



## NATIONAL VET advisory taskforces

National VET Indigenous Advisory Taskforce (NVIAT)  
National VET Equity Advisory Taskforce (NVEAT)  
National VET Disability Advisory Taskforce (NVDAT)

### *Joint Communiqué to Stakeholders*

## What's happening for equity groups in the National Training System?

### How did we get here?

It is now over 12 years since the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) first established the ANTA Disability Forum and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Training Advisory Council (ATSIPTAC) to provide much-needed focus on creating opportunities for people with disabilities and Indigenous people to successfully participate in training leading to employment. The Disability Forum and ATSIPTAC produced Bridging Pathways and Partners in a Learning Culture, Australia's national strategies for disability and Indigenous reform in the training system that have been guiding the reform process ever since.

Following Ministerial endorsement of the strategies, the ANTA Disability Forum and ATSIPTAC were replaced by the Australian Disability Training Advisory Council (ADTAC) and the Australian Indigenous Training Advisory Council (AITAC) which oversaw the implementation of the Strategies and provided advice and guidance at the Ministerial, bureaucratic and delivery levels. Each produced a mid-term review of the respective strategies that provided more practical focus on the reform process.

During this time ANTA also produced a national policy paper for women in Vocational Education and Training (VET) called Women: Shaping Our Future and a national strategy for people in corrections called National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training for Adult Prisoners and Offenders in Australia.

Following the transfer of responsibility for the national training system from ANTA to the Commonwealth, a short-term Action Group: the Client and Student Voice Action Group (CSVAG) was established for a 12-month period to provide advice to the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education (MCVTE) on a new structure to provide leadership to the equity reform process at the national level.

### What happened in 2007 & 2008?

Following an extensive national consultation process in 2006, advice from the Client and Student Voice Action Group (CSVAG) saw the establishment of new national VET equity advisory arrangements by MCVTE (comprising the Ministers responsible for Training from each state and territory and the Australian Government) in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system for a two-year period from the beginning of 2007 until the end of 2008.

The advisory arrangements comprised three National VET Advisory Taskforces (Indigenous, Disability and Equity) and a National VET Advisory Alliance which reported to the National Senior Officials Committee (NSOC – comprising the Chief Executives for the Training Authorities in each state and territory and chaired by the Australian Government) and MCVTE. Each of the taskforces had two co-chairs: an influential leader from the client group(s) that the taskforce represented and an NSOC representative. The Advisory Alliance comprised the co-chairs of each of the Taskforces plus a member of the National Industry Skills Council (NISC).

These new arrangements were established to be the primary source of advice to governments regarding student needs in VET, and particularly for students with poorer VET participation and employment outcomes than the general student population.



The key objectives of the three Taskforces were to see improvements in the following areas for their client groups:

- sustainable employment outcomes;
- higher level qualification attainments;
- effective transitions from school or community;
- participation rates; and
- the capacity of the VET system to contribute to addressing whole-of-life barriers to training and employment.



After a very busy two-year period, the National VET Advisory Taskforces have prepared their final reports, and made recommendations relating to their respective client groups. These reports were tabled at the 20 November 2008 MCVTE

meeting, together with a proposal by the Advisory Alliance for a new national VET equity advisory structure from 2009. Ministers agreed to the establishment of the new equity advisory body, the National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC). More information on this exciting new development is included in this communiqué.

This is the second and final communiqué of the National VET Advisory Taskforces and Advisory Alliance, and is intended to inform stakeholders about what has been achieved since their formation and to outline the new equity advisory arrangements that are currently being established in VET.

## What have the Taskforces achieved?

### National VET Indigenous Advisory Taskforce (NVIAT)

Co-Chairs:

- Ms Darcel Russell, Deputy Federal Secretary, Australian Education Union
- Mr John Hased, Deputy Chief Executive, Department of Education and Training (DEET), NT

Following the National VET Indigenous Forum, held in November 2007 which heard from a range of VET stakeholders on key issues and priority areas, NVIAT identified specific areas of focus including:

- collaborative programs of work to generate greater participation by Indigenous Australians in the mining, construction and health industries;

- a comprehensive research project focussing on successful models for Indigenous training and employment in targeted industry sectors; and
- building the capacity of the Indigenous VET workforce.

Progress on projects and activities associated with these identified areas of focus includes:

### Indigenous research project with NCVER

The NVIAT worked with NCVER to develop a research proposal on common themes in best practice models within a range of identified organisations. The NVIAT commissioned NCVER to undertake this research with the aim of identifying the success factors leading to sustainable employment outcomes for Indigenous clients.

The research project is completed and the report and a guide were released on 24th March 2009.

