



women's access...making history

March 2012



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First Edition 1997



Second Edition 2012

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ULTIMO | NSW | 2007

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Foreword

I have great pleasure in presenting *women's access...making history*.

This is the story of women's participation in vocational education and training in New South Wales from the latter part of the 19th century to the early years of the 21st century.

It builds on the first edition that was published in 1997 by the TAFE NSW Women's Education and Training Coordination Unit. That document, in turn, had drawn on the work of earlier researchers and writers who at some stage had turned their attention to telling this important story.

This updated edition provides a timely reminder that through major world upheavals and changes in the nature of our society, women continue to expand their horizons, explore new fields and improve their share of learning opportunities.

I commend this short history to you as an inspiration for your efforts, a celebration of our achievements and a reminder of the challenges that lie ahead.

Kathy Rankin
General Manager
TAFE Training and Education Support



Celebrating Women in TAFE NSW

In the early 1900s New York textile workers embarked on a campaign to improve their rights in the workplace. Their efforts grew into a worldwide movement that led to the founding of International Women's Day in 1911.

While these historic events were being played out on the world stage, women in New South Wales were making their own advances in the areas of education, training and work. Despite discrimination and limited access to opportunities, women forged ahead to become inspiring teachers, mentors and leaders in their professional fields, paving the way for future generations.

This short history highlights the legacy and achievements of previous generations of women involved in vocational education and training in New South Wales.

ABOVE:

LAUNDRY CLASS c. 1908

Women forged ahead to become inspiring teachers, mentors and leaders in their professional fields; paving the way for future generations.

The early years

The Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts was established in March 1833 at a public meeting attended by some 200 people. Its first female students enrolled in 1838 and the School of Arts expanded the range of courses available in 1878 by establishing the Workingmen's College.

This heralded the beginning of organised technical education in New South Wales as the Workingmen's College went on to become the Sydney Technical College in 1891. The following year a Domestic Economy and Cookery teaching department was established and classes commenced in Dresscutting and Dressmaking and Home Nursing for the Sick. These were generally held during the day as it was not the norm for women to be outside the home at night in the 1890s.

Women who sought to enrol at Sydney Technical College needed an unusual measure of courage and determination and, even then, they were restricted to a small number of fields. Their opportunities were limited even further from 1914 when the Technical Education Branch of the Department of Education restricted enrolment in trade courses and imposed employment prerequisites on most of the remaining courses. Very few women could meet such requirements.

Laying the foundations

After 1914, women's enrolment clustered mainly in three teaching departments: Women's Handicrafts (later Fashion), Domestic Science, and Art. It is interesting to note that, in relation to Women's Handicrafts and Domestic Science: these were the only departments ever to discriminate openly on the ground of sex - men could not enrol in these areas for many years; and courses were advertised as preparing women for two possible vocations - housewives or wage earners.

For a short period of time, girls were also able to enrol at Sydney Technical High School which was located within the College. The School offered a course over two years, five days per week, which included English, Mathematics, Elementary Science, Drawing and Manual Training in Wood and Iron. Girls were required to choose between Domestic Science or Dressmaking and Millinery in place of Manual Training. Their education was later moved from the Technical High School to Fort Street.

The Technical Education Branch also extended Women's Handicraft courses to suburbs and country areas of New South Wales. Courses included Ladies Tailoring, Plain Sewing, Art Needlework, Millinery and Lace Making. The facilities developed to support these courses, particularly in small towns, became the basis for many of the rural colleges that are found across the State today.

Women needed an unusual measure of courage and determination and, even then, they were restricted to a small number of fields.



ABOVE:

ART DEPARTMENT - ANTIQUE DRAWING. c.1904

The facilities developed in small towns became the basis for many of the rural colleges found across the State today.



Women of courage and determination

Although their opportunities were limited, some women did make their mark.

