

Submission  
Part A  
Name withheld

## Inquiry into access to TAFE for learners with disability

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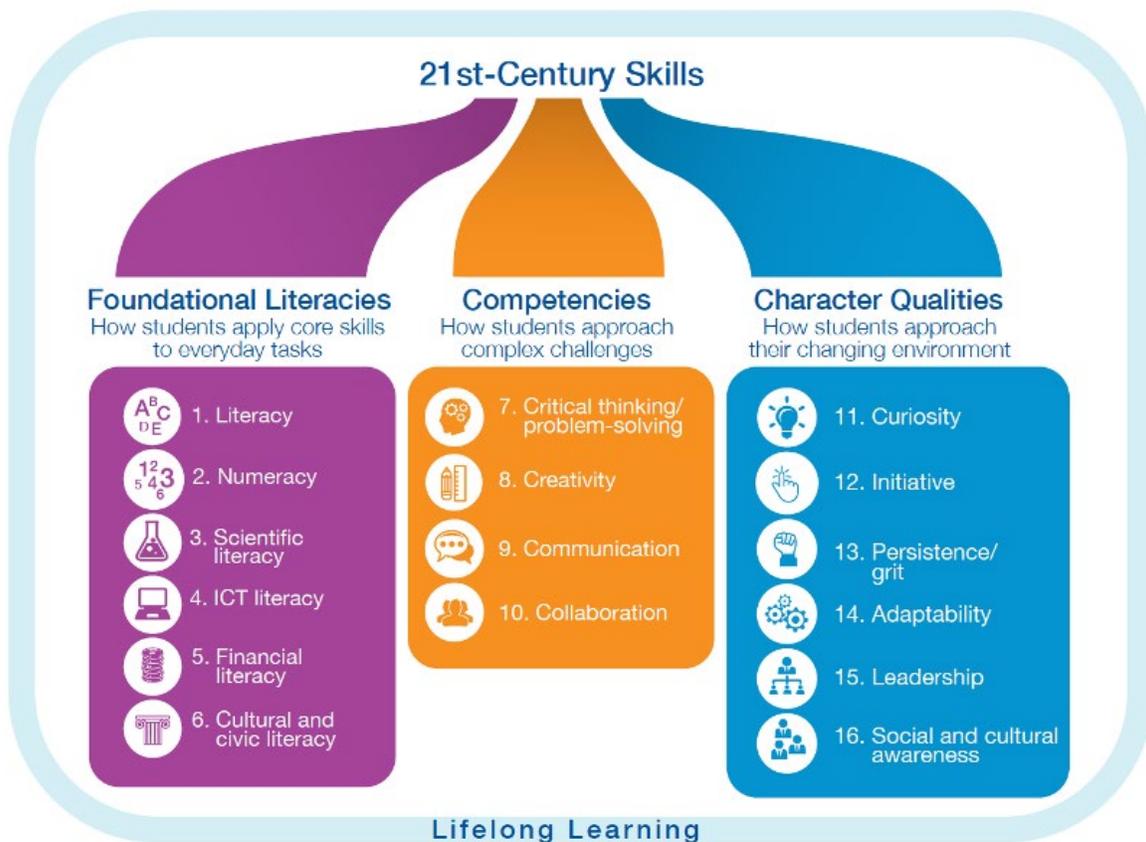
Thank you for the opportunity to submit to this inquiry and the extension granted.

### **Value statement**

I believe in the value of public education, i.e. public schools and TAFE etc. I also think there should be no educational, financial, funding, system or full employment discrimination. It follows that a social model of disability would allow the most flexible choice to sit with the student with a disability and that funding should follow what is deemed the best course, mode of delivery, speed, curriculum modification, location appropriate for the student, including language/ method of instruction. I am against any life time or voucher system thinking and believe that the micro-credentialing could not just be an agile and positive way of training for ease of moving from one job cluster to another (see FYA and overseas moves of “rationalising” and “clustering” the number of qualifications) but could have a very negative effect if education providers could move to credentialise anything anybody ever wants to do in order to grow the education market. Dumbing down and silos are already real threats in our education systems.

