

NVEAC

NATIONAL VET EQUITY ADVISORY COUNCIL

EQUITY BLUEPRINT

2011 - 2016

Creating Futures: Achieving Potential through VET

14 February 2011

Message from the Chair of NVEAC, Mr Tiga Bayles

NVEAC was established in 2009 to provide advice to the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE) on how the vocational education and training (VET) sector can support learners who experience disadvantage to achieve better outcomes from VET.

During our first year of operation we have:

- considered the work of previous equity committees that provided strategic advice to the Ministers for education and training; we want to build on their work and achievements
- talked to a wide cross-section of stakeholders across the country to hear their views about how the VET system can meet the needs of all learners and assist them to transition into sustainable work
- spent time identifying examples of good practice in supporting the needs of learners who have been disengaged and whose life circumstances have made it difficult for them to participate in and complete training.

The Equity Blueprint, which is the result of these activities, contains NVEAC's advice to Ministers on the areas of reform that will ensure the VET system is able to support all learners, no matter what their circumstances. We have acknowledged throughout the document the substantial contributions the consultations and submissions have made to our advice.

The Blueprint acknowledges that this is an unprecedented time of reform across the wider Australian landscape, through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and within the VET sector itself, both nationally and at state and territory levels. NVEAC seeks to 'embed equity into the DNA of VET'. This embedded approach demands that we work side by side with those responsible for the areas requiring reform to articulate the 'how' of redesigning the system to meet the diverse needs of learners experiencing disadvantage. In short, we want to be inside the reform process, working collaboratively with VET leaders to shape the outcomes of the system redesign and ensuring that equity is not merely an add-on.

The major reform on which to advise Ministers is the need for a comprehensive investment policy that ensures those currently excluded or marginally attached to work and learning are given the training and support to gain the skills they need to participate in meaningful and sustainable work. The need to increase workforce participation rates in our country means an investment in skills. There is no question that supporting those who are disadvantaged to gain skills, qualifications and jobs takes time, additional resources and support. How best to fund this in economically constrained times is a challenge and also a matter of urgency. We urge Ministers to support the development of a new equity investment model in VET that will deliver untold returns to the community and the economy as outlined in our case for change.

The Council looks forward to collaborating with stakeholders to create the changes visualised in the Blueprint.

Tiga Bayles

Chair

National VET Equity Advisory Council

14 February 2011

What do we mean by equity?

Equity is concerned with enacting the principle of fairness. It takes account of the fact that people and their life circumstances are not the same and that these should not limit or determine their opportunities to achieve similar outcomes. Life circumstances include the social, cultural, financial, physical, health, gender and language differences that individually and collectively distinguish different groups of people.

In vocational education and training (VET), equity involves designing systems and processes that meet diverse learning needs and which ensure that who learners are and their life circumstances are not the determining factors in their:

- (i) access to VET
- (ii) VET participation and experiences
- (iii) VET outcomes, such as further education and training, employment and/or community participation.

What do we mean by learners who experience disadvantage?

Throughout, the Blueprint refers to 'disadvantaged' learners. By this, NVEAC means current and potential learners in VET who experience disadvantage as a result of VET systems and processes, which do not adequately take account of their particular life circumstances. Rather than positioning disadvantaged learners as the problem and requiring them to change to fit VET's current systems and processes, NVEAC contends that these systems and processes themselves need to change. A more equitable VET system will enable and encourage those who currently experience disadvantage to access and participate in education and training and achieve outcomes in the same way as people who have more fortunate life circumstances and who are not disadvantaged by our social, cultural and economic systems.

People who typically experience disadvantage in VET may have low language, literacy and numeracy skills; they may have a disability or be experiencing mental health issues; they may live in remote communities, or communities with concentrations of people with low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds; they may have low incomes and access to few services; they may be offenders in juvenile justice centres or correctional facilities; they may be women in low-paid jobs with family responsibilities; they may be Indigenous Australians or new arrivals and refugees.

This very diversity must be taken into account in the design of each aspect of VET: in its funding policy; how it monitors and reports on its performance; how it supports and prepares its teachers; how it allocates time and resources to teaching; and in the cluster of services that it harnesses to support and meet the needs of learners. NVEAC wants to see pathways through to Certificate III and beyond for all learners.

How will we know if system re-design is driving more equitable outcomes?

Judgments about how VET systems and processes are performing in terms of equity can be made by monitoring the access, participation and outcomes of those groups of learners for whom opportunities have traditionally been poorer. This includes the following groups that have long been identified in the higher education sector. Many of these groups have also been the focus of attention over a number of years in the VET sector in terms of efforts to achieve better outcomes:

- People from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds
- Indigenous Australians
- Women
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds particularly new arrivals to Australia, refugees and emerging communities
- People with a disability

- People from rural, regional or remote locations or communities with high levels of disadvantage.¹

NVEAC agrees that these are important population groups to monitor in the context of VET.

Further, the Council argues that we also need to monitor the system's success in providing a 'second chance' for people across these populations who are experiencing particular life circumstances, especially people:

- with less than Year 12 or equivalent level of educational attainment
- returning to learning after a long period of absence from study and/or work
- reskilling following redundancy
- involved in the criminal justice system
- of working age who are neither working nor studying.

Monitoring outcomes for the above population and 'second chance' groups will be important in making judgements about the extent to which reforms to the VET sector are making it more inclusive. The Council believes that it is important to establish a baseline of the sector's achievements for different groups, and over time to provide a more nuanced picture of the VET sector's performance in relation to people who are located within more than one group and who experience increased disadvantage because of this.²

NVEAC also remains open to the idea that some individuals may experience barriers in accessing training and employment, even though they already hold higher-level qualifications. For example some highly skilled graduates with a disability continue to struggle to gain access to employment opportunities and there are women for whom higher level qualifications do not lead to improved employment outcomes due to structural labour market barriers.

NVEAC has also considered the current policy context in determining how it should monitor the system's performance. Indigenous reform and disability reform are central to governments' social inclusion policy, while the focus on educational attainment prior to entering VET is important if we are to attain the COAG target of halving the number of those without a certificate III by 2020. The inclusion of low socio-economic background aligns VET with the policy approach taken in the higher education and schools sectors.

The VET system needs to be ready to identify and engage with learners as people of high potential.

Victor Hart, Oodgeroo Unit, Queensland University of Technology

¹ Anti-discrimination and human rights legislation specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of many of these attributes. For example, one submission noted that the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and its supporting standards oblige service providers, including registered training organisations, to provide equal access for people with a disability. Other submissions referred to Australia's obligations as a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. Australia's 6th and 7th reports against the Convention were of some concern to the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, which noted a number of issues related to education and employment including segregation of fields of study that ultimately result in sex segregation in the labour market. (Report provided by *economic Security4Women*)

² Many organisations highlighted the importance of more differentiated analysis of disadvantage including the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET), Manufacturing Skills Australia, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), the Construction and Property Services Industry Skills Council, and a number of women's organisations including Women in Adult and Vocational Education and the Working Women's Centres. All submissions referenced in the Blueprint can be accessed on NVEAC's website at

http://www.nveac.tvetaustralia.com.au/home/nveac_projects/equity_blueprint/submissions

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1. The Blueprint for change – systemic areas of reform

The National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC) has been asked by the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE) to provide advice on the reform needed to ensure that learners who experience disadvantage achieve improved outcomes in vocational education and training (VET) and beyond.

NVEAC's aspiration is for an equitable and inclusive VET system³ that enables all learners to achieve their potential through skills development and to access the opportunities society has to offer. In providing this advice to Ministers, NVEAC believes that systemic VET reforms are required – in contrast to a focus on short-term, project-based initiatives.

The pay-off will be a cleverly designed VET system which is accessible to all and which supports the efforts of all governments to improve workforce participation, productivity and social inclusion.

We have developed a Blueprint for change that highlights the VET systems and processes which, if reformed, will make a real difference to the lives and futures of learners who experience disadvantage, while making the VET system stronger for all learners. The six areas of reform are:

1. **Adopting a sustainable investment approach to funding VET**
2. **Measuring and reporting performance in terms of how the system deals with those who experience disadvantage**
3. **Building the capability of the VET workforce**
4. **Embedding support for foundation skills development**
5. **Embedding pathway planning and partnerships as part of the VET system**
6. **Listening to the voice of the learner when designing the VET system and continuously improving its services.**

The actions in this Blueprint focus very strongly on those who are currently reforming and redesigning the VET system. Too often policy development focusing on the needs of groups of learners has been fragmented and not tackled at the highest level in a holistic way. Achieving improved outcomes for learners, irrespective of their life circumstances when they enter VET, can only occur if equity is embedded in the DNA of VET. This highlights the important role NVEAC has in influencing those designing broader VET sector reforms and ensuring that these reforms are shaped into a coherent and cohesive package that creates systemic improvements for all learners.

A note on “embedding equity”

NVEAC is very conscious that embedding equity carries with it the risk of it becoming invisible. By making equity everyone's business we don't want to turn it into no-one's responsibility.

NVEAC will therefore adopt a two-pronged strategy when working to influence reforms and embed equity:

³ See Attachment C for NVEAC's vision for equitable and inclusive VET.

- Firstly it will act as a champion and advocate for equity practice as well as identifying and collaborating with champions and advocates across the country; and
- Secondly it will continue to articulate clear responsibility and accountability for all the actions proposed in the Blueprint.⁴

We urge Ministers to do likewise when considering policy to reform VET and improve outcomes for learners who experience disadvantage.

While we recognise the merits of the needs of people facing disadvantage being embedded in overall VET reform our caution is that every effort must be made to ensure that these needs remain a priority and are not subsumed by the broader agenda.

Submission by the Australian Industry Group

2. The compelling case for change

The current picture

For more than a decade Ministers for training have been advised by equity committees comprised of diverse stakeholders with the passion, commitment and authority to influence and strategically advise on improving opportunities and outcomes for disadvantaged learners. Despite efforts based on expertise, good will and a spirit of cooperation, previous reviews by those groups, as well as findings from research, have shown that real progress for disadvantaged groups and systemic change to achieve universal access have been slow and patchy.

Time and time again we see positive policy statements, but the implementation is failing to translate into real change. We see clever pilot programs but these are not transforming into new design and embedded good practice.

When we unpack the data and consider how groups of learners who experience disadvantage fare, we find:

- under-representation of some groups of disadvantaged learners in the VET student population compared with their Australian population share
- over-representation in certain types of programs (for example, lower qualification levels)
- poorer completion rates than other learners
- poorer outcomes than other learners.⁵

We can see that reform is already in progress in higher education and schools, with their focus on achieving outcomes for those from low socio-economic backgrounds, clear targets and accountabilities, and money to drive these reforms. In VET such progress is not yet apparent and VET remains the weak link in the chain of education reforms, creating barriers to pathways for learners. We want to change that.

⁴ A number of submissions alluded to the need for clear responsibility and accountability. See for example submissions by Denise Bett of Victoria University and the Australian College of Educators, NVEAC website

⁵ Centre for the Economics of Education and Training, (2009) *Equitable inclusive VET*, report for NVEAC,.

Of all the education sectors, the VET sector delivers education and training to the highest proportion of students who experience the most significant and multiple layers of disadvantage, with very little in the way of core funded systemic resources to recognise this reality. There is no logic in setting up elaborate equity targets in the university sector and in schools without addressing the current significant barriers to delivering on equity outcomes in VET. Universities and schools will fail in their own equity goals without VET on board and able to deliver.

Submission by the Australian College of Educators

The case for advocating change has never been clearer. The Government's social inclusion agenda makes the case unequivocally in terms of social justice and fairness.⁶ In addition there are economic benefits to ensuring that those who experience disadvantage gain the education and skills they need to participate in the economy and in community life.

Widening workforce participation

The Productivity Commission estimates that, if workforce participation could be increased by around 8% (or 4.9 percentage points) by 2030, GDP would increase by around 6% after a period of adjustment.⁷

Skills Australia⁸ recommends that governments commit to achieving a workforce participation target for Australia of 69% by 2025 to provide the workforce required for our economy and improve social inclusion. According to Skills Australia's 'Open Doors' scenario, this target will require around 4.7 million more people in the workforce by 2025.

Those currently excluded from the workforce due to lack of access, opportunities, and skills are the potential source for this increase in workforce participation.

This target will require a bold new approach to encourage and support more people to enter, re-enter and remain in the workforce ... Lifting the qualification levels of the workforce will also make a major contribution to raising our participation rate, as the link between qualifications and workforce participation is clearly evident in labour market statistics.⁹

Population shifts, demand on VET and the economic benefits

This means there will be much greater demand on VET, particularly if it is to meet the needs of those who are currently disengaged, to widen workforce participation. NVEAC recently engaged Access Economics to estimate the economic benefit to the Australian economy if

⁶ The Australian Government has adopted principles to guide social inclusion. The aspirations are:

- Reducing disadvantage - Making sure people in need benefit from access to good health, education and other services;
- Increasing social, civic and economic participation - Helping everyone get the skills and support they need so they can work and connect with the community, even during hard times; and
- A greater voice, combined with greater responsibility - Governments and other organisations giving people a say in what services they need and how they work, and people taking responsibility to make the best use of the opportunities available. Viewed at <<http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Partnerships/Board/Documents/SocialInclusionPrinciples.pdf>>

⁷ Productivity Commission (2007) *Potential benefits of the National Reform Agenda*, Canberra, p.36, viewed at <<http://www.pc.gov.au/research/commissionresearch/nationalreformagenda>>.

