National VET Disability Advisory Taskforce

Final Report and Recommendations

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Executive Summary

Despite some improvements in participation levels of people with disabilities in the national Vocational Education and Training over the past decade, they remain significantly underrepresented in VET. 16.8% of the working age population in Australia have a disability, but only 7.2% of VET students report having a disability[1].

Equal participation of people with disabilities would see an additional 161,000 people with disabilities participating in VET. The majority of those people are currently—and will most likely remain—dependent on Australia's welfare system unless we can improve participation rates of people with disabilities in training that leads to employment.

Australia has the seventh lowest employment rate for people with disabilities in the OECD. In 2003, nearly two thirds of the OECD countries measured had better employment rates than Australia for people with disabilities[2]. Given the significant role that VET plays in achieving employment outcomes for individuals, the significantly lower level of participation of people with disabilities in VET is of very great concern.

The improvements in participation rates that we have seen, while disappointing in magnitude and achieved at a slower rate than we believe is possible, are also somewhat encouraging in that they demonstrate:

- that regardless of the type or severity of a person's disability, it is possible to participate successfully in training and to gain meaningful employment as a result, and

- that when we invest time, effort and resources in removing the obstacles that currently prevent many people with disabilities achieving their aspirations for completing training and gaining work, we can make a significant difference.

In this final report from the National VET Disability Advisory Taskforce (NVDAT) we describe the work NVDAT has undertaken to provide leadership over the past two years to the VET system in the reform process that has been guided since 2000 by Australia's national strategy for disability reform in VET, *Bridging Pathways*. It also describes a new approach to the reform process that we believe will build on the work that has been already done and that will result in the integration of the needs of people with disabilities in all aspects of the VET system. We believe that this new approach will fast track the reform process, significantly increasing participation rates and the speed at which we achieve an increase in successful completions leading to employment.

The report is divided into three main sections:

1. A general background section describing the current status of people with disabilities in Australia and a description of the stages through which disability reform has progressed over the past decades.
2. A summary of the activities and projects undertaken by NVDAT since its establishment, the current status of those projects and a set of recommendations that have emerged from them.
3. A description of a new way forward for disability reform that we believe will be required to address our primary concern: the lack of significant progress in achieving equal participation of people with disabilities in the VET system and in society as a whole.

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[1] Annual National Report of the Australian Vocational and Technical Education System 2006
[2] OECD, Employment Outlook: Towards more and better jobs, 2003, p141, as referred to in HREOC National Inquiry into Employment and Disability Issues Paper 1: Employment and Disability – The Statistics March 2005

Background

Based on the 2003 ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, it is estimated that people with disabilities form approximately 20% of the Australian population (16.8% of the working age population)[3]. The unemployment rate of people with disabilities is higher than the general population (8.5% versus 5.0%) and the workforce participation rate is significantly lower (53.2% versus 80.6%)[4].

If people with disabilities of working age in Australia were participating in the workforce at the same rate as the average Australian, there would be 683,740 less Australians receiving Disability Support Pensions (DSP). Those people would, instead, be paying taxes and contributing to and enjoying the benefits of a more robust Australian economy.
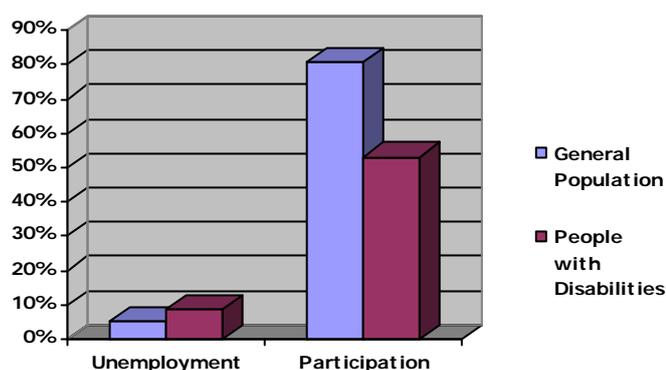

Figure 1: Unemployment and workforce participation of people with disabilities in Australia

Using the most recently published government statistics on people with disabilities in Australia, the innov8 Consulting Group recently estimated that if all working age Australians with disabilities who are currently receiving the DSP were working in jobs that paid the average weekly wage:

- the saving to the Federal Government in DSP payments and other related welfare payments would be $9.4 billion per annum,

- tax receipts would increase by $8.6 billion per annum, and

- the increase in GDP through increased economic activity (using US Department of Labor statistics specifically for Australia on the GDP contribution of Australian workers) would be $54 billion per annum[5].

Research for the Australian National Training Authority in 2001 by Dockery, Birch, Kenyon,[6] indicates that increasing participation rates is a sound economic investment. The report provides a range of estimates of the gain to improve VET participation rates across all age groups for people with a disability and concludes that there would be a $2.8 billion estimated benefit to the Australian economy when including training costs and other discounts[7]. NVDAT is currently seeking an update on the data in this report.

The Dockery, Birch, Kenyon report indicates a return on investment for the Federal and State Governments that warrants significant investment to support the case for improving VET outcomes for people with a disability and potentially for other socially marginalized

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[3] Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2003
[4] AIHW "Disability & Disability Services in Australia", Jan 2006
[5] The innov8 Consulting Group, 2007, using data sourced from the AIHW, the ABS and the US Department of Labor
[6] Dockery, Birch, Kenyon The Economic and Social Analysis of Increasing Opportunities for People with a Disability in VET The Institute for Research into International Competitiveness (IRIC) Curtin Business School, Curtin University of Technology Australian National Training Authority February 2001
[7] Dockery, Birch, Kenyon, op. cit.

groups. A proportion of these savings could be transferred back into the VET sector to encourage the State and Territories to support new training places for these groups.

When people with disabilities receive training and become employed, individual lives not only change but welfare costs are reduced, they and their families become more self supporting, earn wages, pay tax, have a greater capacity to make purchases and contribute to society and in some cases their carers can take up other work as well.

An OECD 2007 report[8] confirms the benefits of shifting people from disability support into employment with a reduction in government costs and improvements in income and opportunities for people with a disability.

The need to increase the participation of people with disabilities in the vocational education and training system in Australia, leading to increased participation of those people in all aspects of society—particularly employment—gained significant focus with the establishment in 1996 of the ANTA Disability Forum. It produced *Bridging Pathways,* Australia's national strategy to increase the successful participation of people with disabilities in VET[9].

Overseeing the implementation of *Bridging Pathways* and providing strategic advice about the disability reform process within the VET system is the role National VET Disability Advisory Taskforce (NVDAT). The 10 members of NVDAT are drawn from the business sector, private training providers, state training agencies, Disability Employment Network (DEN) providers, the union movement, the Commonwealth government, the disability sector and the student community. NVDAT succeeded the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) Disability Forum and the Australian Disability Training Advisory Council and has been in place since February 2007.

(Note: The current equity advisory arrangements come to an end in December 2008. A recommendation is currently being prepared for the Ministerial Council on Vocational and Technical Education (MCVTE) on proposed equity advisory arrangements for 2009 and beyond.)

Bridging Pathways and the *Blueprint for Implementation*[10] have been guiding the reform process to increase the successful participation of people with disabilities in the VET system for the past eight years.

Current Situation

As a result of the combined efforts of many people at the National, State and provider levels, there has been some improvement in some of the measures of participation of people with disabilities over the past 12 years. The percentage of students (aged 15-65) in the VET system who report having a disability increased from 6.4% in 2003 to 7.2% in 2006[11].

Although this is encouraging to an extent as it demonstrates that progress can be made, the overall participation of people with disabilities and their progress to successful completion of training leading to meaningful employment remains disappointingly low and far below equity with the general population.

16.8% of the working age population in Australia have a disability, but as already shown, only 7.2% of VET students report having a disability. Equal participation of people with disabilities would see an additional 161,000 people participating in VET. At the current rate

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[8] OECD Sickness, Disability and Work, Breaking the Barriers (VOL2) Australia, Luxembourg, Spain and the United Kingdom OECD Social issues/Migration/Health Vol 2007 No 25
[9] "Bridging Pathways", Australian National Training Authority, 2000
[10] "Bridging Pathways – Blueprint for Implementation (Revised)", Australian National Training Authority, 2004
[11] "Annual National Report of the Australian Vocational and Technical Education System 2006"

of progress it will take 36 years to achieve a participation rate of people with disabilities in the VET system equal to the general population[12].

As Figure 2 and Table 1 in Appendix 1 on page 28 show, participation rates of people with disabilities and their employment outcomes are significantly below the general population are also lower than other major equity groups.

Figure 3 compares VET outcomes on a range of measures for people with a disability against outcomes for all VET students. It indicates that people with a disability are overrepresented in Certificate 1 and 2 levels and underrepresented on all other measures.

