

November 2020

Opening Doors – Building a TAFE system that enables Autistic learners to excel

**Submission to the Inquiry into access to TAFE for learners
with disability**

**Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure
Committee**



About Amaze

Amaze is a not-for-profit organisation established in 1967 that represents around 55,000 autistic Victorians. Amaze is the peak body for autistic people and their supporters.

Amaze seeks to achieve three key outcomes:

- Community understanding of autism in Victoria increases over time.
- Attitudes and behaviours towards autistic people by the Victorian community (government, private and social sectors) improves over time.
- Opportunities for meaningful participation and valued contribution increase for autistic people.

Amaze is also a partner of the Australian Autism Alliance, a coalition of 12 autism organisations around Australia that represent autistic people, their parents and carers, service providers and researchers who aim to realise the potential of autistic Australians. Together, the Alliance reaches over 170,000 people.

About autism

Autism Spectrum Disorder (or ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition. Autism is not a disease. People are born autistic. It is a lifelong condition and there is no cure, but the way it affects people may change over time as a person grows and matures. Every autistic individual is different.

Autism frequently co-occurs with other conditions including other neurodevelopment conditions (e.g. ADHD, Dyslexia) and Intellectual Disability. 50-70% of autistic people also have mental health conditions.

Acknowledgements

Amaze extends its thanks and gratitude to members of the Victorian autism community who generously gave their time and insights to inform this submission – through both survey responses and in discussions with us.

Amaze humbly acknowledges the essential input of our partners. The comprehensive community survey that underpins this submission was jointly developed and disseminated with Yellow Ladybugs, Different Journeys, I CAN Network and Asperger's Victoria. A related gender analysis, undertaken by Yellow LadyBugs, was very informative.

We have also been assisted by academics and researchers with autism expertise, TAFE staff and TAFE sector policy leaders, to whom we are most grateful.

For further information

Amaze stands ready to assist the Victorian Government to improve the accessibility and relevance of TAFEs for autistic students. Nicole Rees, Executive Manager of Policy & Advocacy (Deputy CEO) can be contacted on Nicole.rees@amaze.org.au to discuss this submission.

Summary of recommendations

System-wide reforms to lift TAFE outcomes for autistic students

1. Expand Victoria's upcoming Autism Education Strategy to cover TAFEs
2. Establish targets, indicators and measures for improving outcomes for autistic people at TAFE. Track and monitor outcomes for autistic students and publicly report on these via the Victorian Autism Plan
3. Extend the remit of Victoria's upcoming Diverse Learners Schools Education Hub to strengthen capabilities in the TAFE Network. Explore the potential to leverage the existing Neuro-Diversity Hub for universities.
4. Invest in an Autism Inclusion Pilot to be trialled in partnership with a TAFE Institute. It could draw on the Australian Catholic University's Autism Inclusion Program.

Equip autistic people to make informed choices about TAFE

5. Expand TAFE outreach to schools (including specialist schools), Learn Locals and community education providers, and to students undertaking home or remote learning.
6. Improve access to Trade Training Centres and Tech Schools for autistic secondary students. Ensure each specialist school has a program with these vocational hubs.
7. Build the autism (and disability) proficiency of TAFE Skills and Jobs Centres, Course Advisors, Trade Training Centres and Tech Schools. This would include professional development for key staff, and the creation of tailored tools, inclusion policies and processes.
8. Engage NDIA Partner in the Community (Local Area Coordinators), Learn Locals and community organisations working with autistic people to promote TAFE pathways and support access to TAFE Skills and Jobs Centres, Tech Schools and Trade Training Centres.
9. Expand the program of TAFE "tasters" and ensure these are promoted to autistic people exploring TAFE enrolment.
10. Ensure flexible options and adjustments are available and promoted for those needing to take TAFE entry tests.

Encourage and support students to disclose their autism

11. Provide clear and consistent information across the TAFE Network to build confidence to disclose a student's disability, by promoting the range of services and supports that are available, and protection of privacy.
12. Recognise the barriers to obtaining an autism diagnosis, including for the vulnerable cohorts of autistic girls/women and gender diverse individuals, and offer alternative ways to meet evidence requirements for accessing support.
13. Consider the high likelihood that autistic students have co-occurring conditions that need to be factored into support arrangements.
14. Promote a commitment to disability inclusion across the TAFE Network to create a safe environment for students to disclose their condition. Disability Action Plans and expansion of the Inclusive Education Index to TAFEs would help demonstrate this commitment.

Provide strong disability supports and adequate funding

15. Require TAFE Disability Support staff to undertake autism-specific training.
16. Develop a network-wide Charter detailing the role of TAFE Disability Support Services. Key elements might include:
 - That staff proactively contact every student who identifies as having a disability, or whether it is otherwise apparent, and outline potential supports and services.
 - Providing students with specific resources and guides relevant to their circumstances (e.g. autism specific materials developed by NDCOP).
 - The offer of an Individual Learning/Inclusion Plan to every Student with Disability, which would be updated annually (or more regularly if needed).
 - A guarantee that teachers/trainers will be advised of, and supported to implement, the Individual Learning/Inclusion Plans of those who consent to it being shared.
 - The option of convening a Student Support Group to promote a shared approach between the student and their family/carer, key clinicians/practitioners, disability support workers and teachers/trainers.
 - Connections with NDIS supports, including LAC community capacity building.
 - Ongoing support and advice about navigating TAFE processes and system.
 - Respect for confidentiality and student control over sharing of their private information.
 - Strengthening capabilities of students to self-advocate about their needs at TAFE, and welcoming the contributions of families/carers or independent advocates where students express a desire for this to happen.
17. Ensure adequate and sustained funding for disability supports. Explore alternative funding approaches such as loadings for TAFE students with disability.

Build the autism capability of TAFE teachers

18. Upskill TAFE teachers to support the strengths and needs of autistic students:
 - Embed disability inclusion as a core unit of Cert IV in Training & Assessment.
 - Expand professional development in autism for educators, TAFE support staff and leaders, with annual targets for completions.
 - Provide access to a future Diverse Learners Education Hub to strengthen the capacity and capability of TAFE educators.

Promote positive mental health and wellbeing at TAFE

19. Extend the Mental Health Practitioners in Schools program to TAFEs. Ensure staff are proficient in autism and disability, and have strong links with TAFE Disability Support Services.
20. Expand the availability of TAFE based mentoring initiatives, and promote these to autistic students.
21. Establish autism friendly social supports – such as peer support networks - across the TAFE Network.
22. Adopt the Productivity Commission's recommendations relating to the role of vocational education providers in supporting student's mental health and wellbeing.

Support sensory regulation

23. Ensure sensory sensitivities are explicitly considered in the design of accessible learning practices and environments.
24. Provide access to quiet spaces on TAFE campuses to enable students to recharge and regulate.

Lift the employment outcomes of autistic TAFE students

25. Embed work experience, vocational exploration and transitions planning into foundational level courses (e.g. VCAL, Certs 1 & 2). This is consistent with recommendations of the Shergold Review into Senior Secondary Pathways.
26. Provide an enhanced offering of work-based learning modes (e.g. work experience, work placements, traineeships and apprenticeships) and strong transition to work support for autistic TAFE students. Key elements of NDS's Ticket to Work model are instructive.
27. Offer clear pathways to areas of employment growth for people with disability. Support the achievement of public sector targets, social procurement opportunities and jobs in the disability sector.

Overview

Amaze is proud to present its comprehensive submission to the *Inquiry into access to TAFE for learners with disability*.

In developing this submission, Amaze together with Yellow Ladybugs, the I CAN Network, Different Journeys and Aspergers Victoria, conducted a detailed survey of autistic people to develop a unique perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of the Victorian TAFE sector, as it relates to autistic learners. Our research provides insights into where and how TAFEs can improve their accessibility, responsiveness and relevance to autistic learners.

Despite increasing numbers of autistic people attending TAFE, the broad outcomes for this cohort of students are unacceptably poor.

Just 17.9% of autistic people have a Certificate III, diploma, or advanced diploma as their highest qualification. Non-completion rates are also high, with almost half of our survey respondents reporting they had discontinued the most recent TAFE course they were enrolled in. Low rates of higher-level VET qualifications undermine the future capacity of autistic people to gain employment, which can have lifelong impacts.

Importantly, the causes of these poor outcomes can be addressed. A clear focus on the strengths and challenges of autistic students, a commitment to build autism capabilities of TAFE staff and systems, and intensive support for transitions to employment, will drive much improved results.

Amaze presents a range of reform opportunities, spanning both the strategic changes required to align the TAFE sector with key Victorian autism plans and strategies and direct organisational changes that individual TAFEs can make to address specific accessibility requirements of autistic students. Our submission offers 27 reform recommendations across the following domains:

- System-wide reforms to lift TAFE outcomes for autistic students
- Equipping autistic people to make informed choices about TAFE
- Encouraging autism disclosure to TAFE
- Strong disability supports and funding
- Building the autism capability of TAFE teachers
- Promoting positive mental health and wellbeing at TAFE
- Supporting sensory regulation
- Lifting employment outcomes of autistic TAFE students.

Our recommendations are sensible. If implemented, the benefits will be enjoyed not just by autistic students, but also other student cohorts – particularly those with other neuro-developmental conditions - experiencing disengagement and low completion rates.

Importantly, our submission shares the voices of autistic learners from across Victoria. Their experiences are an essential component when considering how to address the gaps and challenges identified throughout this consultation.

While the current outcomes for autistic learners are unacceptably poor, we are confident that with courageous reforms, the Victorian Government and the TAFE sector can improve its accessibility to autistic students and deliver outcomes that benefit individual students, their families and the broader Victorian community.

TAFE and Autism: setting the context

Autism needs to be central to the work of this Inquiry

Autism peak Amaze welcomes the Victorian Parliament's Inquiry into access to TAFE for Students with Disability.

Autism is a high prevalence, life-long condition, affecting people from all walks of life. The most recent ABS stats (2018) reveal that 3.2% of children aged 5-14 years and 1.1% of 15 – 40 year olds have an autism diagnosis. More generally, 1.3% of males and 0.4% of females have been diagnosed as autistic. Barriers to diagnosis mean that actual prevalence is likely to be much higher. The *apparent* higher incidence in younger age groups reflects lower rates of diagnosis among older cohorts.

Education is pivotal to life chances, yet, as a group, and despite their high numbers, autistic students have appalling outcomes in vocational education and training – worse than most other disability and vulnerable population groups.

Poor educational outcomes contribute to the extreme rates of unemployment. In 2018, when Australia's economy was booming, unemployment among autistic people was more than three times higher than for all people with disability and almost eight times the rate of people without disability.¹ Post-pandemic, these figures are likely to be even worse.

There is both a huge imperative and a huge opportunity to change this. Attaining vocational skills and qualifications at higher rates will improve participation in work and community life for autistic people, with significant benefits for their physical health, mental health and a higher quality of life. These benefits flow to autistic people's families, local communities and the broader Victorian economy.

As the public provider of vocational education, the anchor of quality in VET, and a prime pathway to jobs of the future, a TAFE system that enables autistic students is a must. As a respondent to the Victorian TAFE and Autism Survey summed up:

If there was no TAFE there would be nothing for my son. Very important

The Inquiry provides a unique platform for the Victorian Parliament and the autism community to work together to achieve reforms that could be game-changing for autistic people.

