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Implementation of Disability Studies
within Post Secondary Education:
An Australian Perspective

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The last two decades have been a period of unprecedented change for Australian higher education and vocational training. These changes involve structures, finances, policy directions and public accountability. Historically, the educational and cultural tradition had been to separate general education and vocational training. This was reflected in senior secondary educational and higher education structures providing academic or general education, but vocational education and training was the province of technical schools, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Colleges, private colleges and training providers and the workplace. The impetus for change originated in the economic reform process which has seen a greater emphasis on creating a higher level of skills formation requiring a greater contribution from industry and closer cooperation between education and training providers and industry to meet Australia's rapidly evolving skill needs.

Australia has a three tier system of government comprised of the Federal or Commonwealth Government, the six individual states and two territories who have their own legislatures, and a Local Government system. The Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments aim to improve the quantity and quality of vocational education and training through substantial reforms which acknowledge that access to training for groups of people under-represented in the labour market must be increased. Through the National Training Reform Agenda, the Commonwealth Government, in collaboration and co-operation with the States, Territories, employers and industrial parties, are developing a more diverse and responsive national vocational education and training system for all Australians. This system is based on the development of agreed national Competency Standards, a National Framework for the Recognition of Training, competency-based training, self-paced learning, the recognition of prior learning, and the delivery of training in an open and flexible manner.

Some key elements include complete reform to entry-level training arrangements through the implementation of the Australian Vocational Training System (the AVTS), the provision of national accredited and recognised, structured training in the workplace and a new qualification system, known as the National Qualification Framework, which replaced all the certificates and diplomas awarded by various state and industry agencies.

The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) was established to ensure close interaction between industry and training. It aims to promote training which is responsive to industry needs and to assure funding to bodies delivering that training. The AVTS was introduced to rationalise apprenticeships and traineeships, and most importantly, to create recognised training and new qualifications in areas where no formal pathways previously existed. It is important to understand that there is no single institution or set course through which new pathways are created. In keeping with the notion of flexibility that underscores the new training system, AVTS pathways are created by partnerships between relevant industries and vocational education and training providers.

In the higher education arena, the Commonwealth Government has used its direct funding responsibility for Australian universities as leverage to encourage the policy changes required to make higher education more responsive to national needs and priorities in both economic and social terms. The agenda is to increase numbers and provide greater equality of access and participation and outcomes for all members of the community. There is increasing cooperation between universities, TAFE institutions, schools and enterprises to meet the needs of post compulsory education students by sharing resources, credit transfers and joint programs.

The traditional approach to training is being questioned and old roles and responsibilities are under challenge. No longer are people confined to the classroom, but learning can take place in a multitude of locations using a wide variety of technology. Increasingly, distance education and open learning opportunities are being created, where people can receive training and be assessed in the workplace and receive a nationally recognised certificate.

Goals of post compulsory education and training

Efforts are being made to ensure a coherent post compulsory education and training system operates nationally to provide comprehensive opportunities to all young Australians (Figure 1). Increasingly, policy themes and activities have focussed on: a desire for a better education and more highly skilled society with an interest in life-long learning; the need for a broader and more relevant curriculum at the senior secondary school level; the need to make post compulsory education and training arrangements more consistent both nationally and between and within sectors; an emphasis on education and training outcomes; and the need to link training arrangements more closely to the requirements of industry.

Figure 1
Typical Avenues of Post-Secondary
Education and Training in Australia

SPECIALIST

UNIVERSITIES TAFE COLLEGES PRIVATE COLLEGES SERVICES

Undergraduate & Postgraduate degrees	Vocational education & training awards Industry training boards	Training Full fee paying support Competitive employment training Individual supported jobs	Employment training & Competitive employment training	
Teaching Research				training
Commonwealth funding HECS charges Research funds Consultancies	States funding Government training assistance	Self-funded funding Department of Human Services & Health DEET	Commonwealth funding	

Massive structural changes during the 1980s and 1990s resulted in fewer, larger institutions, a growth in the number of people participating in higher education and a substantial change to funding arrangements for institutions through the introduction of the Higher Education Funding Act, 1988. Universities operate under Acts of various state parliaments and are publicly funded, in large measure by the Commonwealth Government. This can be supplemented by endowments and consultancies.

