



Submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Reference Committee Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities

NCVER is pleased to assist the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Reference Committee in its inquiry into the education of students with disabilities, including learning disabilities, throughout all levels and sectors of education.

This submission provides background information for the Inquiry on participation and outcomes in vocational education and training modules (or subjects) undertaken by students who have reported having a disability. The submission also discusses other recent research undertaken at the NCVER into employment and income outcomes for students in the vocational education and training sector who have reported having a disability.

1. Participation and outcomes of students with a disability in vocational education and training

The national collection of vocational education and training (VET) data is a source of information about VET courses conducted by providers in receipt of public funds. The collection includes TAFE and other government providers, community-based providers and private providers. The information in this submission relates to all publicly funded VET courses.

Student numbers

In 2000, 62 100 of the students engaged in vocational education and training (VET) reported having a disability or disabilities. This was an increase of nearly 15 000 students from the 47 300 students who reported having a disability in 1996. However, the proportion of the VET population (where disability status was known) reporting a disability fell over this time (from 5.1% in 1996 to 4.5% in 2000). Males accounted for 53% of those reporting a disability in 2000, compared with 51% of all VET students.

At the State level, New South Wales had the largest proportion of VET students reporting a disability in 2000 (5.3%), closely followed by the ACT and Queensland (4.7% and 4.6% respectively). The Northern Territory had the smallest proportion in 2000, with only 2.9% of VET students reporting that they had a disability.

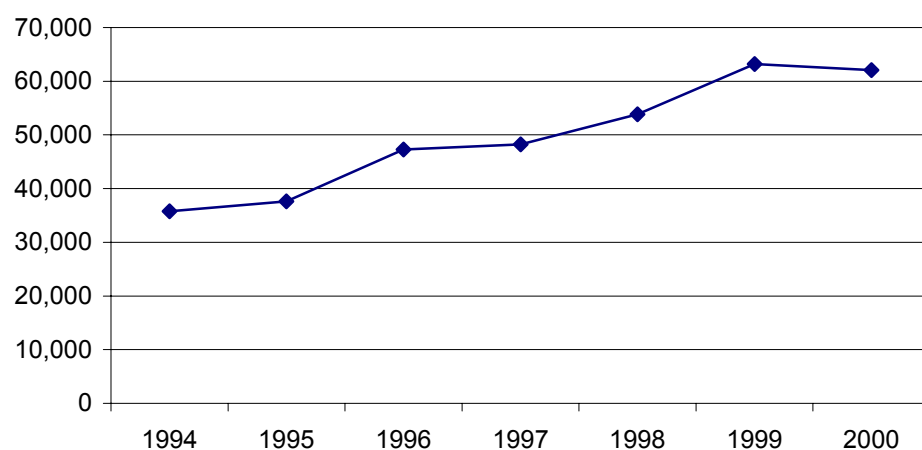
Table 1: VET students who reported a disability, by State, 1996 and 2000

	1996		2000	
	Students reporting a disability	As proportion of all(a) students	Students reporting a disability	As proportion of all(a) students
	No.	%	No.	%
NSW	17,800	5.3	23,930	5.3
Vic.	16,730	5.9	16,910	3.8
Qld.	5,990	3.7	9,940	4.6
WA	1,730	4.6	3,360	3.7
SA	2,810	4.9	5,080	4.2
Tas.	1100	5.1	1360	4.5
NT	320	3.2	610	2.9
ACT	820	5.5	910	4.7
Australia	47,310	5.1	62,080	4.5

(a)Excludes students whose disability status is not known.

Source: NCVET National VET provider data collection, 1996 and 2000

Between 1995 and 1999, the numbers of VET students reporting a disability grew steadily, at approximately the same rate as VET student numbers overall. However, this trend was reversed between 1999 and 2000, with the number of students reporting a disability falling from 63, 200 to 62 100. There was little change in the proportion of VET students reporting a disability between 1995 and 2000, varying at a level between 4% and 5%.

Figure 1: VET students reporting a disability, 1994–2000

Source: NCVET National VET provider data collection

The types of disabilities reported by VET students in 1996 and 2000 are detailed below (Table 2). While there appeared to be minor changes in the proportion of some disability types over this period, the high proportion of disabilities reported as ‘other’ or ‘unspecified’ (over 30% in both 1996 and 2000) makes it difficult to clearly identify any trends.