### **21<sup>st</sup> century skills**

TAFE education should be based on the most up to date labour market insights, seamless and personalised knowledge of the students and strength-based approaches to educating them. If the TAFE workforce is itself diverse and neurodiverse in particular this would make inclusion real and felt. Automation is real so fund free TAFE courses with a view to where skills are needed and where they are least vulnerable to automation and machine learning of any kind. For example, as machines are being used to write texts, make oracy a more prominent feature of TAFE for learners with a disability. At minimum adopt the below definition of skills.



### TAFE and citizenship

I also believe that literacy and numeracy should be just as important as citizenship, financial and political literacy so that learners with a disability can shape and affect all spheres of their lives, including building their community connectedness through service learning, bilingual education, metacognitive and oracy skills.

### Full range of adult roles in a multidisciplinary world

Learning readiness needs to be accompanied by “stretch goals” so everyone can be met where they are at, including with integration aides or in class support/ curriculum modification, whilst also experiencing the relevance of what they learn and setting goals they can reach. Asking too little of someone can be as bad as asking too much of someone. Independence and self-determination to control their learning are part of a humanist approach to TAFE.

The purpose of a (TAFE) education should be to give learners the gift of a sense of themselves, confidence and “supported failure” to give them resilience, equipping students to pursue a meaningful career and life, shape their own expectations of success and experience success. This, however, should go beyond functional and vocational literacy and life skills to enable real self-determination and empower learners with real oracy skills, a rich range of literacies which may include biliteracy (two

languages) and other culturally and personally goals: Academic and vocational courses that in combination allow them to occupy the full range of adult roles in their lives.

The curriculum and powerful knowledge should be delivered as a combination of personal (elective) and compulsory (professional/ vocational) curricular choices. Parity with the University system would allow Victoria to build a TAFE system that is a key stakeholder in climate adaptation and other 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges.

If there is a “bias” in funding, it should be to build up TAFEs as the strong, powerful players in shaping the innovation economy and skills agenda and to work with industry and its peak bodies to fulfill its mission in the entrepreneurial state (see Mazzucato’s work, as well as “Doughnut economics” from Kate Raworth on transition economics).

I do not think it is acceptable for TAFEs to be only vocational in orientation as in this economic climate of increasingly collaborative competition we need to bring interdisciplinary and postdisciplinary thinking and practice to bear. We would therefore shortchange learners with a disability if they get a very narrow education at TAFE and do not make them competitive in a job market that anticipates 17 career transitions in a lifetime and operates on job cluster notions. We need a **design for occupational mobility for learners with a disability.**

### **Oracy**

One of the most important aims for TAFEs is to establish and/ or strengthen oral language competence. Pamela Snow is a wonderful academic who should be invited to address the Inquiry. Here are some of her recent charts which establish the relevance to the Inquiry. I believe whatever we do to help learners with a disability will be of universal design quality, thereby lifting learning outcomes for all learners.

# ORAL LANGUAGE COMPETENCE

as a solid foundation in early life

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- Marketable employment skills
- Social and economic engagement
- Transition to further education or training
- Academic achievement and retention

Social-emotional and behavioural wellbeing; social cognition skills

- Fluency
- Comprehension
- Morphology and etymology
- Decoding
- Text exposure and print concepts
- Vocabulary
- Phonological and phonemic awareness

INSTRUCTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Transition to reading, writing, and spelling



Both continue to develop throughout childhood & adolescence



Development of prosocial interpersonal skills

HOME LANGUAGE AND LITERACY ENVIRONMENT

- Scaffolding from parents and teachers
- Structural and pragmatic language
- Language experience
- "Serve and return" interactions
- Social and human capital

