



We welcome the opportunity to provide comments on the National VET Equity Advisory Council's (NVEAC) Draft Equity Blueprint. We are TAFE Outreach Coordinators in South Western Sydney and Sydney Institutes. TAFE NSW Outreach was initiated in 1976 as a direct response to the Kangan Report, *TAFE in Australia: Report on Need in Technical and Further Education*, April 1974, Australian Committee on TAFE.. This represented a change in approach as it emphasised the need to reach and involve in education people who were disadvantaged in accessing TAFE. There are 45 Outreach centres across urban and rural NSW as well as Outreach distance learning provision at OTEN.

As NSW TAFE Outreach Coordinators, our role is to develop ways to overcome barriers to participation; to deliver community based learning opportunities in partnership with community/support agencies; to develop pathways for tentative learners; and to complement, link with and provide access into other TAFE provision. The theory and practice is based soundly on a response that involves corresponding strengths based approach comprehensive needs assessment and participatory planning to meet specific educational goals. This flexible and responsible delivery aims to assist learners to take control of their future and skills development.

My colleagues and I believe that there **is** a need for major reform. We support the idea of embedding equity in the DNA of VET and in particular improving workforce participation *and* social inclusion through these reforms.

The NVEAC's identification of obstacles to equity programs such as restrictive funding, gaps in the pathways from engagement programs to higher level qualifications and the inadequacy of base level qualifications for teachers in VET are most welcome. The Equity Blueprint's focus on social justice and fairness along with the notion of "a national framework that puts high-quality teaching and learning for all learners as its centrepiece and the foundation for a cleverly designed VET system" inspires confidence in the future.

Our response to the NVEAC Equity blue print is based on our deep knowledge of supporting disadvantaged learners to achieve potential through VET. Throughout NSW, TAFE Outreach's practice has adapted and responded to policies, changing social norms and emerging challenges for more than thirty years and in that time we have achieved excellent outcomes in engaging the most marginalised in our

communities through participatory and transformative education processes. We welcome your acknowledgement of the value of being informed by good practice and your recognition of the significant gap between engagement programs and Certificate III qualifications. We support the idea that good practice be embedded in management, operations, policy implementation, teaching and learning, and partnerships with employers in order for it to take seed and growⁱ.

While we appreciate your position in identifying target groups in order to measure change, we do have concerns arising from our experience that the most marginalised people in our communities experience complex disadvantage, thus tracking specific target groups may not be representative. NSW TAFE Outreach engages people experiencing multiple dimensions of exclusionⁱⁱ (Frieler, 2001) in vocational education and training opportunities including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, refugees, people experiencing intergenerational unemployment, men and women who are socially, economically, geographically and culturally isolated and excluded, the mature long term unemployed, disengaged youth, people with disabilities, people in custody, ex-offenders, people with no or minimal formal education and people with a limited awareness of opportunities available to them. National census data and the NSW report *Dropping off the Edge*ⁱⁱⁱ (Vinson, 2007) finds a complex web of disadvantage ensnaring generations of Australians and highlights the growth of individuals and communities experiencing disadvantage throughout New South Wales. Gillian Considine and Ian Watson's report, *Who is missing out - Access and Equity in VET*^{iv} (NCVER, 2005) recognises that NSW TAFE Outreach strategies to engage the most socially excluded whilst acknowledging the complexities of disadvantage 'appear to have the best chance of increasing VET access' for these groups. These practices and the benefits to communities are further supported in *Lifelong Learning: Work related education and training, Meeting the needs of Australian women*^v, (Turner-Zeller, Butler, 2007) with particular reference to Aboriginal women in their communities.

NSW Outreach has over 23,000 enrolments per year. Many of these students are enrolled in access courses, however a proportion are completing one or more level 2 or 3 AQF training package units as part of their course in fields as broad as construction, child care, computing, bookkeeping, floristry, media, event management, permaculture, aged care, hospitality and maritime. These courses

provide a supported pathway into higher level courses, yet as VET is under pressure to deliver higher level AQF qualifications, this gap widens for marginalised learners as the leap from access programs into a Certificate III or IV becomes more insurmountable^{vi} (Cooke, J. 2010). A range of Post Special Access courses that NSW TAFE Outreach and Aboriginal and Multicultural Education have previously offered (eg Get Skilled) are vital for marginalised learners to build strong foundations of knowledge and study skills in vocational areas. DEEWR PPP funded places are generally not suitable for these students or TAFE Institutes are concentrating their PPP places at Cert III or above in order to meet COAG targets.

