



## **INLLEN Submission Access to TAFE for students with a disability**

LAEIC - TAFE access inquiry  
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### **1.1 The Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network**

The Inner North Local Learning and Employment Network (INLLEN) is one of 31 LLEN that comprise a Victorian-wide network of incorporated associations established in 2001.

Inner Northern LLEN (INLLEN) develops partnerships and strategies to support young people across Darebin, Moreland and Yarra to successfully move from school to further education, training and employment.

We are especially focused on vulnerable young people who are disengaged, or at risk of disengaging from education and training. With a variety of complex social factors contributing to disengagement, we believe that a collective whole-of-community response is the most valuable approach to achieve improvement.

### **1.2 About this submission**

The INLLEN welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Victorian Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee inquiry into access to TAFE for students with a disability.

INLLEN managed a Community Transition Support project in Melbourne's north and west between 2013 and 2019. The Community Transition Support (CTS) program, funded by the North and West Metropolitan Region of the Department of Health and Human Services, was designed to improve post-school pathways and outcomes for young people with a disability between 18 – 21 years of age. The program covered 22 Special, Specialist, and Special Developmental Schools across the North-West Region of Melbourne.

Subsequently, INLLEN has also been working with several Special Schools and the Work Education Unit at a TAFE provider, implementing a youth enterprise and entrepreneurship development process under a broader Youth Enterprise Hub initiative. This initiative was funded by the NDIS.

As a result of this involvement in the CTS program, and NDIS funded Youth Enterprise project, we make a number of observations in relation to TAFE access for students with a disability.

### **1.3 Access to TAFE compared to other post-school options**

VET is more accessible than all other post-school educational pathways and this attribute is of particular value for people with disabilities, who may experience added difficulties in obtaining education and in subsequently utilising education qualifications in the labour market. VET completion has a bigger impact on probable employability for those with a disability than it does for those who do not have a disability. However, in addition to completing a course, there are several other requirements that need to be in place if access is to be meaningful and useful for young people with disability. We discuss these in the following sections.

## **2. Issues in relation to access to TAFE**

### **2.1 Access limited to Work Education Units**

The first issue is that, in general, access for those with intellectual disability is often limited to the discrete Work Education units, rather than across the various teaching areas of TAFE institutes. Resources are thinly spread, and while it makes it easier for the provider to concentrate resources into one area for support, the result is that access is confined and restricted from the perspective of the student.

Student integration in age-appropriate settings with non-disabled peers is associated with more favourable employment-related outcomes.

### **2.2 Literacy and Numeracy**

Low levels of literacy and numeracy remain a significant barrier to accessing and completing training. This is the case for most disadvantaged groups, but is particularly relevant for young people with an intellectual disability. This points to two needs: strengthening these employability skills while still at school, and provision of additional support in TAFE programs.

Support staff and mentors provide an opportunity for students to relate what is taught in class to their own experiences. Success is more likely with TAFE staff using an instructional approach that delivers concepts which build on the students' learning strengths.

### **2.3 Lack of Employment outcomes**

The second issue is that the purpose of providing access to TAFE is to create a line of sight to employment for students with a disability. Work Education units or centres offering low level certificates (i.e. Certificate I and Certificate II level) do not provide a reliable pathway to employment. Research has shown that when students undertake low level Certificates that do not contain enough workplace learning, then the link to employment is not strong (K. Clarke 2012). Access to training that does not effectively support student transition to entry-level occupations short-changes students with disability.

TAFE provides a strong vocational pathway with good employment outcomes when it includes some form of work-based training (as it does with apprenticeships and traineeships) (Cocks and Thorensen 2013).

Students with a disability who are enrolled in an apprenticeship or traineeship have better employment outcomes, when compared against other types of VET courses, due to the employment or on-the-job relationship embedded in the apprenticeship and traineeship models.

Likewise, training that involves practical experience in the workplace is more likely to lead to employment for young people with a disability (Dawe 2004; Clark 2007). Students with a learning disability, however, are under-represented in vocational courses and are therefore excluded from the labour market opportunities that such learning provides upon completion.



## **2.4 Work Preparation rather than Work Integration**

Access to VET can provide a positive benefit for young people with disabilities. VET delivery for people with disabilities has often been implemented with a focus on assisting participation to become 'work ready'. This approach assumes that developing greater levels of skills and confidence will subsequently lead to employment. (Cocks and Thorensen, 2013)

However, the approach often does not match reality, with students often not actually moving on to employment after their course is completed. The approach can trap people with disabilities in Australian Disability Enterprises (previously referred to as sheltered workshops) where workers with disabilities may spend their whole life without qualifying for open employment. (Cocks and Thorensen, 2013)

The preferable approach is to combine work placements with training. This approach pays less attention to the idea of developing "job readiness" and instead places emphasis on learning on-the-job with appropriate support. Research indicates that a work placement accompanied with supported "real world" training is preferable and is much more successful than a 'train and then place' approach. (Meadows 2012; Cocks and Thorensen, 2013; Wakeford and Moore 2014))

## **2.5 Access is only part of the equation**

Access alone provides little benefit if it does not lead to productive outcomes.

It is important that TAFE institutes with high proportions of disadvantaged learners engage these groups in training that provides skills required by industry at sufficiently high levels to lead to sustainable employment.

These learners also need a range of support mechanisms beyond the classroom to ensure successful study and employment outcomes. Many TAFE institutes are yet to focus on ways to help their disadvantaged groups get a job. (Volkoff, Clarke, and Walstab 2008)

## **3. Access to Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Skills**

Enterprise skills are fundamental to employment prospects for all young people, and need greater emphasis in TAFE.

Greater access to programs that provide young people with intellectual disabilities the training and mentoring needed to set up their own businesses should be a higher priority. As enterprise skills and entrepreneurship becomes increasingly a viable work option, including for young people with intellectual disabilities, offering a tangible path to self-employment needs to be available as an option at TAFE.

While some young people with disabilities have taken the initiative to start and run their own businesses, many remain shut out of the job market altogether. With the right skills and support, entrepreneurship offers more people a real alternative path to employment.



TAFEs often provide work experience to students with disabilities, including through social enterprise businesses set up for that purpose. However the experience is usually limited to gaining retail skills – with students gaining no insight into the actual running of a business.

An INLLEN pilot program delivered in the region in 2019-20 demonstrated that support for teacher skill-building and resource development could deliver a six-month program of hands-on experience in starting and operating a business, as well as managing an existing enterprise.

The program focused on equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills to educate young people with intellectual disabilities about entrepreneurship.

During the program students gained individual, ongoing support from entrepreneur mentors, sourced through a social enterprise group. This has created a practical, place based model that can be applied to TAFE – with the ultimate potential to help thousands of young people with disabilities around the country enter the workforce

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