

Funding arrangements for VET students with a disability: more talk or actual improvement?

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Abstract:

VET has an important role in providing equitable access to post-school opportunities for education and training, but is not satisfactorily discharging its responsibilities in relation to Australians with a disability. 16.7% of the working age population were estimated to have a disability in 1998, but only 4.5% of VET enrolments were students with a disability (in 2000). Indeed, the proportion had fallen from 5.1% in 1996. Also students with a disability were less likely than VET students as a whole to be studying higher level courses, to be in employment, to undertake further studies, and to achieve successful module or employment outcomes. This study analyses the existing funding arrangements in each Australian jurisdiction; identifies three possible sets of improved arrangements (modification of the existing arrangements; additional base funding; and case management); and outlines appropriate next steps if effective improvement is actually to occur.

Introduction

In 2000, 62,082 students enrolled in vocational education and training (VET) reported a disability, compared to 47,311 in 1996 (a rise of 31.2%). However, students with a disability fell from 5.1% of total VET enrolments in 1996 to 4.5% in 2000 (NCVER, 2002). Later figures suggest some improvement, although VET enrolments of older students increased faster than for those with a disability and disabilities are more prevalent among older people (NCVER, 2004). The disability statistics, collected at enrolment on a self-reporting basis, are almost certainly an underestimate. VET has an important role in providing equitable access to post-school opportunities for education and training throughout Australia. Nevertheless, despite differences in the coverage and definitions

adopted (e.g. between ABS, NCVET and other sources) it appears abundantly clear that there is gross under-representation in VET by students with a disability.

Dockery, Birch and Kenyon (2001) concluded that, among Australia's working-age population (ie. 15 to 64 years) 16.7% had a disability in 1998; and almost three-quarters of them reported a restriction in one or more core activities. If persons with disabilities had the same age-specific participation rates in VET as the wider population, then 9.6% of them would participate in VET, and they would comprise 12.9% of the VET student population.

Kate Barnett has identified the challenge of developing an inclusive VET system that "enables individuals to reach their full potential and maximise their abilities" (Barnett, 2004, page 106), thus contributing to the creation of a more inclusive society. She notes key attitudinal, resource, knowledge and skill and systemic barriers affecting people with a disability and considers ways to address them, including through good practice exemplars, and learning the lessons of past experience. (Kate Barnett and Associates, 2003; and Barnett, 2004).

The present study investigated how the existing unsatisfactory situation might be improved through changes to funding arrangements (Selby Smith and Ferrier, 2004). In particular it explored how VET systems currently allocate funds to support students with a disability and what other funding arrangements might provide more effective support. The study interviewed 51 people across all States and Territories, and at national level; and identified appropriate criteria to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of alternative funding arrangements.

Following this brief introduction the paper contains four sections, background information; current funding arrangements; possible improvements (including a table summarising their strengths and weaknesses); and appropriate next steps.

Background

The Concept of Disability

In Australia the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 provides the basic framework for the rights of people with disabilities and acceptable social responses. The Act defines disability very broadly, including disabilities that currently exist, disabilities that previously existed but do not exist any longer, and disabilities that may exist in the future. The Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST, 2002) requires education providers "to make reasonable adjustments" to assist students with a disability. While education providers are not obliged to provide adjustments that would

impose 'unjustifiable hardship' this must be demonstrated: it cannot be simply assumed. In both higher education and VET students with a disability are a self-identifying group. Thus, there can be cases where an education provider has no knowledge of a student's disability.

The Current Situation in VET

As already noted the proportion of VET students with a disability is much lower than the proportion of the population with a disability, even taking account of the latter's tendency to increase with age. There were also substantial variations between jurisdictions; the proportion of all VET students with a disability ranged from 5.3% in NSW to 3.8% in Victoria, 3.7% in WA and 2.9% in the Northern Territory. VET students with a disability are much less likely to be in employment compared to all VET students (40% compared with 77%); they have lower levels of educational attainment (only 30% had achieved Year 12, compared with 43%); and they tended to be older (38% were aged over 40 years in 2000, compared with 30%). Students with a disability tended to be studying courses at lower AQF levels than VET students as a whole. In 2000 16% were studying at AQF level III compared to 20%; and 12% were studying at AQF level I compared to 5% of all students. (However, in 2000, most students with a disability were studying a similar mix of qualifications to other VET students.) Phan and Ball (2001) found that the students with a disability who undertook lower level or enabling courses were less likely to be undertaking further studies than other VET students when they completed their course.

