

30 July 2025



Alison Marchant  
Member for Bellarine  
Chair of the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee  
Parliament of Victoria

Dear Chair,

**RE: INQUIRY INTO STUDENT PATHWAYS TO IN-DEMAND INDUSTRIES**

I write to you today on behalf of Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC) to make a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry on student pathways into in-demand industries. Established in 1856, VTHC is the peak body for unions in Victoria, representing 500,000 union members from 40 affiliated unions. These members represent every industry and occupation across this great state, and are all committed to seeing their community and the Victorian economy thrive.

Victorian Unions fully support an education system that skills and upskills workers. VTHC fully endorses the submissions made by affiliated unions, including the Australian Education Union, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Independent Education Union.

VTHC is encouraged to see the Victorian Government give consideration to the future workforce needs. Getting Victorians onto pathways to in-demand industries requires a multi-faceted and multi-layered approach, but must be underpinned by good, secure, well-paid jobs, that give workers a sense of accomplishment and appreciation. The Victorian Government has a role to play in ensuring that all Victorians can benefit from good, secure well-paid jobs.

Should you wish to discuss this submission further, please don't hesitate to contact VTHC Political Organiser, Clare Elliott, at [celliott@vthc.org.au](mailto:celliott@vthc.org.au).

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "W. Stracke".

Wil Stracke  
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Victorian Trades Hall Council  
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Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC), as the peak body for unions in Victoria, advocates on behalf of all working Victorians for justice and dignity in all aspects of their life. This inquiry is a unique opportunity for the Victorian Government to equip the education system to meet future workforce challenges and support the Victorian economy. This submission outlines the opportunities for reform related to educators, care-based industries, clean energy, women in male dominated industries, and supports for people with disabilities.

Issues outlined and accompanying recommendations should be read in conjunction with the recommendations made by the Young Workers Centre.

### **Identifying the in-demand industries**

This inquiry is concerned with pathways into in-demand industries, and as such the committee refers to the Victorian Skills Authority's (VSA) list of in-demand industries and occupations<sup>1</sup>. This list, contained in the appendix to this submission, is non-exhaustive and only details new workers expected between 2024 and 2027.

It would be wise to highlight the most in-demand occupations, rather than occupations within the most in-demand industries. The VSA list favours providing more in-demand industries and misses a number of major in-demand occupations within the most in-demand industries.

There are in-demand occupations missing from the VSA's list, and there are soon to be in-demand industries worth prioritising through this reform project. These missing in-demand occupations include early childhood educators,<sup>2</sup> social workers, disability and aged care support workers, general practitioners, transport workers including truck drivers, bus drivers, tram and train drivers, and manufacturing workers including advanced manufacturing. These occupations have all been the target of government recruitment, retention or promotion programs in recent years, are considered growth industries, and are vital to social wellbeing.

### **Supporting the education workforce**

Investing in the workforce that delivers and supports pathways into in-demand industries is critical to ensuring that graduates in these industries are job-ready. For students to thrive, their educators and support staff must be experienced, knowledgeable, have up-to-date technical knowledge and technology, and be actively supported by industry experts. The Government has an important role to play in ensuring that the educators, support staff, school-based careers counsellors, administrators and support officers who dedicate their lives to supporting young people into good, meaningful jobs are well remunerated, trained, and resourced to do their jobs.

*Recommendation: That the Victorian Government, as the largest employer in the state and a model employer, recognise the value of educators and remunerate them appropriately.*

### **End the undervaluation of work in historically women-dominated industries.**

The *Healthcare and Social Assistance* and the *Education and Training* industries are widely regarded as two of the most in-demand industries in Australia, with demand for new workers in these industries expected to rise dramatically in the next decade. These industries are care-based industries, which are dominated by women in Australia, and are subject to lower wages than historically male dominated industries. Women's median remuneration in an industry

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<sup>1</sup> Snapshot of the Victorian Labour Market, 2024. Link: <https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-11/2024-State-of-the-Victorian-Labour-Market-report-snapshot.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Early childhood educators are currently captured under the category of 'Healthcare and Social Assistance' in Victoria, however, should be included under the category of 'Education and Training'

dominated by women is \$88,420, whilst comparatively, men's median remuneration in a male-dominated industry is \$115,414.<sup>3</sup> These feminised industries are subject to lower take home pay, less favourable conditions, more insecure work and less economic security compared to male dominated industries and occupations, but are vital to the healthy functioning of the Victorian economy and community.<sup>4</sup>

There is an enduring presumption that women work in these occupations because they are naturally skilled at providing care, and undertake this work for the love of it, rather than economic impact. This has allowed industry and successive state and federal governments to avoid addressing gendered under-valuation of work.

