Collaborative Approaches to Increasing the Participation and Outcomes of People with a Disability in Vocational Education and Training

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Abstract
The Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF) is funded by DETYA to promote opportunities for young Australians to acquire workplace knowledge and experience before they leave school. By supporting school-industry programs, the ASTF provides opportunities for senior school students to undertake structured workplace learning as part of their formal education. SWL blends students learning with accredited on the job experience and is based on effective partnerships between schools, RTOs, business and the community.

The ASTF has been working for some time with the ANTA Disability Forum to address the under-representation of students with disabilities in the VET system and in VET in School programs. The 'Lighthouse Initiative' was developed as a response to this challenge and has allocated funding over an 18 month period to 3 projects, each exploring ways to increase Structured Workplace Learning (SWL) opportunities for students with a disability, and to develop a range of models which can be incorporated into mainstream SWL programs. The projects are located in the western metropolitan region of Adelaide, Gosford and Launceston.

In particular, the projects will develop models for linking Competitive Employment Placement and Training (CEPT) agencies to schools and RTOs and to business - a strategy which has been significantly unrecognised at a national level. They will also investigate the creation of pathways to VET which provide preparation for work training as part of SWL, which in turn leads to a School based Apprenticeship, at the same time, identifying the specific inputs required to ensure positive outcomes for students with a disability.

Introduction
Words such as 'collaboration', 'partnerships', and 'social capital' are increasingly common, but can have different meanings in different sectors.

Today we are going to:

• explore the role of collaboration in increasing the effective participation in VET of people with a disability and outline the key features of successful collaborative partnerships
• overview some key initiatives designed to increase this participation at a national level by promoting partnerships within and across sectors
• share with you a local best practice example of collaboration between the business, education, disability and community sectors
• outline with you a model designed to address the under-representation of people with a disability in VET and paid employment.

Why collaborate?
Increasingly organisations from the community, government and private sectors are being encouraged to change the way they do business. There is significant pressure to do more with less, and to constantly challenge existing benchmarks. Where once competition and collaboration were seen as distinct and different, the competitive edge which is possible from a carefully configured alliance is increasingly being understood in all three sectors.

Collaboration occurs when a group of people forms a network to work towards a common goal. Collaboration can occur at the systems, service provider or individual level. Shared needs and values underpin and are essential to a successful collaborative effort.
Collaboration for coordination and continuity
An ongoing challenge to those designing service systems is the duplication and fragmentation of services. This is particularly true in the disability and VET sectors, where the complex web of services provided is often difficult to navigate. Welfare Reform has emerged as a policy direction not only as a result of ideology, but also in recognition of this challenge. A so-called 'silos' mentality, with rigid boundaries separating systems, and services within systems, works against coordinated provision and specific collaborative structures and processes need to be established to overcome these rigidities.

Collaboration for resource efficiency
Another factor, which we are all too aware of, is that the bucket of money is not growing, and in some cases is shrinking. We are therefore challenged to work together to find ways to make our dollars stretch further, and maximise our resources. Collaboration provides a vehicle for this and assists to identify and overcome gaps in service provision.

Collaboration to fill gaps in expertise
The introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act has been a major force in facilitating collaboration between the sectors. VET providers are finding it increasingly necessary to seek expertise from the disability sector in order to remove barriers to accessing VET programs.

Collaboration for holistic provision
A collaborative approach allows need to be addressed in a more holistic manner, particularly in the case of people with a disability.

Collaboration for local solution to need
Collaboration also provides the opportunity to develop local solutions for local needs. Whilst successful collaborations will have a number of shared, replicable characteristics, the actual approach taken to achieving goals will be different as circumstances and contexts vary.

Collaboration for the benefit of individuals
There are also a number of benefits at the individual level – individuals involved in collaborative projects report an increase in skills and knowledge as a result of participation. Individual clients of collaborating agencies are more likely to receive a higher quality service that has greater currency, with many benefits in terms of improved outcomes and access to a wider range of physical and human resources. Organisations obviously benefit in achieving their Mission through this broadening of resources and the increased knowledge and expertise of staff involved.

Collaboration as a means of enhancing expertise
Finally, collaboration provides the opportunity to identify innovative approaches and best practice by stretching the range of experience and knowledge of the collaborating partners.

1. What are the characteristics of successful collaboration?
Collaboration generally starts with the efforts of a few committed individuals, and is often based on goodwill. However, an ANTA funded research project undertaken in SA during 1996 (The Key To Better Outcomes) identified that, unfortunately, goodwill alone is not enough to sustain those efforts in the long term. The project recommended that stakeholders commit to a Memorandum of Understanding or Agreement as an effective way to ensure the sustainability of collaborative efforts.