Table 2: Types of disabilities reported by VET students, 1996 and 2000

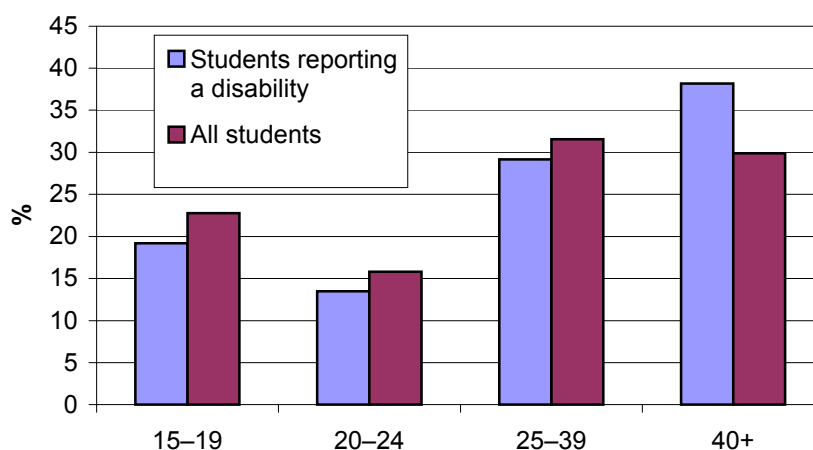
	1996		2000	
	No.	%	No.	%
Visual Disability	8,740	17.5	10,670	15.5
Hearing Disability	5,440	10.9	7,910	11.5
Physical Disability	9,390	18.8	14,290	20.7
Intellectual Disability	7,840	15.7	8,650	12.5
Chronic Illness	3,130	6.2	5,580	8.1
Other Disability	7,170	14.3	15,730	22.8
Unspec Disability	8,300	16.6	6,190	9.0
Total disabilities reported	50,000	100.0	69,030	100.0
Total students reporting a disability(a)	47,310		62,080	

(a) Total disabilities is higher than the number of students reporting a disability as students may report more than one disability.

Source: NCVER National VET provider data collection, 1996 and 2000

Student characteristics

In 2000, students reporting a disability tended to be older than VET students overall, with 38% aged over 40 years (compared with 30% of all students). The proportion of students aged over 40 increased overall between 1996 and 2000, with both students with a disability and all VET students experiencing a proportional increase (from 34% and 25% respectively).

Figure 1: Proportion of VET students in selected age groups, 2000

Source: NCVER National VET provider data collection, 2000

VET students who reported a disability in 2000 tended to have lower levels of schooling than VET students overall. Only 30% of students with a disability had achieved year 12 (compared with 43% of all VET students), 25% had an education level of year 9 or lower (compared with 12% of all VET students). These proportions were largely unchanged from 1996.

Table 2: Per cent of students with each level of schooling, 1996 and 2000

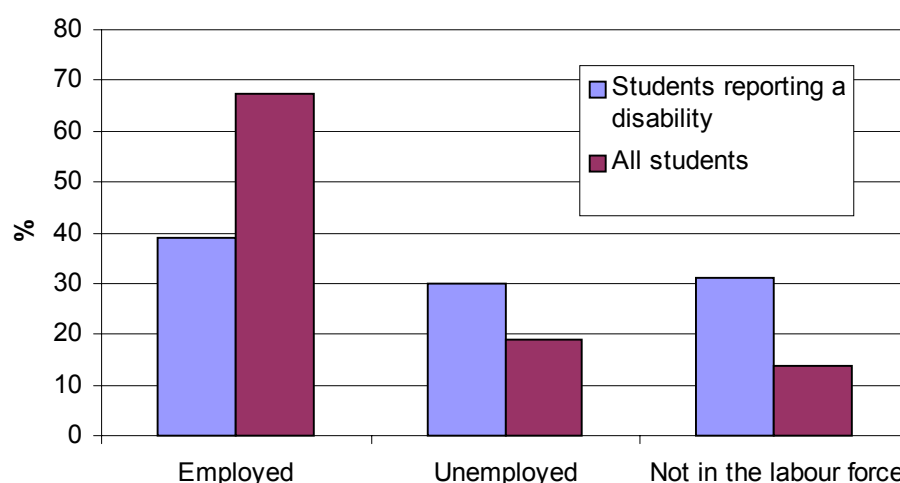
	1996		2000	
	Students reporting a disability	All students	Students reporting a disability	All students
Year 9 or lower	25.1	10.4	25.2	11.6
Year 10	32.6	28.3	32.0	28.8
Year 11	13.1	15.7	12.6	16.3
Year 12	29.3	45.6	30.1	43.3
Total(a)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Only includes those students whose level of schooling was known.

Source: NCVET National VET provider data collection, 1996 and 2000

VET students reporting a disability in 2000 were less likely to be employed (while studying) than other VET students. More than 60% of VET students with a disability were either unemployed or not in the labour force, compared with 33% of all VET students.

