the state. The Victorian Government funded Women's Health Victoria (WHV) and a consortium of organisations including RMIT, Monash University, Knox City Council, Women with Disabilities Victoria, ACEVic and two Learn Local Providers - Coonara Community House and Yarrowonga Education & Training to develop and pilot an accredited Course in Gender Equity and six Gender equity Microcredentials.

At the same time, it was acknowledged that an accredited learning pathway is not the only pathway to develop workplace competence and two pathway courses providing jobseeker and career changer learning opportunities were also proposed and developed as part of the funded project in accordance with the Pre-accredited Quality Framework.

Additionally, since the 2015 Royal Commission, Victoria has seen regulatory changes which have resulted in a shift in knowledge and skills required by those seeking work and working in a range of industries not just those working in the family violence sector. The Victorian Gender Equality Act 2020ⁱ was enacted in February 2020, the Act aims to improve how the Victorian public sector and defined entities embed gender equality in their workplaces and communities. Under the Act there is one Community Based Adult Education Provider which is a defined entity – AMES Australia.

The Act mandates a number of requirements that all prescribed entities, as described in the Act, must comply with. This includes actions to assess the nature of gender-based differences in the organisations as well as in the policies, programs and services they deliver to the public. They must also plan, measure and track progress towards achieving gender equality within their workplace. Approximately 300 organisations are covered under the Act, representing approximately 10% of the Victorian workforce. A substantial amount of people needing skills development in the area of workplace gender equality and changing the future workforce employability skill needs for these entities.

Anecdotally Women's Health Victoria, through the work of the Action for Gender Equality Partnership led by Gender Equity Victoria, have also seen a shift in workforce development needs with many non-prescribed entities now seeking gender equality capability building for their workplaces, including those working in the Family Violence sector and the broader community and corporate sectors. What this means is that there is a broad expectation within workplaces for current and future workforces to hold an understanding of gender equality and how it interplays within the workplace and impacts outcomes for staff, clients and customers. This change in workplace expectations is creating a shift in employability skills expectations within workplaces, adding an understanding of gender equality as equally as important as other employability skills such as workplace communication and workplace health and safety.



The Learn Local sector plays a crucial role in ensuring that core skills for work including literacy, numeracy, English language and employability skills are taught and understood by the Victorian workforces of tomorrow.

The training need

As noted by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency in numerous submissions and reports, employers and employees need to better understand the impact of gender inequality and how to address it if we are to take action to create a more gender equitable work environment. In response to this identified need two pathway courses (pre-accredited learning) were developed using the Pre-Accredited Quality Framework, for the Victorian Learn Local sector to deliver.

The education sector understands this and are working towards ensuring Victorians have the skills to engage in practices that are respectful to all genders working across the lifespan to develop these skills.

In the compulsory year's environment funded by the Victorian government, there are Respectful Relationships programs supporting schools and early childhood settings to promote and model respect, positive attitudes and behaviours.ⁱⁱ

In the last month the Victorian TAFE sector rolled out the new Respect and Equality in TAFE program developed by Our Watch, funded by the Victorian Government, recognising the important role of TAFE as an educator of the future Victorian workforces and as a major employer and their role in ensuring gender equality and safe spaces for all students and employees.ⁱⁱⁱ

March this year the university sector launched it's Educating for Equality resources to stop gendered violence developed by Our Watch and Universities Australia in partnership with the Victorian Government, recognising the importance of harnessing gender inequality in order to maximise a Victorian's future potential.^{iv}

However, there is a very clear gap in this picture. To date the Adult and Community Education sector through the Learn Local network has made no public statement of support for, or resources to support gender equality within their program delivery or workplace practices. The Learn Local network is a large employer with 250 providers across Victoria who provide education programs to build confidence in their students to get a job or go on to further education.

Learn Locals play a crucial role in preparing people for work, yet they are not addressing this growing demand and need for a better understanding and application of gender equality in the workplace. Under the state-wide approach to pre-accredited training delivery through Learn Local providers there is a clear alignment between industry need and educational intent of training delivered under the scope of the *Adult, Community And Further Education Board Strategy 2020–25 Skills For Study, Work and Life*^v specifically the focus on bringing together leading-edge knowledge, promoting people's skills, inclusion and wellbeing and supporting the sustainability of business and industry across Victoria. Strong businesses have staff with contemporary skills and knowledge that will lead Victorian communities forward.

Pre-accredited pathway programs are founded in the principle of student-centred learning that ensures the learner's needs are met, especially when delivered in a supported community environment. Pre-accredited training supports the development of the future workforce and meets changing needs of workplaces, through jobseeker training that draws on contemporary workplace practices, such as gender equity.

In line with the mission of the ACEF Board strategy, the inclusion of pre-accredited gender equity pathway programs positions the Victorian Adult and Community Education sector to lead gender equity education and training in response to changing workplace requirements and the broader regulatory requirements both at the state and federal level.

In keeping with the aspirational principles defined within the ACFE Board Strategy the Learn Local sector and Adult, Community and Further Education Board leadership will ensure that:

- Learners are offered education and training that matches the needs of local communities and employers
- Are delivering demonstrably positive social and economic impact on individuals and the Victorian community as a whole
- Are collaborating with industry and employers to understand trends and needs

The Future of Adult Community Education in Victoria 2020–25 Ministerial Statement^{vi} also supports that training provided by the sector should contribute to developing core foundation skills for work, further study, civic participation, and literacy, numeracy and employability skills.