Figure 7 in Appendix 1: on page 28 and text in Appendix 3: on page 30 provide a summary of outcomes for people with a disability in the VET system and more broadly including employment.

Figure 2: Equity group participation in VET

Successful completion rates of people with disabilities for VET subjects are lower than all other groups apart from Indigenous Australians and employment outcomes are the lowest of all equity groups.
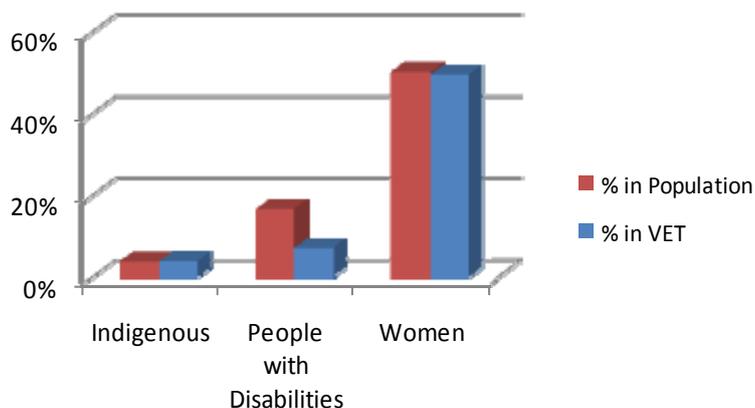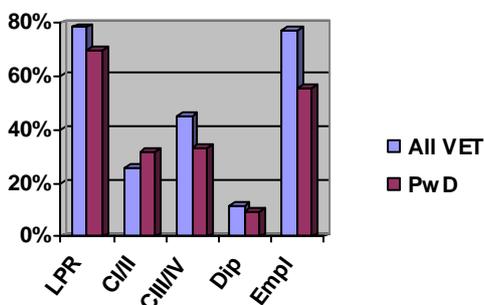

Figure 3: Comparison of Load Pass Rate, Attainment Level and employment outcomes - All students vs. PwD

Every aspect of this data raises serious questions regarding how people with a disability could be left to suffer such inequities when Australia has experienced sustained economic growth for the last decade.

Lifting Expectations

These results for people with a disability are particularly disappointing as firm evidence shows that people with all types and severities of disabilities have undertaken training in the VET system, have completed that training successfully and have gained meaningful employment as a result. The many best practice examples of disability reform that are occurring throughout the country (and in the rest of the world) indicate that there are solutions to the problems that are preventing so many people with disabilities from participating fully in the VET system. A number of these are described in the *Revised Blueprint* for *Bridging Pathways*.

The practical challenges faced by many people with disabilities in participating in VET resulting from infrastructure barriers within and outside the VET system[13] are a major and

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[12] While it is acknowledged that some people's disabilities are so severe that their participation in the VET system is unlikely under any circumstances, we see examples of people with virtually every type and severity of disability successfully completing training, indicating that a participation rate close to that of the general population is possible.
[13] Physical access to buildings for people with physical disabilities, sign language interpreters for deaf students, readable text for blind students, teacher supports for people with learning disabilities are just some examples of the barriers faced by people with all types of disabilities

obvious cause of low participation rates. However, the fact that the community as a whole (including the VET community) expects so little from people with disabilities is at least as great a problem, not least because it reduces the willingness of society to invest in removing the barriers that are making it so difficult for people with disabilities to participate.

This lowered expectation is caused primarily because of a perception that it is the disability itself—rather than the negative effects on people with disabilities of living in a society which has been built without taking their needs into account—that makes participation in all aspects of life so difficult or impossible for people with disabilities. A key challenge, then, is to demonstrate to society as a whole and to the VET system itself the reality that, when a person with a disability is offered an opportunity to participate and can access the supports he/she needs to do so, wonderful outcomes are possible.

Rocket Fuel, not Rocket Science

We believe that, while progress is being made, it is far too slow, given the evidence that people with all types and severities of disabilities can successfully participate in VET and also that investments in removing barriers to participation result in improvements in participation levels.

Far more needs to be done. And the work that needs to be done is not "Rocket Science"— the majority of best-practice successes are not complicated interventions: they are often simple solutions that just required focused people, often with limited resources, to take a new look at what have often been considered intractable problems.

Of particular concern is that, at a time when our nation is facing a skills shortage and the nation is focussing on social inclusion for all Australians, training system participation rates for people with disabilities are improving so slowly and in some cases declining[14]. Training is vital for anyone to participate fully in society and the workforce—some would argue that achieving the highest possible level of skills is even more important for people with disabilities. Not to have access to training is almost a life sentence for people with a disability.

Our society is faced with a dilemma. It has invested a significant amount of effort into disability reform over many years and we have proven that people with all types and severities of disabilities CAN successfully make the transition from exclusion to inclusion. We NEED people with disabilities to be successfully participating in education and the workforce more than ever before.

But progress is far too slow. Too slow for those people with disabilities who can and want to participate; too slow for their families, friends and others whose lives are impacted when a person with a disability is unable to participate; too slow for the many dedicated but often frustrated people who work so hard to remove the barriers faced by people with disabilities; and too slow for our nation that can no longer afford to see potentially productive people prevented from contributing their knowledge and skills to the combined wealth of our nation.

We need a new approach—a new way forward.

And we believe our nation is ready.

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[14] The participation in apprenticeships and traineeships by people with a disability has decreased slightly from 1.5% in 2002 to 1.3% in 2003 - NCVER

The Journey So Far

In understanding what that new way forward might be, we need to understand how we have got to where we are now and what the knowledge tells us about the direction we need to take for the future.

People with Disabilities in Society

There always have been and no doubt always will be people in our communities who live all or part of their lives with some form of disability. As we face an increasingly ageing population it is likely that most people will experience disability first-hand at some stage in their lives.

Over history the perception of people with disabilities of our society has changed—albeit slowly and certainly not universally—from one that regarded "disability" as a welfare issue; then to one that responded to the rights-based disability movement of the late '70s and early '80s; and more recently to an emerging recognition that disability is an "environmental" issue rather than one related to the disability itself.

This more recent thinking recognizes that the difficulty many people with disabilities have participating fully in society is caused less by the disability itself and more by the physical and attitudinal environment in which we live. It acknowledges that our society—its structures, its systems and its processes—has largely been created without taking the needs of people with disabilities into account. For many people with disabilities society is unwelcoming and difficult to participate in fully—we believe unnecessarily so.

Figure 4 portrays the stages of disability reform and where in the process we have reached in 2008 – and where the future lies.
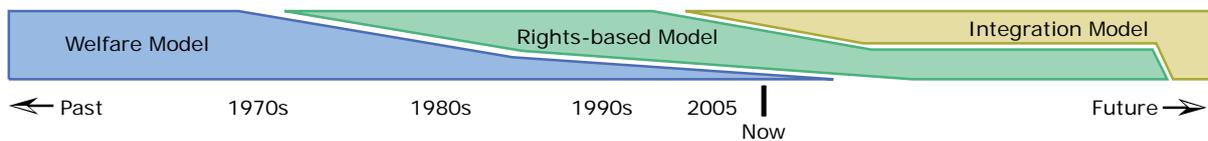

Figure 4: Stages of Disability Reform

The Welfare Model and Dependence

For most of human history people with disabilities have been pitied—even feared—by society and in many cases have been seen and treated as outcasts. Even in our modern society this view lingers, morphed and softened somewhat into a "welfare model" of disability under which people with disabilities are "cared for". The extent of that caring is dictated largely by the economic capacity of our society to do so.

Under this model little is expected of people with disabilities. They are seen as the passive recipients of other people's labour and support. Most importantly they are dependent on the goodwill of other individuals and the combined goodwill of our society.

There are two crucial effects of this model that must be recognized in understanding the impact this has on the ability and capacity of people with disabilities to participate fully in society.

First, from society's perspective "disability" is seen as a cost to society (i.e. welfare payments) rather than an investment that will deliver a significant economic and social benefit. Inevitably any financial/economic system will seek to minimise expenses that are seen as costs rather than investments, in the case of disability reform resulting in a lack of investment in removing infrastructure barriers and providing support.

Second, the emotional impact that being treated as "second-class citizens" by society has on people with disabilities cannot be underestimated. For many people with disabilities the constant, daily grind of dealing with the practical challenges of an environment that is difficult or impossible to navigate quickly and effectively combined with the deflating, often demoralising effect on an individual of being pitied and/or being regarded as less capable than the "average" person, simply destroys self-esteem, hope and motivation.