Figure 2: Employment status of VET students, 2000



Source: NCVET National VET provider data collection, 2000

VET training activity

In 2000, over a quarter of VET students reporting a disability were enrolled in subjects from within the VET Multi-field education area of study (compared with 11% of all VET students). Multi-field education is not directly associated with a recognised ‘field of study’, but rather encompasses a range of enabling courses, addressing generic study, interpersonal and job-search skills.

The proportion of VET students reporting a disability engaged in VET multi-field education decreased noticeably between 1996 and 2000 (from 47% to 27%), meaning that a greater proportion of VET students reporting a disability were enrolling in the main vocational fields of study. This may actually indicate the success of previous study in enabling programs. An

NCVER study (Phan and Ball, 2001) found that, following enrolment in an enabling course, almost a third of those students who undertook further studies in the VET sector in the following year had undertaken a course at a higher level qualification.

In 2000, the popularity of different fields of study varied between male and female students. For male VET students reporting a disability, the most popular fields of study were: *Engineering, Surveying* (14% of students); *Business, Administration, Economics* (13% of students); *Services, Hospitality, Transportation* (9% of students); and *Science* (8% of students). Female VET students reporting a disability had a slightly different focus, favouring: *Business, Administration, Economics* (20% of students); *Health, Community services* (11% of students); *Art, Humanities & Social sciences* (10% of students); and *Services, Hospitality, Transportation* (9% of students).

Table 3: Per cent of students in each major field of study(a), 2000

	Students reporting a disability			All students		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Land & Marine resources, Animal husbandry	7	2	5	8	3	5
Architecture, building	5	1	3	9	1	5
Art, Humanities & Soc Sciences	6	10	8	5	9	7
Business, Administration, Economics	13	20	17	15	27	21
Education	2	2	2	2	3	3
Engineering, Surveying	14	2	8	20	3	12
Health, Community services	5	11	8	5	11	8
Law, Legal studies	0	0	0	1	1	1
Science	8	6	7	7	7	7
Veterinary Science, Animal care	0	0	0	0	0	0
Services, Hospitality, Transportation	9	9	9	17	17	17
TAFE Multi-field education	26	28	27	10	13	11
Module only - no FOS	5	8	6	3	7	5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Major fields of study are categories which encompass a range of related courses or training programs.

Source: NCVER National VET provider data collection, 2000

In 2000, VET students who reported having a disability were mostly studying a similar mix of qualifications to all VET students. However, a smaller proportion of VET students reporting a disability were studying at the AQF Certificate III level (16% compared with 20% of all VET students), and a larger proportion were studying at the AQF Certificate I level (12% compared with 5% of all VET students).

Table 4: Per cent of VET students in each qualification category, 2000

	Students reporting a disability			All students		
	Male	Female	Total(a)	Male	Female	Total(a)
AQF Diploma or higher	10.7	11.2	10.9	11.1	11.8	11.4
AGF Certificate IV or equivalent	8.7	9.0	8.8	9.8	10.1	9.9
AQF Certificate III or equivalent	17.1	15.1	16.2	22.0	17.7	19.9
AQF level unknown	1.8	2.2	2.0	1.8	1.9	1.8
AQF Certificate II	17.5	17.3	17.4	16.9	17.9	17.4
AQF Certificate I	12.5	11.1	11.8	5.2	4.4	4.8
Other recognised courses(b)	9.6	8.4	9.0	8.0	6.1	7.1
Non-award courses	17.1	17.9	17.5	22.0	23.5	22.7
Module only - no qualification	5.0	7.8	6.3	3.1	6.8	5.0
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Students ('000)	33,130	28,910	62,080	884,930	857,930	1,749,360

(a) Includes students whose sex is not known

(b) Includes AQF Senior secondary

Source: NCVER National VET provider data collection, 2000

Module (subject) outcomes

Students who report having a disability have been less likely to achieve successful module outcomes than other VET students. In 2000, 74% of students reporting a disability achieved successful subject outcomes compared with 80% of all VET students. While this proportion was an improvement from the 71% reported in 1996, there was a corresponding improvement in the proportion of successful outcomes for all students, meaning that the difference between the two groups was unchanged at six percentage points.

Over half of the unsuccessful outcomes for VET students reporting a disability in 2000 resulted from withdrawals (13% compared with 9% for all VET students). The proportion failing to successfully complete assessed subjects was only marginally higher than for all VET students (12% compared with 11% for all VET students).

