

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **DISABILITY DOESN'T ALWAYS EXPLAIN EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE**

A new study suggests the poor educational performance of some students with a disability may be due more to educational disadvantage than the direct impact of the disability.

Researchers Tom Karmel and Nhi Nguyen from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research focused their work on outcomes for students in vocational education and training (VET).

The report, *Disability and learning outcomes: How much does the disability really matter?* builds on existing research that shows educational outcomes from VET are relatively poor for students reporting a disability, but there is considerable variability between types of disability.

Co-author Tom Karmel said the study provided pointers to ways in which VET providers, including TAFE institutes and private colleges, could better prepare to assist students with a disability.

He said the significant variation in education performance between types of disability suggested it was not helpful to treat students with a disability as one group.

"For example with disabilities such as hearing/deaf, intellectual, acquired brain impairment and vision, the actual disability explained little, once we took into account other student characteristics such as age, sex, educational background and course studied," Dr Karmel said.

"This suggests that the learning support offered to students in these categories to address their special requirements is probably doing a good job. Any additional support should address non-disability characteristics that may be working against them such as a poor educational background."

Dr Karmel said that for other types of disability—physical disability, mental illness—the actual disability appeared to contribute directly to poor educational performance.

"For this second group of students additional assistance related directly to their disability appears to be precisely what is needed.

"While our research doesn't provide any simple solutions, it does highlight the need for educators to understand the differences between poor performance as a result of a disability and as a result of educational disadvantage.

To download a copy of *Disability and learning outcomes: How much does the disability really matter?*, please visit <http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2017.html>

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