



Australian Government



Jobs and Skills Australia

Speeding up progress towards gender economic equality

10 next steps





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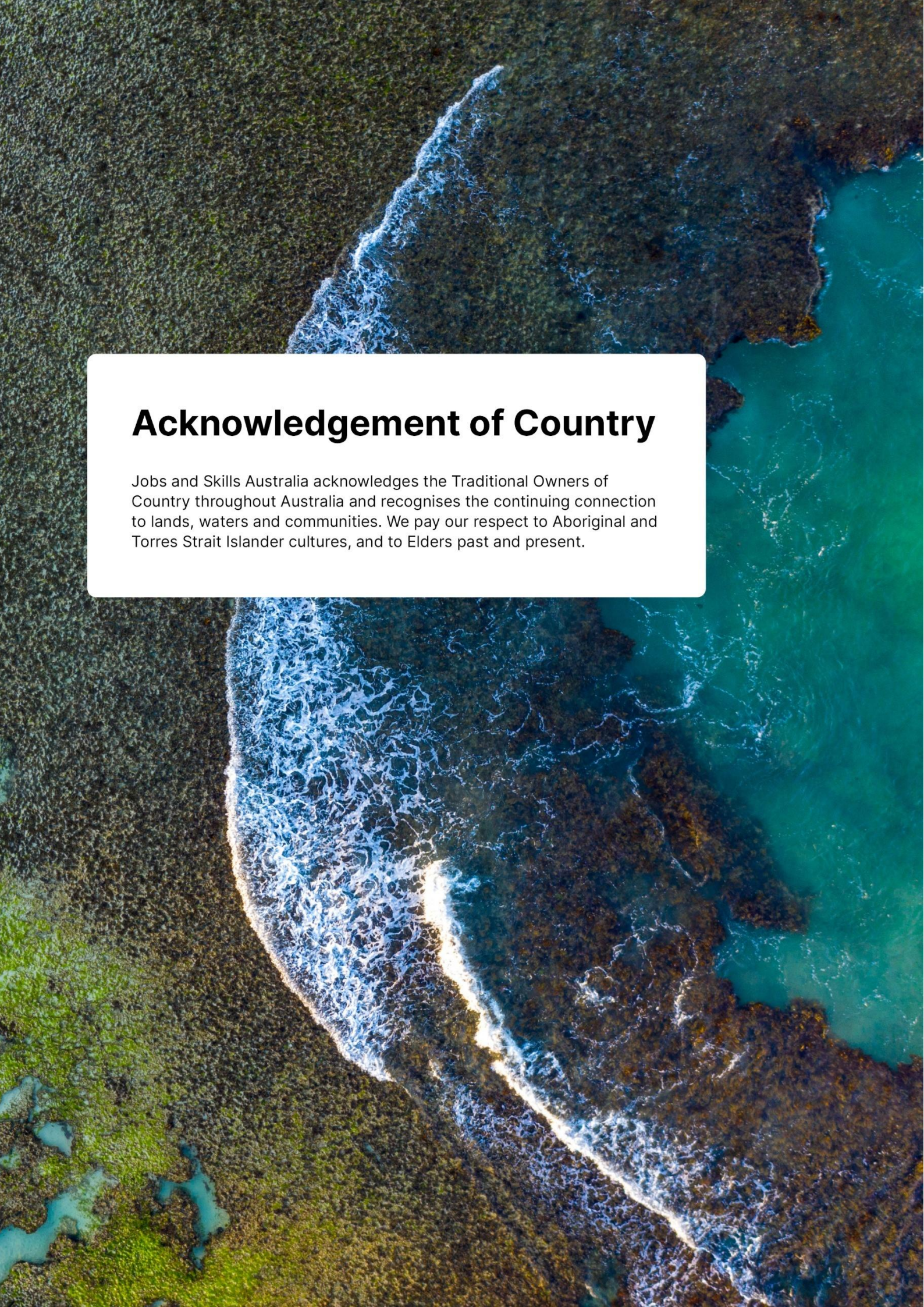
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JSA acknowledges and thanks Deputy Commissioner Megan Lilly, and Bjorn Jarvis for overseeing the study; Dr Emma Cannen for leading the project; and team members Lachlan Camilleri, Professor Troy Heffernan, Mel Ochocki, Dr Camilla Stonier, and Luke Wilson for their contributions to this Paper. JSA also acknowledges former Gender Equality Study Team members, Study Steering Committee members, Kirsty Leslie, Dr Elizabeth Knight and Kristy Birss for their contributions to this final study publication.