Table 6: Outcomes of subject enrolments(a), 1996 and 2000

	1996		2000	
	Students reporting a disability	All students	Students reporting a disability	All students
	%	%	%	%
Total successful	71.2	76.8	74.3	80.1
Assessed subjects	60.4	65.5	60.8	66.6
Non-assessed subjects	6.6	6.1	7.9	6.7
RPL/Credit transfer	4.1	5.3	5.6	6.8
Total unsuccessful	28.8	23.2	25.7	19.9
Assessed subjects	6.0	5.1	11.7	10.8
Non-assessed subjects	8.8	7.2	0.7	0.4
Withdrawn	14.0	10.8	13.3	8.7
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Subject enrolments ('000)	313,380	8,464,050	455,170	12,292,720

(a) Percentages include only those subjects where the result was known (i.e. excludes subjects where the result was withheld, the student was continuing studies, or the result was not stated).

Source: NCVET National VET provider data collection, 1996 and 2000

2. Summary of NCVET research into employment and income outcomes for VET students with a disability

Research undertaken at NCVET reported in Ball and Phan, (1999) investigated:

- if there is any significant difference in the likelihood of members of disadvantaged groups securing employment following graduation from TAFE, after controlling for factors such as field of study and level of qualification attained, compared with other Australians;
- if there is any significant difference in the likelihood of members of disadvantaged groups achieving a 'positive outcome' after graduation from TAFE, after controlling for factors such as field of study and level of qualification attained, compared with other Australians;
- if members of disadvantaged groups who are successful in securing employment manage to achieve the same level of income as Australians as a whole, after controlling for factors such as field of study, occupation and level of qualification attained;

The interpretation of a 'positive outcome' used in this analysis is that either a TAFE graduate has secured employment by 30 May in the following year after the completion of a TAFE course or the graduate has enrolled in further studies.

Given the different distribution of courses undertaken by vocational students from most disadvantaged groups compared with other students, it could be construed that variations in employment and income outcomes for TAFE graduates are solely related to differences in the chosen field-of-study of the course taken at TAFE, the occupation after graduation and the level of qualification attained by members of disadvantaged groups compared with other Australians.

The results indicated that there is a significant difference in the likelihood of members of disadvantaged groups securing employment or achieving a 'positive outcome' following graduation from TAFE, after controlling for factors such as field of study and level of qualification attained, compared with other Australians. While field of study and level of qualification are important factors influencing the likelihood of new TAFE graduates securing employment or achieving a 'positive outcome', demographic factors are also important influences.

The capacity to gain employment, of course, is influenced by a range of non-training related issues including availability of suitable work, as well as employer perceptions and work requirements. The key findings from the research that are relevant for students in VET with a disability are summarised as follows:

- New TAFE graduates who reported in the survey that they have a disability are significantly less likely to obtain employment compared to other new TAFE graduates.
- There is less likelihood of new TAFE graduates who reported in the survey that they have a disability achieving a 'positive outcome' compared to other new TAFE graduates.
- Students with a disability who were successful in securing employment after graduation from TAFE did not achieve the same level of income as Australians as a whole, after controlling for factors such as field of study, occupation and level of qualification attained.
- New TAFE graduates who reported in the survey that they have a disability obtain significantly lower income at 30 May in the year following completion of a TAFE course compared to other new TAFE graduates.
- There are significant differences in the likelihood of securing employment and in the remuneration received by new TAFE graduates depending on the field of study of the course studied at TAFE. With the exception of 'art, humanities and social sciences', 'science', and 'TAFE multi-field education' field of study classifications there was a significantly greater likelihood of recent TAFE graduates being employed if they had taken courses from all other field of study courses compared to the reference group. For graduates who had studied courses from the 'art, humanities and social sciences', 'science', and 'TAFE multi-field education' field of study classifications there was a significantly reduced likelihood of being employed by 30 May in the year following the completion of TAFE studies.

Outcomes for apprentices and trainees

In general, students with a disability who were in an apprenticeship or traineeship during their VET course achieved more positive post-course employment outcomes than students with a disability who were not engaged in a contract of training.

Regression modelling was conducted by NCVET to assess if demographic factors affect the likelihood of continued employment with the same employer, or with a different employer, after the completion of an apprenticeship. The modelling methodology took account of differences in field of study, level of qualification, length of training course, type of training (apprenticeship or traineeship), age of apprentice or trainee, industry of employment, highest previous qualification, occupation, and type and size of employer (government or private sector).

Although apprentices with a disability were 20 per cent less likely to be with the same employer after the completion of an apprenticeship or traineeship than other apprentices and trainees, there was no significant difference in the likelihood of an apprentice or trainee who reported having a disability continuing in employment with a different employer after the completion of an apprenticeship or traineeship than other apprentices or trainees.

Students with disabilities who undertook lower level or enabling courses were less likely to be undertaking further studies when they completed their course compared with other students (Ball and Phan, 2001).

References

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