To encourage students to undertake study in these industries, they need to be guaranteed a dignified job, with a safe workplace and fair wages. The Victorian Government as the state's largest employer and primary funder of essential services has an active role to play in addressing historic undervaluation, insecure work, and underpayment of workers in these industries.

*Recommendation: The State Government, as a model employer, must model appropriate valuation of women dominated care-based industries, and improve pay and job security for workers in these industries.*

*Recommendation: That the Victorian Government undertake a review of the care-based industries, with the view to addressing socialised undervaluation of women dominated industries and occupations.*

This undervaluation of care-based work begins in the education system with cost barriers to attaining qualifications that male dominated trade-based qualifications do not have. Anecdotal and international data suggests that the cost burden of maintaining study is one of the primary reasons students abandon study.<sup>5</sup> This is further supported by the strong correlation between socioeconomic status and likelihood of non-completion of study for both university and VET students.<sup>6</sup> Where there are in-demand industries that require pathways through tertiary education, the Government should take an active role in removing financial barriers, including removing course fees and providing adequate financial supports, which is both an incentive to undertake study in this field and the removal of a barrier to completion of study.

*Recommendation: The Victorian Government must subsidise the cost of all tertiary education courses, including pathway courses, in the Healthcare and Social Assistance and the Education and Training industries, to incentivise study in these critical industries.*

*Recommendation: That the Victorian Government provide financial study incentives to students undertaking study in in-demand industries and occupations to drive uptake.*

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<sup>3</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency, *Employer Gender Pay Gap Snapshot*, 2024. Link:

<https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/WGEA-Employer-gender-pay-gaps-report-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration, *Gender segregation in the workplace and its impact on women's economic equality*, 2017. Link:

[www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Finance\\_and\\_Public\\_Administration/Gendersegregation/~/\\_media/Committees/fapa\\_ctte/Gendersegregation/report.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Finance_and_Public_Administration/Gendersegregation/~/_media/Committees/fapa_ctte/Gendersegregation/report.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Department of Education (Cth), *FINAL REPORT – Improving retention, completion and success in higher education*, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Education (Cth), *Key findings from the 2023 Higher Education Student Statistics*, 2025. Link:

<https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/student-data/selected-higher-education-statistics-2023-student-data/key-findings-2023-student-data#:~:text=In%20other%20words%2C%20just%20over,continued%20their%20education%20in%202022.>

## **Promote job opportunities in the clean energy industry**

Renewable energy is one of the fastest growing parts of the Australian economy, with huge implications for the construction, energy generation, and utility workforces, and as such should be considered and addressed within the context of the in-demand industries. Market forces and government policies, combined with the growing threat of climate change, dictate that the Victorian energy system must undergo a rapid and monumental modernisation in the coming years. Australia has an abundance of natural energy resources, and Victoria is leading the charge on the nation's clean energy uptake.

The scope of jobs in renewable energy is extensive, and the Government must promote these jobs with accessible information via pathways and opportunities to trial different renewables-based works. Not only does the Government need to increase the intake of students in courses related to renewables, but Government must also prevent students interested in this field from abandoning study by offering flexibility within the education system. Students need the opportunity to trial and change courses but remain engaged in clean energy industry through the education system.

*Recommendation: That the Victorian Skills Gateway create specific guidance and pathways mapping tools for students looking to enter the Clean Energy industry.*

The Government owned State Electricity Commission is expected to create 59,000 jobs, including 6,000 apprenticeships, with new jobs expected in electricity, gas, water, and waste services.<sup>7</sup> These are well-paid, secure public sector jobs. To fill these roles, we need clear and identifiable pathways, and mobility within study. This requires an active student recruitment policy, opportunities for already skilled workers to reengage with vocational education to upgrade their skills for the clean energy industry, financial supports for students studying in this industry, and targeted opportunities for workers in traditional energy generation jobs to retrain.

*Recommendation: That the Victorian Government support the State Electricity Commission to engage prospective students at Careers Expos.*

The re-establishment of the SEC is only part of the renewable energy transition requiring strong government support. New renewable energy projects are emerging regularly, but they are often enterprises engaging small or micro business sub-contractors, with less established union presence and poorer wages and conditions. As more renewable energy projects emerge, and major projects like offshore wind commence, the Government must ensure that fair pay and conditions are industry standard.