⁸ Skills Australia is the body responsible for providing advice to the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations on Australia's current, emerging and future workforce skills needs and workforce development needs.

⁹ Skills Australia, (2010) *Australian workforce futures: A national workforce development strategy*, viewed at <<http://www.skillsaustralia.gov.au/publications.shtml#workforce-futures>>.

the same opportunities in education and employment were achieved by disadvantaged Australians as that of the general population. The principal measure of economic benefit for the study was the direct impact on labour force participation. The study developed a series of population projections in order to estimate the prevalence of disadvantage among learner cohorts going forward. The projections found that the population of Indigenous Australians and people with a disability will grow faster than the broader population to 2020. There is projected to be an additional 223 000 Indigenous Australians and people with a disability by 2020 and an additional 348 000 people from low socio-economic status, with the low SES population totalling 2.8 million.

The Council was interested in estimating what the economic gain would be by 2020 if the gap between disadvantaged persons and the general population was closed in the three stages of the 'VET pathway': being defined as (stage 1) the level of VET participation, (stage 2) VET completions and (stage 3) transition to the workforce.

As a broad measure of disadvantage, the existing gaps between all Australians and Indigenous Australians and people with a disability were considered.

The potential increases to key economic indicators by eliminating these gaps for the VET pathway were significant. Access Economics projected that for the Indigenous Australians and people with a disability population in 2020:

- Real GDP would increase by \$12.2 billion
- Real consumption would increase by \$5.9 billion
- Full time equivalent jobs would increase by 118 000.¹⁰

Foundation skills

The other policy imperative for action to lift workforce participation relates to literacy and numeracy skills.

A report by the COAG Reform Council (CRC)¹¹ revealed that 43.5 per cent of Australians of working age have literacy skills below the minimum level that COAG considers is required for work and life in a modern economy. Fifteen per cent or 2.7 million Australians were in the lowest category of literacy skills. On the numeracy scale 53 per cent of Australians were assessed as below the minimum required.¹²

Skills Australia's *National Workforce Development Strategy* sets out a compelling case for an increased policy focus and funding to:

- support education and training for disadvantaged learners
- build a national language, literacy and numeracy strategy as part of Australia's drive to improve workforce participation and social inclusion.¹³

¹⁰ Access Economics (October 2010) Report: *The Economic and Social Benefit of Increased Participation by Disadvantaged Students in VET*, unpublished

¹¹ COAG Reform Council, (2009) *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development: Baseline performance report for 2008, Canberra*. This report referenced the findings from the ABS *Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*, 2006 reissue (4228.0), Jan. 2008, for document literacy. Viewed at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4228.0Main%20Features12006%20%28Reissue%29?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4228.0&issue=2006%20%28Reissue%29&num=&view=>

¹² ABS *Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey 2006*, viewed as above

¹³ Skills Australia (2010) Op cit

Reducing health costs

Finally, a secondary but equally pressing case for investment has been demonstrated in a report commissioned by Catholic Health Australia. It found that the lower a person's socio-economic position is, the worse his or her health is.¹⁴ This suggests that if we invest more in people from low socio-economic backgrounds to lift education levels, we will ultimately reduce the medium and long term costs to the community of poor health.

A fresh approach

What these facts tell us is that redesigning our system so that it is accessible to everyone can potentially provide better outcomes for many Australians, for many employers and for our national economy.

Clearly, a fresh approach and different actions are needed. In NVEAC's view, a fresh approach means tackling the previously intractable barriers that have long constrained the capacity of the training system to truly respond to diverse needs. The greatest barrier is a restrictive funding mechanism that takes no account of the true cost of delivery and support.¹⁵ Without a new investment approach, all other proposed reforms will be tinkering at the margins.

In addition, even a cursory review reveals a plethora of funding programs that represent large scale investment in job seeker supports, employment preparation and foundation skills. NVEAC contends that a proportion of this large scale investment needs to be drawn together and coordinated to become readily accessible to learners and the people who support them in VET. This would result in a far more effective and efficient use of current resources. VET also needs to be accorded the same recognition as the schools and higher education sectors and provided with equity targeted funding resources that will enable it to capitalise on its significant record in meeting the needs of disadvantaged learners.

Potentially the Blueprint provides opportunity to create greater alignment with the schooling and higher education sectors in addressing disadvantage.

Submission by the Minister for Employment, Training and Further Education, South Australia

3. The policy platform

There has never been a better time to drive the changes that will create an equitable and inclusive VET system. The productivity, workforce development and participation, and social inclusion priorities of governments provide a solid platform for VET reform that aims to improve outcomes for learners who experience disadvantage and enhance their access to better life chances.

This is an unprecedented time of reform across the wider Australian landscape through COAG and within the VET sector itself, both nationally and at state and territory level. This

¹⁴ Catholic Health Australia and National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (September 2010) *Health lies in Wealth: Health Inequalities in Australians of Working Age*, NATSEM, University of Canberra

¹⁵ This was highlighted in the final reports of the Equity Taskforces and came up in every consultation NVEAC has conducted.

has led NVEAC to the view that, in order to embed equity into the DNA of VET, its optimum approach is to influence and work in collaboration with the bodies that are leading broader reforms to achieve the systemic change of the Equity Blueprint. At the same time we will undertake a program of work to support these reforms.

The context and related areas of work we have considered in shaping our approach include:

- COAG’s approach to reform and targets in relation to other sectors, which points to the need for a new outcomes and performance framework for disadvantaged learners in VET, supported by sustainable investment
- MCTEE’s establishment of four new Principal Committees, chaired by Ministers, to focus on matters of national significance:
 - workforce development, supply and demand
 - access and participation
 - data and performance measurement
 - regulation, quality assurance and international engagement¹⁶
- Skills Australia’s advice on a National Workforce Development Strategy and its discussion paper on the future of the VET system that identifies the big challenges for VET including the need to engage disengaged people in learning and improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners¹⁷
- the National Quality Council (NQC) ’s continuing work on quality of training delivery and assessment, and training products that are developed to meet industry skill needs
- the impending establishment of the National VET Regulator and National Standards Council (NSC), which signals a new approach to regulation and quality
- work to improve the national VET data collection, including capturing total VET activity, reviewing the data collected from training providers, and development of a unique student identifier for VET
- work underway to sustain and grow a stronger Australian Apprenticeships system through an Expert Panel appointed by the Australian Government and a MCTEE Apprentices Action Group
- the Australian Qualifications Framework Council’s work to strengthen the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)
- key national initiatives such as higher education and schools reforms, the Productivity Commission’s study of the VET workforce, the development of a National Foundation Skills Strategy, and the Quality Skills Incentive¹⁸
- key state and territory policy statements and consultation papers that outline aims to lift skills and workforce participation, such as South Australia’s *Skills for all*,¹⁹ Victoria’s

¹⁶ Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment, Communiqué, 28 April 2010, viewed at <<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Skills/Overview/Governance/Documents/MCTEEComm280410.pdf>>.

¹⁷ Skills Australia (October 2010) *Creating a Future Direction for Australian Vocational Education and Training*, viewed at http://www.skillsaustralia.gov.au/PDFs_RTFs/discussionpaper-creatingnewdirectionforVET-hr.pdf

¹⁸ 2010 Budget fact sheets viewed at <<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Department/Budget/Pages/1011FactSheets.aspx>>.

¹⁹ Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology, (2010) *Skills for all: Productivity and participation through skills: Consultation paper*, Adelaide, viewed at <<http://www.dfeest.sa.gov.au/AboutDFEEST/Strategiesplanspolicies/SkillsforAll/tabid/267/Default.aspx>>.

*Securing Jobs for Your Future: Skills For Victoria*²⁰ and NSW's Tertiary Education Plan²¹. A list of key State and Territory policy documents is included at Attachment E. It is hoped that the Blueprint will be used by States and Territories to influence and inform the next iteration of their policies.

Our ambition is that in five years (2016) the Equity Blueprint will have made a significant contribution to accelerating the progress towards COAG's targets for 2020, as encapsulated in the National Education, Skills and Workforce Development and Indigenous Reform Agreements.²²

4. The role of industry

Industry, business and employers are integral to VET. As such, industry (including employer and employee groups) and employers are vital to increasing workforce participation and enhancing workforce development.

The reforms to VET systems and processes outlined in the Blueprint can only be achieved if employers are engaged upfront and in an ongoing way throughout the learning experience, so that VET can provide a pathway to work. We acknowledge and value the range of positive outcomes that can be achieved by individuals through VET but ultimately we want people to access sustainable and meaningful work and take their place in the economic and social life of the country. Industry is central to this goal and stands to benefit from the higher levels of workforce participation and productivity, which in turn lead to economic benefit to our society and community.

Industry and employers play a lead role in the VET system and engage at all points – in the governance arrangements, the development of VET products, and investment in skills development. They also have the ability to provide work experience and placements for disadvantaged learners. Employers already strongly support investment in skills development at Certificates I and II, as pathways to higher levels of learning, and should be further encouraged to provide employees with opportunities for advancement.

But employers need to be encouraged to offer jobs and training to disadvantaged learners. There is a compelling need for education about the advantages of, and available incentives for, employing these learners. Employers also need support and information to prepare their supervisors and work teams for working with learners with diverse needs. A specific action in reform area 5 addresses this issue.

It is also critical that disadvantaged learners have access to reliable career advice: what industry needs and can offer; what training is available; how businesses can assist them; and what support services and career pathways are available. It is equally important that career advisors are educated about the barriers faced by disadvantaged learners and the support services available to them.²³

²⁰ Victorian Government (2008) *Securing Jobs for Your Future: Skills For Victoria* viewed at http://www.skills.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/15969/SecuringJobsforYourFuture-SkillsforVictoria.pdf

²¹ NSW Government, *A discussion paper for a NSW tertiary education plan*, June 2010, viewed at <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/reviews/nswtep-ksc/nswtep-dispaper.pdf>.

²² Targets are summarised in Attachment D – Education and training objectives of COAG National Agreements.

²³ Submissions by Australian Industry Group and Manufacturing Skills Australia, NVEAC website

Industry submissions have advised that from industry's perspective, if the ultimate focus is to encourage training that leads to jobs and sustainable ongoing employment, training must be linked to identified industry skill needs and priorities, as well as equity objectives, and this is what should drive the training effort. This means encouraging enrolment and delivery in areas of skill shortage and equity or community development needs.²⁴ Industry is a vital partner in identifying these needs and priorities.

5. The diversity of the VET sector

Through skills development, VET sustains the productivity of enterprises and enhances the ability of individuals to actively participate in the labour market and the community. It is also a stepping stone for disadvantaged learners into further education, training and work. As a result VET is a fundamental contributor to the productivity, workforce development and participation, and social inclusion agendas.

The VET sector is extremely diverse. It includes a network of 58 TAFE institutions with over 1300 campuses across the country. TAFE, as the public provider, has had a long commitment and a demonstrated record in providing opportunities for learners experiencing disadvantage. Its scale and geographic spread mean it has links to communities across regional Australia, where it often plays a central role. There is also a vibrant network of over 4000 private providers, many of whom have developed a strong track record in meeting the learning needs of particular groups of disadvantaged learners. Enterprise registered training organisations (ERTOs) provide avenues for learning and ongoing skill development built into the job. For those people who have experienced disadvantage in their lives, this provides an opportunity to re-engage in learning after gaining confidence through their participation in the workforce.

The areas of reform identified in this Equity Blueprint aim to engage all providers across the VET sector. Those who manage training in public, private, enterprise and community providers and practitioners who work directly with learners will all need to drive and implement the systemic and attitudinal changes sought by the Blueprint. Indeed many are already doing so, and for them we hope this Blueprint makes their job easier and provides support. For others we hope it charts a way forward in increasing access and participation for the diverse range of learners in our community.

6. Adult and community education

The adult and community education (ACE) sector contributes significantly to the engagement of learners who experience disadvantage or who are disengaged from learning. The sector offers largely unacknowledged access to foundation skills and provides pathways into further learning, community participation and work.

The Council believes this sector is an undervalued community asset which, with an increased profile and coherent policy and funding approaches, could further support the VET system's performance in relation to improving access, participation and outcomes for people with low skills. In the Council's view, the time has come to: further acknowledge the role of ACE in building social inclusion; place it in the context of the current COAG agenda;

²⁴ Submission by ACTU, NVEAC website

clarify its policy, funding and regulatory frameworks; and formalise recognition of its pathways into further learning.²⁵

7. Embedding good practice

Previous opportunities to embed aspects of good practice resulting from pilot programs with finite funding have failed. It is critical to integrate such good practice in management, operations, policy implementation, teaching and learning, and partnerships with employers, schools and communities in order for it to take seed and grow. The time is right to change the approach and to now capitalise on the investments and accrued wisdom and experience realised from such programs; this can be achieved by implementing a knowledge-sharing and dissemination strategy that ensures good practice influences and drives continuous improvement in policy development and implementation.

