

# **Australian Education Union**



**Submission**

**to the**

**Department of Education, Employment and  
Workplace Relations**

**on the**

**National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy**

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The Education Union has a membership of 170,000 educators who work in public schools, colleges, early childhood centres and TAFEs in all states and territories of Australia.

The Australian Education Union supports the need to address barriers that exclude people with a disability from community life, including workforce participation. As such it welcomes the development of a National Mental Health and Disability Strategy to increase employment opportunity and workforce participation for people with a disability.

One of the primary barriers to workforce and community participation people with disabilities face is lack of effective qualifications, training and skills. Accordingly the basis of any employment strategy must include effective and appropriate education and training and transition programs aimed at assisting and increasing workforce participation.

Within this context the AEU believes that the implementation of such a strategy should take into account the matters discussed below.

## **Education to Work Transition Programs**

The public education system must be adequately resourced to ensure the provision of a quality education to students with disabilities which addresses their special needs. These resources should ensure a range of support services and types of educational settings appropriate to the particular needs of different students with disabilities, adequate access to integration aides and other support staff as required and training and professional development for teachers and other education workers.

There is evidence that many teachers and other education workers consider the level of resources for the provision of the needs of students with disabilities in government schools to be inadequate. Accordingly, the provision of services aimed at maximising the educational and employment opportunities for students with disabilities would be facilitated by an audit of current resources and programs provided by State, Territory and Commonwealth Governments. Such an audit would provide information regarding what resources and programs are in place at present and what are required to meet their responsibilities to students with disabilities.

Specific programs are needed to support the transition of students with disabilities from schools to work or school to further education. These include “work readiness” programs that inform students about pathways and equip them to make choices as well as industry specific VET programs such as school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. However, few schools presently have the resources to provide such programs alone, and the latter particularly requires cooperation between schools and TAFEs.

As part of the aforementioned audit, there could also be an examination of the effectiveness of existing programs. Such a process would enable the identification and resourcing of these programs for further implementation as part of a national strategy aimed at improving the education and training of people with disabilities and ultimately supporting their transition to work.