Early oral language experience: 0-5 years

Expressive and receptive

Solid ground: Social and emotional contexts for language use

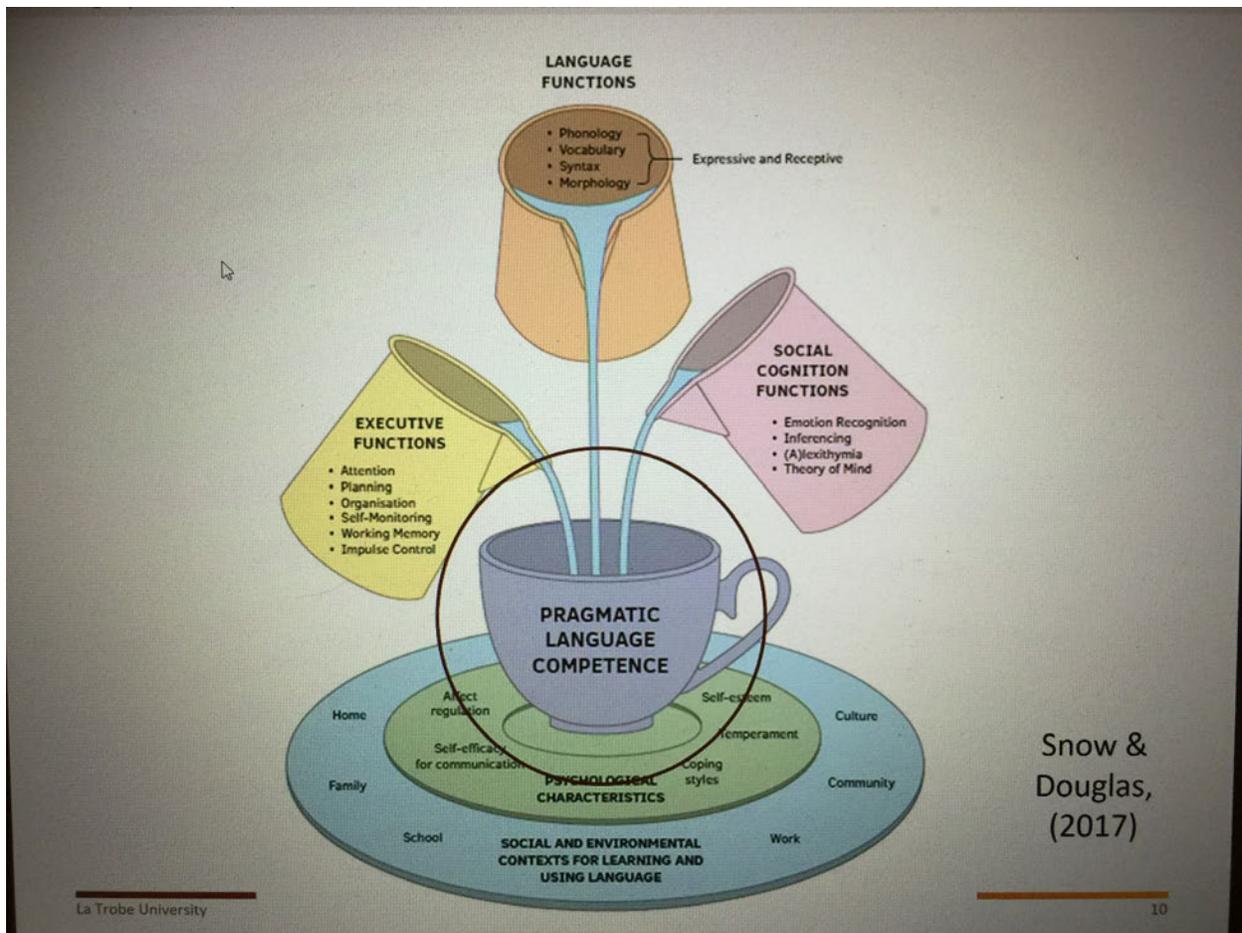
## Language Disorders make it hard to

- ❖ Tell a story (e.g. provide evidence; speak up for oneself)
- ❖ Consider listener perspective (i.e., judge what the listener needs to know / already knows / may not already know)
- ❖ Use specific vocabulary (instead of “you know”, “thing”)
- ❖ Understand idiomatic / figurative language, even at a simple level
- ❖ Get a joke / discern good humour from intended offence
- ❖ Keep up with social banter
- ❖ Be an assertive communicator who can share the load, e.g., can
  - ❖ Correct a mis-understanding on part of the other speaker
  - ❖ Avoid and / or repair inadvertent offence
  - ❖ Reflect on one’s own communicative competence
- ❖ Benefit from verbally mediated interventions
- ❖ Succeed academically



## Take-home messages?

- Language skills are developmentally critical but also **highly vulnerable** – not always in ways that are visible or well-understood
- Risk and protective factors are **cumulative** and academic achievement is significant on both sides of the ledger – both as an input and as an output.
- Oral language underpins **academic achievement**, especially via reading and writing success.
- Some groups are **disproportionately represented** in CP and YJ data
- Early reading success is needed to disrupt otherwise problematic **trajectories**
- Lifting the performance of children in the “long tail of under-achievement” stands to **lift the outcomes for all children**
- Problems with language and literacy in the early years do not magically resolve themselves. It gets **harder to intervene as more time goes by.**



I recommend a rigorous assessment when these learners enter TAFE and to establish a baseline of performance, literacy, numeracy, language competence, life skills, and strength etc. Interdisciplinary assessment from OTs to speechies is as vital as is peer support. This interdisciplinary support needs to continue on a need basis throughout the TAFE course, a professional pool to draw on assisting case managers.