In 2010, NVEAC commenced work to identify examples of good practice that have been trialled, evaluated and are being embedded systemically. Through this work NVEAC has identified a number of good practice principles which underpin programs and initiatives that are achieving positive outcomes for disadvantaged learners. The identified case studies reflect many of the VET equity reform areas that NVEAC is advocating in this Blueprint. The good practice principles and the case studies are available on NVEAC's website and will be widely disseminated. Already this work highlights the importance of the following:

- recognising the value of certificate I and II and preparatory programs, which can play a vital role in engaging individuals who have experienced multiple disadvantage or have been long term disengaged from learning – there is a need to acknowledge the continuum of learning from “preparation for gaining skills” through to “gaining skills for work” and beyond to higher level learning
- embedding and contextualising foundation skills across all AQF levels in VET
- linking training with work
- establishing partnerships, support from community, and strong professional/service provider networks including maximising the use of practitioner networks for sharing of good practice and nurturing specialised communities of practice in areas such as foundation skills delivery and models of transitions to further learning and work²⁶
- providing holistic, wrap-around support to the learner; this may include mentoring, coaching, careers advice, case management and customised learning, as well as assistance with transport, accommodation and referral to other support services
- maintaining flexibility and tailoring learning to the needs of the individual.

NVEAC sees its role as developing networks and the expertise to identify significant examples of good practice, to be followed by dissemination of the lessons learnt to stakeholders. Throughout 2011 NVEAC will work collaboratively with stakeholders to identify and disseminate further case studies. NVEAC also envisages a process of high-level

²⁵ As an example, NVEAC notes South Australia's proposal to enhance the capacity of the community education sector and establish ACE as a 'fourth sector' to address issues of disadvantage best supported by the community sector. See Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology, (2010) *Skills for all: Productivity and participation through skills: consultation paper*, viewed at <http://www.dfeest.sa.gov.au/AboutDFEEST/Strategiesplanspolicies/SkillsforAll/tabid/267/Default.aspx>.

²⁶ Emphasised in submission by the Queensland VET Development Centre, NVEAC website

reporting which potentially will be included in the new chapter on disadvantage of the Annual National Report on Australia's VET System. A further option for highlighting good practice is through the work of the COAG Reform Council which has as one of its tasks *highlighting good performance and good practice* across the COAG reform agenda, including on education, and skills and workforce development. The aim is to enable innovative reforms or methods of service delivery being utilised in one or more jurisdictions to be adopted by other jurisdictions.²⁷

The COAG Reform Council's report for 2009 on the *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development* indicates that for jurisdictions with a higher relative performance under the National Agreement it aims to identify good practice (that is, strategies or interventions that have helped steer systems or service providers towards the achievement of improved outcomes) in its report for 2010 on the *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development*.²⁸

NVEAC will consider the first of these good performance and practice reports when it is released later in 2011 with a view to identifying any aspects of good practice in achieving outcomes for disadvantaged students that can further inform the Blueprint's implementation.

8. Areas of reform

The six reform areas identified by NVEAC require leadership at the highest levels of the system: from Ministers and officials, to VET system committees who provide policy and implementation advice, to Skills Australia and industry stakeholders. An embedded approach to equity in VET demands that we work side by side with those responsible for reform to articulate the 'how' of redesigning the system to meet the diverse needs of learners experiencing disadvantage.

In short, we will be inside the reform process working collaboratively with VET leaders to shape the outcomes of the system redesign.

Thus, the actions NVEAC has identified are those that it believes either the Ministerial Council can implement through its Principal Committees or which can be implemented through key national bodies. Many of these actions focus on the broad systems, policy and infrastructure architecture of the VET system. The underpinning work that has been identified comprises work that NVEAC can undertake to support the areas of reform. Many of these actions focus on the practical delivery and support elements of the system and the links to work outcomes.

We note the caution of one submission that highlighted the strong need for a collaborative and coordinated approach that considers all elements of reform in an integrated way to avoid misalignment of framework design, tensions in funding and incentive models, and ineffective utilisation, duplication or gaps in resources.²⁹ This is an important reminder given the number of stakeholders who advised us during consultations of their frustration about fragmented and uncoordinated initiatives and programs across the education, training and jobs sectors.

²⁷ Submission by the COAG Reform Council, NVEAC website

²⁸ COAG Reform Council (October 2010) *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development: Performance Report for 2009*, viewed at <http://www.coagreformcouncil.gov.au/reports/skills.cfm>, pp 65 and 71

²⁹ Submission by National Employment Services Association, NVEAC website

NVEAC will support implementation of the Blueprint by developing and publishing a “process and timelines” map which steps out key accountabilities and timelines across the first year of the Blueprint. This is a five year Blueprint but it will be reviewed annually to ensure that its focus remains relevant.

REFORM AREA 1 – Sustainable investment

Skills Australia strongly endorses additional investment to adequately support disadvantaged learners. We highlighted this in our report released earlier this year ... which recommended increasing the Commonwealth's general purpose funding to VET for this purpose by 3.6% per annum.

Submission by Skills Australia

The Board agrees that the funding of the VET and ACE sectors in many jurisdictions is not only inadequate but is unduly constrained and inflexible, leaving the system unable to respond adequately to the needs of learners. The Board considers that including these reforms in the National Agreement on Skills and Workforce Development could lead to a more enduring reform, as this Agreement includes the overarching outcomes and performance management framework and could strengthen roles and responsibilities between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories for equity groups.

Submission by Australian Social Inclusion Board

Key message

A new investment model in VET will deliver high returns and achieve economic and social growth for Australia

Rationale

NVEAC recently commissioned a study to quantify the economic and social benefits of increased participation of disadvantaged learners in VET as part of its business case for investing in equity. To illustrate the returns on this investment, this study includes Access Economics modelling that shows there is a potential return to the economy of over \$12 billion in 2020 if we eliminate the barriers to participation, completions and transitions-to-work gaps for Indigenous Australians and people with a disability, compared to the general population.³⁰

Individuals who experience disadvantage require greater resourcing and support to achieve outcomes similar to other VET learners. Previous equity reviews have identified that the level of investment is the key barrier to achieving change. In fact the Equity Alliance that was charged with advising Ministers in 2008 stated:

- Historically, funding models have not sufficiently recognised the need for sustained support nor the long term nature of and the complexity in achieving improved outcomes for socially excluded groups.

³⁰ Access Economics (October 2010) Op cit

- There has also been a lack of recognition that to achieve improved outcomes for socially excluded groups there needs to be financial investment at the outset before outcomes can be delivered.
- There are disincentives to improving outcomes for socially excluded groups including funding models that do not adequately reflect the real costs of delivering improved outcomes for these groups.³¹

NVEAC sees this area of reform as fundamental to achieving success in the other reform areas. Our stakeholders have consistently told us that the investment approach needs to be holistic, flexible, learner-centred and based on individual needs. It should be available to support bridging and pre-vocational pathways, and represent an accurate reflection of the true cost of delivery and support, including the meaningful costing of delivery in remote areas of Australia and in communities with high levels of disadvantage.

In relation to learners with a disability, we have heard many stories about the difference that access to assistive services and technology can make to learning and work opportunities. There is a need to explore investment options that build in ready availability of assistive technologies that follow the learner through their learning and their transition to work. This investment also needs to include upgrades to such technologies and building the capability of the VET workforce to incorporate assistive technologies into their teaching practices.

A new investment approach should tie funding to targets and achievement of outcomes. This would support and reward the full range of actions required to lift educational outcomes for disadvantaged learners in VET, addressing cost and other barriers that currently impede access to the system, and driving achievement of the targets being proposed. This investment needs to be acknowledged as short-term cost for long-term gain to the economic, social and cultural life of the Australian community.

There was strong support across submissions for NVEAC's proposal for a new equity investment model in VET.

However several submissions argued that new investment to engage learners experiencing disadvantage should not divert funds from existing training delivery effort. NVEAC supports this and believes there is scope to both invest more to achieve better equity outcomes, as has happened in the schools and higher education sectors, and to propose levers to "join up" the current investment made in the job seeker, employment preparation and foundation skills areas. These two steps would create the new investment needed to significantly improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners, addressing national productivity and workforce participation issues at the same time.

Current intergovernmental arrangements

NVEAC believes one mechanism to support all learners experiencing disadvantage in the national training system is to embed equity in the existing intergovernmental arrangements as these are the mechanisms for the allocation of Commonwealth funds that drive the delivery of VET services across the country. The *Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Arrangements* agreed by COAG in 2008 includes the *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development* (NASWD) which outlines objectives, outcomes, outputs and

³¹ Final report to the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education from the Equity Alliance (2008) unpublished

performance indicators, clarifies the roles and responsibilities of each level of government for publicly funded VET, and references the funding allocated under the National Specific Purpose Payment for the Agreement. However the NASWD has no specific targets or resources dedicated to equity other than references to Indigenous participation driven by another Agreement (the *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*).

Options for a new equity investment model

Under the *Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations*, National Agreements can be amended by COAG when necessary. It is NVEAC's view that the outcomes, outputs, progress measures and targets of NASWD should be reviewed to include equity groups and reference the reforms contained in this Blueprint. This could occur during the review of the NASWD that is scheduled for 2012. However this would not be sufficient as there would be no funds to support the new equity objectives and outcomes. NVEAC has proposed undertaking significant underpinning work to investigate the resourcing requirements of a new equity investment model. This work will determine the levels of intervention required to implement the Blueprint reforms and to achieve the economic gains highlighted by Access Economics, by eliminating the gaps in the VET pathway for disadvantaged learners. The work will also provide the information needed by the Ministerial Council in order to make an informed decision about the appropriate mechanism for funding the Blueprint.

Funding mechanisms might include joining up and diverting some of the current investment made in job seeker employment preparation and foundation skills areas.

As part of its underpinning work NVEAC will provide advice to Ministers on models such as a loading on the funding rate per training hour to reflect the true cost of additional assistance for disadvantaged students. It is noted that there are challenges to be overcome with a loading approach and several jurisdictions have experience to share in this regard.³² Wrap around support services require infrastructure and staffing that cannot easily be acquired or de-established with the win or loss of a tender in a competitive market. The approach will need to be based on sustainability that allows providers to plan, invest and maintain the infrastructure and staff required to support specialised needs of learners experiencing disadvantage.

Skills Australia in its submission states that any model should take in to account the costs associated with strategies such as mentoring, place-based approaches and wrap around services which have proven highly effective. It also points to the importance of providers working actively in communities to promote enrolments and design relevant customised courses and doing one-to-one work to boost retention. It cautions that a loading per training hour may not necessarily tackle such issues as do other submissions³³.

NVEAC will provide its advice on an investment model in 2011 to inform the review of the NASWD scheduled for 2012.

³² See for example submissions by NSW Department of Education and Training, NT Department of Education and Training, TAFE NSW Equity Committee, NVEAC website

³³ Submissions by Skills Australia and National Employment Services Association, NVEAC website

Proposed policy action by government

1.1 Review the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development to include equity groups and reference the Blueprint reforms

States, Territories and the Commonwealth, through NSOC and the Principal Committees to consider NVEAC's underpinning work on a new equity investment model for VET, when completed and use this to review the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development to:

- Include equity groups in the outcomes, outputs, progress measures and targets and reference the Blueprint's reforms; and
- implement an appropriate mechanism for funding the Blueprint's reforms that might include:
 - articulating targets and funding arrangements for all disadvantaged learners in all jurisdictions
 - the option of reward payments linked to achievement of performance benchmarks, including performance incentives at training provider level for delivery of reforms, noting the importance of incentives targeted at achievements for those with multiple indicators of disadvantage or those experiencing high impact disadvantage
 - a VET engagement and transitions partnership program which could be based on the partnership development models currently used in the higher education and schools sectors.

Underpinning work to be undertaken by NVEAC

1.2 Develop the new equity investment model

NVEAC will investigate the resourcing requirements of a new equity investment model and explore what this might mean for a loading per training hour and payment of rewards and incentives. This will include working with jurisdictions that currently apply loadings to training delivery, considering the advantages and disadvantages of a loading approach, and determining the extent of any additional amount for broader support. It will also take into account:

- the number of learners in VET who might require additional support
- the costs involved in case management and wrap-around support services, including careers advice and the establishment of relevant infrastructure and staffing
- the costs involved in establishing and maintaining partnerships
- the cost of delivering services in remote regions of Australia, noting that there are inconsistencies across current funding arrangements, some of which only acknowledge very remote areas as eligible for additional funding
- identification of the forms and sources of funding support currently available and how these might be better coordinated
- comparative financial data and models for supporting disadvantaged learners across the three education sectors – schools, VET and higher education.

This work will also involve identifying the best investment options to take account of:

- foundation skills being embedded into VET delivery at all levels of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)
- professional development and enhancing the capability of providers to support the needs of learners who experience disadvantage, including having high expectations of learners and encouraging them to achieve their aspirations
- the propensity for learners who experience disadvantage to drop in and out of training, learn part time and take longer to achieve outcomes
- the role of assistive technologies and support as well as the capability of teachers and trainers/support workers to utilise such technologies with learners
- models that facilitate and enhance learner representation, advocacy and input that genuinely allow the user to influence the design of support services and delivery modes which meet their needs.

Together these pieces of work will establish the true cost of delivery and assessment across all areas of Australia and the true cost of holistic support, noting that the investment for some support services may come from different sources.

