

Recipient Details

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Responses

Curriculum and assessment

As a VET professional I experienced a class situation in late 2016, where a group of students, aged from 15- 17, presented for a training program. Over 50% of them demonstrated a range of conditions that affect learning. These conditions included Asperger's, dyslexia, dyscalculia and a range of medically diagnosed conditions including ADHD and stress (which often mask a range of autism spectrum issues).

There were significant adjustments that had to be made by teaching staff to deal effectively with this group. Fortunately, the effort put in by some teachers outweighed the capitulation by others in dealing with this group and around 20% of the students have now achieved some form of employment. This in itself speaks volumes for the efforts put in by the VET professionals.

It is common in the VET sector, particularly with the public providers, to get Multi Sensory Language (MSL) needs students regularly in trade programs and the sector struggles to bring training package curriculum to the level that is required to meet these student's needs.

They've been "dumped" by the school system because their conditions are often not diagnosed until it is too late and TAFE, across Australia, ends up with them as almost a final solution.

The other critical issue is that they are often enrolled into state funded programs (the sector needs to be paid after all) with little real chance of the participants demonstrating competence in many cases, because:

- the VET resources and assessment processes are designed to meet the Training Package requirements and the words 'reasonable adjustment' are treated as just words
- VET sector staff often do not have the knowledge or skills to understand the special requirements of teaching these cohorts
- they are often disconnected from the outset because they have been labelled in both systems as untrainable and this stereotyping affects the diligence required to meet their needs

Rating: 7

Teachers and teaching

Currently it is estimated that over 30% of the Australian population is affected by at least one type of challenging learning style that falls outside the current 'norm'. Given that most researchers in this space are forecasting a significant growth in the population affected by these styles it would seem prudent that the University sector, school sector public sector VET provider (TAFE) begins planning for the day when these styles become the 'norm' and focus more attention on training classroom

management techniques that help teachers support students with difficulties – this will also avoid the commentary associated with segregation as proposed by One Nation.

As a VET professional I also have a view on the VET system that indicates we are missing out on a significant opportunity to support and assist students who enter this pathway after being hustled through the school system.

This appears to occur because the knowledge of effective engagement and teaching strategies such as the implementation of multi-sensory language (MSL) skills are not something that has been made available at point of training or in follow up capability development programs, to all teachers, either in the school or VET sectors. There is no doubt that this is a specialist area for teaching professionals given the obvious growth in students with language and learning issues. More effective teacher and VET training in this space would significantly improve engagement and outcomes for students.

Rating: 7

Leaders and leadership

Many VET teachers decry their abilities to be more effective and increase student outcomes as they are subject to increasing levels of change and rationalisation of products. The funding models for these VET providers are often based on Productivity Commission recommendations – an organisation not really known for expertise in education sectors.

So there are opportunities to contribute in a real way to improved adoption of current knowledge, strategies and tactics that support all learners and show VETs strategic educational leadership intent to its clients.

This issue is getting bigger everyday as more learning conditions are identified. The time to fix them/ begin managing them is obviously back in preschool, so effectively if this 'fix' commenced in 2017 it would still be creating problems for people currently in the system for the next 17-20 years before we started to see improvement in learning capacity from the school pathway to TAFE / VET sector. This is a significant economic, social and cultural drain on our communities.

Rating: 7

School and Community

I'm aware that the impacts of poor teacher training in the MSL field and the flow on effects on the growing number of students presenting with these conditions is having on the capacity of the education and training sectors. This is a topic that is gaining traction, particularly around the Albury/Wodonga border region. As recently as last week a local group aimed at supporting families with kids who experience learning difficulties with 'normal curriculum' had their membership treble to over 300 families following a short article in the Border Mail newspaper.

Rating: 7

Information and Communication Technology

ICT can provide a diverse range of tools that can support MSL programs and can contribute to better outcomes across all education and training sectors. It is just as important to train teachers and VET Professionals in their use and application. As with everything about education it is both a capacity and a capability issue. Give people the skills and the tools and they can achieve anything.

Rating: 5

Entrepreneurship and schools

If this refers to competition between schools for funding dollars based on numbers of students and how they apportion support to engage students in VET in schools programs then this is a significant issue. In NSW the Board of Studies oversees VET in Schools and appear well out of touch with the realities of work and requirements in vocational sectors. Schools should focus on preparatory education and be funded to prepare students for a vocational or higher education path. If they were allowed to be in this position then they could fund MSL support programs and be inclusive of all students. They should not have to compete with the VET sector for funds.

Rating: 5

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding

Rating for enrolments: 5

Rating for clusters: 5

Rating for distance education: 4

Rating for boarding: 0

Diversity

As a VET professional I experienced a class situation in late 2016, where a group of students, aged from 15- 17, presented for a training program. Over 50% of them demonstrated a range of conditions that affect learning. These conditions included Asperger's, dyslexia, dyscalculia and a range of medically diagnosed conditions including ADHD and stress (which often mask a range of autism spectrum issues). Diversity is important as successful integration of multiple learning styles enriches the experience for all students and improves societal benefits of respect, support and innovation.

Rating: 5

Transitioning beyond school

Working in the VET sector I see firsthand the struggle that VET Teachers have with these students – they have no appropriate resources, the TAFE LLN support is not designed or in reality funded to understand and support them. There are the added complications that result from the frustrations that the students experience, including outdated VET sector (particularly TAFE) discipline policies, which do not recognise that learning difficulties can express in discipline problems, that have never considered these issues.

A key challenge and opportunity is to resource the VET sector to create innovative products that help effect positive change on these growing student cohorts and resource TAFE Foundation Skills support with up to date Professional Development. The focus must be on growing support and knowledge of effective teaching and engagement strategies (there is a heap more that we could be trying!).

Rating: 7

Additional Comments

The opportunity is around provision of targeted capability development in multi-sensory language (MSL) for all sector teaching and selected support staff (education support). Many professionals I have spoken with are overwhelming supportive of the need.

They recognise the opportunity to improve positive outcomes for their students, as well as themselves, as these skills would enable greater engagement and understanding of the range of learning styles that they are experiencing significant growth in.

Surely we don't want to be in a position where 30% of the future population has missed the multitude of opportunities that exist outside the 'norm' because of a simple and cost effective capability development approach that upskills the MSL knowledge of current and future teaching professionals.