

Q8 What reforms are needed to promote a quality learning environment and to ensure graduates are entering the labour market with the skills and knowledge they need?

We know that education is transformative and that the social, economic, and physical wellbeing of people with disability is improved by access to tertiary education. Yet, while people with disability remain one of the groups with the most significant increase in enrolments in tertiary education they experience lower levels of access, participation, retention, and success compared with their non-disabled peers. They also experience lower levels of employment and are paid less than those without disability. These statistics are borne out of higher education statistics, student satisfaction surveys and graduate outcome surveys.

The Australia Disability Strategy 2021 - 2030 focuses on removing barriers for people with disability. Through national leadership and an inclusive public policy response the strategy aims to promote mainstream services to improve outcomes for people with disability. The strategy takes a whole of community focus to achieve an inclusive society to ensure people with a disability live as equal members of the community (Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services), 2021).

The strategy acknowledges that people with disability experience more difficulties in the classroom and are underrepresented in the national workforce identifying a significant gap in the attainment of Year 12 or an alternative vocational education and training qualification. As a result, people with disability have specifically identified employment security and education and learning as key outcome areas for continued improvement.

The key policy priorities outlined below will assist mainstream services to improve the outcomes for people with disability. The priorities are to:

- Improve transition of young people with disability from education to employment
- Build capability in the delivery of inclusive education.
- Improve pathways and accessibility to further education and training for people with disability.
- Increase opportunities for participation in lifelong learning.

Similarly, the **Inclusive Victoria State Disability Plan 2022 – 2026** outlines Education and Employment as priority areas for Victoria to create a safe and inclusive community for people with disability. The plan identifies that fewer than five out of ten Victorians with disability are employed and that to improve this ratio the following outcomes need to be achieved. The outcomes are:

- Increased education achievement and engagement of students with disability
- Increased wellbeing of students with disability
- Increased employment and job quality
- Increased positive attitudes towards people with disability in the workplace.
- Increased job flexibility

The delivery of high-quality teaching and learning is an important element that impacts the outcomes of all students, however the ability to identify and implement reasonable adjustments and supports for students with disability is critical to providing high quality educational outcomes.

Good quality learning is more than contact hours with students. The delivery must facilitate both successful learning and the development of quality social and economic pathways for students with disability.

“Meaningful Jobs for students with Disability from luck to Business as usual”

David Eckstein, 2020 Equity Fellow, NCSEHE 2020

https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Eckstein-Swin-EquityFellowship-FINAL_23-2-2022.pdf

The “Meaningful Jobs for Students with Disability from Luck to Business as Usual” Equity Fellowship report by David Eckstein focuses on the Career Development Learning (CDL) of Students with Disability in Universities across Australia whilst also challenging the socially constructed notions of disability. David speaks about the disadvantages that Students with Disability face in the job market. David mentions that whilst universities have limited influence on the job market, there are better opportunities for universities to prepare Students with Disability to compete in it.

The fellowship provides recommendations for universities to better prepare Students with Disability to enter the job market, as well as the barriers that are currently hindering the Universities ability to provide targeted support for Students with Disability entering the job market.

The key finding of the report finds that whilst there are some encouraging stories of career professions in different universities across Australia, that universities in general do not appear to understand how Students with Disability think about their careers.

Recommendations from the fellowship suggest that

- That the education sector, in collaboration with the Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (ADCET), the National Disability Coordination Officer Program (NDCO), and the National Careers Institute (NCI) investigates the provision of a national Students with Disability careers strategy to guide specialist services in the context of broader service delivery. (Recommendation 2)
- That the funded bodies ADCET, the NDCO Program and the NCI promote shared understandings about employability and the employability challenges Students with Disability face through the development and rollout of a university version of its Vocational Education and Training (VET) Sector (Staff and Educators) Disability Awareness Training that includes information about employability and Disability CDL. (Recommendation 3)
- That universities, NDCOs, Disability Employment Service (DES) Providers, employers, and Regional University Centres (RUCs) collaborate to investigate ways of providing cooperative career development support and identifying disability-confident organisations for the benefit of Students with Disability. (Recommendation 5)
- That universities with DES Provider partnerships contribute to the development of DES partnership guidelines for the benefit of the university sector. These guidelines should include DES Provider perspectives. (Recommendation 6)
- That the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA), the National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (NAGCAS), the Australian Tertiary Education Network on Disability (ATEND), the NDCO, Australian Network on Disability (AND) support the development of specialist Disability CDL qualifications to develop the capacity of experienced practitioners to service the needs of Students with Disability. It is recommended that this be done in consultation with Students with Disability and Graduates with Disability. (Recommendation 8)
- That careers and disability professional associations such as ATEND and NAGCAS consider hosting a national Disability CDL Community of Practice to provide a place for interested practitioners to learn from each other about Disability CDL and related matters. (Recommendation 9)
- That universities investigate Universal Design Learning principles for in-curriculum Disability CDL to ensure that the presence of Students with Disability is assumed during curriculum design. (Recommendation 12)

The Australian Government must consider the strategic improvements required for the successful transition for Students with Disability entering the labour market and the resources and skills required by universities to assist Students with Disability achieving these goals.

Recommendations for consideration to improve university's ability to achieve these goals are provided below.

DES partnerships with universities (recommendations 3 – 5 – 6)

DES Providers across Australia have the skills and expertise to potentially assist several outcomes from the Inclusive Victoria State Disability Plan 2022-2026 and from David Eckstein's fellowship recommendations.

These partnerships or graduate programs currently exist in some Australian Universities through programs such as University Specialist Employment Partnerships (USEP) and Gradwise. These programs aim to improve graduate employment outcomes for Students with Disability by establishing connections with DES Providers to provide an on-campus specialist employment/recruitment service.

This program allows for the DES Providers to connect with university career advisors and disability support workers to create an environment that assist Students with Disability to become better prepared and have better support for employment prior and post-graduation. The Australian Government must also consider how it can strategically drive improvement through increasing accountability of individual institutions through:

- Setting targets for increasing the participation of Students with Disability with programs such as USEP and Gradwise and requiring institutions to document strategies and outcomes to increase the employment outcomes for Students with a Disability.
- Requiring institutions to deliver and maintain up to date Disability Action Plans (DAP) that consider the whole student lifecycle including their post University options including employment whilst also meeting the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, 1992 (DDA).
- Ensure that there is a representation from Students with Disability when preparing the employment support activities within the DAP to ensure that the Students with Disabilities voices are heard.