1.3 Examine the impact of price-based competitive tendering and contestability

Stakeholders reported during consultations that in some cases competitive tendering and contestability is impacting on access to the system for disadvantaged learners and eroding quality. Many submissions supported this contention with a recommendation that mechanisms to create competition between providers are monitored to ensure they do not deter providers from tailoring courses to meet the needs of disadvantaged cohorts.³⁴ Concern was also expressed about the need to investigate how incentive mechanisms such as loadings on per student hour for disadvantaged groups will interact with the impacts of competitive funding models.³⁵

Other submissions noted that should VET programs continue to be based on competitive funding, then demonstrated evidence of capacity to support disadvantaged learners should be part of the criteria to be met in a tender with such capacity demonstrated through availability of specialist teaching, counselling and support staff, status within local community and links with external providers to offer pathways.³⁶ One submission also noted that foundation skills programs are vulnerable in a competitive environment as the current funding provision is ad hoc and such programs require additional investment.³⁷

NVEAC will investigate this issue further to determine if any evaluations have been undertaken on the impact of competitive tendering and contestability and whether there is evidence for this claim and if so, whether alternative approaches can be applied in some circumstances. For example, the concept of preferred providers of equity excellence could be established in some markets. This concept is based on funding the real cost of support, delivery and assessment for particular groups and the providers' demonstrated performance in achieving outcomes for disadvantaged learners.

³⁴ See for example submissions by the National Employment Services Association, St Vincent de Paul Society and the Australian Multicultural Advisory Association, NVEAC website

³⁵ See for example submissions by Melbourne Citymission on behalf of the Equity in Education Alliance Victoria, Community Colleges Australia and Adult Learning Australia, NVEAC website

³⁶ Submissions by NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council and Australian Multicultural Advisory Council, NVEAC website

³⁷ Submission by S Black and K Yasukawa, NVEAC website

1.4 Investigate place-based and student-centred funding

Stakeholders, particularly in regional and remote areas, expressed support for place-based funding, whereby program funds are pooled and targeted at achieving agreed outcomes in particular regions of Australia where multiple indicators of disadvantage are identified. They expressed frustration about the fragmented and often incoherent multiplicity of programs applied in particular communities, resulting in confusion and wastage.

NVEAC will investigate place-based funding and its impact on the skills development and transition to employment within the region for those experiencing disadvantage, noting that a place-based approach has been adopted in a number of Commonwealth initiatives being undertaken through the government's Social Inclusion Agenda.³⁸ The Australian Social Inclusion Board has suggested that this work could include an assessment of how Innovation Fund and Jobs Fund projects have worked to create training and employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups.³⁹

Some stakeholders also flagged that student-centred funding, whereby funding follows the student, can work well to meet individual needs. The Australian Multicultural Advisory Council advised that student-centred funding needs to be further explored for young people of culturally and linguistically diverse background who may not always be presented with the information or knowledge to navigate systems associated with funding transfers.⁴⁰ NVEAC will also explore these types of models and consider incorporating the use of learner surveys to identify whether these are achieving enhanced learning outcomes but notes concerns expressed in a number of submissions that any investigations should analyse the full impact of contestability on social inclusion over time and take into account the experience of some jurisdictions in implementing student demand-driven funding, entitlement approaches, and fee, fee-relief and loan models before the models are advocated. A caution was also sounded that there is potential for "double-dipping" if place-based funding and student-centred funding are implemented at the same time.⁴¹

1.5 Investigate models for investing in assistive technologies and services

NVEAC will investigate mechanisms to ensure the ready accessibility of assistive technology (and subsequent maintenance and upgrades) and services that follow the learner with a disability through their education and into the workplace, to facilitate access to and success in learning and work.

Investigations will encompass consideration of:

- opportunities to integrate and better utilise existing funding such as the Employment Assistance fund⁴²; and
- models available in higher education to assess their suitability for the VET sector and potentially facilitate seamless pathways between VET and higher education in terms of supports provided, including:

³⁸ See <<http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Initiatives/Pages/disadvantage.aspx>>.

³⁹ Submission by the Australian Social Inclusion Board, NVEAC website

⁴⁰ Submission by Australian Multicultural Advisory Council, NVEAC website

⁴¹ See for example submissions by the NSW Department of Education and Training, Adult Learning Australia, the ACTU and the Equity in Education Alliance Victoria, NVEAC website.

⁴² As described in submission by National Employment Services Association that points out this example demonstrates how improved stakeholder relationships can better support wrap around services and better utilisation of existing opportunities, NVEAC website

- the additional Support for Students with Disabilities process
- other grants made under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (Commonwealth) in terms of cost recovery identified for individual students over the life of their course.⁴³

⁴³ As advised in submission by Denise Bett of Victoria University, NVEAC website

REFORM AREA 2 – Measuring and reporting performance

Key messages

Accountability will be driven through a new outcomes framework and performance measures that demonstrate progress and achievements for disadvantaged learners in VET.

A strengthened Equity Standard in the Australian Quality Training Framework and more rigorous auditing of the Standard will demonstrate provider achievements for learners experiencing disadvantage.

Rationale

We need to develop robust outcomes and performance measures that set clear targets for achievement, as other key national reforms have done, with regular public reporting on the gains being made for learners experiencing disadvantage. To support the proposed equity investment model, there is a need to expand the range of targets and measures to acknowledge that, for learners who come to VET with a low set of skills, small transitions and improvements in the quality of life are important outcomes in themselves and underpin the ultimate goals of higher-level qualifications and employment. Many submissions highlighted this issue and several cautioned of the risks inherent in a focus on completions alone without consideration of the level of participation/enrolments of disadvantaged learners, particularly in a competitive environment where increased competition between providers to meet completion targets can potentially encourage screening of learners to select those with the best chance of success.⁴⁴

It is also noted that before we can set measures and targets, there are some threshold issues to be addressed, such as the necessity for a consistent definition of disability applied across all education sectors and statistical collections and the development of a mechanism for measurement of socio-economic status while taking account of the higher average age of VET students whose parental socio-economic status may be of decreased relevance. It is noted that the National Training Statistics Committee is currently working on a definition of disability. One submission urges that the disability definition and data set adopted by VET are based on those used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as these are international in application.⁴⁵ It is also noted that work is underway by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics on how socio-economic status can be measured to support pathways but it may take some time before the process of collecting and analysing reliable data can begin.⁴⁶

Moreover, an effective method for tracking the milestones reached on the pathway to further learning and work is needed. Many stakeholders expressed support for the ready availability and funding of skill sets as well as full qualifications and the need for the system

⁴⁴ See for example submissions by Community Colleges Australia, Melbourne Citymission on behalf of the Equity in Education Alliance Victoria, ACTU, TAFE Teachers Association NSW, St Vincent de Paul Society, National Employment Services Association, and Construction and Property Services Industry Skills Council, NVEAC website.

⁴⁵ Submission by Women with Disabilities Australia, NVEAC website.

⁴⁶ Submission by NSW Department of Education and Training, NVEAC website

to be able to identify skill sets and their completion to track their utility as pathways to further learning and work.⁴⁷

NVEAC has outlined in its discussion on disadvantage at the beginning of the Blueprint the groups it will identify and track to enable measurement of the change in the system's performance.

Current reforms

There are several key reforms underway in this area that NVEAC will seek to shape and influence, with the aim of promoting transparent reporting on the objectives to be included in the proposed new equity investment model for VET.

Related reforms include:

- The proposal to introduce a unique student identifier in VET. NVEAC notes that, while the unique student identifier has the potential to provide improved information for the system, there are significant equity issues to be considered and there will need to be solid safeguards to ensure the information is not used inappropriately. Submissions from a number of stakeholders echoed these views.⁴⁸ NVEAC will continue to provide advice as this reform unfolds.⁴⁹ Concerns relate to the use of the information, whether students will have control of the data, and how long the data will be retained. NVEAC also notes that the initiative is currently restricted to VET and may not cover bridging, pre-vocational and foundation skills programs, and programs delivered by ACE providers.⁵⁰
- The review of the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical (AVETMIS) Standard for VET providers is welcome and will provide significant opportunities to improve ways of tracking progress for disadvantaged learners.⁵¹ NVEAC strongly supports the extension of the collection to include student intent and socio-economic status, broader information about student pathways, including pre-vocational and bridging programs, and VET workforce data to support VET workforce development planning. NVEAC also advocates the inclusion of the capacity to identify skill sets and their completion. Skills Australia's discussion paper on the future of Australian VET also flags a broader role for VET that will require performance indicators to measure VET's contribution to supporting regional economic and community development.⁵²

⁴⁷ See for example the submissions Manufacturing Skills Australia, the Australasian Corrections Education Association, the National Employment Services Association, and the TAFE NSW Equity Committee, NVEAC website

⁴⁸ See for example submissions by NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council and Community Colleges Australia, NVEAC website

⁴⁹ The MCTEE communiqué from the meeting of 19 November 2010 advised that Ministers provided their endorsement for the business case for the unique student identifier to progress to COAG for consideration of scope, design concept and implementation. Communiqué viewed at <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Skills/Overview/Governance/Documents/MCTEEComm191110.pdf>

⁵⁰ VET National Data Strategy Action Group, *A unique student identifier for Australia's vocational education and training system*, July 2010, viewed at <http://www.training.com.au/Pages/menuitem_vet_data_strat_5.aspx>.

⁵¹ NCVER, *Review of the AVETMIS Standard for VET providers: Discussion paper*, 2010, viewed at <<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2253.html>>.

⁵² Skills Australia (October 2010) Op cit, p 57

- The regulatory and reporting arrangements of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) and the reforms that will unfold with the establishment of the new national regulator for VET quality and the National Standards Council.
- The *Quality Skills Incentive* will provide performance-based funding to the 100 largest RTOs in return for significant improvements against defined benchmarks, including better access for disadvantaged learners.⁵³ Consultations are to be held to determine the performance measures to be applied. NVEAC welcomes this initiative but believes it could be extended to other providers to encourage excellence in equity provision.
- The development of the *MySkills* website to assist students and businesses to identify and choose appropriate training options and increase transparency within the sector.⁵⁴ This provides an important opportunity to transparently report on the progress and outcomes being achieved by groups of learners experiencing disadvantage.

Proposed policy actions by government

2.1 Develop an outcomes framework to measure the progress and achievements of disadvantaged learners in VET

The Access and Participation Principal Committee of MCTEE, in collaboration with the Data and Performance Management Principal Committee and the NTSC, NCVET and COAG Reform Council, develop an outcomes framework to measure progress for disadvantaged learners. This will include establishment of a baseline of current participation and outcomes, consideration of the COAG Reform Council's recommendations for improved performance reporting in relation to current National Agreements (specifically the NASWD), and identification of indicators that encompass a range of positive outcomes for the groups identified in this paper such as:

- an increase in VET participation levels by those disengaged from formal learning
- an increase in participation at higher qualification levels (certificate III and above)
- an improvement in completion rates
- an improvement in transitions to higher-level learning
- an improvement in transition to sustainable work
- reports by learners of an improvement in quality of life, self confidence, and community participation.

2.2 Strengthen the standard on equity in the AQTF

The MCTEE Principal Committee on Regulation, Quality Assurance and International Engagement and the NQC to explore with NVEAC the feasibility of an AQTF Equity Standard which is practicable, able to be audited and reported, and which supports providers to clearly demonstrate their achievements for learners experiencing disadvantage. This will need to be carefully crafted to reduce the risk of stifling innovation by mandating particular business practices and to avoid additional regulatory burden for providers.

In the interim the option of strengthening the rigour of auditing of the current Standard 2 of the AQTF should be explored with the NQC to ensure the needs of disadvantaged learners are met.

⁵³ Australian Government, 2010/2011 Budget fact sheets, 2010, viewed at <<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Department/Budget/Pages/1011FactSheets.aspx>>.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

Underpinning work to be undertaken by NVEAC

2.3 Use the outcomes framework to inform the review of the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development scheduled for 2012

NVEAC will work with the NTSC, NCVET and CRC to ensure the outcomes framework will inform the NASWD to incorporate progress measurement for disadvantaged learners in the Agreement.

2.4 Provide input to the VET Data Strategy Group and the NCVET on major developments in data management

Provide advice on the development of the unique student identifier and the Review of the AVETMIS Standard for VET Providers to maximise opportunities to track progress and outcomes for learners experiencing disadvantage, including:

- the capacity to identify skill sets and their completion; and
- the potential for the unique student identifier to apply across education sectors and to cover bridging, pre-vocational and foundation skills programs, and programs delivered by ACE providers.

2.5 Provide a more nuanced picture of the VET sector's performance for people who experience multiple forms of disadvantage

Many learners experience multiple forms of disadvantage. While many submissions advocated the importance of identifying particular groups with a history of poor outcomes in VET, we also note the caution made that the multidimensional nature of disadvantage can sometimes mean that people do not fall neatly into given categories.⁵⁵ There is therefore a need to develop a more nuanced picture of the VET's sector's performance for people who experience multiple forms of disadvantage. In 2011 NVEAC will work with the NTSC and NCVET to undertake further analysis of learners' access, participation and outcomes according to circumstances including:

- Gender;
- Age;
- Disability;
- Indigenous background;
- Newly arrived or refugee status and culturally and linguistically diverse background;
- Participation in the criminal justice system;
- Residence in rural and remote locations or socially disadvantaged communities
- Low educational attainment.