Such a Memorandum should include details of roles and responsibilities, document the commitment to work together collaboratively, and establish a process to review progress. The key to this is that management at a systems level should ratify the memorandum, so that efforts can continue long after the departure of individuals. In addition, the presence of an agreement to work together at a systems level also promotes collaboration from the policy and planning level.

Other lessons learned from various collaborative projects include the need for open, honest lines of communication, and clearly identified conflict resolution strategies. Benefits for all stakeholders must be articulated and transparent to all partners.

The role of leaders in the collaboration process must not be overlooked. Essentially the leader is an enabler, and must have the skills to develop trust between stakeholders, and maintain the
communication of the network once developed. Leadership in this process must not be approached from a position of 'I know the best way to do this'.

2. Collaboration Initiatives between the VET and Disability Sectors

ANTA's Disability Forum: Bridging Pathways Strategy

Until recently there has been a distinct lack of collaborative efforts between the VET and disability sectors.

In 1999 the ANTA Disability Forum travelled around Australia to consult with people from both the VET and Disability Sectors during the development of the Bridging Pathways National Strategy. One thing that really stood out from the consultations was that stakeholders from each sector knew little about the roles of agencies in the other sector.

People from the VET sector often feel overwhelmed by the array of services provided by the disability sector, which makes it difficult to know where to start when forming collaborative networks. Conversely, people from the disability sector find the range of programs within the VET sector confusing.

From a client perspective, a number of reports within the VET sector, and more broadly across the disability services sector, have acknowledged the difficulties faced by people with a disability in trying to coordinate and navigate these services in order to undertake a VET activity. System statistics reinforce the extent of these difficulties with participation rates and outcomes achieved by people with disabilities in the VET system being significantly below those of the wider community.

In June 2000, Australia's education and training ministers made a five-year commitment to improving opportunities for people with a disability in Vocational Education and Training. They agreed to a national strategy and blueprint, called Bridging Pathways, which spells out a practical road ahead to achieving better outcomes. For the first time, Bridging Pathways describes a VET system which recognises the diverse needs of individuals, enables training providers to accommodate these needs and supports collaboration between the VET and disability sectors.

The final document developed by the taskforce has been termed a Blueprint because it outlines a detailed plan of action for all of the players involved. The Blueprint is principally designed to overcome or remove structural inequities, whether they are legislative, administrative or resourcing practices.

An implementation taskforce was established to formulate an implementation plan for Bridging Pathways. The taskforce included representatives from all the groups that would be instrumental in implementing a national vocational education and training strategy. A cross-sectoral approach was taken because it was realised that some solutions may be found beyond the vocational education and training sector. Vocational education and training is intrinsically linked with employment and the lives of people with a disability are intrinsically linked with their support services. It was clear that a whole-of-government approach was needed to improve education and training opportunities for people with a disability.

The real challenge for collaboration at a systems level will lie in the implementation of the Bridging Pathways strategy. In order to achieve the outcomes outlined in the blueprint, four Commonwealth Departments, every State and Territory Training Authority, industry, training providers and the disability sector will need to work together.

The Enterprise Career Education Foundation (ECEF) Lighthouse Initiative

In the process of developing Bridging Pathways, the ANTA Disability Forum worked during 1999 and 2000 with the Enterprise Career Education Foundation (ECEF) – a national organisation which is funded by DETYA to provided Structured Workplace Learning (SWL). ECEF was formerly known as the ASTF – Australian Student Traineeship Foundation. A key feature of SWL programs is that they involve structured collaboration between schools, VET providers, industry and communities.

The ECEF was aware of the need for specific intervention to be designed to ensure that SWL
opportunities were equally accessible to students with a disability. For example, while 15% of the working age population are known to have a disability, only 3.5% participate in VET and less than 2% are apprentices or trainees.

The ECEF's Lighthouse initiative is a project which was implemented in 2000 and is destined for completion at the end of 2001. It has funded 3 projects which are each designed to provide guidance on how to make SWL accessible and able to provide positive vocational outcomes for students with a disability.

A critical feature of each project is the formation and strengthening of partnerships or working alliances between schools, RTOs, employers, employment agencies (in particular, Competitive Employment Placement and Training – CEPT – agencies) and other organisations with expertise in managing disability.

Interest and response was significant with 87 proposals received from all Australian states and territories. Only 3 projects could be selected and they are sponsored by:

- Central Coast Business Education Network (CCBEN) in Gosford;
- Launceston Workplace Learning
- Western Adelaide Vocational and Enterprise Services (WAVES).

3. Best Practice in Collaboration - The WAVES Project in SA
I would like to outline to you some of the key features of the WAVES/Email project.

Project Summary
Thirty students (30) within the western cluster of schools will be involved in a structured workplace learning and job placement program.

All students participating in the project need to have completed the Centrelink Workability tables and have a score over 50 points. This indicates that they are eligible to receive a service from Specialist Employment Providers funded by the Department of Family and Community Services (DFaCS).

