Access, Equity and Participation in Training

What do the terms 'access' and 'equity' mean?

Why focus on access and equity in VET?

Is equity the same as equal treatment?

Substantive equality in training

Legislation

Policies which address access and equity:

- National
- State

Access, Equity and Participation in Training

The Western Australian Department of Training and Workforce Development is committed to enabling all Western Australians to reach their educational and employment potential. Access to learning allows individuals to take up work options that provide personal fulfilment, financial independence and enhanced community participation.

This firm commitment is outlined in Building diversity and equity in training 2010-2018: Equity if everybody's business. Building Diversity outlines the vision, principles and actions to create a training sector capable of meeting the diverse learning needs and goals of all (Western) Australians, and which gives due regard to differences in gender, ability, age, location and social and cultural backgrounds and their impact on learners.

What do the terms ‘access’ and ‘equity’ mean?

Access generally refers to the ability to enter training. Improving access might include improving physical access to a training venue, ensuring that selection criteria do not discriminate against clients, adapting marketing activities to encourage all clients and so on. Access issues form a sub-set within equity issues.

Equity in this context means equality of access to, and potentially equal outcomes from training regardless of the individual's circumstances, background and identity.

Why focus on access and equity in VET?

In Western Australia, training has long been characterised by its capacity to respond to diversity. One of its great strengths is its ability to cater to specific areas of identified local need via targeted funding streams both in terms of needs of employers and industry, and the needs of disadvantaged groups and individuals within the community.
Equity and Participation – Questions and Answers

However, it is apparent that currently there are significant numbers who are not benefiting fully from education and training.

- According to the 2006 census, around 30% of Western Australians aged over 25 have post-school education attainment of less than Certificate III level (which is a benchmark skills level for workforce participation). This figure is greater for many priority groups due to the barriers faced by these individuals in accessing and benefiting from available education and training services. For instance the percentage of Aboriginal persons who have qualifications below Certificate III level is 64%, compared to 30% of the general population (ABS Census 2006).
- Additionally, people with a disability are under-represented overall (at approximately 5% of training participants). Further, a gradual decline has occurred between 2006-08 in participation by people who have identified as having a disability with 5486, 5438 and 5203 being the number of people enrolled in publicly funded training over those respective years.

There is, therefore, an ongoing need to ensure that barriers to training continue to be identified, acknowledged, addressed and reduced as far as possible to enable people to gain the skills required to participate in the workforce and society.

A focus on access and equity is also just good business sense. Many businesses are recognising the benefits that arise from responding to the diverse needs of the Western Australian population. These include:

- Winning more clients - The training market is now more competitive with clients choosing their training provider based on the quality of service offered.
- Creating a competitive advantage - Recent research has shown that for businesses seeking a competitive advantage over rival businesses, focusing on diversity is an effective way to become product or service innovators.
- Meeting clients' expectations - The Australian community is increasingly diverse with learners requiring differing approaches. Businesses and learners are expecting training providers to be more flexible and to meet their individual needs.
- Meeting legal obligations - All employers and service providers are obliged to comply with national and state anti-discrimination legislation.
- Managing risks - You are less likely to receive a complaint of discrimination if you take active steps to comply with anti-discrimination legislation and Substantive Equality principles.
- Meeting the AQTF Standards equity and access obligations are built into the AQTF Standards, which all RTOs are required to meet.
Is equity the same as equal treatment?

Equity is not treating everyone the same. It is about ensuring that all people and all groups of people participate, have the opportunity to reach their potential, make choices and receive responsive and appropriate products and services. In other words, the destination for all learners is the same but the journey may be different. For example, some learners may gain qualifications through a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process; others may complete training before being assessed; and some learners may need more time than others, because of family responsibilities or because they are returning to learning after a long interval.

The AQTF Standards for Registered Training Organisations do not require evidence that you treat your learners the same; you are however required to show evidence how you identify and respond to individual learning needs.

Substantive equality in training

The concept of substantive (real) equality is similar to the legislative concept of indirect discrimination. It recognises that giving the same treatment to everyone has the potential to disadvantage some.

Applied to the training sector, it means that some people need to be treated differently to provide them with equality of access and potentially equal outcomes because of their circumstances, background and identity.