*Recommendation: That the Victorian Government work with Victorian unions to improve working conditions within the clean energy industry and improve industry attractiveness.*

For regional communities whose local economy has been centred on power generation for decades, the energy transition represents an existential threat to the future of their communities. Countless governments around the world have been considering the impact of the shift to clean energy, and making structural changes to their welfare, training and employment systems to ensure that workers in the coal and gas energy system do not face job losses and are supported to retrain. The Victorian Government must continue its work to ensure regional workers are not left behind and that there is a Just Transition to clean energy.

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<sup>7</sup> Victorian Skills Authority, *What it's like to work in clean energy*, 2025. Link: [www.vic.gov.au/working-in-clean-energy](http://www.vic.gov.au/working-in-clean-energy)

*Recommendation: That the Victorian Government expand course offerings at regional TAFEs and expand the free TAFE program, with a focus on ensuring regional workers in traditional energy generation jobs have opportunities to study and work in clean energy.*

*Recommendation: That the Victorian Government embed the principle of a Just Transition into decisions made regarding education, regional development, and energy.*

Diversification of the clean energy workforce is also vital to ensure that the benefits of the clean energy revolution are shared by all. This starts in the education system, by supporting underrepresented student groups to engage with the industry and undertake study. Traditionally underrepresented groups include First Nations people, women, culturally and racially marginalised people, and people with a disability, all of whom must benefit from opportunities in the clean energy industry.

*Recommendation: That the Victorian Government create recruitment targets for diverse workers in the clean energy industry to address skills shortages in this in-demand industry.*

### **More support for women who want to work in male dominated industries.**

Traditionally male dominated industries, in particular the construction industry, consistently have meaningful and well-paid jobs, which are often inaccessible to women. The construction industry is one of the most in-demand industries nationally and is vital to addressing impending infrastructure shortages, and women workers are capable of filling these workforce shortages. Women's participation in historically male dominated industries and occupations benefits everyone, but these industries must be safe for women and be perceived to be safe for women.

From perceptions of the trade through the education system, to cultural issues in the workplace, and perceptions throughout the industry at large, there are systemic barriers to women's participation in male dominated industries. Addressing social barriers that prevent women and girls from seeing themselves working in these industries is vital to ensuring that women are part of the solution to address skills shortages in in-demand industries.

*Recommendation: That the Victorian Government maintain support for and funding of the Building Equality Program to address women's underrepresentation in the construction industry.*

*Recommendation: That the Victorian Government undertake a review of the Victorian HSR and ARREO powers, with the view to empowering union officials and health and safety representatives to take an active role in maintaining safe workplaces for women and gender diverse workers.*

*Recommendation: That the Victorian School Curriculum be amended to ensure that all high school students, regardless of gender, have the opportunity to engage directly with male dominated trades in a safe way.*

VTHC, supported by affiliated unions, have been at the forefront of promoting historically male dominated trades to women. VTHC's Women Onsite project was originally funded by Apprenticeships Victoria in 2019 to research and pilot strategies to get women into the construction industry by identifying barriers and trialling strategies to remove them. This research identified that there was no coordinated or direct way for women interested in male dominated trades to effectively engage with the programs without facing barriers.

VTHC received further funding and support from the Victorian Government to address these issues. These are the six main aspects of the program, designed to create pathways for women and support them to enter male dominated industries in a sustainable way:

1. Delivering *Try a Trade* events that gave women hands on experience with tools, and *Introduction to Industry* sessions to give women the opportunity to hear from tradeswomen about their work, career journey, and the industry.
2. Working in collaboration with Vocational Education providers and industry employers to provide information about jobs in the construction, manufacturing and clean energy industries.
3. Supporting women considering a career change to a male dominated industry to self-identify their personal barriers and provide support to remove them, including direct financial support.
4. Creating and sharing social media and advertising material that normalises women working and participating in these industries.
5. Delivering *Rights and Safety at Work* workshops to build women's confidence to understand and enforce their rights and delivering *Safe, Respectful Workplaces* training to employers and Vocational Education providers to support the creation of positive work cultures that prevent and address work-related gender-based violence.
6. Connecting women who achieved employment with their relevant union for ongoing support.