The Rights-Based Movement

As we well know the human race can display an amazing resilience and a determination to overcome adversity. History has shown us that, provided the level of adversity is not so severe that survival is impossible, individuals and communities will ultimately rise to a challenge, whether that be dealing with a natural disaster or fighting an enemy determined to wield its power and influence.

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw the emergence of a new movement, led by people with disabilities themselves and focused particularly in the United States (the nationwide "sit-in" of government buildings organised by the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities in 1977 is recognized as one of the earliest examples), which saw disability not as a welfare issue but one based on fundamental human rights (with a particular emphasis on independent living in the early stages). Internationally the International Year for People with Disabilities in 1991 became a significant catalyst for disability reform at all levels.

One of the earliest examples of rights-based disability activism in Australia grew out of active protests by residents at the Leumeah Nursing Home in Ryde, Sydney, about the appalling, repressive conditions they faced as young people with disabilities trapped in an aged persons' nursing home. The compelling book, *"Captives of Care"*[15], and the equally compelling TV documentary that featured many of the original residents had a profound and lasting impact on the process of disability reform in Australia.

Building on the broad-based human rights movement that emerged during the boom period post World War II, the disability rights movement articulated a simple but powerful argument: a decent society is measured not just by its economic development but also by the extent to which all of its citizens can contribute to and benefit from its success.

The most significant practical outcomes of this movement have been twofold.

First, legislation was passed in many countries articulating the rights of people with disabilities and making discrimination against them illegal.

Interestingly, while the "disability movement" was largely credited as the driving force behind the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) and the UK Disability Discrimination Act (1995), the Australian Disability Discrimination Act (1992) was driven as much by the Hawke-Keating Government as it was by an active disability movement. This may partly explain the paradox felt by many people involved with disability reform in Australia that despite representing the largest equity group (apart from women) and facing disadvantage at least as great and sometimes greater than all other equity groups (measured by participation in the workforce and education), disability reform appears to gain less attention than other areas of equity reform.

Second, the community started to see people with disabilities in a different light—as determined, articulate… and capable.

It would be optimistic in the extreme to suggest that there has been a broad, consistent and sustained shift in thinking about the capability of people with disabilities, or that the community has fundamentally lifted its expectations of people with disabilities to any significant degree. However, as improvements are being made that enable more people

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[15] Roarty, J., *"Captives of Care"*, 1979

with disabilities to participate in community activities and, as a result, the community sees, understands and becomes more comfortable with people with disabilities, this process will continue at an accelerated rate.

It is likely that the rights-based focus on disability reform will continue to play an important role for some time to come. In March 2008, for example, Australia became a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities[16], one of the first countries to do so.

We believe, however, that the rights-based approach is inherently limited in its potential (on its own) to achieve the ultimate objective of disability reform—i.e. equal participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of society—as it does not describe the specific changes that need to occur across all aspects of society to fully include people with disabilities, nor does it justify the investment required to do so.

Disability as an Environmental Issue

Disability reform is undeniably a significant challenge for our society. Not only does it represent such large numbers of people for whom change needs to occur, it requires change not just to the way we DO disability reform but also to the way we THINK about disability reform. And we have been doing and thinking about disability reform using the welfare/dependence model for many, many generations.

In recent years the "integration" approach to disability reform has been emerging that questions some of the most basic assumptions that have been made about people with disabilities, the effects of a disability on the individual, and the real causes of the disadvantage that is so often the outcome for people who live with a disability.

Underlying this new approach is a perspective that the disadvantage faced by people with disabilities is not directly caused by the disability itself but by the fact that we have designed and built our society—its structures, systems, processes—around the needs of the "average" person without taking into account the specific needs of people with all types of disability.

A fundamental principle driving this perspective is an acceptance that even the strongest, healthiest, most intelligent person depends on the structures, systems and processes that make up our society to lead a rewarding, productive life: the transport system, the legal system, the education system, the financial system, the political system, the health system, etc. Without those systems we would all be living subsistence lives.

In understanding this new approach and what it means it is useful to ask "How will things be different when we have 'completed' the disability reform process?" The end objectives of the disability reform process—the "vision" —can be described in two ways. **First**, the statistics will show participation rates for people with disabilities in all aspects of society, including education and the workforce, equal to those of the general population. And we will simply see far more people with disabilities every day, everywhere. **Second**, every system, process and structure of every business, government agency or any other component of our society would have the needs of people with disabilities built-in.

As this approach has started to develop it has gained momentum by recognizing the parallels that exist between the challenges of disability reform and the challenges faced by any other complex activity or enterprise (business, government, environmental management, running the Olympics, etc, etc). They all involve the complex interaction of "raw materials", money, human resources and intellectual property (inputs) which, with careful management (structure), can be transformed (using systems and processes) into the products, services, events, etc (outputs) of the enterprise. Input-process-output.

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[16] Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, United Nations, 2007

Central to our thinking about how we achieve this integrated approach to disability reform is the application of tried and proven techniques that are so successfully applied particularly in the business sector to manage complex, challenging undertakings. In this sense it sees disability reform as a large, complex "virtual enterprise" that needs the same rigorous approach to structure, process and change that is the hallmark of the world's most successful enterprises.

Business thinking for the "business" of disability reform.

NVDAT Project Reports and Recommendations

This section of the NVDAT Final Report shifts gear from the strategic discussion of the document so far to look specifically at the work that has been undertaken by NVDAT over the past two years and to put forward a number of specific recommendations for "micro" reform.

In the section following this one (Shifting Gear: A New Way Forward on page 19) we resume the strategic perspective and bring together the intellectual property that has been generated by NVDAT and its predecessor groups to articulate a plan to guide the disability reform process in VET from 2009 onwards.

NVDAT's advisory role has been a 2 year component of a 30 year process of VET disability reform (as illustrated in Figure 5 on page 21). Since NVDAT is in the final few months of its opertation, this is its final report to NSOC in 2008.

In its May 2008 report to NSOC, NVDAT outlined its work plan and details of its projects and initiatives.

In its August 2008 report, NVDAT provided a review of the VET system as it impacts on people with a disability and outlined its concerns about the lack of real progress for people with a disability in the VET system in participation and pass rates, attainment levels and further study and employment outcomes. NVDAT made the following three recommendations which NSOC decided to refer to the COAG Skills – Productivity and Workforce Development Subcommittee for consideration.

> *Recommendation 1:*
>
> *That MCVTE note the potential contribution that improved VET outcomes for people with a disability will make to the Federal Government's Social Inclusion goals, particularly the National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy and the COAG productivity agenda to address the skills shortage through increased workforce participation.*

> *Recommendation 2:*
>
> *That MCVTE support targets being set to address the gap and increase participation, completion, higher level attainments and transition from VET to employment rates for people with disabilities and that progress towards the achievement of these reforms are monitored at the national level*

> *Recommendation 3:*
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> *That MCVTE support the need for a funding model to be developed to encourage the states to increase participation, completion, higher level attainments and transition from VET to employment outcomes for people with a disability through allowing for higher needs students in resource allocation models and accountability measures to meet the additional cost in providing higher support for many of these students*

In this final report to NSOC in 2008, NVDAT outlines progress of its projects to improve aspects of the whole of life journey for people with a disability to support their successful transition into and beyond the VET system. For many people with a disability, achieving this transition has the potential to shift them from a life of social exclusion to the experience that most people accept as the norm, but few people with a disability encounter, of social inclusion.

NVDAT's projects broadly fall into three categories, aligning with the four goals of *Bridging Pathways*:

- encouraging people with a disability into the VET system (aligning with Goal 1),
- supporting them to complete their studies and in the transition to further study or sustained employment (aligning with Goals 2 and 3),
- supporting the development of the VET system (aligning with Goal 4).

Some NVDAT's projects are now completed and the taskforce has detailed the outcomes and made specific recommendations for reforms. Where projects are still in progress, the anticipated outcomes are noted.

Encouraging people with disabilities into the VET system

PROJECT 1: TAFE Web accessibility project (completed)

Description
This project aimed to assist people with disabilities in accessing information about VET courses and support, through ensuring that TAFE and related websites are compliant with the web design standards of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

Outcomes
Results of a snapshot survey in December 2007 indicated that TAFE websites in most states and many VET related websites failed to meet compliance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (W3C) as required under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. NVDAT sent the survey results to the TAFE Directors Association with information to assist in improving websites to reach compliance, prior to a second snapshot survey being undertaken.

The second survey took place in August 2008. Results indicated that although overall there were only a small number of errors, only two of seven TAFE websites met Priority 1 of W3C compliance.