### **Family advocacy and conflict: the need to fund case management for these learners**

The Inquiry needs to recognise that family/ carers can have a positive and a negative influence on the learners with a disability so we should have advocates who can step in as case managers to ascertain if and when assistance is needed and to make sure no one is left behind and everyone knows how to navigate the system. Informal parent/ carer support groups can work really well in primary schools, fade in secondary schools and I assume do not exist in TAFEs. This needs to change. Juvenile justice settings also need to be given special attention as learners with a disability are especially prevalent there (see Pamela Snow's and Parkville College's work).

## **Schools and TAFEs as sites of prevention and early intervention before entering the labour market**

“I want to work”, the Employment Services 2020 Report cites on page 24 two important aspects of unemployment and disability:

“Working with job seekers with a disability

27 per cent of all job seekers in employment services have a disability

But they only make up 15 per cent of job seekers who stay in employment for 26 weeks or more

Many job seekers with a disability are not getting the support they need

The new system will focus more on helping those who need it most, including job seekers with a disability and give them the support they need to find and stay in work

We will work closely with Disability Employment Services to make sure we get the best results”

“Job seekers should have more choice and control and the opportunity to transfer if they feel a particular service is better positioned to assist them.”

Disability Employment Australia

It follows that TAFE is set up to support choice and control whilst obviously preparing these learners with the knowledge of work rights and other skills to navigate and participate as fully as possible in the labour market. TAFE should focus on the areas which are least vulnerable to automation and hence boost oracy in these learners amongst other skills.

## **Self-determined but informed transition planning to be mandated**

Students with a disability at school need an equitable transition process. For early school leavers the DET’s On Track data 2019 already points to the fact that they complete fewer career activities than their year 12 completing peers. This means that the current DET exit form needs to be underpinned by a proper process to ensure no one is left behind at this vital point of leaving school. Audits need to be conducted and the form itself strengthened from an equity point of view so schools take it consistently seriously.

Unfortunately, the difficulties parents and students with a disability face to find and evaluate post school options are widespread. A 2020 publication summarised their findings:

Due to the lack of post-school support in schools, students with autism continue to be disengaged from the transition planning process.

- Students in this study demonstrated a lack of knowledge of the transition planning process and were unaware of what transition planning entailed.

- Many students expressed the desire to be highly involved in the transition planning process to be able to create an independent path for themselves.
- Many students reported that they contributed minimally at transition meetings (i.e. provide yes/no responses vs. voicing their opinions).
- Many students reported being unaware of existing transition practices (i.e., work experience opportunities) that were in place for them.

Roshini Chandroo, Iva Strnadová, Therese M. Cumming, Is it really student-focused planning? Perspectives of students with autism, *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, Volume 107, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2020.103783>.

These authors conclude: “There is an urgent need for transition planning to be mandated in Australia to allow students with disabilities to receive appropriate support in school (i.e., schools and teachers should actively advocate person-centered planning and support students to develop self-determination skills).” This is not enough. Mandating it is correct, but audits need to be conducted. There are too many who do not aspire for students with a disability and school autonomy can mean inequities go unchecked. For a thorough investigation please see this article<sup>1</sup> and the Castan Report.

