

About this Communique

The Department of Education and Training (DET) – Community Sector Organisation (CSO) Governance Group is a quarterly forum for communication, consultation, engagement and collaboration between the department and the community sector. Meetings are co-chaired by the department and the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) and reflect topics of mutual interest to DET and the sector. You can read more about the partnership agreement that underpins this work on the [VCOSS](#) and [department](#) websites.

This Communique has been prepared by VCOSS to increase the visibility of this forum.

What was discussed in the December 2022 meeting?

The focus of this meeting was disability.

Addressing school exclusion and behaviours of concern

Skye Kakoschke-Moore, CEO, Children and Young People with Disability Australia noted that three surveys were conducted with students with disability to assess the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The surveys found that while students and caregivers are made to feel welcome in a school environment when they start, they often find it difficult to access specific education supports and modifications. During the pandemic, curriculum modification decreased by 18 per cent and individual support workers decreased by 44 per cent. Skye provided examples of strategies to ensure that students with disability are not left behind, highlighting the role of parents and schools in embedding student voice and the need to ensure that all communication is accessible, timely and relevant.

Recognising the diversity of disability

Sharon Barry, Executive Director, Inclusive Education Division, SEPS provided an overview of the Disability Inclusion reforms, noting that this is year two of a five-year reform process. In fostering an inclusive environment, schools should support students to feel welcome and valued and support parent and carer collaboration and engagement. The reforms include introducing a new funding tier and supporting the “missing middle” students that require some levels of intervention and support. A staged rollout is currently underway, with six areas on board and a further three to be rolled out. Sharon noted that the Youth Disability Advocacy Service (YDAS) helped develop an inclusive student voice toolkit to support the implementation of the Disability Inclusion reforms.

Alan Wilson, Manager, Disability and Additional Needs, Inclusive Education, SEPS noted how the COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the importance of working with the community sector to inform policy development and engagement with parents and school communities. Having good processes in place to support all learners, and particularly learners with disability, was key to enabling schools to pivot easily during the COVID-19 crisis. Alan provided a number of examples of partnerships with community sector organisations including AMAZE, ACD, SPELD, Yellow Ladybugs, I CAN, as well as Monash University and noted some of the resources developed to support students and families.

Addressing growing vulnerability in early years services

Noah Hurst, Specialist – Policy and Stakeholder Relations, Early Learning Association Australia

acknowledged the massive investment in the early learning space including the rollout of three-year old kinder and pre-prep. This is occurring amidst a backdrop of challenges around attraction, recruitment and retention of the early years workforce including in the Kindergarten Inclusion Support (KIS) program. He noted that free kinder in 2023 will increase engagement of vulnerable families and thus will need to be accompanied by resources that enable workers to provide appropriate support to families with multiple and complex needs. Noah also observed that staff shortages and inexperience of KIS workers is impacting the learning and development of children with disabilities, noting that the early years reform agenda is an opportunity to progress work on workforce attraction, retention, and development, including increased capacity and capability in inclusive practice.

Resources to support adult learners with disability

Eduard de Hue, Senior Manager, Adult, Community and Further Education -Planning, Projects & Reporting, HES

provided an overview of some of the key statistics around engaging students with disability relating to both pre-accredited training and TAFE. For Learn Local programs, ACFE provides funding to around 220 pre-accredited training housed within Neighbourhood Houses. They focus on delivering foundational skills such as numeracy, literacy, employability, and digital literacy. He noted that around 31% of learners identify as having a disability. In the TAFE sector, around 8% of students identify as having a disability. Eduard noted that Victoria's TAFEs are committed to enhancing support to students with a disability through a variety of student, staff and network initiatives including providing wrap around support to students and dedicated student support services, professional development programs for staff, and identifying and sharing best practice through TAFE networks.

Key projects and priorities feedback

Governance group members agreed on the following priorities for 2023:

- Term 1 - Transitions
- Term 2 - Mental health and wellbeing
- Term 3 - Disability
- Term 4 - Engagement/reengagement.

Next meeting

The theme of the Term 1 meeting will be transitions. Please contact VCOSS if there is something you would like to share with us, to guide our planning for future meetings.

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