

Inclusion as a facet of VET Quality: A study of Universal Design for Learning in European VET contexts

Dr Elizabeth Knight

Victorian Skills Authority Fellowship, 2024

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02

Executive summary

Fellowship funding from the International Specialised Skills Institute enabled a study of how inclusion in vocational education and training (VET) could benefit from observing practices overseas. The Fellowship primarily aimed to gather international insights into how to systemically support and improve the capacity of existing VET staff and trainers to become more confident inclusive practitioners, deliver positive experiences for students with disability and ensure successful completions. The Fellowship took a systemic view to try and see how resources and practices could be ameliorated at a policy or institutional level.

The idea behind the project was to gain knowledge about how international contexts are attempting to deliver inclusive VET for all students and how they work to ensure equitable educational and employment outcomes for VET students. The origin of this inquiry was whether there were innovations in teaching and learning which can better ensure inclusion and meet the needs of students with disability while recognising resource constraints. A promising practice which was a focus of the inquiry was whether, and if so how, the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach aided inclusion in vocational education and training. The funding from the ISSI enabled engagement with projects and programs which enriched understanding of challenges and opportunities in delivering inclusive vocational education. There were two major streams of international consultation funded by the ISSI Fellowship:

- Partners across Europe within a European Commission funded project which sought to certify vocational education and training learning for students with disabilities, using a Universal Design for Learning approach.
- Stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of systemic guidance on UDL for trainers and assessors in vocational education and training.



Figure 1. Training provider visited in Girona

Travel was undertaken during July and August 2023 and ten meetings were held with representatives from the two streams of inquiry in four different European countries. It is hoped that insights which have been gained from the encounters with international practices will support advancement

towards greater inclusion in Australian Vocational Education and Training, while not further stretching resources of Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) or trainers and assessors.

Several key findings were developed from the project:

1. Inclusion and inclusive delivery is somewhat invisible in Vocational Education and Training settings in Australia:

There are comparatively few practical resources (e.g. practice guides or assessment protocols) about inclusion and only a weakly defined professional network to support inclusive practice.

- Inclusion in VET can fall between sector divisions, which limits sharing of ideas. VET can be left out of discussions about employment and education; as inclusion in education due to funding may focus on schooling and employment supports for people with disability, and may not include training.
 - Inclusion is sometime seen as an add-on, not a core business of 'mainstream' VET, and relegated to specialist providers.
2. Inclusion is often unclear and at best fuzzily understood, without shared comprehension between colleagues or different levels of stakeholders:
 - There is a lack of shared understandings about key concepts in inclusion, that can lead to confusion in implementation and trainers and assessors feeling overwhelmed. Without having deep understanding of goals of inclusion, project and program aims can be misinterpreted by key parties.
 - UDL as an approach is sometimes seen as a difficult technique for which much training is needed and requiring significant expense in terms of time and resource.
 - The idea of adapting curriculum and assessment can be an overwhelming barrier for staff working in VET. Inaccessible curriculum and assessment choices can

institute inherent requirements which are sometimes used as spurious reasons to not implement inclusive practices and thereby exclude potential learners.

- Little widespread recognition exists that inclusive design can benefit all students.
3. Resource constraints impact on innovation and thus on inclusion:
 - Design of learning materials and interpretation of training package / curriculum are big tasks and often underbudgeted in terms of resource allocation.
 - Trialling new technologies which may facilitate inclusion takes time and in rapid delivery contexts there is little opportunity to experiment and improve.
 - With limited time available, trainers and assessors tend to revert to delivery modes and interaction that they are used to. This leads to trainers and assessors using activities they have employed before as they have limited time to make new ones and trial or review activities.
 - Delivering inclusively can be seen as expensive and time-consuming as it involves consideration of elements such as activities and assessment items, needing to be refreshed, which are often not resourced.
 4. Choice of activity and assessment for students is a core principle of UDL but is noted as a challenge for RTOs when delivering education in an inclusive environment:
 - UDL's common implementation of 'change one thing' can be understood as unending work where changes are always needed, and a more restricted choice might be enough for accessibility to be assured.
 - There are indications that two accessible choices of assessment have been shown to meet most students' needs. Taking this further, two accessible means of engaging with activities may ensure accessibility for most students.

Considerations

These findings generated some key considerations arising from the Fellowship:

1. It is critical for inclusion to be defined in practice in context, including values, visions and expected outcomes. These ideas could be considered:
 - Focus could be given to the perception of inclusion within the VET sector, away from charity discourses, towards seeing inclusion as a facet of quality which benefits all students. RTOs should have an assumption that all teaching staff are expected to, and are supported to, deliver inclusively.
 - Understanding inclusion in context will enable deepening and thickening the delivery of inclusive practice. Making inclusive practice seem achievable and real is important and distributing practice across settings is critical. It is important to facilitate staff having opportunities within the training setting to have conversations to make the idea of inclusion more concrete and practical .
 - Networks for sharing good and innovative practice should be supported, including synchronous and asynchronous opportunities for engagement.
 - Opportunities should be systematically facilitated for discussing and sharing understanding about inclusion and inclusive practice within RTOs. This could be undertaken by collective engagement with co-production of disability statements, including with students with disabilities.
 - Examples in context (e.g. case studies or illustrations of practice) enable inclusive practices to be modelled and the development and sharing of authentic examples and development of these resources should be centrally supported.
2. Time and resources are essential for quality delivery, including enabling innovation to support inclusion. These ideas could be considered:

