Inclusive learning:

A way forward
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Table of Contents

Minister’s Foreword ...................................................................4
What is inclusive learning? ..........................................................5
Why do we need to focus on inclusive learning in VET? ...............6
How do we embed inclusive learning? .........................................9
The way forward – Areas for action ...........................................10
Actions for teachers and trainers ..............................................11
Actions for RTOs .....................................................................13
Actions for policy-makers and funders .......................................17
Minister’s Foreword

Opportunities are knocking and all Queenslanders have the chance to learn new skills and contribute to workforce productivity.

Over the past decade we’ve come a long way towards achieving equality, however statistics tell us there are still groups in our community that are finding it harder to develop the skills they need to become productive workers.

Inclusive learning really is the way forward now for Queensland’s vocational education and training (VET) system.

An inclusive VET system is one where learners are not only valued and respected for their differences, but also encouraged to develop new skills so they too can play an important role in our state’s future prosperity.

I present to you our plan for providing greater access to, participation in and outcomes from vocational education and training. Inclusive learning: A way forward will help enrich the VET experience and help students to build a strong skill base from which to launch successful careers.

The Honourable John-Paul Langbroek MP

Minister for Education, Training and Employment
Inclusive learning: A way forward

What is inclusive learning?

Inclusive learning is about a fair go for everyone. Everyone has a right to learn, everyone can learn, but many people do not get fair access to learning opportunities. Vocational education and training (VET) systems and practices need to change to create the conditions necessary to include all learners.

Inclusion has significant economic benefit. Population projections indicate growth in the number of people who experience disadvantage. For Indigenous persons and people with a disability this growth is projected to be disproportionate to the broader population. Recent economic estimates of increasing the workforce participation of people who experience disadvantage point toward considerable economy-wide benefits\(^1\).

Inclusion is also about social justice. Inclusion assumes diversity is accepted, respected and valued. It suggests that ‘a just state of affairs is one in which people with a disability or another form of human difference should be included in society from the outset’\(^2\). In Australia today, this commitment to fairness is often referred to as ‘social inclusion’, which is about all Australians having the capability, resource and opportunity to learn, work, connect with others and influence decisions that affect them\(^3\).

Education is at the heart of social inclusion. From a teaching and learning perspective, being inclusive is about approaching, accepting, and valuing people as individuals first. It is at this individual level where a sense of inclusion is experienced. Rather than focusing on a single defining characteristic as representing ‘disadvantage’ (such as having a disability or living in a remote area), inclusive learning acknowledges the diversity of learners, all of whom have different backgrounds, identities and aspirations which impact upon how they learn. Recognising, respecting


and working positively with individual differences is how teachers and trainers put inclusive learning into practice.

Importantly, this inclusive approach does not just benefit the individual learner. By drawing out and valuing different ideas, approaches and experiences, inclusive learning allows individual differences to enrich the lives and learning of others and ultimately to positively influence community values.

**Why do we need to focus on inclusive learning in VET?**

From a social justice perspective, all learners should have equal access to learning. Fair access to learning leads to fair access to work and community participation. Few would argue with this point.

Inclusion is strongly supported in policy declarations and ‘equity’ has been an agenda in vocational education and training policy for decades. Yet, in 2011, large numbers of people are still disengaged and unable to fully participate in vocational learning. This includes people from disadvantaged backgrounds, Indigenous Australians, women, youth, people with a disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people from remote communities and many existing workers with low literacy and numeracy skills. Stronger concerted efforts are needed.

The Council of Australian Governments’ (COAG’s) Reform Agenda\(^4\) includes a commitment to social inclusion that also includes a commitment to closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. These commitments have been progressed through, among others, the Australian Government’s productivity agenda; its National Agreement on Skills and Workforce Development; its National Partnership on Productivity Places Program; and the National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions.

Of immediate interest to vocational education and training is the NVEAC’s ‘Equity Blueprint’ designed to ensure learners who experience disadvantage can achieve improved VET and employment outcomes. This

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Blueprint seeks to ‘embed equity into the DNA of VET’. Significantly, the government report, *Queensland Post-secondary Education and Training (QPET) Review*\(^5\) endorsed key aspects of the equity and language, literacy and numeracy agenda and stated that ‘more will need to be done if equity and social inclusion are to improve through access to post-secondary education and training’.

Inclusive learning should not just be thought of as a social justice strategy. There are vital economic reasons to get everyone learning to their potential. Recommendations from a variety of recent reports (e.g. Report of the Australian Social Inclusion Board\(^6\), the Bradley Review of Higher Education\(^7\) and the National VET Equity Advisory Council\(^8\) (NVEAC)) have all identified the need for action on social inclusion to boost Australia’s skills profile, its productivity and its international competitiveness.