Work preparation is being provided to the participating students.
- Personnel Employment is delivering the ‘Employability Skills: Becoming a Worker’ course in partnership with Minda Job Placement.
- State Education teachers have professional development time allocated to enable observation and evaluation of the employment preparation program.
- Structured work place learning is being provided in manufacturing and retail.
- A Certificate I in Metals and Engineering.
- Retail training is provided by Maxima Training with support from the City of Charles Sturt.
- Job Placement and support is being provided by DFaCS Specialist Employment Providers, such as Personnel Employment, with assistance from the Business Enterprise Centres - Disability Recruitment Coordination Service.

Auspicing organisation
- Western Adelaide Vocational and Enterprise Services (WAVES).

Partners
- WAVES
- Business Enterprise Centres
- Department of Education, Training and Employment (State)
- Department of Family and Community Services (Federal)
- City of Charles Sturt (local Government)
- Personnel Employment
- Minda Job Placement
- South Australian Centre for Manufacturing
In examining this collaboration, it can be seen that:

- Three levels of Government are involved, with each providing direct funding and/or other resource support.
- Industry is an active participant at both the program level and in assisting with coordination.
- Two Disability Employment services have committed to the process.

4. Trialing a Model

The challenges

A major issue to be addressed by the Blueprint is that of the coordination between the disability and VET sectors in the area of learning supports. There is currently a lack of coordination across services and many people with a disability find it difficult to access information, coordinate services and manage their personal needs as well as study demands. Responsibility for providing supports is often not clearly defined across agencies.

Other challenges to be addressed include the following:

- Students with disabilities are more likely than other students to leave school before Years 1 and 12, and to be under-represented in the VET system, which significantly disadvantages their employment options.
- CEPT agencies face significant challenges in securing long term and viable employment for their clients, and have been funded in a way which discourages them building a relationship with their clients during their secondary school years.
- Employers require specific encouragement and support to offer sustainable employment to young people with disabilities.
- Articulation between school and work is a significant issue for all young people, but in particular, for those with a disability, who are most likely to leave school with little understanding of the world of work.

The Opportunity

Opportunity #1: Structured Workplace Learning (SWL)

Structured Workplace Learning (SWL) and VET in Schools initiatives provide significant opportunities to enhance school to industry articulation and to address the problem of a lack of ‘cultural fit’ between the two sectors.

Partnerships between schools, RTOs and employers are vital to the success of this articulation. However, to ensure equity of opportunity for students with a disability, a fourth partner is required – one with a specialised understanding of the needs of people with a disability.

CEPT or open employment placement agencies are ideally placed to become this fourth partner, but have faced significant obstacles in becoming involved at the school level.

Opportunity #2: School-based Apprenticeships

Further opportunity for accredited VET, preparation for work and pathways to long term employment exist in relation to School-based Apprenticeships. These can provide the required Award infrastructure for CBF (see below).

CEPT agencies have traditionally received funding from the Commonwealth in block form, and under the terms of the Commonwealth State Disability Agreement (CSDA) are not supported to become involved within schools because the Agreement defines this as a State responsibility.

Opportunity #3: Case-based Funding to CEPT agencies

From January 2000, Case-based Funding (CBF) has been trialled and this will continue until June 30, 2002. CBF is outcome-based, the outcome being a minimum of 8 hours work for 26 weeks or more, for people who have been assessed by Centrelink under the WAT. This work must be structured under a sanctioned industrial award. CBF will provide for 5 levels of support, ranging from $3000 to $15 000 per year, and these will be determined by assessment of support needs and employment barriers.
At present, CEPTs receive block funding from DFaCS. The CBF Trials are intended to explore and develop an outcomes based funding model, with planning for a transition process between Block funding and this outcomes based model. It is most likely that they will move completely to an outcomes based model over the next few years.

Combining the Challenges with the Opportunity: a Model for Partnerships between Schools, RTOs, Employers and CEPTs to provide young people with disabilities with accredited VET opportunities and sustainable employment outcomes.

In South Australia, WAVES (Western Area Vocational Employment Services), with the support of ASTF funding under the Lighthouse Initiative, will be trialing a model which combines these challenges with the opportunities presented by CBF, SWL and School based Apprenticeships.

The Model provides for CEPT agencies to undertake these key roles:

- transfer labour market knowledge to secondary school teachers via structured in-service training and a train-the-trainer strategy. This would see teachers participating in and then delivering (as RTOs) programs like the 'Certificate of Work Education' or the classroom component of 'Becoming a Worker', and becoming accredited Workplace Trainers and Assessors (Certificate IV). This would mean that teachers would develop a clear understanding of workplace social competencies and receive a nationally recognised VET qualification to accredit this knowledge. (The key challenge here is the need to fund Teacher Release Time. However, it is possible that ANTA funding could be sought for this purpose, given the VET outcomes involved)

- provide the link to employers and manage the interface between schools and industry, including working with New Apprenticeship Centres to obtain apprenticeships.