Acknowledging OECD recommendation that Certificate II and III are equivalent to school leaving “free education through Certificate II or III is consistent with provision in basic education generally and would improve equity.” “Students should be entitled to pursue VET qualifications without charge up to the level normally attained at the end of schooling, that is, up to Certificate II or III.” “The current funding framework has a number of inconsistencies. It is unclear why, on public policy grounds, pupils in schools studying for Certificate III qualifications (the level of qualification for those leaving school and seeking entry to higher education) pay no fees at state schools, while those studying for VET Certificate III qualifications in VET institutions do^{vii} (Hoeckel, et al, 2010)

Previous successful practice in TAFE NSW was to engage students with well designed, negotiated and tailored programs and then support the students into lower level, Cert I, II or III qualifications in mainstream. The added value to this was that mainstream teachers got to teach lower level students, challenging and enriching their practice and giving teachers and students space to develop mutual understanding of each other and the system. Outreach still successfully engages people who would not, under other circumstances come to TAFE. However increasingly, we find the bridges that were there to assist them on the pathway to higher qualifications are more like tight ropes. At a time when TAFE NSW is emphasising “equity is every bodies business”, structures such as the AEET framework appear to have diminished responsibility from mainstream VET as they bounce students back creating an over representation in these “employability skills” qualifications that do not substitute for good supported learning in a mainstream qualification.



“There is a tendency to 'pigeonhole' students who experience disadvantage into these 'lower level' courses rather than implement the process where students can receive assistance to complete 'mainstream' courses. In some cases it may be appropriate to direct students to a course which is attainable for their personal level of previous education with the aim of 'pathwaying' them into mainstream vocational courses but I am loathe to think students are being discouraged from VET courses because of financial disadvantage or cultural differences. Increasingly I am aware of mainstream sections seeing these barriers as 'too hard' to overcome, therefore discouraging students to enrol or apply, or sending them to Outreach, ESOL or ABE where teaching staff are considered more qualified to deal with *these issues*.” (Outreach Teacher, 2010)

The gap between Access courses and mainstream higher level qualifications threatens to reinforce the notions of failure and negative education and training experiences of many disadvantaged learners. These are critical transition points where many of our students are again currently being failed.

The Equity Blueprint does acknowledge the programs that have successfully supported marginalised target groups into mainstream education and employment so rather than totally redesigning the system, we believe that the reform needs to also build on existing successful programs. Those successful programs should not only be acknowledged, but be enabled to continue rather than being disbanded due to lack of funding or a momentary change in political direction.

For more details about TAFE NSW Outreach provision please see Attachment 1 'Embedding Participatory and Transformative Learning in Curricula – from social exclusion to social inclusion' *new community quarterly*, Critical Pedagogy, Popular Education and Transformative Learning in Higher Education, Volume 7 Number 4, Summer 2009 <http://www.newcq.org/?page=loadissue.php&v=7&n=4>



REFORM AREA 1 – Sustainable investment

1.1 and 1.2 National Partnership Agreement for Equity in VET

We support the development of a National Partnership to ensure that equity is embedded into VET funding agreements, however quantifying the costs of provision for people with multiple barriers to accessing education, employment or community engagement is highly complex and not easily simplified to a loading per training hour. Effective support services with qualified and experienced staff require sustainable funding.

Any funding considerations need to take into account the need for qualified specialist teachers working on the programs and adequate support services so that equity outcomes can be achieved.

1.3 Impact of Contestable funding

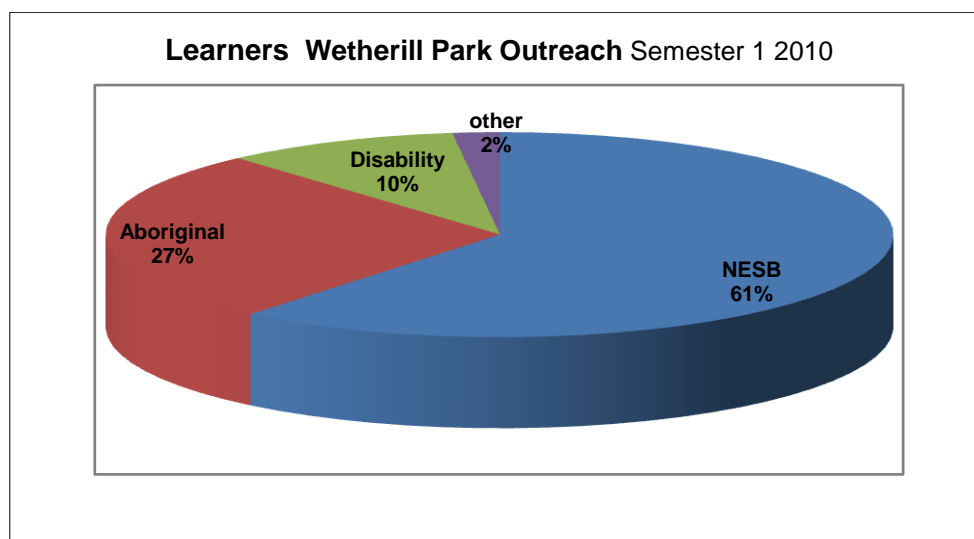
Contestable funding undermines provision of services, sets community agencies in competition, places excessive demands on resources for submission writing and discourages flexible, responsive practice. The prescriptive nature of contestable funding undermines provision of services as the emphasis of programs is shifted to compliance and budgetary constraints while options for responsive flexibility are limited. Collaborative partnerships enrich programs; however competing for funding can undermine partnerships as agencies struggle to win limited funds or compete for the same funds. The demands of writing submissions can place a strain on limited resources and set stakeholders up for disappointment when after significant consultation, funds are not won.

Planning and consultation for best practice must accommodate flexibility in a program to respond to opportunities or barriers that emerge. Contestable funds are not conducive to negotiated learning, responsiveness or taking risks, these are critical aspects of successful practice and effective outcomes. Current DEEWR Innovations funding emphasises the need for place based partnership programs with wrap-around services but fails to identify and acknowledge existing good practice of this nature as it seeks to achieve impressive outcomes to inform policy. In our experience effective practice comes from reliable funding, acknowledgement of professional practice rather than micro management or compliance and an audit culture, and highly proficient committed professionals working in dynamic partnerships to bring about negotiated programs from the ground up. Imposing

partnerships in order to access funds, moving human resources to writing endless submissions to try and “win” funds that have limitations, demands and reporting requirements that absorb resources and fragment programs negates effective practice.

In NSW the need for programs such as TAFE Outreach, Aboriginal Education, Multicultural Education, Disabilities and Adult Foundation Education to constantly vie for funds undermines the efficacy of these TAFE sections. The loss of ANTA, DEST, AWT and most recently LLNP funding sources has had incredibly negative effects on TAFE Special Program delivery capability.

The core funding for the Outreach section in Sydney Institute has been reduced by a third over the past 15 years while the demand for our courses has increased. In Semester I 2010 Petersham Outreach enrolled 274 students, 11% were from Aboriginal and Torres Strait backgrounds, 15% identified as having a disability, 49% were from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and 40% had left school at year 9 or below including 8 students who had never attended school. In the same period at Wetherill Park Outreach 28% of students were from Aboriginal and Torres Strait backgrounds, 61% from CALD backgrounds, 10% identified as having a disability, 41% had left school at year 9 or below and 4% of students had no schooling (see Attachment 3 for more details).



In 2009 Sydney Institute Outreach was successful in securing Federal Innovation funding for 3 years for a large place-based partnership program targeting the homeless and those at risk of homelessness in Woolloomooloo, Redfern/Waterloo

and Marrickville. Already we have had excellent outcomes however when this funding expires there will be a huge gap in delivery capability. This funding has enabled us to increase provision that is very similar to our existing provision with the exception of the potential development of community enterprise outcomes^{viii} (Buckland, Couch and Kenny, 2010 – Attachment 2).

The impacts of contestable funding are detrimental to provision for disadvantaged learners and therefore we support the investigation into the impact of contestability and support the identification of sustainable investment as an important core area of reform.

In our research we have found that over the past 22 years Australia has experienced a downgrading of public education. Funding for TAFE has been reduced by 11% since 1997 despite skills shortages, the need for more educational opportunities for Australians and ambitious COAG targets. NSW risks following Victoria into a fully contestable funding model, where access and equity education provision could be placed in the community education sector resulting in residualised provision (without support services counselling, disabilities support, Aboriginal and multicultural coordinators, libraries, student associations etc) and fluid articulation to higher level courses. Education is Australia's third largest export industry yet education for the country's most disadvantaged is under threat.