The report is titled: *Brokering successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes: Common themes in good-practice models*

The accompanying guide outlines themes and methodologies that will be a useful resource for those working in the field of Indigenous training and employment entitled: *Guide to success for organisations in achieving employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.*

Both documents can be accessed on the NCVER website at: <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2127.html>

### Other NVIAT activities include:

- meetings with the board of the National Community Controlled Health Organisations (NACCHO) to discuss strategies for improving Indigenous access to training in the health industry;
- regular meetings with DEEWR and peak employer/employee organisations to receive updates of work in relation to promoting Indigenous employment, training and retention in a range of industries, including mining, construction, oil & gas, transport and forestry;
- representing Indigenous equity issues on the National Quality Council;
- engaging in initial discussions as a member of the national working party on the formulation of a National Indigenous Early Childhood Training Network;
- engaging in discussions with the Senior Officers National Network on Indigenous Education (SONNIE) on creating greater strategic links between education and training;

- supporting research and advice on scholarships for Indigenous students in the VET system and into further study or sustainable employment; and
- growing partnerships and linkages with higher education through the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council.

### Future Advisory Structures from 2009

As members of the Advisory Alliance the co-chairs of the Indigenous taskforce also worked on the structure of proposed future models for social inclusion in VET, culminating in the proposal for the National VET Equity Advisory Council. The taskforce is of the view that the new Council should involve formal structural arrangements for the engagement of Indigenous people in decision-making structures and the broader Indigenous community, including Indigenous VET stakeholders.

### National VET Equity Advisory Taskforce (NVEAT)

Co-Chairs:

- Ms Kathy Rankin, former Senior Manager, NSW Business Chamber
- Mr Jim Davidson, Deputy Secretary, Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

NVEAT's key tasks were to advise Ministers on the common issues and barriers faced by all learners in VET, as well to consider the issues and barriers specific or unique to particular client groups. Both Co-Chairs embraced these challenges by taking a consultative approach, including through working directly with students to identify the barriers to participation in VET from the grass-roots perspective.

A number of activities were undertaken by NVEAT to gain a better understanding of the range of issues affecting learners and particularly disadvantaged groups of students in VET. These included:

- conducting a range of consultations with potential, current and recently graduated VET students;
- reviewing recent research; and
- establishing an online forum where students can provide ongoing feedback on their VET experiences.

The final NVEAT report draws on the findings of these activities to make the following recommendations:

- improve community awareness and knowledge of VET as a pathway to employment and further education and training;

- develop nationally consistent career guidance and development services at VET institutions to support students through transition from pre-training through to completion and employment;
- continue to work with the NQC providing input and advice on the AQTF; for example, to increase the level of professional development undertaken by trainers/teachers so they are equipped to meet the needs of individual students and understand the importance of mentoring relationships;
- improve links between the VET and higher education sectors (such as improved processes for credit transfer from VET to higher education) to maximise VET as a potential pathway to enable equity groups to achieve higher qualifications;
- increase the ability for students to pay their course fees in instalments or delay payment until greater earning capacity has been attained;
- review the social security eligibility criteria for full-time students to better align with full-time study requirements in VET;
- consider longer term funding initiatives to promulgate proven examples of best practice and successful pilot projects that improve access, participation and learning outcomes for VET students;
- streamline and enhance enrolment, timetabling and other administrative processes through increased use of online services;
- increase course flexibility and consider re-structuring courses by clustering units into fewer days of the week to provide students with a greater capacity to 'earn and learn' and reduce the number of travel days required; and
- in regional areas where local employers are equipped with the materials and facilities required for the practical component of VET courses, consideration should be given to harnessing these facilities and knowledge so they can act as satellite training centres for students studying via distance and online.





Further information about NVEAT's activities and recommendations are included in the final report which is available on the Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations website:

[http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training\\_skills/publications\\_resources/](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/publications_resources/)

### **National VET Disability Advisory Taskforce (NVDAT)**

Co-Chairs:

- Mark Bagshaw, Managing Director, Innov8 Consulting Group
- Craig Fowler, Deputy Chief Executive, Department of Education, Employment, Science and Technology, South Australia.

NVDAT has undertaken a number of strategic yet practical projects including:

- initiating the development of a National VET Disability Research Strategy (in partnership with the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, NCVER);
- designing and overseeing a 'VET to Work' pilot project conducted in South Australia to test an approach for supporting students with disability in VET to successfully complete their training and transition into employment. This project is currently being evaluated and early indications show it to be a very successful model;
- requesting an update of the important economic analysis of the costs and benefits to the nation of improving equity for people with disabilities that was originally conducted by ADTAC (undertaken by DEEWR). The resulting, unpublished, DEEWR report confirms that investment in increasing participation of students with a disability will more than pay for itself in increased earnings potential;
- commissioning a review of the accessibility of training-related websites across the country;
- developing a successful proposal to create a scholarships framework aimed at supporting students with disability in VET, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and staff who are undertaking innovative work in making training more inclusive for people with disabilities; and
- a project to develop recommendations for a one-stop-web-based-shop on disability-related training information.

