Findings from the Disability Disadvantage and VET in NSW study (DDVET)

Presenter:

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We acknowledge the tradition of custodianship and law of the Country on which the University of Sydney campuses stand. We pay our respects to those who have cared and continue to care for Country.

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About the DDVET project

Funded originally by the NSW Department of Industry, later moved to the Department of Education. Purpose:

- How do people from disadvantaged backgrounds in general, and disability in particular, engage with the NSW VET system in general and the Smart and Skilled system in particular?

- What skills and employment outcomes are associated with these groups' engagement in VET?

- How, if at all, can aspects of Smart and Skilled be changed to improve the engagement and outcomes of people from disadvantaged backgrounds in general and disability in particular?

Process:

- Literature review of research on VET and disability

- Analysis of datasets on disability and VET

- 71 Interviews:
  - 16 people with disability involved in VET
  - 6 family members/carers
  - 20 VET providers (10 TAFE, 10 registered training organisations)
  - Others: Disability support providers, employers

Choosing VET and initiating support

Overall, people with disability and their family members were very positive about their experiences with VET. They appreciated the fee-free courses available through Smart and Skilled and enjoyed the courses that they had participated in.

Students chose VET because it:

- allows students to 'test' different career paths and interests
- allows students to build skills gradually
- has flexible learning pathways
- Low bar to enrolment
- Because disability employment services or Centrelink requests it…

Disclosure was important for getting the right supports but needed to be supported.

"… if a disability was identified earlier on, it could streamline a lot of the processes and alert the right people right up-front. Because sometimes it's almost months down the track…" (VET3_4_5)

"Where there is help, I will ask, but where it exposes me to risk and stereotype and exposure to [discrimination], I won't tell." (PWD4WS)

People with disability who had transitioned through VET reflected on the following experiences as being those that they appreciated the most:

- The effectiveness of personalised support built on respectful and supportive relationships between staff and students (PWD1WS; PWD2WS).

- The provision of training focused on vocational outcomes (PWD3WS).

- Easily accessible accommodations and introductions to new types of assistive technology (PWD1GW; PWD1WS; PWD1OT).

- The disability support provider staff working in VET who organised materials and simplified them to suit learning needs (PWD2OT).

- Exposure to work (PWD5GW; PWD1OT; Carer1OT)

→ Relationships and personalisation. Links to employment.

School to VET transition is usually good and this is very important.

"The best solution that you can do is try and get a traineeship or an apprenticeship when you're in high school because it was the best thing, I did to get my foot in the door at the job industry ... It makes sense to me." (PWD3WS)

Support for course choice needed:

"…it wasn't clear to me what Jon was going to end up doing and I couldn't quite figure it out and that's probably why I kept throwing him into different things. Like he was trying different opportunities, maybe too many, and maybe he chopped and changed around too much which I don't think that was very good either." (Carer1OT)

Pacing and accommodation in courses essential:

"[T]hey wanted me to do three courses at once, and even one of those courses are frustrating, as in they have got lots of details. They expect me to learn a whole – months and months of stuff in 10 weeks." (PWD1WS)

Layering of disadvantage

For some students a layering of disadvantage (e.g. poverty, non-English speaking background, caring responsibilities) could limit their involvement in VET. Also life stages (e.g. transition to adulthood, leaving school) could make involvement more tricky.

→ Importance of focusing on the individual rather than 'a disability'.

"…sometimes the barrier for the student or the client, or whatever you like to call them, comes from them. They don't believe that they can do it. Again, that's out in the community. It's all that stigma, discrimination, all that sort of thing, it erodes that belief that they can do it." (VET7GW)

Staff predisposed to help, but this was seen as a difficult part of their work and they needed more expert guidance to provide very tailored support.

Additional problems for people in rural/ regional areas.

"They said you need to do a three-year course to become a florist … I did [think about studying floristry], but they said it's not done in Bathurst. You have to go to Sydney. (PWD2GW)

Training and support for disability needs to be for every student with disability in every course they do.

There was a feeling that while many staff worked well with people with disability others lacked confidence and understanding about disability:

> "[VET staff need] some sort of training and awareness so they don't think the students with mental or physical disabilities are a burden or somehow increase their workload or that [they] are a risk." (PWD4WS)

> "It's like educators are hired for their skills in the subject. You know, if I'm running a TAFE course in graphic design, I'm going to be hiring someone who's done magazines and stuff, but there's no expectation or [true] upskilling for them to deal with students" (PWD1OT)

What was offered could be very uneven across the system:

> "It's bad because there's no support there. So, basically the [Sydney Location 1] TAFE … basically the disability coordinator has got on board and gave her all the access she need, provide support person. When we went to [Sydney Location 2] TAFE, the first thing we did, we went to see the disability coordinator, he said, we don't have funding, she's an adult, she can do everything herself. It was pretty much a roadblock straight away. You're an adult, you should have NDIS funding for this and I go, hold on, this is TAFE, nothing to do with NDIS. So, yeah, basically put a roadblock straight away." (Carer1WS)

Some organisations too small to have specific disability support staff

Importance of connections

Connections between schools, local communities and VET organisations important for involvement and individualisation:

> "… in regional areas that the local TAFE college can be a very approachable facility for people who may be feeling a bit apprehensive about doing any kind of educational training course." (VET2GW)

> "… we get to know every single student. We get it. We know them and we can advocate for them with Centrelink or whatever" (VET3_4_5GW)

Connections between disability service providers and VET.

Connections between VET organisations and employers fostered through work experience.

Rural and regional issues

— Few courses available with limited flexibility

— Range of employers limited

— Long wait for supports (e.g. only once a month)

  – Generic supports only offered

  – Difficult to reach students

— "…teachers certainly are quite skilled at all of that but it still can be difficult. You're in Bathurst with 10 students and you've got two in Cobar, two in Bourke and two in somewhere else" (VET1GW)

— But: better collaborative working

This means → No choice, no control, limited individualisation

Broad changes to VET working recommended based on these results:

1. Collaborative networks
2. Universal/inclusive design for learning
3. Peer support
4. Training in disability for all staff in VET
5. Increasing work experience
6. Centres of excellence and local champions
7. Government as provider/contractor of regional supports for local areas in order to ensure equity of access and support.

**VET is one part of the disability employment equation … and the part we have most control over from a policy perspective.
– the real problems with inclusion start when the qualification ends.**

Connect with our team.

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