TAFE NSW has been able to offer lower hourly costs in comparison to other States, despite the provision of highly effective support services that are mentioned above. Too often the impact on education is measured without consideration to the supports that assist in achieving the outcomes. Administrative support is a case in point. If the administration supports are reduced to the minimum, then qualified teachers and Head Teachers and other educators spend their hours struggling with paper work rather than engaging with the important aspects of educational preparation for which they are qualified.

1.4 Place-based and student centred funding

NSW Outreach is the forerunner of place-based educational provision in the VET sector. In their original submission for placement on the DEEWR Innovation Fund Panel Sydney Institute described the tried and tested 30 year Outreach practice of providing multi-agency, community based negotiated learning programs for

disadvantaged members of the community. Outreach continues to practice negotiated learning despite needing to work within a highly structured competency-based curriculum (AEET Framework).

The resulting success in the first round of the Innovation funding led to Outreach in Sydney Institute having increased capacity to deliver programs to the stated target group: the homeless and those at risk of homelessness. The PLACE Project is a community engagement and learning project focusing on people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in inner, south eastern and inner western Sydney. The project strengthens learning, employment and community enterprise networks in order to provide locally negotiated place based Learning to Work programs leading to a range of community participation, education and employment opportunities (Buckland, Couch & Kenny, 2010).

Ironically South Western Sydney Outreach with its rich history in provision to equity target groups and chronic needs was not successful in procuring Innovation funding.

The diagram below shows how TAFE Outreach is strongly aligned to the federal governments Social Inclusion Agenda with its effective practice in diverse and flexible educational provision to the most marginalised in our communities (see Attachment 3 for more details).



Currently NSW Outreach operates with minimal public funding that has reduced considerably over the past 15 years. Despite providing much needed educational

opportunities for Job Services Australia (JSA) clients TAFE Outreach receives no targeted funding for programs that are well populated by Stream 3 and 4 clients however these students are often referred into programs by a community support agency and not a JSA. It is problematic that JSAs receive funding when their clients engage in education or access employment and yet had nothing or little to do with this placement. Having funding follow the student may ensure that the appropriate provider can continue to provide educational opportunities to disadvantaged learners although this may also lead to increased competition between providers that will not lead to improved equity outcomes.

In the case of Outreach vocational access programs such as Introduction to Aged Care or Access to Child Care, 70% of Stream 3 students (some of whom may never have worked in Australia) gain part-time casual employment in the relevant industry and/or articulate into Certificate III courses. These access courses are very successful but they are expensive to provide and can use up to 25% of an Outreach semester budget.

Outreach Coordinators refer students with higher educational levels and less barriers to learning to more appropriate higher level mainstream vocational courses or to Community College provision. Community Colleges are valuable sources of educational provision for people who are faster learners, people who are working during the day and are able to study during the evenings and on weekends and not dependent upon support services such as counselling, disability consultants, Aboriginal and multicultural coordinators, library computer access, childcare and student services.

1.5 Assistive technologies

In the case of some disabilities assistive technologies are imperative to the learning process as are interpreters, learner support or other support strategies for students with hearing, physical, intellectual, neurological and psychiatric disabilities and acquired brain injury. It is essential that there continues to be funding for these highly specialised disability support services. TAFE students that have disabilities can receive support from specialised TAFE disability consultants and this support is often the difference between them undertaking and completing their studies or withdrawing.

REFORM AREA 2 – Measuring and reporting performance

Measuring and reporting in terms of progress made and setting targets are necessary to inform practice and provide feedback to stakeholders. We consider that reflection, measuring and reporting should be included in good practice to benefit, rather than obstruct outcomes. We have observed systems that develop in particular directions in order to achieve measurable outcomes rather than to achieve the most effective outcomes. For example the focus on curriculum has shifted to measurability and consistency^{ix} (Watt, 2006) rather than sound educational outcomes.

Compliance and auditing have denigrated practice as the simplistic notion of “if it cannot be measured it has no value” has seeped into management speak, to the dismay of educators. The fixation with audit instruments and measuring outcomes is detrimental to good practice as programs are changed to accommodate measurable outcomes. Such procedures undermine professional practice and burden teachers and their managers with administration to the detriment of program integrity. Program reporting and evaluation should complement and enhance outcomes. Balancing qualitative and quantitative reporting is essential to obtain authentic evaluation of outcomes achieved.

