

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO ACCESS TO TAFE FOR LEARNERS WITH DISABILITY

SUBMISSION



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*In this submission, TAFE refers to institutes within the TAFE network. This includes the 12 standalone TAFE institutes and the four dual-sector universities.

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INTRODUCTION

Skills First recognises the distinct role TAFEs have as public providers which partner with industry and government on key economic priorities, lead the training system in excellence and innovation, provide essential life skills and support services, and help disadvantaged learners and communities. For many, TAFE is the first step to employment, providing essential further education and skills needed to enter the workforce.

- TAFE plays a vital role in creating opportunities for disadvantaged Victorians.
- TAFEs provide essential further education and skills needed to enter the workforce.
- TAFE's vision is to lead the training system to become a place where people with disability thrive.
- TAFEs have obligations to support learners with disability under the legislative and regulatory framework in which TAFEs operate within.

Equitable access to life-long learning and education for people with disability is critical to enabling meaningful participation in society. Education and training are pathways to work and economic and social participation. Participating in paid work helps build a sense of self-worth and independence. The pursuit of knowledge is an area of attainment in its own right.¹

The Victorian Government is committed to establishing Victoria as the Education State where every community member has access to a quality education that supports them to gain the knowledge and skills to reach their full potential and shape their lives.²

In preparation for the full roll-out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the Government identified disability inclusion at TAFE as a priority area for improvement. In March 2018, TAFEs agreed to a vision where **Victorian TAFEs lead the training system to become a place where people with disability thrive**. This vision is underpinned by the following key outcomes:

- TAFEs lead the system in the employment and education outcomes for people with disability
- TAFEs lead the system in developing innovative training for disability workforces
- TAFEs become recognised as inclusive workplaces across the Victorian public sector.

Three themes enable TAFEs to deliver the vision's outcomes:

Access and achievement – improving access and achievement for learners with disability, their families and their carers.

Client-centric workforces – delivering quality NDIS-related training to meet workforce demand.

Inclusive workplaces – maintaining inclusive workplaces for employees with disability, as large-scale public sector employers.

¹ Victorian Government 2016, *Absolutely Everyone: State Disability Plan 2017-2020*, Melbourne, pp.11, viewed 24 September 2020, <https://www.statedisabilityplan.vic.gov.au/application/files/2314/8062/9382/1610033_Victorian_state_disability_plan_2017-2020_Text_WEB.pdf>

² Victorian Government 2016, *Absolutely Everyone: State Disability Plan 2017-2020*, Melbourne, pp.54, viewed 24 September 2020, <https://www.statedisabilityplan.vic.gov.au/application/files/2314/8062/9382/1610033_Victorian_state_disability_plan_2017-2020_Text_WEB.pdf>

In 2019, the Department of Education and Training (the Department) and TAFEs commissioned a review into improving access and achievement for learners with disability (the Review). It was designed to better understand barriers affecting opportunity and equity, assess current and best practices, provide insights and recommend targeted strategies for improvement.

The 19 recommendations developed were framed by the learner experience consisting of outreach, identification, wellbeing, pedagogy and pathways. These recommendations were endorsed by TAFEs and provide meaningful steps to improve disability inclusion across TAFEs. Implementation of priority recommendations is under way and will support TAFEs to achieve the TAFE vision. A full list of the recommendations is at **Appendix 1**.

This submission presents an overview of how TAFEs currently support learners with disability. It also highlights actions being undertaken by TAFEs with support by the government to elevate best practice and increase access and achievement.

VICTORIA'S VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET) SYSTEM AT A GLANCE

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is both government-funded and fee-for-service. In 2019 in Victoria, there were more than 624,000 course enrolments, of which more than 328,000 were Government-funded and about 296,500 were fee-for-service.³

In 2020, learners can access subsidies for more than 800 courses delivered by 302 training providers including 12 TAFEs, four dual sector universities, 207 private registered training organisations (private providers) and 79 adult community education (ACE) providers delivering accredited training.

The Victorian Government invests more than \$2.4 billion – through the Training, Higher Education and Workforce Development budget – to support Victorians to acquire the skills our industries and businesses need to grow.

This investment supports Victorians to gain the skills and capabilities essential for a rewarding life and create a globally competitive workforce. It recognises the role of the TAFE and training system in supporting learners and communities to deliver skills, grow jobs, and meet the needs of Victoria's workforce. A strong TAFE network is the cornerstone of the VET system.

As at 31 December 2019, there were more than 275,000 learners within the Victorian Government-funded VET sector. More than half (56 per cent) of these learners were at TAFE.

Victoria's TAFE network

Victoria's TAFE network includes 12 TAFE institutes and four dual sector universities.

Victoria's TAFE institutes are:

Bendigo Kangan Institute, Box Hill Institute, Chisholm Institute, TAFE Gippsland, GOTAFE, The Gordon, Holmesglen, Melbourne Polytechnic, South West TAFE, SuniTAFE, William Angliss Institute, Wodonga TAFE.

Victoria's dual sector universities are:

Federation TAFE, RMIT University, Swinburne University of Technology, Victoria University Polytechnic.

In this submission, TAFE refers to all institutes within the TAFE network.

³ Enrolment numbers include both new and continuing students. For example, 2019 course enrolments will include some students who commenced their course prior to 2019. A student may also be enrolled in more than one course at a time. Therefore, the number of enrolments is generally larger than the total number of students.

Skills First

Skills First is a set of reforms for Victoria's TAFE and training system introduced in January 2017. The reforms ensure the system delivers high quality training that leads learners to real jobs.

Skills First recognises the distinct role TAFEs have as public providers which partner with industry and government on key economic priorities, lead the training system in excellence and innovation, provide essential life skills and support services, and help disadvantaged learners and communities.

Under *Skills First*, TAFEs are at the centre of the training system, setting quality benchmarks, fostering the skills learners need to be job-ready, and driving productivity improvements across Victoria. TAFEs deliver a significant volume of education and training and aim to alleviate market failures and equity issues in the VET system.

Image 1. An Overview of Skills First



Under *Skills First*, TAFEs receive funding for learners who need additional support to engage with and succeed in education and training.

Legislative and Regulatory Framework

A national legislative and regulatory framework underpins and supports the delivery of all VET providers including TAFEs. Under this framework, providers must take steps to ensure that learners with disability can access and participate in education and training on the same basis as learners without disability.

TAFEs have obligations to support learners with disability under the *Standards for RTOs 2015*, *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, and the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*.

The *Disability Standards for Education 2005* sets out a requirement for training providers, including TAFEs, to make reasonable adjustments for learners with disability. A reasonable adjustment is a measure or action (or a group of measures or actions) taken by a training provider to assist a

learner with disability to apply, enrol, participate in courses or programs and to use TAFE facilities or services.

In addition, the Victorian legislative framework includes the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* and the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2016*.

Example – Bendigo Kangan Institute (BKI) reasonable adjustments and engagement with industry to support learners

In 2019, a Certificate II in Engineering and Pathways learner sought support early on in their learning journey to ensure strategies and support for access using their wheelchair and inclusion were in place. With assistance and collaboration from a range of stakeholders including the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), occupational therapists, the engineering department, the Chief Academic Officer and the student support team at BKI, reasonable adjustments were made to enable the learner to fully participate in all aspects of the course.

In addition, the support team at BKI used this opportunity to reach out to industry to understand best practice, alternative equipment and review BKI's access and inclusion plan. The support team also connected the learner into appropriate services such as the Skills and Jobs Centres to support their transition into an apprenticeship post completion of the course.

IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) PANDEMIC

In 2020, in line with changes to coronavirus (COVID-19)-related restrictions, TAFEs have transitioned to remote and flexible learning with limited on-site learning at its campuses.

TAFE teachers and curriculum developers have been working to adapt teaching and learning materials to formats suitable for remote and online delivery since the COVID-19 pandemic began. For example, TAFEs have supported learners by providing laptops or hard copy materials where required and conduct welfare checks on disadvantaged learners.

TAFEs have also adapted and accelerated professional development programs to upskill teachers in delivering online learning. Professional development has focused on the effective use of online teaching tools, developing online content, learning activities and assessment materials, and effectively engaging learners online.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, TAFEs have offered a range of support services specifically to vulnerable learners, such as:

- additional transition support to maintain learners' engagement
- additional pastoral care
- wellbeing/health/psychological support
- technical support/technical equipment/internet access
- financial support and advice.

TAFEs have seen an increase in demand for these supports throughout the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF IMPROVING ACCESS TO TAFE FOR LEARNERS WITH DISABILITY

Under *Skills First*, the Victorian Government is committed to providing excellence and equity in education so that everyone, regardless of background or circumstance, is offered the best chance to develop the skills and attributes they need to thrive and prosper in a changing world. TAFEs play an important role in delivering education and training to learners with disability to reduce inequality in economic and social outcomes in the community.

- Equitable access to life-long learning for people with disability is critical to enabling meaningful participation in society.
- TAFEs play a key role in providing access to a supportive, quality education to learners with disability and are a significant deliverer of training to people with disability.

