Last week in Melbourne TDA participated in the NCVER VET and Disability Roundtable. The participants engaged in a lively discussion about the benefits of vocational education for people with a disability and the employment and further study opportunities that may result from their engagement. The discussion was sparked by three presentations about VET and disability research projects funded through NCVER.

Cain Polidano, Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (MIAESR) talked about the factors contributing to the lower rate of labour market participation among people with a disability including the impact of low levels of education. ‘The role of vocational education and training in the labour market outcomes of people with disabilities’ looks at the role vocational education and training (VET) plays in ameliorating this barrier. Using data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics of Australia surveys, the report finds that for people who are not working, completing a VET qualification does increase the chance of employment and more so for people with a disability.

Peter Waterhouse, Work Place Learning Initiatives (WLI) presented the findings from What would it take? Employer perspectives on employing people with a disability. Based on a series of focus groups with employers from small-to-medium-sized enterprises, this report describes the attitudes of employers towards hiring a person with a disability. It also sets out some strategies that would assist businesses to take on employees with a disability. A key message from the research is that, even when employers are open to the idea of employing a person with a disability, they often lack confidence that they have the knowledge, understanding and capability to do so.

The third presentation by Annie Venville, LaTrobe University Unfinished business: student life, mental illness and disclosure is a work in progress looking at the issue of disclosure by students with a disability. The chance of a student successfully completing their VET studies may be improved if they get additional support. However, this may call for disclosure of their disability, and some choose not to do so. The study looks at the reasons for non-disclosure and the problems faced by TAFE staff in responding to the needs of students who do not disclose their mental illness.