This submission is directly informed by the lived experience of autistic people and their families/guardians, with quotes throughout reflecting their unfiltered words. Key sources include:

- **The Victorian TAFE and Autism Survey 2020** that was jointly conducted by Amaze, Aspergers Victoria, Different Journeys, I CAN Network and Yellow Ladybugs. Commissioned to inform this Inquiry, the survey received almost 100 responses from autistic people currently or recently at TAFE, as well as autistic people hoping to go to TAFE in the next couple of years.

Yellow Ladybugs undertook a gender analysis of survey results, which has been instructive.

¹Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018. *4430.0 Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings 2018*. Available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4430.0Main%20Features102018?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4430.0&issue=2018&num=&view=>

- Discussions with **experts by experience** – including autistic people attending TAFE in Victoria and parents of autistic TAFE students.

We also connected with a number of TAFE staff, TAFE policy leaders, academics and researchers specialising in autism to inform this submission.

Amaze looks forward to engaging deeply with the Inquiry throughout its work, including by convening an **autism panel** to present at upcoming hearings of the Inquiry.

Every TAFE has autistic students

The high prevalence of autism means every TAFE campus will have autistic students – whether they know about it or not.

Many autistic people enroll in TAFE at some point (or points) in their life

While there are no reliable statistics on TAFE enrolments among autistic Victorians, it is our experience that TAFE is a common destination for autistic people.

- Autistic school leavers are more likely to attend TAFE than university compared with their non-autistic peers.²

Early school leaving among autistic young people is particularly high: [ABS data](#) reveals around **one-third of autistic students do not make it past Year 10** – with many leaving school even earlier.

Many of these young people end up in TAFE doing **foundational level studies** (Certs 1, 2 and VCAL). Some enter TAFE directly from school, others make their way to TAFE after being home-schooled, from Learn Locals or other community education settings, or after periods of disengagement from education.

- Specific **courses and programs for students with disability** are delivered by TAFEs. These are often attended by students coming directly from specialist school settings. Autistic people attend specialist settings at higher rates than students with disability more generally.

Over 27% of respondents had Year 10 or below as their highest level of schooling.

Over 10% last undertook their schooling in a flexible learning environment, or via home schooling or distance education.

Over 20% were last enrolled in schooling at specialist or special development schools.

Vic TAFE and Autism Survey 2020

- Autistic **university graduates** often face difficulties in securing work in their field of study.³ This drives some to TAFE in search of an alternative pathway to employment.

I have a bachelor's degree, but after 3 years of unemployment, I thought I would try to get some different skills to help me be more employable.

² Flower, RL. Et al., 2020. Brief Report: *What Happens After School? Exploring Post-school Outcomes for a Group of Autistic and Non-autistic Australian Youth* *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10803-020-04600-6>

³ Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect), (2013). *We Belong: The experiences, aspirations and needs of adults with Asperger's disorder and high functioning autism*. Available at: https://www.autismspectrum.org.au/uploads/documents/Research/Autism_Spectrum_WE_BELONG_Research_Report-FINAL_LR_R.pdf

- **Multiple enrolments** are common – around two-thirds of respondents to the Victorian TAFE and Autism survey reported commencing (as distinct from completing) two or more courses at TAFE. Over 12% reported four or more enrolments.

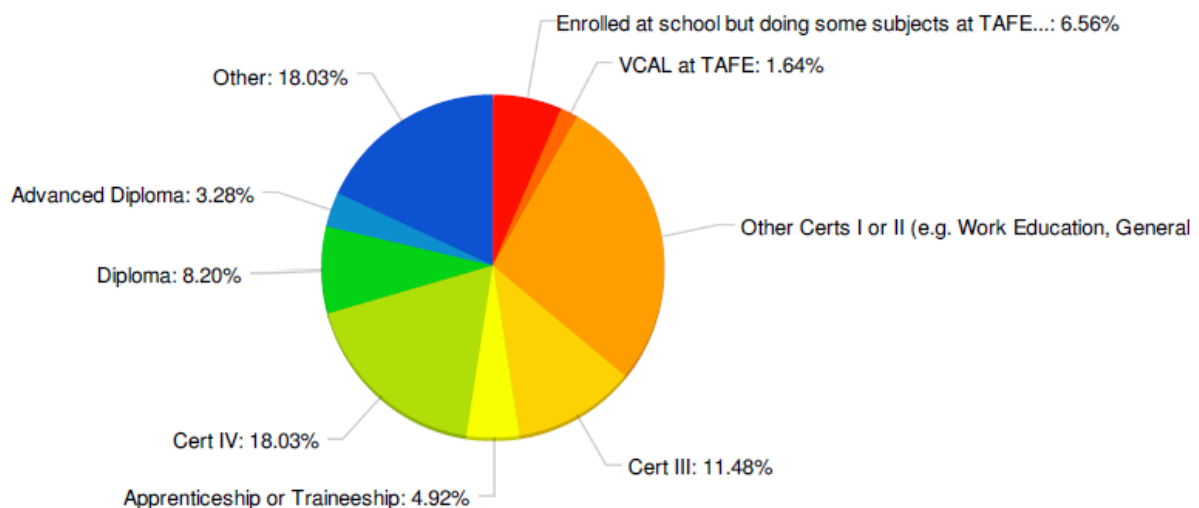
Numbers of autistic students enrolling in TAFE are increasing

Autistic people make up the single largest diagnostic group within the **National Disability Insurance Scheme**: 31% of participants have a primary autism diagnosis, and an additional 5% of participants have autism as a secondary disability. 54% of 15-18 year olds in the Scheme are autistic. We expect that individual supports funded under NDIS plans will enable more autistic people to attend TAFE in order to achieve their employment aspirations.

Enrolment of students with disability have increased with Victoria’s **Free TAFE** initiative. Removing financial barriers for priority courses with high labour market demand is encouraging autistic people to take up these opportunities.

Autistic people are represented at all qualification levels

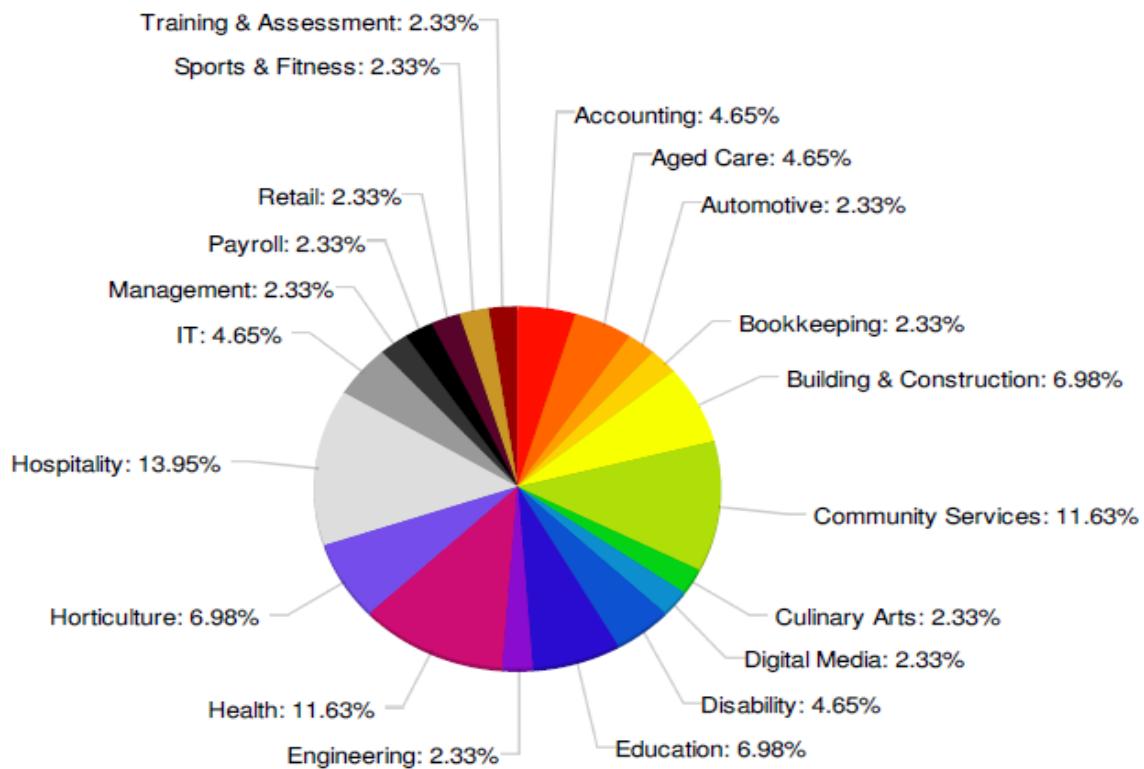
The following diagram represents the most current level of qualification at TAFE being undertaken by our survey respondents, foundation level courses (Certs 1 and 2) are the most common:



And are studying in a wide range of fields

Autistic students study in a broad range of fields. Our survey found the most popular areas include: hospitality; community services; health; building & construction; education; animal/equine studies and horticulture. This is a reflection of the diversity found within the autistic community, and disproves the stereotype that autistic individuals are mainly found in vocations such as IT and engineering.

Our survey found very strong female/gender diverse representation in the humanities or more social/community-oriented fields, with 70.8% of these respondents studying in in the fields of community services, education, health or hospitality.



TAFE can work well for autistic people

There are good reasons why TAFE can work particularly well for autistic students.

The applied nature of VET, its more structured curriculum, smaller class sizes, greater contact hours and shorter courses often work better for autistic learners than the self-directed learning style inherent in many university courses. Clearer pathways to work, the opportunity to demonstrate skills in practice through training and work placements undertaken as part of a VET qualification assist autistic people to overcome other barriers to employment.⁴

Mostly, my TAFE has been a fantastic facility and make learning a great experience. The structure of classes, face to face learning and practical lessons all help to prepare you for work.

I couldn't manage University with large classes and loose structures.

I felt I could deal with small class sizes. I understood the expectations better than Uni. The TAFE was very near home in my comfort zone so my anxiety was less I was in familiar environment. I felt very successful as the work was not difficult but I felt proud to have completed a course that lead to employment. I got a job as a book keeper with a large accountancy firm and now several years later had the confidence to tackle Uni online which is more in my comfort zone.

Educational transition is amazing & I am hoping to get into a traineeship next year.

⁴ Flower, RL. Et al., 2020. Brief Report: *What Happens After School? Exploring Post-school Outcomes for a Group of Autistic and Non-autistic Australian Youth* *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10803-020-04600-6>

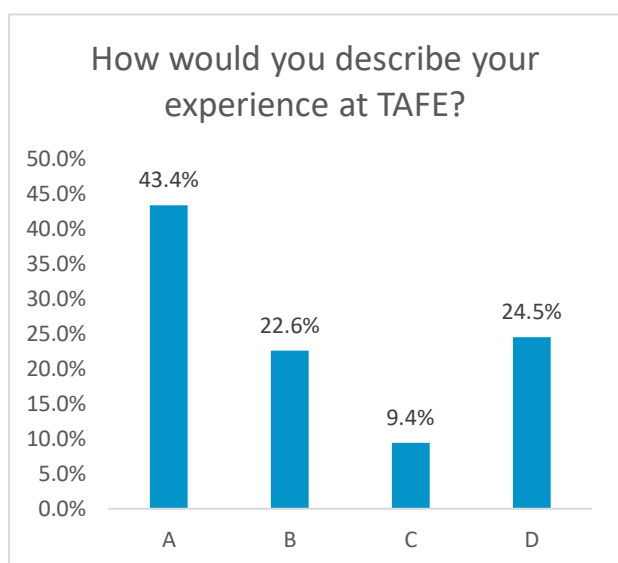
I've generally found TAFE teachers to be more accepting of differing learning styles than teachers I'd previously encountered in mainstream high schools.