We are living in a time of skill shortages. The economy will only have enough skilled workers if there is a significant increase in the number of people with VET qualifications. This means widening access to VET for people who may not have participated in the past. The NVEAC Equity Blueprint quotes a Deloitte Access Economics\(^9\) report that stated that eliminating ‘equity gaps’ for Indigenous Australians and for people with a disability would, by 2020, boost gross domestic product by $12.2 billion, increase consumption by $5.9 billion and increase jobs by 118,300. These figures are likely to be significantly larger once the social and economic benefits derived from increasing participation and achievements of other equity cohorts are also included. Welfare-to-work policies aim to do this and we are already seeing more diversity in the learner cohort. A report


by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research\textsuperscript{10} established that VET can provide a pathway to employment provided it addressed learners’ needs in a holistic way, rather than focusing on training-specific needs only. VET needs to be able to respond to ensure that all those who participate are actively engaged in learning.

There is another benefit to be gained from being inclusive. Research shows that students in universities with diverse populations do better than students in universities with narrow populations\textsuperscript{11}. This is because innovation happens when different types of people are brought together and different views are allowed to be shown. The VET sector has an opportunity to improve outcomes for all learners by increasing the diversity of its learner population.

There is a huge task ahead for all parts of the VET system to:

- increase the overall numbers of learners, by making programs attractive and accessible to all learners
- ensure that those who do participate are learning to their potential, by making the learning experience a productive one for each and every individual.

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Inclusive Learning: a way forward is part of Queensland’s effort towards the national aspiration for ‘an equitable and inclusive VET system that enables all learners to achieve their potential through skills development and to access the opportunities that society has to offer.’ By increasing the knowledge, skills and qualifications profile of people who experience disadvantage, VET can help resolve labour supply and skills needs of industries, while also delivering sustainable, potentially intergenerational, benefits to equity groups.

How do we embed inclusive learning?

For teachers and trainers being inclusive might be about tweaking practice, or it might be about making more wholesale changes. Many teachers instinctively know what to do to respond to learner differences (even if they don’t call it ‘inclusive learning’). After all, being inclusive is just good teaching practice. But others have not had much guidance or experience. A set of four core principles is presented in this document to help teachers and trainers embed inclusivity into their day-to-day practice. These principles interlock and reinforce one another and together they represent a clear, simple and practical framework that can be applied by the range of VET practitioners.

Teachers and trainers cannot bring about the changes on their own. Registered Training Organisation (RTO) leadership and policy and funding systems need to support them in implementing inclusive learning. If systemic issues get in the way of teachers’ good intentions, then all the advice in the world will not bring about the required improvements. Five action areas have been identified for RTO leaders and a further five actions have been identified for VET policy-makers and funders. Addressing these issues will give teachers the permission, resources and knowledge they need to get on with the job.

If teachers and trainers can actively apply the principles in this document in their day-to-day practice and RTO leaders, policy-makers and funders can make the changes required to processes and systems, Queensland will be well on the way towards having an inclusive VET system.

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The way forward – Areas for action

Actions for:

Teachers/trainers
Embed four principles into day-to-day practice:
1. Everyone learns differently
2. Being inclusive is everyone’s responsibility
3. Learners bring existing knowledge and skills
4. Five core skills underpin all learning.

RTOs
1. Understand differences in the learner cohort
2. Access skills and expertise in addressing difference
3. Listen to the learner
4. Help learners choose an appropriate learning pathway
5. Develop the core skills of learners.

Policy-makers and funders
1. Consider how to incorporate performance measures on inclusive learning for RTOs
2. Ensure funding arrangements do not penalise delivery to learners requiring extra time or support.
3. Review processes for triggering support
5. Establish clear governance arrangements.
Actions for teachers and trainers

Embed the following four principles for inclusive learning in day-to-day practice.

Everyone learns differently

Everyone can learn. Good teachers partner with learners to empower them to achieve to their potential.

Identity and learning approach are shaped by many factors. All good teachers embrace a wide range of differences and explore their effects on individual learning, then tailor teaching to the person as a whole.

The principle in practice: Teachers and trainers ensure learners feel connected, supported and valued as individuals and as part of a community of learners. Learners are encouraged and motivated to embrace course content, concepts and the perspectives of others.13

Being inclusive is everyone’s responsibility

Inclusive learning is not just for equity experts. All good teachers create an inviting and ‘safe’ environment for all individuals to learn. They use a variety of teaching methods, encourage respectful interaction, seek feedback from learners, collaborate with specialists when they need extra help and continually update their skills.