DISABILITY WITHIN VICTORIA

The Victorian Government's vision is for an inclusive Victoria, which supports people with disability to live satisfying everyday lives. Across government, work continues to achieve the goal as set out in the State Disability Plan, but more work is required to achieve this vision.

In 2018, there were 1.1 million Victorians with disability, which is about 17 per cent of the state's population.⁴ The prevalence of disability increased with age – one in nine (11 per cent) Victorians aged 0-64 years, and about one in two (48 per cent) Victorians aged 65 years and over had disability.⁵ Disability prevalence was slightly lower for Victorian males (16 per cent) than Victorian females (17 per cent).⁶

VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT'S INCLUSION FRAMEWORK

The Victorian Government is taking a lead on promoting the inclusion of Victorians with disability. The cornerstone of the Victorian Government's inclusion framework is *Absolutely Everyone: State Disability Plan 2017-2020*.

State Disability Plan

The State Disability Plan acknowledges that many Victorians with disability have encountered negative attitudes and barriers in being able to fully participate in everyday activities.⁷

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Victoria, 2018* 'Table 1.1 and 1.3 Persons with disability, by age and sex-2012,2015 and 2018', Victoria spreadsheet, cat. No. 44300DO002_2018, viewed 16 September 2020, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4430.02018?OpenDocument>>

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Victoria, 2018* 'Table 1.1 Persons with disability, by age and sex-2012,2015 and 2018, estimate', Victoria spreadsheet, cat. No. 44300DO002_2018, viewed 16 September 2020, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4430.02018?OpenDocument>>

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Victoria, 2018* 'Table 1.1 Persons with disability, by age and sex-2012,2015 and 2018, estimate', Victoria spreadsheet, cat. No. 44300DO002_2018, viewed 16 September 2020, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4430.02018?OpenDocument>>

⁷ Victorian Government 2016, *Absolutely Everyone: State Disability Plan 2017-2020*, Melbourne, pp.9, viewed 24 September 2020, <https://www.statedisabilityplan.vic.gov.au/application/files/2314/8062/9382/1610033_Victorian_state_disability_plan_2017-2020_Text_WEB.pdf>

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020), in 2018, almost 10 per cent (76,000) of Victorians with disability aged 15 years and over (living in households) had experienced discrimination in the past 12 months due to disability.⁸

Promoting inclusion in mainstream systems including Victoria's education and training system is critical to shifting the negative attitudes of some community members.⁹ The State Disability Plan acknowledges the potential for the Reconnect program to increase opportunities for people who require additional supports, including people with disability. More information on the Reconnect program is provided in sections below.

Economic Participation Plan

Every Opportunity: Victorian economic participation plan for people with disability 2018-20 (the Economic Participation Plan) sets out the Victorian Government's vision to increase the economic participation of people with disability across the state.

The three areas set out under the vision include:

1. Education and learning pathways
2. Employment opportunities
3. Business ownership and opportunities.

The Economic Participation Plan was developed to respond to the underrepresentation of Victorians with disability in the workforce. It acknowledges that Victorians with disability can and want to work but face barriers and discrimination in doing so.

The plan takes a broad view of economic participation. It encompasses all the ways people contribute to and participate in economic life, including through employment, self-employment, career progression, enterprise development, education and training, and as consumers. **TAFEs play a key role in providing access to a supportive, quality education to learners with disability and are a significant deliverer of training to people with disability.**

The Victorian Government wants to ensure people with disability are included as the economy changes. The Economic Plan for people with disability sets out to attract more people with disability into careers in disability. Eligible learners with disability can learn the skills needed for such a career within the VET system and TAFEs through a range of subsidised training funded under *Skills First* and *Free TAFE for Priority Courses*.

Example – Holmesglen Institute's practical placement partnership with the Royal Children's Hospital supporting economic participation

In 2018, Holmesglen and the Royal Children's Hospital partnered to support Victorians with disability to grow their career opportunities and give learners greater skills and knowledge while they study. Ten learners with disability participated on an integrated practical placement program.

The learners completed three work placements at the hospital during the year while studying a Certificate I in Work Education. The class was split across various areas of the hospital, including human resources, medical records, allied health, volunteer and family services, the early learning centre, the kitchen, mailroom and equipment department. The participants applied for each

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Victoria, 2018* 'Table 20.3 Persons aged 15 years and over with disability, living in households, whether has experienced discrimination due to disability in the last 12 months-2018, estimate', Victoria spreadsheet, cat. No. 44300DO002_2018, viewed 16 September 2020, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4430.02018?OpenDocument>>

⁹ Victorian Government 2016, *Absolutely Everyone: State Disability Plan 2017-2020*, Melbourne, pp.18, viewed 24 September 2020, <https://www.statedisabilityplan.vic.gov.au/application/files/2314/8062/9382/1610033_Victorian_state_disability_plan_2017-2020_Text_WEB.pdf>

placement based on their skills and interests. They were supported during the placement by a TAFE teacher and a job coach employed by a disability employment service.

Four of the learners were offered employment at the hospital and four gained employment in other settings. The participants identified the program as having a positive impact on their confidence, initiative, maturity, trust, reliability, independence and motivation. The program also benefitted the hospital, with opportunities for staff to learn about people with disability; to engage productively with a social equity activity; and to develop pride in being involved with learners who were visibly developing critical social, workplace and everyday life skills.

SKILLS FIRST

Economic outcomes are strongly influenced by access to supportive, quality education and training opportunities because these underpin a lifetime of contributions and involvement in the broader economy for all Victorians.¹⁰

Under *Skills First*, the Victorian Government is committed to providing excellence and equity in education so that everyone, regardless of background or circumstance, is offered the best chance to develop the skills and attributes they need to thrive and prosper in a changing world. This includes people with disability.

Skills First consists of:

- high-quality training that learners and industry can trust, aligned to industry and workforce needs
- a real voice for industry in training
- funding for high needs learners who need additional support to engage with and succeed in education and training
- access to targeted, relevant training for learners in regional areas.

Through *Skills First*, Victoria's government-subsidised training system has been reformed and a new approach to training implemented, boosting training quality and supporting the courses that are most likely to lead to employment.

According to Lamb et al. (2018), VET is a steppingstone for many into further education, training and work. It helps address barriers to workforce participation, including long-term unemployment, early school leaving, low literacy or numeracy skills, and the need to retrain or upskill. Lamb et al. (2018) conclude, that VET is a fundamental contributor to productivity, workforce development and participation. VET also provides personal benefits for learners, as well as social benefits to the community.¹¹

The Department's Student Satisfaction Survey shows that, in 2019, about one in three (32 per cent) of TAFE learners with disability had an improved employment status after completing their training. This result is comparable to learners with disability in the broader non-TAFE government-subsidised training system (32 per cent).

¹⁰ Department of Health and Human Services 2018, *Every Opportunity: Victorian economic participation plan for people with disability 2018-2020*, viewed 23 September 2020 <https://www.statedisabilityplan.vic.gov.au/application/files/7815/3740/3384/Every_opportunity_-_Web.pdf>

¹¹ Lamb et al. 2018, *Improving participation and success in VET for disadvantaged learners*, NCVET, Adelaide, pp.12, viewed on 8 October 2020 https://www.ncver.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0030/2096175/Improving-participation-and-success-in-VET-for-disadvantaged-learners.pdf.

In 2019, about one in four (24 per cent) TAFE learners with disability went on to further study at a higher level after completing their training. This is slightly higher than the broader non-TAFE government-subsidised training system (17 per cent).

These findings highlight the important role training at TAFE plays in improving outcomes for learners with disability, including participation in the labour market. More information about the Student Satisfaction Survey is provided in sections below.

Example – TAFE Gippsland’s training partnership with Yooralla addressing barriers to workforce participation

TAFE Gippsland and Yooralla, a disability support organisation, have established a training partnership in Leongatha and Drouin that serves as a training ground to support learners with disability to develop interpersonal and hospitality skills.

Yooralla Community Development personnel work closely with TAFE Gippsland to provide suggestions for skills which would be beneficial across a diverse range of individual learner abilities. This contextualised hospitality program with Yooralla is delivered over a six-month period and is designed to provide learners with a range of hospitality and service skills, helping to build their confidence and establish employment opportunities and pathways to further study.

The program is primarily run out of TAFE Gippsland’s Wildflower Training Restaurant based in Leongatha. The program is well supported by local communities and supports community engagement with learners and builds the learners’ confidence and sense of achievement. Learners also benefit by developing customer service skills including using ‘point of sale’ systems and processing payments. They develop other skills when researching ideas around the food they want to prepare and cook each week, including finding recipes in books and online and watching cooking programs.

The program has been successful in helping learners gain paid employment within Gippsland communities in the hospitality sector and other related industries, even before they have completed the training in some cases.

THE EXPERIENCES OF LEARNERS WITH DISABILITY ACCESSING AND PARTICIPATING IN TAFE PROGRAMS

TAFEs are playing a key role in providing access to learners with disability to a quality education.