TAFE colleges provide industry related training and are organisationally and financially the responsibility of State Governments, although special funds are provided by the Commonwealth Government to promote particular initiatives in vocational training. Courses generally run on a fee-for-service, cost recovery basis. All disability provisions are funded by the state and variations occur between states.

Private colleges charge full fees to students or trainees, but may attract Government training assistance. They offer courses in areas such as office skills, hospitality and child care. Evening Colleges are supported by subsidies and provisions from local Government or are self funding. Some Community Colleges, Voluntary and Community Groups obtain small subsidies from state governments though Community Adult Education Boards.

Definition and prevalence of disability

Disability is usually conceptualized as a multi-dimensional experience for the person involved. There may be effects on organs or body parts such as impairment of the ear's structure or function or both. There may be effects on certain activities such as understanding or producing messages. There may be consequences for a person's participation in aspects of life such as education, work or leisure. Participation can be facilitated in various ways; for instance, by the

provision of assistive technology or sign language interpretation.

Correspondingly, three dimensions of disability are recognized in the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (ICIDH): body structure and function (and impairment thereof); activity (and activity limitations); participation (and participation restriction) (WHO 1997). The classification also recognizes the role of physical and social environmental factors in affecting disability outcomes. The first ICIDH was published by the World Health Organization in 1980. It is now in the process of revision to take account of the developments in the field since then. WHO is developing the revised classification, ICIDH-2, in co-operation with a number of countries, including Australia, as well as specialist task forces and organizations representing people with a disability.

The most recent national population survey of disability is the Australian Bureau of Statistics 1988 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (ABS, 1999). This survey defined "disability as the presence of one or more 17 limitations, restrictions or impairments". To be consistent with the draft of ICIDH-2, the survey used the concept of "activity restrictive" instead of "handicap". In 1998, 12.5% of the population aged less than 65 years had an activity restriction. Of these people, 4.0% reported a profound or severe core activity restriction meaning that they always or sometimes needed person assistance or supervision with activities of early living.

For people aged 0 to 64 years most disabilities arose from main disabling conditions that were likely to be related to physical disabilities: 10.7% of the population in this age group reported such main conditions. The most common physical main disabling conditions were arthritis and other musculo-skeletal disorders. The next most frequent group was disabling conditions affecting intellectual abilities (1.6%) followed by sensory (1.2%) and psychiatric (1.1%) conditions.

The intellectual disability group had the largest difference in prevalence between males (2.2%) and females (0.9%). These data do not indicate the overall prevalence of these conditions since they count each person only once according to the main disability condition.

This population is not static as incidence of disability is related to such factors as genetic pre-disposition, accidents, injuries and illness. Other factors which influence population data are the various methods employed in collecting the data, the definition of disability and the willingness of people to self identify. A recent focus of attention has been on the variable interpretations of the definition of disability particularly for the purposes of special education funding and eligibility criteria to disability support programs.

Policies and legislation

In the past decade there has been a significant change in community perceptions of how services should be provided for people with disabilities. These changes have resulted in a major shift from segregated services to the present demand for a more inclusive form of community support. Accordingly, government policies and legislation have undergone changes which reflect this world-wide social and political trend towards community support and inclusion of people with disabilities in their local communities.

(a) Commonwealth Disability Services Act, 1986

Growing awareness of the rights of people with disabilities was acknowledged in the Commonwealth Disability Services Act, 1986 (DSA). The introduction of this Act provided services with:

a philosophical frame of reference about the expectations people with disabilities and their families should have about services funded through the Commonwealth; a legal frame of reference through which to interpret the Disability Services Act; a distinct value base about the rights of people with disabilities to be given the same opportunities and services similar to those open to all members of the Australian community.

National Standards and guidelines in applying the Act, developed in 1992, have clarified the administrative requirements and provided processes for standardised national practice. To locate the DSA historically within the Australian legislative and policy environment a timetable of events relevant to the development of services for people with disability is attached in Appendix 1.