> *Recommendation 4:*
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> *That NSOC note the NVDAT co-chairs will be writing to the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG) regarding implications of NVDAT's web accessibility project findings and requesting FLAG's advice to NSOC on improving national compliance of TAFE and related websites with relevant legislation*

PROJECT 2:   Study Access feasibility study (completed)

Description
This project scoped the feasibility of establishing a national one stop shop website for VET and related study information for people with disabilities

Outcomes
The Study Access project report was completed in June 2008 with eight recommendations linked to the establishment of a national one stop shop website of study information for people with a disability. Recommendation 2 of the report advocated that the Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (ADCET) should develop and host the national website. The report also noted that the National Training Information Service (NTIS) and training.com.au are in the process of being 're-visioned' in order to better meet the needs of VET students, employers, providers and regulators.

 NVDAT understands that consideration is being given in the development of the training.com.au website to the possibility of incorporating the recommendations of the Study Access report into the new training website to ensure it meets the needs of students with a disability in accessing study information.

> *Recommendation 5:*
>
> *That NSOC note that the NVDAT Study Access report recommends the establishment of a one stop shop of VET and related study information for people with a disability and notes that the report's findings will be considered for inclusion in the redevelopment of the training.com.au website to ensure the needs of people with a disability are addressed on the new national website.*

Supporting students with a disability in the VET system and into further study or sustained employment

PROJECT 3:   Disability related VET scholarships (completed)

Description
NVDAT's August 2008 report to NSOC highlighted the need to support students with disabilities in the VET sector given that the Australian National report on the VET system indicates that people with disabilities have worse outcomes than other VET students in participation and pass rates, level of attainment and further study and

employment outcomes and significantly worse outcomes on most measures than the general population, including income and employment levels.

Information on DEEWR funded Equity programs indicates a lack of support through scholarships and awards for students with a disability in the VET sector. While recognising that different funding models apply in the higher education and VET sector, there are a range of scholarships and other support in higher education that are not available in the VET system, resulting in inequities in support for students with disabilities in VET that need to be addressed.

Outcome

NVDAT has prepared advice on a three part National VET Disability Scholarships Framework (see Appendix 4: Increasing Participation and Access through a National VET Disability Scholarships Framework on page 32).

> *Recommendation 6:*
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> *That NSOC endorse funding from 2009 of NVDAT's proposal for a three part National VET Disability Scholarships Framework, in recognition of the need to raise the profile of disability in VET, improve support options for students with disabilities, and improve staff skills and capacity in supporting these students*

PROJECT 4: VET to Work Disability Support and Transition Pilot (in progress)

Description

This 12 month pilot is developing, testing and will evaluate a model that provides 50 VET students with disabilities with additional support while undertaking their TAFE studies to assist them in completing their courses and with a guaranteed place in an employment agency at the end of their VET training.

This $200,000 pilot project is a collaborative federal/state venture, jointly funded by the SA Department of Employment, Further Education, Science and Technology (DFEEST) and funding received from the Australian Government (DEEWR) under the National Disability Coordination Officer Program. The pilot funds Disability Employment Network providers to assist students and staff in a range of TAFESA campuses during the students VET study and in the transition to guaranteed work.

Anticipated outcome

An evaluated model that can be replicated in other states to improve VET participation and completion rates, successful transition to employment and employment outcomes for people with disabilities through providing additional support during their VET study.

PROJECT 5: "Reframing the Future" advice (completed)

Description

Advice to NQC regarding allocation of funding for equity purposes through "Re-Framing the Future" program to improve workforce development and the skills of staff in working with people with a disability. This advice recognises that skilled staff are critical to supporting students with disabilities to complete their VET courses.

Outcome

NVDAT's advice remains pertinent given proposed changes to state – Commonwealth funding arrangements whereby it is expected that funding of workforce development through "Reframing the Future" will be discontinued as a nationally funded program. This potentially creates a risk to the development of workforce skills nationally that have supported students with disabilities and other equity groups.

> *Recommendation 7:*
>
> *That NSOC members consider the need to quarantine funds in their jurisdictions for workforce development including a proportion of funding for equity purposes, should the proposed changes to the national initiatives funding arrangements proceed, whereby funding of the national Re-Framing The Future program would be transferred to the states and territories as general funds*

Supporting the development of the VET system

PROJECT 6:   *Disability research project with NCVER (in progress)*

Description

Disability research in VET and related sectors is currently undertaken as one off projects, sponsored by various organisations with outcomes often unknown to others. This occurs because there is no disability research strategy, to map, coordinate, and guide this research. NVDAT has been working closely with NCVER in designing a national VET disability research strategy.

Anticipated outcome

To scope VET and disability research to produce a national VET disability research strategy.

PROJECT 7:   *Information management improvement (in progress)*

Description

Develop strategies to improve the coordination of information, data sources and definitions of disability within and across systems that currently negatively impact on people with a disability.

Outcomes

NVDAT's desktop research of data sources and definitions of disability is completed. Further work to be undertaken with other sectors to seek support for the coordination of data and information on people with a disability.

PROJECT 8:   *Linkages with Higher Education (in progress)*

Description

Explore options to improve linkages with the higher education centre regarding people with a disability

Outcome

Initial contact has been established with the newly formed National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education at UniSA that will require further follow up

PROJECT 9:   Advice to VET system (ongoing)

Description
Provide advice to the National Quality Council, National Industry Skills Council, DEEWR and NSOC on equity and disability projects

Outcome
Ongoing, but included a NVDAT submission to the National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy

PROJECT 10:   Communicating With Stakeholders (ongoing)

Description
Develop a joint equity Taskforce communiqué for circulation to VET student groups, peak disability bodies, state VET and private providers and other peak bodies to keep abreast of issues of importance at the local level and to inform them of progress of national disability VET reform.

Outcome
The Communiqué circulated to 600 bodies and individuals. A second communiqué to be produced at the end of 2008

PROJECT 11:   Update cost/benefit analysis

Description
This project, being undertaken by DEEWR, will update existing cost/benefit analyses, particularly the analysis conducted by ANTA in 2001[17], to demonstrate the investment required and potential benefits of that investment in increasing the participation of people with disabilities in VET using currently available data.

Outcome are
The revised report will be used to help justify the investment required to increase participation of people with disabilities in the VET system.

Funding of Supports for People with Disabilities in VET

Since NVDAT made its recommendation in August 2008 related to funding models to provide support for people with disabilities in the VET system (see Recommendation 3: on page 12), further work has been done to understand the importance of this issue.

One of these challenges in increasing the participation of people with disabilities in VET is the increasing impact of financial pressures on students' participation in post-school education and training. The Victorian *On Track* post-school survey of students is of interest here in that it provides a snapshot of student destination data that is not produced anywhere else in Australia. The survey indicates that:

- the proportion of students deferring the take up of University or TAFE has increased from 8.9 per cent in 2007 to 11.9 per cent in 2008

- There is a strong relationship between low socioeconomic status or disadvantaged background and the deferral rate: nearly 80 per cent of students surveyed stated that the reason for their deferral was due to the lack of financial support while studying.

While the On Track survey indicates that financial pressures are impacting on the mainstream student population, it is important to recognise that for students with a disability, these financial issues are further compounded. These students may be

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[17] "The Economic and Social Analysis of Increasing Opportunities for People with a Disability in VET", Mike Dockery, Elisa Birch and Peter Kenyon, 2001

contending with additional costs associated with study, the ongoing impact of their disability on the capacity to earn an income to support them as well as on their capacity to learn and study.

Supports for students with a disability

In the school-to-further education continuum, there is considerable variation between sectors in the support/resources that can be provided to those people with disabilities who require assistance.

- In the school sector, students with a disability can receive aided assistance if required.

- In the University sector, the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, (based on updated census data of equity groups in University education) indicates that participation levels for students with a disability have improved (2008 Universities Australia study on Participation and Equity). While it is not known if there is a causal link with improved participation rates and funding of the Commonwealth Equity Programmes the latter has provided substantial funding to support both institutions and students, including students with disabilities

- For Apprenticeships, the Federal Government provides support provisions for employers under the *Disability Australian Apprenticeship Wage Support* (DAAWS) scheme to create incentives for employers of apprentices and trainees. Under DAAWS, employers can receive an incentive to accommodate a student's (only apprentices and trainees) physical learning needs by providing modifications to the workplace.

In comparison, there are limited supports for students with disabilities who participate in other (non-apprenticeship) TAFE courses. Given that more students with disabilities are enrolled in TAFE courses, than apprenticeships/ traineeships, the issue is significant.