I have very specific areas of strength so I tried to choose something I enjoy and thought I would be good at as well as lead to employment.

Credit goes to the admission team for not seeing my diagnosis as a problem and my teacher who believed in me from the start and was positive and strengths-focused.

... a formal party once a year, a lot of practical training, excursions, large industrial facilities, canteen, and work placement. Most of the students are friendly. Very nice environment to study.

When asked how they would describe their experience at TAFE, respondents to the Victorian TAFE survey were largely positive, although almost a quarter reported they did not enjoy TAFE.



A	I enjoy/ed TAFE and felt welcome and included there
B	I enjoy/ed the learning, but not the social aspects of TAFE
C	I enjoy/ed the social aspects but not the learning at TAFE
D	I do not/did not like TAFE

But TAFE is not delivering the outcomes that autistic people need

While it is important to acknowledge pockets of promising practice and excellent outcomes for some individuals, as a system, TAFE is not working well for autistic students.

Low proportions of autistic people are achieving higher level TAFE qualifications

The stark gap in outcomes between autistic students compared with others with disability, let alone the general population, speaks volumes. **Just 17.9% of autistic people have a Certificate III; diploma or advanced diploma as their highest qualification, compared with 29.4% of all people with disability.** Low rates of attainment of higher-level VET qualifications significantly undermines the capacity of autistic people to gain employment.

Autistic potential is not being realised

The talent and potential of autistic students is far from being realised. Characteristic tendencies for strong focus on areas of specific interest and attention to detail should serve autistic people well at

TAFE. However, autistic students are at high risk of under-performing academically relative to their level of intelligence.⁵

Poor educational attainment is not primarily caused by autism, but rather by the lack of an enabling and supportive environment. This is driven, in part, by a culture of low expectations and damaging assumptions of low capability.

Non-completion rates are high

Almost half of respondents to the Victorian TAFE and Autism Survey reported they had dropped out/discontinued the most recent TAFE course they were enrolled in (48.3%).

Nearly half of those who dropped out reported it was because they could not get the support from TAFE needed to complete the course (46.7%). Other key reasons included: loss of interest (20%); personal circumstances (16.7%); and lack of flexibility (e.g. inability to take time off and continue the course later).

The course was too intense. They tried to fit too much into 1 year.

I hated the TAFE course - the teachers did not care about my needs.

I did not complete my course as I experienced bullying and discrimination from one of the teachers at the institution that made me feel too anxious and unsafe to continue.

I became overwhelmed and could not complete the course

Disruptions caused by the pandemic across 2020 also took their toll.

Discontinued due to Covid19.

Delayed due to COVID and unable to complete placement yet.

Given 2020 threw some curveballs I was not able to do as much face to face learning as I wanted... I did not find the online classroom meetings easy. Very exhausting and sensory overload. But I persisted and for that I'm very proud of myself.

I really found it hard to complete projects and learn how to make things as I am a visual learner and all classes were conducted online.

Never again offer disability-approved courses as a remote learning. Understandable that post-secondary schools are not the same as primary and secondary schools, but the TAFEs needed to have pushed the state govt to get these courses BACK INTO the CLASSROOM. These courses are only open for 'special needs' young adults so no different than special schools which were allowed to have students back in the class room.

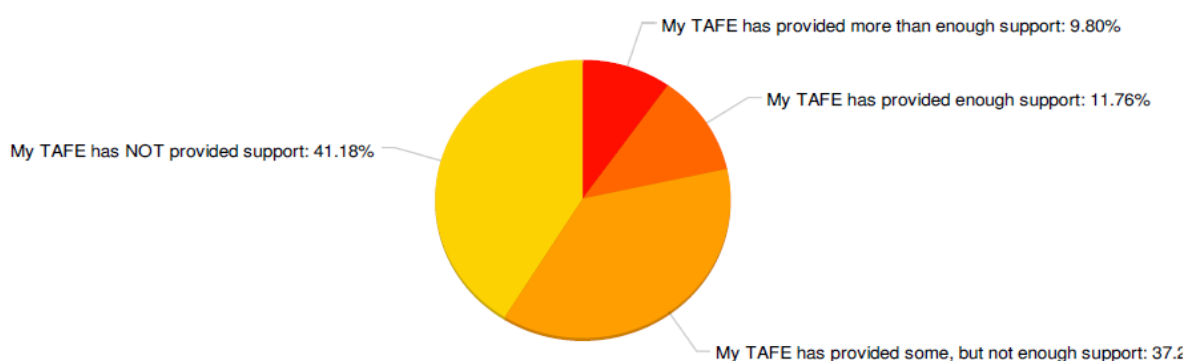
Support provided by TAFE is falling short of the needs of autistic students

When asked about their overall rating of whether TAFE met their access needs:

- The most common response was that TAFE had not provided support (41.8%)
- Almost a third (32.7%) said they received some, but not enough support
- Just over 21% said that enough support (or more than enough) was provided.

⁵ Ashburner, J. et al., 2010. *Surviving in the mainstream: Capacity of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders to perform academically and regulate their emotions and behaviour at school*. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1750946709000798?via%3Dihub>

The psychologist who was part of the welfare team was very nice and understood many of my issues. She organised the study plan support. She communicated with some of my teachers but some of them couldn't help me in the way I needed. Many were too busy to meet with me individually when I had difficulties, so I lost my way.



The right to equality of education is not being realised

The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disability provides the right to educational equality, which in Australia is implemented via the Disability Discrimination Act and the **Disability Standards for Education**. TAFEs have obligations under these frameworks to support learners with disability.

Our experience is that there is very low awareness of the Standards among autistic people and their families. For those that are aware of them, the Standards are commonly understood as being aspirational, rather than mandatory – by both families and educational providers.

The Standards are currently under review, and are also being considered by the Disability Royal Commission. We join others in calling for the Standards and the context in which they operate to be substantially overhauled. A new frame for educational equality for students with disability – captured in a national strategy and made enforceable through the DDA and Standards is needed.

TAFE is critical to assisting autistic people recover from the impacts of COVID

Amidst the upheaval of 2020, the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the lives of autistic people and their families must be considered. Already experiencing significantly poorer education, mental health, social participation and employment outcomes compared to the broader population, autistic people have been hit hard by the pandemic.

With Victoria's unemployment and underemployment increasing in the face of the COVID-impacted economy, those with existing labour market disadvantages are likely to fare badly. Autistic people are at high risk of being caught in the long tail of disadvantage. Without targeted and sustained measures, the pandemic and its aftermath risk reversing advancements on key life outcomes for autistic people.

There is high aspiration and huge untapped talent in the autistic community. If harnessed, it will contribute to strengthening Australia's recovery, productive capacity and community resilience.

TAFE is the lynchpin in creating the conditions for autistic people to successfully take up opportunities created to stimulate economic recovery such as Victoria's expanded Free TAFE program that targets areas of jobs demand and growth, and the national JobTrainer and JobMaker initiatives. TAFE can also play a pivotal role in facilitating the realisation of targets for employment of people with disability in the public sector and in the disability sector.

Reform opportunities to enable autistic students at TAFE

Closing the gap for autistic learners requires an autism-specific response

While the plight of autistic students is doubtless on the radar of some TAFEs, we have not been able to identify any systemic response within a TAFE Institute, or across the TAFE Network that is directed at enabling autistic learners. This needs to change.

The stark gap in VET attainment between autistic students and others with disability necessitates a tailored approach to specifically address the discrete barriers and enablers for autistic students. The needs of autistic students are often beyond the scope of the usual supports and adjustments provided to students with disability by tertiary education providers.⁶ A generalised disability response, has not – and will not – effectively close the gap for autistic students.

Autism-specific measures would complement, not compete with, broader efforts to strengthen outcomes for students with disability at TAFE, and would significantly advance the inclusion agenda.

This section includes tangible recommendations for change. **Part A** deals with bold, big picture measures to drive system wide improvements. **Part B** unpacks elements of these into discrete, stand-alone reforms.

Part A: Strategic reform opportunities

Victoria's Autism Education Strategy could be expanded to cover TAFE

The State Government is expected to soon release Victoria's first ever Autism Education Strategy, which will cover Victorian schools. The Government committed to developing a '[comprehensive education strategy for autistic students](#)' in response to recommendations from the 2017 [Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Autism](#). The need to systemically address the unnecessarily and unacceptably poor outcomes experienced by autistic children and young people in Victorian schools is the underpinning imperative for this autism-specific strategy. If well designed and implemented, the Strategy should create deep inroads into addressing some of the state's worst educational disadvantage.

This same imperative exists in TAFE. There would be considerable benefit in expanding the Autism Education Strategy, in its next iteration, to cover TAFE (and VET more generally). While it is possible to introduce autism-specific measures in TAFE in the absence of an overarching strategy, our experience in the school system is that without a strategy, such measures tend to be haphazard and disconnected. The data collection, measures, outcomes reporting, and co-ordination of mutually reinforcing initiatives inherent in a Strategy are critical to shifting the dial for autistic people.

⁶ Owen,C, McCann D., Rayner, C., Devereaux, C., Sheehan, F., & L Quarmby (2016) Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Higher Education. Accessed at <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wpcontent/uploads/2016/03/Supporting-Students-with-Autism-Spectrum-Disorder-in-Higher-Education.pdf>

Strategic themes under the Strategy should include:

1. **Building inclusive TAFEs** – through culture, leadership, policy, practice and physical environment
2. Strengthening the **capabilities of educators and support staff** to enable autistic students⁷
3. Meeting autistic students **individual learning needs and strengths**
4. Supporting the **connectedness, social-emotional learning, wellbeing and mental health** of autistic students
5. Strengthening **TAFE--family-community-industry partnerships** around autistic students.

Targets are needed to drive improved outcomes for autistic TAFE students

Specific targets and measures for autistic students at TAFE are needed. They ought to cover a broad range of outcome such as:

- Increasing the rate of course completion among autistic students at TAFE
- Increasing the proportion of autistic people completing higher level VET qualifications
- Improving the rate at which autistic people obtain employment post-TAFE
- Increasing the proportion of educators and staff reporting they are confident in supporting autistic students
- Increasing the proportion of autistic students reporting improved wellbeing and involvement at TAFE.

A detailed outcomes framework with measures to track progress across key indicators would enable critical insight into what is working (or not), highlight where attention is most needed, and inform decisions about the best use of resources.

For transparency and accountability, performance against these targets should be embedded in TAFE system reporting, and should also be publically reported upon under the [Victorian Autism Plan](#), the metrics for which are still being developed.

