

NVEAC

NATIONAL VET EQUITY ADVISORY COUNCIL

**NVEAC Submission to
Productivity Commission**

**Education and Training workforce:
Vocational Education and Training**

Preliminary information about NVEAC and its approach which underpin comments made in this submission

NVEAC was established in 2009 to provide advice to the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE) on how the vocational education and training (VET) sector can support learners who experience disadvantage to achieve better outcomes from VET.

What do we mean by equity?

Equity is concerned with enacting the principle of fairness. It takes account of the fact that people and their life circumstances are not the same and that these should not determine their opportunities to achieve the outcomes of their choice. Life circumstances include the social, cultural, financial, physical, health, gender and language differences that individually and collectively distinguish different groups of people.

In VET, equity involves removing systemic barriers and designing the system to meet diverse learning needs to ensure that who learners are and their life circumstances are not the determining factors in their: access to VET, VET participation and experiences, VET outcomes.

NVEAC's aspiration

NVEAC's aspiration is for an equitable and inclusive VET system that enables all learners to achieve their potential through skills development and to access the opportunities society has to offer. In providing its advice to Ministers, NVEAC believes that systemic VET reforms are required – in contrast to a focus on short-term, project-based initiatives.

Proposed areas of reform

NVEAC has identified six areas of VET which, if reformed, will make a real difference to the lives and futures of learners who experience disadvantage, while making the VET system stronger for all learners. One of these areas of reform relates to the VET workforce. The complete set is as follows: Adopting a sustainable investment approach to funding VET

Measuring and reporting performance in terms of how the system deals with those who experience disadvantage

Building the capability of the VET workforce

Embedding support for foundation skills development

Embedding pathway planning and partnerships as part of the VET system

Listening to the voice of the learner when designing our system and continuously improving its services.

Disadvantage

NVEAC does not want to define people by disadvantage. NVEAC recognises that people may come to VET with low language, literacy and numeracy skills; they may have a disability or be experiencing mental health issues; they may live in remote communities, or communities with concentrations of low socio-economic status (SES); they may have low incomes and access to few services; they may be offenders in juvenile justice centres or correctional facilities; they may be women in low-paid jobs with family responsibilities; they may be Indigenous Australians or new arrivals and refugees. This very diversity must be taken into account in the design of each aspect of VET – whether it is funding policy; how VET monitors and reports on its performance; how it supports and prepares its teachers and other staff; how it allocates time and resources to teaching and to the cluster of services that VET harnesses to support and meet the needs of learners.

Attachment 1 includes the section of NVEAC's draft Equity Blueprint relating to the VET workforce.

NVEAC's response to Productivity Commission Discussion Paper

NVEAC has responded primarily to a sub set of questions that it believes are pertinent to its area of expertise and from the perspective of the learner in VET who experiences disadvantage.

VET in the education sector and the economy

The VET workforce

The way this study describes the VET workforce (VET practitioners, VET professionals, general staff) needs to take account of the range of specialist staff who work in the sector – such as teacher consultants and aides who provide support to disabled students or students with mental health issues, specialist language and literacy teachers who provide language literacy and numeracy support and often team teach with vocational teachers.

It should not, however, detract from the arguably more fundamental and long term vision that as many teachers as possible should have the capabilities to work with a diverse range of students and to provide them with a highly personalised learning experience. Ideally, the VET workforce of the future will not be heavily reliant on student access to specialists in order to serve students well.

For this reason, NVEAC would argue that capability development in the future should operate under a Continuing Professional Development model, with one component of that model being access by teachers to specialists-as-coaches. These coaches can help teachers build skills and knowledge related to certain student needs in a just-in-time way. This is a more sustainable and embedded model than one which focuses primarily on students themselves having to access specialists separate from their learning experience.

VET the economy and society

The discussion paper states:

The terms of this study ask the Commission to examine the capacity of the VET workforce to provide 'second chance' education and training for migrant and Indigenous students.