- Enrolments for learners with disability has grown within TAFEs.
- Free TAFE is removing financial barriers to training and giving learners with disability the confidence to join or re-join the training system.
- While TAFEs play a key role in providing access to learners with disability, maintaining a focus on access and equity to achieve their full potential remains a priority.

LEARNERS WITH DISABILITY

As at 31 December 2019, one in eleven (9 per cent) Victorian TAFE enrolments in government-funded accredited courses are learners who have reported a disability. The prevalence of disability in the Victorian community (aged 0-64 years) is only slightly higher (11 per cent) than the self-reported prevalence of disability within TAFEs.

As at 31 December 2019, 43 per cent of learners with disability enrolled within TAFEs are studying a Certificate IV or above. This is comparable to learners without disability (44 per cent) and is higher than learners with disability enrolled within the broader Victorian VET system (38 per cent).

As of 31 December 2019, enrolments for learners with disability in government-funded accredited courses had grown within TAFEs by 14 per cent compared to the same period in 2018, while enrolments by TAFE learners without disability grew by a more modest 10 per cent. In contrast, enrolments for learners with disability in government-funded accredited courses had fallen during the same period for non-TAFE providers, down more than 6 per cent for private providers and 6 per cent for adult community education providers, while enrolments for learners without disability at non-TAFE training providers decreased by 3 per cent. This emphasises the important role that TAFEs, as public providers, play in the Victorian training system.

Free TAFE for Priority Courses (Free TAFE) has been successful in attracting more learners with disability to study in a range of priority courses within TAFEs. More than 3300 learners with disability started a Free TAFE course in 2019 compared to about 1700 learners with disability in 2018. More than half (58 per cent) of all learners with disability who started a Free TAFE course in 2019 were female.

Free TAFE is removing financial barriers to training and giving learners with disability the confidence to take the first step to join or re-join the education and training system. Free TAFE is in its second year and it is hoped that, over time, this increased participation will lead to greater economic and social inclusion for learners with disability.

Student Satisfaction Survey

The Department's Student Satisfaction Survey is an annual census that invites government-subsidised learners in Victoria, who either completed or discontinued their VET studies in the previous year, to determine their satisfaction and outcomes following training. For example, the 2019 survey captured learners who left the government-funded training system in 2018.

According to the 2019 survey, about one in five (22 per cent) TAFE learners with disability who left training early did so because of family or personal reasons and about one in five (21 per cent) TAFE learners with disability who left training early did so because of illness or injury. TAFE learners with disability who left training early were more than three times more likely to have done so due to illness or injury than TAFE learners without disability.

As at 30 August 2020, about three-quarters (73 per cent) of all learners with disability within TAFEs are studying a Certificate III or above. One in four learners with disability were studying at the Certificate I, II or VCE/VCAL level.

This tells us the course offerings at these lower qualification levels are an important stepping-stone for some learners with disability who are trying to gain skills to engage in employment and improve their own economic and social situation. As mentioned above, in 2019 about one in four (24 per cent) of TAFE learners with disability went on to study at a higher level after they completed their training.

Based on the 2019 Student Satisfaction Survey, TAFE learners with disability reported lower levels of satisfaction with their training and were less likely to achieve their main reason for training than TAFE learners without disability:

- 70 per cent of TAFE learners with disability were satisfied with their training compared to 77 per cent of TAFE learners without disability
- 68 per cent of TAFE learners with disability were satisfied that their teachers/trainers understood their learning needs, compared to 74 per cent of TAFE learners without disability.

The Student Satisfaction Survey findings highlight that while TAFEs play a key role in providing access to learners with disability, maintaining a focus on access and equity to achieve their full potential remains a priority. Recommendations currently being implemented by TAFEs to support access and achievement can make a direct contribution improving results on these measures.

BARRIERS TO LEARNERS WITH DISABILITY ACCESSING TAFE AND IDEAS FOR ADDRESSING THESE

Experiences of learners with disability vary between TAFE institutes, campuses and courses. Different learners with disability also experience different barriers and require different supports to address them.

- For some learners a lack of confidence and self-doubt is the biggest barrier they face to training.
- Course design and delivery, administrative process and a lack of financial resources are other common barriers.
- The challenge for TAFEs is to provide sufficient supports across all TAFE courses and campuses so that no learner is disadvantaged based on their individual circumstances.

The Review commissioned by the Department and TAFEs found that experiences of learners with disability vary between TAFE institutes, campuses and courses. For some learners, the physical environment on a campus may not allow easy access and connection to other learners. For other learners, access to IT infrastructure and technology poses challenges. Low self-confidence is also a significant barrier for some learners with disability. For some learners a lack of confidence and self-doubt is the biggest barrier they face to training.

Example – Learner’s experience of barriers to training

“I struggled in the course before they gave me assistance with a support worker. I have learning difficulties and speech problems and with my support worker’s assistance we got my portfolio in order which actually showed I was up to date with my work. She helped explain things to me and has been my voice to the teachers and I was very comfortable with her. We had a good relationship which helped my confidence and anxiety.

For my first year leaving my safety net of school I was extremely nervous on how I would manage outside of my school bubble. My support worker was more than willing to be my aide again which gave me reassurance going forward as having no familiar faces makes it extremely hard for me with my language and lack of confidence with new people.” – Bendigo Kangan Institute Second Year Student

How courses are designed and delivered and what access to resources can be provided has a bearing on learners’ experience. For example, the pace set for learning, the design of assessments, access to Auslan interpreters or note-takers, and the release of video-based resources with appropriate captions can make a significant difference to the experience of learners with disability. More information on access to Auslan interpreters is provided in sections below.

Administrative processes can also be a barrier for some learners with disability. Some find the enrolment process confusing. Online systems used in the enrolment process can be problematic for some learners. Online literacy and numeracy testing can also act as a deterrent to enrolment. To address this barrier, some TAFEs have introduced flexible options in which learners are able to

take the literacy and numeracy test at a separate time or in a different format. Disability liaison officers employed within TAFEs also provide enrolment support to learners with disability.

Another barrier that impacts upon access to TAFE for learners with disability is a lack of financial means. The cost of training can be a deterrent to study. Research commissioned by the Department and TAFEs has shown that prospective learners are not always aware of government subsidies or loans or they over-estimate the costs and under-estimate the benefits of post-school education. Prior to Free TAFE, some learners received concessions¹² or exemption from tuition fees, however Free TAFE eligibility settings are more wide-reaching. This initiative has been highly successful in attracting priority groups to take up training at TAFE. Further information on the impact of Free TAFE is provided in sections below.

Free TAFE for Priority Courses

Since 1 January 2019, eligible learners have not paid course tuition fees in priority courses and apprenticeship pathway courses. Free TAFE for Priority Courses (Free TAFE) reduces the financial barrier for learners wanting to train in courses that lead to in-demand jobs.

Free TAFE courses, offered within TAFEs, have been prioritised because they lead to jobs in high growth industries, and important areas for Victoria, like early childhood education, preventing family violence, rolling out the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and delivering major infrastructure projects.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to remote learning has been a barrier for some learners with disability. For example, some learners such as those with mental illness and autism are more reliant on structures and routines. The disruption to learning and the transition to remote and flexible learning can be challenging for these learners. For vision-impaired learners, some online teaching resources are not compatible for screen readers and other assistant technology. For some learners with severe and complex disabilities, access to eye gaze technology has supported their transition to an online learning environment.

It is important to note that barriers that exist for some learners with disability, may not exist for other learners with disability. The challenge for TAFEs is to provide sufficient supports across all TAFE courses and campuses so that no learner is disadvantaged. Strategies that increase participation of learners with disability in TAFE and supports that learners with disability need to maximise their learning experience at TAFE are provided in sections below.

LEARNERS WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

National Mental Health Service Planning Framework suggests that about 20 per cent of Victorians will experience a mental illness in any given year.¹³

The Review commissioned by the Department and TAFEs found that learners with mental illness experience a range of barriers in participating at TAFE. These include:

- difficulty keeping up with the course pace and content
- difficulty interacting with peers and teachers

¹² Training providers, including TAFEs, must allow fee concessions for some learners. Concession fees must be charged for courses at Certificate IV and below to holders of a Health Care Card issued by the Commonwealth, Pensioner Concession Card or a Veteran's Gold Card. The concession fee must be 20 per cent of the provider's standard tuition fee, that is, the fee that a non-concession learner would have been charged. The concession provided also applies to a dependent spouse of dependent child of a Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card.

¹³ National Mental Health Service Planning Framework, *Introduction to the NMHSPF*, January 2019, pp.10.

- suffering from panic attacks in class
- difficulty concentrating due to distractions in the classroom
- fatigue and exhaustion
- low motivation
- exacerbated symptoms (including stress and anxiety) due to sudden changes in course planning.

The role of supporting learners with disability extends across administrative, support and teaching staff within TAFEs. An example of how one of Victoria’s dual-sector universities is addressing barriers for learners with mental illness is included below.

Example – RMIT University’s Framework for Promoting Student Mental Wellbeing in Universities

RMIT has put measures in place to support TAFE and university learners’ mental health. The institute “recognises learners’ mental health and wellbeing as a core institution-wide priority”.