DES Star rating system, University Graduate contract. ("Meaningful Jobs for Students with Disability from Luck to Business as Usual" Recommendations 3 – 5 – 6 - 9)

Currently in Australia DES Providers use Star Ratings as an outcome-based model to provide an indicator of each DES Provider's performance. This model is based on their success in placing participants into sustainable employment and education and obtaining employment outcomes for People with Disability.

Each Provider receives a Star Rating ranging from 1-Star to 5-Stars. A Site performing at a level that is better than the average of all Sites will receive a high rating (4 or 5-Stars). A Site that is performing at around the average will receive 3-Stars. A Site performing at a level that is below the average will receive a lower rating (2-Stars or 1-Star).

DES Providers in Australia are currently scored across 20+ speciality descriptive contracts such as Mental Health, Physical (Musculoskeletal), Psychiatric disability, autism disorder, hearing impaired and deaf and Neurological to name just a few. However, in Australia they are not allowed to engage with full-time students due to their registration guidelines.

By creating a new Speciality Descriptive Contract for Students with Disability we would be able to introduce DES Providers to work with Students with Disability pre- and post-graduation whilst also allowing us to successfully track the employment outcome rates of Students with Disability both in the short and long term.

This would also allow for the continuation of supports provided to students whilst at university, such as reasonable adjustments, to continue into employment. Employment service providers would have knowledge of the required adjustments, and the ability to utilise their connections with JobAccess to ensure that these requirements were finalised before moving into employment which would, in turn, build confidence in the graduate employment program across Australia.

Promotion of available supports already available to universities and employers (“Meaningful Jobs for Students with Disability from Luck to Business as Usual” **Recommendations 3**)

There are currently numerous supports and resources available that relate to disability employment.

Tools such as the JobAccess Employer Toolkit (www.jobaccess.gov.au/employers/employer-toolkit) can help to empower employers to hire and support Students with Disability by helping them understand the necessary steps required to make the successful transition into employment.

This resource can also assist university staff to understand the importance of sharing any reasonable adjustments that have been in place to support Students with Disability with the employment specialist, and employers who maybe assisting the student with their employment transition.

By promoting resources such as this Toolkit through universities, we will empower students, university employment support teams and employers to better understand their responsibilities and the requirements needed to assist with the transition of Students with Disability into sustainable employment in their field of study.

Support DES Providers capacity to support Graduates’ employment (“Meaningful Jobs for Students with Disability from Luck to Business as Usual” **Recommendation 8**)

- Creation of a mandatory training package for all DES/Workforce Australia/Parents Next/Transition to Work and other Employment Specialist employees which improves their capability to understand the barriers that Students with Disability face whilst looking to move into employment.
- This training should be designed to help the Employment Specialist to understand and respond to the needs of the graduate in their transition into employment.

Building capacity for currently enrolled university students in future graduate facing roles such as Human Resource advisors, recruitment officers etc. (“Meaningful Jobs for Students with Disability from Luck to Business as Usual” **Recommendation 8**)

- Creation of mandatory subject/topic in relevant undergraduate degrees which focuses on the employability barriers of Graduates with Disability, including the importance of identifying reasonable adjustments to support successful recruitment practices and ongoing employment.
- Training to be developed for each university student to increase their awareness of the difficulties Students with Disability face when entering the open employment market with strategies to assist with overcoming these barriers in their future roles.

Alignment of university funding with the employment outcome rates of Students with Disability as a KPI

The Australian Government Department of Education – Higher Education Funding website (<https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-funding>) states that the majority of funding for universities is administered under the *Higher Education Support Act (HESA) 2003*.

Measures funded under the Higher Education Support Act (HESA) includes the

- Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) and the
- Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS)

Whilst also contributing other grants to Higher Education Providers across Australia including but not limited to

- The Disability Support Program

- The Indigenous Support Program
- The Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program
- The Superannuation Program and the
- National Institute Program

This funding is designed to support Higher Education Providers to cover student tuition costs, to help students themselves to cover their study costs, to improve access for Students with Disability, to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students access and complete studies, to assist people from low socio-economic backgrounds, to cover superannuation costs for university staff members and to assist universities to cover the operational costs at the institutes.

However, the funding to support Students with Disability to enter the employment market post-graduation is not a priority currently in universities across Australia.

Data from the DESE's Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) shows graduate employment outcomes for people who have declared a disability are less likely than for graduates who have not declared that they have a disability.

Research shows that,

- undergraduate courses who reported they had disability (79%) were less likely than those without disability (86%) to be employed.
- postgraduate coursework courses who reported disability (85%) were less likely than those without disability (92%) to be employed.
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Data from the 2020 Graduate Outcomes Survey – Longitudinal (GOS-L) which is completed approximately three years after completing their studies show that,

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From Postgraduate Courses

- 86% of those who reported disability were employed in 2017 and 90% in 2020, compared with 93% and 96% respectively for those without a disability.
- 72% of those who reported disability were employed full time in 2017 and 87% in 2020, compared with 87% and 94% respectively for those without disability.

If the Australian Government were to realign some of the above funding to universities which was dependant on a KPI regarding the successful completion and attainment of employment outcomes for Students with Disability, then we would potentially see a rise in the employment outcomes for this group entering the employment market whilst also helping to close the gap between people with and without disability entering the employment market.

Continuation of the National Disability Coordination Office Program and the Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (ADCET) role ("Meaningful Jobs for students with Disability from luck to Business as usual" Recommendations 2 – 3 – 8 – 12)

David outlines the value and importance of the NDCO program in numerous recommendations. He highlights the programs ability to collaborate with other peak agencies to successfully identify the

barriers faced for people with disability accessing and completing studies in the higher education system.

ADCET, with significant support by NDCOs, have provided easy access to information in a range of different formats including self-paced online learning, Communities of Practice, Fact Sheets and webinars. It is critical that these two unique programs – NDCO and ADCET – are sufficiently supported to continue to ensure ongoing commitment and support to a range of equity issues that other representatives in the sector are not currently funded to focus on, nor are able to dedicate the same amount of time to. The NDCO program was introduced in response to difficulties faced by people with disability in navigating complex systems of fragmented, overlapping services across the disability, education and employment sectors. The last completed evaluation of the program found that the NDCO program provides a valuable resource and range of activities that help service providers to improve education and employment outcomes for people with disability. The NDCO program is unique in its mandate to provide whole of system expertise across different sectors and is considered an essential support. Further findings were that the program was appropriate, effective and efficient and would benefit from further investment.

Other Considerations

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework that improves learning for all students. UDL has proven to increase retention and positive outcomes by allowing a greater number of students' equitable access without the need for adjustments or accommodations. Considered an inclusive education skill, UDL achieves a range of benefits including reduction in barriers to learning, reduced number of adjustments (resources including time and money), reduced stigma, more time (for students, educators, support staff).