Make sure TAFE enrolment practices are not mirroring school practices and audit the processes and recommend best practice and offer PD for staff so real capacity building takes place:

Our research reveals that some government schools continue to turn away students because of their disability. This often takes the form of school leaders discouraging parents from seeking enrolment for their child, on the basis that the school isn't the right 'fit' for the student, or can't accommodate the student's needs. This is occurring in an informal manner, without an analysis of the adjustments needed by the child, and whether they can be reasonably provided by the school. Once enrolled and in the classroom, students are not always receiving appropriately designed and implemented adjustments. Schools often rely heavily on aides who can support multiple students, rather than implementing more complex, targeted adjustments. Our research also indicates that teachers often struggle to modify curricula in ways which suit the needs and capacities of individual students with disability, instead simply 'dumbing down' work tasks.<sup>2</sup>

Examine the different TAFEs' capacity to deploy inclusive practice, see

<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/impact-of-tafe-inclusiveness-strategies>

Make sure student inclusiveness is linked to workforce inclusiveness, including the use of “reasonable adjustments”, inherent requirements before someone starts and also assistive technologies as obviously as universal building design etc.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://t.co/X5sIHKE4dw?amp=1>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.monash.edu/\\_\\_data/assets/file/0016/1412170/Castan-Centre-Improving-Educational-Outcomes-for-Students-with-Disability.pdf](https://www.monash.edu/__data/assets/file/0016/1412170/Castan-Centre-Improving-Educational-Outcomes-for-Students-with-Disability.pdf) 2018, p. 3

## **Transition, triades and integration of schools and TAFEs as and with workplaces**

TAFEs need to play their part to integrate with schools and employer engagement as we know that “Participation in meaningful paid and unpaid work experiences during the last years of school is consistently the most significant indicator of post-school success.”<sup>3</sup> As the “next educator” for many students with a disability, it is important for TAFEs to understand the following:

Young people with disabilities are more likely to get and keep a job if they:

- believe they can work and will get a job when they leave school and have people in their lives who believe they can work
- have done multiple work experiences while at school
- participate in work preparation activities at school
- have had a paid part-time job while at school
- have some social skills and are as independent as possible
- know people in the community and have good community networks.<sup>4</sup>

I highly recommend the Inner LEN’s report on employer engagement for students with a disability. More resources on this can also be found here: <https://www.voced.edu.au/vet-practitioner-resource-inclusive-education-and-training>

Liaison staff between schools, DET regional offices and TAFEs in the school transition need to be funded. Parents of children with a disability need to know who they can trust and where that person is. VSN/ USI and other identifiers could be utilized to identify learners with a disability.

School’s PSD may leave the student functionally illiterate and innumerate when they leave high school. So a general assessment at the beginning of the TAFE engagement should be compulsory. Learners with a disability also need to have real opportunities to experience their schooling and TAFE education as relevant and meaningful. This happens best through experiential learning, hence:

### **The real game changer is making schools first employers for everyone but especially these learners**

First of all, this Inquiry should make all schools first employers to ensure students with a disability get a culturally safe way to experience first employment and build employability from primary school. Career choices are formed in gender and class terms by then (See Jenny Gore’s work).

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<sup>3</sup> Inner LEN report, p. 8

<sup>4</sup> Inner LEN, p. 20

In secondary schools the following is already practice in leading schools that give students “any role or task that has a reasonable chance of success being done by a student”, in fact they it should be. This should then be continued in TAFE so TAFE routinely employ students with a disability. Secondary school student roles examples:

### **Student Employment Opportunities**

- School Newsletter Editors
- Social Media Managers
- Photographers
- 1:1 Afterschool Tutoring
- IT help desk
- Activities Leaders (\$10-20 per session)
- Office Administration
- Animal carers
- After school tutoring
- Classroom Assistants/ Tutors/ peer mentors for young learners
- English Conversation Tutors/ peer mentors for young learners
- Graphic Designers
- Gardeners
- Maintenance services
- Canteen Assistants
- Sound & Lighting technicians
- Catering Assistants
- Primary School Reading tutors
- Sports coaches
- Umpires
- Baristas
- Computer gaming teacher
- Educational consultants/ nothing for us without us/ experts of their own learning
- Plant maintenance - (indoor foliage)

Based on state employment laws (and two states/ territory laws in border regions) these could be based on employment or paid an honorarium. Multiple roles could be occupied/ matched depending on student interest and capacity but to obviously develop their full potential.

## Industries other than entertainment

Is there a minimum age of employment in industries other than entertainment?