Incorporating the principle of substantive equality into training provision is pivotal to the pursuit of effective equity outcomes. In line with this, training programs and services need to be tailored and customised in accordance with variations in individual and community circumstances. The particular identity and aspirations of learners also need to be taken into account to enable them to engage in, develop through and benefit from the learning process.

Legislation

RTOs must comply with the following Commonwealth anti-discrimination legislation:

- Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act 1975
- Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act 1984
- Commonwealth Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Act 1986
- Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992

RTOs must also comply with the following State legislation:

- Western Australian Equal Opportunity Act 1989
Equity and Participation – Questions and Answers

POLICIES WHICH ADDRESS ACCESS AND EQUITY

NATIONAL

Shaping Our Future

Shaping Our Future: National Strategy for vocational education and training 2004-2010, developed by the Australian National Training Authority, outlines the objectives and strategies for VET until 2010. It states that RTOs are expected to continue to take active measures to reduce barriers to learning and achieving in VET.

Closing the Gap - Indigenous Employment Program

The Indigenous Employment Program (IEP) aims to increase Indigenous Australia employment outcomes and participation in economic activities, by supporting employers and Indigenous Australians to develop sustainable employment/business opportunities, take up training or employment and developing strategies that support local and regional economic growth.

Disability (Access to Premises - Building) Standards

The Premises Standards will commence operation on 1 May 2011. The Disability (Access to Premises - Buildings) Standards will achieve more consistent, systemic and widespread improvements in non-discriminatory access for people with a disability to publicly accessible buildings.

2008 Ministerial Declaration on ACE

The 2008 Ministerial Declaration on Adult and Community Education (ACE) provides a national policy framework which supports collaborative approach to ACE.

This Declaration acknowledges ACE as a significant contributor to education and training provision and demonstrates the commitment of the Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers to work collaboratively to maximise positive outcomes from this sector in Australia.

National Disability Strategy

A National Disability Strategy (NDS) is currently being developed. The Strategy will provide a national framework to drive future reforms in the disability service system and, importantly, mainstream systems for people with a disability, their families and carers.
Building Diversity and Equity in Training 2010 - 2018: Equity is everybody's business

Building diversity and equity in training 2010 - 2018 sets out the Department of Training and Workforce Development’s firm commitment to creating a training sector capable of meeting the diverse learning needs and goals of all Western Australians which gives due regard to differences in gender, ability, age, location and social and cultural backgrounds and their impact on learners.

Building Diversity outlines four areas of action:

- To embed and support substantive equality in training;
- To explicitly recognise and respond to the needs of diverse groups of learners;
- To enhance accessible learning and career pathways for people from diverse backgrounds; and
- To promote priority group participation in training.

Community Learning in Focus: A Strategy for Adult and Community Education in Western Australia (2009 - 2018)

Community learning in focus: a strategy for Adult and Community Education (ACE) in Western Australia (2009-2018) sets the following goals for ACE in this state:

- ACE is an integral part of the broader Western Australian learning and training culture.
- Learning outcomes delivered by ACE are valued, promoted and recognised.
- The capacity of ACE providers is strong and meets the diverse needs of learners.


Culture Strong, Career Proud is the Department of Training and Workforce Development’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy 2008-2010.

It covers all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees of Department of Education and Training and public providers of vocational education and training. This strategy is a specific commitment within the Department’s Equity and Diversity Management Plan 2007-2010 to increases the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in the workforce.

The Action Plan 2008 sets out the specific strategies and initiative aimed at recruitment and retention, a supportive work environment and career pathways.
Equity and Participation – Questions and Answers

Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2011-2015

The Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (DAIP) for 2011-2015 is currently being developed.

The Western Australian Disability Services Act 1993, (as amended in 2004) requires Local and State Government authorities to develop and implement a Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (DAIP) that will further both the Principles and the objectives of the Act.

The purpose of a Disability Access and Inclusion Plan is to ensure that people with disabilities can access all information, services and facilities provided by State Government authorities in Western Australia, and be included in the community like other community members.

Substantive Equality

The Department of Training and Workforce Development is a signatory to The Policy Framework for Substantive Equality.

The objective of the Policy Framework is to achieve substantive equality in the Western Australian public sector by:

- eliminating systemic racial discrimination in the provision of public sector services;
- promoting sensitivity to the different needs of client groups.

Aboriginal people and ethnic minorities are the focus of the Policy Framework.

Implementation of the Policy Framework across Government is co-ordinated by the Substantive Equality Unit (SEU) of the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC)