

**Submission**

**to the**

**Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and  
Education References Committee**

**Inquiry into the Education of Students  
with Disabilities**

**From**

**Enterprise and Career Education Foundation**



## **Enterprise and Career Education Foundation**

The Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEF) has been established by the Commonwealth Government to help reshape the Australian schooling system, so it can more effectively prepare young Australians to meet the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> Century living.

ECEF recognises that effective learning extends beyond the classroom. It therefore brokers alliances of mutual benefit between education, business and their wider communities, recommends policy changes, develops tools and financially supports innovative ideas to offer young Australians more diverse learning opportunities.

As a catalyst for change, ECEF seeks to ensure that young Australians develop the skills and knowledge they will need to make informed choices about their futures and ensure successful transitions from school to adulthood.

ECEF's broader focus on "transition management" which complements the soon to be released Joint Declaration by Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers for Education, Training and Employment, Youth and Community Services "*Stepping Forward*" (draft attached), means that we can now link into middle schooling and post schooling activities. It is really a "case management" agenda which is perfectly suited to students with a disability.

### **This submission**

This submission deals with:

*An ECEF initiative that provides opportunities for school students with a disability to participate in vocational education and training, enabling them to have a better life and contribute to the Australian economy.*

*It highlights the demand for quality workplace learning for these students, demonstrates the barriers to increasing the level of participation and recommends some solutions.*

### **Lighthouse Disability Initiative**

ECEF provides workplace learning opportunities across Australia for almost 80,000 students annually in their senior secondary years of school through more than 230 education/business/community alliances. These alliances are also experiencing the challenge of assisting students with a disability to access appropriate vocational programs but with limited additional support and resources.

In response to this demand ECEF undertook its' so called *Lighthouse Disability Initiative*, which focused on three specialist disability projects to develop models which could be incorporated into mainstream enterprise and career education programs.

The *Initiative* complements the ANTA Disability Forum's *Bridging Pathways* Strategy and the implementation of its accompanying Blueprint by the Australian Disability Training Advisory Council (ADTAC).

The *Initiative* sought ways to improve sustainable economic, social and personal circumstances of young people with a disability and their communities. The potential social and economic gains from increased participation of people with a disability in VET programs highlighted in recent research conducted by ANTA demonstrate that the return far exceeds the

input costs associated with disability support. The personal gains for individuals include personal worth (value), confidence, and financial and emotional independence.

## Definition

The *Lighthouse Initiative* as a whole was based on an understanding of ‘disability’ as applying to impairments which restrict a student’s ability to function at school or in the workplace. However, definitions of disability vary from one educational jurisdiction to another so each of the three specialist disability projects worked within the definition applied by its State education authority.

## Support from key organisations and groups

The ECEF *Lighthouse Disability Initiative* has support from a range of key organisations and groups including:

- Australian National Training Authority
- Australian Disability Training Advisory Council
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training
- Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services
- Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
- State/Territory Department of Education (NSW, TAS, SA)
- Commonwealth Employment Placement and Training Agencies
- Employers
- Schools and TAFEs
- Parents and students

## Three specialist projects

ECEF funded in 2000 and 2001 three disability projects selected from 87 proposals received from all States and Territories. ECEF financial support for the three projects including continued funding until December 2003 is \$560,000. ECEF has also provided a further \$200,000 for project management and resource development. The projects are **Youth Connections “Work-Out”** on the NSW Central Coast, **Gateway to Awareness, Employment and Training (GATE)** in Launceston, Tasmania, and **WAVES** in Western Adelaide, South Australia.

The *Lighthouse* model builds on the education/business/community alliances existing in ECEF supported mainstream workplace learning programs with an additional key partner, the Commonwealth Employment Placement and Training Agency network (CEPT). All three projects have built alliances and are working successfully with Commonwealth Employment Placement and Training Agencies (CEPTs) in their regions. CEPTs are also known as open employment or specialist employment agencies.

## Purpose and Objectives

There were two key premises underpinning the *Lighthouse Initiative*:

1. the under-representation of students with a disability in the VET system can be addressed by interventions targeting students while they are still in senior school; and
2. this intervention includes the building of partnerships between schools, employers and disability employment agencies because of the latter’s disability expertise and links to employers.

