

Chapter 17

People with Disabilities; Indigenous People; and Mature Aged Workers

INTRODUCTION

Government policy should be set to maximise the potential for all Australians to be competitive in the employment market. Inclusive practice and a focus on equity should underpin all vocational training delivery to increase the opportunities to transition into employment by those participating in vocational education and training.

In this chapter we discuss a number of special-case employment issues related to education and training. They are:

- people with disabilities;
- Indigenous Australians; and
- Mature aged workers

The same principles could be extended to include rural and remote; women; youth at risk; people in correctional facilities; and people from Non English Speaking Backgrounds.

BACKGROUND

While the extent of disability for each person with a disability is unique in its nature, policies should support a diverse work force in which people with disabilities are encouraged to participate where they are able to do so.

Those who are genuinely not able to work because of their disability deserve the support of the community and the opportunity to lead constructive lives as valued community members.

Over 670,000 Australians of working age now receive the Disability Support Pension - more than the number receiving unemployment benefits. The growth in numbers has been in excess of 60 per cent over the last 10 years. This trend indicates that an ageing Australian workforce, together with growing numbers of people with disabilities, has a potential to seriously erode labour supply and add significantly to public outlays.

In an era of improved health and longevity and declining lost time injuries in the workplace, growth in the incidence

of disability should be seriously questioned and policies that encourage greater reliance on income support must be discarded in favour of better rehabilitation and employment policies.

It is also important for business to promote equality of education opportunities and options for Indigenous Australians.

Measures aimed at growing Indigenous participation in the business sector are positive steps to creating and maintaining an economic base and a move away from welfare dependency for Indigenous Australians.

Another area of special attention in terms of employment and education is the 'mature aged'.

Generally, people regarded by governments as 'mature-age' are those 45 years and above. It is evident that treating this large group of people with one solution is unrealistic. Therefore although this policy refers to this group collectively, it is imperative that the overall group is segmented and different strategies are adopted to meet different elements of the group.

CONSIDERATION OF ISSUES

People with Disabilities

Australia has disappointing rates of participation for people with disabilities in vocational education and training – less than 2.5 per cent compared with 11 per cent of all workforce-age Australians. Training retention rates and eventual employment outcomes are also well below average, as people with disabilities are less likely to complete their training and graduates with disabilities less likely to find employment.

ACCI promotes equality of educational opportunities and options for groups with special needs, including people with disabilities. This means providing access to and appropriate support for people with disabilities in education and training to ensure they have opportunities to develop marketable skills that meet the needs of business.

In particular this means that education and training policies need to develop and recognise the marketable skills of the

people concerned.

There needs to be special attention paid to the transition for young people with disabilities from school to further education and training, and the promotion of participation in vocational education and training through early intervention in schools.

We need to ensure that people with disabilities are acknowledged as potential participants in programs that address areas of skills shortages wherever reasonably practicable. And it is important to ensure that there are effective links between employment and pre-employment programs so that people with disabilities have continuity in the assistance they require to move from training and education to work.

Indigenous Australians

The underpinning principles in this area recognise the shared responsibility of all Australians in developing a responsive Australian employment, education and training system that takes account of the needs of the Indigenous community.

There needs to be a focus on reducing welfare dependency through mutual obligation and development of appropriate strategies to encourage employment in the general labour market.

Further policies need to give due recognition to the diverse locations that Indigenous peoples live in, particularly in rural and remote communities, and how this impacts on the delivery of education and training.

Business acknowledges that Indigenous Australians remain the most disadvantaged group in the labour market and supports the need for specific policy responses.

ACCI supports employment policies which:

- assist Indigenous Australians to have access to private sector employment as distinct from community and public sector options;
- recognise the importance of Australian Apprenticeships as one of the most important options for employers to open up opportunities for Indigenous job seekers to enter private sector employment;
- include the promotion of private sector employment opportunities to Indigenous communities and

individuals;

- continuously develop the labour force skills and knowledge of Indigenous job seekers and the Indigenous community generally;
- link available labour, particularly in remote areas, with available employment opportunities;
- ensure the design of labour market programs to meet individual and business needs;
- implement adequate pre-employment assistance to meet the needs of the job seeker and employer;
- establish appropriate support mechanisms for Indigenous people employed in the private sector, particularly in small business;
- encourage and facilitate cross-cultural awareness training for non-Indigenous businesses and their employees to develop an awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural issues within the workplace;
- encourage the development and implementation of structured induction training programs for Indigenous employees, with an emphasis on employee obligations and responsibilities within the workplace;
- establish targeted employer incentives which relate to ongoing placement with the employer;
- provide incentive to Community Development Employment Projects to encourage participants to gain nationally recognised skills and qualifications and structured workplace learning and experience in private sector companies;
- maintain publicly funded employment services; and
- adequately respond to the needs of Indigenous job seekers and prospective employers.