From 1908 until the reorganisation of 1914, Miss E.R. Bannister taught Woodcarving in what was then called the Department of Architecture at Sydney Technical College. While her competence as a wood carver was never doubted (her work was exhibited widely), nor her tenacity in working for six years as the only woman among twenty-five men, her appointment was something less than the breakthrough it might appear to be. Woodcarving was the one area of building training considered suitable for women (provided that it was not actually put to use in the industry).

Miss M.E. Roberts was head of the Department of Women's Handicrafts from 1909 until her premature death in 1924. She wrote three textbooks and was the only woman on the founding editorial committee of the Technical Gazette of New South Wales, a journal published by the Technical Education Branch from 1911 to 1941. She served as vice-president of the Feminist Club and of the Silk Culture Society, was an active member of the Red Cross Society and served on the women's auxiliary of the Australian Board of Missions.

Miss Roberts, or Mary Ellen as she was known to friends, also established the Vocations Club in 1917 to help students find their way and develop their interests. Most of the club's responsibilities were subsumed gradually by various sections of the College - its small store supplying fashion students surviving until the latter part of the last century.

One indication of the scale of Miss Roberts' contribution was the fact that, at the time of her death, Women's Handicrafts students represented 22 per cent of total technical education enrolments. Nevertheless, her salary remained much lower than those of her male colleagues in charge of smaller teaching departments.

ABOVE:

THE STAFF OF THE DEPARTMENT
OF ARCHITECTURE. c.1909

Miss Roberts' Women's Handicrafts students represented 22 per cent of enrolments. However, [her] salary was much lower than her male colleagues...

Doubly proud

Very few women enrolled in trade courses. A small number enrolled in the professional-level diploma courses leading to the award of the Associateship of Sydney Technical College (ASTC). In theory students could complete the courses part-time in either five or six years. Most took about eight, attending college at night.

All Associates could take justifiable pride in their achievement. Women could be doubly proud, having achieved their success as a tiny minority in a male-dominated environment.

Records from the early years of technical education indicate that the first two women to earn the award of ASTC were Jean Ohlen in Assaying in 1904, and Bridget Cass in Geology in 1906. Other women who were amongst the first to earn the award in their fields were Annie Spencer (Biology, 1917), Ellen Forde (Chemistry, 1924), Henrietta Wooster (Science, 1929), Eileen Guilfooy (Optometry, 1936) and Rae Crump (Mechanical Engineering, 1939).

Barbara Tribe was one of the outstanding early graduates in Art. She earned her ASTC in 1933, specialising in Sculpture. Miss Tribe worked with Rayner Hoff on the ANZAC Memorial in Hyde Park, Sydney, before winning the New South Wales Travelling Art Scholarship two years later. This took her to the United Kingdom where she developed a successful career as a professional artist.

Researchers and educators

Graduates who undertook research or technical college teachers who fulfilled certain conditions could earn the award of Fellowship of Sydney Technical College (FSTC). Of the thirty Fellowships awarded by the end of the 1940s, only two of the recipients were women - Agnes Brewster and Naomi Roach - who were both honoured in 1921.

Women could be doubly proud, having achieved their success as a tiny minority in a male-dominated environment.



Shifting roles in times of crisis

Training in office administration remained outside of technical colleges for the first three decades of the 20th century as it rested with private colleges. It is worth noting that office administration carried insufficient weight to attract public funding, and the growing army of stenographers and typists was made up largely of women. Shorthand and bookkeeping classes, on the other hand, attracted limited public funding and were offered part-time at technical colleges. These classes catered mainly for the needs of male public servants and male clerks in private offices.

The situation changed late in 1931 as the economic depression deepened.

A key initiative of this period was the introduction of Emergency Day Commercial classes which were offered to unemployed male and female school leavers. Although the classes were similar, the boys' learning placed more emphasis on bookkeeping, while the girls' focused more on typing. This did not stop some young women, however, from achieving outstanding results in the accountancy courses while amongst a majority of male students.

Emergency Day Commercial Courses were forerunners of what later became known as labour market programs. They were funded jointly by the New South Wales Department of Labour and Industry and the Department of Education. As the depression eased, they became fully-funded mainstream courses. As full-time employment grew in the post-war era, the boys' classes were not continued while the girls' classes were reduced in favour of a new, day Secretarial course.