Students reporting a disability undertook more hours of training than other students (243 compared to 198 hours annually). 12% of them were studying full-time, compared to only 9% of all students in 2000. However, they were less likely than all VET students to achieve successful module outcomes (74% compared with 80%); and a larger proportion of students with a disability withdrew from their VET study (13% compared to 9%). Thus, they spent more time in VET, but with poorer outcomes.

For TAFE students with a disability who graduated in 2000 the proportion in employment was 43% both before and after training, whereas for all graduates the proportion rose from 68% to 76%. For full-time employment the proportions were 21.3% before and 21.1% after training for students with a disability, compared to a rise from 39.5% to 50.4% for all students. Students with a disability who did secure employment after graduation did not achieve the same level of income as other TAFE graduates, even after controlling for factors such as field of study, occupation and qualification level attained.

Provision Costs for VET Students with a Disability

Andrews and Smith (1992) and Wightman and Foreman (1991) found that not all people with disabilities incur extra costs and, where they do, the costs can vary greatly between individuals. Providers, especially small providers, face difficulties predicting costs from year to year: which students will enrol?; what types and levels of disabilities will they have?; and what support needs will they require? Andrews and Smith (1992) divided the supports into three groups: relatively low-cost support requirements, normally provided by educational institutions within their general range of student services; more costly support requirements provided by the institutions, which they considered appropriate for special funding (eg. large print materials, special furniture); and support requirements related to unique needs for individual students (eg. note takers, interpreters). They estimated that 6%, 24% and 70% of total expenditure on supports for students with disabilities was in the respective groups (excluding capital costs). High-cost supports were less frequently required, but consumed the largest proportion of the budget. Dockery, Birch and Kenyon (2001) note that, while Andrews and Smith's estimates imply much higher training costs for VET students with disabilities, they are average costs and marginal costs are likely to be lower. Also, in relation to workplace training, the costs of accommodating an employee with a disability may be similar, whether or not the employee is engaged in training.

The National Board of Employment, Education and Training emphasised that teaching staff, although willing to assist students with disabilities, may not know how to do this efficiently. The time they give is foregone elsewhere – including from their own career development (NBEET, 1994). NBEET also noted that an institution which gains a reputation for excellence in providing for disadvantaged students may encourage increasing enrolments and thus costs: the incentives for providers can be perverse.

As governments move from a supply-based to a more demand-based VET system (Selby Smith et al, 2001), the interests of those whose choices are limited need to be safeguarded, such as people with disabilities. This is especially so for those with multiple disabilities or where disabilities interact with other characteristics affecting educational participation, such as low levels of literacy and numeracy, distance from VET facilities and services, low income or Aboriginality.

Assessing Funding Arrangements

Devlin (2000) identified two distinct types of funding models that are in current use in education in different sectors in Australia and overseas: funding allocated to students; and funding allocated to institutions. Both types of support can be found within the Australian VET system, but the second type seems to be the

predominant form of support. Funding allocated to individual students to cover the costs of additional supports (perhaps on an entitlement basis up to an agreed limit) empowers students to make choices about supports and education providers, but can be difficult to administer; can place stress on students by requiring them to complete forms and to locate, price and secure appropriate services; and can disadvantage students when negotiating the purchase of equipment or services from powerful providers.

Providing funding directly to educational institutions has advantages, particularly for large organisations, which can plan services, adjust flexibly to changing circumstances, and take advantage of their bulk purchasing power. In Australia, most public VET providers are large, but many private registered training organisations are small. Guidelines are necessary covering the use of funds and appropriate accountability mechanisms. Devlin proposed four criteria for assessing disability funding arrangements in Australian higher education that it can be argued are also applicable in VET:

- whether funding follows the student from one educational institution to another (portability);
- whether additional funding reflects the actual cost of providing the required support for each student;
- whether the funding arrangements limit administrative costs and devolve administration as close to the client as possible (administrative efficiency); and
- respect for the autonomy of educational institutions.

An additional consideration is whether a given set of funding arrangements offers incentives for VET providers to enrol students with a disability and to provide them with appropriate support (Buys, Kendall and Ramsden, 1999; and Barnett, Jardine and Wilson, 1996). The Monash University-ACER Centre for the Economics of Education and Training (CEET) has also identified three rather different criteria which can be applied when assessing funding arrangements in VET (see Burke in Selby Smith et al, 2001). These three criteria can be applied generally, or specifically for students with disabilities. First, do the existing arrangements, or proposed alternatives, promote more education and training? Secondly, do they promote efficiency in the provision of VET? Thirdly, do they promote equity?

