

Submission to the Senate Enquiry into the Education of Students with a Disability

07/05/2002

Dear Senators,

Thank you for considering this submission of the Disability Advisory Committee to the Queensland Training & Employment Board. This submission considers the ADTAC discussion paper “ All of Life: Whole of Life” and the Bridging pathways Blueprint in compiling our comments to you.

Our comments are made here in line with your terms of reference and focus on definitions and prioritisation of students for extra support, transition arrangements from school to VET and access to further training for people who are serviced by a disability employment agency

Priority access to VET via the Priority Passport

Disability is ‘Human Variation’. With the emerging social definition¹ of disability overlapping the medical diagnosis we are finding that many more people in our society can self –identify, or be labelled, as disabled.

The implications for VET are becoming apparent as increasingly students self-identify as having a disability when they fill out their enrolment form. Other sectors are seeing a similar explosion in the numbers of people identifying as disabled. Further more, there is a general rule of thumb that 20% of people with a disability can compete VET training with no real need of extra supports, a further 60% of people with a disability can only complete VET with supports and finally about 20% of people with a disability would find it difficult to complete competence in VET even with support.

The central issue in VET is how to **prioritise** access to limited federal and state funds allocated to disability equity to focus on the 60% who can only complete VET successfully with supports and reduce the focus of RTO’s and TAFE on the 20% who do not really need extra supports.

Without such measures of deservedness we find that agencies and RTOs are able to ‘cream’ the ‘easy to train’ from a large population of people with disability. This is a double injustice to those with genuine barriers to learning that can only be overcome with additional assistance. This marginalised group are often the cognitively disabled – given the fact that vocational training is predominately a cognitive task.

We need to develop an instrument to measure ‘deservedness’² of people to access limited VET equity funds. This instrument would identify a level of need

¹ (International Classification of Impairment Disability Handicap –Version 2) World Health Organisation

² ‘Disability and Deservedness’ is a key issue in European Social Policy in 2001-2002.

/disadvantage in accessing VET. Once the person with a disability is assessed and given this passport they can then access other VET services without going through further screening, paperwork or justification.

Furthermore this passport can include the learning profile³ of the student (preferred learning style, appropriate learning supports and adaptations) and would record all accredited training as the person progressed through the VET system.

The Disability Pre-employment instrument (DPI) from FaCS could be used as a model but focus on training needs instead of employment needs (a Disability Pre-Training Instrument). Finally a central VET database could be employed to manage the Priority Passport, including the learner's training profile and training log.

This instrument can be used to bring together some of the strategies in *Bridging Pathways* and extend the **Whole of Life, All of Life** argument raised in the stimulus paper.

Transition from School to VET

There seems a duplication of effort and at times gaps in the transition of students with disabilities between State Education and State VET systems.

We encourage a “whole of government” response to this issue where a logical solution is the co-funding of the transition officers and support staff involved in this task.

Again, the Priority Passport can be a platform on which school-based ascertainties of the student with a disability are fed into the Passport along with identified career aspirations, current skills and skills gaps.

Pathways Between Employment and VET Services

The reality of a working life for many people with a disability, especially an intellectual disability, can be described as a journey between casual employment, work experience placements, further vocational training, and possible part-time/fulltime employment. This journey becomes more enjoyable when the person becomes multi-skilled through continued vocational training and is able to capitalise on job opportunities as they arise across industry.

Currently, under block funding for disability employment agencies, there is little incentive for the agency to facilitate pathways for their clients in and out of VET. This funding model, however, is under review with FACS and the proposed case-based funding model⁴ may provide such incentives for the agency to facilitate transitions between VET and employment. For example, there is some discussion of a

³ see the Personal Pathways work by Directions Australia

⁴ see Australian Healthcare Associates, 2002, A two stage **evaluation** is proposed for the Case Based Funding Trial. (available from FaCS)

“VET outcome” for disability employment agencies and there are various possible incentives being examined for a disability employment agency to achieve a VET outcome for a client as part of an employment strategy.

Furthermore, as noted in the Priority Passport , FaCS has a central role in developing assessment and screening instruments to gauge the level of employability and need of people with a disability. These instruments are still being refined by FaCS and can conceivably incorporate information on the industry competencies and skills gaps of the client that may subsequently prioritise access to particular VET courses and supports.

In closing, thank you for reading through this submission. If you require further exploration or explanation of any issues raised here please contact me and I will arrange further input from committee members versed in the issue in question.

Sincerely,

Dan Kearns, (chair) on behalf of the Disability Advisory Committee to the Queensland Training & Employment Board