- VET could be delivered more inclusively if trainers and assessors had time to fully realise their training and assessment expertise.
- A UDL approach could be implemented by facilitating time to build in routine choice in all training and assessment and make iterative improvements and modifications, including to enhance inclusion.
- Resourcing of training courses ought to be routinely accompanied by estimates which include allocation for review time of learning activity development and assessment to ensure quality improvement and particularly inclusion at the point of delivery.
- Time to integrate new technologies and trial new methodologies could enable new and multiple inclusive activities to be developed for new and existing training packages.

GLOSSARY

Ableism - Ableism is discrimination or prejudice towards people with disability. It can be described as the systemic and interpersonal exclusion and oppression of people with disability (PWD, 2023)

AQF Australian Qualifications Framework

DSE Disability Standards for Education

EC European Commission

EU European Union

RTO Registered Training Organisation

UDL Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2024)

VET Vocational Education and Training

03

Background

Introduction

The Fellowship has enabled an investigation into how practices, policies and cultures of vocational education and training provision in other countries can inform the Victorian VET sector so it can better develop and adapt our vocational education system to be more inclusive, while not stretching the resources of RTOs or tutors.

- What training is provided relating to inclusive education concepts and is such detailed understanding of the social model of disability promoted: if so, how?
- How are professional development sessions funded, and disseminated?
- Are there any central resources within this country or in the EU that support staff to make realistic and evidence-based assessments of time to support students with disability and other needs?
- What level of guides and support materials are available within the EU context for VET practitioners and how do they make training materials and assessment tasks accessible?
- Does staff training include socio-cultural understandings of diverse cohort needs and does it have an intersectional lens?
- How is cultural awareness training integrated and does it support staff understanding about different cultural positionings of disability and how to support students facing cultural barriers?

Insights drawn from the Fellowship operate so that the individual accommodations which are sometimes necessary are resource-intensive, along with traditional modes of differentiated teaching, and can even lead to exclusion of students in implicit or explicit ways. Innovations that were observed include conceptual thinking about the training environment as one for everyone, drawing on principles of universal design and thinking about inclusion as a critical element in delivering quality training.

By better understanding how international contexts are delivering inclusive VET for all students, and ensuring equitable educational and employment outcomes for VET students this knowledge and know-how will operate in Australia where it will be analysed and considered for its appropriateness in the Australian context.

The findings from the fellowship seek to re-focus the debate in Victorian VET around inclusion, and to highlight the necessity for a mindshift in delivering inclusion. They will support and improve the capacity of existing VET staff and trainers to become more confident inclusive practitioners and so will help to enhance successful completion of training for students with disability.

In Australia there has been a long tradition supporting inclusion in education and training settings. Australia is a signatory to the UN Convention on Rights of People with Disability and Article 24 specifically affirms the right of people with disability to 'access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult

education, and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others' (2006, p.14). The importance of supporting students with disability in education has been enshrined in laws such as the *Disability Discrimination Act* (1995). This Act however, was felt to need additional guidance, and to provide greater detail to the education section the Australian *Disability Standards for Education* [DSEs] (2005) was published.

The *Disability Standards for Education* (2005) states 'that students with disabilities are able to access and participate in education on the same basis as other students' (p.iii). Aligned to this, an overarching goal of Australia's previous National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training was the provision of equitable access to and outcomes from vocational education and training for disadvantaged groups, including people with disabilities. While RTOs are bound by the Disability Standards for Education 2005, there is concern that these lack clarity regarding implementation and engagement. A particular gap in VET resources for inclusion of students with disabilities was identified by the 2021 *Review of the Disability Standards for Education*. Further, with resource constraints, the support of people with disability can be a challenge for RTOs to strategically engage with the issue. Many other national and regional systems that provide vocational education and training face similar resourcing issues and it is useful to understand practice abroad to better understand what difference in implementation means for inclusion in VET.

Approach

My interest in supporting inclusion in VET settings is of long standing. My interest in the Fellowship topic derives from my background as a qualified career counsellor with over ten years' experience working in VET and higher education settings, and experience as a disability support practitioner with five years direct experience in colleges and higher education institutions. I am a disabled woman and have a lifelong connective tissue disability that impacts my mobility and dexterity; I have had disability support at every stage of my educational and work career and have mobility assistance in my daily life. My

disability advocacy, including my nine years as a Board Member of the Disability Discrimination Legal Service, which seeks to resolve complaints and queries from people with disability, shows my commitment to the area. I am a member of Physical Disability Australia and People with Disability Australia.