Current funding arrangements

In most jurisdictions, arrangements currently comprise a mixture of base funding to institutions with additional funding being available for special purposes, such as where students have particularly expensive support needs. However, within various training institutions, a rather different emphasis can

be placed on various elements in the funding mix; and there are also some differences in the ways in which funds are bid for, and allocated.

Four main similarities were found in the funding arrangements across the States and Territories:

- *Funding arrangements are complex and the basic principles on which they are based are not easy to identify.* As one senior bureaucrat commented, there “is not a conception of the overall architecture”. Funding arrangements could vary even within one State, for example, between State and Commonwealth sources, public and private providers, students with different sorts of disability, and students in different VET courses.
- *Funding arrangements are limited in scope.* They generally provided little for those outside VET and seeking to enter or for student needs not directly related to VET, but which might still affect students’ ability to complete VET successfully: eg, transport, accommodation, personal hygiene, social interaction and financial circumstances. There was also little assistance for transitions – for example, students moving from school to VET or from VET to employment – despite these being areas of particular difficulty. Relatively little assistance was available for students with a disability undertaking a workplace assignment, even when a compulsory part of the VET program.
- *Resource pressures inhibit the assistance offered.* Respondents indicated that they sometimes ran out of resources and that doubt about future funding influenced their present actions (eg, advice to students). Problems with the existing statistical information systems affected the timely provision of resources and the appropriate determination of priorities.
- *Current funding arrangements focus on public providers.* Both public and private providers argued that funding additional costs for students with a disability is a matter for society in general and not primarily for individual providers (especially small providers and those located in geographically remote areas).

Further similarities across jurisdictions were that students with a disability tended to be concentrated in lower level, lower cost courses; and those in New Apprenticeships tended to be trainees rather than apprentices. Further, while students with a disability often required extra time to complete a VET qualification, additional funding was frequently not available. There were also significant differences between jurisdictions, partly because VET remains primarily an area of State and Territory responsibility and jurisdictions vary, for example, in their geographical area, total population, industry structure and traditional governmental arrangements. Also, lack of knowledge about each other’s arrangements limited mutual learning and transfer of good practice between jurisdictions.

- *Structural arrangements differ.* For example, in NSW the responsibilities of the Department of Education and Training include both schools and TAFE; and the assistant director-general for student services and equity reported to two deputy directors-general (for schools and TAFE, respectively). In Western Australia, by contrast, the Department of Training is responsible for VET but not schools. The structural arrangements for adult and community education also differ between jurisdictions, as did its relationship with VET. The different structural arrangements influenced the policy environment for disability services, the degree of linkage between the sectors, and the opportunities for action in relation to both students and staff.
- *Views of existing funding arrangements differed significantly between jurisdictions of differing size.* In the smaller jurisdictions, such as Tasmania or the ACT, personal contacts were more continuous; trust and co-operation were easier to develop and maintain. Direct relationships helped the purchasing authorities “keep a finger on what is going on” and direct funds to “where an extra \$500 can really make a difference”. In contrast, in the larger States there was more frustration at the provider level, more formal bureaucratic processes, and less confidence at the central level that resources were being used effectively. Also, there was less evidence of cumulative learning.
- *Supplementary assistance arrangements for VET students with a disability varied.* Most jurisdictions provide a mixture of general support to providers, special assistance to providers to assist with meeting extra costs, and other funds available for disbursement centrally. However, some place emphasis on statewide arrangements while elsewhere supplementary assistance is primarily a matter for individual providers.
- *Many valuable specific initiatives had been implemented,* some at the system level, some representing co-operative efforts by training providers, and some developed by individual providers. However, they often relied on the contributions of particular individuals; and there was little evidence of mutual support across jurisdictions or of systematic efforts to stimulate cumulative learning.

Considering the current funding arrangements against the Devlin criteria outlined earlier indicates that:

- The existing funding arrangements do not satisfy Devlin’s portability criterion. The funding for a student with a disability varies from one public provider to another, from public to private providers, and from one jurisdiction to another. Even within a specific training provider the funding assistance can vary from course to course and from campus to campus. A student transferring from one VET course to another or from one provider to another cannot count on receiving the same level of financial assistance or other support.