> *Recommendation 8:*
>
> *That NSOC/MCVTE endorse the development, implementation and monitoring of funding models for the provision of support for students with a disability that are consistent across schooling, further education/training and higher education sectors and employment to ensure smooth transitions and support for these students.*

National Benchmarks

Under the Commonwealth Equity Programmes, three specific key areas of funding can be sourced to assist students in higher education. These include:

1. Higher Education Equity Support Programme In 2007, $11.25 million was allocated to higher education institutions to assist eligible higher education providers that are supporting disadvantaged students through a specialised institutional equity scholarship programme

2. Higher Education Disability Support Program In 2007, $6.7 million was allocated to fund this initiative on an annual basis for

   - the reimbursement of specialised equipment and educational support costs

- Performance based funding initiatives based on how well institutions attract and retain students with disabilities

3. Commonwealth Scholarships to assist

   - General education costs,
   - Accommodation costs for relocation
   - National priority scholarships in chosen disciplines areas.

As an election commitment, (*Scholarships for a Competitive Future*) the Government promised to double the number of Commonwealth Scholarships in Universities from 44,000 to 88,000 by 2012—a proposed budget of $4,080 per scholarship in 2008.

International benchmarks

Research from OECD data indicates that in Germany, Denmark and France, there have been small improvements in the participation levels of equity groups overall (OECD study Education at a Glance, 2007).

The UK has adopted an ambitious equity agenda to widen participation levels of student equity groups as reported in the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE) 2008. The UK model is similar to the framework used in the Australian higher education sector.

Some of the UK initiatives are worth considering in principle. These include;

- Adoption of a national Scholarship Framework

- Removal of up-front fees

- Institutional funding incentives

- And encouragement of part time attendance

Shifting Gear: A New Way Forward

A great deal has been learned over the past 12 years about the reform process to improve participation of people with disabilities in the VET system—about the reasons why so many people with disabilities are not participating in training, about the problems and barriers they face and about the solutions that can be (and in some cases are being) put in place to remove those barriers. Our analysis so far has led to the following major conclusions:

- People with virtually all types and severity of disabilities CAN successfully complete vocational education and training leading to meaningful employment. **This is a solvable problem.**

- For people with disabilities to make successful transitions from exclusion to full inclusion in all aspects of society, the reform process needs to take place **across virtually all aspects of society**—the physical environment, transport, personal care, technology, product and service development and delivery, education, law, employment, etc.

- These reforms need to be managed in unison to create a smooth pathway for people with disabilities through every day and throughout their lives. We call this the **"Whole of Life"**[18] approach to disability reform. Its implementation requires, in the first instance, the development of a coordinated management system to link the reform process across all levels of government and across the business and community sectors.

- To achieve the full inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of society we need to ensure that all of the business processes and systems that are used to effectively run government enterprises (transport, health, education, etc), business (particularly employment and product development) and the community sector take into account the needs of people with disabilities. This represents a new phase in the overall disability reform process based on **business process transformation** and **systems integration**.

- Disability reform requires a **sustained investment and focus**, representing as it does a long history of development in our society that has often excluded the needs of people with disabilities in its design and implementation.

- The most positive outcomes for students with disabilities emerge in environments that display a **strong positive culture** towards including people with disabilities. In those environments we see the formation of strong partnerships between employers, specialist disability agencies, training providers and people with disabilities.

From "Bolted-On" to "Built-In"

As we look back on the history of the disability reform process, particularly in relation to the ownership and management of the process, it is clear that it has been managed largely

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[18] The Whole of Life" model for disability reform was described by The Ability Australia Foundation in 1996. It represents a dramatic change in thinking about the "business" of disability reform. Its three-pronged approach recognises that for the majority of people with disabilities three things combine—the significant infrastructure barriers they face every day, the low expectations placed on them by the community and their overall sense of disempowerment—to make living a fulfilling, productive life a pipe dream for many people with disabilities. The "Whole of Life" model centres reform on the integration and interconnecting of systems and the removal of barriers to support an individual's smooth transition in their daily life, whatever the life circumstance, to ensure that those who have been socially excluded have access to the same services, opportunities, choices and rights as others to enable them to fully participate in society

separately from mainstream processes. Major decisions about national directions and priorities are made by specially formed committees or by Ministers and others who largely follow the advice of those committees. Plans and strategies are created specifically for disability reform but are often not integrated into the broader plans and strategies of the various organisations to which they apply. Specialist disability management and support roles are created to deliver on those plans and strategies. The design, construction and implementation of programs and processes to support people with disabilities is conducted in a "disability laboratory" environment through a plethora of pilot projects that more often than not achieve outstanding success but rarely become "business as usual".

> We believe the time has come to take the combined learnings about what works and what doesn't work in disability reform (in Australia and elsewhere) and, through a systems integration approach, use that knowledge to modify and enhance mainstream processes in the VET system and beyond to fully include the needs of people with disabilities. As part of that process we will transfer the ownership of disability reform from the current "specialist" disability management system and build it into existing mainstream management structures.

A useful analogy can be made to the development of Occupational Health and Safety in modern society. 100 years ago or less, occupational health and safety was virtually unheard of and certainly gained little focus or attention. Workers built skyscrapers in modern cities, walking on narrow girders hundreds of feet in the air without safety harnesses. Radiographers used no protective clothing. Asbestos workers used no breathing apparatus despite evidence of the dangers of asbestos.

Today, stringent OH&S laws are in place, policies are in place in all organisations, safety methods have been developed. And most significantly, OH&S is now EVERYONE'S responsibility in every organisation—it is built into every mainstream business process.

In reaching that point, OH&S reform went through several phases and transitions, from problem recognition, pressure for change, government (legislative) response, organisational reaction, solution development, implementation (process change) and ongoing management.

Overall these phases can be grouped into three major stages of change: the *Incubation Stage*, during which a problem is recognized and pressure builds for it to be addressed; the *Solution Development Stage* during which a trigger is created to start the change process (often legislation) and a structure is formed to lead and manage the development and testing of solutions to the problem; the *Integration Stage*, during which the knowledge that has been created in the "laboratory" of the Solution Development stage is "rolled out" to become "business as usual" and ownership is transferred to mainstream management systems and processes.

It is important to understand that, while ultimately for the OH&S problem to be solved we needed to reach the stage where the reforms became fundamental to the way our society works and were "owned" by every employee, every manager, every department, every division, every organisation; it didn't start out that way. Its earlier stages of development were owned and managed as a separate process … an "OH&S laboratory" … in which

OH&S policies, systems and processes were developed and tested prior to roll out into mainstream systems.

Many fundamental changes in our society, including the inclusion of people with disabilities could develop and operate in this way.
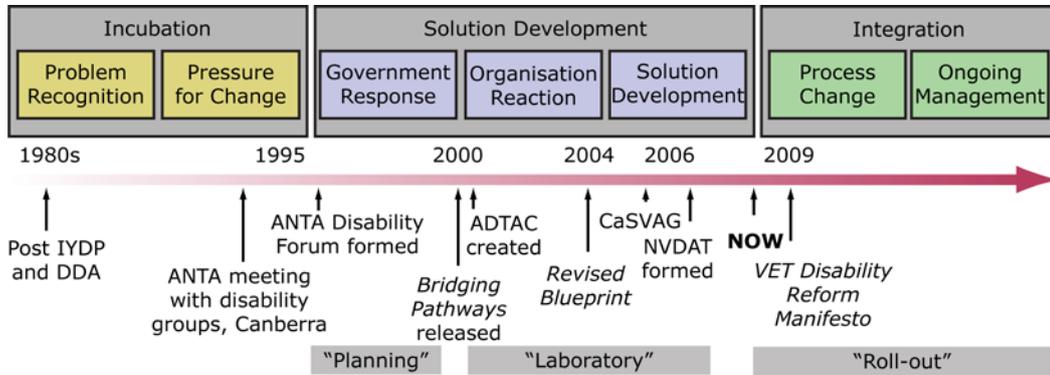

Figure 5: Stage of Change of Society-wide Issues (VET disability reform mapped on timeline)

Turning Knowledge into Action

While the high-level analysis on page 19 describes what we know—it doesn't articulate what this means in terms of the future direction we need to take.

It builds a case for an integrated "Whole of Life Approach" to disability reform highlighting the need to link individual reforms across government and across society to create a "smooth life pathway" for people with disabilities, but it doesn't describe how this can be done. It advocates for a significantly increased focus on awareness, attitudinal change and cultural change but doesn't describe the methods and methodologies that could be used to achieve this. And it points to the need for a new focus on the reform process, shifting the ownership and management of the process from the "bolt-on", laboratory-like environment in which it is currently managed to one focused on integrating the needs of people with disabilities into mainstream business systems and processes.

In relation to the latter, however, it doesn't identify which processes need to change, how those processes need to change and who is responsible for implementing that change. It articulates what needs to happen but not how.

We've always had the vision...
We now have the knowledge...
Now we need a plan of action...
A Disability Reform Manifesto...

