## Does training enhance the employment prospects of people with disability?

In short, the evidence strongly suggests it does. Completing a Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualification not only strongly improves the chances of getting a job, but also keeping it (Polidano et al. 2010).

Even though there are definite benefits of VET participation, people with disability are underrepresented in the VET sector (6.8 per cent in 2013). They generally have lower levels of education, which has been identified as one of the factors contributing to their lower rate of labour force participation (Cavallaro et al. 2003).

For an unemployed person with disability, completing a training course at Cert III and above increases the likelihood of getting a job from 9 per cent to 29 per cent - a significant increase in employability. In comparison, for someone who is unemployed and does not have a disability, completing training increases the likelihood of employment from 52 per cent to 62 per cent - a 10 per cent increase for people without disability compared with twice the impact for people with disability (Polidano et al. 2010).

This added benefit for people with disability may be because completion of a VET qualification provides assurances to employers that a job candidate’s disability does not hinder their ability to perform tasks that are relevant to their prospective job.

When participating in VET, there is no significant difference in completion rates of VET between people with and without a disability (except for people with a mental health condition).

**Not all training is equal for people with disability**

Research has found that a large proportion of VET students with disability are participating in enabling (foundation) courses that are far less likely to lead to employment compared with higher level qualifications. (Griffin et al. 2011b) Enabling courses are lower level preparatory and prevocational courses in the VET sector.

A study of administrative records revealed that half of VET students with disability were enrolled in enabling courses compared with one-third of their non-disabled peers. Furthermore, it was found that students with disability completing an enabling course were less likely to undertake further studies at a higher level than students without a disability.  (Phan et al. 2001)

Members of various disadvantaged groups indicated that they enrolled in an enabling course as they believed the course would assist them to enrol in another course. (Phan et al. 2001) This progress to higher levels of qualification is less likely to occur for people with disability, which indicates that they might not be receiving the full employment benefits of VET.

It remains a concern that half of VET students with disability are participating in courses with little employment value and not progressing to qualifications that have proven employment benefits.

**How can people with disability maximise the benefits of training and education?**

Seek to understand and maximise a person’s interests and skills before enrolling in a course in order to assist quality and meaningful career development. Analyse the labour market including skill shortage areas and the qualifications and skills that will support employability. Demand-led, place-based initiatives which engage local employers to meet their workforce needs can help to determine the skills and qualifications in demand in a local area. (Visit [Social Ventures Australia](http://www.socialventures.com.au/work/highgrowthjobs-talentedcandidates/) and the [Diversity Field Officer Service](http://www.diversityfieldofficer.com.au/) for more.)

Training that involves practical workplace experience is more likely to lead to employment for people with disability (Dawe 2004; Clark 2007). Potential students should be able to participate in any practical part of the course. A review of Education Standards found that students with disability often missed out on work or industry placement/experience in their courses.

Participation in VET apprenticeships and traineeships for people with a disability result in high workforce participation rates and income post training - comparable with similarly-aged Australians without disability. A longitudinal study of apprentices and trainees with disability found a year after graduation 87 per cent of the participants were in paid work. Unfortunately, participation by people with disability in apprenticeships and traineeships remains very low at 2 per cent. (Cocks and Thoresen 2013)

The quality of training organisations also varies significantly across the sector. Training providers should be able to facilitate employment pathways for people with disability as well as be willing and able to make adjustments that ensure students can complete their studies.

Unfortunately, some training providers have aggressively promoted training courses to jobseekers with disability that are of little value to them. There is a [complaints hotline](http://www.asqa.gov.au/complaints/complaints.html) set up specifically regarding training providers as well as [consumer resources](http://www.accc.gov.au/disabilityresources) for people with disability.

**Conclusion**

Vocational training has clear benefits in obtaining and sustaining employment, especially for people with disability. Participation in employment comes with significant social and economic benefits. However, it is important to allocate resources wisely and consider potential benefits to the student in order to ensure that training indeed leads to improved employment outcomes.

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