- provide individual support to students with disabilities and their families.

- act as the feedback loop between student, school and the workplace.

The CEPT role would ultimately be funded through Commonwealth outcomes-based funding (CBF), with SWL being the first component of an outcomes-based strategy, a front-end for School Based Apprenticeships.

The WAVES project will apply this strategy through these specific steps:

- Term 1 – Year 10 student completes 'Becoming a Worker'
- Term 2 – student undertakes SWL (either with Maxima or Email training)
- Mid 2001 – student begins a School based Apprenticeship.
- By the end of 2002, the student has completed, or nearly completed 2 years of a SBA and is thus highly marketable. This enables the CEPT to market the student in the labour market; a relationship has been built with employers and co-workers, the student is developing informed choice about the labour market and has attained a level of work readiness and recognised qualification. The CEPT’s long term investment has a much greater chance of being rewarded through CBF than would be possible without this preparation. Given that 30% of CEPT funding is known to be spent on employment preparation, this model builds on and improves the status quo.

In the course of the ECEF Lighthouse initiative, this model will be trialed and its lessons documented.

While the model is designed specifically to meet the challenges facing students with a disability, it is highly transferable and holds significant promise for students who have completed SWL, assuming the required support resources are part of the overall provision. It builds on the partnerships which are essential to SWL and increases the likelihood of achieving sustainable and improved outcomes for students with a disability.

5. Conclusion

Patterns of school participation show that students with disabilities are more likely to leave school before years 11 and 12 – probably because of the absence of clear vocational pathways. Preventing these early leaving rates requires intervention which provides learning opportunities, support and
structured work placement experience. The model presented in this paper involves Structured Workplace Learning (based on collaborative links as described), and School-based Apprenticeships leading to employment.

The success of the model is highly dependent on collaboration and the building of alliances within the VET sector and across to the community services sector. It depends on effective working relationships between industry, education, community and disability support services. However, intersectoral boundaries can present barriers and necessitate a whole of government approach.

The challenge for this model will be to develop such an approach so that open employment or CEPT agencies are enabled to work with students with disabilities while they are in school, despite the existing policy impediments to this. At present, they are funded to support clients who have been assessed by Centrelink and current policy precludes school students from this assessment. Effectively, CEPTs cannot be funded immediately for working within schools. However, unless CEPTs can build a long term relationship with school age clients, they are less likely to achieve employment outcomes when they leave school. In doing so, they can provide significant support and expert advice to schools and employers and are an integral part of the collaborative model.

Given new policy directions which link CEPT funding to employment outcomes, it is time to remove the barriers which currently inhibit their involvement.

About the authors

Kate Barnett BA, Dip Ed, M Ed, FAICD

Kate Barnett is the Managing Director of Kate Barnett and Associates, a consultancy which specialises in vocational education and training, the management of diversity and the provision of services to young people, older people, women, people with a disability and people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Kate Barnett and Associates has operated for the past 16 years and is based in Adelaide, but works on a national basis. She is also an Associate with the National Centre for Vocational Education Research and has undertaken a number of equity-focused projects with the Centre.

One of the large projects which Kate is currently managing for the Enterprise Career Education Foundation is identifying strategies for increasing the participation of young people with disabilities in the VET system. This is the focus of her presentation today.

Craig Harrison ACROD

Craig Harrison, Manager - Personnel Employment (SA) is a member of the ACROD Ltd National Committee on Employment and Training and has also managed open employment services for people with a disability in Qld and NSW. Craig has also been an office bearer with the Association of Competitive Employment (ACE) in New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia since 1992.

Craig brings a diverse range of experience to the Disability Training and Employment agenda, having also worked as Manager, Research Development and Training for Personnel Employment, Northern Rivers Inc, and as a Staff Development Officer within the South Australian Public Service. Craig also holds a degree in Education.

Craig has been central in encouraging the Disability Employment Sector to view itself as a part of the VET system, with particular emphasis upon the opportunities to value add to the on-site training delivered to people with disabilities by funded agencies.

Craig was a member of the working group that developed 'Planning Together: Collaborative Approaches for people with a disability in vocational education and training'. This project developed a planning model that will maximise participation and outcomes for people with a disability in vocational training and employment.

Craig was also the service provider representative for the steering committee evaluating the national Jobnet pilot projects between 1994 and 1996.

Craig has been a founding member of the ANTA Disability Forum, with involvement in the
development of 'Bridging Pathways' and the subsequent 'Blueprint for implementation'. He is an executive member of the Australian Disability Training Advisory Council which carries the responsibility for facilitating and monitoring the implementation of 'Bridging Pathways'.