An aerial photograph of a coastline. The ocean is a deep teal color, with white foam from waves crashing onto a dark, textured shore. The shore appears to be covered in low-lying vegetation or coral. The waves are breaking in a curved pattern, creating a sense of movement and energy. The overall tone is natural and serene.

Acknowledgement of Country

Jobs and Skills Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

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Deputy Commissioner's Foreword

Gender economic inequality remains one of the most persistent and complex challenges facing Australia's labour market and skills systems. The Gender Economic Equality Study provides a compelling evidence base and new analytical tools to better understand and address this challenge.

Across three papers, the Study reveals how deeply gendered our jobs, work, pay, education and training pathways continue to be. [Paper 1](#) introduces the Gender Segregation Intensity Scale (GSIS), a new framework for measuring occupational segregation, and highlights the enduring nature of gendered divisions in the workforce. [Paper 2](#) extends this analysis into education and training, showing how gendered study choices and skills mismatches reinforce inequality and limit the full economic potential of women and other underrepresented cohorts. Paper 3 brings these findings together, offering 10 practical and ambitious recommendations to accelerate progress towards gender economic equality.

This Study makes clear that gender economic inequality is not just a matter of fairness—it is a structural barrier to productivity, workforce sustainability and inclusive economic growth. It also shows that compounding disadvantage for different types of people—particularly for First Nations women, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, and people with disability—requires targeted and nuanced policy responses.

The recommendations in Paper 3 call for coordinated national action across governments, industry, education and training providers, and communities. They include early interventions in education, reforms to vocational pathways, improved workplace safety and inclusion, and the adoption of new tools like the GSIS to monitor progress. Importantly, they also call for a standalone First Nations Women's Economic Equality Plan to address the unique and compounding barriers faced by First Nations women.

Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) is proud to contribute this work to the national conversation. We encourage all stakeholders to engage with the findings and recommendations, and to work together to build a more equitable, inclusive and productive future for all Australians.

I would like to acknowledge the significant contribution of JSA staff, especially Dr Emma Cannen, Bjorn Jarvis and the Gender Economic Equality Study Project team. I also express my appreciation for JSA's Ministerial Advisory Board and the deep commitment from the Gender Economic Equality Study Steering Committee who have been instrumental in providing considered advice and expertise to the three reports.

Megan Lilly

Deputy Commissioner

Jobs and Skills Australia



Executive Summary

The Gender Economic Equality Study has explored three key and complex challenges for the jobs and skills systems that contribute to gender economic inequality: occupational segregation, pay gaps and gendered divides in the education, training and skills systems.

Our final paper—Paper 3—presents a series of recommendations to address these complex policy challenges based on the new evidence, findings and policy implications presented in [Paper 1](#) and [Paper 2](#). We have also drawn on important recent work, such as the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce (WEET) Report (2023) and various First Nations work, and this collected body of findings, initiatives and recommendations from others has informed our pathway to the 10 recommendations in this paper.

Figure 1: Gender Economic Equality Study publications



Our 10 next steps focus on addressing:

- How to best intervene in gendered occupational segregation patterns.
- Why early intervention into gendered norms that define gendered study, career and occupational choices is crucial.
- The urgent need for more targeted attention to and intervention into the intersecting and compounding forms of sex, race, cultural and age discrimination across workplaces and industries, including their longer term and cumulative impact on women's career trajectories and economic wellbeing.
- The identification of and solutions for gendered barriers in training pathways at both the individual and system level.