Figure 2. Margarita, Athens site of EqualVET project - door sign reading 'autonomy'

I position myself as a practitioner first, and have engaged in research to support improvements in practice since I completed a PhD, which looked at the marketing of tertiary institutions. At the time of the commencement of this fellowship I had worked for five years primarily in research active roles at Australian universities with a particularly focus on vocational education. My research role enabled me to work closely with VET policy makers, researchers, tutors and managers to help their practice with evidence-based insights. For the last twenty years I have worked in access to tertiary education for students with disability, and have worked in student support as well as teaching at VCAL, VET and higher education settings. My teaching areas are inclusive education, career development and employability skills. My extensive experience includes my management of 2016 provision of video and illustration of practice resources for the Preparing Secondary Students for Work Commonwealth framework. This work was undertaken as a subject matter expert for the Ministerial Company Education Services Australia during my doctoral studies.

Recent work has been in investigating enrolment issues for students with disabilities in VET, while I am currently working in practice-based research aligned with the ISSI Priority Area 2: *Developing*

educational approaches that address the gaps between disadvantaged learners and high-quality education and training outcomes.

In 2021 I worked with a team convened by the Australian Disability Clearinghouse for Education and Training to better understand how Universal Design for Learning operated, and conducted an international scoping review to understand the extant literature on the subject. The scoping review was published with recommendations for the Australian Tertiary sector (Jwad et al., 2021) about how to introduce Universal Design for Learning. Thereafter, I took part in a project which drew together tertiary educators, learning designers, accessibility advocates and researchers to develop a national e-learning program to develop workforce capability. This work was necessary as the project team found that:

references to UDL appear in only a small number of Australian educational policies and tertiary institute websites, and few tertiary educators use UDL in practice (Leif et al., 2023 , p.55)

The development of the eLearning program drew inspiration from the Irish organisation AHEAD's similar work in the tertiary setting. The uptake of the program was very strong and feedback from the program showed the support that was being sought by practitioners and educators across the higher and vocational education sector. Following this I worked on ADCET's project funded by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations' program of works on 'Supporting Students with Disability – VET', specifically on the review of enrolment practices for students with disability.

During the projects I worked on over the 2021-2022 I became increasingly interested in and concerned by trainers, assessors and institutions' expressed feelings of being overwhelmed by the requirements of delivering inclusive spaces. Therefore, I was motivated to apply for the ISSI Fellowship to explore how inclusion is done in other countries.

From my research into innovative practice internationally to support students with disability in a project on VET enrolment practices reports, I was able to identify several key sites of good practice. I noted that the European Commission has been particularly active in the global support of vocational education. The development of inclusive settings and organisations that I contacted are primarily reported in the EqualVET European Union project completed in 2022 and in a "UDL for FET" Resource Hub published by AHEAD, which is an Irish independent non-profit organisation. That project has recently concluded, but partners are still working on disseminating results and good practice. Through visits in 2023 I have engaged with diverse project teams which investigated different aspects of supporting VET engagement for students. By engaging with these teams I was able to consult with each of the experts, observe them in practice, and collaborate with them to better understand the underpinnings of the optimal approach to support VET practitioners to deliver inclusive classrooms and workplace teaching settings. The two-pronged approach provides a wider scope to learn from these international expert sources and then subsequently apply my conclusions in an Australian VET context which has limited work in this area.

I constructed a project plan about collecting insights from the international partners, how to analyse the information and recontextualising it for the Australian VET setting. To explain why the sites were appropriate for analysis, I here detail the two projects I visited.

Equal VET project

An aim of the project was to develop the curriculum across three discipline areas that had been running in the partner training providers for many years. The original idea of the project is that there would be an adaptation of curriculum in each of the provider sites using Universal Design for Learning approach to make it more easily transferable to the other provider. As the providers were all in different countries and used different languages, English was used as a medium.








Figure 3. EqualVET project front page

By engaging with these teams I will record insights from the inventive and trialled ideas and recontextualise them for Australia. I would also like to consult with each of the experts, observe them in practice, and collaborate with them to co-create the optimal approach to support VET practitioners to deliver inclusive classrooms and workplace teaching settings.

The project outputs are in English but I have strong language skills in French and German which will help in some of the project documentation from the European Commission. The information below gives an overview of project partners who have engaged in the Equal VET project and their particular carriage of different aspects of the project.

The EqualVET project was funded by the European Commission to develop certificated learning in the three training provider organisations who currently delivered the training without certification.

Table 1 EqualVET.eu partner organisations

Organisations	Place	
European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities	Brussels, Belgium	
University of Girona	Girona, Spain	
Fundació Ramon Noguera	Girona, Spain	
Vocational Training Center MARGARITA, EqualVET.eu partner	Athens, Greece	
TÜV HELLAS (TÜV NORD), EqualVET.eu partner	Athens, Greece	

UDL for FET practitioners

The second part of the project was identified through my link with the Australian Disability Clearinghouse Education and Training who work closely with AHEAD in Ireland and who seem to be able to provide system wide support for VET staff across the system.

This settled delivery of practice would complement the other projects within the EU range of organisations which are dealing more with novel innovative approaches.

Particularly in focus for the ISSI Fellowship was the publication in March 2021 of specific guidance for Further Education and Training to implement Universal Design for Learning approaches. These were developed by members of the AHEAD organisation in consultation with an international expert Thomas Tobin from the University of Wisconsin.

