

TAFE NSW – Sydney Institute
Response to the Hon Brendan O'Connor MP Minister for Employment Participation
– Issues regarding the current employment services

Introduction

TAFE NSW – Sydney Institute over a number of years has developed an employment service available to existing students and graduates as well as voluntary work placements. These services utilise close links with industry when matching newly-skilled graduates to suitable employment. The Institute provides relevant, vocationally-based training programs as well as job search assistance and job placement. Some of the ways in which TAFE NSW has responded to industry needs include:

- Expanding its capacity to provide workplace-based assessments and training
- A greater focus on employability skills within classroom based training
- The customisation of programs to suit special needs clients such as the provision of English language training combined with vocational skills training to migrants
- A wide range of programs tailored to students with disabilities accessing the employment market
- The provision of Job Placement Services for existing and former students by which links to industry are used to match appropriate graduates to employers. Job services are also available to employers seeking current students or recent graduates.

The Institute also has a central role in local community engagement and social inclusion projects. Within this context socially excluded and marginalised individuals can participate in active community engagement/citizenship activities which develop social and employment related skills leading to greater workforce participation opportunities. These social inclusion projects involve multiple government and non-government agencies and large and small enterprises. For the long term unemployed this is the most effective way for sustainable employment and community engagement.

In addition, Sydney Institute works with 21 Job Network Members in its immediate catchment. A number of formal and informal associations between the Institute and these JNMs have provided insights into how these relationships can be developed and improved.

1. Employment services are relevant to the circumstances and needs of the job seeker and prospective employer

The model whereby financial incentives are paid to JNMs for the most expedient employment outcomes has given concern to educational providers dealing with the same client group. Some Job Network clients have been removed from training programs in order to undertake employment not well matched to their skills and experience. This can result in the client managing to maintain the employment for only a short time and then returning to the classroom with decreased levels of confidence and in many cases a regression in the skills levels at which they had previously been assessed. It is also felt that by not allowing jobseekers to fully obtain vocational qualifications as well as the underpinning employability skills, their skills gaps cannot be addressed adequately, which in turn contributes to the current skills shortages.

TAFE NSW – Sydney Institute can extend its existing Job Placement Services, extending personalised vocational education and training programs, appropriate

student support as needed, on and off the job training, employability skills and work experience leading to employment.

2. Incentives for training which will improve the employability of job seekers including incentives for long term training and education to address labour market needs

TAFE NSW – Sydney Institute agrees that a revised incentives system for long term training and education will enhance the employability of jobseekers and assist with placement into sustainable employment. Currently a number of constraints exist when considering the educational needs of Job Network Member clients and other job seekers.

- As an incentive for Job Network Members (JNM), training for JNM-referred job seekers at TAFE NSW should be recorded as part of the training and employment services provided to the job seekers. TAFE NSW offers concessions for or full individual exemptions from course fees for students in receipt of Centrelink benefits. This has resulted in a large number of referrals of jobseekers by JNMs to TAFE NSW. Identifying such individuals and negotiating funded training places through the jobseeker's Training Account and Training credits managed by JNMs, has proved problematic and have had minimal results. Institute staff report that Job Network Members are more likely to contribute financially when courses demonstrably lead to employment, for example *Responsible Service of Alcohol and Conduct of Gambling* courses which are often run in partnership with industry and have clear employment outcomes.
- TAFE NSW is regularly, directly responsible for placing students in employment. This needs to be recognised as an outcome. However, Commonwealth contracts such as the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and the Language Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) have no employment outcome that can be attributed to the training provider. Further, when employment is gained during a training program, a provider's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) can be adversely impacted as this outcome can only be recorded as a withdrawal which affects KPIs linked to retention rates. In addition, unless other arrangements outside of the contract are made, the student fails to attain the qualification in which they were enrolled. This is also the affect for students whose participation in mainstream vocational courses is interrupted by their obligation to find employment and for whom part-time options are not suitable.
- Personalised, flexible arrangement to achieve sound education and training outcomes are needed for job seekers as an incentive. If an employment outcome is not immediately obtainable, a Job Network Member must find alternative approved activities such as training for the jobseeker. Some of the requirements of the current Participation Agreements are at odds with sound educational outcomes. For example, the requirement that recipients of the Parenting Payment be placed in an Approved Activity for a minimum of 20 hours per week has resulted in a significant demand by both enrolling students and JNMs that TAFE NSW tailors both non-core and mainstream training programs that respond to this newly-introduced Commonwealth requirement. With this new requirement, jobseekers with family responsibilities, especially sole parents, demonstrate a high level of absenteeism even in programs where relatively few hours are offered and particularly over the winter months and during school holidays. This is made particularly difficult in an environment where there is a shortage of childcare places.