Our experience endorses the idea of using skill sets to engage and motivate disadvantaged learners. Barista, first aid, white card, creative skills, advocacy, computing, trades orientation, child care, mentoring, green skills or whatever you can negotiate as meaningful and valuable and you have the capability and capacity to deliver has proven a very effective means of engaging disengaged learners including young people at risk. This is a step on the way to achieving a student’s potential. In Outreach practice these skills sets would be embedded into a process that includes ongoing negotiation, collective learning and critical literacy.

The trends in standardising qualifications nationally have moved the focus to quantitative reporting rather than qualitative. This has meant a shift to competency based qualifications in training packages and an escalation in reporting demands in measurable terms to accommodate easier processing and analysis. These trends fit awkwardly with Outreach practice, distracting teachers from evaluation and reporting that enriches learning, in order that they meet compliance and audit demands that are often punitive and repetitive.



In an environment that has increasingly moved VET towards a business model, could it be there has been a deliberate move to “shorten the replacement cycle” as part of the product strategy. An effective way to achieve this might be to reduce the breadth or depth of education and training, to focus on narrow procedural knowledge or technical outcomes at the expense of cognitive and behavioural skills that make learning deeper and extend the context of learning:

“The most valuable learning enables students to act differently in different contexts. This kind of learning – ‘deep learning’ (Marton & Säljö, 1976) – changes students’ concept or understanding of and interaction with the world (Ramsden, 1992: 4; Biggs, 1999: 13).^x (Moodie, 2004)

In a business model this would offer several benefits, the cost of delivery would be reduced as programs are stripped back to technical skills and learners would need to return to purchase further technical skills as their narrow range of skills became obsolete. Such a move would be particularly detrimental to those doing lower level qualifications and working in low-income insecure work as they are the least able to keep returning to update their skills.

“In a knowledge-based economy, those who have the lowest levels of skill and the weakest capacity for constant updating are less and less likely to find paid employment. Individualization has also meant that access to social support mechanisms has weakened”.^{xi} (Smith, 2001)

Work related training is just part of the notion of lifelong learning, it is also about participation, personal development, active citizenship and participation in recreational learning.^{xii} (Slowey, 2008). Skill has three ‘logics’ – a cognitive dimension (eg literacy, numeracy, general educational competence), a technical dimension (eg trade/professional skills) and a behavioural dimension (eg interpersonal skills).^{xiii} (Buchanan et al, 2001)

The most marginalised in our communities by engaging in a community learning group develop skills and knowledge to extend their personal and community networks while building self-confidence and extending critical literacy skills in order to make sense of the world and their place in it. This empowers and motivates learners to participate more effectively in society and set sustainable informed goals



for further vocational education and training options, participating in their community and accessing employment. These difficult to measure behavioural dimensions lead in either the short or long term, depending on the learner, to more appropriate and sustainable employment. These outcomes are particularly prevalent in the Department of Corrections funded Pathways to Education, Employment and Training (PEET) programs that Outreach provides across NSW. These access programs are for Probation and Parole clients who are identified as being at high risk of re-offending. Many PEET students have had very negative educational experiences and during this course begin to explore opportunities and start to redefine themselves as students and job seekers and people with something to offer their community. A similar program for Juvenile Justice clients has had the same outcomes. Following the educational pathways of these students would be one way of measuring success however confidentiality is of paramount importance.

Outreach Work Opportunities for Women (WOW) courses are particularly effective at supporting women, who are entering the Australian workforce for the first time or re-entering the workforce, to value their existing skills and life experience and develop skills that are relevant to their short and long term vocational goals. Some students gain employment upon course completion but others may continue to study in Cert II or III courses before having the qualifications and confidence to pursue work that is meaningful to them or that will fit with the caring roles that many of these women have. Only longitudinal and broad measurement will effectively reflect the VET and employment outcomes of these groups of students.

An Outreach Coordinator in South Western Sydney recounts her experience of working on a place-based partnership program for women:

“I worked closely with Edna from Centrelink in setting up a course that would be of interest to women, provide child minding, teach them a simple and useful skill, and provide an opportunity to raise their self esteem. As part of the strategy, Edna attended all the sessions along with a TAFE teacher who taught the skills – in that instance skin care products. One of the activities was writing up the individual stories. This followed a format and was put together with their photo. I offered to assist the group to write their own story which I then published in a book of the class with each individual’s photos and a contact page at the back



for friends to write down each other's contact details if they agreed to share them so they could keep in touch.