A precursor for such measures is overcoming the significant shortcomings in existing baseline data about autistic students collected by and about TAFEs. New data sets are currently being developed for reporting under the State Disability Plan and related indicators are being developed for the Victorian Autism Plan. Data needs to be disaggregated to allow for autism specific outcomes to be tracked, and not lost in broader disability data.

Significant benefits that will flow from extending Victoria's upcoming Autism Education Strategy to TAFEs:

- ✓ **Advancing Victoria's journey towards inclusive education**
- ✓ Improving educational attainment for a cohort of students experiencing poor outcomes that do not reflect their potential
- ✓ **Lifting the wellbeing, connectedness and engagement of a student group at high risk of social isolation and course non-completion**
- ✓ Increasing the uptake of further and higher education
- ✓ **Supporting recovery from the detrimental impacts of COVID-related education disruptions**
- ✓ Growing Victoria's productive capacity through increased skills and economic participation

⁷ In line with the Autism Education Strategy, this should include providing more targeted support for vulnerable cohorts including autistic girls/women, and the autistic LGBTBIQ+ community.

Victoria's centre of excellence in autism and neuro-diverse education needs to extend to TAFEs

Strengthening the capability of our TAFE system to lift outcomes for autistic students is a precursor for driving change.

The Victorian Government has committed to establishing a centre for excellence in education for autistic and neuro-diverse students, inspired by [Queensland's Autism Hub for Schools](#). It will initially be schools focussed.

It will build the capabilities of educational systems, educational providers, educators, families, and the broader community – including employer/industry bodies.

The TAFE system would doubtless benefit from access to such a capability strengthening hub. Expanding its remit to cover TAFEs would create continuity of approach across our state education systems, and drive greater return on investment.

Alternatively, the existing [Neuro-Diversity Hub](#) – although predominately university focussed and with national reach – could be leveraged and built upon to make it TAFE relevant. Essentially an on-line resource bank for students and educators, the Hub also aspires to develop communities of practice, research collaborations and industry partnerships.

A dedicated Autism Inclusion Program could be trialled in TAFE

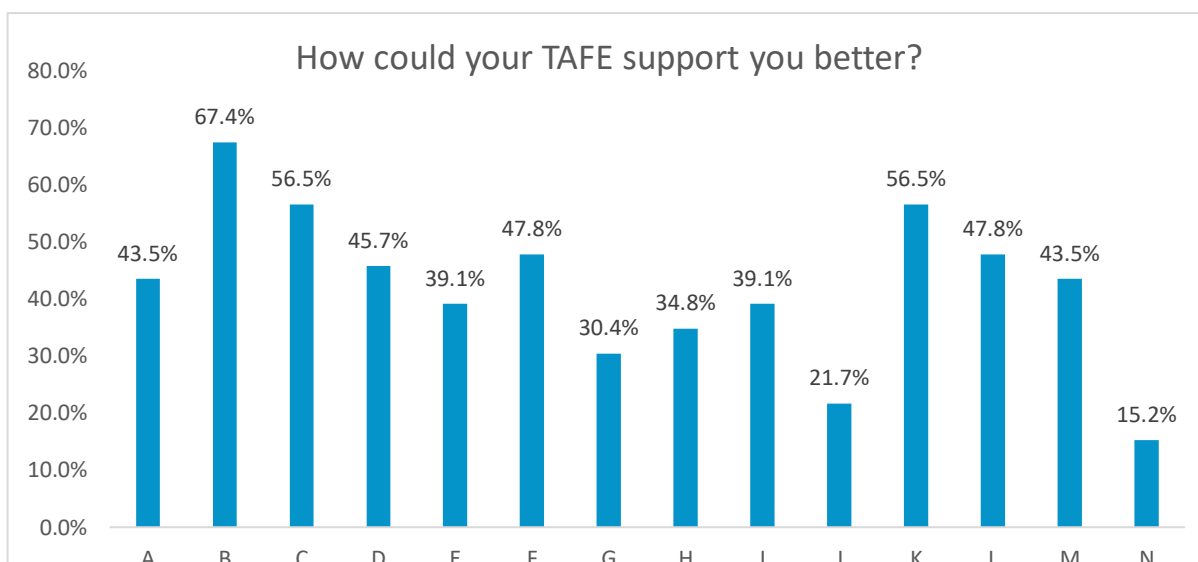
A recommendation we would urge the Inquiry to explore is the piloting of a dedicated autism program in a small number of TAFE Institutes. The pilot would bring together key enablers for autistic students, and provide end to end support from pre-enrolment outreach to post-course transitions. Evaluation of the pilot would enable continuous improvements, measure outcomes, and test the feasibility of replication.

Responses to the survey question of how could your TAFE support you better provide insights into key elements to include in such a program

TAFE would benefit from being supported by Victoria's upcoming Diverse Learners Hub

This Centre of Excellence in education for autistic and neuro-diverse students is initially schools focussed. Its key functions:

- Host a multi-disciplinary team of experts in the education of autistic and neuro-diverse students
- Employ coaches to build the capabilities of education providers, educators, support and wellbeing staff
- Deliver tele-classroom consults to educators seeking tailored, in-situ advice around supporting individual students
- Facilitate system-wide implementation of evidence-based autism education tools and practices- such as individual learning plans, effective adjustments, social emotional supports and transition planning
- Oversee and quality assure autism and inclusion training/PD (delivered by a range of providers) and keep a register of staff who have undertaken PD and higher-level training relevant to autism
- Provide advice to students, families, practitioners and the broader community on autism and neuro-diverse education
- Monitor enrolment, planned exclusions/suspensions and discontinuations by neuro-diverse students
- Collaborate with post-secondary providers and industry/employer bodies to expand pathways for autistic students
- Partner in innovations and demonstration projects to contribute to the evidence base.



A	Having an Individualised Inclusion Plan
B	Communication of support needs with teachers/trainers and support staff
C	Adjustments to assessment methods, timelines or criteria
D	Support with sensory adjustments (e.g. ability to wear headphones and/or sunglasses, lighting adjustments in classroom, permission to move while learning, access to chill out spaces).
E	Assistance to make connections with other students.
F	Access to mentoring
G	Student Support Group (e.g. student, family, TAFE, support and allied health workers come together to discuss ways to support student).
H	Assistance to help me transition into TAFE
I	Support to help with my next steps after TAFE
J	Assistance with accessing financial supports
K	Support with academic skills development
L	Advocacy – advocating for me, or supporting me to advocate on my own behalf
M	Having a contact person for queries about TAFE processes
N	Other

Inspiration for such a pilot can be drawn from the Australian Catholic University’s Autism Inclusion Program (see box below). Launched earlier this year on its Melbourne and Ballarat campuses, the Program will be rolled out across all ACU campuses in 2021.

Australian Catholic University – helping autistic students reach their potential

ACU's Autism Inclusion Program is a comprehensive offer that seeks to both work individually with students through academic, social and wellbeing supports while also addressing structural barriers to inclusion. The Program is designed to be embedded in the activities of the university, with strong cross-unit collaboration. Core elements include:

- Access to comprehensive information for (prospective) autistic students
- Working with schools to support transition (including presentations at Future Students events)
- Welcome pack for autistic students including resources and sensory items to assist with transition and demonstrate a sense of inclusion and connectedness (including welcome letter signed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Engagement who is herself autistic)
- Peer mentoring program, including ongoing PD for mentors
- Academic skills workshops
- Education Inclusion Plans
- Professional Development for teaching and administrative staff
- Autism acceptance and inclusion communications and events to raise awareness across university campuses (staff and students)
- Resource library
- Environmental audits and adjustments
- Low-sensory room on campus (Melbourne room opened, Ballarat room identified for refurbishment)
- Sensory maps (being developed by OT placement students)
- Social events (initially online due to Covid)

Webpage: <https://www.acu.edu.au/student-life/student-services/autism-at-acu>

Student portal page: <https://www.studentportal.acu.edu.au/acuinfo/ss/autism-at-acu>

Development and implementation of the program is being led by autistic staff and students. The Program's Steering Committee includes representatives of key ACU portfolios. An Advisory Group includes current and former autistic students and academics from ACU and other universities.

Recommendations: system-wide reforms to lift TAFE outcomes for autistic students

1. Expand Victoria's upcoming Autism Education Strategy to cover TAFEs.
2. Establish targets, indicators and measures for improving outcomes for autistic people at TAFE. Track and monitor outcomes for autistic students and publically report on these via the Victorian Autism Plan
3. Establish targets and measures for improving outcomes for autistic people at TAFE. Track and measure outcomes for autistic students and publicly report on these via the Victorian Autism Plan.
4. Extend the remit of Victoria's upcoming Diverse Learners Schools Education Hub to strengthen capabilities in the TAFE Network. Explore the potential to leverage the existing Neuro-Diversity Hub for universities.

Part B: Addressing discrete challenges & enablers for autistic students

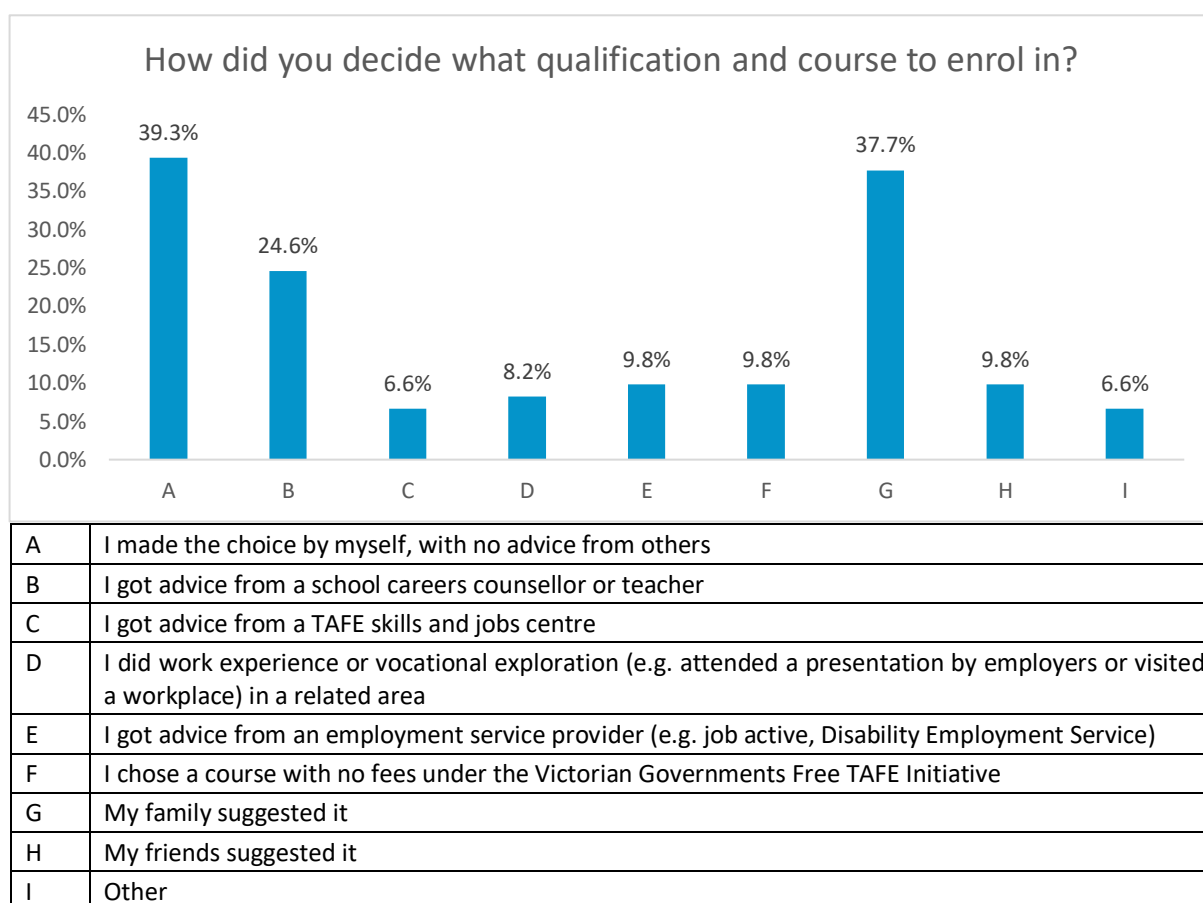
The following section unpacks key challenges and enablers for autistic TAFE students, with specific recommendations to address these. While they function as standalone recommendations, they would best be brought together under the Autism Education Strategy, and underpinned by the Autism Education Hub recommended above. Recommendations in this section could also form elements in a TAFE Autism Inclusion pilot.

