

THURSDAY, 25 MAY 2023

WOMEN IN TRADES UP AT FEDERATION TAFE

Data released by Federation TAFE shows how emerging skills needs in the region and the removal of barriers is encouraging more women than ever to seek a trade.

The figures reflect Federation TAFE's support of getting more women into the workforce and addressing the disparity of women working in male-dominated trades

Encouragingly, the number of women enrolling in Federation TAFE courses remained steady during the pandemic with around 240 enrolments annually, before an increase of over 100 additional enrolments in 2022 and healthy enrolments again at the start of this year. The overall percentage of female apprentices and trainees at Federation TAFE now sits at 17%.

Even more women are expected to seek a trade following the recent pledge from the Federal Government of \$8.6 million to deliver the Australian Skills Guarantee which aims to vastly increase the number of women in apprenticeships, traineeships and cadetships by 2030.

Closing the gender gap

There has been promising growth in the number of women enrolling in a variety of programs at Federation TAFE, including:

- The number of women studying Electrotechnology Electrician programs has doubled since 2019.
- The number of women enrolled in Early Childhood Education and Care has effectively doubled year-on-year since 2019, with women now accounting for 87% of enrolments.
- Agriculture enrolments have shown that women are growing within the overall cohort, from 18% in 2019 to now being a third of total students (32%) in 2023.
- The proportion of female cabinet making students has effectively doubled rising from 5% in 2019 to 9% of the 2023 cohort.

Alice Stewart is one of the recent women studying a Certificate III in Cabinet Making and is proof that gender plays no role when it comes to excelling in a trade. Alice will be graduating this year and is currently employed by a small women-run business specialising in upholstery and furniture restoration.

"When I did my first certificate back in 2018 there was a bit of shock and awe from others seeing me as a female walking into the trade centre. However, now it's good to see more women in my class and doing trades in general. In my experience, women who are studying at TAFE don't just see their trade as just a job, it's a real passion for them."

Strong female representation

In recent years, some courses have enjoyed consistently high levels of women enrolments such as hairdressing (98% women), community services (92% women) and nursing (92% women).

Steady as she goes

Traditionally male-dominated trades like plumbing, automotive mechanics and carpentry have shown little change in women enrolment rates in recent years. Plumbing has the lowest rate of women participation of all, with women averaging around 1% of total enrolments in recent years.

Why the increases?

Factors contributing to more women in vocational education are likely to include:

- Organisations promoting the representation of women like the National Association of Women in Construction and Tradeswomen Australia
- Initiatives aimed at supporting women in non-traditional occupations like the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Women in Non-traditional Trades program, Women Building Australia program, delivered by Master Builders Australia and The Women in Work Boots initiative
- Strengthened support and services from organisations like Apprenticeships Support Australia
- Promoting vocational learning opportunities for secondary school students through partnerships like the Highlands Local Learning Employment Network (Highlands LLEN) VET (Vocational and Education Training) Cluster and Head Start, school-based apprenticeship and traineeship program
- Widespread skilled workers shortages
- Free TAFE programs
- Changing societal attitudes and improved workplace practices

Empowerment and Education

Federation TAFE encourages women in trades through the annual Girls Try-A-Trade Day, directly addressing the lack of trade careers information given to girls often cited as a major barrier for women aspiring to enter a skilled trade.

In 2022 over 80 high school girls across the greater Ballarat region got valuable hands-on experience in Federation TAFE's trade space and had the chance to speak with TAFE teachers, industry partners and women in trades, to learn about potential future career pathways.

Quote attributable to Deputy Vice-Chancellor and CEO, Federation TAFE Mr Liam Sloan

“It is encouraging to see more women enrolling and thriving in their trade careers but unfortunately there is still a way to go. Federation TAFE is doing everything we can to ensure industry reflects society and are always pushing for greater accessibility and inclusivity for all.”

“The budget announcements echo Federation TAFE’s own commitment to encouraging women to pick up the tools in male-dominated industries. Federation TAFE aims to transform lives and enhance communities in the regions where we operate and welcome more opportunities for women to enter traditionally male industries and occupations.”

Quote from Sharyn Wright, Head of Centre, Centre for Service Industries and the Built Environment

“Federation TAFE believes women’s participation and gender equality within vocational education and training and industry is of the utmost importance. Ensuring that our learning spaces are welcoming and inclusive for all is a focus for all in Team TAFE.”

“With women still disproportionately represented in traditionally male dominated industries, these figures are promising for women and girls exploring a career in the trade industry, and for addressing skilled worker shortages in the regional areas in which Federation TAFE operates.”

About Federation University Australia

With a history spanning over 150 years, Federation University Australia is Victoria’s premier regional dual-sector university with campuses located in Ballarat, Berwick, Brisbane, Gippsland and Wimmera. From 2018-2022 Federation ranked first in Australia for first-generation student enrolments. In a first for Australia, the globally recognised co-operative education model will be embedded across all Federation programs from 2025.