The outcomes were dramatic. Two years later, the women were still in touch with each other and giving each other support. Some of them came to mainstream courses. One of them, who like many in that particular group was a victim of domestic violence, found the group so helpful in raising her self-esteem that she brought out her excellent qualifications and came back and taught the next group." (TAFE Outreach Coordinator, South Western Sydney)

Longer term, sustainable outcomes such as confidence, network building and lifelong and life-wide learning skills add value to many aspects of a student's life. This has flow on effects to their families and cultural, local and wider communities. These outcomes include second chance education and opportunities to explore the full range of vocational and further education options available and for students to get hands-on experience in these industries and fields.

Volunteering is also a valid outcome for primary carers (full time parents), mature aged unemployed and retired citizens and for some students with disabilities, chronic health issues or drug and alcohol addiction. Outreach students acquire through volunteering valuable vocational and employability skills and develop networks that often lead to paid employment. This outcome is even more important with the ageing of the Australian workforce and population and is why validation of life experience and existing skills and life-long and life-wide learning skills are such important outcomes.

Bearing all these considerations in mind, we support effective evaluation of programs that informs teachers, VET managers, funding bodies and policy makers and leads to enhanced provision for people experiencing multiple barriers to education.

REFORM AREA 3 – Building the capability of the VET Workforce

Outreach practice continues to be informed by research in social transformation, community cultural development, adult education and civil society. Mike Newman, Stephen Brookfield, Jane Thompson, Paulo Friere, Myles Horton and Jack Mezirow are some of the educators whose proven effective strategies and theories for transformative and participatory adult education shape Outreach practitioners adding a further dimension to their practice. Formal and informal, collaborative and reflective professional development as a statewide community of practice contributes to the high standard of provision to the most marginalised people in NSW communities.^{xiv} (Kenny, Cooke 2008)

In TAFE NSW over the last few years, base level qualifications have dropped for teachers undervaluing teaching expertise and undermining the morale of teaching staff. The breadth and depth of teaching strategies and informed practice suffers as professionalism is diminished and teachers lose the skills required to deliver high quality teaching from engagement level AQF1, through to delivery of AQF5 diploma level qualifications.

Wheelahan (2010) reports widespread acknowledgement that in order for VET teachers to achieve government objectives for the growth of VET, social inclusion, building workforce's skills, and specific participation and equity targets and in response to shifting international economy highly skilled VET teachers are essential.^{xv}

An outstanding feature of Outreach is the calibre of its teachers who are not only skilled in education and a broad range of professional and trade related areas but who are also able to meet the needs of adult learners who may lack confidence in their ability to learn and need special encouragement while respecting and honouring their skills, knowledge and life experience. Outreach runs a qualification in partnership with UTS which is equivalent to a subject form the Bachelor of Adult Education, we have found this to be a highly effective induction to teaching in Outreach. It is also run for community groups such a bilingual community workers as part of our community capacity building strategy. The programs enhance their work in the community and some go on to University to study Adult Education as a result.



Hence we endorse the need for teachers to have the skills to identify, respond to and draw in specialist support for a diverse learning population. Reduced capability of the VET workforce results in shallow learning outcomes and more disadvantaged people missing out because their needs cannot be met. Society misses out on the lost potential of disadvantaged people who are often seen as an economic and social drain.

In public VET Institutes, a refocus on pedagogy and professional learning that goes beyond compliance with accredited standards would be welcomed. Professional development opportunities have responded to the trends in audit culture that emphasises compliance rather than pedagogy. The intersection of the current narrowed aspect of skills in training alongside the recognition of the need for VET pedagogical development to build deeper learning will assist in overcoming short cycles back into poverty as quick fix training drives disadvantaged learners backwards so they find themselves unable to respond beyond a narrow vocational context and unemployed again.

“A report investigating the role of VET in the welfare-to-work pathway found that VET does play a role in helping welfare-to-work target groups (including people with a disability) into work. However, short-term pre vocational courses alone are not likely to lead to sustainable employment although they may be useful as stepping stones to mainstream VET (Barnett and Spoehr, 2008) (NCVER, 2010)^{xvi}

In recent times there has been a great loss of expertise and specialists in equity leadership and support resulting from a misguided notion that removing such expertise would make equity everybody's business. This has posed further challenges to working effectively in the area to achieve optimal outcomes, highlighting the importance of such expertise.