Autistic people need to be equipped to make informed decisions about TAFE

Autistic people often undertake less vocational exploration than others before attending TAFE. High rates of early school leaving coupled with low rates of participation in work experience exacerbate this.

Professional advice to inform decisions about TAFE enrolment are under-utilised

The following table represents how Victorian TAFE and Autism Survey respondents described what had influenced their choice of course and qualification at TAFE.



Acting independently (without the advice of others), advice from family, and advice from school were the major contributing factors. Comparatively low in influence was participation in course related work experience or vocational exploration, and use of Victoria's TAFE Skills & Jobs Centres.

When asked why they decided to attend TAFE, respondents overwhelmingly told us it was to get a job (46.7%) and/or as a pathway to further studies (41.7%). Other reasons included personal interest/development (35%); because of Free TAFE (16%); or in place of school (10%).

Of concern was that a quarter of respondents said they enrolled in TAFE because they weren't sure what else to do.

I think many autistics might need to thoroughly assess (with outside help) their plans for study and whether a TAFE course is the appropriate course for them. In my experience, autistics tend to be poor at decision making ... so I just want to voice a word of caution on jumping head first into studies because the person might find the topic personally interesting.

TAFE connections with autistic secondary students need to be expanded

There is significant opportunity for TAFEs to expand their outreach to schools (including specialist schools), Learn Locals and community education providers in their region. Ways to connect with students undertaking home or remote learning also need to be explored given the over-representation of autistic students in these cohorts. Opportunities to undertake vocational tasters, receive vocational guidance and visit the local TAFE should be part of this outreach.

Improving access for autistic students (and others with disability) to Trade Training Centres (such as the Knox Innovation Opportunity & Sustainability Centre [KIOSC](#) which is connected to Swinburne) and Victoria's ten TAFE connected [Tech Schools](#) is essential. Each Victorian secondary specialist school ought to be connected with one of these centres, and have a dedicated program developed. Disability training for staff at Trade Training Centres and Tech Schools is needed.

TAFEs Skills and Job Centres could also play an enhanced role

Given their low rate of utilisation by autistic people (and more generally) TAFEs Skills and Job Centres ought to play an enhanced role.

As a potential trusted source of advice to prospective students and their families/carers, and also a key gatekeeper to TAFE, frontline staff need to be proficient in engaging with people with disability. Similar to work currently being undertaken at Australian Catholic University, this could be facilitated by the development of autism-specific resources and guidance to enable potential students to find the information they need and know what questions to ask. Tools such as the myWAY Employability app recently launched by the Autism Co-operative Research Centre could inform practice of those delivering vocational guidance.⁸

TAFE-Community Partnerships are important

Work can be done with autism organisations, Learn Locals and the NDIA's Partners in the Community (LACs) to promote TAFE options, and to help enable access to TAFEs Skills and Job Centres, Trade Training Centres and Tech Schools.

⁸ This free app is designed for autistic young people (aged 14-30 years) and covers careers exploration matched to strengths and interests, career planning, further education and employment pathways Information and links to resources are available at: mywayemployability.com.au

Tasters support informed decisions

TAFE tasters can provide an important opportunity for autistic people to prospectively try whether a course is the right fit for them, and can support smooth transitions. When asked what helpful support was received from TAFE Disability Support staff, a survey respondent said:

A day in the vet clinic to see if I could do it

Tasters are currently not offered systemically across the network or vocational fields.

Entry tests can be a barrier

Entry testing and online enrolment can create barriers to TAFE entry. Online literacy and numeracy testing leave little room for adjustments. Flexible options and adjustments for taking entry tests need to be available and promoted.

Recommendations: equipping autistic people to make informed choices about TAFE

5. Expand TAFE outreach to schools (including specialist schools), Learn Locals and community education providers, and to students undertaking home or remote learning.
6. Improve access to Trade Training Centres and Tech Schools for autistic secondary students. Ensure each specialist school has a program with these vocational hubs.
7. Build the autism (and disability) proficiency of TAFE Skills and Jobs Centres, Course Advisors, Trade Training Centres and Tech Schools. This would include professional development for key staff, and the creation of tailored tools, inclusion policies and processes.
8. Engage NDIA Partner in the Community (Local Area Coordinators), Learn Locals and community organisations working with autistic people to promote TAFE pathways and help enable access to TAFE Skills and Jobs Centres, Tech Schools and Trade Training Centres.
9. Expand the program of TAFE “tasters” and ensure these are promoted to autistic people exploring TAFE enrolment
10. Ensure flexible options and adjustments are available and promoted for those needing to take TAFE entry tests.

It needs to feel safe and worthwhile for autistic students to disclose their condition

The Victorian TAFE and Autism survey revealed that almost 73% of respondents had disclosed their autism to their TAFE’s administration. Over 16% had not disclosed, and 11% were unsure.

Of those disclosing to TAFE administration: 55% made their own disclosure; families disclosed a quarter of the time; and school/former education providers disclosed in 7% of instances. NDIS providers also made disclosures.

Disclosure to teachers was lower, at just over 60%. Almost one-quarter (23%) reported not disclosing to their teacher/s and 16% were unsure.

There are reasons why autistic people do not disclose their condition

Key reasons given by those who did not disclose their autism to TAFE included:

- 39% were not confident that TAFE would do anything to support their needs
- 39% were worried about stigma or discrimination. Notably, significantly more female/gender diverse respondents gave this reason: 64%, compared to 17% of male respondents.

- 26% felt that disclosure of their condition was unnecessary.

I'm worried about being bullied by my classmates, or that instructors won't know what to do with me if I tell them I'm autistic. I'll probably just try to keep my head down.

I wanted to be able to study and jump through all the same hoops as 'normal people'. In hindsight, it was excessively stressful and harmed my studies, along with my mental and physical health. I would not do it again.

Didn't feel comfortable telling

I disclosed to them later when it came to placement

Absence of diagnosis can be another barrier to disclosure

Many autistic people remain undiagnosed or are diagnosed later in life. Poor Medicare coverage (autism diagnosis rebates are only available for those aged under 13 years), high instances of autism going undetected (particularly for females) or mistaken for another condition contribute to this.⁹ This is reflected in the survey, where 27% of female/gender diverse respondents identified 'not being diagnosed at the time', or 'only recently diagnosed' as a reason for not disclosing.

Wasn't diagnosed at the time.

I was only recently diagnosed 3 months ago.

Autism rarely occurs alone

Autistic people frequently have multiple conditions or disabilities. Indeed, over 90% of respondents to the Victorian TAFE and Autism survey reported co-occurring conditions, with the most common being:

- Mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression (74%)
- Other neurodevelopmental condition such as ADHD, Intellectual Disability, Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Tourettes or OCD (67%)
- Physical conditions such as epilepsy or mobility issues (16%)

Non-disclosure has consequences

Invisible disabilities (like autism and other neurodevelopmental conditions) may be difficult to detect if not disclosed. This is particularly the case for autistic individuals (often female or gender diverse) who have a more 'internalised' autism presentation, and whose needs are often hidden due to their ability to mask, or pass as neurotypical.

Without disclosure, TAFE's knowledge about how many autistic students they have, what co-occurring conditions they may have and what their experiences and outcomes are at TAFE is limited.

⁹ Australia Autism Alliance Survey 2020: over half of autistic adults responding to the survey revealed they were misdiagnosed with another condition before being diagnosed as autistic. 31.1% of parents/carers reported the same experience for children in their care. Girls and women are at high risk of being un-diagnosed or misdiagnosed.

Critically, it means autistic students are going without the supports they need. Students who do disclose and are able to identify their adjustment requirements tend to have better academic outcomes and completion rates.¹⁰

The benefits of disclosure need to be promoted

While disclosure is a choice for each individual, concerns about stigma and unresponsiveness by the TAFE system to autistic needs are things that can be addressed.

Promotion about the benefits of making disability disclosure may help address the perception that TAFE will be unresponsiveness to the circumstances of autistic people.

We note NSW TAFE provides explicit information about benefits and has a consistent offer around engagement with disability support across the network.

Privacy needs to be respected

Students need to be confident that they can determine who information about their condition can be shared with, and when. Equally, students need to know when information is not shared (for privacy or other reasons) so they do not assume teaching staff are aware of the information they have disclosed to disability services

A culture of inclusion makes a huge difference

We understand the rate at which Students with Disability enrol at different Victorian TAFEs varies considerably, suggesting some are more encouraging and welcoming of students with disability than others, and may have practices that encourage disclosure.

Promoting belonging and encouraging participation improves access to TAFE.¹¹

Inclusion! If they're going to talk the talk they had better walk the walk!! You can't just claim to be inclusive and equitable and follow anti-discrimination policy and then do the opposite.

Disability Action Plans can play an important role in building institute-wide commitment to inclusion practices, but are rare in the TAFE landscape.

The State Government is developing an Inclusive Education Index. Extending the Index to TAFEs and making the results publically available would build knowledge and confidence in the community about the comparative inclusiveness of different TAFE providers.

Four reasons to let us know you need support:

1. Our support services are free and confidential and available to both enrolled and prospective students
2. You may be eligible for an exemption (you pay nothing) or a concession (you pay a reduced amount) on your course fee
3. You'll get the right support to achieve study success, right from the very start
4. We will respect your privacy

[NSW TAFE website](#)

¹⁰ University of Tasmania (2016), "Supporting students with autism spectrum disorder in higher education", Accessed at: <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Supporting-Students-with-Autism-Spectrum-Disorder-in-Higher-Education.pdf>

¹¹ Lamb et al (2018) "Improving participation and success in VET for disadvantaged learners", Accessed at: https://www.ncver.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0030/2096175/Improving-participation-and-success-in-VET-for-disadvantaged-learners.pdf

Disability inclusion training for key staff - including enrolment staff and course advisers - will influence the way these public-facing roles interface with prospective and current students.¹²

Recommendations: encouraging autism disclosure

11. Provide clear and consistent information across the TAFE Network to build confidence to disclose a student's disability, by promoting the range of services and supports that are available, and protection of privacy.
12. Recognise the barriers to obtaining an autism diagnosis, including for the vulnerable cohorts of autistic girls/women and gender diverse individuals, and offer alternative ways to meet evidence requirements for accessing support.
13. Consider the high likelihood that autistic students have co-occurring conditions that need to be factored into support arrangements
14. Promote a commitment to disability inclusion across the TAFE Network to create a safe environment for students to disclose their condition. Disability Action Plans and expansion of the Inclusive Education Index to TAFEs would help demonstrate this commitment.