ACCI supports education and training policies which:

- strengthen the focus on sound basics such as English language, literacy and numeracy at primary and secondary school level;
- improve, and regularly test, on a nationally agreed and consistent basis, literacy and numeracy standards and develop appropriate intervention strategies;

- focus on nationally consistent outcomes for Indigenous students and achieve standards which are comparable to international standards of best practice;
- maximise education and training pathways from school to the workplace, particularly to assist in increasing retention rates for Indigenous school students;
- respond to the growing need for students to undertake workplace learning programs which develop links with industry and create pathways to further training and employment in the private sector;
- improve and integrate careers education, employability skills and enterprise education principles into the education and training system to provide Indigenous students with an understanding and potential of the range of pathways available;
- provide for the adoption of an enterprising culture, particularly by young Australians;
- develop culturally specific support documentation for nationally accredited training packages to encourage use in Indigenous communities;
- fully implement “user choice” in Indigenous communities to ensure they benefit from training providers delivering training to meet their needs;
- develop more flexible delivery mechanisms including online delivery to enable nationally recognised training to be offered to remote communities; and
- continue to encourage further education and training, including university and vocational education and training.
- growth in mature aged employment. Three quarters of people between 45 and 54 are employed;
- average age of retirement around 60 years;
- a sharp decline in labour force participation with increasing age;
- the fact that mature aged Australians are less likely to hold a post-compulsory qualification and less likely to undertake formal education and job-related training;
- longer duration of unemployment among mature aged workers than among younger people;
- a higher rate of 50 to 64 year olds are welfare-dependent;
- some industries or occupations already show older workforces;
- life expectancy at the average effective retirement age is five or six years longer than it was 30 years ago;
- one in four new entrants to the labour market comes from overseas, either through migration or temporary work visas;
- since June 1980 there has been a very slow growth in the number of children (aged 0 to 14 years); and
- the workforce entrants for the next twelve years are already in school and there is only a slight increase in their number that is insufficient to meet projected labour demand.

All industries have significant numbers of mature aged workers already in the workplace with continued increases in workers over 55 years of age. Industry Skills Councils have advisory arrangements that focus on the development of a comprehensive information and planning process to identify current and future skill needs for industry.

It is recognised that the array of data sources available from the range of government departments and other agencies needs to be brought together to inform future vocational education and training direction and product and service development. This new mechanism will be particularly important in assisting in addressing potential demand for labour and identification of skills required.

The need to develop a more responsive education and

Mature Aged Workers

A key concern of industry has been the ageing of the workforce, the overall decline of youth entering the labour market over time and the impact these issues may have on the future supply of skills. Increasingly employers must have dual strategies to attract the most suitable young employees and retain older workers with enhanced skills.

Some key developments in Australia include:

- a substantial increase in the median age of the Australian population;

training system to enhance the skills of older workers is a priority for industry. Currently there is no clear strategy to target existing mature aged workers to enhance their skills and productivity. There is additional urgency in developing this approach given the impact of new and emerging technologies on all workplaces, the lack of post-compulsory qualifications held by mature aged Australians and the need for some mature aged people to update their skills as they move employment.

It is also important for state and territory governments to examine the potential of allocating a specific element of their vocational education and training budgets to addressing existing mature aged workers. There also needs to be considerable work undertaken on improving the incentive for providers to offer recognition of prior learning which lessens the requirement for experienced individuals to undertake the same extent of ‘off the job’ training.

CONCLUSION

Sustained and sustainable economic growth underpins improvement in the standard of living of all Australians. Through participation in work, people with disabilities are able to make a valuable contribution and share in the benefits of employment.

At the same time, ACCI recognises that increasing the capacity of people with disabilities to participate in employment and in many other areas of community life will bring greater opportunities for improved markets in assistive and adaptive technologies that remove barriers.

The special focus on the education of Indigenous people will assist in breaking the existing welfare dependency and provide role models from within the Indigenous community itself.

Further, employers will need a range of information and support products and services to be developed to assist them in meeting the challenge of employing greater numbers of mature aged Australians. But there are also considerable opportunities for older Australians to contribute towards their own economic prosperity and for individual businesses to benefit from a changing world.

ACCI PROPOSALS

To make real progress in these areas, a concerted and well-coordinated effort must be made on the part of governments and the community sector, working in partnership with

employers to achieve the following key goals:

People with Disabilities

ACCI proposes that:

- there needs to be a concerted effort to eliminate aspects of social and industrial policies that create disincentives for people with disabilities to take up employment;
- both business and governments need to provide for enhanced employment opportunities for people with disabilities through the provision of training, recognition of skill, support in the workplace and community education; and
- there needs to be consistency and ease of transition between government programs that aim to assist people with disabilities in education, training, pre-employment, employment and return to work;

Indigenous Australians

ACCI proposes that:

- the Australian Government should focus on access to literacy and numeracy skills for Indigenous Australians. It should continue programs that provide exposure to the acquisition of real workplace experience, knowledge and skills;
- Indigenous students should have access to VET in Schools Programs in Years 8 and 9. Indigenous students should also have access to the full range of educational and training options;
- Australian Apprenticeships are an ideal pathway for Indigenous people to obtain skills while being employed and programs that encourage their uptake should continue;
- culturally sensitive support material should be available for all Training Packages; and
- practical support should be given to employers hiring Indigenous apprentices in the form of cross cultural awareness training and the provision of incentives, especially in rural and remote areas.

Mature Aged Workers

ACCI proposes that:

- there needs to be a clear strategy to target existing mature aged workers to enhance their skills and productivity;
- it is important for state and territory governments to examine the potential of allocating a specific element of their VET budgets to addressing existing mature aged workers; and
- there needs to be considerable work undertaken on improving the incentive for providers to offer recognition of prior learning which lessens the requirement for experienced individuals to undertake the same extent of 'off-the-job' training.