I was able to meet with the CEO of AHEAD, Dara Ryder, in Ireland and two other colleagues involved in the project, one principal of a major VET College at the time of implantation and also the CEO of the Irish Centre of Excellence in Universal Design.



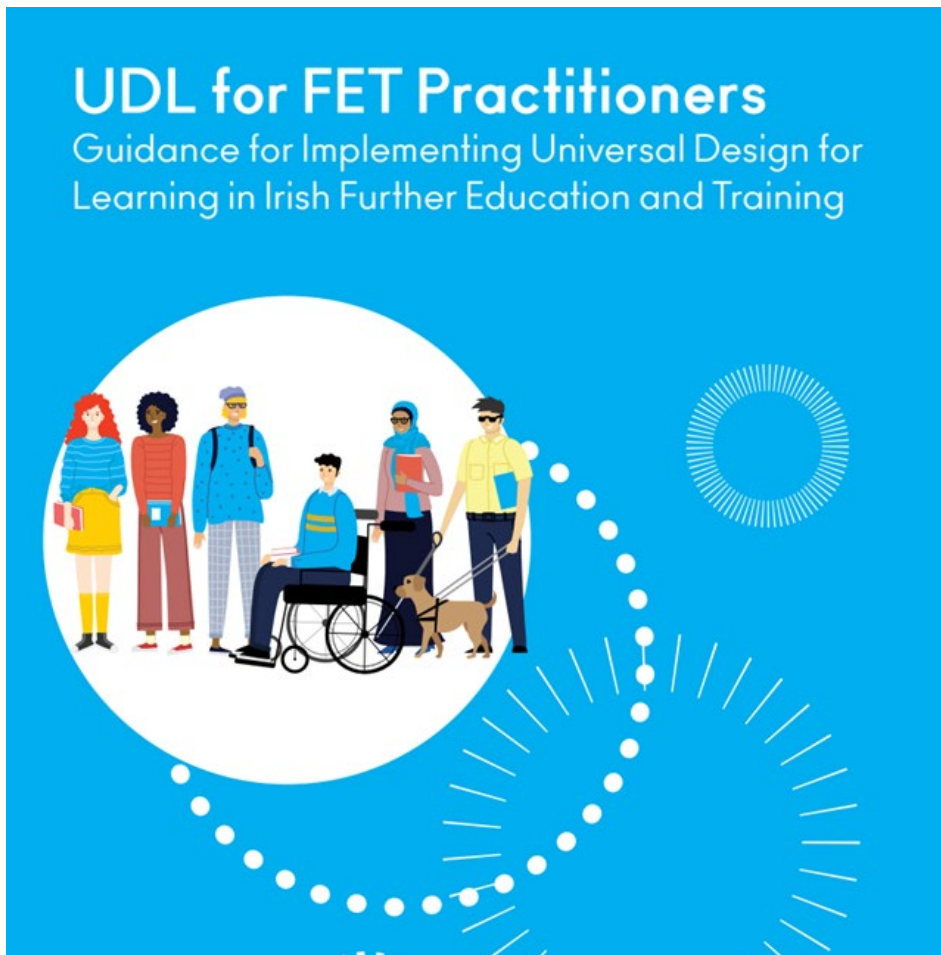
Organisations	Place	
AHEAD.ie	Dublin, Ireland	
Centre for Excellence Universal Design	Dublin, Ireland	

Figure 4. UDL for FET Practitioners



04

Fellowship Learnings And Findings

Issues and Challenges

Identified as part of the Fellowship preparation in the Australian context and developed as key enquiry points for the Fellowship were major concerns of trainers, assessors and institutions, where this Fellowship and its international lens were able to shed light on several issues.

Some key issues included that Australian VET staff:

- were found to overestimate the time and resources needed to assist students with disability, or the supports that they can access themselves to do so.
- may have poor knowledge about how to create inclusive materials and to adapt materials.
- have little understanding how to create an inclusive culture in the classroom.
- have no easy access to training materials for VET trainers and assessors which explore how to create inclusive settings.

Difficulties in delivering inclusive classrooms are further exacerbated when gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality, race and other such factors intersect with disability within the education sector, especially in VET. There are indications that VET delivery in Australia can be characterised as having 'exclusionary rather than inclusive practices' (Moslagae M. and Bekker TL., 2021)

Some of the issues identified can be seen as systemic in nature and some may derive from how providers organise their training settings. For these reasons, the Fellowship was structured to gather insights in how provisions for inclusive training across the European Union are operating at a systemic level. The systemic level was based on insights from one country site, Ireland, where provision is advanced. The wide uptake of the Universal Design for Learning approach in VET has been used in Australia already for synergies and also from the cross-institutional research and policy elements of the European Commission project 'EqualVET'. To better understand how some overseas providers were re-orienting their delivery towards more inclusive understandings of VET settings, training organisations who were partners in the EqualVET project were visited to see how their international collaboration was developing inclusion courses drawing on the principles of Universal Design for Learning.