(b) Anti-discrimination legislation

Australia also has a package of anti-discrimination legislation which is underpinned by international obligations as a member state of the United Nations. There are five Commonwealth laws based on a number of Covenants and Declarations made by the United Nations General Assembly. They comprise The Racial Discrimination Act, 1975; the Sex Discrimination Act, 1984; The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act, 1986; The Privacy Act, 1988; and the Disability Discrimination Act, 1992. These Commonwealth Laws are administered from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and this body is responsible for monitoring the legislation to ensure consistency with the following international obligations: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Declaration of the Rights of the Child, Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons and Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), 1992, came into effect on 1st March 1993 and this Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against people on the grounds of their disability which includes physical, intellectual, psychiatric, sensory, neurological or learning disabilities. It also includes physical disfigurement and the presence in the body of a disease-carrying organism, for example the HIV virus.

In the area of education and training, the DDA protects against discrimination in admission or access and against personal harassment while undertaking education or training. Reasonable Adjustment is the principle for making adjustments which allow a focus on a person's abilities without causing unjustifiable hardship to the people involved. Adjustment measures may include changes to training or work practices, changes to program design, modification to equipment or premises and extra training or other assistance.

In applying the principle of reasonable adjustment in education and training settings teaching support and administrative staff are expected, whenever possible and reasonable to do so, to consider the person's disability and make appropriate adjustments to the organisational, learning and physical environment to lessen the impact of the disability. This concept covers college design, the provision of equipment, physical access, curriculum design, delivery and assessment. Currently, a set of standards is being developed to better inform employers of what actually constitutes "reasonable adjustment" and "unjustifiable hardship".

Being a Commonwealth Act, the DDA legally binds State, Territory, local governments, private industry, incorporated and unincorporated organisations, and private citizens to uphold the rights of all citizens with disabilities and ensures uniformity across all States. The DDA is the most recent anti-discrimination legislation, and as it is relatively new, its effectiveness in serving the best interests of people with disabilities who are experiencing discrimination will only become clear over time. However, people with disabilities now have a mechanism for legally enforcing their right to be treated fairly.

The DDA has provision for standards to be developed in relation to the delivery of certain services for people with disabilities. Those relating to vocational education and training were scheduled from 1996. It is envisaged that these standards would set legislative deadlines for achieving adequate access, provide more definite benchmarks for accessibility than is presently provided within the Act and provide a time line for achieving compliance to the above.

The Australian Standard Design for Access and Mobility, (AS1428 Pts 1-4) has been developed to specify design requirements for specific elements of buildings, related facilities and sites to permit access to and access within non-residential buildings for people with functional disabilities. It is intended this standard be used during the design phase of a project.

(d) State and Territory Laws

Complementing Commonwealth legislation, individual States and Territories have enacted similar Anti-Discrimination and Disability Services legislation or are in the process of developing the same.

(e) Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement (CSDA) 1992

Under the CSDA agreement funding for services for people with disabilities was rationalised to eliminate duplication in Commonwealth, State and Territory administration of disability services. The aim was to further develop, on a national basis, integrated services for people with disabilities to ensure that they have access to appropriate services which meet their individual needs. The Commonwealth administers employment services and the State/Territory Governments administers accommodation support, recreational, respite and other support services for people with a disability. The responsibility for advocacy services and research is by both levels of government.

The Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement has achieved a number of outcomes including: complementary disability legislation enacted by all States; the provision of additional funding by the Commonwealth for disability services over the life of the agreement; the establishment of joint planning processes and the creation of joint advisory bodies in each state as an avenue for community sector advice to the ministers; and increased co-operation and co-ordination between the Commonwealth and State Governments

Teacher training

Traditionally, teacher training in Australia has been segmented into initial or pre-service teacher training of equity groups some projects focus on specific disability groups. One of these national projects is providing university accredited training in the transition process for teachers of students with disabilities through the key competencies. The course combines theoretical and practical components, uses a mixed mode, open learning approach and is available to teachers in

secondary school sectors and TAFE across several states.

In another project AccessAbility, disabilities training for staff and volunteers was funded by the Queensland Open Learning Project, Queensland Department of Education. This resulted in a kit the aims of which are to enhance the expertise of higher education and TAFE college staff who teach and lecture to students with disabilities to assist the development of support networks and to address the note-taking, study skills and tutoring needs of such students. It was designed for use as pre-service and in-service training of staff, students and volunteers. This kit is being used on licence, as a resource for internal TAFE staff training.