The limited delivery of supported Certificate I and II courses has also impacted on quality teaching as teachers have generally lost the opportunity to develop the teaching skills with lower level students and team teaching opportunities that enriched their teaching skills.



The need for building capability across the VET sector is of the utmost importance. Currently a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment is the entry-level qualification for VET delivery. In TAFE the minimum qualification for teachers of foundation studies is a degree in adult education (literacy, numeracy or ESOL) but this is not the case across the sector and as a result disadvantaged students are further disadvantaged as their complex educational needs are not met. With many foundation and access teachers nearing retirement age there is an additional need for investment in the VET workforce.



REFORM AREA 4 – Embedded support for foundation skills development

We as Outreach Coordinators support the emphasis NVEAC is placing on the embedding of foundation skills in VET. Foundations skills, engagement, confidence and motivation are essential in addressing social exclusion and increasing workplace participation. Expert professional educational services are necessary to achieve this for people with multiple dimensions of disadvantage and cultural diversity. Furthermore foundation skills in qualifications extending from VET to higher education and employment are key for learners to move forward.

While we welcome the recent Federal government initiative (LLN) Practitioner Scholarships Program promoting teachers into adult literacy and numeracy^{xvii} (Australian Government, 2010), issues such as the casualisation of teachers are problematic in terms of the consistency and time invested to commit to work between language, literacy and numeracy teachers and vocational teachers. The practice in TAFE of team teaching between literacy and numeracy teachers or vocational teachers and Outreach teachers is highly effective in achieving mutual professional development.

Short term funding and expectations that quick fixes will work within a system that does not acknowledge the value of high quality teaching, works against our capability and capacity to embed foundation skills.

We welcome identification of successful approaches to delivering foundation skills as opposed to “bold new approaches and innovation” as we see many effective solutions that are systemically overridden and dismissed in the rush to be innovative. Reflective practice and evaluation are critical aspects of the high standards of practice required to make a real difference when working with the most marginalised in society.

REFORM AREA 5 – Pathways and partnerships

NSW TAFE Outreach works closely with a range of government and non-government agencies to define the educational and employment potential of individuals and collectives. We negotiate programs with a broad range of community partners to promote social inclusion. Our negotiated, place based approaches apply appreciative inquiry strategies and seek to holistically address opportunities and challenges to achieve intergenerational outcomes that are productive and sustainable. The partnerships often provide additional benefit with other services that the learners will benefit from outside of the program. Such partnerships promote wrap around solutions and opportunities. Mutual benefits for all stakeholders are key to successful partnerships. Modelling dynamic partnerships or networking is also of great benefit to learners demonstrating the benefits of such collaborations. Social Inclusion Pathways for Refugee Youth, a recent very successful program with young refugees in Fairfield, is the result of the partnerships shown below.



Statements of Attainment at varying levels are critical transitions for some migrants to contextualise the qualifications and experience they bring with. They often have the skills and just require updating workplace and social practices.

Sydney Institute Outreach and Multicultural sections are taking part in the Federal Local Connections to Work initiative at Campsie Centrelink and this is consistent with our practice of collaborating with community agencies and industry to improve access to information and services and effective referral for marginalised people. It is encouraging to see that the DEEWR is rolling out partnership programs such as this that build on past successful practice.

Imposed partnerships such as those with Job Services Australia (JSAs) are problematic when there is a lack of appreciation of the program complexity and learners are pressured to undertake punitive tasks that undermine their progress. For example, Outreach students at Liverpool have been directed to sit in a room at a JSA for three hours as their training requirement, reading newspapers and then writing letters of application, with no one in the room to assist them. We are advised by DEEWR that the funds we need to run programs for the most marginalised are

now with JSAs. They are offered incentives to achieve specified outcomes for the most disadvantaged; in our experience this is not congruent to individuals achieving their potential for full participation in society. Even the basic task of providing résumés to their clients seems to be beyond the capability of many JSAs:

“Every résumé brought in by JSA client has had to be rewritten. One man brought in a résumé with simply his name and address, what does this do for a person’s confidence? A résumé can reflect a person’s identity. There is also the opportunity to apply very productive processes including validation of life experience, skills and knowledge, building self esteem and exposing opportunities that can be applied in building a résumé that seem to be completely lost by JSAs” (Outreach Teacher, 2010, Mt Druitt TAFE Job Pond)

We question the JSAs capability to engage and refer or provide the quality of services required to transform or rebuild life’s of the most disadvantaged. We also question whether JSAs are qualified to address the most pressing issues of the job seekers who are assessed as having the most severe levels of disadvantage. Our experience suggests such people require highly qualified specialist assistance to address multiple strands of disadvantage and deprivation. Our practices apply intergenerational approaches, community capacity building, collaborative learning, appropriate strategies to draw learners into community inclusion, advocacy and critical literacy access to appropriate services. The current business approach of offering bonuses or rewards for achieving specific outcomes with the commodity being the most disadvantaged in our community is abhorrent and open to exploitation and undermines professional informed practice.