By reducing barriers, UDL will support the federal governments commitments to increase the proportion of Australian residents (25-34) who possess a university qualification.

Some strategies that may increase the uptake of UDL includes the addition of UDL in government and university policies, building the knowledge of educators and those involved in course design on UDL to ensure that attitudes are positive and informed, greater awareness of and engagement with current UDL Community of Practice to share ideas and encourage progress, financial encouragement for evidence of adoption (eg award, grant, outcomes tied to funding etc??).

To ensure that future course designers and educators include UDL as a matter of course, include UDL as a compulsory subject for all programs and courses, and in particular pre-service teachers and trainers (eg TAE). There is currently a range of information regarding UDL that has been developed in collaboration with NDCOs and is shared via the ADCET Website.

Mandatory Disability Education

Disability awareness should be a compulsory inclusion in all programs. Education about what our society actually looks like (and regardless of the choice of study and career pathways all current students will be engaging with society, exactly as it is, not just the bits that suit them or they find easiest) and elements of Universal Design, will ensure a successful society where an individual's outcomes is more tied to their own efforts, rather than ability to overcome particular barriers that others may not face. Priority for this should be for all pre-service teachers and required professional development for in-service teachers and decision makers.

Ensuring that all current staff complete freely available Disability awareness training (as per Cultural Awareness training) as standard, with each institution aiming for 80% or higher completion by all staff each year, will also help bridge the knowledge gap.

Given the move of the NCCD to include data regarding imputed disability on the same basis as verified conditions, it is timely that anyone involved has sufficient awareness and knowledge to

ensure that young Australians receive the best possible access to education and appropriate supports.

Enabling Career Pathways

The NDCO program works towards improving the access and participation of people with disability in tertiary education and subsequent employment. An NDCO collaborative project looked at the issue of lack of a central platform that would allow carriage of information relating to career aspirations and all that entails. A range of national research and stakeholder engagement activities identified this problem statement:

“For a person with disability, the repetitive and inconsistent approach to accessing/enabling career and education pathways, coupled with the lack of centralised and personal ownership of data significantly impacts the potential for successful transition into meaningful and productive learning or employment opportunities.”

The Project team conducted interviews with people with lived experience from across Australia and asked about their experiences when accessing different types of supports and managing their own journeys, as well as engaging those who support and influence them. The top 4 problems for people with disability as they transition through different life stages were identified as:

1. Having to tell their story multiple times
2. Not being listened to
3. Identifying the right service
4. Having to have all the right documents

The impacts of these problems were clarified as loss of time, loss of aspirations, disconnecting from services impacting effectiveness of supports, and increasing the length of time individuals were reliant on higher levels of supports.

After much research and engagement, the project team partnered with an existing platform (Sameview) to inform enhancements around further education and employment, with ownership and control of the information remaining with the individual. There is a cost involved in using the platform and it will take some time for awareness to grow of its existence. However the primary goal of the project team, to have modifications made to MyGov was deemed to be a longer term plan, whereas changes could be made to a privately owned platform relatively quickly.

Q9 How should Australia ensure enough students are studying courses that align with the changing needs of the economy and society?

Q10 What role should higher education play in helping to develop high quality general learning capabilities across all age groups and industries?

Our current education environment is not a true reflection of society, but rather provides the greatest opportunities for those who are able to successfully navigate. Students facing barriers to gaining their education are usually required to take extra steps, expend more time and energy, and arrange the support of others to make the same educational gains.

If education is the key to success, the opportunity to succeed should be equally available to all Australians. The messaging received while studying (more than just the current subject of study) has a long-lasting impact on all students – messaging about a persons place in society and their value. If a student is treated as less due to a single characteristic such as disability, often due to

lack of understanding, this value is felt not only by the individual but the students around them, compounding the impact. These may be newly acquired attitudes or perhaps justify current attitudes, and will carry outside the learning environment into everyday life – the workplace, social activities, shared spaces etc. Student experience is key to promoting equity within society. If we want society to continue moving towards being more informed, aware and tolerant it is essential that our education providers play a key role in championing this.

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Ensuring that all current staff complete freely available Disability awareness training (as per Cultural Awareness training) as standard, with each institution aiming for 80% or higher completion by all staff each year, will also help bridge the knowledge gap.

Given the move of the NCCD to include data regarding imputed disability on the same basis as verified conditions, it is timely that anyone involved has sufficient awareness and knowledge to ensure that young Australians receive the best possible access to education and appropriate supports.

You don't know what you don't know, this is common theme expressed by people with disability and their family/carers. The NDCO's submission to the 2015 **Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (DSE)**, outlined the standards in general are being used in a positive way when people know about them. If people are aware of the standards, then they are enabled to be more confident in sourcing opportunities and adjustments. The challenge is when people don't know about the standards and are not aware of what support should legally be made available to them. Forward to the 2020 Review of the DSE, and the experience is similar, with NDCO's making recommendations to implement an awareness campaign to help fill the void of knowledge about the DSE to inform people with disability, family/carers. This together with education providers/practitioners undertaking specific training as National Legislation, all schools Public, Independent and Catholic should reflect the same messaging with more monitoring how inclusive teaching practices are being implemented.

There is currently a range of information regarding Disability Awareness and practical application of the DSE that has been developed by NDCOs and is shared via the ADCET Website. There is still much work to be done in this space and the NDCO program has proven ability to engage with a range of stakeholders in an open and impartial manner, therefore more likely to gain cooperation and buy-in.

Q13 How could an Accord support cooperation between providers, accreditation bodies, government and industry to ensure graduates have relevant skills for the workforce?

Q14 How should placement arrangements and work-integrated learning in higher education change in the decades ahead?

The NDCO program works towards improving the access and participation of people with disability in tertiary education and subsequent employment, so is already established across the tertiary and employment spaces. Skilled at effectively collaborating across the various sectors to identify and respond to barriers, highlight best practice and develop new ideas that positively impact further education and employment outcomes, the NDCO program is uniquely placed to support continued

improvement. It is critical that this unique program is sufficiently supported to continue to ensure ongoing commitment and support to a range of equity issues that other representatives in the sector are not currently funded to focus on, nor are able to dedicate the same amount of time to.

There was further support for the continuation of the NDCO program in this report:

“Meaningful Jobs for students with Disability from luck to Business as usual”

David Eckstein, 2020 Equity Fellow, NCSEHE 2020

https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Eckstein-Swin-EquityFellowship-FINAL_23-2-2022.pdf

This report focuses on the Career Development learning of Students with disability (SwD) in Universities across Australia whilst also challenging the socially constructed notions of disability. David speaks about the disadvantages that SwD face in the job market. David mentions that whilst universities have limited influence on the job market, there are better opportunities for universities to prepare SwD to compete in it.