ResponseAbility People with Disabilities: Skilling Staff in Vocational Education, Training and Employment Sectors

ResponseAbility is a national staff development program funded by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. The program aims to equip staff to make equitable provision for students with disabilities across the full range of vocational education and training options in TAFE colleges throughout Australia. The curriculum is a model of best practice and is in Competency Based Training (CBT) format. The key elements are interactive and involve people with disabilities themselves in the training process. There are four modules which have applications across the full range of TAFE staff: Mandates for Change, Enhancing Access, Communication and Instruction, and Action Planning for Change. Underpinning themes which recur in the materials are those of rights based service delivery, mutual accommodation, networking, anti-discrimination, equity principles, valuing diversity, enacting key concepts of social role valorisation, confidentiality, building on existing skills, inclusive practices, and ongoing consultation with people with disabilities. Although based on these themes, this is not a theoretical or philosophical study. It is a practical work-based system of training focussed on outcomes which lead to the equitable provision for students with disability.

Sponsored as a national initiative, training has been provided to facilitators from each state and territory who then further the progress of staff training within their own systems. In New South Wales data for a 9 month period in 1994 indicated 36 trained facilitators had held 35 workshops for 370 participants. Implementation has been rapid with reports from states and territories indicating that most TAFE staff have been involved in at least the first level of awareness raising activities. Guidelines have been developed for ongoing implementation. The curriculum has been made available as a National Development Product, and extended to staff beyond the TAFE system, including Disability Access Support Units for the Skillshare network. It can also be used for university staff. Expansion plans for impacting the large number of sessional and part time staff in higher education are required.

FlexAbility

A further significant initiative has been the development and implementation of FlexAbility - People with Disabilities and TAFE: A strategic framework for people with disabilities in TAFE 1994-1996. This training program has been shaped by six national Vocational Education and Training goals: (1) a national training system; (2) quality; (3) outcomes and opportunities for individuals; (4) the needs of industry; (5) equity; and (6) training as an investment. Objectives and strategies are designed to ensure relevance for people with

disabilities across the range of vocational education and training programs and student services within TAFE.

Three significant themes are pursued within each goal and associated objectives and strategies. These themes are participation, fair and equitable practices and outcomes. FlexAbility promotes a training system which is free of bias against people with disabilities. It requires that skilled TAFE staff: meet the learning, participation and assessment requirements of people with disabilities; adopt the principle of reasonable adjustment to improve training opportunities for people with disabilities; adopt the principle of reasonable adjustment to improve training opportunities for people with disabilities; and promote partnerships to improve the quality of training outcome with industry, Industry Training Advisory Boards (ITAB's), employment agencies and the community.

This framework has been developed to assist State/Territory TAFE systems to equalise opportunities for people with disabilities in vocational education and training. It is anticipated that this framework will improve the capacity of TAFE systems to respond to the particular requirements of people with disabilities by: providing a framework through which State/Territory TAFE systems can develop implementation plans and strategies which are relevant to local conditions; clarifying TAFE's role in the provision of programs and services for people with disabilities; and providing the means to complement the national training reform agenda and other societal changes likely to impact on the provision of vocational education and training for people with disabilities. The success of implementation depends on each State/Territory's ability to apply available resources equitably, efficiently and effectively.

Courses for workers in the disability field

Most disability specific agencies and organizations have their own induction programs for incoming staff and staff are encouraged to join professional and industry associations through which some networking and in-service occurs. According to a recent review of Disability Services Programs, there can be few industries in greater need of professional development than the disability industry where many support workers have minimal training for tasks that are demanding and which require specific skills. The authors advocate a career structure for this industry to help retention rates and assure high quality service for clients (Baume & Kay, 1995).

A growing range of staff training provisions are being offered, however, including specific university courses: pass and Honours degree in Bachelor of Applied Science (Disability Studies), Flinders University of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia; Master of Applied Science (Disability Studies), Flinders University of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia; Bachelor of Applied Science (Intellectual Disability Studies), Graduate Diploma in Intellectual Disability Studies, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Victoria; Diploma in Education (Habilitation)/Bachelor of Habilitation, Australian Catholic University, Sydney, New South Wales; Bachelor of Applied Science (Habilitation) and Associate Diploma/Bachelor of Health Science (Leisure and Health), Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, New South Wales; Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma of Disability Studies, Deakin University, Melbourne, Victoria; Master of Health Sciences (Disability Studies), Institute of Disability Studies, Deakin University, Melbourne, Victoria; a Graduate Certificate and Masters Degree in Developmental Disability Studies is currently being developed by College of Health Sciences, The University of Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales; Disability Studies at the University of New South Wales;

Graduate Program in Developmental Disability Studies, The University of Sydney; Master of Disability Studies, University of Newcastle. Additional disability specific programs are also available at Universities in Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory.