The aim of the analysis will be to:

- understand the life circumstances and systemic barriers that impact on outcomes for these groups of learners;
- establish a baseline of the sector's achievements for different groups who experience multiple disadvantage;
- assist the system to respond to diverse needs and circumstances; and
- over time provide a more nuanced picture of the VET sector's performance for people who experience multiple forms of disadvantage.

⁵⁵ Submission by St Vincent de Paul Society, NVEAC website

2.6 Work with NCVET and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) on the information and narrative on disadvantage included in the 2011 report on performance of the VET system (the Annual National Report)

Report on the outcomes of the Blueprint in the new chapter on disadvantage in the Annual National Report (ANR) on Australia's VET System, being developed by NCVET for DEEWR.⁵⁶ Options include either a detailed report or a presentation of high level indicators in the ANR supplemented by a more detailed, stand-alone statistical bulletin.

2.7 Provide input to DEEWR on new initiatives they are developing

- Provide advice on the performance measures to be applied in the *Quality Skills Incentive* and consider alternative models such as the establishment of Providers of Equity Excellence.
- Provide advice on the learner information to be included on the *MySkills* website for each provider to clearly show the numbers of disadvantaged learners and progress and outcomes being achieved.

2.8 Work with the National Quality Council/National Standards Council to examine options for strengthening the AQTF standard on equity and how it is audited

This work will provide the basis for advice to the MCTEE Principal Committee on Regulation, Quality Assurance and International Engagement.

⁵⁶ The new Annual National Report chapter is to complement indicators presented in the COAG Reform Council (CRC) Report on the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development and the National Indigenous Reform Agreement but could potentially be extended to accommodate the additional outputs of the new equity investment model for VET.

REFORM AREA 3 – Building the capability of the VET workforce

A serious approach to widening access, participation and success in VET requires serious investment in the teachers who work with the learners.

Submission by NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council

Key messages

There are significant national developments that will have an impact on VET workforce policy.

NVEAC will support these developments by:

- Providing advice to the Productivity Commission’s study on the VET workforce
- Influencing national qualifications for VET trainers and assessors
- Collaborating with the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council on building the capability and diversity of the tertiary education workforce

Rationale

Ten years have passed since the VET blueprints for Indigenous Australians and people with a disability were first agreed by Ministers. There are still concerns about whether the VET workforce has the necessary skills to meet the needs of disadvantaged learners and there is still no unified national framework or strategy for building VET workforce capability.

There is a need to develop 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. Stakeholders have consistently reported to us that the critical issues for the VET workforce are access to professional development; high levels of casualisation; the need to increase skill levels in working with diverse learners so that the VET system is culturally competent to understand the needs of VET learners and the communities they come from; the inadequacy of the base-level qualification required for teaching in the VET sector; and the lack of diversity of the workforce, with little representation of the groups the sector serves. Further to this submissions highlighted the role the university sector can play in building practitioner capability.⁵⁷ Skills Australia’s discussion paper *Creating a Future Direction for Australian VET* notes that:

Practitioners are envisaged as educating an even broader cohort of learners in a wider range of contexts.....Meeting the needs and learning styles of such a diverse group will require a VET workforce that is capable of using creating teaching and

⁵⁷ Submissions by the NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council and S Black and K Yasukawa, NVEAC website

*learning strategies to support learners whose needs may challenge traditional ways of teaching and learning.*⁵⁸

Developments that will have an impact on VET workforce

There are two significant developments which will have an impact on policy in relation to the VET workforce. The first is the Productivity Commission's study of the VET workforce, which is due in early 2011⁵⁹. The second is the introduction of national regulation and quality arrangements for the VET sector and the establishment of the National Standards Council (NSC) for VET, scheduled for 2011. Research is also being managed by the Australian College of Educators on behalf of DEEWR on the quality of teaching in VET. This includes a study of VET teacher qualifications and continuing professional development; the impact teaching has on the quality of the VET student experience and student outcomes; and how this can be evaluated. It is anticipated that the final report will be released in early 2011.⁶⁰

NVEAC does not wish to duplicate research work being undertaken elsewhere, nor pre-empt opportunities for lifting the skills of the VET workforce that might be presented by the national regulatory arrangements.

In addition the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) is currently considering strategies to systematically address concerns about the higher education workforce's ability to meet the needs of disadvantaged learners. In particular it has noted the need to increase the number of staff members with specialist skills such as cultural competency and to ensure that groups served by the sector are also reflected within its staffing profile. IHEAC has recommended that it and NVEAC seek opportunities to collaborate on successful strategies to address mutual concerns within each sector and to share information.⁶¹

In the meantime it is also noted that the rollout of the National Broadband Network and the Vocational Education Broadband Network may provide opportunities to improve access and participation for disadvantaged learners. The rollout is expected to significantly increase the demand for flexible training options with many learners living in rural and remote communities gaining access to high speed internet connections. This has implications for VET workforce capability with the need for teachers and trainers to have digital literacy as well as the capacity to integrate them into teaching and learning in an innovative way.⁶²

To avoid duplication NVEAC will await the outcomes of the foundation work outlined above and revisit the capability of the VET workforce in 2011 to identify where NVEAC can most add value. In the meantime, NVEAC has provided advice to the Productivity Commission's study with its views about the key areas for action and will indicate to IHEAC its interest in undertaking collaborative work.

⁵⁸ Skills Australia (October 2010) Op cit p 60

⁵⁹ The draft research report of the Productivity Commission's study on the VET workforce was released in November 2010. Submissions are sought by 28 February 2011.

⁶⁰ For details of the study see <http://austcolled.com.au/announcement/study-quality-teaching-vet>

⁶¹ Submission by IHEAC, NVEAC website

⁶² Submission by the Flexible Learning Advisory Group, NVEAC website

For information about the Vocational Education Broadband Network see

<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Skills/Programs/Infrastructure/VEN/Pages/VocationalEducationBroadbandNetwork.aspx>

Underpinning work to be undertaken by NVEAC

3.1 Contribute to and influence the Productivity Commission study on the VET workforce

Inform the Productivity Commission's study of the following key areas for action to build the capability of the VET workforce in meeting the needs of disadvantaged learners including:

- a unified national framework for building capability across the whole VET workforce, not just teachers and trainers, as organisation-wide capability is required to respond to the needs of disadvantaged learners. The framework needs to consider career structures and incentives and whole of career professional learning and development. It could include a national program to promote excellence in teaching and learning such as exists in the schools and higher education sectors, with the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership in the schools sector and the Australian Learning and Teaching Council in the higher education sector
- reform to the entry-level qualification expected of VET teachers and trainers, especially in relation to ensuring they have the skills to identify, respond to, and draw in specialist support for a diverse learning population
- a critical need to increase the number of people with specialist skills, such as cross-cultural competencies, foundation skills delivery, careers services skills, and digital literacy to meet increased demand for flexible delivery, as well as core skills, such as industry engagement and workplace training
- an increase in the diversity of the VET workforce through mechanisms such as a scholarship program
- a need for strategies to engage the higher education sector as well as the VET sector in building the capability of the VET workforce in foundation skills
- the need for the above areas for action to be underpinned by investment.

3.2 Contribute to and influence the further development of the training package for trainers/assessors

Work collaboratively with Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA), the national industry skills council with responsibility for the training package used for entry-level training of VET teachers, to:

- identify the range of competencies required to meet the needs of diverse learners;
- incorporate improvements to the training package to address these; and
- use the outcomes to contribute to the identification of funding required for VET workforce capability as outlined in reform area 1.

3.3 Collaborate with IHEAC on building the capability and diversity of the tertiary education workforce

It makes sense to learn from and build on strategies being considered within the higher education workforce where similar capability concerns have been identified. In 2011 when the final outcomes of the Productivity Commission study on the VET workforce are available, the recommendations of the Australian College of Educators research are known and the national VET regulator has been established, NVEAC will seek to work collaboratively with IHEAC on strategies that might generate success across both the VET and higher education workforces.

REFORM AREA 4 – Embedding support for foundation skills development

Key message

NVEAC will provide expert advice to shape the development of the National Foundation Skills Strategy

Rationale

The facts show that unless foundation skills are lifted, efforts to increase workforce participation and social inclusion will be limited.⁶³ A review of the current picture shows us that definitions of foundation skills vary across sectors and policy environments and that delivery occurs in many different settings, through different models, and is hard to track. It is difficult for learners to identify their need for foundation skills and funding is often inflexible and creates silo approaches, while practitioner capability is limiting capacity to meet demand.⁶⁴

One submission suggested it could be useful to examine international models of cross sectoral foundation skills partnerships where there are considerable ‘health literacy’ programs involving active partnerships between adult literacy and numeracy and health professionals. The indications are that health and adult literacy and numeracy professionals work well together in partnership, especially in providing education for the prevention of chronic diseases. There are some examples of such partnerships in Australia but these are limited due to ad hoc funding and no overarching national framework.⁶⁵ The usefulness of exploring other models outside the VET sector, particularly in youth and Indigenous community service organisations was also suggested.⁶⁶

Another submission pointed to the need for better engagement between VET and higher education by rebuilding the research-practice nexus in VET and foundation skills through supporting practitioner research and partnerships with higher education researchers.⁶⁷

During consultations, stakeholders working with Indigenous learners reported that there is limited understanding and capacity to respond appropriately in the delivery of foundation skills to Indigenous learners who have English as a second or third language and who do not speak standard Australian English. Others expressed concerns that, while foundation skills are embedded in training packages, the practical impact is that they have become invisible.

The VET system needs to invest in foundation skills as a priority and do it better.

⁶³ Skills Australia, *Australian workforce futures: A national workforce development strategy*, 2010, viewed at <<http://www.skillsaustralia.gov.au/publications.shtml#workforce-futures>>.

⁶⁴ A Roberts and L Wignall, Briefing on foundation skills prepared for NVEAC, 2010, see <<http://www.nveac.tvetaustralia.com.au/>>.

⁶⁵ Submission by S Black and K Yasukawa, NVEAC website

⁶⁶ Submission by National Employment Services Association, NVEAC website

⁶⁷ Submission by the NSW Adult Literacy and Numeracy Council, NVEAC website

Developments in progress

The development of a National Foundation Skills Strategy announced in the 2010–11 Commonwealth Budget, provides the platform for VET to improve its performance in this key area of skills and to ensure that foundation skills are embedded into the learning journey. The additional funds committed in the Budget will be critical, but it may be that a better understanding is needed of the most successful models of delivering foundation skills to different groups with different levels of need. The National Foundation Skills Strategy should support bottom-up responses that can inform the system as a whole. How existing funding models impact on provision will also provide insights into a more coherent and coordinated funding base and make better use of current resources. Stakeholders expressed frustration about funds being capped and short-term in nature and about the inconsistent and competitive funding conditions associated with Commonwealth funding.

NVEAC will provide advice to MCTEE's Access and Participation Principal Committee (APPC), which has responsibility for overseeing the development of the National Foundation Skills Strategy. NVEAC has also commenced other underpinning work in relation to understanding and replicating good models of delivery. NVEAC notes there was strong support in submissions for its involvement in the development of the National Foundation Skills Strategy including the need to advocate for the inclusion of digital and financial literacy as important foundation skills for disadvantaged groups.⁶⁸

Underpinning work to be undertaken by NVEAC**4.1 Provide advice to DEEWR and APPC on the development of a National Foundation Skills Strategy**

Work with stakeholders to formulate NVEAC's advice on the development of the National Foundation Skills Strategy. Options for collaborative work might include:

- working with IBSA to assess skill needs and gaps and workforce development needs. Skills might include team teaching by specialist teachers and vocational practitioners and general awareness training, so that practitioners are equipped to effectively design training and assessment that is fit for purpose and to seek out specialist assistance when needed
- issuing a national guidance document on models of good practice in delivery including vertical integration of foundation skills delivery across all levels of the AQF
- exploring the setting of targets for delivery of foundation skills together with mechanisms for measuring achievements and outcomes
- investigating the pooling of funds that are currently differently administered and freeing them up for more flexible application to meet individual learner needs
- working collaboratively with the NQC on its suite of work on training packages to consider whether design issues are impacting on the effective delivery of foundation skills
- identifying strategies to improve the links between VET and higher education in research and practice.

⁶⁸ See for example submission by the Australian Social Inclusion Board, NVEAC website

4.2 Identify successful approaches to delivering foundation skills

Identify successful national and international approaches to delivering foundation skills to different groups with different needs, including cross-sectoral partnerships, and work with stakeholders to trial and evaluate the flexible and fit-for-purpose models more broadly, with a view to incorporating them for funding and replication into the National Foundation Skills Strategy. This work will take into account work underway by the Australian Industry Group which is:

- investigating new approaches to building the literacy and numeracy skills of existing employees
- aiming to develop models that can be used across the economy to improve workplace literacy and numeracy and
- providing a guide on entry level literacy and numeracy standards employers need in new recruits.⁶⁹

NVEAC will also draw upon offers made in submissions to share insights into successful approaches in foundation skills development such as that made by the Adult Community and Further Education Board in Victoria.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Submission by Australian Industry Group, NVEAC website

⁷⁰ Submission by ACFE Victoria, NVEAC website

REFORM AREA 5 – Embedding pathways planning and partnerships as part of the VET system

Key messages

Achieve better outcomes for disadvantaged learners by investing in partnerships and pathways support as an integral part of training delivery and assessment:

- Embed individualised partnerships and pathways support into the new VET investment model
- Strengthen the requirements of the AQTF so providers can clearly demonstrate efforts and success in partnerships and pathways support
- Formally recognise the role of ACE in providing pathways to learning and work for learners experiencing disadvantage
- Investigate concerns expressed by stakeholders about factors impacting on the availability of strong partnerships and pathways into and through VET to meaningful work.