NSW TAFE Outreach courses, with the exception of Mentoring, are free. This means that the hidden unemployed, such as spouses with working partners have access to educational opportunities that would otherwise not be an option in low-income households. As students pathway into higher level courses the fees increase presenting yet another barrier to education (and the meeting of COAG targets).

Partnerships are particularly crucial to the success of programs for young people at risk as youth support agencies have the staff with the specialist experience in case managing young people. This collaboration can mean the difference between success and failure of a vocational access program.

REFORM AREA 6 – Listening to the voice of the learner when designing the VET system

Programs developed applying negotiated collective learning to bring about community strengthening as well as catering to individuals prove effective in NSW TAFE Outreach. Outreach Coordinators work outside their colleges making contact with people and groups in the community. Through a process of appreciative inquiry they listen and respond to the potential, the strengths and needs of stakeholders. Collaborative interagency partnerships and with ongoing negotiated and collective learning are standard practice in NSW TAFE Outreach.

Community capacity building programs are rich in outcomes with intergenerational change and the opportunity to apply collective negotiated learning in a context to enhance reaching potential of individuals and communities. Individual and collective advocacy, access to services, appropriate pathways to sustainable career opportunities and social inclusion are outcomes achieved.

Silencing the voices of learners

Replication of successful programs that emerge from good practice is often suggested. Our experience finds such practices are frequently disappointing because it is the seed or the practice that needs to be taken and nurtured rather than the program. Replication diminishes the voice of the learner and other stakeholders in the program. This reduces flexibility and the responsiveness that contributes to undermining of program outcomes. We see this as further evidence that business practices that commodify disadvantaged people are not only offensive, but also ineffective.

Contestable funding can also diminish the voices of learners as compliance to meet funding generally means more structure and inflexible programs. The paradox is that program outcomes are compromised when the ongoing contribution of learners to programming is silenced or the authenticity of listening and responding to it undermined.

Listening and heeding the voice of the learner is a positive step forward.



Conclusion and Recommendations

We wish to state that we welcome the prospect of an overhaul of how equity is funded in Australia and the many reforms outlined in the draft Equity Blueprint. We believe that in order for these reforms to be successful in increasing the participation of disadvantaged equity groups in vocational education, community engagement and employment the following recommendations need to be taken into account:

That in the process of identifying target groups to measure outcomes that it be noted that the most marginalised people in our communities experience complex disadvantage, and thus tracking specific target groups may not be representative.

That any reform needs to build on existing successful programs.

That sustainable investment is an important core area of reform.

That any funding considerations need to take into account the need for qualified specialist teachers working on the programs and adequate support services so that equity outcomes can be achieved.

That NVEAC explore the efficacy of funds for further education and training going to JSAs rather than VET.

That built into funding mechanisms are incentives to work with the most disadvantaged currently identified as Stream 4 and that providers with a proven commitment to social justice, university qualified staff and existing equity support services are not overlooked for the sake of cheaper provision.

That there be effective and sufficient opportunities for equity students to pathway into lower level, Cert I, II or III qualifications in mainstream VET and that these courses be fee exempt, as per OECD recommendations.

That program reporting and evaluation should complement and enhance outcomes recognizing that balancing qualitative and quantitative reporting is essential to obtain authentic evaluation of outcomes achieved.

That the workforce capacity and capability building measures reflect the need for a



highly skilled workforce in order to effectively embed literacy, language, numeracy and employability skills into foundation qualifications up to Cert III.

That NVEAC and funding arrangements acknowledge that while TAFE mainly spans from middle high school through to university in terms of delivery, a significant percentage of our students have had minimum or no schooling at all, adding further complexity and stretching our reach to cover literacy at primary school level in tailored adult format.

That learners do have a voice in what they study, how they study and who their educational provider may be.

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