NVEAC questions why the focus is limited to migrant and Indigenous students. Second chance education is for any student who does not achieve school leaving educational level. The VET workforce needs to have the capacity and capability to deal with students with diverse needs – they may be migrants and or Indigenous – but they may also have disabilities, they may have mental health issues, they may have low levels of literacy and numeracy, they may have little experience of formal learning – whoever they are, whatever their circumstance the VET workforce needs to be able to recognise and support these students-

That said, the case in relation to Indigenous students is a special one. Here, identity is fundamental, and the VET sector must do a lot more to ensure that Indigenous learners and potential learners see their own people engaged in every aspect of VET service delivery.

Demand influences on VET sector

Demographic and economic change

Do you anticipate that demand for VET for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds will increase in the next 5-10 Year?

Inherent in the social inclusion agenda is the aim to widen participation from groups currently excluded from learning and from work and therefore NVEAC anticipates that demand for VET will grow from learners who experience disadvantage. NVEAC has commissioned ACCESS Economics to model population projections and can share this work with the Commission later this year.

In fact, in terms of demographic and economic trends, NVEAC notes the Skills Australia modelling that suggests employment growth will require an additional 2.4 million workers with qualifications at Certificate III or higher by 2025, and their subsequent case that only engagement of the disadvantaged will see the nation achieve the qualification levels required to get our workforce participation to an adequate level (69%). NVEAC's view is that to reach this will require more people currently excluded from both education and the workforce to participate in training and to succeed in that training. This will require more teachers and trainers working with and training learners who have been disengaged from training, or who have little confidence and experience of formal learning.

An increase in demand will require the VET system to ensure training and learning are readily available, complete with support mechanisms and well educated and motivated trainers and assessors for disadvantaged learners, and ensure that they (the disadvantaged learners) are aware of the opportunities and trust in the providers to meet their expectations.

What impact might demographic trends have on future demand for VET, and the VET workforce? (p.15)

Although the Indigenous population is young, with approximately 49% aged 19 years and under, it is growing much faster than the non- Indigenous population. The ABS projects that by 2016, over 125,000 Indigenous people will enter the working age population.

Trainers and assessors require education and training to be able to train effectively learners with special needs. The current qualification Certificate IV in Training and Assessment does not provide this specialist training. The replacement qualification, Certificate IV in Training and Education, does not appear to provide it either.

Under AQTF 2010 Standard 2: The RTO adheres to principles of access and equity and maximises outcomes for its clients, sub-standard 2.4 requires that learners receive training, assessment and support services that meet their individual needs. NVEAC proposes that auditing of this requirement should place greater emphasis on learner experiences and teacher effectiveness, and less on process compliance as happens now.

Another issue that NVEAC wishes to raise is the pace of change of assistive technologies for people with disability and the need for the VET teachers/trainers and support workers to be

acquainted with the technologies that are available that make access and participation easier for learners with disability. A good understanding of the technology available can assist learners become less dependent on for example note takers and support workers and more independent – but there needs to be information and understanding of the range of assistive technologies and how they can be used in the learning environment and how materials and lessons need to be presented so that the assistive technology can be used to its full advantage. As mentioned earlier in this submission, this sort of knowledge and skill development should form part of a teacher’s CPD.

What other economic factors or trends should be considered when examining future demand for VET? How do you expect these trends to influence demand for the VET workforce? (p.18)

A major economic factor is the disparity in the distribution of public funding for training on a per capita basis. This does not take into account the increased funding required for disadvantaged learners in regional, remote and very remote areas.¹ The Australian and State/Territory Governments have policies aimed at growth in remote and very remote areas through establishment of increased employment opportunities. This will lead to further demands for training and hence more funds will be needed.

In addition to this, there will be a need for more trainers in these growth areas and incentives will be needed to attract them to live in remote areas, and retain them there. What are luxuries today in the bush (eg, broadband, TV, computers, housing, shops, access to regional centres) will be the necessities of tomorrow.