RMIT’s academic board has endorsed a Framework for Promoting Student Mental Wellbeing in Universities and established a mental wellbeing advisory group which has developed priorities and an implementation plan. Action has started on:

- *building teaching staff capability to support and respond to learners’ mental wellbeing needs*
- *exploring digital solutions to enhance learners’ access to support services*
- *fostering strong partnerships and reducing stigma in collaboration with the student union*
- *developing learner mental health knowledge and skills, with a focus on resilience.*¹⁴

¹⁴ RMIT University 2020, *Mental Health and Wellbeing*, ‘Student Mental Wellbeing’, RMIT, accessed at 23 September 2020, <<https://www.rmit.edu.au/about/our-values/mental-health-and-wellbeing>>.

STRATEGIES TO INCREASE THE PARTICIPATION OF LEARNERS WITH DISABILITY IN TAFE PROGRAMS, INCLUDING INITIATIVES THAT HAVE PROVEN SUCCESSFUL IN VICTORIA

Under *Skills First*, TAFEs receive funding to deliver comprehensive wrap-around services aimed at improving learner outcomes and supporting disadvantaged learners. These programs also support learners with disability to participate in training.

- Community Service Funding assists TAFEs to provide a broad range of general and tailored support programs and pathways for learners with disability.
- The Reconnect program harnesses a collaborative approach that draws on local resources and expertise to increase access and remove barriers to vocational education and training.
- Free TAFE is successfully attracting more learners with disability to TAFE to study in priority courses that lead to in-demand jobs.
- Disability liaison officers provide advice and support for learners with disability to ensure equal access to learning opportunities, including arranging access to reasonable adjustments.
- Supporting pathways and transitions into TAFE is an essential strategy to increase participation of learners with disability.

TAFEs have a range of policies to support inclusive environments including:

- access and equity policies to ensure institutes are inclusive as possible of diverse learners and employees
- equal opportunity policies to promote dignity, rights and opportunities for all learners and employees
- disability access plans
- reasonable adjustment policies.

Example: Swinburne University's AccessAbility Action Plan supporting inclusion

Swinburne University's AccessAbility Action Plan (Action Plan) sets out Swinburne's vision "to be a recognised leader in quality, accessible and inclusive education and employment for people living with disability, and carers."¹⁵

The Action Plan details the university's strategy to create a supportive, inclusive institute with goals, actions and responsibilities.

¹⁵ Swinburne University of Technology 2014, *AccessAbility Action Plan*, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, viewed 21 September 2020 < https://www.swinburne.edu.au/media/swinburne.edu.au/about-swinburne/docs/pdfs/accessability-plan_web.pdf>

SKILLS FIRST

Under *Skills First*, TAFEs receive funding to deliver comprehensive wrap-around services aimed at improving learner outcomes and supporting disadvantaged learners. This includes Community Service Funding and funding for the Reconnect program.

Community Service Funding

Community Service Funding enables TAFEs to provide a broad range of general and tailored support programs and pathways for learners. The Victorian Government provides this funding to TAFEs to deliver a broad range of support services and programs to disadvantaged members of the community.

The Department sets out minimum service standards under Community Service Funding but is not prescriptive about the types of services and programs that can be provided. Each TAFE determines what supports are required for their specific local community. The minimum service standards are:

- building networks with local organisations/ services
- inclusion and engagement support services
- educational support services
- social support services
- career advice and support
- job readiness and connectedness.

Within TAFEs there are several partnerships with disability service providers and disability-specific networks that support learners with their educational, social and employment goals. These act to enhance accessibility and inclusion for learners with high support needs in TAFEs and to raise awareness of vocational pathways at TAFE.

TAFEs provide educational support services, such as with applying for courses, direct learning support, help for negotiating alternative assessment, information and referral services, advocacy support and specialised study materials.

TAFEs provide access to disability support workers for eligible learners. The support encompasses assistance with organisational skills for study, course work review, assistance to navigate language, literacy and numeracy support, and access to assistive technologies. Disability support workers are available to provide support face-to-face or online. In some instances, learners also bring along their own psychosocial support worker to assist with managing interactions and participation in the educational environment.

Learners with disability have access to language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) support. LLN support is offered either one-on-one or in groups sessions embedded within the classroom. There is a close working relationship between the LLN support staff and disability liaison officers.

TAFEs work with disability employment services, through their Skills and Jobs Centres, to provide job readiness and employment services. Services includes tailored employer liaison and advocacy to secure employment or work placements; specialist employment services programs; work-ready training programs; career coaching; and motivational sessions.

Example – Swinburne University’s ‘Success Coaching’ Model a Community Service Funding initiative

Swinburne University funds its ‘Success Coaching’ model, a learner mentoring program, through Community Service Funding. Success coaches work individually with a designated group of learners, identifying those who may need additional supports and developing individual learning plans in consultation with learners. Coaches provide general mentoring to learners, maximising their potential to complete their training and gain entry to employment or further study. The coaches also facilitate referrals to other support services in the university, ensuring a cohesive approach to learner success.

Learners can self-refer to success coaches. Coaches are available to all learners, including learners with disability. Staff in focus groups said that making success coaching available to all learners helps to reduce stigma towards people with disability, by sending a clear message that all learners need support at times. Teachers also said the naming of the service plays an important role in destigmatising disability and emphasising that the service is available to all.

Reconnect

The Reconnect program is currently delivered by 26 providers across Victoria, comprised of 10 TAFEs and 16 Learn Locals. The program employs a place-based approach for supporting Victorian adults experiencing significant barriers to accessing TAFE. **The learner-centre model enables participants to identify and achieve their vocational goals in a supportive and empowering environment.** The program commenced in 2016, and over a quarter of the participants have reported a disability.

The design of the program consists of four key elements that maintain a tailored and responsive service for people experiencing complex forms of disadvantage. This includes the following:

1. **Engagement:** engage non-service-connected participants via outreach activities; develop and maintain place-based partnerships and connections with organisations and the community to facilitate referral pathways into the program; assess participants’ suitability for the program.
2. **Learner wrap-around supports:** identify the support needs of participants; refer participants to support services through partnerships and connections; identify personal interests and opportunities for community participation.
3. **Education, training and employment:** identify education and training needs and goals; facilitate participation in pre-accredited vocational education and training; facilitate participation in accredited vocational education and training; identify employment needs and goals; facilitate employment opportunities with industry partners.
4. **Pathways:** support participants to move into an appropriate pathway out of the program into education, training, employment or further service provision at a partner organisation.

The program harnesses a collaborative approach that draws on local resources and expertise to increase access and remove barriers to vocational education and training. This approach also enables providers to facilitate opportunities within the community that increase the participants’ capabilities and capacity to reach their work, learn and study goals.

Skills and Jobs Centres

Skills and Jobs Centres are ‘one-stop-shops’ offering services for all Victorians, including prospective learners, employers, apprentices, trainees, and unemployed, upskilling and transitioning workers. They are funded through Community Service Funding.

There are a 32 Skills and Jobs Centres across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria, plus outreach services, linked to TAFEs. A full list of locations is available in **Appendix 2**.

All Skills and Jobs Centres' services are available to learners with disability, and include career information and support, professional career counselling, training information, and access and referral to workshops and appropriate training programs.

Skills and Job Centres hold CV writing seminars and provide guidance on how to prepare for job interviews for learners, including learners with disability.

Key services provided by Skills and Jobs Centres include:

- triaging clients into appropriate government initiatives
- provision of training and course advice and referrals
- delivering qualified career counselling
- making referrals to appropriate community service and job readiness service providers
- working with local industry and employers.

The following example is how TAFEs' Skills and Job Centres are assisting learners with disability.

Example – GOTAFE Skills and Jobs Centres career counselling and course advice

Thomas visited GOTAFE Skills and Jobs Centre seeking advice on what courses to study to improve his employment prospects. Thomas wanted to join the air force, but a degenerative eye disease rendered him legally blind. Thomas' vision impairment affected his ability to work and caused emotional and financial frustration.*

*The Skills and Jobs Centre facilitated a career voyage assessment with Thomas. This assessment identified Thomas' knowledge on aircrafts. Thomas also had advanced computer skills. The Skills and Jobs Centre discussed designing websites and online games as relevant areas of study. The Reconnect program assisted with financial costs for Thomas' study and provided case management during transition to study. Thomas successfully completed a Certificate IV in Graphic Design and went on to study a Diploma in Graphic Design. – *Name has been changed*

FREE TAFE

Free TAFE has proven successful in attracting more Victorians to study at TAFE. Free TAFE began on 1 January 2019, and at the end of its first year more than 39,700 learners had started in Free TAFE courses across TAFEs. This was 88 per cent higher than for the same courses at the end of 2018.

Free TAFE has also been successful in attracting a diverse range of learners.

Commencements for learners with disability grew by 94 per cent. Commencements for mature-aged learners – aged 30 years and over – unemployed Victorians and learners with a culturally and linguistically diverse background also grew.