- Additional funding only partly reflects the actual cost of providing support for the individual student (Selby Smith and Ferrier, 2004, Volume 2). While efforts are made, especially by some providers and jurisdictions, there are major problems: the statistical information is inadequate for effective action; resource constraints are strong (and growing in some states); provision was more satisfactory for physical disabilities than for students with intellectual disabilities or challenging behaviours; financial support was more readily available in public than private providers; and there was a focus on educational support, neglecting other assistance which could affect educational success. Funding appeared inadequate to cover the additional time some students with a disability required to complete their VET program successfully; or to support them in finding satisfactory employment.
- The administrative efficiency criterion was largely met for the public providers, less so for the private providers. Overall, jurisdictions sought to keep the resource allocation process simple; and largely expected providers to manage their own resources, albeit with varying degrees of supplementary (usually small) assistance for special needs. Generally, the approach was determined centrally, at system or provider level, rather than by those dealing directly with students.
- The autonomy of educational institutions is largely respected, especially for big public providers. The institutions are largely free to enrol students, advise them on their educational program and provide support with relatively little outside interference or oversight (other than legal requirements, staff and student representations, and community expectations).
- The existing arrangements do not encourage VET providers to enrol and support students with a disability. (For detailed discussion of the situation in each State and Territory see Selby Smith and Ferrier, 2004, Volume 2.) Current incentives may even discourage providers from enrolling such students, with greater success causing higher uncompensated costs. The current incentives appeared especially damaging to the opportunities for students seeking to study in higher cost courses, in workplace-based programs, in smaller providers, where non-educational as well as educational supports are required, when employment outcomes from VET study are sought, and at the points of transition from school to VET or from VET to employment.

Considering them against the CEET criteria indicates that:

- Clearly some students with a disability are able to enter VET and achieve successful outcomes because of the extra funding provided. However, discussions indicate that more might be achieved with existing resources and there is a case for extra resources.

- Existing arrangements do not promote efficiency. For example, inadequate statistical information implies difficulty in knowing what assistance is required, when, and by whom. There is also relatively little evaluation of existing funding arrangements and processes to identify what works well, what does not, and how future arrangements might be improved. Efficiency in resource use was not particularly high and the basis for dynamic efficiency improvements was weak.
- The existing funding arrangements promote equity inadequately. They do enable some students with a disability to enter VET, to complete modules or programs, and to achieve employment or other outcomes. However more could be done, especially for those who would benefit from VET study but are currently not able to undertake it, and for those seeking employment outcomes. Significant variations between jurisdictions imply the VET experience and outcomes for individual students are affected by their geographical location. Public support for VET students with a disability is inadequate in relation to private providers.

Thus, while there are considerable strengths to the current funding arrangements, there are also important weaknesses. Consideration of ways to improve them is warranted.

Alternative funding arrangements

Discussions during the study identified three alternative funding arrangements. The States and Territories indicated that they covered the possibilities warranting serious consideration (not that they were advocating such changes, necessarily).

The Current Arrangements with Improvements

- *Statistical arrangements:* Discussions indicated that annual self-reporting at the time of enrolment (as now) is not the most appropriate approach. A more in-depth statistical sample, perhaps conducted less frequently, was suggested (since the basic parameters changed little from year to year), supplemented by additional efforts by providers to identify quickly students needing assistance.
- *Better support to students,* including speedy provision of supports; expanded capacity to reduce or waive fees, including materials fees; and improvements in lending, leasing and sharing arrangements, especially for expensive aids. Greater assistance, in particular, for providers with limited resources (including private providers, smaller providers generally, providers in less populated districts and those with specialised programs).
- *More systematic recognition within the basic funding arrangements of the special*

needs of students with disabilities: Where funding for such students is provided through “top-up funding” rather than general funding, it can promote segregated provision. Organisations can exclude people with disabilities on the ground that no further top-up funding is available. Basic funding arrangements could also be altered to recognize that some students with a disability require a longer period of time to complete and need ongoing support during work placements.