Giving women the opportunity to try work in a safe, peer-led environment through the Try a Trade and Introduction to Industry open sessions is invaluable. The *Women Onsite* snapshot from 2019 - Jan 2024 highlights the impact that this project has had on the Victorian trade-based landscape, including 410 Women Onsite program participants, supported into 185 jobs that the program secured from designated employers. The average age of participants was 28 years of age, demonstrating that women often consider a career in trade much later than male counterparts and need additional support to enter. This project has had a 94% success rate for apprenticeship completions, which is nearly double the average pre-apprenticeship completion rate.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) was similarly funded to deliver a Women in Manufacturing program to support industry shifts that benefit women workers and improve their involvement in manufacturing. The pilot worked in partnership with industry employers to trial family-friendly shifts, support women's advancement within the industry and their elevation to leadership positions, upskilling women, delivering educational forums on improving workplace culture to businesses, and establishing a peer network for women in the sector.

The Australian Workers Union (AWU) recently received funding for the Job Ready and the Ready for Advancement programs in 2024. These projects aim to develop workplace gender equality training for the manufacturing and energy industries, pilot cultural change initiatives in partner workplaces and support women members in roles into trade-based roles from non-trade-based roles.

Whilst these programs have been incredibly successful in meaningfully impacting women's career opportunities and working to create systemic change, they alone cannot address the systemic barriers that persist for women. Short-term program-based funding models do not allow for the ongoing adaptation and review necessary to create real impact.

*Recommendation: The Victorian Government commit to permanently fund union delivered Women in Trades projects to support women entering male dominated industries and occupations.*

*Recommendation: The Victorian Government fund VTHC and Victorian Unions to deliver free Safe, Respectful Workplaces training to Vocational Education providers and employers in male dominated industries.*

### **Creating pathways for people with disabilities**

Vocational education has always been the great equaliser. The VET student cohort is more diverse culturally and economically, its learning opportunities more varied, and its job outcomes stronger. However, students with a disability are underrepresented in year 12 attainment, vocational education and training qualifications, and participation in university study.<sup>8</sup> People with a disability are also drastically overrepresented in unemployment and underemployment statistics.

Accessible and ongoing learning opportunities are vital to improving disability inclusion in education. In 2023, there were over 5 million students enrolled in VET, only 191,000 of these students identified as having a disability – equivalent to 3.8% of the student cohort compared to the 15% of people aged 0-64 who have a disability.<sup>9</sup> Poor uptake of VET by people with a disability indicates policy failings and accessibility issues within the education system. People with disabilities want to undertake study but they face economic, structural and social barriers to engagement with study, including the supported wage scheme and other legal forms of discrimination.

*Recommendation: The Victorian Government should undertake a review of the experiences of students with a disability in vocational education, with the view to expanding study opportunities for people with disabilities and making the vocational education system safer for students with a disability.*

*Recommendation: That the Victorian Government, as the largest employer in the state and a model employer, end their use of the Supported Wage Scheme.*

*Recommendation: That the Victorian Government work with unions and other key stakeholders to identify ways to support people with a disability into the workforce.*

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<sup>8</sup> Department of Social Services, Update: *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031*, 2024. Link: [www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2025-01/5831-dss3513-ads-strategy-2021.pdf](http://www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2025-01/5831-dss3513-ads-strategy-2021.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> ABS, *Disability, Ageing and Carers Australia: Summary of findings*, 2024. Link: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release>

### **List of recommendations from Victorian Trades Hall Council.**

1. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government, as the largest employer in the state and a model employer, recognise the value of educators and remunerate them appropriately.*
2. *Recommendation: The State Government, as a model employer, must model appropriate valuation of women dominated care-based industries, and improve pay and job security for workers in these industries.*
3. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government undertake a review of the care-based industries, with the view to addressing socialised undervaluation of women dominated industries and occupations.*
4. *Recommendation: The Victorian Government must subsidise the cost of all tertiary education courses, including pathway courses, in the Healthcare and Social Assistance and the Education and Training industries, to incentivise study in these critical industries.*
5. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government provide financial study incentives to students undertaking study in in-demand industries and occupations to drive uptake.*
6. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Skills Gateway create specific guidance and pathways mapping tools for students looking to enter the Clean Energy industry.*
7. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government support the State Electricity Commission to engage prospective students at Careers Expos.*
8. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government work with Victorian unions to improve working conditions within the clean energy industry and improve industry attractiveness.*
9. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government expand course offerings at regional TAFEs and expand the free TAFE program, with a focus on ensuring regional workers in traditional energy generation jobs have opportunities to study and work in clean energy.*
10. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government embed the principle of a Just Transition into decisions made regarding education, regional development and energy.*
11. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government create recruitment targets for diverse workers in the clean energy industry to address skills shortages in this in-demand industry.*
12. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government maintain support for and funding of the Building Equality Program to address women's underrepresentation in the Construction industry.*
13. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government undertake a review of the Victorian HSR and ARREO power, with the view to empowering union officials and health and safety representatives to take an active role in maintaining safe workplaces for women and gender diverse workers.*
14. *Recommendation: That the Victorian School Curriculum be amended to ensure that all high school students, regardless of gender, have the opportunity to engage directly with male dominated trades in a safe way.*
15. *Recommendation: The Victorian Government commit to permanently fund union delivered Women in Trades projects to support women entering male dominated industries and occupations.*
16. *Recommendation: The Victorian Government fund VTHC and Victorian Unions to deliver free Safe, Respectful Workplaces training to Vocational Education providers and employers in male dominated industries.*
17. *Recommendation: The Victorian Government should undertake a review of the experiences of students with a disability in vocational education, with the view to expanding study opportunities for people with disabilities and making the vocational education system safer for students with a disability.*
18. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government, as the largest employer in the state and a model employer, end their use of the Supported Wage Scheme.*
19. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government work with unions and other key stakeholders to identify ways to support people with a disability into the workforce.*