Another initiative of the depression era was the Married Women (Lecturers and Teachers) Act, 1932. This Act required married women to resign from positions as permanent staff and stayed in effect until 1947.

ABOVE:

DAY EMERGENCY COMMERCIAL CLASSES
FOR UNEMPLOYED SCHOOL LEAVERS c.1933

Office administration carried insufficient weight to attract public funding and the growing army of stenographers and typists was made up largely of women.



Wartime contribution

The Second World War brought great changes to the Technical Education Branch as women replaced those men in the workforce who had enlisted in the armed services or found employment in the various war industries. 'Normal' students continued to attend part-time in the evenings while service personnel trained from 10.00 p.m. to 6.00 a.m. and civilian war workers, who were mostly women, trained during daylight hours.

Local Dilution Committees gave permission for the requirements of many skilled trades to be 'relaxed'. Tasks previously undertaken by qualified tradesmen were done by those who had mastered only the specific skills needed to complete particular parts of the job. A 'dilutee' may have had to learn, for example, how to make a gun component on a machine but would not acquire the full range of a fitter-machinist's skills. 'Dilutees' were mainly women and earned less than tradesmen's wages. They knew that they would be replaced by returning skilled workers at the end of the war and expected to return to their traditional roles.

ABOVE & BELOW:

COMMONWEALTH DEFENCE TRAINING SCHEME. c.1942

SCIENCE STUDENT. c.1950



'Dilutees' were mainly women and earned less than tradesmen's wages. They knew that they would be replaced by returning skilled workers at the end of the war and expected to return to their traditional roles.



ABOVE:

HAIRDRESSING STUDENTS c.1963

Emerging pathways and opportunities

In 1949, the Department of Technical Education was formed as a separate entity from the Department Education. In 1951, most of the professional-level diploma courses became the responsibility of the NSW University of Technology (now the University of NSW). These changes prompted a review of the technical education mission and led to changes that would have long term impacts on the educational opportunities available to women.

Matriculation courses became open to the general public during the late 1940s and early 1950s (after being restricted to returned service personnel in the immediate post-war years). Initially, the great majority of students were men. By 1978, women represented more than half of all enrolments.

Surveys undertaken by the new Department of Technical Education also identified a need for training at the sub-professional or technical level. This led to certificate courses being introduced, starting with Chemistry and Biology in 1955. Once again, the great majority of students were men in the early years. By 1991 almost half the places in a wide range of courses at this level were filled by women.

More immediate opportunities emerged for some women, particularly in the field of Hairdressing. From 1953, Hairdressing apprentices were required to undertake training at a technical college. This led to considerable opposition from some employers who were concerned about staff being away from the workplace. At the same time, this change enabled many women to gain their first qualification and take advantage of broader employment opportunities.

From 1953 Ladies Hairdressing apprentices were required to receive technical college training despite considerable opposition from some employers.

Championing access and equity

Technical education evolved steadily during the 1960s but, for women, not all developments could be regarded as progress. From 1964, the Department began to offer short Homemaking courses comprising what was described as 'vocational training for the women's role in the home'. From a different perspective, in 1968 Miss Dorothy E. Ironmonger became the first female technical college principal at Seaforth in northern Sydney.

In 1971, women became eligible to enrol in technical college courses without charge, their fees being paid by the Commonwealth Government. These developments were signs of more comprehensive changes that would take place in the 1970s.

The publication of 'TAFE in Australia' (the Kangan Report) in 1974 was a watershed in the history of vocational education and training. It led to the establishment of the Department of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in 1975 which had a far more complex mission than the earlier Department of Technical Education. The new organisation was to focus on the individual, providing each student with the education to meet their chosen vocational needs as well as develop skills to meet the needs of employers and industry. This meant that TAFE was less focused on training and more focused on vocational education with a training component.