More than 3300 learners with disability started a Free TAFE course in 2019 compared to about 1700 in 2018. In 2019, the most popular Free TAFE courses for learners with disability were:

- Certificate IV in Accounting and Bookkeeping
- Diploma of Community Services
- Diploma of Nursing
- Certificate III in Individual Support

- Certificate IV in Education Support.

As at 30 August 2020, there are still more learners with disability enrolled in courses on the Free TAFE course list than at the same time in 2019 (about 3700 learners with disability compared to 3100).

The Certificate III and Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care were added to the Free TAFE list in 2020 to support the government's expansion of three-year old kindergarten. Both courses are among the most popular Free TAFE courses in 2020 for learners with disability.

As at 31 July 2020, the most popular Free TAFE courses for learners with disability are:

- Certificate IV in Cyber Security
- Diploma of Nursing
- Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care
- Certificate IV in Community Services
- Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care.

The popularity of the Free TAFE early childhood course with learners with disability demonstrates **that Free TAFE is attracting Victorians with disability into training and into priority courses linked to in-demand jobs.**

In recognition of the strong learner demand for Free TAFE in 2019, TAFEs received additional funding for support services for learners facing disadvantage, which included new course materials to help them improve their time management, study skills and literacy, making them more employable.

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System released an Interim Report in November 2019 which included the recommendation that the Certificate IV Mental Health Peer Work be included on the Free TAFE list. This qualification reflects the role of workers who have lived experience of mental illness as either a consumer or carer and who work in mental health services in roles that support consumer peers or carer peers.

The course was added in July 2020 and the Department is working closely with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to build and support the future mental health peer workforce by strengthening training delivery, and partnering with peak bodies representing people with lived experience and mental health services. The Certificate IV Mental Health is also offered as part of Free TAFE to increase the capacity of Victoria's mental health sector.

DISABILITY LIAISON OFFICERS

TAFEs employ disability liaison officers through their Community Service Funding. Disability liaison officers provide advice and support for learners with disability to ensure equal access to learning opportunities, including arranging access to reasonable adjustments (as described below).

Upon disclosure of disability, the disability liaison officer will establish a person-centred support plan that is tailored to the learner's potential impacts on learning and how to best support them. Person-centred support plans (also referred to as disability access plan) ensure that all reasonable adjustments, course modifications, tutoring, assistive technologies and other supports are explored, to provide the learner with the greatest opportunity to succeed in their studies.

Reasonable adjustments may include additional time or alternative formats for assessments and exams, access to specialised equipment such as ergonomic chairs, interpreting services, note-taking and tutoring. Learners with disability can also be referred to a student wellbeing advisor and be linked to counselling and other welfare services as required.

TAFE TASTER

TAFE Taster courses or days are available across TAFEs. The TAFE Taster program offered by TAFEs are one way in which TAFEs seek to attract learners, particularly for foundation programs and other transition courses designed for learners with disability.

According to the Review commissioned by the Department and TAFEs, learners with an intellectual, learning or cognitive disability reported that the TAFE Taster program had influenced their decision to enrol in TAFE. TAFE Taster programs provide an opportunity for learners with disability to understand what their course will involve, what will be expected of them and helps learners to select the right course.

SUPPORTING PATHWAYS AND TRANSITIONS

To support pathways into training, TAFEs partner with a range of local organisations to help learners, including those with disability, to enrol in and succeed at TAFE. For example, school outreach programs to both mainstream and specialist schools have been developed by TAFEs as a way of engaging school students in training pathways. A further example is the partnership that exists between Box Hill Institute and Alkira.

Example – Box Hill Institute’s partnership with Alkira supporting pathways

Alkira is a not-for-profit organisation that provides services and supports to people with disability. In 2017, Box Hill Institute formed a partnership with Alkira to deliver Certificate I in Work Education and Certificate I in Transition Education to their learners with an intellectual or learning disability or permanent cognitive impairment. Classes take place at Box Hill Institute’s Nelson Road campus. To ensure connectedness to Box Hill Institute, Alkira also established an office in the Nelson campus.

The purpose of the partnership is to include learners with disability in a mainstream education environment, enable them to use campus facilities and provide well-supported, meaningful and practical placement opportunities. The partnership allows both organisations to work closely to provide tailored programs and meaningful work placement opportunities for learners with disability. This builds the learner’s confidence to pursue further education and achieve their employment goals.

Learn Locals

Learn Locals are an effective pathway for people with disability. Through Learn Locals, Victorians with disability engage in further education. Learn Locals are a first step towards transitioning to accredited courses at TAFEs.

Learn Locals have early engagement programs to foster participation and positive early experiences. They move learners on and into core skills development courses needed to improve their lives and take the next steps towards their future – whether further study, gaining employment, maintaining employment or gaining greater ability to be active citizens. People with disability participate strongly in pre-accredited education and training. More information about Learn Locals is at **Appendix 3**.

In November 2019, a *Ministerial Statement on The Future of Adult Community Education in Victoria 2020-25* was released which identifies a strengthened role for the sector in supporting learners to enter and successfully complete TAFE and university courses.¹⁶

Career education in schools

Some learners with disability need extra support for their transition from school to TAFE and other post-school training options. Starting the planning and preparation process early is critical to help school students move into further study, employment or other options.

The Victorian Government has funded career education reforms initiatives through the *Transforming Career Education in Victorian Government Schools* plan, to ensure all students are empowered to make better career and pathway decisions and to meet the needs of business and industry.

Strengthened Career Education is a transition resource specifically developed for students with disability. The resource provides information and guidance on career education for students with disability and their teachers, career practitioners and parents. Advice is provided to support students with disability to:

- explore their interests, strengths, values and aspirations
- plan their pathways
- consider their options
- make informed subject, course and career decisions
- track their progress over time.

Skills First programs that support disadvantaged learners, Free TAFE and supporting pathways and transitions into TAFE are all essential strategies in increasing participation of learners with disability in TAFE and in supporting learners to succeed in their training.

¹⁶ Department of Education and Training 2019, *The Future of Adult Community Education in Victoria 2020-25*, viewed 28 September 2020 <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/training/learners/learnlocal/Future-ACE-2020-25-Ministerial-Statement.pdf>

THE SUPPORT LEARNERS WITH DISABILITY NEED TO MAXIMISE THEIR LEARNING EXPERIENCE AT TAFE

Learners with disability attain better training outcomes when they identify their disability or adjustment needs. Work placements help learners with disability feel more confident in their ability to find work.

- TAFEs use a variety of approaches to engage with learners with disability to advise them of resources and services available.
- Learners with disability in courses with work placements are more confident in their ability to find work.

According to the Review commissioned by the Department and TAFEs, **learners with disability get better training outcomes when they identify their disability or adjustment needs.** However, not all learners with disability identified their disability. Reasons why this occurs include not seeing the value in identifying their disability and not feeling comfortable about telling others about their disability.

Factors that encourage learners with disability to identify their disability or adjustment needs include:

- simplified processes for identify their disability and accessing support as part of the enrolment process
- pre-training reviews
- access to resources, including disability liaison officers
- self-awareness and self-advocacy skills to identify their disability and request reasonable adjustments
- mentoring to help learners' awareness of resources and supports available to them.

Some learners may develop disability after they have started training. This highlights the need to have multiple opportunities for learners to identify their disability or adjustment needs throughout their training.

There is a variety of ways in which TAFEs engage with learners with disability to advise them of the resources and services available to them. Disability liaison officers are often central to this engagement. The following is an example of one TAFEs' approach.

Example – Box Hill Institute awareness approach supporting learners to identify their disability or adjustment needs

Learners who enrol at Box Hill Institute are given the opportunity to identify a disability as part of the online enrolment process. All learners who identify a disability receive an email advising them of the supports available through student services and are encouraged to contact the TAFE's disability liaison officers. This ensures that all learners are made aware of the resources available to them and given the opportunity to access these supports as required.

WORK PLACEMENTS

Work placements provide learners with an opportunity to apply and develop skills they develop during training. Work placements provide learners with the chance to receive direct feedback from employers about their skills.¹⁷ Work placements are mandatory in some VET courses, but not all.

The Review commissioned by the Department and TAFEs found that **learners with disability who study courses with work placements are more confident in their ability to find work after completing their training**. Some TAFEs have developed traineeship programs that lead to employment for participants.

Example – Holmesglen Institute’s Horticulture Pathways to Employment providing work placements

Horticultural learners with disability at Holmesglen Institute undertake practical experience throughout their course and are assisted into employment following graduation. During the course, learners undertake 1.5 days of coursework and 3.5 days maintaining the grounds at Holmesglen’s campuses, each week. Towards the end of the year, learners participate in job trials. Course supervisors help learners set up work placements with a view to gaining permanent employment.

The previous sections on barriers to learners with disability and strategies to increase participation also outline some of the supports learners with disability need to maximise their learning experience at TAFE. The following section focuses on the types of supports needed for Deaf and hard of hearing learners.

SUPPORTS FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING LEARNERS

The most important support service for equitable access for Deaf and hard of hearing learners in training is Australian Sign Language (Auslan) interpreting. To support the ongoing provision of Auslan interpreting within TAFEs, the Department has funded a pilot with Melbourne Polytechnic and Expression Australia to ensure an adequate supply of interpreting staff for Victorian TAFEs is maintained, along with other crucial supports such as community engagement, individual support for learners and professional development and support services for TAFE staff.