## Outcomes

The *Lighthouse Initiative* was designed to explore different approaches to providing such early intervention and **at the end of two years' implementation, formative and summative evaluation has identified that the *Initiative* has achieved all four of the following aims:**

- increased awareness and commitment to Structured Workplace Learning (SWL) for students with a disability
- developed a diverse range of transferable 'first generation' project models designed to increase participation rates of young people in SWL programs
- captured on the ground knowledge and experience of the projects in the form of a Resource Kit targeting a wider audience to further promote SWL for students with a disability
- through the *Initiative* assisted ADTAC to achieve the goals of its Blueprint for increasing opportunities for people with disabilities in vocational education and training.

The early intervention approach adopted by the ECEF *Initiative* has created pathways to VET and ultimately employment that have not usually been identified as relevant to students with a disability. By providing the supports needed to allow them to pursue those pathways, the three ECEF projects have demonstrated the viability of those career choices and the outcomes that are possible when appropriate support is made available.

- All **158** participating students have successfully undertaken SWL and some have completed additional accredited vocational education opportunities.
- Although not part of the original objectives, employment has been achieved by **29** students
- The subsequent growth in self-confidence among students is seen as positively affecting their future study and work directions, and engagement with the mainstream community
- There has been a dramatic altering of the expectations held about career development possibilities for students with a disability by participating teachers, parents, employers and students.

## Key Issues

The *Initiative* has highlighted the importance of cross-sectoral and cross-government approaches to enterprise and career education for students with a disability in particular – and possibly, for all young people. However, such linkages are under-developed and this is limiting the scope and impact of early intervention approaches.

- Within schools, the importance of linking VET teachers with special education/disability support teachers as part of individual transition planning has been highlighted.
- The important role to be played by disability employment agencies (CEPTs) within schools has been trialed and reinforced by the *Lighthouse Initiative*. These agencies have linkages to employers which schools are unlikely to possess and have specialist knowledge of disability that cannot be expected of most teachers. They can also provide the support employers need to accept a student with a disability for work place learning. They can play a key role as case managers of transition planning processes, and have a greater investment in obtaining employment-related outcomes for students than do other stakeholders.
- At the broader level of education policy, there is also scope to link VET in Schools programs, special education, transition planning and disability support into a wider and

‘seamless’ strategy of career development – as is reflected in the New Framework of Vocational Education in Schools (MCEETYA).

- Alliances have been built between schools and disability employment agencies at the service delivery level, and have identified the need for collaboration at the policy level between the Department of Family and Community Services (DFaCS) and the Department of Education Science and Training (DEST).

## Barriers and Solutions

There are a number of barriers that limit the capacity of early intervention and collaborative strategies to link students with a disability to vocational education and employment opportunities.

- It is critical that funding to support students with a disability is regarded as a front-end cost – an investment – which offers significant returns in terms of the outcomes which can be achieved for those students, their families and the community. However, State/Territory education authorities in general have not allocated the resources required to meet the demand for disability support for school students.
- Disability employment agencies (CEPTs) are funded by the Department of Family and Community Services and the Commonwealth State Disability Agreement limits their involvement to people **outside** the school system (which is a State responsibility). Therefore, they cannot be paid for working with school students. Given the pivotal role which they have been found to play in the course of the *Lighthouse Initiative*, and the potential role which they could play, it is essential that this structural barrier to a cross-sectoral approach is addressed.
- At a broader level, cross departmental and cross jurisdiction (Commonwealth, State and Local government) work is needed to reduce fragmentation and duplication, to make more effective use of knowledge and resources, and to encourage a holistic approach.
- There is significant demand for young people with a disability to engage with mainstream workplace learning programs and there is evidence that the business community is willing to participate to realise that outcome. The practical needs however, are often not met. For example, students with a disability undertaking a VET course at school usually need supervisory support when completing a workplacement and employers need training in managing these students. Business needs to see the benefits for them and requires a financial incentive to engage.

## Recommendations

ECEF recommends that the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education

References Committee:

- Reviews the barriers and solutions outlined in this submission
- In particular, undertakes an urgent review of the policy change required to provide a financial incentive for CEPTs to work inside the school system
- Notes the comprehensive findings of the *Disability Lighthouse Initiative*
- Urges the Commonwealth and State Governments, across all relevant Departments, and key business organisations to work together to develop an integrated strategy and plan for increasing and improving career development opportunities for school students with a disability.

*Attached:*

*Appendix providing further details of the ECEF Disability Lighthouse Initiative.*

*Draft Joint Declaration “Stepping Ahead”.*