The VET Disability Reform Manifesto

> *Recommendation 9:*
>
> *That NSOC/MCVTE endorse $30,000 funding to develop a project plan for a proposed Manifesto for Disability Reform in VET for 2009 and beyond. The Manifesto will build on Bridging Pathways, the current national VET strategy for disability reform and define the next stage of VET system reform to achieve the full inclusion of people with disabilities.*

The proposed Manifesto would have two components—the first focused on research and analysis and the second on systems design. They would:

a) gather, analyse and extract the key learnings from the wealth of knowledge that has been generated about the participation of people with disabilities in the VET system over the life of Bridging Pathways and

b) describe the next phase of the reform process that NVDAT believes will focus on integrating the needs of people with disabilities into the fundamental business processes of the VET system and will deliver an overarching strategy to achieve that outcome.

While *Bridging Pathways* has been generally considered to have made a major contribution to the disability reform process in VET over the past eight years—providing as it does a clear overall strategy for the reform process, articulating the key priorities and actions that have been required to reach the point where we now believe we understand what works and what doesn't work—NVDAT believes it is now time to bring together that combined knowledge and commence the process of integrating that knowledge into the mainstream VET system.

NVDAT believes the first crucial step in this process will be to create a robust, far-reaching roadmap to guide the disability reform process from now until the grand vision of disability reform in the VET system is achieved: equal participation of people with disabilities at all levels of the VET system leading to successful work and life outcomes. We call this roadmap *The VET Disability Reform Manifesto*.

Bridging Pathways and The Manifesto

Bridging Pathways is not dead. The direction it articulated over eight years ago is still valid. It described three stages of the pathway that need to be created for people with disabilities to successfully participate in VET, and one major systemic change:

- *opening the door* — to increase access to vocational education and training for people with a disability

- *improving the learning experience* — to support people with a disability to achieve in all areas and levels of vocational education and training

- *achieving employment and lifelong learning outcomes* — to enable people with a disability to make a greater contribution to the economic and social life of the community

- *creating an accountable system* — to provide the tools, supports and pathways to achieve meaningful outcomes for people with a disability.[19]

Those objectives were, and still are, relevant in describing what needs to be done to achieve the objectives of the disability reform process in the VET system.

Articulating the specific changes that needed to occur in the "laboratory" stage of the change process was the role of the *Blueprint* that accompanied *Bridging Pathways* and the *Revised Blueprint* that was published after the Mid-term Review of Bridging Pathways. Together those documents guided a great deal of hard work by many people in the VET system that have created an environment in which it is time to move to the final stage of reform that will see the needs of students with disabilities integrated into every structure, system and process of the VET system.

The Project

The next, and we believe final stage of the disability reform process will involve integrating the needs of students with disabilities into every mainstream VET business process—teaching, planning, finance management, enrolment, career guidance, information management, accreditation, policy development, quality management, facilities management, planning, etc, and the management system and structure that brings these processes together. Figure 6 depicts how this new integrated business model will include the needs of people with disabilities in all aspects of the VET system.
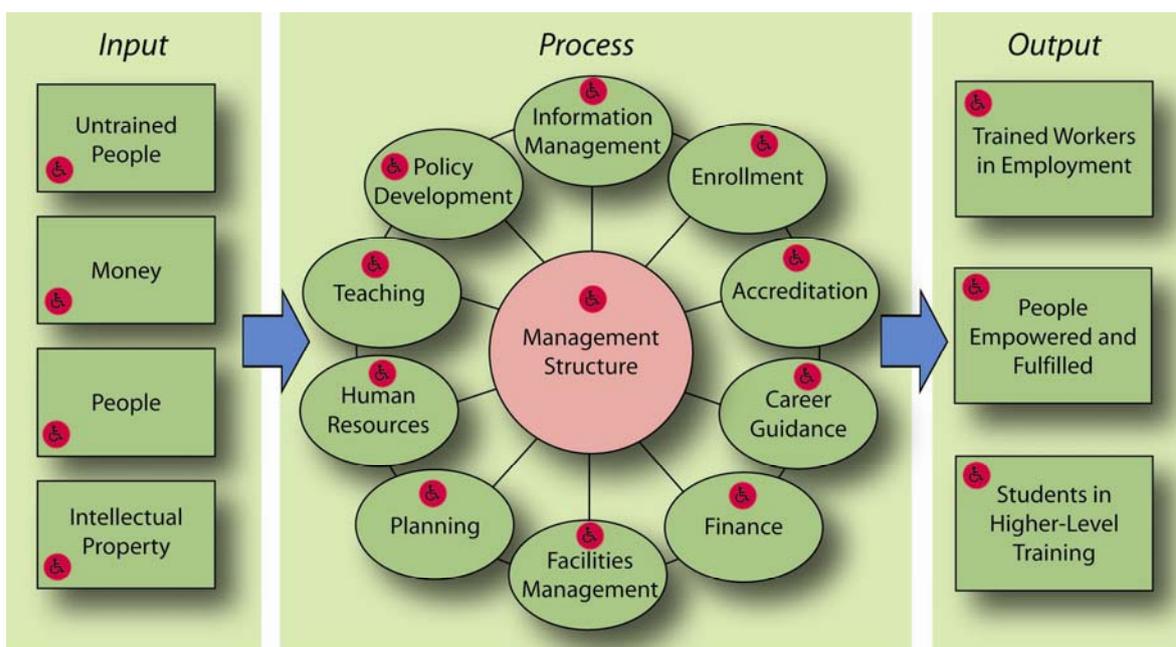

Figure 6: People with Disabilities' needs integrated into VET management, systems and processes

To commence this process NVDAT believes we need a project that brings together a small group of the most experienced practitioners in disability reform with business systems integration specialists who together would create the *VET Disability Reform Manifesto* that would guide the Integration Stage of disability reform in VET in the same way that Bridging Pathways guided the Solution Development Stage. The development of the Manifesto and

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[19] "Bridging Pathways", Australian National Training Authority, 2004.

the leadership and facilitation of its implementation would be the primary activity of the disability reform component of the proposed new VET equity leadership/management structure currently being developed by the National VET Equity Advisory Alliance.

Project Objectives

The objectives of the VET Disability Reform Manifesto Project would be:

1. to bring together the combined knowledge about what works and what doesn't work for people with disabilities in the VET system in Australia and beyond,
2. to undertake a focused analysis of that knowledge to extract the key learnings from our experience with a particular focus on understanding how "best practice" can be transformed into "business as usual",
3. to examine the business structures, processes and systems currently in place in state training agencies of the VET system with a view to identifying which of those structures, processes and systems need to be modified to fully include people with disabilities,
4. to map those priority processes against the key "best practice" learnings of the past 12 years to determine specifically what changes need to be made to existing structures, processes and systems,
5. to identify the key individuals and positions that need to be engaged in this process and to identify the key motivators of success for those individuals to determine how best to foster their engagement in the change process,
6. to articulate specifically the changes that need to be made to existing VET business systems, structures and processes (listed under The Project on page 23) to fully include people with disabilities and to describe what needs to be done to implement those changes and by whom,
7. to determine where and how the VET disability reform process can link with the broader "whole of life" disability reform process, in particular the National Disability Strategy currently being developed by the Australian Government,
8. to create a marketing plan to communicate to all of the relevant participants in the VET system what these changes mean, what their role in implementing those changes is and how their area of responsibility links with other relevant areas.

The end result of this process would be a document that, like Bridging Pathways, would be endorsed by "the system", would be communicated throughout the system and would lead and guide the activities of all those within the VET system who need to be engaged in the Integration Stage of disability reform in VET from 2009 onwards.

In a nutshell, it would define a new integrated business model for disability reform in VET.

Process

To achieve these objectives a small but highly experienced team of specialists in disability reform and strategic business systems integration would be formed to create the Manifesto over a period of six months. It is proposed that the team, probably consisting of a project leader, a strategic disability reform specialist, a strategic business integration specialist, an experienced disability research analyst and an administrator would undertake the following activities:

- Broad-based desktop research in Australia and elsewhere that would bring together the plethora of research that has already been conducted (we believe that further "on the ground" research is not required at this stage) with a view to identifying the key messages and patterns that have emerged from the work already being done over the past 12 years about what works and what doesn't work.

- A series of facilitated workshops involving individuals from the state based VET system who have demonstrated a capacity to understand the complexities of disability reform, the complexities of the VET system itself and/or the political and "intangible"

environment in which the VET system operates. These workshops would be conducted in two stages: first, these groups would be brought together with others who have similar roles in the VET system (VET executives; mainstream process managers in the VET system including planners, administrators, workforce development managers etc; disability practitioners; policy makers; front-line trainers; etc) and second, those individuals who demonstrated a capacity and willingness to be engaged in the change process in the first stage would be brought together cross-portfolio to identify the linkages between the business processes and how the needs of people with disabilities could be integrated across those processes.