- How gender pay gaps and unique segregation patterns for culturally diverse, migrant and First Nations women mean we need more nuanced policy solutions and urgent action including a standalone First Nations Women's Economic Equality Plan.
- Why we need to invest in occupational pathways and life-long career supports to improve women's economic wellbeing over their life course.
- How to harness opportunities where education and training outcomes for disadvantaged cohorts such as students or workers with disability are already positive or direct policymaker attention where more support is needed.
- How to identify where women's skills are being underutilised and how addressing it can improve productivity.
- Why intersectional data is so integral to more nuanced policy solutions and speeding up progress towards gender economic equality for women with compounding disadvantage.
- How to shift gender biases embedded in labour market frames like occupational classifications and skill definitions as well as education and training structures and institutions themselves.
- How it would be useful to adopt the Gender Segregation Intensity Scale (GSIS) as a shared framework across government to inform action and monitor progress towards gender economic equality.



In our pathway to these 10 recommendations, we considered a range of factors such as:

- socio-cultural norms, including caring load and the role that the family and other social networks play in influencing views on education and training, and occupations
- education and training awareness, options and choices (from childhood to adulthood)
- career learning, options and choices (also from childhood to adulthood)
- career pathways (and mentoring and coaching)
- attraction, progression and retention dynamics within occupations
- safe and respectful workplaces (with inclusive culture and design)
- leadership and accountability.

In developing our recommendations, we have also been balancing a range of inherent tensions between:

- short-term or long-term actions
- broad whole-of-system reforms and more targeted system policy changes or levers
- new reforms or supercharging existing government efforts
- a focus on workplaces, industries, occupations, institutions, systems or broader society
- government-led action or action led by jobs and skills systems actors
- supply-side or demand-side levers
- a focus on male dominated occupations, workplaces and problematic cultures compared with action in female dominated or increasingly gender balanced parts of the economy
- actions focused on the population and broader economy or the need for cohort-specific policy levers, supports and nuance
- generalising from examples that are currently making a difference, to the need for further data and research compared with action on existing evidence.

JSA openly encourages further discussion of these tensions and complexities with policymakers in the consideration and implementation of these 10 next steps.

Recommendation 1: Implement a three year Shifting the Dial on Gender Segregation Policy Action and Evaluation Agenda with findings informing the Working for Women Strategy mid-term review and further action beyond 2029.

JSA recommends four priority policy actions be implemented from 2026 to 2029 that leverage and extend existing efforts and are informed by the Study's new evidence, measures and findings:

- A Jobs and Skills Council (JSC) gender segregation intervention sprint and evaluation impact report.
- Industry gender segregation action plans across existing and emerging Australian Government reforms.
- The establishment of a systematic cross-jurisdictional evaluation mechanism led by the Australian Government.
- An independent evaluation review and report on 'Shifting the Dial' as a key input into the mid-term review of Working for Women with recommendations to inform further action beyond 2029.

JSA recommends the Australian Government work towards national coordinated action for balancing occupational and industry segregation beyond 2029.

WHO? All Australian governments with leading coordination and stewardship from three Australian Government agencies: Office for Women (OFW) within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) and JSA. JSCs would also play a key role.

Recommendation 2: All Australian governments consider how to intervene earlier in education and training study choices through innovative changes to career learning and exploration in curriculum, campaigns and supports in both primary and secondary schooling.

JSA recommends priority policy action in four areas:

- The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) develop a national Years 3-10 curriculum on career exploration and learning that all States and Territories can adapt or utilise.
- Scaling low cost national campaigns, such as [Your Career](#), or initiatives including the [Diversity in STEM Toolkit \(DiST\)](#) and [Little Ripples](#) as interventions in early gendered study choices that can also be used as teaching resources.
- Empowering and uplifting gender-aware informed career advice, practitioner capacity and counselling through the funding and development of continuing professional development (CPD) including CPD that is fit-for-purpose for primary school teachers and education settings.
- In the longer term, the introduction of mandatory career learning and exploration curriculum for Years 3-12.