Provider sites

One stream of visits from the ISSI Fellowship was to engage with training providers who were part of the EU Commission project which sought to have vocational programs certified, following a history of non-formal learning by using a UDL approach. The project was funded to have three delivery sites in Greece, Spain and Portugal each of whom would

provide and deliver curriculum, taking the lead on one curriculum stream and adapting two other curriculum streams. Further, there were three other partners, one certification specialist, one policy-orientated body and one research and evaluation lead – the University of Girona. The Fellowship engaged with all sites thanks to the support of the coordinating partners in Greece.

The nature of the project highlights some critical issues for inclusion in the European Union area. There has been a major policy shift away from ‘sheltered workshops’ and towards an open labour market, and this is requiring agility of the service provider organisations, many of whom have vocational education and training capabilities. Traditional informal learning programs at service providers have facilitated a route into closed market opportunities, often also operated by the same provider.

While previous practices may have been enjoyed by many individuals, and equally critiqued by inclusion advocates, there is a desire amongst disabled persons’ organisations reflected in European Commission policy to move towards training that provides mobility in the labour market and independence rather than dependence. It is for this reason that the future of service providers which operate as sheltered workshops is changing and the training needs of their clients has shifted towards certificated learning which is transferable between employers in an open market.



I engaged with the three EqualVET partners who were training organisations and who remained in the project and visited two of these, seeing their training facilities and the certificated programs they had developed as part of the project. The project sought particularly to certificate three existing programs that were running in the project partners and by using a Universal Design for Learning approach to share these programmes across the other sites.

Through discussion with the project leads at the training sites and at conversations with other members of staff involved in the training at the sites I visited, I was able to develop an understanding of

how the project had worked and the lessons that had been learnt in its development and implementation. Noting that the project was severely impacted by the planning and early stages being run in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were still key findings in the training providers about how inclusive curriculum can be shared across multiple sites.

Systems

To investigate the systems view, there were three organisations that were engaged with:

<p>the researchers who provided pedagogic advice and about curriculum development for the EqualVET project based at the University of Girona;</p>	
<p>the policy experts based in the European Association of Service Providers for people with Disabilities who coordinated the central organisation of EqualVET project and organised dissemination of the project;</p>	



These organisations and individuals engaged with did not directly delivery VET but supported those who deliver to students. All those I talked to were strong disability advocates, many with lived experience of disability and strong anti-ableism ideologies which they brought to their work.

However, they also understood the constraints in terms of resources for VET and were endeavouring to improve practices across large areas with disparate local practices. This systems-level view enabled a consideration of regulations of different levels of force and impact that could be brought in, and the issues of assuring delivery and the importance of seeing inclusion as a quality issue for delivery. For those in research engagements there were elements of frustration that the EqualVET project had been so heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, as this meant their influence as researchers was difficult to mobilise. The policy stream of the EqualVET project were less adherent to the UDL approach as a core part of the project delivery. This was as the policy stakeholders were coming from an employment perspective, seeing the training organisations in the project as primarily service providers in relation to employment, as they were, and the core importance was in relation to the certification of learning. Real success and hopefulness was found in the Irish case where a multi-faceted approach of easy to access training, clear guidance and policy impetus had enabled a greater understanding and thickening of the role of a VET practitioner in their context and a growing awareness that inclusive practice is a core competency of the role of a trainer and assessor.

Findings

Several key findings were developed from the project:

Invisibility of inclusion and inclusive delivery

Inclusion and inclusive delivery is somewhat invisible in Vocational Education and Training settings in Australia but in some contexts, such as Ireland, is now becoming more part of the systems. In the European Commission work there is a particular issue with vocational education and training responsibility falling across education and employment areas which impedes sharing of insights. Thus, inclusion in VET can fall between sector divisions which limits sharing of ideas. VET can be left out of discussions about employment and education; as inclusion discussions in education streams may focus on schooling and employment supports for people with disability, and may not include vocational education and training.

From a scan of resources and previous projects in Australia, it has been noted that there are comparatively few practical resources (e.g. practice guides or assessment protocols) about inclusion and only a weakly defined professional network to support inclusive practice. While in Ireland there is a growing community of practice and this is emerging in Australia in VET, this is a systemic problem which may be linked to a lack of defined roles in most Australian RTOs which focus on inclusive delivery.

Compared to some European contexts, inclusion is sometime seen as an add-on, not a core business of 'mainstream' VET, and relegated to specialist providers in quasi-segregated settings. While all providers under the RTO Standards are required to offer reasonable adjustments, there are many barriers to implementation.

Lack of clear understanding of inclusion

Inclusion is often unclear and at best fuzzily understood without shared comprehension between colleagues or different levels of stakeholders. This could operate at a policy level where across country differences were difficult to overcome and develop shared understandings.

There is a lack of shared understandings about key concepts in inclusion, primarily what the aims of inclusion are and should be but also understanding the nature of ableism, both systemic and individual. Without having deep understanding of goals of inclusion, project and program aims can be misinterpreted by key parties. This lack of clarity was reported to lead to many interactions at cross purposes that could lead to confusion in implementation, and trainers and assessors feeling overwhelmed and lacking a clear sense of purpose of programmatic work.