TAFE disability support services play a critical role, but need to be well equipped

Disability support staff need to be autism proficient

TAFE Disability Supports Services (or Learning Assess or Equity Services) are the glue in the TAFE system for autistic students. They work with students and their families/carers to identify supports, address challenges and troubleshoot issues as they arise. They work across the Institution to communicate and broker outcomes with teachers/trainers, administrative and transitions staff, and broader student services. They can also provide a bridge linking TAFE with externally provided supports. It is critical that this group of key workers is proficient in autism.

When asked about whether their TAFE Disability Services has helped meet their support needs, responses were mixed:

- Just over a third said yes (34.5%)
- The same amount said no (34.5%)
- Almost 22% said they don't know if their TAFE has Disability/Access Support services – this suggests a lack of information about and poor visibility of Disability Services
- 9% reported having no support needs.¹³

We were pleased to learn that at least one Victorian TAFE has undertaken autism specific training and professional development for their team. This needs to be replicated across the network.

¹² A program for VET Staff Supporting Students with Disability has been developed by the National Disability Co-ordination Officer (NDCO) Program and Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (ADCET). It focuses on promoting awareness about the rights of students with disability, the needs and requirements of students, and responsibilities of registered training organisations.

¹³ We note that this figure should be interpreted with caution. It does not necessarily mean students did not have needs, as it is likely many were not aware of the support that they were entitled to access, and the supports that were available.

Disability Liaison Units need to make themselves known to autistic students

We understand some TAFEs have a practice of contacting students that identify as having disability to proactively discuss their circumstances and potential support needs. NSW TAFE commit that Disability Services will be in touch during the enrolment process for those that disclose their condition. Such an approach needs to be embedded across the Victorian TAFE system, through a positive duty on the Disability Unit to proactively reach out to students who have disclosed.

I disclosed but was told that disability support would contact me, which was incorrect, so I had no support

Autism-specific resources need to be shared

There are a range of autism specific resources that would be helpful for Disability Liaison Units to share with enrolling students. For example, the federally funded National Disability Coordination Officers Program guides on [How to Transition to Tertiary Education - Helpful hints for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder](#) and [NDIS Pre-planning Toolkit for people on the Autism Spectrum entering Higher Education or Vocational Education and Training](#).

Enabling student and family/carer-advocacy is important

When asked “do you have an understanding of what would help you learn at TAFE (e.g. what strategies, supports, or adjustments work for you)” over half (52.5%) replied they have a partial understanding, one-third (32.8%) understood, and 14.8% said they did not have an understanding.

I honestly feel that I don't even have a good understanding of my specific educationally related support needs. After having been to so many different schools/TAFE's and never having completed secondary schooling or a qualification of any kind, I'm almost ready to just to ascribe my educational failings as a personal character flaw.

When asked “are you confident to talk to your TAFE about what you need to help you in your education” the most common answer was no (44.3%), followed by partly (36.1%). Less than one in five (19.7%) reported being confident to discuss their needs. This underscores the need for an environment that enables self-advocacy (see discussion re mentoring in the wellbeing section below).

We heard from families/carers distressed that advocating on behalf of an autistic person in their care was often unwelcome. In an adult learning environment, the expectation is that this responsibility sits with students. For autistic students with low confidence to advocate or limited knowledge of their needs, this can mean the TAFE Institute is unaware of key information. It can also prevent participation:

My son missed out on important excursions to industry settings. If I'd known he had to get to a different location independently of his class, I could have ensured in advance he knew where he was going. Instead he got lost in the city.

Strengthening the capacity of students to advocate on their own behalf, and welcoming the input of family/carer or independent advocates is important.

Autistic students often benefit from assistance with:

- Organising and managing studies
- Balancing studies with other areas of life
- Communicating with others
- Considerations for sensory overload
- Access to assistive technology

NDCO Pre-planning Toolkit for autistic students entering VET

Disability Liaison Staff provide valuable support – but this is not always the case

Survey respondents that received assistance from Disability/Access Support Services rated the following as most helpful: communication of support needs with teachers/trainers; adjustments to assessment methods, timelines or criteria; having an individualised inclusion/learning plan; having a contact person for queries about TAFE processes; transition assistance into and out of TAFE and sensory supports.

The student support staff has regular check ins that I find really valuable, they feel like they genuinely care about my needs.

The TAFE Special Education Department was very adept in dealing with students with ID and autistic students

Met with me and seemed to understand. She tried hard to get teachers to help me.

The best thing (they) can do is to facilitate 'bridge the gap' in communication of an individual's needs to their facilitators.

A common theme was that disability staff are too disconnected from other TAFE staff and processes.

I've told them but they still don't inform my teachers correctly and use outdated terms

Disability liaison officer given a copy of Access Plan but it never reached the teacher

The disability service needs to actually come into class and see if the needs /requirements alleged to have been put in place for the student actually have.

Will be good if Disability Liaison can help with registration. Also can be better if they are able to help liaising with Course Coordinator should the need arises.

...need to give students more help with the admin and just how things work at their institution. Too confusing to battle alone.

Across Victoria's TAFE Network are a range of varied plans and policies related to supports for students with disability. Instead, consistency across the TAFE Network about the base offering or minimum guarantee provided by Disability Services is needed. This could be detailed in a Service Charter.

Adequate resourcing of disability supports at TAFE is needed

Funding for TAFE disability supports primarily comes out of each Institute's Community Service Obligation allocation.

While all TAFE Institutes house Disability (or Access & Equity) services, we have heard resources are stretched. A Disability Liaison Officer we consulted explained at her (multi-campus) institute, there are just two DLOs, which significantly rations the reach and scope of the support they can offer. Another reported there was just one DLO at their Institute, also spread across multiple campuses. These staff are a critical lynchpin for students with disability. Investment in their capacity and capabilities is needed.

Unlike school and university, there is no disability loading attached to student enrolment, which means TAFEs typically need to apportion part of the Community Service Obligation funding they receive for this purpose. Approaches to and investment in inclusion support look very different across the TAFE Network. Historical practices and also current demands for support needs (e.g. enrolment of a student with assisted technology requirements) are influential.

Innovative use of NDIS funds can significantly improve TAFE accessibility. At least one TAFE is a registered NDIA provider, so should be well-equipped to bring TAFE and NDIA supports together. For others, the interface between TAFE and NDIS funded supports is still developing.

Because the NDIS provider is providing in-house support, no support was forthcoming from the TAFE Disability Support Officer.

Our survey revealed that the overwhelming majority of respondents (67.9%) have no support person helping them at TAFE. A small number had a TAFE funded aide (14.3%); NDIS funded support person (10.7%) or privately funded support (7.1%). Some families describe experiencing previous education supports dropping off a cliff when moving into the VET system.

Don't let them say no to an Education Aide if you need one. Be firm. They tried not to give us an Education Aide but we kept advocating for him.

I was asked to leave as I required too much of the teacher's time and the teacher didn't have enough time to spend with the other students. I did not qualify for an aide ...

... living in regional Victoria it is hard to access academic supports that meet the needs of autistic adults.

TAFE provide Education Aide in class only. If he has issues doing assignments he can email subject teacher.

Work education designed for people with disability so no support worker needed

As aspirations and enrolments of people with disability in TAFE continue to grow, alternative funding mechanism need to be explored. Reforms currently underway to the Program for Students with Disability in schools could prove instructive.

Recommendations: Strong Disability Supports and Adequate Funding

15. Require TAFE Disability Support staff to undertake autism-specific training.
16. Develop a network-wide Charter detailing the role of TAFE Disability Support Services. Key elements might include:
 - That staff proactively contact every student who identifies as having a disability, or where it is otherwise apparent, and outline potential supports and services.
 - Providing students with specific resources and guides relevant to their circumstances (e.g. autism specific materials developed by NDCOP).
 - The offer of an Individual Learning/Inclusion Plan to every Student with Disability, which would be updated annually (or more regularly if needed).
 - A guarantee that teachers/trainers will be advised of, and supported to implement, the Individual Learning/Inclusion Plans of those who consent to it being shared.
 - The option of convening a Student Support Group to promote a shared approach between the student and their family/carer, key clinicians/practitioners, disability support workers and teachers/trainers.
 - Connections with NDIS supports, including LAC community capacity building.
 - Provision of ongoing support and advice about navigating TAFE processes and systems.
 - Respect for confidentiality and student control over sharing of their private information.

- Strengthening capabilities of students to self-advocate about their needs at TAFE, and welcoming the contributions of families/carers or independent advocates where students express a desire for this to happen.
17. Ensure adequate and sustained funding for disability supports. Explore alternative funding approaches such as loadings for TAFE students with disability

Educators need to understand how to support the talents and needs of autistic students

Building teacher capability around autism is a critical reform piece. Staff that understand autism and know how to enable autistic students make a huge difference.

It's incredible that this team of teachers have built up my shattered confidence & I'm moving forward thanks to their help.

Autistic students experience with TAFE teachers is varied

Those undertaking specialised courses for students with disability tended to rate their teachers as having strong skills.

They employ great teachers that really understand disability and allowed and really embraced my sons need of a support worker when initially commencing TAFE.

Only the teacher with disability background understood

The staff within the Work Education Department strive to create an inclusive, welcoming atmosphere, which decreases my stress levels and allows me to learn more effectively.

More generally, results about understanding and accommodation of autism by TAFE teachers/trainers were mixed.

- Over 43% of respondents reported none of their teachers demonstrated a good understanding of autism
- 38% said some of their teachers had a good understanding
- Just 17.6% reported all of their teachers had a good understanding.

Overall ratings of teacher support (in the adjacent box) were equally mixed. Just over 20% reported their needs were well met.

One teacher did [understand my support needs]. The rest didn't.

Respondents noted differences between different TAFE Institutes they had attended.

[TAFE 1] have great staff that understand autism but [TAFE 2] were very disappointing and didn't support

Overall, how well did your TAFE teachers/trainers meet your support needs?