- There is a **minimum age of 11 years** for children delivering newspapers and advertising material, or making deliveries for a registered pharmacist.
- In other types of work, **there is a minimum age of 13 years** for employment in industries other than entertainment.
- There is **no minimum age** for children working in a family business.
- Despite popular opinion, 14 years and 9 months is **not** the minimum age of employment – **to be employed without a permit, a child must be 15 years.**

Under the Child Employment Act 2003, children can be employed for a maximum of 3 hours per day and 12 hours per week during school term and a maximum of 6 hours per day and 30 hours per week during school holidays. These hours are inclusive of rest breaks.

Second, cost and recognition barriers need to be removed so TAFE and VETiS clusters improve student choice and allow specialisations for equity groups (e.g. disability but also gender) during their schooling and ease the transition to TAFE/ or later to higher education or other careers. A VET cluster might be way too big in class size compared to a work education or vocational course at TAFE with smaller classes more fit for purpose. However, TAFEs cannot offer their courses in schools as they are delineated as “post compulsory/ post school” this short-changes some students who need more targeted, smaller and more supportive learning whilst doing VET or VCAL. Currently, that represents a barrier both for credit and for cost reasons. There is no recognised prior learning available and the fees just to participate are staggering. So many students are bored at school, they do not know why they learn something and the hands on opportunities are too rare in schools.

Third, orientation and familiarisation for carers with TAFE is suboptimal. I have many ideas on how to improve this space and the transparency of the various offers. Social enterprise, cooperatives and other employers with disability friendly policies need to be connected into schools and TAFE desperately and urgently.

Fourth, career development needs to happen from primary school onwards. When students with a disability apply for Maccas they never had a formal interview before. No mock interviews at school and a terrible career expo at school. Victorians cannot assume that big employers stay first employers in an age of automation. Schools and TAFEs need to be funded to be the first employers for all children, therefore, but particularly for learners with a disability.

Fifth, intersectionality needs to be taking into consideration when designing disability-friendly education and employment offers. Unemployment has gone up massively for women (the so called “pink recession”) so transition from school to TAFE need to make sure the equity measures are strengthened and the exit form from schools is a rigorous and accountable process of handover so truancy or dropping out is case managed. The current resources might be a start, but the reality is until career

education is embedded in the curriculum, authentic learning tasks with community partners/ employers are offered throughout their schooling and across their subjects nothing will change sufficiently See the lack of deep practice of current approaches here <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/additional-needs/Pages/disability-leaving-school.aspx>

Sixth, triades, student, teacher and community partner, need to be an essential element for their education experience. In the early years the community partner can be the parent but in the teenage years this could be a peer or mentor of their chosen hobby/ interest/ industry or TAFE educator. This could be reviewed in the context of changing circumstances, interest and transitions and renewed to keep the social connectedness, speak to their strength and improve the relevance of what they are learning. It would avoid “micro-segregation” by making social bonds a feature of their educational experience.

Seventh, the single most important thing to integrate learners with a disability is what every learner needs: Work experience! It inducts and familiarises them and tells them what they might want to become/ do. “Trial and error” experiences as well as getting the permission to explore/ experiment can be especially empowering for them. It also is a protective factor for them in a discriminatory job market that is shrinking and making them vulnerable as young and insecure workforce. The online survey summary (as part of the Inquiry into career advice activities in Victorian schools) showed the following as the most valuable experiences as judged by the 247 young people (August 2018):

<b>Question Which career advice activities have you found to be the most useful to help plan for your future beyond school?</b>		
	<b>Response per cent</b>	<b>Response count</b>
<b>Work experience</b>	<b>67.63</b>	<b>94</b>
Developing a career plan	21.58	30
Interview with school career adviser or guidance counsellor	27.34	38
<b>Resume writing or mock interviews</b>	<b>38.13</b>	<b>53</b>
Group discussion about careers	19.42	27
<b>Excursion to a TAFE and/or university campus</b>	<b>30.94</b>	<b>43</b>
Online search for information	28.78	40
Listening to a talk from an employer	21.58	30
<b>Listening to a talk from a TAFE or university representative</b>	<b>31.65</b>	<b>44</b>
Receiving hand-outs or other written information	26.62	37
Other (please specify)	5.04	7

Staff also valued work experience highly, in conjunction with career guidance and TAFE tours/ presentations:

<b>Question 10 Which career advice activities do you think are the most valuable for students?</b>		
	<b>Response per cent</b>	<b>Response count</b>
<b>Work experience</b>	<b>78.72</b>	<b>148</b>
Career plan development	66.49	125