UDL as an approach is sometimes seen as a difficult technique for which much training is needed and requiring significant expense in terms of time and resource: this was a key barrier for the EqualVET project, where staff found it was difficult to understand conceptually with so much change going on. In the Irish case, a key message of the work was to demystify a universal design for learning approach and to reorient it to 'universal design for education' including all the physical and material aspects of education as well as learning.

The idea of adapting curriculum and assessment can be an overwhelming barrier for staff working in VET: trainers within EqualVET delivery locations emphasised how much work was involved in certifying the learning that they had been already undertaking.

Inaccessible curriculum and assessment choices can institute inherent requirements and barriers to employment entry. Inherent requirements are sometimes used as reasons to keep people from entry to courses, termed by some stakeholders as systematic ableism and seen as spurious reasons to not implement inclusive practices, and thereby exclude potential learners.

In the literature and within the settings, there was a feeling that there was little widespread recognition that inclusive design can benefit all students. In Ireland this idea had been directly addressed by AHEAD and part of the core delivery strategy was to improve quality for all students, which had been found to be effective.

Resource constraints

VET sector resource constraints across all the systems I engaged with, including Australia, have in the past impacted trainers' and assessors' abilities to innovate and develop and devise means of delivering inclusion. This is not to critique individual educators, nor funders of systems, but to just note that in periods of time and human resource constraint, innovations are not able to be prioritised.

It was noted by researchers involved in the EqualVET project that the design of learning materials and interpretation of training package / curriculum are large, complex tasks and often in project planning and implementation are under-budgeted in terms of resource allocation. Attention to work with content and curriculum in VET is aided by the structure of training packages in Australia, just as training providers in EqualVET were by the existing curriculum of the other training providers. However, despite this, and the intent of providers to use the UDL approach, there was not sufficient time for the providers to be able to fully implement all the curriculum, particularly not using UDL approaches (and this was likely intensified by the disruption of the pandemic).

Trialling new technologies which may facilitate inclusion takes time and in rapid delivery contexts there is little opportunity to experiment and improve. With limited time available, trainers and assessors tend to revert to delivery modes and interaction that they are used to and to an extent this is what happened in the EqualVET project. In the great disruption of COVID-19 the fall-back position was that the sites only were able to fully deliver the courses that originated in their sights. Lack of time for extensive development leads to conditions that support trainers and assessors using activities they have used before, as they have limited time to make new ones and trial or review activities.

Delivering inclusively can be seen as expensive and time-consuming as it involves consideration of elements such as activities and assessment items to be refreshed which are often not resourced.

Choice as a key facet of inclusion

Choice of activity and assessment for students is a core principle of UDL but is noted as a challenge for RTOs when delivering education in an inclusive environment.

A core idea of UDL is the Plus One concept (Behling & Tobin, 2018) and this idea is said to be part of continuous improvement methodologies. However, UDL's common implementation of 'change one thing' can be understood as unending work where changes are always needed, and a more restricted choice might be enough for accessibility to be assured.

In Ireland it was understood as a part of delivery that there are indications that two accessible choices of assessment have been shown to meet most students' needs. Taking this further, two accessible means of engaging with activities may ensure accessibility for most students.

Limitations

There are limitations to this Fellowship and several that may have impacted on the findings. Despite having received ethics approval from the Fellow's university, not all meetings were recorded and many were more like conversations and conducted as background. The projects visited were also impacted by COVID-19 restrictions, particularly the EqualVET project.

Finally and most significantly, the project takes an explicitly systemic view, at most looking at an institutional level of implementation, not investigating the individual practices of trainers and assessors, nor the experiences of learners in any of the systems.

05

Considerations / Implications

The learning from the Fellowship visits and findings generated some key considerations arising from the Fellowship. These are the practical steps which could be implemented by the sector or RTOs to ameliorate practice in regard to students with disabilities in VET. While there is a broad set of frameworks that support students with disabilities this report calls for a change in the approach and orientation of policy, practice and processes towards success for students with disabilities and that this report informs the development of guidelines.

Primary consideration

The primary consideration arising from this report is:

It is critical for inclusion to be defined in practice in context, including values, visions and expected outcomes.

This consideration arises from synthesising the key learning from the two projects I investigated. The core vision and shared understanding of success criteria that drove the effectiveness of AHEAD's UDL Guidelines for FET and that has enabled change across the sector. Similarly, for the EqualVET project, project team members identified key lessons learned from the project having time to think about and align expectations, unpacking key terms and explore critical definitions to ensure there are not mis-understandings in implementation of policy and practice.