Some examples of the supports TAFEs provide Deaf and hard of hearing learners include:

- real-time and live captioning
- notetaking
- adaptive technology
- provision of course materials in suitable formats and accessible resources
- learning assistance and aids and study support.

Example – Melbourne Polytechnic’s Auslan Training

In 2018, Melbourne Polytechnic consulted with Vicdeaf (now Expression Australia) and the Auslan Teachers Association of Victoria to develop an application to the Department’s Regional and Specialist Training Fund to deliver the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment to a group of people who are deaf who could achieve employment outcomes as trainers of Auslan.

¹⁷ KPMG 2018, *Final Report: The Importance of TAFE to Victoria’s Prosperity*, KPMG, pp33.

The grant funding was utilised to contextualise the TAE40116 which included:

- using plain English
- translating resources into Auslan to make them more accessible
- use of examples in Auslan of content that the trainers might use as teachers.

In the most part, training was delivered by a deaf trainer in Auslan to deaf participants. Completion of this course means that deaf people can enter the training sector working as trainers of Auslan delivering tutoring, teaching and training across Victoria.

Melbourne Polytechnic promoted the program internally to Auslan staff and through engagement with schools, industry and community groups including those in regional Victoria. The training program was also advertised through Expression Australia, Deaf Children Australia and the Auslan Teachers Association of Victoria.

The funding made available through the Regional Specialist Training Fund provided quality project management and resource development that included video production (script, editing, Auslan resources, captions). Additional support included:

- an extra teacher
- increased contact time with learners to complete their learning and assessment tasks
- an interpreter to allow a hearing trainer to assist
- additional one-on-one guidance for learners as needed.

Since COVID-19, this extra support for learners has taken on greater importance and the learning is now delivered remotely.

NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) also funds a range of supports for learners with disability to assist with their access to and participation in education. The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) has developed guidance on the division of responsibilities between the NDIS and training providers, with examples of supports generally funded by the NDIS and other parties. An overview of education-related supports generally funded by the NDIS is at **Appendix 4**.

The division of responsibilities is usually resolved at a local level. Determining funding responsibility can be complicated, which may be impacted by the type of support required for a learner, and the learner's NDIS status. The following is an example of how TAFEs address this issue and support learners to access the NDIS.

Example – Melbourne Polytechnic's partnership with Araluen helping learners to access NDIS supports

Melbourne Polytechnic has partnered with Araluen, an NDIS service provider, to provide information to current and prospective learners with disability to help them understand the supports that can be accessed under the NDIS. The partnership draws upon both organisations' expertise and provides "an enhanced platform for better career planning and development".¹⁸

¹⁸ Araluen 2018, *Partnering to achieve better lives through inclusive, community-based learning*, viewed 28 September 2020 <<https://www.araluen.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Araluen-MP-DL-2018-Brochure-Soft-FINAL.pdf>>

THE TRAINING AND PRACTICAL, POLICY AND CURRICULUM SUPPORT TAFE TEACHERS NEED TO MAXIMISE THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF LEARNERS WITH DISABILITY

Experiences of learners within TAFE are influenced by the quality of teaching provided. Creating an accessible and flexible workplace supports staff with disability and benefits other staff and learners.

- Developing teacher capability to teach learners with diverse needs is a priority for TAFEs.
- Increasing the number of ongoing teaching positions across TAFEs is supporting greater stability in the sector and contributes to the quality of training.

TAFE TEACHER TRAINING

Highlighting the impact that teaching quality has on a learner's experience at TAFE, a priority recommendation from the Review commissioned by the Department and TAFEs was that teacher capability be developed to teach learners with diverse needs, including:

- Flexible approaches to teaching
- Understanding the needs of diverse groups
- Soft skills for communicating and interacting with all learners.

This recommendation is currently being implemented.

Initiatives that support the TAFE teaching workforce to maximise the learning experiences of learners with disability are outlined below.

Victorian TAFE Teaching Staff Multi-Enterprise Agreement

The Victorian TAFE Teaching Staff Multi-Enterprise Agreement 2018 (MEA) between the Australian Education Union and the Victorian TAFE Association recognises the central role of TAFE teachers in delivering quality training. The MEA includes reforms to increase hours of teaching delivery, enhance flexibility in course scheduling, reduce the proportion of TAFE teachers in casual employment and increase TAFE teaching salaries by 24 per cent over four years. These elements aim to increase the status of TAFE teachers and also the number of ongoing teaching positions across TAFEs.

By increasing the number of ongoing teaching positions across TAFE, the MEA is leading to more stability in the TAFE sector. This stability contributes to improvements in the quality of training and better outcomes for TAFE learners, including learners with disability.

Alongside the MEA agreement, the government provides additional funding to support the professional development of TAFE teaching staff, to undertake gap training and elevate their quality as professional educators.

TAFE Teaching Capability Development Fund

The TAFE Teaching Capability Development Fund supports quality TAFE teaching and professional development within TAFEs. The fund is a two-year professional development program

that extends to June 2021. It consists of four parameters; teaching excellence and assessment practice; industry immersion; digital literacy; and capacity for innovation and change. This enables TAFE teachers to better respond to the increasingly complex and changing demands of learners and to develop training strategies for disadvantaged learners and those with diverse needs.

To date, most professional development activities have focussed on improving teaching excellence and digital literacy. With the onset of COVID-19, all TAFEs have adapted and accelerated professional development programs to upskill teachers in delivering online learning.

Standards for Teaching of Vocational Education and Training

Victorian TAFEs must make sure training and assessment complies with national standards as set out in the *Standards for Registered Training Organisations Amendment 2017*. This includes ensuring that training delivery and assessment is conducted by those who:

- have the necessary training and assessment competencies
- have the relevant vocational competencies at least to the level being delivered or assessed
- can demonstrate current industry skills directly relevant to the training/assessment being delivered
- continue to develop their VET knowledge and skills, industry currency and trainer/assessor competence.

The Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAE) is a national standard for TAFE trainers. It provides individuals with the skills and knowledge to train and assess in the TAFE system.

The design and content of the TAE Training and Education Training Package (TAE training package) supports equitable access and progression for all learners, including learners with disability. The TAE training package also provides advice on reasonable adjustment considerations specific to learners with disability.

It is the responsibility of the TAFE delivering and assessing qualifications to:

- ensure that training and assessment processes and methods do not disadvantage individual learners
- determine the needs of individual learners and to provide access to any educational and support services necessary.

In 2019, two units with a focus on delivering to learners with disability were developed as electives for the TAE training package. The electives are:

- TAEXDB401 Plan and implement individual support plans for learners with disability. This unit is packaged as an elective in the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. The outcomes of the unit focus on determining and addressing the educational options and support needs of a learner with disability and implementing support that enables learners with different types of disability to access education and training opportunities.
- TAEXDB501 Develop and implement accessible training and assessment plans for learners with disability. This unit is packaged as an elective in the Diploma of Vocational Education and Training and the Diploma of Training Design and Development. The outcome of the unit focuses on developing and implementing a training and assessment plan that ensures it is accessible to learners with disability.

TAFE AS A DISABILITY INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

In 2019, the Department and TAFEs commissioned a second review into TAFE as a disability inclusive workplace. According to this research, creating TAFE as disability inclusive workplaces benefits employees with disability and the broader TAFE community.

Creating an accessible and flexible workplace supports staff with disability but also supports staff without disability and creates a more positive culture for learners. Diverse workplaces are also better able to understand the diverse communities they serve.

Research also shows that diverse workplaces contribute to innovation as they establish a culture in which staff feel free to speak up, ask questions and suggest novel ideas. This culture leads to improvement in performance within workplaces.¹⁹

The review into TAFE as a disability inclusive workplace also recognised the important role of TAFE as employers. They are a significant employer, particularly in regional areas. There is a substantial opportunity for TAFEs as both employers and as training providers to improve the workforce participation for Victorians with disability.

In response to the disability inclusive workplace review TAFEs are implementing the following recommendations:

- Promoting mentally health workplaces.
- Advertising jobs on disability employment platforms.
- Giving all employees the opportunity to identify any adjustment needs at the onboarding stage, using language that is enabling and noting the broad spectrum of employee needs.
- Agreement on consistent and defined data measures across the employee pathway.

One example of how a regional TAFE is working towards becoming a disability inclusive workplace is through a traineeship program.

Example – South West TAFE traineeship program building a disability inclusive workplace

South West TAFE runs a traineeship program each year for prospective employees, with quotas for applicants with disability. South West TAFE partners with employment providers to identify applicants, and places them within different teams in the TAFE to work. HR practitioners say that the traineeship program has helped to raise awareness about employees with disability across the TAFE.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Universal design improves learning outcomes for all learners. Flexibility in delivery and learning materials is essential in improving outcomes for all learners.

Universal design is the design of products, environments, programs and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design.²⁰

¹⁹ Hewlett, S.A, Marshall, M. and Sherbin, L. 2013, *How diversity can drive innovation*, Harvard Business Review, December 2013.

