

Best practice in managing diversity in TAFE distance learning centres

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In recent years, the vocational education and training sector has experienced a change from a system or provider focus to a client focus in a more competitive market for education and training services. A more competitive training market should not of itself accord a lower priority for equity and access issues. This project demonstrates how, through the provision of client focussed administrative, academic and support services, DLCs implement Managing Diversity policy and principles, and continue to provide students with flexibility and choices regarding mode of study, learning style and format of course materials.

The Managing Diversity approach is underpinned by a number of principles including valuing diversity, recognising and encouraging the contribution of people with diverse backgrounds to the community, and providing learning and training opportunities which focus on a person's needs as an individual, rather than as a member of a particular equity group.

By working closely with the Open Training Network, the study identified many examples of innovative practices employed by Distance Learning Centres, which have enabled individuals from diverse backgrounds and circumstances to successfully participate in training, attain qualifications and advance to further study or employment through the use of customised and flexible delivery methods. The methods employed are diverse and are structured according to individual needs, circumstances and constraints; and are reflective of best practice in managing diversity. Further, the research revealed the many challenges facing Distance Learning Centres and their staff in a dynamic environment characterised by rapid change in information technology and student demand.

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