To realise this consideration, these ideas could be considered:

- Focus could be given to the perception of inclusion within the VET sector, away from charity discourses, towards seeing inclusion as a facet of quality which benefits all students. RTOs should have an assumption that all teaching staff are expected to and are supported to deliver inclusively and to explicitly combat ableism.
- Understanding inclusion in context will enable deepening and thickening the delivery of inclusive practice. Making inclusive practice seem achievable and real is important and distributing practice across settings is critical. It is important to facilitate staff having opportunities within the training setting to have conversations to make the idea of inclusion more concrete and practical .
- Networks for sharing good and innovative practice should be supported, including synchronous and asynchronous opportunities for engagement. Opportunities should be systematically facilitated for discussing and sharing understanding about inclusion and inclusive practice within RTOs. This could be undertaken by collective engagement with co-production of disability statements, including with students with disabilities.
- Examples in context (e.g. case studies or illustrations of practice) enable inclusive practices to be modelled and the development and sharing of authentic examples and development of these resources should be centrally supported.

Wider consideration

A wider consideration arising from this report, which is judged to be more difficult to directly and quickly implement:

Time and resources are essential for quality delivery, including enabling innovation to support inclusion.

The basis of this consideration draws on accounts from the Fellowship visits in which time and staffing resources were identified as a key barrier to fully realising projects, including as a barrier to implementation of the EqualVET project. This was particularly traceable as time was lost and resources were not available due to the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. Such an unusual event during the project enabled a clear identification of the ways in which loss of time and project phases impacted the full implementation of the project vision. The EqualVET partners were only able to fully realise and develop the courses in the EqualVET that had already been running in their delivery settings as the curriculum sharing, innovation and andragogic development needed more time than was available during the pandemic. In addition, analysing the systemic case of Ireland there was an understanding that creativity and innovation including for delivering inclusion are a core part of quality which takes time and dedicated resources.

For this consideration to be implemented, these ideas could be effected:

- Resourcing of training courses ought to be routinely accompanied by time for learning activity development and assessment review to ensure inclusion at the point of delivery.
- Specified and ring-fenced time to integrate new technologies and trial new methodologies could enable new and multiple inclusive activities to be developed for new and existing training packages.
- VET could be delivered more inclusively if trainers and assessors had time to fully realise their training and assessment expertise and were well supported to see their delivery as inclusive as standard.
- A UDL approach could be implemented by facilitating time to build in routine choice in all training and assessment and make iterative improvements and modifications, including to enhance inclusion in line with continuous improvement.

06

Impacts Of Fellowship

The key goals of the Fellowship were to discover insights into how other contexts meet the needs of VET staff in supporting inclusion. The Fellowship opportunity enabled the investigation of how countries are successfully contending with the same resource challenges that Australia is now experiencing, while they are still ensuring the creation of inclusive and successful delivery of VET.

It is hoped that this Fellowship can encourage existing efforts which enable VET practitioners to be better supported to understand how to be enabled to create inclusive environments for students with disability. The project has brought back understandings of how VET teachers will benefit from building their capacity and will be more confident to respond to the diverse needs of students with disabilities: it aimed to improve the quality of education and training for VET students through supporting capacity recognition in VET practitioners.

The Fellowship has enabled me to widen my own knowledge about innovative methods of supporting students with disability in order to share them with practitioners and policy makers in Australia. A core learning was that to assist tutors and other VET support staff to facilitate successful transitions for students with disability, they should be supported.

I would like to study how in Australia we can better develop and adapt our vocational education system to be more inclusive, while not stretching the resources of RTOs or tutors. There are strong indications that there are different ways to support students with disability which are less resource-

intensive in terms of differentiated teaching: these include integration of universal design for learning. By better understanding how other contexts are delivering inclusive VET for all students and ensuring equitable educational and employment outcomes for VET students, this knowledge will be brought back to Australia where it will be analysed and considered for its appropriateness in the Australian context.

Learning how other countries deliver inclusive environments and how they support staff and upskill industry-experienced VET professionals was particularly useful in understanding how to understand VET policy by seeing how different jurisdictions organise VET, by observing the different deployment of skill development practices, and seeing how international contexts understand the need for enhancement of the skills and knowledge of VET practitioners. Obtaining the knowledge of best-practice from overseas has enabled direct feedback into teaching in inclusive practices and given further resources and know-how to establish the most effective inclusive practice for VET practitioners in Australia. In this way the Fellowship has been able to improve the skills of existing VET staff and trainers, for them to become more confident inclusive practitioners and so to help enhance the successful completion for students with disability.

The personal impact of the Fellowship has been broad, the international focus/study and opportunities to share the findings has significantly expanded my understanding of both the VET systems visited, of approaches to inclusive education and training and unexpectedly employment. Further it has

broadened and deepened my professional network by introducing me to other VET practitioners and researchers, collaborators, and industry partners. It also furthered my personal and professional goal to make VET a key site of inclusive education supporting the development of employment outcomes and education achievements for students with disabilities.

