NVEAC *Blueprint for Change*

Finding New Ways for More Equity in Training

August 2010
ACPET welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the National VET Equity Advisory Council’s (NVEAC) consultations in Melbourne on Thursday 29 July 2010.

ACPET is the peak, national industry association for independent providers of post-compulsory education and training. ACPET members represent a diverse range of private education providers from schools to higher education institutes, delivering a full range of education, training and English language courses to both domestic and international students. Of ACPET’s members almost 850 provide VET.

While there are approximately 5,000 training providers (public, private, enterprise, and others in the VET sector) a recent national survey of 500 private training providers shows that private providers deliver 74% of all VET in Australia. The research also shows that within the private training sector, ACPET members deliver approximately 85 per cent of the training effort. Furthermore, within the private VET sector 80 per cent of training is delivered to domestic students, of which the vast majority is provided on a fee for service basis.

Private training institutions are the ‘engine room’ of the Australian training sector and deliver over 4,000 accredited and non-accredited courses to 1.4 million\(^1\) equivalent full time (EFT) VET students annually (By contrast, data collected by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research shows that TAFE Institutes deliver to approximately 511,000 thousands EFT students each year\(^2\)). The private sector includes 95,800 full-time equivalent staff: trainers and assessors, administrators, and others directly involved in supporting VET delivery.

\(^{1}\) WHK Horwath Education Industry Study, 2010
\(^{2}\) NCVER, Data extract from Australian vocational education and training statistics: Students and courses 2009
ACPET understands that the National VET Equity Advisory Council 2010 Work Plan supports a strong commitment to breaking the cycle of disadvantage. The NVEAC vision is of a training system that:

- delivers high quality training and promotes equity and inclusiveness;
- supports learners who experience disadvantage to achieve their full potential; and
- work in partnership with industry and the community to achieve improved outcomes for learners who experience disadvantage.

To this end, NVEAC has drafted (and is consulting about) its Equity Blueprint for Change called 'Equal Futures: Achieving Potential through VET – 2011-2016’. The draft discussion paper defines equity as:

- Equal access, participation and outcomes;
- Removing systemic barriers; and
- Recognising diverse needs and pathways.

ACPET supports this definition which is consistent with its own working definition of equity ie ‘The principles and practices of fairness and impartiality in ensuring that all members of the community have appropriate and equitable access to, and potentially equal outcomes from, the opportunities, resources, goods and services provided by an enterprise.’ ACPET’s definition of equity sits alongside its commitments to diversity and social inclusion.

NVEAC’s aspiration is to embed equity into the DNA of the VET system. NVEAC has identified its five priorities for systemic reforms as:

1. Sustainable funding and investment
2. Measuring and reporting performance
3. Building the capacity and capability of the VET workforce
4. Strong support for foundation skills development
5. Quality learning experiences and pathways to work.

ACPET supports the aspiration and priorities of NVEAC as they are consistent with the six principles set out in ACPET’s Statement on Social Inclusion and Diversity:
An integrated approach to managing diversity; strengthening capacity; supporting social inclusion and challenging exclusion; ensuring flexibility and resources; inclusive consultation; and continuous evaluation.

At the same time, ACPET would like NVEAC to be more specific in nominating the socially excluded groups of people who need to be assisted and supported. Not enough is said about this in the NVEAC discussion paper. For example, ACPET’s Statement on Social Inclusion and Diversity takes its lead from the Australian Government’s social inclusion agenda together with additional research about the diversity of the Australian workplace:

Almost 60% of women of working age are in paid employment; almost 40% of the workforce comprises workers aged 45 years and over; 28% of workers are part-time workers; 12% of the workforce also care for people with a disability or the aged.

At the same time, people under-represented or missing from the workforce are people with a disability (of whom only 53% were in the workforce in 2004 compared with 81% for the rest of the working age population); people with a mental illness; people who are homeless; Indigenous Australians (of whom only 43.2% were employed in 2006); and new arrivals and refugees.

ACPET is also pleased to see that NVEAC plans to undertake a legislative review to ascertain how existing legislative framework supports disadvantaged groups in the VET system. ACPET would be very pleased to take up the NVEAC invitation to contribute our expertise to this project when it commences. While research has shown that legislation can be idealistic and removed from the everyday realities of disabled people, (and that disability-related legislation tends to be based on medicalised notions of disability), a strong argument can nevertheless be made that without such legislation (including anti-discrimination laws), the rights of people with a disability and other disadvantaged groups would be considerably diminished.

In addition, Australia’s legislation is somewhat chaotic in that there is no one, single overarching equal opportunity legislation. Instead, each state and territory has its own anti-discrimination legislation to manage, in addition to keeping a weather-eye on the work of HREOC which oversees the administration of multiple Acts relating to discrimination based on age, race, sex and disability. (Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986; Age Discrimination Act 2004; Disability Discrimination Act 1992; Race Discrimination Act 1975; Sex Discrimination Act 1984). In addition, legislation tends to be premised on ‘bad things being done to vulnerable people’. A more positive approach might be to premise legislation on an examination of the role of structural and systemic privileges.
ACPET would also like to see reforming attention focused on:

- **Training package / Curricula design**, ie., making sure that course materials and learning approaches are inclusive. This might also require the establishment of dedicated training institutes to meet the educational and vocational learning needs of particular cohorts. In particular, technical institutes for deaf students that have been established in North America with apparently good results, for example, the Rochester National Institute of Technology for the Deaf. (See: [http://www.ntid.rit.edu/](http://www.ntid.rit.edu/) James (Jim) de Caro would be an excellent person there to speak with).

- **Transitions to work**, ie., turning training into ‘real’ work (instead of churning disadvantaged students through multiple training programs).

- **Collaborations** between the training sectors (public, private and community based); employers/ employer groups; and organisations representing the training and work prospects of disadvantaged students and trainees.

- **Establishing better links** between Commonwealth and States agencies.

ACPET suggests that other issues for NVEAC’s consideration include:

- **Responding to the impact of the casualisation of Australia’s workforce** in general, and the training/education workforce in particular, on the quality of professional development and career progression within the VET sector.

- **Matching business models with the policy settings for reform**. This includes either minimising or making better strategic decisions about the reporting and measuring requirements for the VET sectors.

The NVEAC consultation meeting in Melbourne was robust and enthusiastic, with participation from a wide range of organisations. ACPET looks forward to taking up the invitation to contribute to the next round of consultations following the release of the revised NVEAC Blueprint for Change later this year.

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