



AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION

SUBMISSION TO THE

CLIENT AND STUDENT VOICE

SUB-GROUP

PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

February 2006

Pat Byrne
Federal President

Susan Hopgood
Federal Secretary

Australian Education Union
Ground Floor
120 Clarendon Street
Southbank VIC 3006

Telephone: 61 3 9693 1800
Facsimile: 61 3 9693 1805
E-mail: aeu@aeufederal.org.au

Background

The Australian Education Union is an Industrial and Professional organisation representing approximately 165, 000 members nationally. Membership of the AEU includes teachers and educators working in TAFE. We welcome the opportunity to submit our thoughts on National Advisory structures for people with a disability within the VET system to the Client and Student Voice Action Group, through its Disability sub-group.

Key Issues

The AEU supported the role of the former Australian Disability Training Advisory Council (ADTAC) and the work outlined in *Bridging Pathways – Australia’s National Disability Strategy for Vocational Education and Training (2000 – 2005)*.

We also support the key priority areas outlined by ADTAC, stemming from the findings of the mid-term review of the Blueprint for Implementation, these being:

- Progressing a whole of life approach;
- The need for effective performance measures;
- Delivering on the ground; and
- Engaging key players.

It is essential that any new advisory structure for people with a disability has the capacity to engage key players who would enable the achievement of the priority of Progressing a Whole of Life Approach for people with a disability. There are many ways in which this could occur, including the establishment of one peak advisory body, which has the ability to further engage with stakeholders across governments, systems and stakeholder organisations on a project basis.

The Need for Effective Performance Measures, including the priority area of improving data collection is essential if any new advisory structure is to meet the principle of *adopting an evidence base to provide advice*, as stated on page 6 of the consultation paper. Clearly, it is an unrealistic expectation to establish a group based on this principle if the evidence-base for the provision of advice does not exist. It is also critical that the data collected must be relevant.

In relation to the priority area of Delivering on the Ground, the AEU would like to make particular reference to the development of a coordinated and targeted professional development strategy for teachers and trainers. We believe that for such a strategy to be successful, it must be developed with participation from all key stakeholder groups, including teacher unions, and funded appropriately to ensure proper implementation and evaluation occurs.

We note that the ADTAC advice outlines funding as a key principle to the priority item of Delivering on the Ground’ and endorse the notion of the development of more equitable purchasing arrangements in relation to supporting people with a disability throughout their training and on to employment.

The AEU also supports the need to improve employment outcomes for people with a disability; however we believe that some caution must be exercised in using employment as

the only indicator for success, as there are a broader range of indicators which need to be taken in to account.

The AEU believes that any advisory structure that is established for people with a disability should be enabled to generate work through self-initiated projects and partnerships with other VET sector stakeholders, and should be funded to do so. We also believe that planning and measurement of outcomes for people with a disability in the training sector must be embedded in to the key performance measures in mainstream planning processes, and that an individual report specific to the training of students with a disability should also be established.

The AEU believes that key players in the Union movement should be engaged through the unions' peak body in Australia, the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

Related Issues

The AEU believes that the VET system must create advisory structures with emerging target equity groups in mind, as the Commonwealth's 'Welfare to Work' policy will create demand for education and training opportunities from parents with particular barriers facing them, including parents with a disability and parents of children with a disability.

With the Welfare to Work policy changes, parents previously eligible for the Parenting Payment will, when their youngest child turns 6, have their payment ceased and be required to work 15 hours a week for the 'Newstart' allowance. Research tells us that parents in this demographic are more likely to have limited education and reduced prospects of employment. Therefore the impact of this policy change is likely to create demand for additional VET places, either by job seekers wishing to access VET or by industry wishing to re-train new employees.

One of the most significant changes disallows new applicants, including parents caring for children with severe disabilities aged between 6 and 15, from accessing the parenting payment. As the NFAW notes, (Perry, 2005) many parenting payment recipients themselves have disabilities. When access to the Parenting Payment (Single) PPS is reduced, many of these will apply for Disability Support Pension which is, at the same time, restricting access to people with less severe disabilities and requiring 15 hours of work. No account is being taken of the effects of a combination of moderate disability and parenting responsibility. (Perry, 2005, p6)

Whether parents of children with disabilities, or parents themselves with disabilities, the pressure to seek and sustain employment creates a potential need for further education. These potential students may find training costs or inflexibility in the system to be significant deterrents. The potential for limited pathways for many of these would-be VET participants should also concern DEST.

The AEU believes that there should be scope within the new advisory structure, and ongoing consultation with a broad range of stakeholders in order to encompass such diversity in emerging student cohorts.

References

Perry, J. (2005), "Brief for NFAW on Changes Proposed for Sole Parents by Government's Welfare to Work Policy," National Foundation for Australian Women.
<http://www.nfaw.org/p-r-2005-www-7.doc>