- *More attention to transitions, such as the transition into a VET program from school or elsewhere, noting that students with a disability tend to be older than other VET students (NCVER, 2002); or from VET into employment, which is a serious problem area. Supports could be provided or improved, including through employers and trade unions: easing individuals into the workplace; educating workmates and supervisors; and providing future support when required (eg. during enterprise restructures or changes in ownership). Edge Training Solutions’ work in Perth is noted in Selby Smith and Ferrier (2004, Volume 2, Appendix 7).*

Additional Base Funding to Training Providers within the General Funding Model

Students involving particularly high costs for providers would be grouped into a small number of broad cost categories, including for private providers. Relatively low-cost cases could continue to be covered by overall funding to the provider on the current “swings-and-roundabouts” basis. Existing supplementary arrangements in some States and Territories could continue, allowing additional support to be negotiated for individual students. Additional resources could be extended beyond public providers, so that other organisations, including enterprises and private training providers, have the incentive to provide appropriate training opportunities and support. Targets could be set and achievements monitored to ensure that resources are used effectively. Resource use could also be monitored to facilitate learning and the transfer of good practice.

Case Management

This approach responds to arguments that education and training is only one part of the life of a person with a disability – and that a successful approach requires attention to their overall needs. It is based on a holistic approach to supporting people with disabilities in VET. However, this approach was not supported strongly during discussions with stakeholders, who argued it requires a capacity among students to make appropriate choices that might not always exist, and the employment of a case manager, which could prove costly. Before this approach could be considered seriously, further work on its detailed structure and operation is needed.

A number of project respondents argued that VET institutions currently focus primarily on educational assistance to students with a disability, but non-educational factors can have serious educational consequences. They noted that the VET sector would be only one part of case-management arrangements and not necessarily the most important or influential in determining how they were developed and implemented. Adoption of a case-management approach, with its focus on the individual's overall needs and aspirations, would facilitate empowerment of individuals, some respondents argued, enabling them to influence more the type and level of the vocational education and training they undertake, where and by what mode of study. Too often decisions are made on behalf of students which may be well intentioned, they claimed, but do not necessarily accord with the students' real needs and aspirations. The case management approach might encourage closer attention to the combination of social, individual and economic outcomes the student is seeking from their participation in VET, and how they might best be achieved.

Discussion of Funding Alternatives

There are numerous opportunities to improve efficiency in the use of resources to assist students with a disability in VET and significant possibilities for improving their access, participation and outcomes. Both efficiency and equity reasons support changes to the current funding arrangements.

Will additional funds be provided? If so, substantial improvements could be achieved. However, if additional funds can only be provided by redirecting existing resources from other areas in VET, then much less net benefit is likely; improvements will tend to be confined to the public sector; and there will remain considerable cynicism about a perceived gap between the rhetoric of access, equity and support, and the perceived reality of constrained resources. What degree of standardisation is to be sought? At present, the support facilities and services vary considerably; for example to students with a physical compared to an intellectual disability. There are also substantial differences between jurisdictions in access to VET for people with disabilities. The first two alternative funding arrangements discussed above allow scope for substantial variation between the States and Territories (and consequently disadvantage some students just because of the accident of their geographical location), whereas greater harmonisation is likely under a case-management approach.

Finally, are decisions about whether to change the funding arrangements primarily for VET alone? Any significant changes will involve interaction with other parties, including State Treasuries, if additional resources are sought. However, of the options outlined, the range of powerful stakeholders outside VET who would be involved in policy development and implementation is greater for the case-management approach than for the other options. This is likely to reduce its attractiveness to the VET authorities.

Table 1: Strengths and Weaknesses of the Alternative Funding Options¹

Funding Option	Strengths	Weaknesses
(A) Current Arrangements with Modifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * More timely and appropriate support to students with a disability. * Potential to improve efficiency of resource use and increased opportunities in VET for people with disabilities. * Improved support for work placements. * Potential to create more inclusive and integrated training, which could strengthen industry engagement and lead to improved employment outcomes. * Changes can be tailored flexibly to the diverse VET systems in different jurisdictions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Improvements in efficiency and VET opportunities for students with a disability might not be large. * Enrolment and support for students with disabilities still reliant on provider discretion. * Basic incentives not changed substantially.
(B) Additional Base Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Provides improved incentive for RTOs, both public and private, to enrol and support students with high needs. * Potential to improve the efficient use of resources (and thus the outcomes from given allocations). * Establish a stronger link between resource allocation and outcomes. * The changes increase transparency and accountability. * Has the potential to decrease disparities between students with a disability and other VET students. * Cumulative growth in understanding of successful approaches to access, study and outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Assumes additional funding would be available (and not result from reductions elsewhere in VET). * The additional resources are confined to VET. Although implementation would be easier, the many other non-VET aspects that affect students' capacity to enter, complete and benefit from VET, would not be changed. * Directly confronts the issue of whether the rhetoric of providing better VET opportunities for students with a disability is to be backed by action to provide adequate resources.
(C) Case Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * An integrated model that considers relationships between the wider aspects of a person's life situation and their vocational education and training. * Potential to strengthen the linkages between secondary schooling, VET and employment. * Potential to improve both efficiency in the use of scarce resources and equity outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Implementation difficulties. Requires a whole-of-government approach. It would entail complex negotiations (eg. various levels of government; range of activity areas; and public and private sectors). * Extends far beyond VET. Many decisions would not be made by VET. The special concerns of VET could be overlooked. * Decision, once made, would be difficult to reverse. * Limited scope for flexibility at the State/Territory level.