Courses in Colleges of TAFE

Examples of courses available in Colleges of TAFE are: Vocational Education and Training (Disabilities) Certificate III and IV; Disabilities Issues: Responding to customers, legal obligations, Statement of attainment; Disabilities Issues: Awareness, Statement of attainment; courses for people working with people with disabilities in accommodation, employment, post school options and community access programs, Certificate III and IV, and Diploma levels (on line in 2001).

Barriers to further developments

Presently Australian Universities and higher education generally are being seriously affected by the overall diminution of resource allocation by Commonwealth and State Governments, a trend that commenced in the 1990s as governments of all political parties adopted neo-classical market-driven economic policies. School retention rates are now falling rather than increasing and there has been a significant drop in resources allocated to research and development. At the University level these policies have resulted in savage staff cuts and an increased emphasis upon cost recovery for both undergraduate and postgraduate programs, a far cry from the 1970s when the then Commonwealth Government abolished university fees. An emphasis upon attracting higher fee paying overseas students has restricted places for Australian students in several popular programs.

In order to initiate a new program of study the proposal must assure in most cases not only a cost recovery, but also the promise of a profit to assist the institution's overall infrastructure costs. To many observers this would appear to be an entirely prudent process. However, if one were to compare the Australian system with that obtaining in the USA, the major difference is the degree to which major research funding bodies in the USA support research across the range of bio-psychosocial issues in the disability field. These research grants in turn support University teaching. Historically, in Australia the teaching component has been supported by per capita student allocations from the Commonwealth Government. The reduction in the per capita grants, together with a squeeze on overall research monies, is making it extremely difficult to mount courses in areas such as disability studies where the capacity of the industry to support employees gaining qualifications is fairly limited. Moves towards the implementation of compulsory quality assurance procedures in government-supported disability services programs, and proposals to introduce an accreditation system for support personnel, may result in pressures for additional disability studies courses in the tertiary education sector.

Despite these current problems, Australia has been able to meet many of the challenges that the contemporary philosophies and policies in disability have presented. While not everyone working in this field has adequate knowledge and skills, the existing disabilities studies programs are, to some extent, preparing a cadre of professionals who will provide leadership into the next decade. It is also encouraging that increasing numbers of people with disabilities are accessing higher education programs, not only in disability studies. People with disabilities are also gaining

a tentative foothold in research programs, a process that is being encouraged in several research centres. School inclusion policies are having a positive impact upon students, both those with and without disabilities, to aspire to higher education courses in disability studies. The most pressing challenge is to strengthen the political support for disability research, teaching and development. We have certainly lost the momentum that was evident in the 1980s and early 1990s.

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APPENDIX 1

Timetable of events relevant to the development of services for people with disability

1908 Invalid pensions introduced, commencing 1910

1919 Repatriation Commission established

1941 (Forerunner of) Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service established 1944 Sickness Benefits introduced, commencing 1945

1954 National Health Act

1961 First National Conference - Sheltered Workshops

1962 Disabled Persons Accommodation Act

1960s Principles of normalisation developed in Scandinavia and the United States

1967 Sheltered Employment (Assistance) Act

1971 United Nations Declaration on rights of Disabled Persons 1974 The Handicapped Persons Assistance Act, Nursing Home Assistance Act, and Handicapped Child's Allowance introduced

1975 Meares report (Volume 2 of National Committee of Inquiry 1976 United Nations declares 1981 as International year of Disabled Persons

1977 Royal Commission on Human Relationships

1981 International Year of Disabled Persons

1982 Review of Handicapped Persons Assistance Act

1985 Home and Community Care Act, New Directions Report, and Office of Disability

established

1986 Disability Services Act (DSA)

1987 Commonwealth Rehabilitation Services (DRS) decentralised 1988 Social Security Review report on income support for people with a disability

1991 Disability Reform Package launched, Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement (CSDA), and National Technical Assistance Unit established

1992 Disability Services Act (DSA) amended, Disability Discrimination Act, and Disability Services Standards developed

1993 UN Draft Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities and Australian Disability Strategy drafted