

Topic 3: The Inclusive Learning Framework – an overview

A key strategic commitment of the Queensland Government action plan for further education and training, *Great skills. Real opportunities*, is ensuring learners with diverse needs will receive assistance to make the most of their training opportunities.

Inclusive practice is also a requirement of the VET regulatory framework. The current *Standards for RTOs* require all VET providers to adhere to principles of access and equity and maximise outcomes for its clients. This means they must be:

‘responsive to the individual needs of clients whose age, gender, cultural or ethnic background, disability, sexuality, language skills, literacy or numeracy level, unemployment, imprisonment or remote location may present a barrier to access, participation and the achievement of suitable outcomes’ (DIICCS RTE 2012).

Proposed changes to the Standards for VET providers signal stronger accountability requirements around supporting individual learner needs and the pedagogical skills of VET educators.

The Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment has developed an Inclusive Learning Framework with the aim of helping VET providers respond to these policy requirements and achieving a more equitable and inclusive VET system. The Department sees inclusive practice as a priority for both social justice and economic reasons:

- Inclusion is strongly supported in policy declarations and equity has been a mainstay of VET policy for decades. Even so today, large numbers of people are still disengaged and unable to fully participate in vocational learning (NVEAC 2013).
- If the economy continues to grow strongly, there will only be enough skilled workers if there is a significant increase in the number of people with VET qualifications (AWPA 2013). All jurisdictions have signed up to a National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform to increase VET qualifications in the order of 375,000 nationally by 2017. This means widening access to VET for people who may not have participated in the past.

VET educators consulted in the development of the Inclusive Learning Framework reported that they are already noticing that policies to encourage a wider range of people to access VET are resulting in much more diversity amongst the learner cohort. The challenge for VET providers is the need for their systems and processes to be responsive and flexible to ensure that all those who participate both now and into the future, are actively engaged in learning. This is recognised in a new departmental policy statement – Queensland VET - an inclusive training system’. It says:

‘To maximise success and ensure future business viability now, VET providers and the VET system must address learner diversity and demographic changes through integrating inclusive practice as a core business element’ (DETE 2013).