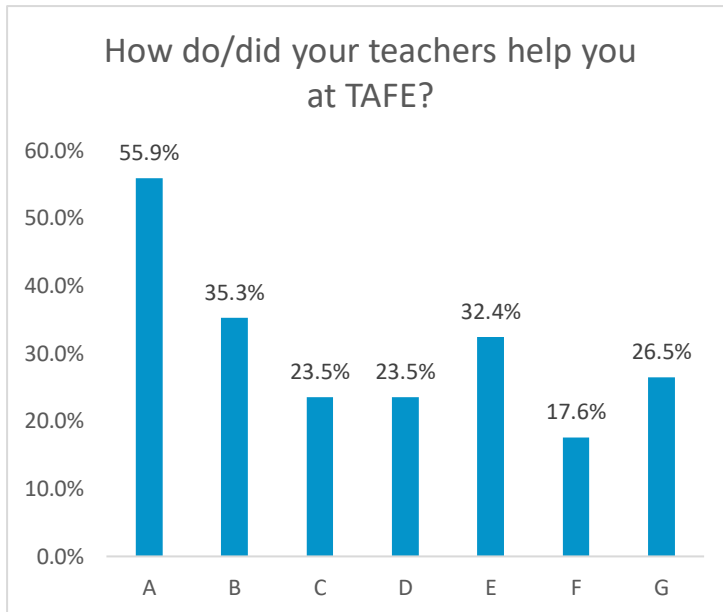
Not at all: 41.5%

Very well: 20.8%

Partly: 37.7%

Victorian TAFE and Autism Survey

For those reporting their TAFE teachers had put measures in place to support their needs, the following were identified as most helpful: adjustments to teaching and assessment (e.g. extra time, assessment modifications); help with organisation and planning; providing a sensory friendly environment; respecting and implementing their individual learning plan; assisting with the challenges of group work and meeting about their support needs.



A	Made adjustments to teaching and assessment (e.g. extra time, assessment modifications)
B	Support with organisation and planning
C	Provided a sensory friendly learning environment (e.g.) my positioning in the classroom; adjusted lighting; permitted me to wear headphones)
D	Respected and implemented my individual learning plan
E	Assisted with group work (e.g. assistance to work through challenges of group work)
F	Participated in meetings with me about supporting my access needs
G	Other

[Teachers] Encouraged and believed in me.

Given me extra time to complete exams as it is hard to manage time in general and do specific subjects I don't particularly like. And it gives me time to re-read a question like 5 times to make sure I haven't skipped a line or misread something because that too easy to do.

Some unhelpful teacher behaviours were also shared:

A common phrase I got was "you will need to learn to adapt to work in the workplace, accommodations will not be made for you"

Teachers said "the information is on the website" when I asked questions, but sometimes I couldn't figure it out. I just needed someone to step me through it occasionally so I was more confident I was on the right track but that didn't happen.

I have asked for help but I don't think my teacher is particularly good at giving it. The way assignments are worded often confuses me.

The precarious working conditions of TAFE trainers was raised as a barrier. This contributes to high churn, limits professional development and undermines responsiveness to individual student circumstances. We imagine workforce security issues will be addressed in the upcoming **Macklin Review**.

It was difficult for my teachers because they seemed to be employed part time at the campus so not around when I was free to give me a little help.

They kept changing teachers each term so I had to go through the whole process of letting them know my needs.

Many teachers in mainstream TAFE courses have not undertaken disability and autism training

Remarkably, the qualification for TAFE teaching (Cert IV in Training and Assessment) does not include a mandatory unit on disability. While an optional unit in inclusive education is available, we are concerned that uptake may be low among those teaching mainstream courses.

With more students with disability, and TAFEs being pivotal to training the disability workforce (which is rapidly expanding with NDIS-generated demand) it is imperative that TAFE staff are disability competent and NDIS literate.

There are courses¹⁴ and materials¹⁵ available to support professional development. We understand some TAFEs have been more committed than others to taking these up.

Undertaking PD in autism education is more common among school teachers. However, even those who have undergone autism training benefit from support to translate theory and policy into practice.¹⁶ Innovative models such as tele-classroom consults¹⁷ enables staff to access real time advice and support that is relevant to the particular circumstances they are facing. Such advice, together with dedicated resources and tools could be delivered to the TAFE workforce through the Autism Education Hub recommended above.

Recommendations: build the autism capability of TAFE teachers

18. Upskill TAFE teachers to support the strengths and needs of autistic students:

- Embed disability inclusion as a core unit of Cert IV in Training & Assessment
- Expand professional development in autism for educators, TAFE support staff and leaders, with annual targets for completions
- Provide access to a future Diverse Learners Education Hub to strengthen the capacity and capability of TAFE educators

¹⁴ A program for VET Educators Supporting Students with Disability developed by the NDCO and ADCET. Swinburne University has a [MOOC](#) to support people living and working with individuals with Autism.

¹⁵ ADCET has published practical resources to support teachers on disability awareness; pedagogical approaches; understanding the needs of diverse cohorts; communication tips; making reasonable adjustments; and sample curricula. Available at: <https://www.adcet.edu.au/students-with-disability/autism-transition/helpful-resources/>

¹⁶ Siggers, B. et al., 2018. *Australian Autism Educational Needs Analysis – What are the needs of schools, parents and students on the autism spectrum? Final Report*, Autism CRC. Available at: <https://www.autismcrc.com.au/sites/default/files/inline-files/Educational%20Needs%20Analysis%20-%20Final%20report%20Version%202.pdf>

¹⁷ Siggers, B. et al, 2019. *Early Years Behaviour Support Program (EYBSP): Application of tele-classroom consulting (TCC) practices to support classroom teachers to meet the challenging and complex needs of students on the autism spectrum in the early years of schooling* Final Report. Brisbane: Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism. Available at: https://www.autismcrc.com.au/sites/default/files/reports/EYBSP_Executive_Summary.pdf

Attention to wellbeing is critical

Mental ill health impacts the majority of autistic people with between 50-70% experiencing co-existing mental health conditions (74% of survey respondents indicated they had a mental health condition). Anxiety and depressive disorders are the most prevalent, particularly among autistic females.

When asked about the impact of TAFE on their wellbeing, almost half of respondents replied in the negative.

I've never actually gotten very far in a TAFE course because I usually have an episode of depression or anxiety related symptoms and completely disengage from the course I'm attempting entirely. I'll turn my phone off and stop answering my e-mails and disappear entirely, I once even moved. I can't reasonably expect a TAFE teacher to be able to cater to that, it just wouldn't be practical for teachers or welfare staff to divert time and resources into encouraging a failing, disengaged student when there are others to teach.

It was a real disaster for me. They tried but effectively it was a terrible experience for me. I went in with high hopes and enthusiasm and after about 7 months I had a mental health condition.

Not far behind was the number of respondents who reported TAFE had a positive impact on their wellbeing:

At times, I can get anxious, however the benefits of being enrolled in a TAFE course, and the associated community around me, have far outweighed any negatives.

... built my confidence that I have strengths. My Secondary School teachers would never think I have the capabilities to study in TAFE.

I gained a bit more confidence travelling to my course on my own and I enjoyed the relaxed environment, which was a lot less stressful than regular school. Plus, it felt good to have animals in the classroom as this was an animal studies course.

Mental health support is needed at TAFE
Being able to access mental health and wellbeing supports through TAFE can make a big difference for student wellbeing and engagement.

We applaud the Victorian Government's roll out of the Mental Health Practitioners in Schools Program. There could be considerable value in expanding this to TAFE. It would build on existing initiatives in some TAFEs (e.g. Box Hill Institute offers free online and in person counselling to its students.

Autism proficiency of these staff would be critical, as would strong links into Disability Support Services.

At the Commonwealth level, we note the Productivity Commission's [Inquiry into Mental Health](#) which made recommendations about the essential role that tertiary and vocational education providers play in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of students.

How would you describe the experience of TAFE on your wellbeing?

- 48.1%: TAFE has/had a negative effect on my mental health and wellbeing
- 44.4 %: TAFE has/had a positive effect on my mental health and wellbeing
- 7.4 %: TAFE has/had no effect on my mental health and wellbeing

Victorian TAFE and Autism Survey 2020

While the wellbeing of all students should be core business for education providers, there is a strong imperative for additional supports, above and beyond those designed for neuro-typical students, to be made available for autistic learners.

Mentoring can improve outcomes learning and wellbeing for autistic students

There is an emerging evidence base around the effectiveness of mentoring for autistic university students,¹⁸ which we believe would translate well into the TAFE environment.

Peer mentor programs can support autistic students to navigate typical challenges such as disclosing their condition, planning and organising their studies, negotiating extensions, navigating on-line learning platforms, and settling into general student life.^{19 20}

A number of universities have established peer mentoring and peer facilitated skills development programs, some of which are backed by resources developed by Curtin University²¹ and the Autism Co-operative Resource Centre.²² The University of Southern Queensland runs [A-Skills](#), a peer-to-peer program for autistic students which provides guidance on topics including university services and processes, communicating at university, advice on assignments, study techniques and time management, self-care, employment and careers, identification and self-advocacy. Australian Catholic University has a mentoring program that was developed by autistic staff and students, and includes both non-autistic and autistic students as mentors who are supported by ongoing training.

Some TAFEs use mentoring strategies for students experiencing disadvantage – a recent Victorian study found these exist in over 60% of higher performing TAFEs.²³ There is a strong case to expand these, and learn from the university sector about establishing autism friendly groups.

Having a strong and visible peer mentoring program within their institution provides proactive individualised support, and can assist students overcome some of the fear and anxiety they may have about disclosure and seeking the general student supports they need...

A mentor is often equivalent to an interpreter for a deaf student in that they help the student leverage their academic strengths to navigate their tertiary education more successfully and in doing so set them up for making a valuable contribution to society in their adult lives.

Mentoring Autism Community of Practice (auspiced by NDCOP) submission to the DSE Review 2020

¹⁸ University of Tasmania (2016) “Supporting students with autism spectrum disorder in higher education”, Accessed at: <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Supporting-Students-with-Autism-Spectrum-Disorder-in-Higher-Education.pdf>

¹⁹ Owen, C., McCann D., Rayner, C., Devereaux, C., Sheehan, F., & L Quarmby (2016) Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Higher Education. Accessed at <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wpcontent/uploads/2016/03/Supporting-Students-with-Autism-Spectrum-Disorder-in-Higher-Education.pdf>

²⁰ Nuske, A., Rillotta, F., Bellon, M., & Richdale, A. (2019). Transition to higher education for students with autism: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. 12(3). Accessed at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000108>

²¹ Siew, CT., Mazzucchelli, T.G., Rooney, R., & Girdler, S. (2017) A specialist peer mentoring program for university students on the autism spectrum: A pilot study. Accessed at <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0180854>

²² Autism CRC Knowledge Centre, *Peer mentoring program for autistic university students* accessed at <https://www.autismcrc.com.au/knowledge-centre/reports/peer-mentoring-program-autistic-university-students>

²³ Lamb et al, (2018) Improving participation and success in VET for disadvantaged learners. Accessed at: https://www.ncver.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0030/2096175/Improving-participation-and-success-in-VET-for-disadvantaged-learners.pdf

Social isolation is a live issue for autistic students

Autistic students are at high risk of experiencing social isolation.²⁴ Our survey showed that almost a quarter (22.6%) of respondents enjoyed the learning but not the social aspects of TAFE. Another quarter of respondents (24.5%) reported not liking TAFE.

Socialising is hard for me anyway and there was no obvious ways to connect with other students or groups. I felt pretty isolated.

Feeling accepted, valued, supported and connected at TAFE is an important protective factor for current and future mental wellbeing.

