FEMALE students will bear the brunt of the cuts to Victoria's vocational training budget, according to a preliminary analysis by the state’s peak TAFE body.

However the state government disputes the Victorian TAFE Association’s claims, saying funding rates for some female-dominated courses have risen.

The VTA said TAFE courses skewed to female students had lost up to 85 per cent of their government subsidies while the most male-dominated TAFE courses had lost only about 6 per cent.

VTA executive director David Williams said women had been disproportionately affected because they tended to favour the disciplines which had seen the most severe funding cuts, including hospitality, retail and business administration.

But trade courses had barely lost out because a moderate increase in government teaching funds for apprenticeship courses had almost compensated for the removal of TAFEs’ “full service provider” allocation.

Mr Williams said the analysis raised a red flag about the future of women’s participation in the workforce.

“We always knew the cuts would have a negative impact on Victorians but now we are getting a clearer picture of who the primary victims will be.”
He said it was “simply discriminatory” that a male undertaking an apprenticeship experienced a minimal fee increase, typically met by his employer, while a sister studying business administration faced fees of around $3000 a year.

The VTA study looked at 20 high-enrolment TAFE courses skewed to either gender. It found average funding cuts of 64 per cent in female-dominated courses, and just 12 per cent in male-dominated courses.

Certificate II and III hospitality courses, in which almost two-thirds of students last year were female, faced 85 per cent cuts to government funding. But apprenticeship courses in carpentry, plumbing, electro-technology, engineering and bricklaying – in which 98-99 per cent of last year’s students were male – stood to lose just 5-7 per cent of funding.

Skills Minister Peter Hall disputed the figures, and said the VTA’s analysis ignored female-dominated courses in which funding rates had risen.

They included hairdressing apprenticeships as well as certificate IV courses in dental assisting, aged care, nursing, allied health assistance and mental health, he said.

Mr Hall said gender-based comparisons were misleading. “Historically, more males than females have been enrolled in Victoria’s vocational training system, just as there are now far more women than men at university,” Mr Hall said.

The VTA analysis suggests males will be the bigger losers in some course areas. The most popular female-dominated course – the certificate III in children’s services, in which 97 per cent of enrolments last year were women – is facing a 22 per cent funding cut next year. Meanwhile the course which attracted most men, a certificate III in warehousing and storage, stands to lose 40 per cent of its funding.

But Mr Williams said many female-dominated courses including business, hospitality, tourism and retail faced closure or higher fees. He said that at one large Melbourne TAFE, fees for female-dominated courses would rise by an average 66 per cent next year.

“Yes, there was an oversupply in those areas, and yes, there needed to be a capping undertaken. But to cap purely by price is causing major disadvantage to women,” he said.

“On this data, women face a whopping average $800 increase in student fees in 2013.”

Federal Tertiary Education Minister Chris Evans said that as well as tradespeople, Australia needed childcare, aged care and community service workers.
“These cuts are having real impacts which are going to prevent women studying (and) coming back into the workforce. We need women in the workforce.”

The VTA said it had raised the matter with the Victorian Auditor-General’s office, and would seek a performance audit. However chief operating officer Peter Frost said VAGO had no plans to conduct such an audit.

Click [here](https://www.example.com) to view the story online.