The fellowship provides recommendations for universities to better prepare SwD to enter the job market, as well as the barriers that are currently hindering the Universities ability to provide targeted support for SwD entering the job market.

Recommendations from the report include:

Recommendation 2: That the education sector, in collaboration with Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (ADCET), the National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) Program and the National Careers Institute (NCI) investigates the provision of a national SwD careers strategy to guide specialist services in the context of broader service delivery.

Recommendation 3: That the funded bodies: ADCET, the NDCO Program and the NCI promote shared understandings about employability and the employability challenges SwD face through the development and rollout of a university version of its Vocational Education and Training (VET) Sector (Staff and Educators) Disability Awareness Training that includes information about employability and Disability CDL.

Recommendation 5: That universities, NDCOs, Disability Employment Service (DES) providers, employers and Regional University Centres (RUCs) collaborate to investigate ways of providing cooperative career development support and identifying disability-confident organisations for the benefit of SwD.

Recommendation 6: That universities with DES provider partnerships contribute to the development of DES partnership guidelines for the benefit of the university sector. These guidelines should include DES provider perspectives.

Recommendation 8: That the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA), the National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (NAGCAS), ATEND, the NDCO, Australian Network on Disability (AND) support the development of specialist Disability Career Development Learning (CDL) qualifications to develop the capacity of experienced practitioners to service the needs of SwD. It is recommended that this be done in consultation with SwD and Graduates with Disability (GwD).

Recommendation 12: That universities investigate Universal Design Learning principles for in-curriculum Disability CDL to ensure that the presence of SwD is assumed during curriculum design.

In David’s recommendations, he outlines the value and importance of the NDCO program in numerous recommendations. He highlights the programs ability to collaborate with other peak agencies to successfully identify the barriers faced for people with disability accessing and completing studies in the higher education system.

Long term commitment to the NDCO program ensures that the benefits from the relationships that have been built by the network could be maximised, avoiding the loss of skill and expertise that are the result of short contracts.

Other Recommendations from “Meaningful Jobs for students with Disability from luck to Business as usual” and other sources that would support cooperation between the various stakeholders, and support effective placement arrangements include:

DES partnerships with universities (recommendations 3 – 5 – 6)

While Universal Design will go some way to reducing barriers for students, some areas will still require specialist supports. In the same way that specific supports are funded to assist people with disability gain employment, Work Integrated Learning (WIL) for students also requires consideration. While some universities are quite skilled and offer this support, some would benefit from the support of a partnership that would provide access to expert knowledge in negotiating disability employment placements.

DES Providers across Australia have the skills and expertise to potentially assist several outcomes from the Inclusive Victoria State Disability Plan 2022-2026 and from David Eckstein’s fellowship recommendations, and can support higher education providers with effective WIL for students with disability.

These partnerships or graduate programs currently exist in some Australian Universities through programs such as University Specialist Employment Partnerships (USEP) and Gradwise. These programs aim to improve graduate employment outcomes for Students with Disability by establishing connections with DES Providers to provide an on-campus specialist employment/recruitment service.

This program allows for the DES Providers to connect with university career advisors and disability support workers to create an environment that assist Students with Disability to become better prepared and have better support for employment prior and post-graduation. The Australian Government must also consider how it can strategically drive improvement through increasing accountability of individual institutions through:

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DES Star rating system, University Graduate contract. (“Meaningful Jobs for Students with Disability from Luck to Business as Usual” Recommendations 3 – 5 – 6 - 9)

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If the Australian Government were to realign some of the above funding to universities which was dependant on a KPI regarding the successful completion and attainment of employment outcomes for Students with Disability, then we would potentially see a rise in the employment outcomes for this group entering the employment market whilst also helping to close the gap between people with and without disability entering the employment market.

Q15 What changes are needed to grow a culture of lifelong learning in Australia?

Q16 What practical barriers are inhibiting lifelong learning, and how can they be fixed?

In Australia there are current a number of factors that influence attitudes towards learning. Many of these impacts specifically on people living with disability and there are a range of possible solutions that could significantly improve opportunities and experiences, therefore supporting the growth of a culture of lifelong learning.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework that improves learning for all students. UDL has proven to increase retention and positive outcomes by allowing a greater number of students' equitable access without the need for adjustments or accommodations. Considered an inclusive education skill, UDL achieves a range of benefits including reduction in barriers to learning, reduced number of adjustments (resources including time and money), reduced stigma, more time (for students, educators, support staff).

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There is currently a range of information regarding UDL that has been developed and is shared via the ADCET Website.

Enabling Career Pathways

The NDCO program works towards improving the access and participation of people with disability in tertiary education and subsequent employment. An NDCO collaborative project looked at the issue of lack of a central platform that would allow carriage of information relating to career aspirations and all that entails. A range of national research and stakeholder engagement activities identified this problem statement:

“For a person with disability, the repetitive and inconsistent approach to accessing/enabling career and education pathways, coupled with the lack of centralised and personal ownership of data significantly impacts the potential for successful transition into meaningful and productive learning or employment opportunities.”

The Project team conducted interviews with people with lived experience from across Australia and asked about their experiences when accessing different types of supports and managing their own journeys, as well as engaging those who support and influence them. The top 4 problems for people with disability as they transition through different life stages were identified as:

5. Having to tell their story multiple times
6. Not being listened to
7. Identifying the right service
8. Having to have all the right documents

The impacts of these problems were clarified as loss of time, loss of aspirations, disconnecting from services impacting effectiveness of supports, and increasing the length of time individuals were reliant on higher levels of supports.

After much research and engagement, the project team partnered with an existing platform (Sameview) to inform enhancements around further education and employment, with ownership and control of the information remaining with the individual. There is a cost involved in using the platform and it will take some time for awareness to grow of its existence. However the primary goal of the project team, to have modifications made to MyGov was deemed to be a longer term plan, whereas changes could be made to a privately owned platform relatively quickly.

DISABILITY AWARENESS AND DSE

While the current offering of University Hubs and other opportunities for rural and remote students to access facilities to support their studies is an excellent initiative, they have been found to lack knowledge and equipment in how to support all students. This includes issues such as accessibility and other reasonable adjustments. This has created further barriers for students who are already managing the challenges of a remote or rural location. You don't know what you don't know, this is common theme expressed by people with disability and their family/carers. The NDCO's submission to the 2015 Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005, outlined the standards in general are being used in a positive way when people know about them. If people are aware of the standards, then they are enabled to be more confident in sourcing opportunities and adjustments. The challenge is when people don't know about the standards and are not aware of what support should legally be made available to them. Forward to the 2020 Review of the DSE, and the experience is similar, with NDCO's making recommendations to implement an awareness campaign to help fill the void of knowledge about the DSE to inform people with disability, family/carers. This

together with education providers/practitioners undertaking specific training as National Legislation, all schools Public, Independent and Catholic should reflect the same messaging with more monitoring on how inclusive teaching practices are being implemented.