Rationale

The Alliance believes that achieving equity in education includes equality of access, opportunity and conditions. We believe that social inclusion in education also requires the adoption of a community development perspective that embraces holistic understandings of student wellbeing and community participation, partnerships and support.

Submission by Melbourne Citymission on behalf of the Equity in Education Alliance

Holistic case management

We want to see pathways that enable people to move forward and improve the quality of their lives. Other sectors, including the employment sector, successfully use a case management model to link up and coordinate services and support people through life transitions. For example, Local Connections to Work, initially established in four sites across Australia, brings a range of services under one roof to provide tailored assistance to people who are long-term unemployed and to disadvantaged young people and their families.⁷¹ The current approach of Job Services Australia to supporting job seekers is another example.

There are also examples of good practice in wrap-around services emerging in the VET sector. NVEAC has already identified models operating in several jurisdictions in which a spectrum of services is individually packaged to meet learners' needs.

⁷¹ See <http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/individuals/wrap_around.htm>.

We need to learn from models such as those used with disengaged young learners and Indigenous learners in the schools and higher education sectors⁷² and invest in supported pathways for learners experiencing disadvantage, to assist them into VET and into further education, community engagement or employment. Such pathways, individually tailored to circumstances, are critical access points for groups such as women returning to work after raising children, fulfilling caring responsibilities or transitioning from income support. Ultimately, we want to see fewer disadvantaged learners trapped in circular movement, through successive lower-level qualifications.

This will involve taking a holistic approach that considers all elements of people's lives and offers customised careers advice. And we will need to monitor the impact of the package of supports on outcomes so we can drive continuous improvement in this area.

Importance of partnerships

Skills Australia considers partnerships through case management and wrap around services approaches are to be commended and appropriately funded. Currently the VET outcomes framework does not recognise the time consuming work of RTOs in developing partnerships, engagement and customised services. Until there is acknowledgement of the value of this work in accountability frameworks, partnerships and wrap around services may continue to be the exception rather than the rule.

Submission by Skills Australia

We know that establishing the right partnerships and connections and nurturing them so they are robust, sustainable, and based on mutual benefits are fundamental to achieving successful pathways and transitions, particularly to employment. Strong cross-government, community, schools and employer partnerships are also critical if we are to successfully reach those in the community who have been disengaged from learning. Establishing and nurturing partnerships takes time, commitment and leadership and needs to be recognised as an integral component of effective quality training and assessment and support provided to learners. Moreover, the more highly disadvantaged the learner, the larger the number of partnerships that are required to provide the support that leads to a positive learning environment.⁷³ Support for partnership development is currently part of the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program⁷⁴ and is also part of the schools agenda through the Schools Business Community Partnership Brokers Program.⁷⁵

Transitions and pathways

We need to take a fresh look at ways to identify and embed models that create successful transitions through training and employment, including incorporation of careers advice into the VET system, as well as its integration into the schools sector.

We are not starting from a zero base. Industry groups such as the Australian Industry Group together with the Dusseldorp Skills Forum have investigated issues such as youth engagement and attainment and identified many strategies to further engage young Australians in learning or work, including the use of case management approaches.⁷⁶

⁷² ACER (August 2010) *Providing support to disadvantaged learners in the Australian VET system*. Report for NVEAC.

⁷³ NVEAC is conducting ongoing research into good practice. Current examples are published on the NVEAC website

⁷⁴ See <<http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Programs/Equity/Pages/HEPPPProgram.aspx>> for further details.

⁷⁵ See <<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/YouthAttainmentandTransitions/Pages/SBCPB.aspx>> for further details.

⁷⁶ Submission by the Australian Industry Group, NVEAC website

Another submission noted the potential contribution that can be made by local councils to partnerships in reaching and facilitating support for disengaged learners in the community. An example cited is the achievements of the Gwydir Learning Region in NSW, a cooperative venture of the Gwydir Shire Council, with successful linkages of local businesses, employees, TAFE, schools, ACE and University to address broad economic and social issues.⁷⁷ NVEAC notes that this venture has been in place since 2000 offering potential lessons in relation to sustainability and success factors in generating pathways to further learning and work.

NVEAC has also, through its Good Practice project identified a number of examples of programs and initiatives that are achieving positive outcomes for disadvantaged learners. Many of the case studies demonstrate how the resources of complementary service providers can be leveraged to develop innovative initiatives, deliver comprehensive support services and streamline transitions through training into employment.

We need to build on the experience of public, private and community providers and consider new ways of operating that might include public–private partnerships in creating better learning outcomes. Recognising the role that ACE plays in engaging disengaged learners and that it acts as an entry pathway for many people is crucial. We also need to learn from the experiences of regional Australia, where many innovative providers and community groups have broken down silos to generate successful outcomes for their clients. This is despite the fact that a compounding factor to disadvantage is the cost of access to training and support in regional, rural and remote communities.

Given our emphasis on generating sustainable employment outcomes for learners, we want to work collaboratively with peak employer and employee bodies to encourage a commitment by local employer groups and enterprises to providing work experience and placements for disadvantaged learners; these can then become pathways to meaningful and sustainable work. The approach needs to be based on win-win outcomes that meet the needs of both businesses and job seekers. A good place to start might be the 20 Priority Employment Areas identified under the Keep Australia Working strategy during the global downturn, where local employment coordinators are working to establish partnerships and develop regional employment plans in regions vulnerable to rising unemployment.⁷⁸ Other options include building on:

- successful strategies in particular jurisdictions such as the NSW Corporate Partners for Change⁷⁹ and the Queensland Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation's (DEEDI) entry level labour market programs which are achieving good results in terms of medium to long term participation outcomes using flexibility and often case management⁸⁰
- current national industry led initiatives such as the Australian Employment Covenant which includes as goals the placement of 50,000 Indigenous people into work with sustainable employment and short term, skills based training programs based on employers needs to prepare job seekers.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Submission by Martha Henderson of the Industry Skills Unit in the NSW Department of Education and Training, NVEAC website

⁷⁸ See <<http://www.keepaustraliaworking.gov.au/pages/LocalEmploymentCoordinators.aspx>>

⁷⁹ See Submission by NSW Department of Education and Training's, NVEAC website, for details on Corporate Partners for Change

⁸⁰ Submission by Queensland Department of Education and Training, NVEAC website

⁸¹ See <http://www.fiftythousandjobs.com.au/About-AEC.aspx>

It is also important to note that it is anticipated that a strengthened AQF will be implemented in 2011. The submission from the AQF Council noted that there are several aspects of the strengthened AQF that align well with the Blueprint. The AQF includes a pathways policy that supports systemic and negotiated pathways for students between and across sectors and providers.⁸²

Areas of concern

Stakeholders have expressed concern to NVEAC about a number of key issues in relation to pathways, partnerships and transitions:

1. That the worthy focus on achieving stronger participation in higher-level qualifications is potentially impacting on availability of and access to bridging and pre-vocational pathways – which provide a critical entry point for disadvantaged learners – through diversion of limited resources. This is a concern that needs to be investigated to ensure that policies are not inadvertently working against each other. A number of submissions highlighted the need for the new equity investment model to allocate new funds some of which are specifically tied to bridging, pre-vocational and lower level qualification pathways. One industry submission questioned the intensity of the focus on achievement of Certificate III targets indicating that within the manufacturing and automotive industries in Australia as many as half of workers are engaged in meaningful and rewarding work below Certificate III. They believe the quest should be to raise successful attainment numbers within all qualification levels.⁸³ These statistics suggest that a sole focus on higher level qualifications not only squeezes out disadvantaged learners but potentially “over-trains” and undervalues a whole group of existing workers in particular industry sectors

The focus on achieving stronger participation in higher level qualifications further exacerbates the level of disadvantage experienced by equity groups.

Submission by Manufacturing Skills Australia

...a focus on Certificate III and above does not adequately reflect the training needs of disadvantaged job seekers who need to commence pathways to vocational qualifications with entry level training. Referral of job seekers to training beyond their capacity creates failure and further disengages them from vocational training.

Submission by National Employment Services Association

2. That VET funding for training delivery and assessment should not be used to pay for holistic, wrap around support when other funding sources are available for such supports and services. This is linked to the point made many times across the country that better coordination of funding sources would achieve economies and generate enhanced outcomes. NVEAC has outlined in action 1.2 the need to identify the forms of funding support currently available and how these might be better coordinated, as

⁸² Submission by Australian Qualifications Framework Council, NVEAC website

⁸³ Submission by Manufacturing Skills Australia, NVEAC website

part of the underpinning work to investigate the resourcing requirements for the proposed new equity investment model.

3. That structural labour market barriers and discrimination continue to impact on outcomes for particular groups even if higher level qualifications are achieved. Women's groups provided significant data showing that increasing qualifications and qualification levels for women does not necessarily result in improved employment outcomes. Disability advocates point to data that shows many graduates with high level qualifications struggle to access and maintain employment despite their skills. For Indigenous Australians there are barriers to moving from lower level to higher level qualifications.⁸⁴ These systemic barriers are one key reason for disaggregation of data to unpack factors that might remain hidden unless deeper data analysis is undertaken
4. That fees impact on access for disadvantaged learners with strong arguments that income contingent loans are not an effective mechanism for allowing equal or affordable access to VET.⁸⁵ Investigation of this issue is included in action 1.4.
5. That there is poor access to appropriate resources for people with a disability, including assistive technologies and services, which are fundamental to participation in learning and work.
6. That poor or absent quality careers services are impacting on choices and ultimately on work outcomes. This theme was repeated across a number of submissions by industry groups as well as by the Career Industry Council of Australia and the Australian College of Educators.

There is a disturbing tendency in the school sector and in the VET sector to push students with significant problems and low levels of success in basic schooling into the VET sector with very little case management and serious support and pathway planning.⁸⁶

Submission by the Australian College of Educators

7. That VET in schools is not linked sufficiently to meaningful work outcomes and that too frequently pathways selected are compounding labour market inequities. For example, many submissions noted that segregation of young women into traditional fields of study is ultimately continuing to reinforce occupational sex segregation of the labour market.
8. That the overwhelming majority of prison populations contain people who comprise the disadvantaged groups identified by NVEAC, lacking proficiency in adult basic education, being low skilled and having little or no sustainable employment history. Despite the potential VET in correctional facilities has for transformational change, facilitating pathways to further learning and work on release and breaking the cycle of

⁸⁴ Submissions by economic Security4Women, Women in Vocational Education, Women with Disabilities Australia and Indigenous Higher Education Council, NVEAC website

⁸⁵ Submission by Melbourne Citymission on behalf of the Equity in Education Alliance Victoria, NVEAC website

⁸⁶ Submissions by Australian Industry Group, Construction and Property Services Industry Skills Council, Manufacturing Skills Australia, the Australian College of Educators and the Career Industry Council of Australia, NVEAC website. Feedback on this issue was also received from a number of Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry members via its NVEAC representative.

poverty and incarceration, these programs remain undervalued and under-resourced and a number of barriers inhibit their potential.⁸⁷

Proposed policy actions by government

5.1 Strengthen partnerships and pathways support in delivery of all training to those who experience disadvantage

- In developing the new equity investment model, ensure that the investment required to:
 - formalise and embed case management, individualised careers advice and other approaches to transitions and pathways support in VET and
 - develop and maintain partnerships

is considered in the loading calculation or other investment mechanism recommended for the model.

- The MCTEE Principal Committee on Regulation, Quality Assurance and International Engagement to consider, when strengthening the AQTF, how providers can demonstrate they have established partnerships with other agencies, employers and organisations that help them provide the support and access to work experience that a disadvantaged learner needs. This might include providers demonstrating:
 - improved collaboration and information sharing with other agencies; and
 - provision of their own supports and those of other services through visible and accessible presence on campuses

5.2 Give formal recognition to the role of ACE

The MCTEE Principal Committee on Access and Participation to strengthen the pathways to further learning and work provided by ACE by formally acknowledging its role in engaging disengaged learners, clarifying its policy framework and providing a solid funding base. It is noted that not all jurisdictions have a formal ACE sector and any proposed funding arrangement should take this into account so that jurisdictions without ACE are not disadvantaged.

Underpinning work to be undertaken by NVEAC

5.3 Investigate costs of providing transitions and pathways support and mechanisms to reward providers

- Undertake a cost analysis of the range of approaches to providing transitions/pathways support to inform the development of the new sustainable investment approach proposed in Reform Area 1.
- Consider appropriate mechanisms in the proposed sustainable investment approach that reward providers who can demonstrate performance in providing the support learners need and in forming partnerships.