The Kangan Report also recommended that State and Commonwealth governments place particular emphasis on improving access to vocational education and training for those who had been under-represented in the past: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people from language backgrounds other than English, people with disabilities, older adults and women. The first step towards fulfilling this objective occurred when Commonwealth funding replaced all technical college fees except those for recreational courses.

Commonwealth funding had started on a very limited scale in 1965 and grew following the Kangan Report. It broadened the mainstream TAFE curriculum and promoted the introduction of what became known as Special Programs for equity target groups.



ABOVE:

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS c.1963

The Kangan Report recommended... improving access to vocational education and training for those who had been under-represented in the past.



ABOVE :

CERMAIC STUDENTS c.1973

Major strides in access

Early efforts to encourage women to enrol in mainstream courses had limited success, while less formal Outreach programs delivered off-campus often attracted more enrolments. As a result, an extended period of consultation began in 1976 to better understand the needs of women enrolling in TAFE.

A Committee on the Equality of the Sexes was established in 1978 and a Women's Vocational Re-entry Program was developed in 1979. This was the first time that a Program specifically addressed issues such as the knowledge, confidence, skills, and experience women needed to enter or re-enter the workforce.

Efforts to increase women's participation in TAFE gained more focus with the establishment of the Women's Coordination Unit and the Women's Educational Programs Advisory Committee in 1982. TAFE Regions (the forerunners of Institutes) also took the lead in these areas. For example, during this period Hunter Region appointed the first Coordinator of Women's Programs and the first TAFE Coordinator of Equal Opportunity Training Programs. These appointments were followed by similar positions being created in TAFE Regions across the State.

A high level of individual commitment and organisational support led to a number of other advances in the early 1980s.

The Women's Vocational Re-Entry Program was revised and became known as the New Opportunities for Women (NOW) Program. The latter program went on to support many thousands of women enrolling in TAFE courses over the following decades.

Another important advance was the founding of the Introduction to Technical Occupations (INTO) program in 1983. This was an industry-specific program designed for women seeking employment or training in a non-traditional industry but requiring bridging courses to make this transition. Within three years of its introduction, twenty-one INTO courses had been delivered across the fields of engineering, electronics, building and construction, rural technology and business administration.

A major breakthrough of a different kind was the opening of the first child care centre at Granville TAFE. The centre provided valuable support for students, especially women from language backgrounds other than English. By 1995 the TAFE child care centres accommodated around 1200 children per week. This represented a 90 per cent student usage rate which was well above the national average of 55 per cent.

A major breakthrough was the opening of the first child care centre on a TAFE campus at Granville.



LEFT:

APPRENTICE SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENT MAKER
c.1984

Years of expansion and consolidation

The responsibilities of the Women's Coordination Unit expanded considerably during the 1980s under the leadership of Kaye Schofield. By 1986, the Unit employed 19 staff in the central area who liaised with 94 designated officers in colleges. Of those in colleges, about half worked as teachers and educators while half worked in TAFE child care centres. This emphasis on child care was supported by a national survey of students in the late 1980s. Amongst those women who had a withdrawn from a course, child care difficulties were cited amongst the main reasons for not continuing with their studies.

The Unit continued to develop courses and programs that were similar in purpose to NOW. For example, the Unit established the Work Opportunities for Women (WOW) Program and developed courses for women with special needs. It also monitored policy planning; organised staff development programs; provided educational resources and executive support; liaised with numerous outside agencies and organisations; and coordinated child care policy, planning and research.

Women's access courses from NOW to CEW

Growth in women's programs and enrolments also raised other issues for the Women's Coordination Unit to address. Recognising the risk of unintentionally promoting the isolation and marginalisation of women's education and training, the Unit developed a set of principles aimed at discouraging the proliferation of women-only courses and facilitating the enrolment of women in mainstream courses. An example of this approach was the successful accreditation of the Certificate in Career Education for Women (CEW) to be delivered by the School of General Studies.