Throughout my life I have had the extreme privilege of receiving excellent support in educational settings to overcome dexterity and mobility issues. This is due to several capital privileges and also having a, while not well known, easily understood underlying condition which is accommodated with reasonable adjustments that require little extra resource and time. I was fortunate to grow up within an era of information technology in the classroom and have written on digital keyboards since my fourth year at primary school. Handwriting is painful for me and unreadable and had I not had the fortune to have access to this support, e.g. if I had been only a decade older, my educational trajectory through all 10 AQF levels would have been very different and likely impossible. This privilege is not afforded to all students within the skills development system and as a practitioner, researcher and tutor I have been disturbed by ableist notions which are embedded in many facets of the VET system. This Fellowship has been important to me personally to pursue to make a small contribution towards a more inclusive training system where learners' functional needs will not impede them achieving commensurate with their abilities. I hope that this Fellowship highlights the systemic action needed and reinforces that this is not up to the individual trainer, assessor or teacher to find time (and too frequently personally fund) support their students' need. Hopefully the findings of this report and the considerations mooted will go some way to overcome difficulties in understanding what support is available, while not deploying charity nor ableist discourses but focusing the sector on discovering what every student's needs are, building curriculum and content delivery approaches that have baked in inclusion and make it as easy as I found it to access support.

07

Sector Engagement (Dissemination)

The sector engagement for this Fellowship has been both internal throughout all stages of the Fellowship development due to my role as a tutor for inclusive education at Box Hill Institute, researcher at Victoria University including close work with colleagues who work in Disability and Accessibility Services supporting students at VU Poly and my work with networks facilitated by the ADCET team and communities of practice. My role on the AVETRA executive and convening the 2023 conference was of great help throughout my active Fellowship period and also helped me raise awareness of and support from VET sector colleagues during the period.

There has also been a stream of engagement which could be considered as proxy internal in relation to the reference group that has supported me through this Fellowship with formal meetings carried out through 2023. Individuals were invited onto the reference group due to their personal and professional expertise but through their links and own networks they have been able to open up opportunities for dissemination which have led to formal events.

The findings and considerations for this report aim to influence policy and practice. It is hoped that the Victorian Skills Authority will be able to incorporate an explicitly anti-ableist approach into their policy and guidelines and that RTOs are exhorted to think beyond accommodating students with disabilities and work towards understanding quality as ensuring inclusion.

Before publication of this report I have been able to deliver a range of synchronous presentation to interested audiences. These opportunities included an initial pre-travel presentation to applied research colleagues at the 2023 AVETRA conference which stimulated important discussion and contribution from the floor. After my travel and when my interim report had been submitted I was privileged to be able to present in the Box Hill Institute AVETRA October VET event for ISS Institute Fellows and feedback at that session was useful and pertinent. After my executive summary had received feedback from my reference group, I was able to present to the Australian Tertiary Education Network on Disability on my project thanks to one of my reference group members, Marion McGregor's invitation, and spoke to highly engaged audience.

08

Conclusion

The overarching conclusion of the Fellowship is that there is much work to do in terms of benefiting inclusion in Australia, but it is work that must be done together for success and must not diminish the capacities and confidence of VET trainers and assessors. There is much work being done individually by trainers and assessors and RTOs and jurisdictions but support of a coordination of good practice and insight is critical. Provision such as ADCET which connects VET and higher education and shares good practice to obviate the need to replicate practice.

It is critical to define inclusion in practice, including values, visions and expected outcomes and to speak out about ableism as a scourge of education delivery. Inclusion should be seen as a facet of quality and just as with quality needing to be built into all stages and aspects of VET provision. Early design for inclusion is critical and all teaching staff supported to deliver inclusively.

VET practitioners must be better supported to understand how to create inclusive environments for students with disability. The project will bring back understandings of how VET teachers will benefit from building their capacity and will be more confident to respond to the diverse needs of students with disabilities, and it will improve the quality of education and training for VET students. It should also enable VET teachers to review and improve their skills.

The Fellowship opportunity will enable me to develop my knowledge in practice, observe how countries

are successfully contending with the same resource challenges that Australia is now experiencing while still ensuring the creation of inclusive, successful delivery of VET which will support my lifelong work in the area of supporting students in post-school education.

The international focus/study and opportunities to share the findings will also expand my professional network by introducing me to other VET practitioners and researchers, collaborators, and industry partners. It also furthers my personal and professional goal to make VET a key site of inclusive education supporting the development of employment outcomes and educational achievements for students with disabilities.

Drawing on the expertise of those consulted during the project, there is real evidence that Victorian VET institutions are on the right track in developing inclusive institutions. However, there are also strong indications that there are different ways to understand the support needs of all students, including those with a declared disability, that may ease pressure on trainers, assessors and institutions and system supports. The key message of this Fellowship report is that early design for inclusion is critical, while engagement with issues of accessibility for all is worthwhile and a great driver of quality.

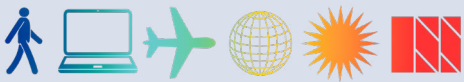
These learnings would anticipate indirect beneficiaries of the project, future and current VET learners with disabilities, and learners' range of other inclusion needs. The key beneficiaries of the proposed Fellowship outcomes are VET sector

stakeholders as they will be able to effect change to support VET practitioners to facilitate improvement to inclusive environments. The target beneficiaries are the individual VET practitioners as the goal will be to find concrete suggestions and innovative practices that are easy to implement in their settings. However, it is important for this and all reports to have the core beneficiaries of learners, both those with declared disabilities and those without, in mind in this quality improvement as with a more inclusive delivery all learners will benefit.

09

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