TAFEs lack the social groups and clubs so prevalent in universities. Autism friendly peer support networks can provide an important connector. The I CAN Network has developed peer networks at a number of TAFEs and universities to connect autistic and neuro-diverse students. Expanding social supports such as peer networks for autistic TAFE students ought to be explored.

Recommendations: promote positive mental health and wellbeing at TAFE

19. Extend the Mental Health Practitioners in Schools program to TAFEs. Ensure staff are proficient in autism and disability, and have strong links with TAFE Disability Support Services.
20. Expand the availability of TAFE based mentoring initiatives, and promote these to autistic students.
21. Establish autism friendly social supports – such as peer support networks - across the TAFE Network.
22. Adopt the Productivity Commission’s recommendations relating to the role of vocational education providers in supporting students’ mental health and wellbeing.

A sensory-supportive environment is important

It is very common for autistic people to experience sensory sensitivity – which can cause hypersensitivity to noise, light, odour, touch or taste. Sensory overload is overwhelming, and poses a significant barrier to participating at TAFE.

Classroom and campuses environments can trigger or support these sensitivities.

...they would not allow me to wear prescription tinted lenses or have earplugs in despite the fact one boy used to listen to music with wireless headphones every lesson.

Making sure the things that help are somewhere that the person needs not where there is a sensory overload

... I was studying at RMIT TAFE in the city, which was very busy and noisy and a bit of a nightmare from a sensory perspective. A quieter campus in the suburbs probably would have been a much more pleasant experience.

Sensory wise the campus is really good for my son, he feels safe and calm when there.

Individual adjustments (e.g. enabling students to wear sunglasses, headphones, or sit in a particular position) and access to indoor and outdoor quiet spaces play an important role in supporting autistic students to achieve sensory regulation.

²⁴ Van Roekel, E. et al., 2010. *Bullying among Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Prevalence and Perception*. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2809311/>

Recommendations: supporting sensory regulation

23. Ensure sensory sensitivities are explicitly considered in the design of accessible learning practices and environments.
24. Provide access to quiet spaces on TAFE campuses to enable students to recharge and regulate.

Work placements and connections with employers are critical to post-training employment

Limited exposure to the world of work puts autistic people at a distinct disadvantage in finding employment after their course when compared to others that have worked a range of student jobs, participated in work experience, work placements and internships.

Autistic students are less likely to work while studying

Many autistic students do not work student jobs: they are less likely to combine study and employment than their neuro-typical peers.²⁵ The Study of Australian School Leavers with Autism (SASLA) revealed a 23 percentage point discrepancy in job seeking (51% in the autistic group compared with 74% otherwise) among post-secondary students. In part, lower rates of job seeking may reflect the challenges some autistic students face in juggling multiple responsibilities.²⁶ Results in the Victorian TAFE and autism survey reflect this.

Results in the Victorian TAFE and autism survey reflect low rates of combining work and study:

- Almost 68% did NOT combine their studies with work (37.3% were studying full time study and 30.5% part-time)
- Just 20.4% reported combining study with employment – half of those were studying part-time

Participation in student work experience and work placements is limited

Autistic students tend to participate in work experience at lower rates. We endorse the recommendation of the recent Shergold Review²⁷ that all senior secondary students with disability have access to work experience and have an individual post-school transition plan in place prior to leaving school. Given the high rate of early school leaving among autistic students, this also needs to be embedded in foundational level courses at TAFE (e.g. VCAL, Cert 1 & Cert 2) which are heavily populated with learners that have not completed school.

Many TAFE courses include work placements, which can be important stepping stones to later employment. However, placements can raise particular issues for autistic students:

²⁵ Flower, RL. Et al., 2020. Brief Report: *What Happens After School? Exploring Post-school Outcomes for a Group of Autistic and Non-autistic Australian Youth Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10803-020-04600-6>

²⁶ Flower, RL. Et al., 2020. Brief Report: *What Happens After School? Exploring Post-school Outcomes for a Group of Autistic and Non-autistic Australian Youth Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10803-020-04600-6>

²⁷ COAG Education Council, 2020. *Looking To The Future, Report Of The Review Of Senior Secondary Pathways Into Work, Further Education and Training*. Available at: <https://uploadstorage.blob.core.windows.net/public-assets/education-au/pathways/Final%20report%20-%202018%20June.pdf>

The struggles with organising a suitable placement as well as my placement experience was negative.

The course I am interested in requires placements and I am not sure I am confident enough to do this.

... weren't considerate with the location of our placement. Monash hospital was too far for me to travel and I experience travel sickness so the disability liaison person tried to advocate to organise something more suitable and closer to home.

Higher rates of post-TAFE employment need to be achieved for autistic students

The stark gap in employment outcomes for autistic people calls for a much stronger transition to employment offering for autistic students at TAFE.

Autistic people need to be positioned to successfully take up current opportunities – including those generated as part of the pandemic recovery response such as expansion of Victoria's Free TAFE initiative, and the federally funded JobMaker Wage Subsidy and JobTrainer programs.

26% of respondents reported TAFE helped (or partially helped) them get a job related to their course.

41% reported TAFE helped (or partially helped) them go onto further study

Victorian TAFE and Autism Survey 2020

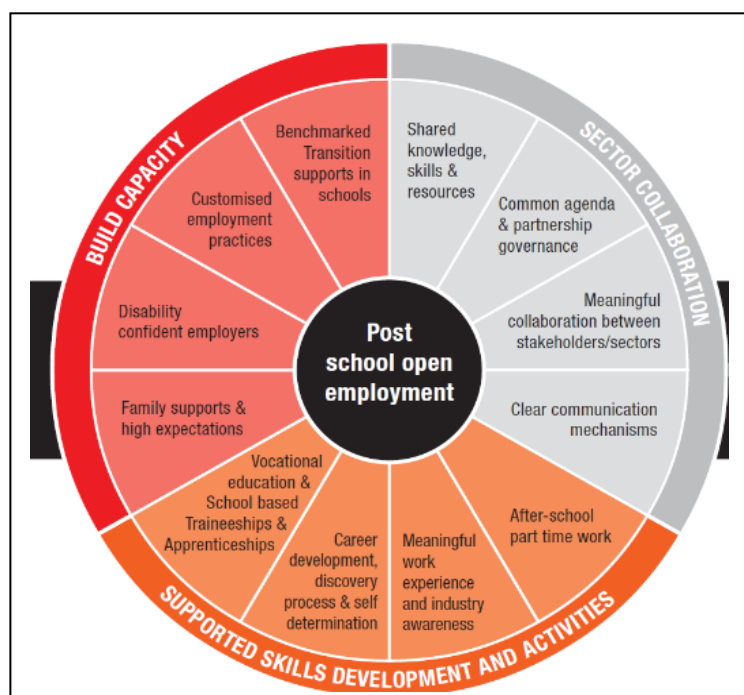
There are a range of existing initiatives that could be expanded or replicated in TAFE²⁸ that could assist.

Ticket to Work deserves to be highlighted. It is demonstrating real success in employment outcomes for young people with disability, including autistic young people in the open about market.²⁹

It provides a holistic approach (see adjacent diagram) including opportunities for work experience, work-based learning and links to disability confident employers.

Reliance on a mix of philanthropic, corporate and state based grants means it has limited reach and long-term sustainability issues.

A recent House of Representatives Inquiry recommended expanding the Ticket to Work initiative.³⁰



²⁸ For example, the [TAFE Specialist Employment Program](#) (TSEP) delivered by UniSpecialist Employment Partners currently has a couple of Victorian TAFE partners. NDCO's industry focussed '[Create your own Future Program](#)' aims to strengthen awareness of volunteering, employment, and further study.

²⁹ Information about Ticket to Work is available at: <https://tickettowork.org.au/>

³⁰ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 2018, Unique individuals, broad skills: Inquiry into school to work transition. Available at:

Amaze recommends this type of offer be available for autistic students at TAFE to facilitate participation in the world of work both during and immediately after this course.

Work-based training is an effective model for autistic people

Job-related vocational education and training (e.g. work experience, internships and traineeships) helps autistic people to gain competitive employment.^{31 32}

Work-based learning is a proven model for autistic people.³³ There are some promising examples of bespoke initiatives that combine in situ vocational training (and other support elements) where autistic people can apply their knowledge and skills in the context of employment. However, these are small scale, few and far between and often IT focussed.³⁴

TAFE could be at the heart of a considerable expansion of work-based learning models, with a strong offering of work placements, traineeships and apprenticeships for autistic students.

There are some innovative and effective approaches to work-based training for people with disability currently running with TAFE partners, for example:

- TAFE Gippsland's training partnership learning with disability support organisation Yooralla to deliver a hospitality program in a training restaurant that is open to the public.
- Holmesglen's employment pathways for horticulture students.

Rather than being exceptional, such models ought to become core business.

Strong pathways to sectors with growing opportunities for people with disability are needed

Significant policy initiatives over the last few years are expanding employment opportunities for people with disability. In particular:

- Public sector employment. Victoria's public sector targets are 6% this year rising to an ambitious 12% by 2025.³⁵ Nationally, there is a 7% employment target for people with disability across the Australian Public Service by 2025.
- Disability sector roles, in part driven by the NDIA and Partners in the Community, which carry 15% employment targets.

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Employment_Education_and_Training/School_to_WorkTransition/Report

³¹ Nye-Lengerman, K. (2017). *Vocational rehabilitation service usage and outcomes for individuals with autism spectrum disorders 41:39-50*. Accessed at: <https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S1750946717300880>

³² Remington, A., and Pellicano, E. (2018). 'Sometimes you just need someone to take a chance on you.' *An internship programme for autistic graduates at Deutsche Bank, UK*. *Journal of Management and Organisation*. Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-management-and-organization/article/sometimes-you-just-need-someone-to-take-a-chance-on-you-an-internship-programme-for-autistic-graduates-at-deutsche-bank-uk/60B2AF606ADA081C93E01EEC41BAE3A9>

³³ Flower, R., et al. (2019). *An alternative pathway to employment for autistic job-seekers: a case study of a training and assessment program targeted to autistic job candidates*. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13636820.2019.1636846>

³⁴ See for example [DXC](#), [Dandelion & Specialisterne](#)

³⁵ Victorian Government, 2018. *Victorian Public Sector Disability Employment Action Plan 2018-2025*. Available at: <https://vpssc.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Getting-to-work.pdf>

- Social procurement requirements attached to Victorian Government funded infrastructure projects are generating opportunities for people with disability, particularly in building and construction related roles.

More generally, Free TAFE is directed at areas of labour market need. Development of strong work-based training pathways in these fields should significantly improve autistic students' employment prospects.

Recommendations: Lifting employment outcomes of autistic TAFE students

25. Embed work experience, vocational exploration and transitions planning into foundational level courses (e.g. VCAL, Certs 1 & 2) in recognition that most participants in these courses are early school leavers who have often missed such support while school. This is consistent with recommendations of the Shergold Review into Senior Secondary Pathways.
26. Provide an enhanced offering of work-based learning modes (e.g. work experience, work placements, traineeships and apprenticeships) and strong transition to work support for autistic TAFE students. Key elements of NDS's Ticket to Work model are instructive.
27. Offer clear pathways to areas of employment growth for people with disability. Support the achievement of public sector targets, social procurement opportunities and jobs in the disability sector.