In addition, all accredited courses were reviewed to ensure that they had no inbuilt stereotyping and that the learning needs of women were taken into account. This was reflected in the Women's Education and Training Strategy that was released in 1989 with its emphasis on harnessing the organisation's resources behind the "key objectives of promoting equal opportunity in education and employment and improving the range and quality of women's participation in TAFE". To support the Strategy, 108 Women's Strategy Officers were appointed to colleges. These were part-time positions filled by existing staff with a commitment to improving education and training for women.

...the Unit developed a set of principles... facilitating the enrolment of women in mainstream courses.



ABOVE :

ELECTRICAL TRADE APPRENTICE c.1981



ABOVE :

PETERSHAM ELECTROTECHNOLOGY c.1996

Recognition of Prior Learning held particular relevance for women; offering the possibility of relevant life experience and unpaid work being formally recognised and repetition of study being avoided.

TAFE NSW in times of reform

The 1990s began with a recession and accompanying job losses. Female-dominated industries including retail, finance and insurance were amongst the hardest hit by the economic downturn. The number of female apprentices entering male-dominated industries also declined.

Against this backdrop, the new decade ushered in a period of dramatic policy reform in vocational education and training. Under the National Training Reform Agenda, a broad range of initiatives was introduced to improve the sector's performance. Amongst these initiatives was Recognition of Prior Learning which held particular relevance for women; offering the possibility of relevant life experience and unpaid work being formally recognised and repetition of study being avoided. Similarly, the emphasis placed on lifelong learning resonated with many women as it highlighted the potential for on-going learning and skill development through all stages of one's life.

This period also signalled major changes for TAFE in NSW. The catalyst for this change was 'TAFE's Commission for the 1990s' (the Scott Report).

In 1990, the Department of Technical and Further Education was replaced by the New South Wales Technical and Further Education Commission (TAFE NSW). TAFE colleges were grouped into Networks and later consolidated into eleven Institutes. Institute Directors assumed responsibility for the delivery of access and equity programs across their campuses and each Institute was staffed with Women's Strategy Officers. At the same time, the Open Training and Education Network (OTEN) was formed and provided flexible and family-friendly delivery options for women living across New South Wales and, in many cases, beyond the State's borders.

The Women's Education and Training Coordination Unit was established and located in South-Western Sydney Institute. Under the leadership of Institute Director, Jozefa Sobski, the Unit focused on setting strategic policy directions for Institutes and researching issues that informed program development, delivery and evaluation. As part of the 1992 National Plan of Action for Women in TAFE, the Unit undertook research with Australia-wide outcomes and implications and developed a national voice on VET policy issues. In 1994 it developed a State Plan for Women in TAFE and two years later released the State Program of Action for Women in TAFE 1997-2000.

The latter document provided a framework against which all TAFE managers were required to report. As a result of these efforts, between 1997 and 2000 the number of women enrolling at TAFE increased by 34 per cent from 197,300 to 263,656.



Shifting focus and managing diversity

It was clear by the end of the 1990s that equity policies and programs had made a significant contribution to increasing the participation of women in TAFE NSW. However, despite the increasing enrolment numbers, women remained concentrated in a narrow range of traditional occupations and industries, clustered in lower paid occupations and under-represented in workplace management and decision making. Women also continued to carry, almost exclusively as carers and volunteer workers, the burden of unpaid work in the home and in the community. The evidence was pointing to the need for a shift in approach.

This new thinking highlighted the multiple and intersecting barriers that some women experience in accessing learning including age, disability, cultural and language difference, literacy and numeracy skills, education costs, unemployment, imprisonment and isolation. In recognition of these complexities, national and state policies shifted from a focus on equity target groups towards the delivery of integrated programs that could address multiple barriers.

This more holistic approach was reflected in the TAFE NSW Women's Strategy 2004-2010. Key strategic directions focused on: addressing multiple and diverse needs; improving outcomes as well as access; promoting flexible and family friendly education; strengthening links with industry and community sectors and better supporting the needs of staff working with women students. This was particularly important in addressing the training and employment barriers facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women living with disabilities.

ABOVE :

TILING c.1996

...new thinking highlighted the multiple and intersecting barriers that some women experience in accessing learning.