Ensuring that the NDCO program to continues, with a focus on driving change will bring further gains in the ongoing identification and reduction of barriers for people living with disability and access to further education.

Q20 How can pathways between VET and higher education be improved, and how can students be helped to navigate these pathways?

In the **2019 Strengthening Skills Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System** the Honourable Steven Joyce, recognised that Vocational Education and Training (VET) could be an effective and efficient work based learning model that is well positioned to support the workforce as it moves towards a more technology driven environment (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019).

Evidence outlined in another report entitled "Looking to the Future: report of the review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training" outlines the many systemic barriers faced by young people with disability in completing their education. Key statistics identify that:

- 64 per cent of people with disability aged 20 to 24, had completed Year 12 or equivalent, compared with 81 per cent of those without disability.
- 19 per cent of people with disability aged 15 to 64 left school before 16 years of age, compared with 11 per cent of people without disability.
- 15 per cent of people with disability aged 20 and over have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 31 per cent of people without disability (Education Council, 2020)

The report also highlights that most students choose university as their transition pathway, however evidence suggests that disadvantaged students, such as regional, rural and remote students, students from low socio-economic status, Indigenous students and students with disability are more inclined to choose the vocational education and training pathway (Education Council, 2020).

Education is not solely focused on academic engagement and achievement. It plays a central role in a young person's social, emotional, and physical wellbeing. It is a safe space to develop connection and belonging. Vocational Education, in particular, develops confidence, education, and employability skills, enhancing a smooth transition into work and independence. This fact is important in the life of a person with disability (Drane, Vernon, & O'Shea, 2020) .

Vocational Education is designed to increase the engagement of young people in education and training and to provide transition opportunities to further studies and employment. The complexity of the VET Sector and ongoing negative community attitudes contribute to VET not being taken up as a valuable post school pathway (Education Council, 2020). It is critical this Accord enhances the opportunities of Vocational Education as a pathway to higher education and employment. Participation in VET will support students with disability to build work readiness skills and encourage them to make informed decisions about their future (Commonwealth of Australia, 2021)

The Australia Disability Strategy 2021 - 2030 focuses on removing barriers for people with disability. Through national leadership and an inclusive public policy response the strategy aims to promote mainstream services to improve outcomes for people with disability. The strategy takes a whole of community focus to achieve an inclusive society to ensure people with a disability live as equal members of the community (Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services), 2021).

The strategy acknowledges that people with disability experience more difficulties in the classroom and are underrepresented in the national workforce identifying a significant gap in the attainment of Year 12 or an alternative vocational education and training qualification. As a result, people with

disability have specifically identified employment security and education and learning as key outcome areas for continued improvement.

The key policy priorities outlined below will assist mainstream services to improve the outcomes for people with disability. The priorities are to:

- Improve transition of young people with disability from education to employment
- Build capability in the delivery of inclusive education.
- Improve pathways and accessibility to further education and training for people with disability.
- Increase opportunities for participation in lifelong learning.

Similarly, the Inclusive Victoria State Disability Plan 2022 – 2026 outlines Education and Employment as priority areas for Victoria to create a safe and inclusive community for people with disability. The plan identifies that fewer than five out of ten Victorians with disability are employed and that to improve this ratio the following outcomes need to be achieved. The outcomes are:

- Increased education achievement and engagement of students with disability
- Increased wellbeing of students with disability
- Increased employment and job quality
- Increased positive attitudes towards people with disability in the workplace
- Increased job flexibility

As participation and access to education and employment are the foundation of opportunity for people with disability it is evident that greater value must be placed on Vocational Education and Training in order to achieve the objectives outlined in the current Federal and State Disability strategies.

It is outlined in a report completed by PriceWaterhouse Cooper that many VET educators have limited understanding and general knowledge of disability. Evidence shows that VET educators and training providers lack disability confidence and awareness, in particular with hidden disabilities such as Mental Health and Chronic Illness.

VET educators receive limited professional development in relation to disability awareness and inclusive education. Consultations completed during the VET Skills Reform have highlighted the fact that the VET educator's certification of Training and Assessment does not contain a unit on disability awareness, this oversight results in lack of knowledge about students learning needs (Commonwealth of Australia, 2021).

VET educators also identified inadequate support and professional development to enhance their knowledge of inclusive pedagogical practices to benefit students with disability. VET educators have reported limited ongoing experience of working with students with disability lessening their opportunity to build awareness of supports, services, and resources available for students (PricewaterhouseCoopers: Skills for Australia, 2018).

VET enhances pathway opportunities and work readiness skills for disadvantaged learners and those who do not wish to initially transition to higher education. Evidence indicates that disadvantaged students, including those with disability are more inclined to complete a VET qualification, it is important that VET be recognised as a building block into their future (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019).

Evidence suggests that Careers Practitioners have limited knowledge of disability supports which restricts their ability to advocate for reasonable adjustments and course selection for students with

a disability. This limitation results in a lack of encouragement and recommendation of a VET qualification for students. In addition, Practitioners also lack sufficient links with industry bodies which limits their ability to provide reliable advice on VET pathways. This short coming restricts their ability to provide advice on opportunities for students to transition to higher education and employment (Education Council, 2020).

Students with disability continually face barriers finding their career paths within vocational education. For VET to be recognised as a valid pathway for students with disability further professional development must be provided to Careers Practitioners (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019).

There is a lack of collaboration between Registered Training Organisations and key stakeholders, including secondary school providers, higher education institutions, and employers' resulting in a less successful transition outcome from school to VET. This failure to collaborate results in students having limited opportunities for suitable work placements. It also results in limited community promotion and marketing of the VET sector by RTO's (PricewaterhouseCoopers: Skills for Australia, 2018).

There is no one solution to removing the barriers to education and employment for students with disability. The problem is complex. VET providers can contribute to this reform, provide an inclusive learning environment, and change community attitude towards Vocational Education.

Q28 What is needed to increase the number of people from under-represented groups applying to and prepared for higher education, both from school and from other pathways?

Q29 What changes in provider practices and offerings are necessary to ensure all potential students can succeed in their chosen area of study?

Increasing the number of people from under-represented groups to transition into higher education is complex and by attempting to apply to same strategies to people from various background, culture CALD, disability and low-socio economic families into one cohort magnifies rather than addresses the issues.