A number of issues concerning the newly-introduced Commonwealth requirement are as follows:

- Programming more training hours for groups not academically equipped to engage with intense educational programs leads to increased levels of absenteeism and a higher rate of failure.
 - TAFE NSW is being asked to implement a more arduous and difficult training regime specifically for this group creating discomfort among staff in relation to gender discrimination, given that Parenting Payment clients are primarily women.
 - The requirement that places be programmed for known absentees also reduces the State's ability to provide training places for those not eligible for Job Network assistance particularly in certain areas of delivery such English as a Second or Other Language.
 - High levels of absenteeism can also impact on a provider's ability to achieve attendance KPI's for Commonwealth contracts such as the LLNP.
 - While it is possible to split the activities required to fulfil welfare obligations, eg 10 hours of training and 10-20 hours of job search activities, there seems little motivation either on behalf of Job Networks or jobseekers to do so.
- Immediate employment placement after successful training completion is needed as an incentive for job seekers with disabilities and Special Employment Services. There is a gap between completion of training and employment for job seekers with a disability. Students complete training in industry settings and are assessed as job ready but often have to wait for a few more months or more to secure a job with the assistance of their community Specialist Employment Service. The training provider often opens the industry door to the Specialist Employment Service during the education and training phase. Specialist Employment Services are encouraged to work closely with the training provider but this is purely voluntary. Working parents or carers respond to the gap in provision by encouraging their son or daughter to enrol in another course regardless of its appropriateness.
 - Recent arrival migrants should be entitled to receive job network support even if they may not be entitled to income support. This can be similar to their access to the Commonwealth funded LLNP.
 - JNMs need incentives to be integrated into the process of community engagement and social inclusion. Involvement in community engagement is a creative way of developing employment skills and local enterprise opportunities. Individual/job seeker involvement in community engagement and social inclusion projects needs parity with current employment outcomes for JNMs. These projects have TAFE NSW employability skills training embedded.
 - There is a great need for closer partnerships and alliances between JNMs, RTOs and industry groups to provide more effective and seamless services and appropriate programs for individual job seekers. RTOs need to be allowed to provide professional advice to tailor programs to cater for individual job seekers according their learning needs.
 - Close and on-going partnerships between Special Employment Services and RTOs such as TAFE NSW are particularly needed to provide effective training programs and employment services for job seekers with disabilities. Disability Teacher/Consultants at Sydney Institute receive a wide range of feedback, some of it extremely negative, from carers and parents regarding client satisfaction with Specialist Employment Services. Parents and students fear that providing honest

feedback or complaints may result in some type of negative repercussion for them or their son or daughter.

3. job seekers with higher levels of disadvantage receive intensive assistance

TAFE NSW – Sydney Institute agrees that jobseekers with higher levels of disadvantage in the job market should receive increased levels of intensive assistance in order to improve employability and vocational skills. It is felt that JNMs may not be in the best position to fully service some job seekers, especially those suffering severe physical or psychiatric disabilities. Sydney Institute can provide training to meet these job seekers' needs. For example, specialist Employment Services tender for Transition to Work (TTW) funding as part of their program for job seekers with a disability. They deliver a Certificate 1 course in employability skills. However, job seekers are often referred for more intensive industry training to TAFE. TAFE does not receive any TTW funding for these students and are not eligible to tender for TTW funding. The quality and relevance of the service delivery by the Specialist Employment Service may not meet this groups learning and training needs. As the TTW funding is provided for a two year period it may act as a disincentive for the Specialist Employment Service to find the person a job.

4. Performance management principles including star ratings and business reallocation that support sustainable outcomes and promote quality service delivery

TAFE NSW – Sydney Institute is a recognised quality delivery institution of vocational education and training with a long history of effective performance management that supports sustainable industry/community engagement and social inclusion outcomes for business and community. In particular, Sydney Institute strongly believes that performance management of Job Networks should be reviewed to ensure that:

- skills shortages within the labour market are addressed by referring clients to jobs they are trained for and not just manual or low skills job to achieve the outcome they are measured in according with
- referring clients to training provider for training matching skills gaps should also be considered as alternative outcomes
- jobseekers are properly equipped with language and literacy, as well vocational and employability skills which are transferable across a range of vocations before being placed in employment
- jobseekers are provided with User Choice both when selecting Job Network Members and choosing educational providers.

5. The minimisation of time and money spent on administration

Commonwealth requirements of program administration within the Language Literary and Numeracy Programme (LLNP) demand significant amount of time to administer the program. Sydney Institute supports any improvement in efficient program administration.