Translating policy into practice

In the early years of this century, TAFE NSW Institutes continued to provide a very wide range of opportunities for women, including mature-aged women disengaged from education or employment. New Opportunities for Women (NOW), Career Education and Employment for Women (CEEW), and Work Opportunities for Women (WOW) were just some of the programs available at the state-wide level that offered women a variety of flexible pathways to further education and employment.

At the same time, TAFE NSW Institutes developed and implemented a diverse range of programs to support girls and specific groups of women at the local level. These programs were based on identifying local needs and characteristics; building cross-sectoral partnerships with other educational providers and agencies; sustaining longer-term engagement with employers and communities; and balancing economic, social, and personal goals.

The Bush Babies Program, offered by Western Institute, is a salient example of a community-focused approach. The Program engaged mothers from the local Aboriginal playgroup to provide training in four competencies from Certificate III in Children's Services. The units were adapted to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander views on caring for children following consultation with community Elders and Aboriginal health workers. More than half the participants went on to complete their Certificate III with some women going on to complete their Diploma in Children's Services. The Bush Babies Program highlights the importance of active involvement of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in determining appropriate processes and outcomes for training. It demonstrates the importance of community-based education that is locally relevant, and quality teaching that is culturally aware and responsive.

Another successful example of customised programs being developed locally is the Illawarra Institute's Retrenched Workers Pathways Program. Designed for women working in the textiles and clothing sector, the Program's success was built on Illawarra Institute's partnerships with local employers, job service agencies, unions, and community organisations. Significant components of the program were delivered in the workplace, resulting in over 200 women accessing language, literacy and numeracy programs on-the-job. It involved learning plans being developed to meet individual learners' needs, interests, and aspirations, as well as local and regional industry skill needs. In this way, women working in a declining industry were actively provided with support while they were still employed so as to maximise their opportunities for a successful transition to other industries and occupations.

The Bush Babies program...demonstrates the importance of community-based education that is locally relevant and quality teaching that is culturally aware and responsive.



The Forklift Operation Course, offered by Western Sydney Institute, aimed to increase women's employment prospects in the Transport and Logistics field - a traditionally male dominated industry. Delivered in partnership with a private provider, this course offered women training in a simulated warehouse environment, leading to the attainment of a WorkCover Licence. As many of the students had no previous history with further education, individualised training was provided to those women requiring additional support. Seven of the eight students that enrolled in the program successfully completed the course, four of whom gained part-time or temporary employment as forklift drivers, while the rest strengthened their employment options.

These case studies highlight how women's participation and success in vocational education and training is shaped by interconnected factors. Over the past decade, Institutes have built an extensive body of expertise around the design and delivery of customised vocational education and training for diverse groups of women by working in partnerships with industry stakeholders, support agencies and community representatives. Women benefit most from programs that respond to their individual learning needs and personal circumstances.

ABOVE:

ULTIMO MECHANIC c.2008

Women benefit most from programs that respond to their individual learning needs and personal circumstances.

Learning from the past: shaping the future

The Centenary of International Women's Day provided an opportunity to reflect on the milestones that have been reached over the last 100 years, celebrate the achievements of TAFE in supporting women's education and training over that period, and recognise the challenges that still lie ahead.

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2011 indicates that the high participation rate of women in education and training in Australia is not translating into labour market success. The Report ranked Australia 1st for educational attainment but 18th for economic participation and opportunity.

Pay inequity further compounds gender imbalance. In the 1990s, the NSW Pay Equity Inquiry stated that the introduction of pay equity would not only remove discrimination against women workers but would also improve community wellbeing. Despite this clear message, progress in the arena of pay equity has been sluggish.

The NSW Women's Plan emphasises how vocational education and training provides the best opportunity for women to obtain economic security and achieve their full potential in a rapidly changing, globalised work and social environment. But it is not only women who stand to gain from advances in economic and political participation. The World Economic Forum reminds us that when the gender gap is reduced, benefits not only accrue to women but flow to every member of society.

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