WHO? All Australian governments with the Department of Education, ACARA and DEWR playing leading roles. Non-government actors such as Career Industry Council Australia (CICA), Education Services Australia, teachers, career practitioners, and parents.

Recommendation 3: All Australian governments scale occupational gender segregation interventions across future National Skills Agreements and outcomes reporting including the introduction of explicit gender targets for national priorities.

JSA recommends priority policy action in four areas:

- The introduction of more explicit gender-focused targets for national priorities or a framework for measuring progress against them in the renegotiated National Skills Agreement (NSA) from 2028.
- The consideration of Study findings in the pending NSA review.
- Further leveraging and uplifting existing procurement levers at all jurisdictional levels including expanding the Australian Skills Guarantee beyond construction and ICT projects at the federal level and considering a review of the Skill Guarantee's current targets and thresholds.
- More systematic evaluation of interventions and initiatives, and cross-jurisdiction sharing of outcomes and public reporting of progress including contributions to the independent evaluation under **Recommendation 1** to ensure scale and impact for national coordinated action beyond 2029.

WHO? All Australian governments with the Skills and Workforce Ministerial Council (SWMC) and DEWR playing a leading role.

Recommendation 4: All Australian governments and lead skills system actors coordinate a national and economy-wide approach to gender segregated VET training pathways for occupations in shortage through four main policy actions.

JSA recommends four policy actions:

- A scholarship and supports package for trainers.
- A gender-conscious national VET pathways awareness and promotion campaign.
- A suite of career introduction, entry-level programs.
- An equity by design approach to systems, classrooms, qualification design and occupational pathways and supports.

WHO? All Australian governments with leading roles for skills and education departments and authorities. Education and training institutions and actors, such as the National TAFE Network, TAFE Centres of Excellence, Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) and schools and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) involved in VET in Schools (VETiS) delivery will also play key roles.

Recommendation 5: All Australian governments and lead skills system actors complement current Closing the Gap reforms with additional and immediate national and economy-wide action for First Nations women.

JSA recommends priority policy action in three areas be progressed and co-designed with First Nations stakeholders:

- A standalone First Nations Women's Economic Equality Plan including coordinated action to address, and ongoing reporting and monitoring of, First Nations gender pay gaps.
- Strengthened industry partnerships and longer-term investment in the capability, capacity and sustainability of Aboriginal Community Controlled (ACC) and First Nations Owned (FNO) Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).
- The progression of the Indigenous Centre of Vocational Excellence (ICOVE) that leads innovation, capacity building, advocacy, and evidence-informed best practice research in VET with the aim to support the growth of First Nations participation and leadership in VET.

WHO? All Australian governments with stewardship from PM&C in partnership with the National Women's Alliances to reflect the urgent need for action on First Nations women's economic inequality. In the skills space, ACC and FNO RTOs, the VET First Nations Policy Partnership under existing Closing the Gap governance settings, DEWR and JSCs will also be key players.



Recommendation 6: Industry and employers to accelerate progress on inclusive and safe workplaces and training settings.

JSA recommends employers and industry prioritise three actions:

- Going above and beyond what is required by the legislated Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) [Gender Equality Targets](#) Scheme. For example, employers below the legislated 500 employee requirement could voluntarily devise and set targets and independently monitor their progress, while larger employers could consider setting additional targets and independently monitoring their progress separate to the legislated three target requirement reporting to WGEA.
- Strengthening workplace health and safety settings to not just meet regulation but foster safe, and respectful workplace cultures where workers thrive. For example, replicating National Construction Industry Forum (NCIF) [Blueprint for the Future](#) recommendations in other industries.
- Accelerating recognition of cultural load for First Nations and CALD workers.

WHO? Industry, particularly employers, as well as unions, industry associations, education and training institutions and JSCs. WGEA and the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) could play supporting roles as Australian government agencies, as well as SAGE who are working with education and training institutions as employers to create safe and inclusive workplaces.