### **Additional recommendations made by the Young Workers Centre.**

1. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government support careers counsellors in Victorian schools to ensure that career pathway mapping is done by educators who are trained, resourced and supported.*
2. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government undertake a review of the perceptions of VET, with the view to addressing negative assumptions similar to the review conducted in NSW.*
3. *Recommendation: The Victorian Government promote Vocational Education as the foundation of the tertiary education system.*
4. *Recommendation: That the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions improve the existing VSA Skills Gateway to support students to identify actual pathways to their dream job, using VET and Free TAFE to achieve these goals.*
5. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government, as the largest employer in the state, take an active role in creating work experience opportunities for students in government worksites, including through local councils and statutory authorities.*
6. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government provide financial study incentives to students undertaking study in an in-demand industry to drive uptake.*
7. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government accept and implement all recommendations from the Apprenticeship Taskforce final report to support all students undertaking workplace-based learning programs.*
8. *Recommendation: That the Young Workers Centre be funded to deliver workplace rights training to every Victorian high school and TAFE student.*
9. *Recommendation: Fund Victorian Trades Hall Council and Victorian Unions to deliver Safe, Respectful Workplaces training to VET staff and employers free of charge.*
10. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government advocate on behalf of young Victorian workers for the abolition of junior and apprentice wages.*
11. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government as a model employer commit to ending the use of junior and apprentice wages across all Victorian Government departments, agencies, portfolio entities and projects.*
12. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government undertake a review of Victorian TAFE online learning management systems to ensure that they are fit-for-purpose.*
13. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government undertake a whole of system review of the Vocational Education and Training system to assess compatibility for students with a disability, with the view to addressing existing barriers to inclusion.*
14. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government fully fund Victorian TAFE in line with the AEU's recommendations.*
15. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government, as a model employer, recognise the value of vocational educators and remunerate them appropriately.*
16. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government adopt the recommendations made in the Gonski Review to fund Victorian schools to the School Resourcing Standard.*
17. *Recommendation: That the Victorian Government guarantee foundation skills, including digital literacy, for all Victorians*
18. *Recommendation: Standardising literacy and numeracy skills education in vocational education to di-stigmatise foundational education and ensure all students have the opportunity to develop strong foundation skills at the start of their tertiary education journey.*

## Appendix

### **List of in-demand industries and occupations from the Victorian Skills Authority *State of the Victorian Labour Market snapshot***

- Healthcare and Social Assistance
  1. Ageing and disability carers\* (12,500)
  2. Registered Nurses (11,100)
  3. Receptionists\* (4,800)
  4. Nursing support and personal care workers\* (4,100)
- Construction
  1. Construction managers (7,700)
  2. Carpenters and joiners (6,100)
  3. Electricians\* (4,500)
  4. Plumbers\* (3,500)
- Professional, Scientific and Technical services
  1. Software and applications programmers (4,100)
  2. Accountants (3,400)
  3. ICT managers (1,700)
  4. Civil engineering professionals (1,700)
- Education and training
  1. Primary school teachers (6,500)
  2. Secondary school teachers (5,800)
  3. Education aides\* (2,200)
  4. Private tutors and teachers (1,900)
- Retail trade
  1. Retail managers\* (2,500)
  2. Store persons\* (1,200)
  3. Motor vehicle and vehicle parts salesperson\* (800)
  4. Pharmacists (600)