<b>One-on-one interviews with school career adviser or guidance counsellor</b>	<b>89.36</b>	<b>168</b>
Resume writing or mock interviews	59.57	112
Group discussion about careers	42.02	79
<b>Excursion to a TAFE and/or university campus</b>	<b>69.68</b>	<b>131</b>
Online search for information	39.36	74
Employer presentations	59.04	111
<b>TAFE or university presentations</b>	<b>59.04</b>	<b>111</b>
Provision of written material	32.45	61
Other (please specify)	15.43	29

As the Government does not know the extent of work experience in government schools, it is vital that such data is gathered and looked at with an equity lens. (Again, I have many ideas in this space).

Lastly, the Macklin, VCAL and federal Shergold Reviews into a new career and work ecosystem at schools need to be linked and linked with TAFE reform explicitly. The segregation of VCAL and VCE is unsustainable and not knowledge focused. Interdisciplinarity is required in all work places but schools are living in the last century with their subject and certificate paths.

Work experience access is a life-long issue when you need to transition 17 times into new careers, at least theoretically. Insurance needs to be held by education providers and employers and this could be subsidised and incentivised for employers and as KPAs for education providers (schools and TAFEs) to have work experience opportunities (40 days as provided for in the school curriculum policy).

Without understanding the employment/ employer landscape and the lack of cultural recognition to aspire and then host students on work experience, such KPAs would be completely unfair. An employer centric view to paperwork, insurance and smart contracting needs to be implemented (DPC needs to play a key role here) so barriers for hands on learning and training can be removed so that many more people can “try before they buy” (start a TAFE course for the learner) and transition from job to job with work experience as a gateway. Integration aides and the like need to be funded in TAFE, liaison, LLENs and other support based with employers so a productive, fulfilling and meaningful life can be had by all.

All barriers to participation need to be audited. From physical barriers in school and TAFE buildings to representation of learners with a disability/ student voice on school councils, VCAA, VRQA to TAFE boards, from NDIS funding for employers and other avenues to working with disability friendly employers (Credential for employers!). Proper skills match is also an area absent from common practice. What can someone do and is capable of doing? What if life has changed or someone had an illness/ accident and can no longer perform certain tasks. A real skills audit and match could make a world of difference and the public sector needs to lead this and work experience across the life span. A third of our unemployment barriers are due to lack of work experience. So let’s do something about this, especially for people with a disability, agile and equitably.

A curriculum audit is required, numbers of hours actually delivered versus funded, especially during the pandemic but also in general and the vocational course work materials used. Some are so difficult to understand for people without disability that there is little hope people with disability could understand and learn with them. Pedagogical rigour needs to be applied and curriculum modified where needed with much scaffolding, esp. for those with an intellectual disability.

## **What are the social and economic benefits of improving access to TAFE for learners with disability?**

If schools were first employers, some work readiness and work education programs at TAFE could become superfluous in the long term. The benefits of the social model of disability are also proven. Nothing for them, without them is where we need to get to now. Carers are not support. Advocacy is very tiring for staff, carers and learners with a disability.

School and TAFE Teachers need proper training to teach and service learners with a disability. It is really difficult for everyone, but especially for those who are not educated, articulate and confident in negotiating pathways. Any lack of knowledge can lead to long-term and costly disadvantage. Mass carer education needs to accompany personalised support for learners with a disability and they in turn can teach others what they know best.

Universal design principles can spur innovation and progress so the benefits are always life-long if we get this right. RCTs should be conducted! Then rolled out universally if proven to be effective. Schools are THE education provider to upskill to get the foundation right for TAFE to build on and integrate with. A lot of schools still positively manage out children with a disability or tell you the “movement” of students is towards this and that school. So audit how schools enroll and if it is not population parity something is wrong with their capacity and/ or willingness to educate learners with a disability.

Offer a personalised, case managed service for the whole of life (including all migration dynamics) across all education providers.

Do not assume everyone is comfortable or happy with using the NDIS, so do not make everything dependent on them.

Do a non-threatening audit of TAFE teachers capacity to interact and train learners with a disability. Ask them what they think they need to succeed. Share international best practice with them.

We need high quality biliterate educational outcomes and high equity results where culturally responsive pedagogy, curricula, assessment and employability outcomes are real.