The NDCO program works towards improving the access and participation of people with disability in tertiary education and subsequent employment. The NDCO's nationally have worked tirelessly to provide expertise in all facets of transition and retention through; *providing Professional Development to educational providers, students and support services in a vast range of areas that promote inclusiveness, developed resources to support educators in providing best practice, submitted recommendations to increase participation in Tertiary education, and in collaboration with other experts conducted and wrote research papers on areas that require attention and possible solutions in leading the way to increase access and participation in tertiary education and subsequent employment.*

Enabling Career Pathways

One of the NDCO collaborative projects looked at the issue of lack of a central platform that would allow carriage of information relating to career aspirations and all that entails. A range of national research and stakeholder engagement activities identified this problem statement:

“For a person with disability, the repetitive and inconsistent approach to accessing/enabling career and education pathways, coupled with the lack of centralised and personal ownership of data significantly impacts the potential for successful transition into meaningful and productive learning or employment opportunities.”

The Project team conducted interviews with people with lived experience from across Australia and asked about their experiences when accessing different types of supports and managing their own

journeys, as well as engaging those who support and influence them. The top 4 problems for people with disability as they transition through different life stages were identified as:

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After much research and engagement, the project team partnered with an existing platform (Sameview) to inform enhancements around further education and employment, with ownership and control of the information remaining with the individual. There is a cost involved in using the platform and it will take some time for awareness to grow of its existence. However the primary goal of the project team, to have modifications made to MyGov was deemed to be a longer term plan, whereas changes could be made to a privately owned platform relatively quickly.

The **Joyce report** addresses key issues relating to the VET sector provided thoughts around a seamless transition from VET to higher education. The report identified that underrepresented groups such as; indigenous, CALD, people with disability and people from low socio-economic backgrounds are more often to take up a VET course than people from other underrepresented groups. This is due to several reasons including the ability to commence a qualification at a lower level and proceed to higher level qualifications as skills and knowledge increase. This within itself should contribute to increase of underrepresented groups moving through to higher education, however the report states that to enable a seamless transition from the VET sector there needs to be a conscious effort between Commonwealth and the States and Territories to work together to develop a strategic plan to address the recommendations that intersect.

The **NDCO's submission to VET reforms** highlighted the recommendation that secondary schools, other VET providers together with Higher Education should be represented at this table to find ways to leverage a smoother transition from school to VET and/or Higher Education.

Focusing on transparent and transferable systems that enables a carriage of information through life-long learning and includes, a national alignment of qualifications between VET and Higher education, reasonable adjustments with study loads and assessments, a national approach to SBAT pathways which currently vary from state to state/territory, together with national arrangement of required documentation. Revising the descriptor for the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education to emphasise its role in preparing students for vocational education and training and/or higher education is necessary to ensure pathways are well articulated to all students.

Another area of concern requiring urgent attention is the need for teaching and associated degrees to encompass specific units of study to cover disability to enhance teaching methods and to ensure no one is left behind. In 2018 The NDCO's worked with the Australian Government appointed expert panel on Australia's Literacy review. Given the falling literacy rates for students entering secondary school the expert panel implemented explicit teaching which primary schools elected to pilot throughout Australia. Current teachers had to be trained how to deliver the program which fell short when it came to students with Dyslexia and learning disabilities. A recommendation was made to the government to introduce disability awareness training as a part of teaching and associated degrees, in addition, add this to all Teaching and Assessment qualifications to ensure that people with disability are included in progression learning.

For people with disability access to healthcare, transport, public infrastructure and education and employment are the key factors that support active participation in community life. Although

significant positive change has occurred in the development of disability policy in recent times questions remain today as to how successful this change has been.

Evidence outlined in a recent report entitled **“Looking to the Future: report of the review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training”** outlines the many systemic barriers faced by young people with disability in completing their education. The report also highlights that most students choose university as their transition pathway, however evidence suggests that disadvantaged students, such as regional, rural and remote students, students from low socio-economic status, Indigenous students and students with disability are more inclined to choose the vocational education and training pathway (Education Council, 2020).

The Australia Disability Strategy 2021 - 2030 focuses on removing barriers for people with disability. Through national leadership and an inclusive public policy response the strategy aims to promote mainstream services to improve outcomes for people with disability. The strategy takes a whole of community focus to achieve an inclusive society to ensure people with a disability live as equal members of the community (Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Social Services), 2021).

The strategy acknowledges that people with disability experience more difficulties in the classroom and are underrepresented in the national workforce identifying a significant gap in the attainment of Year 12 or an alternative vocational education and training qualification. As a result, people with disability have specifically identified employment security and education and learning as key outcome areas for continued improvement.

One in five Australians live with a disability, yet only 6.91% of students commencing higher education in an Australian university in 2020 indicated that they had a disability, impairment or long term medical condition that may affect their studies (DESE, 2021).

Widening Participation (WP) has been defined as “initiatives which aim to address patterns of under- representation in higher education” (Jones, 2009). In 2007, Bourne conceptualised WP as “opening higher education up to people who might not traditionally have considered university while improving retention, because students from different backgrounds need different support to complete their courses successfully” (Chiwandire & Vincent, 2019). Pre-Access and Pre-Entry are terms often used interchangeably with WP to describe ‘working directly with communities to raise expectations about higher education and to provide information on available supports.’ (Dublin City University, 2017).

WP initiatives in Australia are governed by the Department of Education through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP). HEPPP provides \$140M annually to universities listed in Table A of the Higher Education Support Act 2003 to implement strategies that improve access to undergraduate courses for people from identified equity cohorts, and to improve the retention and completion rates of those students. Reforms to the program in 2021 narrowed the focus of HEPPP to support students who are from regional and remote Australia, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. Disability is consistently omitted from considerations and changes to higher education policy and practice.

While it is intended that HEPPP should include people with disability from low SES backgrounds, evaluation of the HEPPP program in 2017 showed that only 3% of all program funding was distributed to supporting students with disabilities. These figures are lower again for outreach projects with students with disability being engaged in only 1% of all targeted outreach activities (Department of Education and Training, 2017).

WP programs should support individualised agency and assist people with disability to identify their strengths, interests, challenges, and support needs. Participants must be afforded the opportunity to consider the societal and systemic limitations they may face as a disabled person and specific implications of these their future education, employment, and whole self. It is essential that the prospective student drives their transition planning to the largest extent possible (Crawford, 2012)

(Kohler et al, 2016). Cushing et. al (2020) found that self-determination and transition planning were the most frequently addressed and supported methods of building successful transitions to post-secondary education.

Further, to be truly student centred, WP programs must support the future student to consider their whole self, considering all dimensions of their identity, for example gender or cultural background, and how these intersectionality's might support or impact their learning experiences (Crawford, 2012).