1. For more detailed discussion see Selby Smith and Ferrier, 2004, Volume 1, pages 39-50.

Next steps

This matter was raised quite frequently during the research project. Three main conclusions emerged.

First, it was suggested that the four broad options be analysed stakeholders; a preferred option identified; and a pilot project established. Other relevant options might also be identified and analysed: a range of permutations and combinations are possible and the policy conclusions need not be identical for each State and Territory. A pilot project would trial the preferred arrangements, accompanied by careful evaluation, before making any wholesale changes. Other matters excluded from the present study would, if included, provide more detail (but greater complexity). Examples include variations in course type and level; in types and severity of disability; elasticity of demand; capital costs; and the links with schools, adult and continuing education, higher education and employment.

Secondly, the objectives being sought for people with a disability in VET (or who could be in VET) warrant clearer specification. Do the objectives focus, for example, on employment, personal development, social considerations, or some combination of all of them (and, if so, with what relative priority)? Are investment or consumption purposes more important (and in what combination)? To what extent are the objectives of the various stakeholders consistent?; and if they differ, in what regard and to what extent? Overall, it is not clear that differences in objectives between various States and Territories really mirror their different funding arrangements.

Clear objectives are necessary to ensure that resources are used effectively and economically to achieve them. Clarity in objectives also makes it easier to monitor developments and evaluate progress, to share knowledge and to spread good practice. The situation is serious if, as one respondent said, "much of the objectives are hot air, are not backed by resources and do not lead to action".

But whose responsibility is it to articulate the overall objectives to be pursued, to provide the necessary resources and to facilitate whatever monitoring, evaluation and remedial action may be required? There are many significant stakeholders in VET; and the costs they each face and the benefits they each expect to receive, influence the decisions they take about whether to participate in, or support, VET and when, to what extent and in what form. From a societal perspective, the balance between the total costs of provision and the total benefits from participation in VET by individuals, including individuals with a disability, is crucial for decisions about resource allocation. Overall benefits need to exceed costs; and the more they do so, the stronger becomes the case for societal action. Dockery, Birch and Kenyon's initial analysis of costs and earnings, although limited by a lack of detailed data, suggests that increasing the participation in VET of people with disabilities would result in substantial

economic gains ie. that societal benefits significantly outweigh costs (Dockery, Birch and Kenyon, 2001).

While all stakeholders have a role to play, the primary responsibility was generally seen by respondents to lie with governments at all levels, and with VET providers, especially the public providers. In situations where overall benefits exceed costs, but costs exceed benefits for individual enterprises or providers, and especially if the latter are unable or unwilling to provide assistance as a community contribution, then the public authorities need to tilt the balance by subsidising costs, augmenting the benefits received, or some combination of the two. The broader society also shares responsibility for a range of related matters, such as the special difficulties of transition for people with a disability, and when changes in the workplace have a disproportionate adverse impact on them. There is an important role here for industry bodies, including employers and unions, as well as for the educational authorities.

Finally, there is significant scope for more monitoring and evaluation of the range of activities assisting students with a disability in VET. Much good work is being done, but thorough evaluation and dissemination would enable a wider sharing of experience and promote improved practice. All parties could benefit from a closer partnership between research, policy-making and practice, respondents argued. Both efficiency and equity outcomes for students with a disability in VET can be improved; and advocacy with VET policy-makers could help ensure that students' needs are more effectively met. People with disabilities form a large, still disadvantaged, group in the community. What is required is not more talk, but targeted, effective and cumulative action that will enable them to engage more fully in VET and achieve improved outcomes.

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