- The team would then undertake a "strategic systems integration" design exercise that would develop a new business model for disability reform in VET that would overlay the best practice business models we have already identified with the existing VET business model. In the development of this new business model the team would consult with a broad range of experts and strategic thinkers including those in disability reform, senior bureaucrats, successful business executives and academia (the Australian Graduate School of Management, the newly-formed Centre for Social Impact and others).

- The resulting model would be tested in an appropriate "micro environment", possibly in one State, to refine the model in a practical setting.

- The Manifesto itself would be presented to all of the key participants in the VET system and relevant peak bodies across the country in a national roadshow that would describe the new model and articulate what it meant to those people and to the systems and processes they own.

- Either as part of this project or as a follow-on initiative, an implementation "SWAT team" of business integration specialists could work directly with practitioners in the VET system at all levels to help them modify their business processes in line with the Manifesto (this team could be employed for a defined period with project funds from the proposed new National VET equity advisory leadership structure that is currently being determined).

Resource Requirement

While a detailed estimate of the costs involved in this project and a detailed project plan would be created as the next stage of this process, NVDAT envisages that substantial resources will be required to employ a specialist team working together over a six-month period, with the associated costs of accommodation, travel and meetings.

NVDAT believes this investment will result in the development of a sound business approach to the integration of the needs of people with disabilities in the VET system that will lead to significantly increase levels of participation flowing through to increased workforce participation, reduced welfare dependency and improved economic and social inclusion outcomes overall.

Timeframe

In the next stage, a detailed project plan and budget proposal would be developed, costing approximately $30,000.

If approved by NSOC and MCVTE, work potentially could be completed by March 2009 with the project itself commencing in April - May 2009 for completion by December 2009. NVDAT would expect that the main project would be conducted under the auspices of the proposed new National VET equity advisory leadership structure for implementation in 2009.

A Note about Information Management

Since the early stages of disability reform in VET in Australia, one of the significant challenges has been gathering accurate, reliable data about the participation of people with disabilities in VET (and elsewhere).

While the extent of the problem of the low participation of people with disabilities is clearly demonstrated in every analysis we have seen, obtaining statistics about people with disabilities generally and their participation in VET specifically that allows consistent, accurate and robust "apples-to-apples" comparisons to be made over time and with other populations, predictions to be made and conclusions to be reached about what needs to be done and what the results are likely to be, is extremely difficult.

The availability of timely, accurate data and information is essential in running any complex enterprise (including the "disability reform enterprise") for the enterprise to understand the current state of the enterprise, key problem areas, trends over time, achievement against targets, future investment requirements, etc. The inadequacy of information about the participation of people with disabilities in VET is a significant problem that needs to be addressed.

An early priority for the reform process under the proposed new National VET equity advisory structure in 2009 should be the development of a data model for people with disabilities in VET and the subsequent development of an integrated information management system for disability reform (linked with or a component of AVETMISS and the data resources maintained by NCVER).

Recommendation 10:

That NSOC/MCVTE note NVDAT's recommendation that an early priority for the reform process under the proposed new National VET Equity Alliance structure in 2009 should be the development of a data model for people with disabilities in VET and the subsequent development of an integrated information management system for disability reform (linked with or a component of AVETMISS and the data resources maintained by NCVER)

This recommendation links directly with the previous discussion about integrating people with disabilities into the core business processes of the VET system.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

That MCVTE note the potential contribution that improved VET outcomes for people with a disability will make to the Federal Government's Social Inclusion goals, particularly the National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy and the COAG productivity agenda to address the skills shortage through increased workforce participation

Recommendation 2:

That MCVTE support targets being set to address the gap and increase participation, completion, higher level attainments and transition from VET to employment rates for people with disabilities and that progress towards the achievement of these reforms are monitored at the national level

Recommendation 3:

That MCVTE support the need for a funding model to be developed to encourage the states to increase participation, completion, higher level attainments and transition from VET to employment outcomes for people with a disability through allowing for higher needs students in resource allocation models and accountability measures to meet the additional cost in providing higher support for many of these students

Recommendation 4:

That NSOC note the NVDAT co-chairs will be writing to the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG) regarding implications of NVDAT's web accessibility project findings and requesting FLAG's advice to NSOC on improving national compliance of TAFE and related websites with relevant legislation

Recommendation 5:

That NSOC note that the NVDAT Study Access report recommends the establishment of a one stop shop of VET and related study information for people with a disability and notes that the report's findings will be considered for inclusion in the redevelopment of the training.com.au website to ensure the needs of people with a disability are addressed on the new national website

Recommendation 6:

That NSOC endorse funding from 2009 of NVDAT's proposal for a three part National VET Disability Scholarships Framework, in recognition of the need to raise the profile of disability in VET, improve support options for students with disabilities, and improve staff skills and capacity in supporting these students

Recommendation 7:

That NSOC consider the need to quarantine funds in their jurisdictions for workforce development including a proportion of funding for equity purposes, should the proposed changes to the national initiatives funding arrangements proceed, whereby funding of the national Reframing The Future program would be transferred to the states and territories as general funds

Recommendation 8:

That NSOC/MCVTE endorse the development, implementation and monitoring of funding models for the provision of support for students with a disability that are consistent across schooling, further education/training and higher education sectors and employment to ensure smooth transitions and support for these students

Recommendation 9:

That NSOC/MCVTE endorse $30,000 funding to develop a project plan for a proposed Manifesto for Disability Reform in VET for 2009 and beyond. The Manifesto will build on Bridging Pathways, the current national VET strategy for disability reform and define the next stage of VET system reform to achieve the full inclusion of people with disabilities

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That NSOC/MCVTE note NVDAT's recommendation that an early priority for the reform process under the proposed new National VET Equity Alliance structure in 2009 should be the development of a data model for people with disabilities in VET and the subsequent development of an integrated information management system for disability reform (linked with or a component of AVETMISS and the data resources maintained by NCVER

Appendix 1: Participation of equity groups in VET

Equity Group	Indigenous		**People with a Disability**		Women		Language Other Than English	
Performance Outcome/Year	2003	2006	**2003**	**2006**	2003	2006	2003	2006
Proportion in population	3.6%	3.9%	**16.8%**	**16.8%**	49.9%	50.3%	n/a	n/a
Proportion in VET	3.4%	4.0%	**6.4%**	**7.2%**	50.6%	49.7%	12.5%	13.5%
Difference	-0.2%	0.1%	**-10.4%**	**-9.6%**	0.7%	-0.6%	n/a	n/a

Table 1: Comparison of participation of major equity groups in VET (Sources: ABS 2003 and 2006; Annual National Report of the Australian Vocational and Technical Education System 2006)
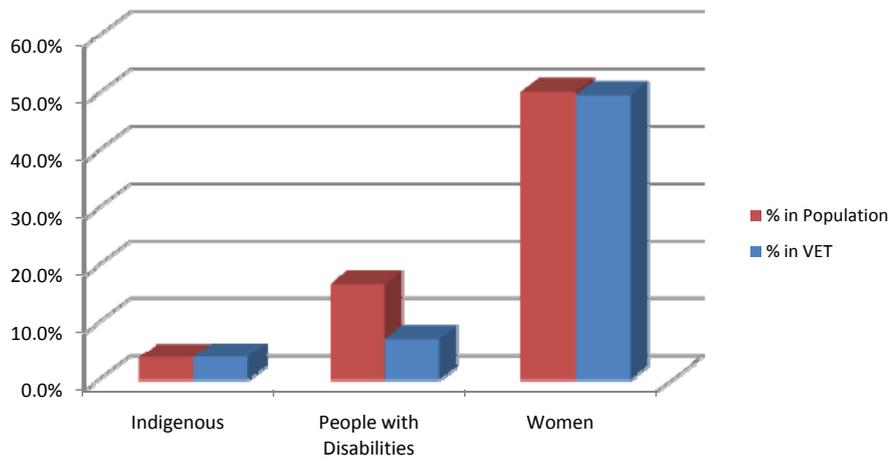

