

## **INQUIRY INTO TRANSITION SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL OR COMPLEX NEEDS AND THEIR FAMILIES**

**Organisation:** Sydney Institute TAFE NSW

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This response is from Teacher/Consultants who work with students with disabilities at Sydney Institute, TAFE NSW (disabilities include intellectual, psychiatric, neurological, physical, vision and hearing).

The response relates to the fourth transition, that is, the transition of students with additional and/or complex needs from secondary school to vocational education and training and subsequently to employment.

In response to the first term of reference, we believe that TAFE offers accessible support for students with disabilities. Our Disability Services are well known to secondary school Transition staff and other service providers and Teacher/Consultants are readily available to answer enquiries and to meet with prospective students and their advocates to provide pre-enrolment advice and counselling as well as enrolment assistance. The Teacher Consultants assess the reasonable adjustment/s required by individual students with disabilities enrolling in TAFE courses, they implement reasonable adjustments, monitor student progress and at the completion of the course, make referrals and recommendations.

In considering the adequacy of the support for students with additional and/or complex needs at TAFE it must be stated that TAFE is not a post-school pathway that is recommended for all students. As a provider of Vocational Education and Training targeted at adults, students must have or be able to develop skills to study in an adult education environment, for example, students are not supervised between lessons or at breaks. They also need to be able to generalise skills and knowledge from classrooms to vocational and employment settings..

In terms of best practice, a young person with intellectual disability transitioning to TAFE would benefit from being placed in a discrete access course for students with intellectual disabilities, especially if they are transitioning from a support unit in a secondary school setting. An access course provides a supportive learning environment offering training in entry-level skills to a particular industry at AQF level 1 or 2. Such courses provide reasonable adjustment for a group of students with intellectual disabilities and a pathway to further education and training. This learning environment breaks down some of the barriers associated with unsuccessful transitions such as difficulties in accessing information, difficulties establishing new support networks, and not feeling welcome in a new environment. Families, school staff and Disability Employment Services often seek placement for students in these courses but availability is very limited.

### **Issues that impact on a seamless transition for students who receive Transition to Work funding and attend TAFE**

There are a growing number of students who attend TAFE and have been assessed to be eligible to access funding for additional support which is provided

by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Department of Human Services, NSW through the Transition to Work (TTW) program.

Students who receive Transition to Work (TTW) register with a TTW service provider. TTW is a two year program which aims to prepare the school leaver for employment.

TAFE NSW and ADHC have a Memorandum of Understanding which identifies how TAFE NSW and ADHC funded service providers will work together to support young people to access TAFE NSW as part of their TTW program.

Some of the issues that impact on a seamless transition for these students are:

- A lack of collaboration in the planning process for TTW students accessing education at TAFE. Disability teacher consultants at TAFE are often not consulted in relation to the vocational education aspects of the 2 year transition plan for the student within which the role of TAFE in providing vocational education is embedded.
- A student who attends a TTW program may well be attending a full time course at TAFE. First, this is contrary to the TTW funding guidelines where full time study at TAFE is precluded for students receiving TTW funding. Second, enrolling a student at TAFE becomes the major focus of the students TTW program instead of addressing the wider range of skills the student needs to develop in order to transition to employment.
- The timing of the young person's enrolment in a vocational course is also a critical factor in providing a seamless transition to work. For example a person may access a TAFE course within the first year of TTW and be ready for employment at the end of that year, but they are held back at the TTW service for another year and are likely to lose the skills they acquired in the first year by the time their 2 year transition period is completed.
- Within their guidelines TTW service providers must provide support for a young person to access vocational training and education. There is great inconsistency around the type and level of support provided by different service providers, such as travel training and work experience to support the skills the student is learning at TAFE.
- For students with additional or complex needs, the provision of structured, supervised work experience has proven to be very valuable in preparing the young person for future employment. Again there is inconsistency in the level of support that individuals receive for this through TTW service providers. Some services

provide intensive on the job training, whilst others provide the same work placement for a whole cohort of young people regardless of their individual career goals and preferences. For example a work placement was set up without any support for the student and communication with the employer regarding the young person skills and abilities leading to the placement being terminated within a day.

- Students with complex needs often require a collaborative team of professionals to assess their individual needs and to address their barriers to employment. There appears to be a lack of awareness of some TTW service providers in identifying and addressing these barriers. For example a young person with limited range of movement in one hand would benefit from the services of an occupational therapist to make recommendations about suitable adaptive technology or modifications that will allow participation in a certain vocational area. Or a speech therapist may be able to advice on strategies that will address some of the communication barriers faced by another young person.
- Students with disabilities who come to TAFE need support in many different aspects of their education – tutorial support, case management, financial help with course materials, travel training to name a few. Students who receive TTW funding could be using some of their funds to support their training at TAFE. There appears to be a lack of consistency in this regard and there is a need for more accountability on how funds allocated to an individual are used for to meet their needs.

Another aspect of TAFE involvement in providing transition services to students with a disability is through the TVET program (TAFE delivered Vocational Education and Training) Currently school students with a disability attend a TAFE campus one afternoon per week as part of their HSC(including Life Skills HSC). Attendance at TAFE is usually part of the Individual Transition Plan for the students.

Some of the issues that impact on a seamless transition for students with disabilities attending TVET programs are:

- Students with a confirmed disability access additional Learner support as part of their TAFE delivered vocational training. The funds for Learner support available to TAFE are capped. Whilst the demand has increased and the needs of individuals complexity in

terms of disability have become more complex the funding has not increased.

- Students with more complex needs (high support in terms of autism, emotionally disturbed and behaviour disordered, moderate intellectual disability) or those who have issues to preclude them from attending an adult learning environment need alternate options to participate in vocational training. Currently there is little opportunity to develop and deliver such programs.
- Many students are not identified in mainstream schools as having a disability and therefore not always given the appropriate guidance to make informed career choices. Whilst some schools and Careers advisers are exemplary in their understanding of vocational training others are not.
- Students with disabilities may be engaged in work experience at school, TAFE, through TTW and with a Disability Employment service. This work experience needs to be more clearly aligned with the student's vocational goals.

To summarise we would advocate that to ensure seamless transition best practice approaches must be collaborative and provide strong case management for the person in transition. The current economic environment and the increasing move towards more contestable funding for VET, has restricted the development and delivery of high quality transition programs for people with disabilities. Parents and care givers are faced with a plethora of fractured services, causing them great anxiety and frustration. There is a crucial need for integrated services across school, TAFE, TTW and Disability Employment Services and adequate funding to maintain best practice for students with disabilities transitioning from school.