We strongly believe the gender equity pathway courses meet these aspirational principles and objectives and are aligned to the goals of both the ACFE Board Strategy and the Ministerial Statement.

The courses

The pathway courses assist learners to articulate into both employment and the accredited Course in Gender Equity. They provide upskilling and reskilling opportunities for vulnerable workers, jobseekers and career changers. Providing educational opportunities to meet the changing workplace requirements and keeping pace with industry transition to equitable work environments.

The pathway courses were co-designed by industry and developed for jobseekers and career changers, informed by contemporary research and subject matter expertise:

1. Introduction to gender equity work (refer attached AFrame documentation)
2. Prepare for employment: the changing Australian workplace (refer attached AFrame documentation)

The pathway courses were developed in accordance with the Pre-accredited Quality Framework (AFrame).



The resources

As part of the WHV Gender Equity Project^{vii} a suite of resources has been developed to support delivery of the two pathway courses. The suite includes all teaching and learning materials supported by a comprehensive Implementation Guide aligned to the *Teaching Gender Equity Toolkit*^{viii} developed through the original project.

It is recognised that teachers delivering courses developed under the Pre-Accredited Training Framework are not required to hold any specific credentials but rather they understand the subject matter that they are delivering and the cohort they are teaching. However, Women’s Health Victoria and ACEVic both support that teacher preparation is required for these courses due to the content matter and the potential for push back, resistance or disclosures that may arise during the program delivery.

To that end it is recommended that trainers delivering this course complete the following Microcredentials to prepare them for delivering these programs:

- Apply a Gender Lens Microcredential (2hr)^{ix}
- Communicating Gender Equity Microcredential (2hr)^x

Which are both freely available to Victorian Learn Local Providers via the Victorian Department of Education and training license^{xi} held with WHV. Along with the following free short online courses:

- Introduction to PVAW Short Course (45min)^{xii}
- Introduction to Gender Equality Short Course (45min)^{xiii}

Which are both available for free via the Women's Health Victoria online learning platform.

Additionally, we recommend that all trainers read the *Teaching Gender Equity Research*^{xiv} and companion document *Teaching Gender Equity Toolkit* to understand the resources and content, to support development of effective pedagogical approaches for teaching gender equity.

We believe that this approach will provide a comprehensive and flexible suite of teaching resources and training to support informed and effective teaching of gender equity for jobseekers and career changers.

The recommendation

We recommend the ACFE Board and Department of Education and Training approve delivery of the pathways programs as funded pre-accredited courses.

All teaching and learning resources and A Frame documentation has been developed and will be made available to support delivery and for inclusion on the Learn Local website and program sharing platform under creative commons attribution and sharing.

Learn Local providers that prepare their trainers and themselves to deliver these programs will additionally be starting the journey towards gender equality within their own work practices as they acquire the skills and knowledge to apply the principles of gender equality to their teaching practice and broader work.

WHV is happy to provide additional support to the ACFE Board and Learn Local Providers on the work required to apply a gender lens across the sector as is already happening within the Early Childhood, Compulsory years, TAFE, and University sectors, however that work is outside the scope of this submission.

ⁱ Gender Equality Act 2020 <https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/about-gender-equality-act-2020>

ⁱⁱ Respectful relationships <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/respectfulrelationships.aspx>

ⁱⁱⁱ Change the story at TAFE <https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/video-collection/change-the-story-in-your-tafe/>

^{iv} Change the story at your university <https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/video-collection/change-the-story-at-universities/>

^v ACFE Board Strategy 2020-25

https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/acfepublications/ACFE_Board_Strategy_2020-25.pdf

^{vi} ACE Ministerial Statement <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/training/learners/learnlocal/Future-ACE-2020-25-Ministerial-Statement.pdf>

^{vii} WHV GET Project <https://whv.org.au/our-focus/gender-equity-project>

^{viii} Teaching Gender Equity Toolkit <https://whv.org.au/resources/whv-publications/teaching-gender-equity-toolkit-teaching-gender-equity-units-competency>

^{ix} Apply a Gender Lens Microcredential <https://womenshealthvictoria.otrainu.com/product/apply-a-gender-lens/>

^x Communicating Gender Equity Microcredential <https://womenshealthvictoria.otrainu.com/product/communicating-gender-equity/>

^{xi} The Victorian Government, through the Department of Education & Training, has a license agreement to share the resources developed through the GET Project, including the listed Microcredentials, with all Victorian TAFEs and Learn Local Providers – Learn Local Providers are to email VET.SharedLearning@education.vic.gov.au to access the Microcredentials.

^{xii} Introduction to PVAW short course <https://womenshealthvictoria.otrainu.com/product/pvaw-101/>

^{xiii} Introduction to gender equity short course <https://womenshealthvictoria.otrainu.com/product/introduction-to-gender-equity/>

^{xiv} Supporting Gender Equity education Research Paper <https://whv.org.au/resources/whv-publications/supporting-gender-equity-education-research-project-inform-gender-equity>