The principle in practice: Teachers and trainers clearly discuss their pedagogical beliefs, approaches and expectations. Learners are supported at multiple levels to motivate and enhance the learning journey. 14

14 Ibid.
Learners bring existing knowledge and skills

Learners need opportunities to express what they already know. Teaching strategies that draw upon the learner’s own knowledge and skills will engage them and give them confidence in their potential. Including different perspectives will enrich learning for everyone.

The principle in practice: Teachers and trainers ensure teaching and learning activities have contextual application and relevance. Learning is productive, meaningful and engaging, and builds on the learner’s existing capabilities.15

Five core skills underpin all learning

The skills of oral communication, reading, writing, numeracy and learning need special attention. They underpin every competency standard, at every qualification level. Teachers and trainers need to be able to identify gaps in these skills, provide customised resources and/or additional skill-building sessions for some learners and know when and how to access support from specialists.

The principle in practice: Teachers and trainers actively recognise the need for learners to continually update and build core skills for new contexts and are supported to identify and action learner skills gaps. Learners are encouraged and supported to fully engage with the vocational content.

15 Ibid.
## Actions for RTOs

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<td>1. Understand differences in the learner cohort.</td>
<td>Many learners struggle through and drop out of courses because they do not understand what is involved in the course before they enrol or do not have their support needs identified early enough. Understanding the vocational aspirations and support needs of learners prior to enrolment would allow organisations to ensure they are enrolled in the right level course and have the right mix of supports available to help them succeed. This does not need to be a formal process. RTOs could also provide teachers with relevant information about their learners’ needs prior to commencement of classes so that teachers can prepare accordingly.</td>
<td>Provide pre-enrolment appraisals and guidance to learners. Provide teachers with information on learner diversity.</td>
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<td>2. Access skills and expertise in addressing difference.</td>
<td>All staff need a minimum level of training that gives them an awareness of inclusive learning and confidence in dealing with diversity. For frontline staff, a more comprehensive depth of knowledge is required. Introductory inclusive learning skills can be embedded in induction programs. But most teachers and trainers also need the time and the space to acquire more sophisticated pedagogical skills, to give them strategies for responding to difference. ‘Equity experts’ such as LLN teachers, disability officers or Indigenous mentors need to be tasked with the job of capacity building to give teachers the confidence to work with diversity. They can provide teachers with strategies to understand their learners better, help them adjust their teaching practice to suit learners’</td>
<td>Prioritise professional development on inclusive learning. Create a culture of collaboration with internal and external experts.</td>
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Inclusive learning – a way forward
October 2012 version 1.0
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<td>backgrounds and identify when extra support is needed. They can also provide any specialised extra support at key times or for individual learners. Some specialists will be available ‘in-house’ (e.g. a disability officer is available in TAFE institutes), while in other cases specialists may need to be brought in or RTOs may wish to collaborate with ‘specialist’ organisations (e.g. ACE providers and RTOs in the disability, Indigenous and migrant areas). As the primary connection with the learner, teachers and trainers need to take responsibility for accessing specialist support in a timely way. To do this they need to know what kind of support is available and when and how to access it.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Identify and promote teaching and learning strategies to engage individuals and enrich the learning of others. Develop models for ensuring learning decisions are based on learner input.</td>
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<td>3. Listen to the learner.</td>
<td>The research shows that if learners’ backgrounds and experiences are not ‘given voice’ the differences they reflect may be pushed to the margins of program content (Bowl 2005). Many adult learners are unfamiliar with or have had unsatisfying experiences with formal learning, but their life experiences will have given them a context for their learning. Effective teachers will make connections with learners, create a climate of trust and draw on learners’ stories to make content as real as possible. Institutional commitment and leadership can support this practice. RTOs should also ensure that they are collecting the perspectives of learners. They need to consider learner views in the way courses are organised, support is provided and professional development is prioritised.</td>
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<td>4. Help learners choose an appropriate learning pathway.</td>
<td>Some VET learners need support to build the underpinning skills that enable them to develop the specific skills described in qualifications with vocational outcomes. These learners may need to first complete a Certificate I or II course or they may require additional support such as extra delivery hours, an extended completion time, completion of extra modules or units of competency. Other learners are limited by their geographical situation and/or personal circumstances and are unable to participate in learning the ‘standard’ way. Learners need flexible options and advice and guidance on the best pathway towards their vocational outcome.</td>
<td>When planning training offerings, consider pathways that will allow a diverse range of learners to access the training. Provide information and guidance on course requirements and outcomes prior to enrolment.</td>
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<td>5. Develop the core skills of learners.</td>
<td>Given that 50 per cent of workers have difficulty with language, literacy and numeracy skills, we can assume a large percentage of VET learners are struggling in this area. There are many things teachers can do to help learners integrate the development of such core skills in vocational courses. This will enable more equitable participation and significantly improve quality outcomes for all. But the wide range of awareness and understanding of these skills leads to considerable inconsistency in how this is done. The new TAE Certificate IV elective ‘TAELLN401A Address adult language, literacy and numeracy skills’ is one way</td>
<td>Provide professional development in integrating core skills into vocational content. Provide LLN support across all AQF levels in recognition of the need to continually update and build core skills for new contexts.</td>
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<td>Action areas</td>
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<td>teachers can acquire the basic knowledge they need to identify and respond to language, literacy and numeracy needs. A diploma is available for those wanting to develop specialist skills in this area.</td>
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<td>Currently, specialist language, literacy and numeracy support is concentrated at the lower level foundation courses. But many high level courses have significant LLN content and vocational teachers often need specialist help in unpacking, interpreting and delivering these skills.</td>
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Actions for policy-makers and funders

