# ATEND response: The NDIS inquiry in to the NDIS workforce.

The Australian Tertiary Education Network on Disability (ATEND) is the peak professional organisation for Disability Practitioners in the Higher Education and Vocational Training sectors in Australia. Our membership is predominantly individuals who are primarily employed as Disability Practitioners in the tertiary education and training sector and National Disability Coordination Officers (NDCO). The key role of Disability Practitioners is to enhance tertiary education opportunities and access for people with disability. The role of the NDCO is to drive change so that people with disability have equitable opportunity to access, participate in and reach their goals in tertiary education and graduate employment.

This submission focuses on responding on *category F: the opportunities and challenges experience by people with disability*, and *G: Any other matters* *(Support Workers on Campus)*.

Our response focuses on three specific requests and areas of market demand, in line with the response categories.

1. Internships and graduate opportunities needed: Vocational Education & Training graduates within the Agency
2. Improved integration of accessible work placements within VET coursework and Higher Education – Work Integrated Learning placements within the Agency and the NDIS workforce
3. Support workers on campus: Training required

## Internships and graduate opportunities needed: Vocational Education & Training graduates within the Agency

We acknowledge the efforts the NDIA has undertaken to provide a graduate program for all students who have a bachelor’s degree or higher. We call for a similar program to create specific career pathways for graduates from Vocational Education and Training (VET), with a focus on ensuring this is accessible and welcoming for students with disability from within these levels of study.

In Australia, we require significant improvement regarding graduate employment outcome rates for VET graduates with disability. These graduates are an untapped pool of capable and potential employees that bring forward valuable skill sets alongside a lived experience of disability.

VET data from NCVER (2019) indicates that 53.5% of all students with disability are employed after training, compared to 79.1% of students without disability.

TAFE, a recognised and large provider of VET training, represents a significant portion of this trend[[1]](#footnote-1):

* 54,125 students with disability (8.2% of all TAFE students) are enrolled in TAFE nationally in 2017.
* 2017/18 Employment rates for TAFE students with disability were alarming – 49.3% of TAFE graduates with disability were employed post-study, compared to 75% of their peers without disability, and the overall rate of 72.4%.
* This gap is also reflected in TAFE students with disability who were not employed before training, with an employment rate of 28.1% post-training.  Their fellow students without disability who were not employed before study had an employment rate of 46.1% post-training.

We believe the NDIA is uniquely positioned to take positive steps towards improving the employment outcomes of VET students through this initiative. We request that the Agency shows leadership by providing specific pathways for these study levels for VET students with disability.

## Improved integration of accessible work placements within VET coursework and Higher Education – (Work Integrated Learning) placements within the Agency and the NDIS workforce

Research indicates that working while studying is an indicator of likelihood to be employed post-study. When it comes to paid work, students with disability who engage in paid work are 15 times more likely to be in full time work if they had undertaken paid work in their final year of study[[2]](#footnote-2).

ATEND requests that a formalised and focused effort is put forward from the NDIA and its partners to directly link with Vocational Education and Training coursework to improve the availability of inclusive and welcoming paid placements for students with disability as they study, leveraging this workforce to provide disability confident work placements and pathways to paid employment.

As a starting point the following could be implemented:

1. Working with faculties or business units regarding relevant skillsets for the workforce such as Community and Disability Services, ICT and Business.
2. A clear statement and position on the importance of graduates with lived experience within the NDIS workforce, providing an environment where tertiary students are explicitly welcomed to apply, engage, and be hired for the skillset they have just developed during their studies.

## External support workers on campus: Training required

The tertiary sector has experienced an increase of support workers funded through NDIS coming on to campuses around Australia. We have received feedback from the sector on a number of occasions that these workers do not have the required experience, skills and knowledge needed to undertake the support of students with disability.

Universities and TAFEs from across Australia have identified that often external (NDIS funded) support workers do not have the appropriate knowledge to:

* maintain student’s independence;
* understand campus life;
* understand academic integrity;
* comply with health and safety rules;
* understand reasonable adjustment in the education context;
* understanding online learning platforms;
* honour protocols and appropriate boundaries within lectures, tutorials and practicals;
* follow relevant communication channels;
* be aware of referrals points to on campus specialist services.

At present, the NDCO program in partnership with ADCET has three available training courses:

* Introduction to disability awareness
* VET staff supporting students with disability
* VET educators supporting students with disability

ATEND propose to collaborate with the NDCO program and ADCET on funding & developing a fourth training course: “External support workers on campus”. This would be available free of charge to the NDIS workforce to address the above knowledge and skill gaps prior to working on campus in Australia.

We would be interested in exploring options for linking to or embedding this particular training pack in to NDIS Quality & Safeguards Commission training.

## Conclusion

We highlight the need for stronger relationships and linkages to be developed between the Tertiary sector and NDIS to improve opportunities for employment of skilled graduates with disability and the improved outcomes of students with disability in Tertiary Education.

This submission highlights three opportunities for the NDIS to work with the Tertiary Education sector to improve outcomes for students with disability while improving the representation of staff with lived experience of disability within the NDIS workforce. They are:

1. Internships and graduate opportunities needed: Vocational Education & Training graduates within the Agency
2. Improved integration of accessible work placements within VET coursework and Higher Education – (Work Integrated Learning) placements within the Agency and the NDIS workforce
3. External support workers on campus: Training required

As a next step, a relevant representative would be welcome to make contact with ATEND to convene a discussion about ways to implement these recommendations.

1. NCVER 2018, Australian vocational education and training statistics: Total VET students and courses, 2017: data slicer, NCVER, Adelaide. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tim Pitman, Lynne Roberts, Dawn Bennett & Sarah Richardson (2017): An Australian study of graduate outcomes for disadvantaged students, Journal of Further and Higher Education. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)