⁸⁷ Submissions by the Australasian Corrections Education Association, Ray Chavez and Janice Navin of TAFE Western NSW, NVEAC website

5.4 Investigate the impact on entry-level pathways of the increased focus on higher-level qualifications

Investigate concerns that the focus on higher-level qualifications is impacting on the availability of entry-level pathways (bridging, pre-vocational, preparatory and lower level qualifications) for disadvantaged learners. This work should also:

- Take stock of the range of entry-level pathways currently available to different groups of learners;
- Assess employer and individual perceptions of the value of such pathways in leading to work and the extent to which they do so;
- Consider work being undertaken to strengthen the Australian Apprenticeships system and whether this provides opportunities to improve pathways into apprenticeships;
- Identify successful national and international models that build learner capability across the range of foundation skills; and
- Consider whether government policies continue to support the lower-end qualifications, which play an important role in engaging learners.

5.5 Investigate a range of transitions and pathways to achieve a clearer picture of barriers and successes

NVEAC has identified a range of underpinning work to provide the foundation for a possible VET engagement and transitions partnership program that could be established as part of the new VET equity investment model. These include:

5.5.1 Successful transitions to meaningful work

Many examples have been given of programs that are achieving transitions from learning to meaningful work.

NVEAC will collaborate with peak employer and employee bodies, relevant non-government bodies, the Commonwealth and jurisdictions to take stock of successful strategies, identify the key success features, and widely disseminate these for consideration of application in other settings.

5.5.2 The case for skills sets as a means of engaging learners

Consult further with stakeholders on the importance of skill sets as a stepping stone to further learning for disadvantaged learners, particularly in workplaces and propose strategies for making them more widely available.⁸⁸

5.5.3 Transitions from lower level qualifications to higher level qualifications and from VET to higher education

- Investigate and identify the barriers to learners progressing from lower level qualifications to Certificate III and beyond and propose solutions.
- Work collaboratively with the Indigenous Higher Education Council to identify and improve pathways for Indigenous learners between VET and higher education including by examining the effectiveness of enabling programs and the quality of culturally appropriate careers advice targeted at these learners.

⁸⁸ For example the submission by the National Employment Services Association advises that many providers report high levels of success in achieving employment outcomes, particularly in apprenticeships, through delivery of skill sets, NVEAC website

5.5.4 Pathways from VET in schools to work

Segment participation in VET in schools by indicators of disadvantage, field of study and outcomes (including the extent to which these achieve pathways to sustainable work) with a view to identifying:

- barriers to achieving sustainable work outcomes
- factors that influence choice (see related action 5.7)
- whether and how factors such as gender are impacting on young women's choices of training and employment areas which may be compounding pathways to lower paid, casualised and under skilled employment.

5.5.5 Pathways from prisons to work

Work collaboratively with the Australasian Corrections Education Association to:

- Identify the scope and nature of VET in correctional facilities and segment according to the indicators of disadvantage identified by NVEAC
- Identify the barriers that inhibit participation in VET across the different groups particularly in relation to foundation skills and pathways to work
- Identify and advocate strategies to remove barriers in consultation with States and Territories.

5.6 Identify high quality careers advice to enhance choices and meaningful work outcomes

Work collaboratively with the Career Industry Council of Australia to identify and advocate strategies for integration of high quality careers advice into VET services at both schools and registered training organisation level. Areas for specific attention include:

- The extent to which high quality careers services which provide robust, accurate and industry relevant advice are readily available and identification of gaps in provision and in the availability of professional careers advisors
- Informing evidence based policy by analysing:
 - the impact that high quality careers advice has on making meaningful choices that lead to positive personal and work outcomes; and
 - the nature, scope and impact of poor choices that result in frustrated expectations by the learner and limit pathways to meaningful work.

5.7 Explore options for strengthening the AQTF

NVEAC will work collaboratively with the NQC to explore options as to how providers are required to demonstrate effective partnerships, linkages, and support services to meet the needs of disadvantaged learners. This work will provide the foundation for advice to MCTEE's Principal Committee on Regulation, Quality Assurance and International Engagement (see related action 5.1).

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

Key message

Learners will drive improved system design and services if providers are required to demonstrate through the quality framework that they listen to and act on learner voices.

Rationale

Clever system design is driven by the continuous improvement that comes from listening to client feedback and incorporating client input. Individual learners should have a voice in the design and implementation of the system. While the AQTF already requires this, NVEAC wants to amplify the voice of the learner by strengthening the regulatory framework and provider accountability for genuine inclusion of learner voices, particularly the voices of disadvantaged learners. This presents challenges because some learners will need support to express their opinions and needs. We've seen recent examples where providers and their community partners take listening to the learner as their starting point – listening to their aspirations and what works for them, helping them plan their pathway through learning, and seeking feedback along the way and after their learning is completed.

There are also international approaches in VET and in other sectors for us to consider. Approaches identified include having one or more elected students on VET provider boards, inclusion of learners on advisory committees, and funding independent learner controlled organisations that provide advocacy, student services and input into policy and practice. One submission pointed to the possible use of Community Wide Study Circles for giving voice to current and potential VET learners, as practised in Sweden and the USA as a highly effective form of non formal learning and an effective means of community engagement.⁸⁹

While there was broad support in submissions for the elevation of learner voice in the VET system, there was little guidance about how this could occur. Perhaps this reflects the fact that while there are individual examples of good practice, there is work to be done to ensure systemic inclusion of the learner voice.

NVEAC can identify a range of effective models for dissemination, in consultation with registered training organisations, ACE providers, higher education providers and student representative organisations. We can also work collaboratively with the relevant MCTEE Principal Committees to influence the regulatory environment and the rewards available to providers who deliver in this area.

⁸⁹ Submission by Adult Learning Australia, NVEAC website

Proposed policy action by government

6.1 Include learner voice as a requirement of the AQTF

The MCTEE Principal Committee on Regulation, Quality Assurance and International Engagement to consider when strengthening the AQTF, how providers can demonstrate that they listen to learners, particularly disadvantaged learners, and act on feedback.

Underpinning work to be undertaken by NVEAC

6.2 Identify effective models for listening and responding to learner voice

In collaboration with the NCVET and in consultation with ACE providers, registered training organisations, higher education providers, student organisations and student representatives, identify a range of effective models for listening and responding to the learner voice, in particular those that respond to disadvantaged learners, and disseminate these throughout the VET system.

6.3 Examine options for including learner voice in the AQTF

NVEAC will work with the NQC to investigate options to strengthen provider accountability in the AQTF for listening to learners and acting on this feedback.

9. Better coordination of policy between levels of Government

Finally, we want to highlight that via the consultations NVEAC has heard many comments about the need for better coordination between different Commonwealth agencies and between Commonwealth and state governments. This has also been confirmed in a number of submissions to NVEAC.⁹⁰ In particular, there needs to be better coordination of funding and program objectives across governments, especially where the objectives relate to skill development, learning, and training. In many instances agencies, departments and providers fund programs that have different goals for the same clients. We have heard of situations where clients are encouraged to enrol in training to gain access to a further benefit, but there is no requirement for this training to be aligned with the person's aspirations or life context. For example:

- Centrelink's cap on training conflicts with Victorian Government policy regarding the unlimited provision of numeracy/literacy programs for individuals.
- Centrelink's payment for enrolment in study encourages people to enrol in any course, whether or not it contributes to a potential work outcome.

A further issue to note is that employment brokers funded through Job Services Australia and the Disability Employment Service have the potential to influence VET, particularly for disadvantaged job seekers. Job Services Australia has access to a pool of funds to support the needs of disadvantaged job seekers through the employment training fund. Having close links with RTOs who deliver training and learning support and RTOs forming strong partnerships with their local employment brokers can ensure the job seeker is receiving the training and support needed to gain skills for sustainable employment. However one submission expressed concerns that there are conflicts of interest to be identified and

⁹⁰ Submissions by Adult Learning Australia, Australian Industry Group, Manufacturing Skills Australia, National Employment Services Association, NVEAC website

managed when the one organisation is both the referral agency and the provider of services.⁹¹

NVEAC notes that Commonwealth and state and territory governments are exploring opportunities to better integrate the employment services and training sectors.⁹² The Commonwealth Government plans to work closely with state and territory governments at regional and local levels on ways to deliver services in a more integrated way, thereby maximising training and employment outcomes for job seekers. One example outlined during consultations is the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Northern Territory Departments of Education and Training, and Business and Employment and the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations which commits each agency to work collaboratively across the broad employment and training agenda. They have agreed to coordinate activities and programs to achieve a skilled workforce and sustained economic growth.⁹³

This is a welcome initiative. In NVEAC's view many of the stakeholders who participated in the development of this blueprint could provide useful practical input about how to make this work better.

10. What will success look like in the future?

Our ambition is that in five years (2016) the Equity Blueprint will have made a significant contribution to accelerating the progress towards COAG's targets for 2020, as encapsulated in the National Education, Skills and Workforce Development and Indigenous Reform Agreements.

NVEAC believes we will know we have been successful when the following have been achieved:

- a sustainable investment framework that supports the full range of support required to lift educational and employment outcomes for disadvantaged learners in VET and acknowledges that the investment will deliver long-term benefits
- an agreed framework for measurement and public reporting against targets and outcomes indicators for disadvantaged learners
- a VET workforce that is equipped to meet the diverse learning needs of the Australian population, has high expectations of all learners, and is able to deliver a quality learning experience that transforms learners' lives for the better
- the wisdom accrued from good practice is actively disseminated and replicated across the system, driving continuous improvement in policy and practice
- disadvantaged learners reporting that their voice is being heard and acted upon in driving improvements to the learning experience
- higher levels of foundation skills across the Australian population in accordance with agreed targets

⁹¹ Submission by Adult Learning Australia, NVEAC website

⁹² MCTEE communiqué April 2010 accessed at

<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Skills/Overview/Governance/Documents/MCTEEComm280410.pdf>.

⁹³ Submission by the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, NVEAC website

- higher levels of participation in training and course completions for disadvantaged learners that lead to a range of outcomes, including personal development, self confidence, enhanced quality of life, community participation, further learning, and sustainable employment outcomes
- proportional representation of disadvantaged groups in certificate IV and above
- employers reporting positive outcomes from the Blueprint's actions.

A summary of the proposed actions and underpinning work can be found at [Attachment A](#).

11. Support documents

Support documents produced by NVEAC that contain further background information are available on NVEAC's website <<http://www.nveac.tvetaustralia.com.au/>>.

- CEET (2010) Equitable Inclusive VET
- Roberts and Wignall (2010) – briefing paper on Foundation Skills
- Support Document for Blueprint for Change (NVEAC 25 June 2010)
- National Funding Arrangements for Equity Students in VET (NVEAC Discussion Paper 7 May 2010)
- Submissions on NVEAC website – a complete list is at [Attachment B](#)

Attachment A Summary of proposed actions and underpinning work

1 Sustainable investment	
<p>Proposed Actions</p> <p>All Principal Committees and NSOC</p> <p>1.1 Review the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development (NASWD) to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • include equity groups in the outcomes, outputs, progress measures and targets; and • reference the Blueprint reform 	<p>Underpinning work for NVEAC</p> <p>1.2 Investigate the resourcing requirements of a new equity investment model through a detailed costing analysis to determine the levels of intervention that should be funded to implement the Blueprint reforms.</p> <p>1.3 Examine the impact of price-based competitive tendering and contestability.</p> <p>1.4 Investigate place-based and student-centred funding.</p> <p>1.5 Investigate models for investing in assistive technologies and services.</p>
2 Measuring and reporting performance	
<p>Proposed Actions</p> <p>Access and Participation Principal Committee, in collaboration with the Data and Performance Measurement Principal Committee and States and Territories</p> <p>2.1 Develop an outcomes framework to measure the progress and achievements of disadvantaged learners in VET.</p> <p>Regulation, Quality Assurance and International Engagement Principal Committee, National Quality Council</p> <p>2.2 Strengthen the standard on equity in the AQTF and rigour of auditing the standard.</p>	<p>Underpinning work for NVEAC</p> <p>2.3 Work with the NTSC, NCVET and CRC to ensure the outcomes framework will inform the review of the NASWD to incorporate progress measurement for disadvantaged learners.</p> <p>2.4 Provide input to the VET Data Strategy Group and NCVET on major developments in data management (the unique student identifier and review of AVETMISS to maximise opportunities to track progress and outcomes for learners who experience disadvantage).</p> <p>2.5 Work with the NTSC and NCVET to undertake further analysis of learners' access, participation and outcomes in order to measure the VET sector's performance for people who experience multiple forms of disadvantage.</p> <p>2.6 Work with the NCVET and DEEWR on the information and narrative on disadvantage included in the 2011 report on performance of the VET system (the Annual National Report).</p> <p>2.7 Provide input to DEEWR on new initiatives they are developing (Quality Skills Incentive and information for inclusion in the MySkills Website).</p> <p>2.8 Work with the NQC to examine options for strengthening the AQTF standard on equity and how it is audited.</p>
3 Building the capability of the VET workforce	
<p>Proposed Actions</p>	<p>Underpinning work for NVEAC</p> <p>3.1 Contribute to and influence the Productivity Commission study on the VET workforce.</p> <p>3.2 Contribute to and influence the further development by Innovation and Business Skills Australia of the training package for trainers/assessors.</p> <p>3.3 Collaborate with the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council on building the capability and diversity of the tertiary education workforce.</p>