Recommendation 7: Extend policy settings and supports to normalise men's involvement in unpaid care, domestic work and paid care work, with the longer-term aim of addressing social and cultural norms.

JSA recommends the Australian Government and employers consider an expansion of Australia's paid parental leave (PPL) model to 52 weeks in line with previous Women's Economic Equality Taskforce and 2025 [Work and Family Roundtable](#) recommendations. This means the:

- inclusion of a strong 'use it or lose it' model for fathers and 'secondary' carers, which earmarks four months of PPL for each parent and four months to share.
- potential flexibility to take PPL across the life course of the child (up to 12-13 years as per other best-practice international models).
- the leveraging of other policy levers in the tax and transfer system that could further normalise men's involvement in unpaid care, and not just support women's return to work, but drive more equitable career progression and promotion for mothers and carers.

WHO? All Australian governments but leading action from the Australian Government as well as employers, fathers, and 'secondary' carers.

Recommendation 8: Government and others adopt the GSIS as a common and shared framework for informing action and monitoring progress towards gender economic equality.

JSA recommends adoption of the GSIS in evaluation, monitoring and reporting of diverse projects, reforms and work across government, industry and education and training institutions. As a first step JSA recommends the GSIS is adopted in:

- Various JSA research and public reporting.
- The Shifting the Dial policy and evaluation agenda and JSC workforce planning.
- The upcoming NSA Balanced Scorecard reporting framework.
- Gender pay gap research and reporting.
- Gender Impact Assessments and Gender Responsive Budgeting infrastructure.

WHO? All Australian governments as well as key jobs and skills system actors such as JSCs and education and training institutions. JSA and OFW would be lead Australian Government agencies who will provide early demonstrations of its use and applications.

Recommendation 9: Further address gender and other biases in labour market and skills frameworks that reflect gendered language, structure and norms.

JSA recommends leveraging the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) progress on the [Occupational Standard Classification for Australia](#) (OSCA), the Fair Work Commission's (FWC) ongoing work on gender undervaluation, and JSA's work on the National Skills Taxonomy to further address gender and other biases in labour market and skills frameworks. Examples of frameworks and work that could be part of this include:

- Statistical classifications such as OSCA and the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC) including in its upcoming review.
- Skills system frameworks such as the National Skills Taxonomy, the Training Package Organising Framework, the Australian Qualifications Framework and more broadly Recognition of Prior Learning models.
- Policy frameworks such as the [Australian Apprenticeships Incentives System](#).
- Industrial frameworks such as modern awards.

WHO? All Australian governments with leadership from Australian Government agencies such as the ABS, the FWC, JSA, OFW and DEWR. Non-government actors include employers, unions and individual education and training institutions.

Recommendation 10: Expanded research, data and reporting to monitor progress on gender economic equality and increase intersectional perspectives and understanding.

JSA recommends the Australian Government fund repeating, deepening and extending the data and research work of this Study. JSA also recommends more coordinated government action to improve and expand existing data assets to allow for more intersectional insights and reporting. JSA recommends priority action to:

- Identify the most appropriate Australian Government agency to use the data and methods in this Study to do ongoing intersectional, life course and detailed occupation pay gap reporting.
- Fund the ABS to expand and extend the available integrated data to support improved gender pay gap monitoring.
- Fund regular research on differences in labour market situation and outcomes for women and men (including working arrangements, conditions, preferences), differences in superannuation accumulation and retirement, and women's entrepreneurship and business ownership.
- Incorporate additional data and research, especially newer intersectional insights, into existing and future reporting such as the Working for Women Status of Women Annual Report card.

WHO? Lead Australian Government agencies including JSA, the ABS, the NIAA in their role in coordinating Closing the Gap, and OFW and Gender Data Steering Group. Agencies that are data custodians for key datasets that could further usefully extend Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA) and the National Disability Data Asset (NDDA).