²⁰ United Nations n.d., *Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, 'Article 2 – Definitions', viewed 23 September 2020 <<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-2-definitions.html>>

In some TAFE courses, universal design approaches to learning and assessment are developed to support learners with diverse needs. This strategy is used particularly by teachers in courses with a larger proportion of learners with disability.

Some TAFEs provide training for teachers on pedagogical practices for learners with disability. The Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training also provides a range of material describing how to adapt pedagogy for learners with disability.

Adaptive technology and online learning platforms are also improving accessibility for some learners with disability. Learners with vision impairment can use screen readers because of this technology, instead of relying on other resources such as note-takers.

Example – Swinburne University Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) to support people living and working with individuals with Autism

In 2015, Swinburne University developed a free Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) for parents, families and carers living and working with individuals who have Autism. The MOOC design included a six-week course, using a scenario-based learning approach to support, guide and share stories and experiences from parents and experts in the field, with participants receiving a certificate upon completing the course. Today, participants can study the Autism MOOC at their own pace through an online program.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRENT GOVERNMENT AND TAFE POLICIES AND PROGRAMS IN SUPPORTING LEARNERS WITH DISABILITY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Efforts and actions will continue to make improvements to access to TAFE for learners with disability and current reviews will inform the future direction.

- The Victorian Government is continuing to take action to improve Victoria's training system.
- The Macklin Review is currently finalising reform options, including strengthening access and equity, to improve the Victorian training system.
- TAFEs have made a collective commitment to supporting people with disability through their learning experience and are committed to a vision where TAFEs lead the training system to become a place where people with disability thrive.

SKILLS FIRST

The 2018 *Skills First* Evaluation found the proportion of learners achieving improved job outcomes after training has increased slightly, whereas disadvantaged learners' job outcomes have remained stable. **This highlights the challenge for TAFEs and other training providers; to continue to support disadvantaged learners and to work alongside other services such as health and community organisations.** The evaluation recommended a holistic approach in delivering support programs (at both the Victorian and Commonwealth levels) to improve training outcomes for disadvantaged learners.

The evaluation identified opportunities for the Department to improve its administration of the system to:

- bolster current performance monitoring systems
- simplify and strengthen funding and performance arrangements for TAFEs
- incorporate local labour market data to better inform course alignment with jobs
- focus on improving access and equity in the VET training system
- build on current activities to improve the quality of teaching, assessment and curricula.

The Victorian Government is continuing to connect with learners, employers, TAFEs, universities, community and private providers – as well as the broader community – to improve Victoria's training system.

This action includes:

- advocating, at the national level, for a better connected post-secondary education system and the removal of current Commonwealth funding inconsistencies that advantage higher education over VET

- continuing to improve the alignment between training and jobs, including ensuring the training system supports the delivery of the Government's economic, infrastructure and social priorities
- supporting the development of a highly valued network of adaptable, sustainable TAFEs through close partnerships with TAFEs
- strengthening apprenticeships and traineeships through improved learning materials, independent assessment processes and higher apprenticeships
- providing targeted supports to learners throughout their training and transition to the workforce.

REVIEWS AND REFORM PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE ACCESS

There are a range of activities under way to examine aspects of the VET system that will influence how TAFEs can best support learners with disability.

The Victorian Government is undertaking a significant review into the state's post-secondary education and training system to ensure Victoria has the skills needed for our growing economy. The review is being led by Ms Jenny Macklin. The Macklin Review is to make recommendations to ensure the state has a quality TAFE and training system ready to equip Victorians with the skills they need for current and future jobs, with strong connections and pathways between VET and higher education as well as schooling.

In March 2020, the Macklin Review released a broad-ranging Issues Paper. The Issues Paper highlighted areas where recent Victorian Government reforms have lifted quality standards, supported TAFEs, stabilised subsidies, and helped those that need it most. In relation to disability, the Issues Paper makes specific reference to the need for increased supports for learners with a disability to ensure they are supported to succeed in their course, in a way that meets their unique aspirations and goals. The Issues Paper also highlights the important role of VET in building the NDIS workforce.

The Macklin Review is currently finalising reform options, including strengthening access and equity, and recommendations for the Victorian Government in relation to improving the Victorian post-secondary education and training system. These proposals are aimed at achieving the review's three goals of relevance to skills needs; quality teaching and learning; and equity in participation and outcomes. The review is due to provide a final report to the Victorian Government in October 2020.

The Office for Disability released a discussion paper in 2019 to inform the *State Disability Plan 2021-24*. The paper outlines six topics for targeted feedback. They include:

1. Improving how we describe disability and disability inclusion in the next plan.
2. Finding better ways to include people with disability in making the next plan.
3. Strengthening the state disability plan outcomes framework.
4. Introducing overarching approaches to strengthen government commitments under the new plan.
5. Supporting the interface between NDIS and mainstream services.
6. Strengthening disability inclusion through the review of the *Disability Act 2006*.

Consultation on the 2021-24 plan has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. All face-to-face consultation activities have been suspended. The Office for Disability is considering options for engaging with the community and is extending its consultation phase.

Outcomes from the review of the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Cth), the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, and the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with a Disability will also be considered in this context.

NEXT STEPS

TAFEs are continuing to implement the recommendations outlined at **Appendix 1** to elevate best practice to support access and achievement for learners with disability in response to the 2019 Review. A broad range of consultations were undertaken to inform the recommendations which have considered current barriers and supports for learners within TAFE. **This has resulted in a collective commitment to supporting people with disability through their learning experience, consisting of outreach, identification, wellbeing, pedagogy and pathways.**

This has been part of a broader commitment by the TAFEs to improve disability inclusion, through delivering quality NDIS-related training to meet workforce demand and maintaining inclusive workplaces for employees with disability, as large-scale public sector employers.

The Inquiry into Access to TAFE for learners with disability provides a further opportunity for the Department to hear from a range of stakeholders on barriers to accessing TAFE and the strategies and supports that would improve participation and outcomes for learners with disability. This Department looks forward to reviewing the recommendations from the Inquiry to inform future actions.

The Department recognises the important role that education and training plays in improving life outcomes and is committed to maximising not only access but outcomes for learners with disability in Victoria. **TAFEs are committed to a vision where Victorian TAFEs lead the training system to become a place where people with disability thrive.**

APPENDICES

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APPENDIX 1: RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS AND ACHIEVEMENT FOR LEARNERS WITH DISABILITY

| Outreach | Identification | Wellbeing | Pedagogy | Pathways |
|--|--|---|---|---|
| <p>1. Deliver (or continue to deliver) school outreach programs for both mainstream and special schools.</p> <p>2. Conduct outreach to local disability service providers to raise awareness of TAFE options.</p> <p>3. Improve communication between TAFE and schools (mainstream and specialist) to ensure that TAFEs receive up-to-date learner data.</p> | <p>4. Carefully word enrolment forms, using strength-based reinforcement.</p> <p>5. Develop resources that provide learners with guidance on when and how to identify their disability.</p> <p>6. Simplify processes for identifying disability, including:</p> <p>a) Train course advisors to be more disability competent by ensuring they are confident to engage with people from diverse backgrounds and are aware of when to refer learners on to Disability Liaison Officers.</p> <p>b) Encourage disability liaison officers to email learners who identify as having a disability to inform them of supports available.</p> | <p>7. Implement mentoring programs for all learners. Key considerations include:</p> <p>a) Providing mentors with sufficient support, and professionalising the mentor cohort where possible.</p> <p>b) Promoting an inclusive culture by making the service available to all learners, while targeting learners most in need to ensure they receive the support they need to succeed.</p> <p>8. Ensure that zero-tolerance policies for bullying and harassment are in place, including accountabilities to ensure that teachers and staff enact the policy.</p> <p>9. Introduce innovative models to improve learner mental health, including actively involving learners in developing new initiatives.</p> <p>10. Establish inclusive common areas that encourage all learners to mingle.</p> | <p>11. Consider establishing teacher communities of practice to share best practice teaching strategies, including planning for universal design and reasonable adjustments.</p> <p>12. Draw on existing online resources to support teachers in working with learners with disability.</p> <p>13. Develop teacher capability to teach learners with diverse needs, including:</p> <p>a) Implementing flexible approaches to teaching.</p> <p>b) Understanding the needs of diverse cohorts.</p> <p>c) Soft skills for communicating and interacting with all learners.</p> <p>14. Invest in adaptive design to maximise accessibility of existing buildings and technology.</p> <p>15. Improve communication channels between Disability Liaison Officers and teaching staff to ensure that disability access plans are passed on to teachers and learners</p> | <p>16. Raise awareness of transition to work funding that is available to some learners through the NDIS, as well as potential pathways for learners who are not NDIS participants.</p> <p>17. Continue to offer work placements for all TAFE learners, or where work placements are not possible promote links with industry, such as inviting industry representatives to speak to classes.</p> <p>18. Consider traineeships, work experience programs and apprenticeships that lead to jobs within TAFE.</p> |
| <p>Evaluation</p> <p>19. Improve processes for collecting data on learners with disability to allow for benchmarking and monitoring of progress across all stages of the learner pathway.</p> | | | | |

