

NATIONAL VET EQUITY ADVISORY COUNCIL

In November 2008 the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education (MCVTE) agreed to the establishment of the National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC). From 2009 the Council would replace the existing National VET Advisory Alliance and Advisory Taskforces with a single national VET equity advisory body.

Earlier this year, the Chair and members of the new Council were formally appointed by the Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon Julia Gillard, and a secretariat to support the Council was established in TVET Australia in Melbourne.

The establishment of the National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC) represents a new direction in VET equity reform. Under the new advisory arrangement the focus has shifted away from a consideration of issues facing individual equity groups to a wider focus on supporting all learners in the national training system who are experiencing barriers to successful outcomes.

1. The Inaugural Council Meeting of 13 August 2009



Members of the National VET Equity Advisory Council (l to r) Gayle Peake, Elizabeth McGregor, Sean Wrigley, Greg Lewis, Matter Machar, Natalie Walker, Caspar Cumming, Gary Kerridge, Trevor Gale, Tiga Bayles (Chair). (front) Liz Reid

The Council held its inaugural meeting on Thursday 13 August 2009 at the Marriott Hotel in Melbourne. At this meeting the Council discussed its priorities and developed a Charter, which has been submitted to the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment for endorsement. The Charter will guide the work of the Council.

The primary role of the Council will be to provide high-level advice to Ministers on all matters relating to improving the participation and achievement of disadvantaged students in the national training system.

The Council recognised that it will be important to integrate equity into all aspects of the national training system and that systemic barriers that prevent the achievement of inclusion and equity for VET learners must be addressed. The Council also agreed that sustained support and long-term investment are fundamental to improving outcomes for equity groups.

The Council will work towards improving participation and successful completion of training rates. Increasing the number of students moving to higher qualifications and sustainable employment is also a priority.



The Council also discussed its forward agenda and how to build on the work of the Advisory Alliance and its Taskforces.



Given the age of the two existing blueprints for learners with a disability (Bridging Pathways 2004) and Indigenous learners (Partners in a Learning Culture – the way Forward 2005), the Council agreed that preliminary work should be undertaken on developing a new Equity Blueprint to set the vision and framework for equity reform in the national training system. A directions paper will be developed for discussion by NVEAC and stakeholders in the system.

Following on from the recommendations from previous advisory taskforces, the Council also asked for preliminary work, including a mapping of existing measures, to be undertaken on developing a set of performance measures and targets for equity groups in the national training system. An analysis of investment options to support equity students in the long term to achieve improved training and employment outcomes, will also be considered.



2. Future activities

Stakeholder Forums The Council has expressed its commitment to engaging with stakeholders to ensure that the advice they provide to Ministers is informed and reflects what is happening ‘on the ground.’

The Council has a desire to ensure that its consultation with stakeholders has a national focus. In order to achieve this Stakeholder forums are planned for October / November in each state and territory. Council members will meet with representatives from key organisations to discuss specific issues and barriers facing equity learners in the national training system. The relevant state and territory government bodies responsible for VET have agreed to facilitate these forums on behalf of NVEAC.

NVEAC welcomes the opportunity to consult with those working within the national training system to discuss best practice strategies being implemented in the sector and the future direction of VET equity reform.

Further details on the stakeholder forums will be published on the NVEAC website soon.

Conferences Members of the Council will also take the opportunity to participate in conferences which deal with issues around equity in vocational education and training and the social inclusion agenda. In October, Trevor Gale will chair the Social Inclusion in Further Education Summit in Sydney.

3. A personal message from Tiga Bayles, Chair of NVEAC



I am really excited to have been appointed as Chair of the National VET Equity Advisory Council. This is the first time that a council has been set up in the VET sector to represent all disadvantaged learners and advise Ministers directly on the issues facing them in the training system.

That doesn't mean that we will ignore the specific issues facing particular groups such as Indigenous Australians, or people with a disability. But we will be taking a broad approach as we recognise that many people suffer multiple disadvantage and cannot simply be put into a "box".

My fellow council members come from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences - people who live with a disability; who have experienced homelessness and hardship; who understand what it is to be a refugee; to be an Indigenous Australian. We have members on the Council who work closely with disadvantaged students in the education and training system, and who understand the many barriers facing them.

The former equity advisory bodies have achieved a great deal and have set the direction for reform. The recent NCVET Report on Students and Courses shows that in 2008 the number of Indigenous students in VET rose by 4% over the previous year. This means that Indigenous Australians are now 4.7% of all students in publicly funded VET. The proportion of students from non-English speaking backgrounds also increased.

This is good news, but there is still a lot to achieve. Indigenous Australians are still over-represented at the lower level qualifications – Certificate III and below. This means that for many, pathways into further study are still not an option.

More concerning is the fact that the proportion of VET students with disabilities actually decreased by 2.7%. The number of students from regional and remote areas also fell. So despite some achievements, we continue to fail many disadvantaged students.

The work of this Council will be important to driving reform in the system for all equity learners and working towards better training outcomes and employment opportunities for them.

I look forward to talking to many of you over the coming months and hearing your stories.

Tiga Bayles
Chair, National VET Equity Advisory Council

4. More information:

For more information on the operation of the Council and its Chair and Members, please refer to the TVET website, www.nveac.tvetaustralia.com.au. Specific queries should be directed to enquiries-nveac@tvetaustralia.com.au.