In order to achieve this, the Ministers Ingrid Stitt, James Merlino, Ros Spence and Gayle Tierney, should work together and integrate curricula with relevant community partners to enable students to live bilingual lives as well as enabling language and career immersion by making schools students’ first employers. In addition, funding SBATs and trainee/ apprenticeships for these learners would get them this experiential learning, embedded with one employer who is empathetic.

Then keep education providers to account across the life span and they need to be made to aspire and then be funded, trained and paid to achieve this. Low certificate training does not provide the employment outcomes we need so make sure that labour market data informs courses and pathways. The best would be to build entrepreneurial, vocational and cooperative skills in workplaces so their skills are clustered and can be built on to shift to another role/ industry with increasing automation. Employer data indicates what minimum qualifications are required so build algorithms that inform TAFEs. If you develop it at scale, then all TAFEs can benefit from it whilst still being able to offer place-based approaches. Work towards the abolition of Australian Disability Enterprises. This micro-segregation is terrible.

## **Within and after TAFE**

Start-Ups involving learners with a disability

### **Business models: Cooperatives**

I believe that cooperatives are a business model that is underutilised in the labour market to promote positive business and social outcomes. Whilst there are social enterprises who support people with a disability such as Sibling in Nicholson Street, North Carlton, I have not seen evaluations specifically on these and how they compare with worker owned cooperatives. However, I believe it would be worthwhile to look for or commission a study to investigate if worker owned cooperatives could significantly improve employability outcomes (over social enterprises) and if people with a disability could set these up whilst at school or TAFE with the right support structures. I believe business mentors and others could help. You can build complementary teams with the right skills match. Easy when you work with the existing LLEN structures to make sure they have capability across the business, not just serving coffee or in retail but the spectrum of needs and capacities to run a business!

If public schools were not internally privatised through cleaning, canteens and before and after school care much more on the job training could be done by cooperatives with LLENS and TAFES.

### **Whichever TAFE course a learner pursues link it to the lived experience of workers with a disability**

Link the curriculum to specific knowledges we have of workers with a disability. Make sure the learners hear about how others have experienced success (with their disability) and link them up with people with lived experiences throughout the course. Parents could also mentor each other's learners as they are already familiar with that disability.

For example, autistic workers have unique challenges and neurodiverse workplaces really benefit our economy (see Hayward, S. M., McVilly, K. R. and Stokes, M. A 2020, 'Sources and impact of occupational demands for autistic employees,' Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, vol.76 pp. doi:10.1016/j.rasd.2020.101571: page 1-2)

Autistic individuals are described as producing high-quality work (Hedley et al., 2018; Lee, Black, Tan, Falkmer, & Girdler, 2019; Nicholas, Mitchell, Zulla, & Dudley, 2019). Their attention to detail (Nicholas, Mitchell, Zulla, Solomatin, & Qi, 2019; Richardson, McCoy, & McNaughton, 2019), and excellent problem-solving ability make them excellent employees (Black et al., 2019; Hedley et al., 2018). The contribution these individuals can make in the workplace, and the value of their inclusion is now well recognised, evidenced by the increasing number of organisations adopting autism employment initiatives (Hayward, McVilly, & Stokes, 2019). Autistic employees increase company diversity (Hedley, Wilmot, Spoor, & Dissanayake, 2017; Scott et al., 2017). In turn, organisations can benefit from increased innovation (Reese & Gilmartin, 2017), performance (Mohammed & Nadkarni, 2014; Valls, González-Romá, & Tomás, 2016), and productivity (Hedley et al., 2017; Scott et al., 2017). However, autistic employees experience multiple barriers to sustaining employment and maximising their productivity, including managing social demands, and occupational stress (Hayward, McVilly, & Stokes, 2018). Consequently, employers can

struggle to capitalise on their skills, and the community loses their economic contribution (World Health Organisation, 2019).

In the “pink recession” particular attention needs to be paid to the gendered nature of (un)employment so in the TAFE offer, employment issues and barriers need to be covered and addressed so scaffolded transitions can occur. For gendered autism aspects see Hayward, S. M., McVilly, K. R. and Stokes, M. A 2019, “‘I Would Love to Just Be Myself’: What Autistic Women Want at Work,’ *Autism in Adulthood*, vol.1, no.4, pp. 297-305. doi:10.1089/aut.2019.0020.