One in five Australians live with a disability, yet only 6.91% of students commencing higher education in an Australian university in 2020 indicated that they had a disability, impairment or long term medical condition that may affect their studies (DESE, 2021) or to have the same opportunities to choose and control their own career pathways as any other Australian.

The National Disability Coordination Officer Program (NDCO Program) is an Australian Government initiative which aims to drive change so that people with disability have equitable opportunity to access, participate and achieve their goals in tertiary education and subsequent employment. The NDCO Program undertook a revision of current theory and of policy in Australia, as well as the United Kingdom and the United States of America where disability participation rates are much higher.

The report provided an overview of recent widening participation theory, provided a snapshot of current practice, and delivered recommendations for strengthening approaches to increasing participation of disabled people in Australian universities.

Investigations identified gaps and barriers at both institutional and federal policy levels. At the institutional level, lack of knowledge of and access to information about internal disability services reduced the capacity of disabled people to access widening participation activities and therefore embarking on tertiary education. Increasing representation of disabled people in marketing and awareness of the available supports both internally and externally will support uptake of tertiary studies by disabled students.

The report also identified the current federal funding structures aimed at increasing the participation of priority cohorts are actually prohibiting the delivery of widening participation activities aimed specifically to meet the unique requirements of disabled Australians. That only two programs were identified is indicative of the impact that underfunding and poor policy is contributing to low uptake of tertiary studies by this cohort.

Recommendations for consideration to improve this are provided, including the further investigation by the Australian Government to consider:

- Increased funding and inclusion of disabled people as a priority cohort within Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program OR
- Increased funding and strengthening of accountability for widening participation activities under the Disability Support Program
- Funding of Pathways and Transitions Coordinators independent of individual institutions

The Australian Government must also consider how it can strategically drive improvement through increasing accountability of individual institutions through:

- Setting targets for increasing the participation of students with disability and requiring institutions to document strategies and outcomes
- Requiring institutions to deliver and maintain up to date Disability Action Plans that consider the whole student lifecycle

- Provide guidelines for effective WP program development that are developed in partnership with disabled people.

Promotion of available supports already available to universities and employers (“Meaningful Jobs for Students with Disability from Luck to Business as Usual” Recommendations 3)

- There are currently numerous supports and resources available that relate to disability employment.
- Tools such as the JobAccess Employer Toolkit (www.jobaccess.gov.au/employers/employer-toolkit) can help to empower employers to hire and support Students with Disability by helping them understand the necessary steps required to make the successful transition into employment.
- This resource can also assist university staff to understand the importance of sharing any reasonable adjustments that have been in place to support Students with Disability with the employment specialist, and employers who maybe assisting the student with their employment transition.
- By promoting resources such as this Toolkit through universities, we will empower students, university employment support teams and employers to better understand their responsibilities and the requirements needed to assist with the transition of Students with Disability into sustainable employment in their field of study.

DAP/DIAP

In order to meet their requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act, 1992 (DDA) many universities prepare Disability Action Plans (DAPs). These documents outline the providers’ strategies towards meeting obligations under the Standards for Education, 2005 enshrined within the DDA. DAPs provide an overview of the actions that universities plan to take to increase access and inclusion of people with disability and are a strong indicator of the importance that universities place on this objective. While reviewing current practice in 2022, NDCO project group found that of the 44 Australian Universities reviewed, 33 had publicly available DAPs and only 11 had current plans. The remaining 22 were expired, some as far back as 2009.

- We believe that current, publicly available Disability Action Plan should be mandated for all Australian Universities. These must include targets for increasing participation of people with disability across all course areas, and strategies for achieving them. The DAP must consider all stages of the student lifecycle and assign accountability to the roles responsible for delivery of the strategies it contains. As part of the DAP, institutions can develop Widening Participation or similar programs that consider current research and consider a range of factors that have been found to be critical elements of successful programs. Including the topic of Universal Design for Learning in the DAP may also encourage quicker achievement of the benefits that UDL provides to all stakeholders.
- Ensuring that there is executive level active endorsement of the DAP significantly increases the effectiveness and outcomes achieved, and ensures involvement/ownership by whole of university. This effectiveness has been demonstrated in activities promoting inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in all aspects of university planning and engagement.
- As such, there should be Inclusion of students with disability in the groups developing the DAP, or other opportunities for students with disability to contribute to the development of the DAP.

Australia must take action to improve the participation of disabled people in further education. We have fallen behind in securing the systems and delivery of programs to ensure that people with disability can access higher education as a basic human right. Until disabled Australians are

encouraged to participate in a system that meets their needs, they will not be afforded the opportunities to secure meaningful economic participation.

Q30 How can governments, institutions and employers assist students, widen opportunities and remove barriers to higher education?

Q31 How can the costs of participation, including living expenses, be most effectively alleviated?

DES partnerships with universities

DES Providers across Australia have the skills and expertise to potentially assist several outcomes from the Inclusive Victoria State Disability Plan 2022-2026 and from David Eckstein's fellowship recommendations.

These partnerships or graduate programs currently exist in some Australian Universities through programs such as University Specialist Employment Partnerships (USEP) and Gradwise. These programs aim to improve graduate employment outcomes for Students with Disability by establishing connections with DES Providers to provide an on-campus specialist employment/recruitment service.

This program allows for the DES Providers to connect with university career advisors and disability support workers to create an environment that assist Students with Disability to become better prepared and have better support for employment prior and post-graduation. The Australian Government must also consider how it can strategically drive improvement through increasing accountability of individual institutions through:

- Setting targets for increasing the participation of Students with Disability with programs such as USEP and Gradwise and requiring institutions to document strategies and outcomes to increase the employment outcomes for Students with a Disability.
- Requiring institutions to deliver and maintain up to date Disability Action Plans (DAP) that consider the whole student lifecycle including their post University options including employment whilst also meeting the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, 1992 (DDA).
- Ensure that there is a representation from Students with Disability when preparing the employment support activities within the DAP to ensure that the Students with Disabilities voices are heard.

Promotion of available supports already available to universities and employers ("Meaningful Jobs for Students with Disability from Luck to Business as Usual" Recommendations 3)

- There are currently numerous supports and resources available that relate to disability employment.
- Tools such as the JobAccess Employer Toolkit (www.jobaccess.gov.au/employers/employer-toolkit) can help to empower employers to hire and support Students with Disability by helping them understand the necessary steps required to make the successful transition into employment.
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- By promoting resources such as this Toolkit through universities, we will empower students, university employment support teams and employers to better understand their responsibilities and

the requirements needed to assist with the transition of Students with Disability into sustainable employment in their field of study.