APPENDIX 2: SKILLS AND JOB CENTRES

Skills and Job Centres are based in TAFEs across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria in the following locations:

Bendigo Kangan TAFE

Bendigo: 136 McCrae Street, Bendigo 3550

Phone: 1300 100 606

Email: skills&jobscentre@bendigotafe.edu.au

Broadmeadows Campus: Building A, Office 121, Pearcedale Parade, Broadmeadows

Phone: 1300 100 606

Email: skills&jobscentre@kangan.edu.au

Box Hill Institute

Box Hill Campus: Ground Floor, Building 8, 465 Elgar Road, Box Hill 3128

CAE Campus: Level 3, 253 Flinders Lane, Melbourne 3000

Lilydale Campus: Level 3, LA Building, 1 Jarlo Drive, Lilydale 3140

Phone: 03 8892 1350

Email: sajc.elgar@boxhill.edu.au

Chisholm Institute

Dandenong Campus: 311 Lonsdale Street, Dandenong, 3175

Phone: (03) 9212 4909

Email: skillsandjobs@chisholm.edu.au

Federation TAFE

Ballarat SMB Campus: 20 Grant Street, Ballarat 3350

Horsham Campus: Building M, 289 Baillie Street, Horsham 3400

Phone: 03 5327 6540

Email: skillsandjobs@federation.edu.au

The Gordon

Geelong: Geelong City Campus, G building, Level 1 Geelong

Phone: 03 5225 0700

Wyndham: 24 Watton St, Werribee

Email: skillscentre@gordontafe.edu.au

GOTAFE

Benalla Campus: 57 Samara Road, Benalla 3672

Seymour Campus: Wallis Street, Seymour 3660

Shepparton Campus: 152-200 Fryers Street, Shepparton 3630

Wangaratta Campus: 27 Docker Street, Wangaratta 3677

Phone: 1800 SKILLJOB (1800 754 555)

Holmesglen Institute

Chadstone Campus: Corner Batesford and Warrigal Road, Chadstone, 3148

City Campus: 332 St Kilda Road, Southbank, 3006

Phone: 03 9564 2755

Email: sjc@holmesglen.edu.au

Melbourne Polytechnic

Preston Campus: 77 Georges Road, Preston 3072

Phone: 03 9269 1932 or 03 9269 1934

Email: sjc@melbournepolytechnic.edu.au

RMIT University

Carlton Campus: 39-49 Cardigan Street, Carlton 3053

Phone: 03 9925 2552

Email: sajc@rmit.edu.au

South West TAFE

Warrnambool: The Old Courthouse, Timor Street, Warrnambool 3280

Phone: 03 5564 8515

Email: skillsandjobscentre@swtafe.edu.au

Sunraysia Institute of TAFE

Mildura Campus: 453 Benetook Avenue, Mildura 3502

Phone: 03 5022 3999

Swan Hill Campus: 64 Sea Lake-Swan Hill Road, Swan Hill 3585

Phone: 1300 478 648

Email: skillsandjobs@sunitafe.edu.au

Swinburne University of Technology

Croydon: Building CA, 12 – 50 Norton Road, Croydon VIC 3136

Outreach: Building WA, 369 Stud Road, Wantirna 3152 - please phone or email to book an appointment

Phone: (03) 9726 1450

Email: swinburnehub@swin.edu.au

TAFE Gippsland

Bairnsdale Campus: 48 Main Street, Bairnsdale 3875

Leongatha Campus: 129 Nerrena Road, Leongatha 3953

Morwell Campus: Cnr Princes Drive and Monash Way, Morwell 3840

Sale Campus: 75 Desailly Street, Sale 3852

Warragul Campus: 116-118 Queen Street, Warragul 3820

Phone: 1300 282 317

Email: skillsjc@tafegippsland.edu.au

Victoria University Polytechnic

MetroWest: 138 Nicholson St, Footscray 3011

Sunshine Campus: Building W, 460 Ballarat Road, Sunshine 3020

Phone: 03 9919 9988

Email: sjc@vu.edu.au

William Angliss Institute

Melbourne Campus: 555 La Trobe Street, Melbourne 3000

Phone: 1300 ANGLISS (1300 264 5477)

Email: skillsjobscentre@angliss.edu.au

Wodonga TAFE

Wodonga: 87 McKoy Street, Wodonga 3690

Outreach centres:

TAFESpace – Lawrence Street, Wodonga

Myrtleford – Neighbourhood Centre, 156 Myrtleford St, Ph: (03) 5752 2775

Beechworth – Quercus, 30 Ford Street, Ph: (03) 5728 2388

Tallangatta – Community Centre, 35 Towong St, Ph: (02) 6071 5100

Corryong - Neighbourhood Centre, 39 Hanson St, Ph: (02)6076 2176

Phone: 1300 698 233

Email: skillsandjobs@wodongatafe.edu.au

APPENDIX 3: ADULT COMMUNITY AND FURTHER EDUCATION (ACFE) AND LEARN LOCALS

Victoria's unique pre-accredited education and training helps Victorian adults build their education capacity and core skills they need for study, work and life. Core skills include literacy, numeracy, English language, employability and digital skills.

Pre-accredited training is designed around a quality framework. Pre-accredited programs are short modular courses designed for learners to gain confidence and skills, focusing on creating pathways to further education and training or a step to employment.

The ACFE Board is a statutory authority under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006. Through the ACFE Board, the Government provides funding to community-based organisations, known as Learn Local organisations (Learn Locals), and an adult education institution Australian Multicultural Education Services (AMES) Australia.

Learn Locals deliver place-based, inclusive, and flexible pre-accredited education and training that matches the needs of their local communities and businesses. Learn Locals can also deliver other programs, such as personal development programs, accredited training, VCE and VCAL.

Learn Locals are welcoming and highly accessible. There are about 270 Learn Local providers across Victoria. The network services nearly 30,000 Victorians a year including people already in the workforce who may want to upskill or reskill to maintain employment or seek new opportunities.

In the Learn Local provider network, there are organisations who specialise in programs for people with disability.

APPENDIX 4: SUMMARY OF HIGHER EDUCATION, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING RELATED SUPPORTS GENERALLY FUNDED BY NDIS²¹

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provides individualised support for people with disability, their families and carers. NDIS participants are given a plan of supports which is developed to their individual needs.

Supports generally funded by NDIS

Assistance with daily personal activities – individualised assistance associated with the functional impact on the participant’s activities of daily living, including personal care while attending higher education and VET activities (e.g. for assistance with eating).

Assistance in coordinating or managing life stages, transitions and supports – specialist support to assist a participant transition to higher education or VET to post-education options such as building the participant’s capacity for independent living and self-care, development of social and communication skills, development of specialist behaviour management plans and enabling the participant to travel to their place of education.

Supports which, dependent on their purpose, may be funded by the NDIS or other parties

Aids and equipment

The NDIS: aids and equipment which are required because of a participant’s functional impairment and required regardless of the activity they are undertaking (e.g. hearing aids, wheelchairs, personal communications devices), but not any requiring medical or surgical procedures.

Other parties: aids and equipment, which are:

- A reasonable adjustment to enable access to an institution (e.g. ramps, lifts, hearing loops, or other capital works), and/or
- Required for an educational outcome (e.g. modified computer hardware, education software, braille textbooks), and/or
- Fixed or non-transportable in higher education and vocational education and training that enable a learner access to education (e.g. hoists).

Assistance with transport

The NDIS: specialist transport to and from a higher education and VET facility required as a result of a participant’s disability and only in circumstances where the participant is unable to use public transport and where no other transport option is appropriate,

Other parties: transport for educational activities (e.g. excursions, field trips) or responsibilities of transport providers (e.g. reasonable adjustments to busses)

²¹ Source: National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) 2019, *Planning Operational Guideline Appendix 1 – Table of guidance on whether a support is most appropriately funded by the NDIS*, 'Higher education, vocational education and training', viewed 21 September 2020 < <https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/operational-guidelines/planning-operational-guideline/planning-operational-guideline-appendix-1-table-guidance-whether-support-most-appropriately-funded-ndis>>.

Specialist support and training

The NDIS: for higher education and VET staff related to the individual personal support needs of a participant, including individually tailored plans.

Other parties: general education and training for education staff to support and engage learners with disability in general.

Therapeutic support, including assistance by allied health professions such as speech and language pathology, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, audiology, and therapy delivered by a therapy assistant under the supervision of the therapist:

The NDIS: to support a learner's functional capacity which are delivered in education facilities for non-educational purposes (i.e. where the education facility is being used, but the therapy is not for educational purposes).

Other parties: where it is primarily for the purpose of educational attainment, participation in the curriculum or a clinical support.

Higher education and vocational education and training course fees

The NDIS: course fees for training which is to develop personal, life skills or work readiness development (such as a Certificate 1 in Work Readiness).

Other parties: course fees for general learning (e.g. French language course) and vocation-specific courses (e.g. Diploma in Horticulture).