NVDAT spent a considerable amount of time developing thinking about the future of disability reform in the VET system. NVDAT's work became central to the development of the new national VET equity leadership structure.

We believe that the disability (and broader equity) reform process has reached a point of major transition from what we call the "laboratory" stage to the "integration" stage in which the needs of people from each of the equity groups are built into every system and process of the training system. Central to this transition will be the acceptance of ownership of, and responsibility for disability and equity reform by the "mainstream" structures, systems and processes in the VET system. The new NVEAC and the equivalent structures at the state and local levels will provide the leadership and guidance required during that transition.

This next stage of disability and broader equity reform in VET is about to begin with the endorsement by Ministers of the NVEAC proposed jointly by the three Taskforces via the Advisory Alliance. The new advisory body will be significantly different both in structure and operation. Most importantly it represents a renewed focus on equity reform in the training system including a significant increase in funding to support the advisory body.

This is an inspiring and exciting time for everyone who is so committed to equity reform in Australia's training system. There is an enormous amount of hard work ahead of us to bridge the still significant gap in participation of all of the equity groups in the VET system, but these changes represent a shift in gear and a shift in focus that many believe will be the key to the reform process into the future.

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### **A personal message from Mark Bagshaw, Co-Chair NVDAT**

As I look back on the last 12 or so years, I feel both encouraged by and frustrated by the progress we have made so far. When I first became involved in the equity reform process in the VET system as Chair of the ANTA Disability Forum, only 3.5% of all VET students in Australia reported having a disability. At the same time over 16% of the working age Australian population reported having a disability—a gap of over 13%. Helping to bridge that gap was the task the ANTA Disability Forum embarked on.



In the 12 years that followed, and due to the unflagging effort and commitment of the many, many people around the nation who have contributed to the disability reform process, that gap has now closed to 9.4%. That is encouraging as it demonstrates that this is a solvable problem. It is frustrating because it still represents 121,000 of our fellow Australians who are currently not participating in training. Australia can do better. The new National VET Equity Advisory Council has a large task ahead of it.



In closing I would like to thank, on behalf of all Australians with disabilities, the many people who have contributed to the disability reform process in the VET system over the past 12 years. In particular I would like to thank my colleagues, the members of NVDAT, who have worked so hard over the past two years to help reach the point we are at now.

Deserving of particular recognition and thanks are the two NVDAT Co-Chairs with whom I have worked over the past two years, Brian Cunningham (formerly CE of the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST) in South Australia), who established himself as an absolute champion of disability and equity reform. His successor in the role of Co-Chair of NVDAT and Chair of the Advisory Alliance, Deputy CE of DFEEST, Craig Fowler, was the driving force in convincing Australia's training Ministers of the need for a new approach and a revitalised investment in equity reform. Their contributions have been profound. I have enjoyed working with these two champions enormously.

Finally, four people whose work is often insufficiently recognised but without whom NVDAT could not have done its work, are worthy of a standing ovation. Sarah Marshall (original Executive Officer of NVDAT), Sally Ryan (Sarah's successor), Robyn Porter (NVDAT Administrator) and their manager Richard Osborne made contributions to the VET disability reform process that have left a significant legacy that we all appreciate enormously.

## What's going to happen in 2009?

### The new National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC)

MCVTE endorsed, on advice from the National VET Advisory Alliance, the establishment of a new National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC) to operate from mid-2009. NVEAC will provide high-level advice on matters relevant to improving the participation in VET and achievement of students from equity groups in VET, and the performance of the national VET system in support of such students.

MCVTE's decision to establish the NVEAC recognises that equity students are an integral part of the VET system. The new Council will include a part-time Chair and a full-time Director with secretariat services. The Council will consider and provide advice on a broad range of equity issues in VET, streamlining equity advisory arrangements. Membership will include Indigenous, disability and broader equity advocates as well as VET providers, union and business.

Activities to establish the Council are underway and include:

- appointment by the Minister in consultation with states and territories of a high-calibre part-time Chair;
- engagement of a full-time Director to oversee the activities of the newly formed Council;
- appointment of Council members; and
- engaging project and administrative officers to support the work of NVEAC.

Secretariat services for NVEAC will be provided through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Australia which also supports the National Quality Council and the National Industry Skills Council (NISC.)

### More Information

For further information regarding the establishment of NVEAC, please contact:

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