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
About the inclusive learning framework

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, vocational education and training (VET) can help resolve labour supply and skills needs of industries, while also delivering sustainable, potentially intergenerational, benefits to equity groups.

Inclusive learning: A way forward can assist Queensland to be well on its way towards having an inclusive VET system. It just requires teachers and trainers to actively apply the principles in their day-to-day practice. It also requires registered training organisation (RTO) leaders, policy-makers and funders to make changes to processes and systems.

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.

From a teaching and learning perspective, being inclusive is about approaching, accepting, and valuing people as individuals first. Learners have different backgrounds, identities and aspirations which impact upon how they learn. Rather than focusing on a single defining characteristic (such as having a disability or living in a remote area), inclusive learning acknowledges the diversity of learners. Recognising, respecting and working positively with individual differences is how teachers and trainers put inclusive learning into practice.

Teachers are not wholly responsible for inclusive learning. RTO leadership and policy and funding systems need to support them to ensure systemic issues do not get in the way of teachers’ good intentions.
Why do we need to focus on inclusive learning in VET?

Recommendations from a variety of recent reports have identified the need for action to boost Australia’s skills profile, its productivity and its international competitiveness.

We are living in a time of skills 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.

All people should have equal access to learning. This improves access to work and community participation.

By increasing the knowledge, skills and qualifications profile of people who experience disadvantage, VET can help address labour supply and skills needs of industries. This will also assist to deliver sustainable, potentially intergenerational, benefits to people who experience disadvantage.

Importantly, inclusive learning 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.
How do we embed inclusive learning?

The task ahead for all parts of the VET system is 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.

For teachers and trainers being inclusive might be about tweaking practice, after all it is just good teaching practice. Or it may be about making more wholesale changes. A set of four core principles is presented in this framework 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.

For RTO leaders and policy-makers and funders, changes need to be made to systems and processes to ensure teachers are holistically supported to embed inclusivity. Five actions for RTO leaders and another five for VET policy-makers and funders are identified in this framework. Addressing these issues will give teachers the permission, resources and knowledge they need to get on with the job.
Actions for:

**Teachers/trainers**

Embed four principles into day-to-day practice:

- Everyone learns differently
- Being inclusive is everyone’s responsibility
- Learners bring existing knowledge and skills
- Five core skills underpin all learning

**Registered training organisations**

- Understand differences in the learner cohort
- Access skills and expertise in addressing difference
- Listen to the learner
- Help learners choose an appropriate learning pathway
- Develop the core skills of learners

**Policy-makers and funders**

- Introduce performance measures on inclusive learning for RTOs
- Ensure funding arrangements do not penalise delivery to learners needing extra time or support
- Review processes for triggering support
- Prioritise professional development on inclusive learning
- Establish governance arrangements
Actions for teachers/trainers

Embed the following four principles 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. ²

Being inclusive is everyone’s responsibility

Inclusive learning is not just for equity experts. All good teachers create an inviting and ‘safe’ environment for everyone 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. ³

³ Ibid.
Learners bring existing knowledge and skills

Learners need opportunities to express what they already know. Teaching strategies that draw upon learners’ 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 learner’s existing capabilities. ⁴

⁴ Ibid.
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.
Actions for registered training organisations
Understand differences in the learner cohort

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.

**Action:** Provide pre-enrolment appraisals and guidance to learners to ensure:

- they are enrolled in the right level course
- the course matches their vocational aspirations
- the right mix of support is available to help them succeed.

This does not need to be a formal process.

**Action:** Provide teachers with information on learner diversity so that they can prepare accordingly.
Access skills and expertise in addressing difference

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.

**Action:** Prioritise professional development on inclusive learning.

‘Equity experts’ can give teachers confidence to work with diversity. They can provide teachers with strategies to understand their learners better, help them to adjust teaching practice to suit learners’ backgrounds and identify when extra support is needed. They may also arrange extra support at key times for individual learners.

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.

**Action:** Create a culture of collaboration with internal and external experts.
Listen to the learner

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. 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.

Action: Identify and promote teaching and learning strategies to engage individuals and enrich the learning of others.

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.

Action: Develop models for ensuring learning decisions are based on learner input.
Help learners choose an appropriate learning pathway

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 the ‘standard’ way. Learners need flexible options and advice and guidance on the best pathway towards their vocational outcome.

**Action:** When planning training offerings, consider pathways that will allow a diverse range of learners to access the training.

**Action:** Provide information and guidance on course requirements and outcomes prior to enrolment.
Develop the core skills of learners

Given that 50 percent of workers have difficulty with language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) 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. Accredited programs are available at Certificate IV and more advanced levels to understand adult LLN skills.

Currently specialist LLN 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.

**Action:** Provide professional development in integrating core skills into vocational content.

**Action:** Provide LLN support across all Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) levels in recognition of the need to continually update and build core skills for new contexts.
Actions for policy-makers and funders
The following actions for policy-makers and funders are all currently being researched and progressed at both a national and state level:

• consider how to incorporate performance measures on inclusive learning for registered training organisations

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

• review processes for triggering support

• prioritise professional development on inclusive learning for 2012 – 2015

• establish clear governance arrangements.
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