<h4>4 Embedding support for foundation skills development</h4>	
<p>Proposed Actions</p>	<p>Underpinning work for NVEAC</p> <p>4.1 Provide advice to DEEWR and APPC on the development of a National Foundation Skills Strategy.</p> <p>4.2 Identify successful approaches to delivering foundation skills.</p>
<h4>5 Embedding pathway planning and partnerships as part of the VET system</h4>	
<p>Proposed Actions</p> <p>Regulation, Quality Assurance and International Engagement Principal Committee</p> <p>5.1 Strengthen partnerships and pathways support in the delivery of all training to those who experience disadvantage by enhancing the AQTF requirement for providers to engage with employers and other parties.</p> <p>Access and Participation Principal Committee</p> <p>5.2 Give formal recognition to the role of ACE.</p>	<p>Underpinning work for NVEAC</p> <p>5.3 Investigate the costs of providing transitions and pathways support and mechanisms to reward providers. Provide this input to the development of an equity investment model.</p> <p>5.4 Investigate the impact on entry-level pathways of the increased focus on higher-level qualifications.</p> <p>5.5 Investigate a range of transitions and pathways to achieve a clearer picture of barriers and success which include:</p> <p>5.5.1 Successful transitions to meaningful work;</p> <p>5.5.2 The case for skills sets as a means of engaging learners;</p> <p>5.5.3 Transitions from lower level qualifications to higher level qualifications and from VET to higher education;</p> <p>5.5.4 Pathways from VET in schools to work;</p> <p>5.5.5 Pathways from prisons to work.</p> <p>5.6 Identify high quality careers advice to enhance choices and meaningful work outcomes.</p> <p>5.7 Work with the NQC to explore options for strengthening the AQTF in relation to how providers are required to demonstrate effective partnerships, linkages and support services to meet the needs of disadvantaged learners.</p>
<h4>6 Listening to the voice of the learner when designing the VET system</h4>	
<p>Proposed Actions</p> <p>Regulation, Quality Assurance and International Engagement Principal Committee</p> <p>6.1 Include learner voice as a requirement of quality assurance.</p>	<p>Underpinning work for NVEAC</p> <p>6.2 Identify effective models for listening and responding to learner voice.</p> <p>6.3 Work with the NQC to investigate options to strengthen provider accountability in the AQTF for listening to learners and acting on this feedback</p>

Attachment B - Written Submissions

Adult Learning Australia
Adult, Community and Further Education Board Victoria
ACT Minister for Education and Training
Association of Women Educators
Australian College of Educators
Australian Corrections Education Association
Australian Council for Private Education and Training
Australian Council of Trade Unions
Australian Federation of Graduate Women
Australian Industry Group
Australian Multicultural Advisory Council
Australian Qualifications Framework Council
Australian Social Inclusion Board
Stephen Black & Keiko Yasukawa
Career Industry Council of Australia
COAG Reform Council
Community Colleges Australia
Construction and Property Services Industry Skills Council
economic Security4Women
Equity in Education Alliance Victoria
Flexible Learning Advisory Group
Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council
Janice Navin – TAFE Western
Manufacturing Skills Australia
Martha Henderson, Industry Skills Unit in the NSW Department of Education and Training
National Centre for Vocational Education Research
National Council of Women of Australia
National Employment Services Association
National Quality Council
New South Wales Department of Education and Training
Northern Territory Department of Education and Training
NSW Adult Literacy & Numeracy Council
Queensland Department of Education and Training
Queensland VET Development Centre
Skills Australia
Skills Tasmania
South Australian Minister for Employment, Training and Further Education
St Vincent de Paul Society
TAFE NSW - South West Sydney Institute
TAFE NSW Equity Committee
TAFE Teachers Association, NSW
Tasmanian Minister for Education and Skills
Victoria University
Victorian Minister for Education and Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation
Western Australian Department of Training and Workforce Development

Women in Adult and Vocational Education
Women in Adult and Vocational Education Victoria
Women with Disabilities Australia
Women's Electoral Lobby
Working Women's Centres

Attachment C

NVEAC's vision for an equitable and inclusive system is one that:

- Places ***the learner at the centre*** by:
 - being accessible and responsive
 - providing accessible and meaningful information about options, pathways and supports so learners can make informed choices
 - ensuring that the learner is an active participant in the design of their learning experience by taking a strengths-based approach
 - providing support to meet the diversity of needs and requirements of individual learners
 - being affordable for the learner and their family
 - recognising and responding to the underlying issues impacting on the individual and their ability to participate effectively in the VET system
- Is ***well funded, efficient, effective and sustainable, achieving similar levels of performance and outcomes*** (including participation and completion rates) for all equity groups including:
 - having higher expectations of disadvantaged learners
 - having a transparent investment model that acknowledges costs will deliver long-term benefits
 - having an outcomes-based performance framework with targets and reporting publicly on outcomes being achieved for disadvantaged learners
- ***Acknowledges and values diversity*** and all its aspects in the learning experience by:
 - acknowledging and valuing different cultural and individual differences
 - removing structural barriers that may limit participation of various equity groups
 - creating an inclusive learning environment
- Is ***strategic and focused on the future***, able to:
 - effectively respond to the changing needs of industry, the employers and the labour market
 - recognise the changing aspirations of individual learners in terms of their personal, educational and vocational goals
- ***Actively engages with industry and employers*** to:
 - establish pathways to employment for learners
 - provide incentives for employers and learners to achieve sustainable employment outcomes

- Has a **skilled and positive workforce** that:
 - has high levels of morale
 - is able to provide effective student support
 - is able to build positive relationships with learners from all equity groups.

The benefits of an inclusive and effective VET system

An inclusive and effective VET system has the capacity to deliver a range of outcomes for disadvantaged learners while concurrently providing a range of benefits for the vocational education sector, employers, the community and government.

Benefits for disadvantaged learners	No one is left behind: pathways are diverse but outcomes are equitable; employment opportunities are increased.
Benefits for the education sector	The sector’s performance is enriched: more learners graduate with higher-level skills and qualifications that ensure they participate more fully, and for longer, in work and community.
Benefits for employers	Enterprises have access to a diverse workforce and access to a wide range of skills in demand.
Benefits for communities	Communities are fairer and stronger: quality VET outcomes deliver cultural strength and social inclusion.
Benefits for the economy	A productive nation: Australia will benefit socially and economically when the most marginalised and most excluded participate in the workforce.

Some guiding principles

In developing the Blueprint NVEAC had regard for the 10 Equity Observations and Principles posed by Trevor Gale⁹⁴, National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. These can be used as a handy checklist for actions to support equity outcomes in VET.

1. If equity is to have traction in education, it must connect with broader social and economic agendas.
2. When equity in education is justified purely in economic or human capital terms and its social justifications are neglected, its chances of success are diminished.
3. Equitable education outcomes for all groups in society require education systems to favour the disadvantaged.
4. Equity strategies can be used by the advantaged to re-assert their advantage.

⁹⁴ Gale, T. (2010), ‘Has Equity’s Time Come for VET? *Observations and Principles for Equity Policy and Practice in Australian Education*, NCVET ‘No Frills’ Conference, Perth

5. Equity in education requires funding, although funding is not all that equity in education requires.
6. To advance equity, education institutions need to be knowledgeable about and form meaningful relations with their communities.
7. Equity in education is not simply about access; it is also concerned with the nature of the education that students receive.
8. Equity benefits flow to individuals when the education institution is the primary site for action, not the individual or his/her community.
9. Equity in education has teeth when education institutions are held accountable for their equity strategies and achievements.
10. Equity definitions help to provide direction for policy and practice and to monitor progress towards achievement, although this is only as good as the definition.

Attachment D Education and training objectives of COAG National Agreements

Agreement	Objectives	Outcomes	Targets
National Education Agreement	<p>All Australian school students acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society and employment in a globalised economy, and the outcomes of this will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All children are in and benefiting from schooling Literacy and numeracy standards are met and are improving Students excel by international standards Promotion of social inclusion and reduced educational disadvantage, especially for Indigenous Australians Successful transitions from school to work or further study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All children are engaged in and benefiting from schooling Young people are meeting basic literacy and numeracy standards, and overall levels of literacy and numeracy achievement are improving Australian students excel by international standards Schooling promotes the social inclusion and reduces the educational disadvantage of children, especially Indigenous children Young people make a successful transition from school to work and further study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lift the Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate to 90 per cent by 2020 Halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade At least halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by 2020
National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Australians have the opportunity to develop skills and receive the training needed to be effective participants of the labour market Individuals are helped to overcome systemic barriers to education, training and employment and are encouraged to gain and use new skills Businesses and industry develop and use the skills and abilities of the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The working age population has gaps in foundation skills levels reduced to enable effective educational, labour market and social participation. The working age population has the depth and breadth of skills and capabilities required for the 21st century labour market. The supply of skills provided by the national training system responds to meet changing labour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Halve the proportion of Australians ages 20-64 without qualifications at Certificate III level and above between 2009 and 2020. Double the number of higher qualification completions (diploma and advanced diploma) between 2009 and 2020.

Agreement	Objectives	Outcomes	Targets
	workforce	market demand. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills are used effectively to increase labour market efficiency, productivity, innovation, and ensure increased utilisation of human capital. 	
National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access for all Indigenous four year olds to early childhood education within 5 years • Halving the gap in literacy and numeracy results for Indigenous school children in ten years • Halving the gap in Year 12 (or equivalent) attainment for Indigenous students by 2020 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Indigenous working age population has the depth and breadth of skills and capabilities required for the 21st century labour market • Indigenous people of working age participate effectively in all sectors and at all levels of the labour market • Quality early childhood education and care supports the workforce participation choices of parent in the years before formal schooling • Indigenous children acquire the basic skills for life and learning • Indigenous children have access to affordable, quality early childhood education in the year before formal schooling as a minimum • Schooling promotes the social inclusion and reduces the educational disadvantage of children, especially 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all Indigenous four years olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years; • Halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade; • Halve the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020; and • Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.

Agreement	Objectives	Outcomes	Targets
		<p>Indigenous children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous children and youth meet basic literacy and numeracy standards, and overall levels of literacy and numeracy are improving • Indigenous young people successfully transition from school to work and/or further study 	

Source: COAG (2009) *Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations*

Attachment E - Skills strategies of State and Territory Governments

State & Territory Skills Strategies

Australian Capital Territory

Chief Minister's Department, *ACT Skills Future: Key initiative in a long term strategy to address the skills challenge*, May 2008.

New South Wales

NSW Department of Education & Training, *Delivering Skills for NSW: Strategic Plan for Vocational Education and Training 2008-2010*, April 2008.

NSW Department of Education & Training, *Aboriginal Education and Training Policy*, October 2008 – updated July 2009.

NSW Department of Education & Training, *Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy 2009 – 2012*, undated.

NSW Department of Education & Training, *NSW DET Disability Action Plan 2004-2006*, c2004.

Northern Territory

Department of the Chief Minister, *Territory 2030: Strategic Plan 2009*, c2009.

Northern Territory Department of Business and Employment, *Jobs NT Employment Strategy 2010 – 2012*, May 2010

Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, *Strategic Plan 2009 – 2012: Delivering a Smart Territory through Quality Education and Training*, July 2009.

Queensland

Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Towards Q2: Tomorrows Queensland*, September 2008

Department of Education and Training, *Queensland Skills Plan 2008*, September 2008

Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, *Skilling Queenslanders for Work*, July 2010.

Department of Education and Training, *Positive Dreaming, Solid Futures: Indigenous Employment and Training Strategy 2008 – 2011*, c2008.

Department of Education and Training, *Adult Community Education – Toward Q2: A statement on Adult Community Education in Queensland*, undated.

South Australia

Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology, *DFEEST Strategic Plan 2010 – 2014*, c2010

Government of South Australia, *A Skills Strategy for South Australia's Future*, March 2008.

Tasmania

Skills Tasmania, *Tasmanian Skills Strategy 2008 - 2015*, c.2008.

Skills Tasmania, *Equity Policy and Action Plan*, September 2009.

Department of Education, *Tasmania's Adult Literacy Action Plan 2010 – 2015*, c.2010

David Adams, *A Social Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania*, Department of Premier & Cabinet, September 2009.

Tasmania Together Progress Board, *Tasmania Together: Revised 2009*, c.2010.

Victoria

Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, *Securing Jobs for Your Future: Skills for Victoria*, August 2008.

Department of Planning and Community Development, *A Stronger ACFE: Delivering Skills for Victoria*, June 2009.

State Government of Victoria, *A Fairer Victoria: Standing Together Through Tough Times*, May 2009.

Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, *Working Victoria: Victoria's Workforce Participation Strategy*, November 2008.

Western Australia

Department of Education and Training, *Training WA: Planning for the future 2009 – 2018*, c.2009.

Department of Training and Workforce Development, *Building diversity and equity in training 2010 – 2018: Equity is everybody's business*, May 2010.

Department of Education and Training, *Community learning in focus: A Strategy for Adult and Community Education in Western Australia (2009-2018)*, c.2009.