Consider how to incorporate performance measures on inclusive learning for RTOs

The performance of RTOs in relation to inclusive learning is not currently measured except in relation to Indigenous learners. This sends a mixed message around the importance of inclusive learning. The NVEAC strongly supports reform in this area and recommends that equity be incorporated into the ‘outcomes, outputs, progress measures and targets of the National Agreement for Skills and Workplace Development’. The NVEAC is in the process of developing a suitable set of performance measures which are likely to be built into the next intergovernmental agreement. Policy-makers and funders need to consider how these measures can be used to judge and reward RTO performance. The higher education sector now offers both carrots and sticks to universities to ensure they engage with the inclusive learning agenda, including providing better funding for institutions that do well in attracting enrolments from and supporting completions by students from equity groups. With consistent performance measures in place, the VET system could look at similar incentives.

Ensure funding arrangements do not penalise delivery to learners requiring extra time or support

Funding arrangements based on nominal duration of training do not support learners who need extra time for completion. In supporting and rewarding RTOs for successful outcomes for disadvantaged learners, a focus on qualification completions may not be appropriate if it penalises RTOs that provide training to learners who require longer timeframes for completion.

The NVEAC is developing a VET Equity Investment Framework which will propose a specified level of funding needed to support improved outcomes for equity groups and contribute to the outcomes being suggested for the next intergovernmental training agreement. The investment framework will include costing of a range of interventions and supports that can be used by states and territories to meet equity targets, as well as a projection of the numbers of disadvantaged learners that could be serviced through this funding.
This will provide a sound basis for revising funding arrangements to take the pressure off teachers and trainers who need time to accommodate individual difference.

**Review processes for triggering support**

While specialist resources and expertise are available, they are not always easy to access in a streamlined and timely way. Many RTOs are not aware that they can access funding for things like equipment, tutors and Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) support. If the process is difficult, providing inclusive training becomes a burden on RTOs and disadvantaged learners are excluded. There is also a need to look at eligibility for support. Some people do not wish to disclose their personal circumstances or they do not identify with standard categories, such as learners with a disability or Indigenous, but they may still require support. Approaches for identifying support needs and accessing the required resources in a timely way need to be developed that avoid a deficit approach. Finally, the volume of funding for support needs to reflect the true level of the need. The fact that about half Australians do not have the literacy and numeracy skills to perform their jobs properly\(^{16}\) indicates that need, in this area at least, is likely to be much higher than previously thought or budgeted for. Information on learner support needs should be collected, collated and analysed to inform the funding allocation process. The upcoming NVEAC VET Equity Investment Framework will provide a guide for designing the budget for these support programs in future years.

**Prioritise professional development on inclusive learning for 2012 – 2015**

The professional development challenge cannot be underestimated. Queensland has over 1500 RTOs, the most in the country. While frontline staff (teachers and trainers) are critical, other staff such as product developers, vocational placement officers, workplace assessors, educational managers and administrative staff all impact on the learner’s experience. All staff need some understanding of

how they should contribute to an inclusive learning environment. A strong push over the next three years to build the skills of the VET workforce in this area is one of the most important commitments the Government can make to ensure every learner is engaged and learning to their potential.

**Establish clear governance arrangements**

This document represents a first step in planning for a more inclusive VET at the delivery end of the system. As noted, there are a number of processes underway in other parts of the VET system which need to synchronise with the actions proposed in this document, including Queensland’s response to the NVEAC Equity Blueprint, the implementation of the updated professional development strategy and the strengthened emphasis on foundation skills in training products. Clear processes and governance arrangements need to be established to monitor and oversee implementation of this framework and ensure it links in with, gets picked up within, and capitalises on related work.