Figure 7: Graphical comparison of equity group participation in VET

Appendix 2:   Outcomes from VET for Equity Groups

Performance Outcome/Year	Indigenous		People with a Disability		Women		Language Other Than English		All	
	2003	2006	2003	2006	2003	2006	2003	2006	2003	2006
Outcomes										
Load Pass Rate	63.6	66.2	68.9	69.9	77.8	78.1	70.6	72.3	77.1	78.5
Level of Attainment										
Diploma or above	5.5	4.0	10.2	9.4	13.7	12.8	18.4	15.6	13.4	11.7
Certificate III or IV	33.6	32.7	30.4	33.0	38.7	41.1	37.3	38.1	41.5	45.1
Certificate I or II	42.7	43.2	32.0	31.7	22.7	26.0	24.8	26.5	22.9	25.9
Other	17.3	18.2	27.4	25.8	24.9	20.1	19.5	19.9	22.2	17.3
Further Study and Employment Outcomes										
Employed after training	60.2	63.6	49.6	55.8	70.7	78.3	60.8	64.4	73.9	77.4
Employed or in further study after training	89.2	77.1	83.8	69.6	90.6	85.1	88.5	80.3	92.3	86.7
Comparison of Outcomes of Equity Groups vs All Students										
Load Pass Rate	-13.5	-12.3	-8.2	-8.6	0.7	-0.4	-6.5	-6.2		
Level of Attainment										
Diploma or above	-7.9	-7.7	-3.2	-2.3	0.3	1.1	5.0	3.9		
Certificate III or IV	-7.9	-12.4	-11.1	-12.1	-2.8	-4.0	-4.2	-7.0		
Certificate I or II	19.8	17.3	9.1	5.8	-0.2	0.1	1.9	0.6		
Other	-4.9	0.9	5.2	8.5	2.7	2.8	-2.7	2.6		
Further Study and Employment Outcomes										
Employed after training	-13.7	-13.8	-24.3	-21.6	-3.2	0.9	-13.1	-13.0		
Employed or in further study after training	-3.1	-9.6	-8.5	-17.1	-1.7	-1.6	-3.8	-6.4		

Table 2: Attainment levels and outcomes from VET for equity groups, including a comparison vs. general VET student population (Data source: Annual National Report of the Australian Vocational and Technical Education System 2006)

Appendix 3: Analysis of Participation of People with Disabilities in VET

Overview

While the source of the data may differ, the take-home message remains the same: people with disabilities have significantly worse outcomes on most measures than the general population. As a result they are more likely to live at the margins of society and to feel socially excluded from the mainstream.

 ABS indicates that 20% of the Australian population[20] or 3.96 million people have disabilities, and this proportion is increasing, particularly as the population ages.[21]

The following statistics provide a snapshot of the situation for people with a disability.

VET outcomes

(Data source: 2006 ANR of the Australian VET System)

Participation rates
- Over a five year period from 2002-2006, there has been little increase in the proportion of students reporting a disability, participating in VET: from 5.8% to 7.2%[22]

Pass rates
- In 2006, the load pass rate for people with a disability was 69.9% [23] compared to 78.5% for all students in Government funded VET

- There has only been a marginal increase in the load pass rate over 5 years for students with disabilities from 67.8% to 69.9%[24]

Level of attainment
- In 2006, people with a disability were much less likely than any other student group to be studying at Certificate III and above[25] with 31.7% at Certificate I or II or lower levels compared to 25.9% of all students

- AQF Certificate level III and above awards are the benchmark since they are more likely to lead to direct employment outcomes than do Certificates I and II and non AQF education[26].

Further study and employment rates
- Despite strategies to improve further study and employment outcomes for people with a disability, trends are going backwards over a five year period 2002-2006.

- Of all government funded TAFE graduates in 2006, 86.7%, were in further study or employment after training, compared to 69.6% of people with a disability (ie 17

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[20] 2003 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers
[21] p 3-4. ABS, 2003, Another 20% of Australians (4.15 million) have a long-term health condition that does not restrict their everyday activities.
[22] p175 2006 ANR of the Australian VET System
[23] p 40 2006 ANR of the Australian VET System
[24] p 40 2006 ANR of the Australian VET System
[25] p 35 2006 ANR of the Australian VET System
[26] p10 Cavallaro T, Foley P, Saunders J, Bowman K NCVER 2005 Report People with a Disability in Vocational Education And Training: A Statistical Compendium NCVER Report May 2005

percentage points below other students) and this figure has fallen from 71.3% in 2002[27].

Other data sources

Income levels

- In 2003, the median gross personal income per week of people of working age with a disability was $255, compared to $501 for those without a disability[28]

- The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) research found that Australia has the lowest average personal income for people with disabilities, at 44% of the income of people without a disability[29].

Employment levels

- In 2003, 53.2% of people with disabilities participated in the labour force as compared to 80.6% of those without a disability[30].

- Australia has the seventh lowest employment rate for people with disabilities in the OECD. In 2003, nearly two thirds of the OECD countries measured had better employment rates than Australia for people with disabilities[31]

In 2003-2004, people with disabilities made up 3.8% of ongoing Australian Public Service (APS) employees, down from 5.8% ten years ago[32]

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[27] p 53 2006 ANR of the Australian VET System
[28] ABS 2003, p3. Persons aged 15-64 years living in households as referred to in HREOC National Inquiry into Employment and Disability Issues Paper 1: Employment and Disability – The Statistics March 2005
[29] p29 OECD, Transforming Disability into Ability, Policies to Promote Work and Income Security for Disabled People, 2003, as referred to in HREOC National Inquiry into Employment and Disability Issues Paper 1: Employment and Disability – The Statistics March 2005
[30] HREOC National Inquiry into Employment and Disability Issues Paper 1: Employment and Disability – The Statistics March 2005
[31] OECD, Employment Outlook: Towards more and better jobs, 2003, p141, as referred to in HREOC National Inquiry into Employment and Disability Issues Paper 1: Employment and Disability – The Statistics March 2005
[32] Australian Public Service Commission, State of the Service Report 2003-04 as referred to in HREOC National Inquiry into Employment and Disability Issues Paper 1: Employment and Disability – The Statistics March 2005

Appendix 4: Increasing Participation and Access through a National VET Disability Scholarships Framework

Summary

This paper outlines the National VET Disability Advisory Taskforce (NVDAT) proposal to NSOC for consideration of a three part National VET Disability Scholarships Framework (the Framework) to improve overall education and training outcomes for people with disabilities (PWD).

Proposal and Recommendations for a National VET Disability Scholarships Framework

NVDAT recommends the Federal Government establish a National VET Disability Scholarship Framework, similar to the Commonwealth Equity Scholarship Program in higher education sector to improve VET participation and completion outcomes for students with disabilities and to support the Federal Government's Social Inclusion and Productivity reforms.

NVDAT recommends that under the proposed National VET Disability Scholarship Framework, the following three scholarship programs be funded from 2009:

1. A Disability VET Professional Scholarships Program to assist VET institutions to award general grants to staff to build capacity in disability specialisation

2. An Institutional VET Disability Support Program to provide reimbursement for specialised equipment and extra support costs to a maximum value, including professional training and specialisation.

3. A VET Student Disability Scholarships Program to provide support for students to meet the associated costs of studying including mobility, specialised equipment, supports and relocation expenses.

Key Issues for consideration

Disability VET Professional Scholarships Program

Teacher/ trainer skills and confidence are known to be crucial in improving student participation and retention outcomes, particularly for students who require additional support and/or assistance.

In 2008, the Business Council of Australia commissioned the Australian Centre Education Research to analyse teacher professional training. The research indicates that teachers felt inadequately trained to deal with the demands of the training room. It is reasonable to assume that this concern would be amplified for teachers faced with the additional challenges of assisting students with high support needs.

A 2007 survey of the VET sector commissioned by the Australian Council of Private Education and Training, also found a similar finding. VET and TAFE professionals self identified their need for greater disability training in order to build their 'disability confidence', hence workforce development is an essential feature in raising participation and retention levels for students with a disability.

The proposed Disability VET Professional Scholarship Program would build capacity in the VET sector to improve professional knowledge and culture in support of students with a disability. This scholarship would assist in addressing barriers to entry into the VET system for people with a disability that can result from professional inexperience, lack of awareness of access supports and cultural issues that can limit expectations of the potential capability of students with a disability.

VET Student Disability Scholarships Program

This would address barriers to income support for students faced with financial difficulties. This scholarship would need to be aligned with current Centrelink income requirements and asset eligibility criteria that currently preclude students from having additional income. NVDAT could assist in proposing reasonable criteria for income support that assists students with a disability.

The eligibility criteria for the VET Student Disability Scholarships should be matched according to relative need identified by the applicant with supporting evidence. In order to ensure the success and take up of this Scholarship, eligibility criteria should not be too stringent so that, depending on the individual student's needs, the Scholarship could be used to meet living or study expenses and/or the cost associated with supports/aids. This Scholarship aims to find solutions to these whole of life issues to enable students with a disability to undertake further training and increased participation in the VET sector nationally.