Supply of the VET workforce

NVEAC makes the following additional observations regarding the VET workforce and the skills it requires:

- The VET workforce needs to have the capability to recognise and deal with learners whose needs are complex - who may have mental health issues, who may need literacy and numeracy support, who need specialist assistive technologies - the VET trainer or assessor needs access to expertise and in the ideal, embedded world, specialists would focus more on teacher capability and much less on direct student services.
- The key to dealing with disadvantage is forming partnerships with range of community organisations including community education providers and service providers as well as employment organisations (employers, group training companies, Job Services Australian, Disability Services) - it is important the VET workforce has skills and resources to establish and nurture partnerships and is committed to this - as these are the key to successful outcomes.

¹ For example, the Northern Territory receives 1% of available funds, with close to 30% of the Aboriginal population of Australia, the majority of whom are located in remote and very remote locations and have special learning needs that have to be catered for, but which currently, in the main, are not.

- Another issue is the lack of diversity of the workforce with little representation of the groups the sector serves. There is a need for more Indigenous workers, workers with disability, workers from migrant/refugee backgrounds to work as VET practitioners. Perhaps a scholarship program would entice them, or program of having mentors and support workers who are then provided with support and training to become VET practitioners/trainers/teacher consultants, etc. Partnerships with community organisations often make this happen. Registered Training Organisations could have a 'Diverse Workforce Strategy'.

Attachment 1

NVEAC's Draft equity Blueprint

(http://www.nveac.tvetaustralia.com.au/home/nveac_projects/equity_blueprint)

makes the following statements about the VET workforce:

REFORM AREA 3 – Building the capability of the VET workforce***Rationale***

Ten years have passed since the VET blueprints for Indigenous Australians and people with a disability were first agreed by Ministers. There are still concerns about whether the VET workforce has the necessary skills to meet the needs of disadvantaged learners and there is still no unified national framework or strategy for building VET workforce capability.

There is a need to develop a national framework that puts high-quality teaching and learning for all learners as its centrepiece and the foundation for a cleverly designed VET system. Stakeholders have consistently reported to us that the critical issues for the VET workforce are access to professional development; high levels of casualisation; the need to increase skill levels in working with diverse learners; the inadequacy of the base-level qualification required for teaching in the VET sector; and the lack of diversity of the workforce, with little representation of the groups the sector serves.

Developments that will have an impact on VET workforce

There are two significant developments which will have an impact on policy in relation to the VET workforce. The first is the Productivity Commission's study of the VET workforce, which is due in early 2011. The second is the introduction of national regulation and quality arrangements for the VET sector and the establishment of the national Standards Council for VET, scheduled for 2011. NVEAC does not wish to duplicate research work being undertaken by the Productivity Commission, nor pre-empt opportunities for lifting the skills of the VET workforce that might be presented by the national regulatory arrangements.

For this reason, the capability of the VET workforce will be revisited in 2011 to identify where NVEAC can most add value. In the meantime, NVEAC will provide advice to the Productivity Commission's study with its views about the key areas for action.

Underpinning work to be undertaken by NVEAC**3.1 Contribute to and influence the Productivity Commission study on the VET workforce**

Inform the Productivity Commission's study of the following key areas for action to build the capability of the VET workforce in meeting the needs of disadvantaged learners including:

- a unified national framework for building capability across the whole VET workforce, not just teachers and trainers, as organisation-wide capability is required to respond to the needs of disadvantaged learners. This could include a national program to promote excellence in teaching and learning such as exists in the schools and higher education sectors, with the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership in the schools sector and the Australian Learning and Teaching Council in the higher education sector

- reform to the entry-level qualification expected of VET teachers and trainers, especially in relation to ensuring they have the skills to identify, respond to, and draw in specialist support for a diverse learning population
- a critical need to increase the number of people with specialist skills, such as cross-cultural competencies and in foundation skills delivery, as well as core skills, such as industry engagement and workplace training
- an increase in the diversity of the VET workforce through mechanisms such as a scholarship program.

3.2 Contribute to and influence the further development of the training package for trainers/assessors

Work collaboratively with Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA), the national industry skills council with responsibility for the training package used for entry-level training of VET teachers, to identify the range of competencies required to meet the needs of diverse learners and incorporate improvements to the training package to address these.