Q32 How can best practice learning and teaching for students from under-represented groups be embedded across the higher education system, including the use of remote learning?

Q33 What changes to funding and regulatory settings would enable providers to better support students from under-represented groups in higher education?

UDL

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework that improves learning for all students. UDL has proven to increase retention and positive outcomes by allowing a greater number of students' equitable access without the need for adjustments or accommodations. Considered an inclusive education skill, UDL achieves a range of benefits including reduction in barriers to learning, reduced number of adjustments (resources including time and money), reduced stigma, more time (for students, educators, support staff).

By reducing barriers, UDL will support the federal governments commitments to increase the proportion of Australian residents (25-34) who possess a university qualification.

Some strategies that may increase the uptake of UDL includes the addition of UDL in government and university policies, building the knowledge of educators and those involved in course design on UDL to ensure that attitudes are positive and informed, greater awareness of and engagement with current UDL Community of Practice to share ideas and encourage progress, financial encouragement for evidence of adoption (eg award, grant, outcomes tied to funding etc??).

To ensure that future course designers and educators include UDL as a matter of course, include UDL as a compulsory subject for all programs and courses, and in particular pre-service teachers and trainers (eg TAE).

There is currently a range of information regarding UDL that has been developed and is shared via the ADCET Website. ADCET, with significant support by NDCOs, have provided easy access to information in a range of different formats including self-paced online learning, Communities of Practice, Fact Sheets and webinars. It is critical that these two unique programs – NDCO and ADCET – are sufficiently supported to continue to ensure ongoing commitment and support to a range of equity issues that other representatives in the sector are not currently funded to focus on, nor are able to dedicate the same amount of time to. The NDCO program was introduced in response to difficulties faced by people with disability in navigating complex systems of fragmented, overlapping services across the disability, education and employment sectors. The last completed evaluation of the program found that the NDCO program provides a valuable resource and range of activities that help service providers to improve education and employment outcomes for people with disability. The NDCO program is unique in its mandate to provide whole of system expertise across different sectors and is considered an essential support. Further findings were that the program was appropriate, effective and efficient and would benefit from further investment.

Mandatory Disability Education

Our current education environment is not a true reflection of society, but rather provides the greatest opportunities for those who are able to successfully navigate. Students facing barriers to gaining their education are usually required to take extra steps, expend more time and energy, and arrange the support of others to make the same educational gains.

If education is the key to success, the opportunity to succeed should be equally available to all

Australians. The messaging received while studying (more than just the current subject of study) has a long-lasting impact on all students – messaging about a person's place in society and their value. If a student is treated as less due to a single characteristic such as disability, often due to lack of understanding, this value is felt not only by the individual but the students around them, compounding the impact. These may be newly acquired attitudes or perhaps justify current attitudes, and will carry outside the learning environment into everyday life – the workplace, social activities, shared spaces etc. Student experience is key to promoting equity within society. If we want society to continue moving towards being more informed, aware and tolerant it is essential that our education providers play a key role in championing this.

Disability awareness should be a compulsory inclusion in all programs. Education about what our society actually looks like (and regardless of the choice of study and career pathways all current students will be engaging with society, exactly as it is, not just the bits that suit them or they find easiest) and elements of Universal Design, will ensure a successful society where an individual's outcomes are more tied to their own efforts, rather than ability to overcome particular barriers that others may not face. Priority for this should be for all pre-service teachers and required professional development for in-service teachers and decision makers.

Ensuring that all current staff complete freely available Disability awareness training (as per Cultural Awareness training) as standard, with each institution aiming for 80% or higher completion by all staff each year, will also help bridge the knowledge gap.

Q39 What reforms are needed to ensure that all students have a quality student experience?

Q40 What changes are needed to ensure all students are physically and culturally safe while studying?

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Given the move of the NCCD to include data regarding imputed disability on the same basis as verified conditions, it is timely that anyone involved has sufficient awareness and knowledge to ensure that young Australians receive the best possible access to education and appropriate supports.

There is currently a range of information regarding UDL and Disability Awareness that has been developed in collaboration with NDCOs and is shared via the ADCET Website.

Q45 How should the contribution of different institutions and providers to key national objectives specific to their location, specialist expertise or community focus be appropriately financed?

Q46 How can infrastructure development for higher education be financed, especially in regional and outer urban locations?

Alignment of university funding with the employment outcome rates of Students with Disability as a KPI

The Australian Government Department of Education – Higher Education Funding website (<https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-funding>) states that the majority of funding for universities is administered under the *Higher Education Support Act (HESA) 2003*.

Measures funded under the Higher Education Support Act (HESA) includes the

- Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) and the
- Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS)

Whilst also contributing other grants to Higher Education Providers across Australia including but not limited to

- The Disability Support Program
- The Indigenous Support Program

- The Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program
- The Superannuation Program and the
- National Institute Program

This funding is designed to support Higher Education Providers to cover student tuition costs, to help students themselves to cover their study costs, to improve access for Students with Disability, to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students access and complete studies, to assist people from low socio-economic backgrounds, to cover superannuation costs for university staff members and to assist universities to cover the operational costs at the institutes.

However, the funding to support Students with Disability to enter the employment market post-graduation is not a priority currently in universities across Australia.

Data from the DESE's Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) shows graduate employment outcomes for people who have declared a disability are less likely than for graduates who have not declared that they have a disability.

Research shows that,

- undergraduate courses who reported they had disability (79%) were less likely than those without disability (86%) to be employed
- postgraduate coursework courses who reported disability (85%) were less likely than those without disability (92%) to be employed
- postgraduate research courses who reported disability (85%) were less likely than those without disability (90%) to be employed

Data from the 2020 Graduate Outcomes Survey – Longitudinal (GOS-L) which is completed approximately three years after completing their studies show that,

From undergraduate courses

- 80% of those who reported disability were employed in 2017 and 87% in 2020 compared with 87% and 94% respectively for those without disability, for those who were available for any work
- 64% of those who reported disability were employed full time in 2017 and 83% in 2020, compared with 74% and 91% respectively for those without disability, for those who were available for full time work

From Postgraduate Courses

- 86% of those who reported disability were employed in 2017 and 90% in 2020, compared with 93% and 96% respectively for those without a disability
- 72% of those who reported disability were employed full time in 2017 and 87% in 2020, compared with 87% and 94% respectively for those without disability

If the Australian Government were to realign some of the above funding to universities which was dependant on a KPI regarding the successful completion and attainment of employment outcomes for Students with Disability, then we would potentially see a rise in the employment outcomes for this group entering the employment market whilst also helping to close the gap between people with and without disability entering the employment market.

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