



Final report

SpinalWorks Phase 3: Transition to new funding arrangements

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This report has been prepared for the NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training by
TAFE NSW Western Sydney Institute-OTEN.



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Executive summary

Overview of 'SpinalWorks Phase 3 Transition to New Funding Arrangements'

Spinal Works is conducted as an embedded component of the larger *Community Participation Project* (CPP) being undertaken by the NSW Motor Accident Authority (MAA) and the Department of Disability Ageing and Home Care. Funded by the NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training (BVET), the *Spinal Works* project was delivered by the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) Disability Programs Unit and the Western Sydney Institute of TAFE, Open Training and Education Network (OTEN.)

Two previous phases of the *SpinalWorks* program have been completed and documented. The report of the 2005 NSW BVET-funded phase of this project is available on the NSW BVET website. The current *SpinalWorks Phase 3* project follows on from, and builds on, this previous project.

In 2006 BVET committed a further \$60,000 to the project to engage a Project Officer to:

- effectively disseminate information about the completed phases of the project
- facilitate future provision of vocational training to spinal injury unit patients until the introduction in July 2006 of the Commonwealth Government *Welfare to Work* and *Skilling Australia* packages and introduction in late 2006 or early 2007 of the NSW Motor Accident Authority *Lifetime Care Package*

The facilitation of provision of vocational training was to encompass:

1. Dissemination of information about the completed phases of the *SpinalWorks* project
2. Research into the implications of the *Lifetime Care Package* for provision of vocational education and training
3. Education of TAFE NSW personnel based on research findings
4. Maintenance of coordination, relationships and interagency linkages

The 22 participants in *Spinal Works Phase 3* project have been again drawn from the Prince of Wales Hospital Spinal Unit, Moorong Spinal Unit within the Royal Rehabilitation Centre located in Ryde and Royal North Shore Hospital.

Project milestones

In consultation with the project Steering Committee milestones were developed for Phase 3 of the project in 2006. These milestones have been achieved. These milestones were:

- Milestone 1: Production of an information sheet for TAFE NSW staff
- Milestone 2: Design of Teacher/Consultant Physical Disability telephone survey
- Milestone 3: Conducting Teacher/Consultant Physical Disability Survey
- Milestone 4: Analysis and reporting on findings
- Milestone 5: Research in response to further information requests from Teacher/Consultants on *Welfare to Work*, *Skilling Australia Workforce Act* and the Lifetime Care Package.
- Milestone 6: Feedback of research findings to Teacher/ Consultants
- Milestone 7: Ongoing and developing *SpinalWorks* coordination
- Milestone 8: Preparation of final report

Issues emerging

1. The project was envisaged to operate as a transition mechanism until the introduction of the *Lifetime Care Package* for motor vehicle injuries in late 2006 to early 2007. The introduction of *Lifetime Care Package* has been delayed until October 1 2007. A gap in provision of coordination and ongoing information dissemination may now occur, as funding for *SpinalWorks* coordination has now been expended.
2. When the Lifetime Care package is introduced in October 2007, there is a risk of a two-tiered system of delivery of VET and other services occurring, as only people who have acquired their injuries in motor vehicles will be eligible to participate. This risk must be managed by TAFE NSW to ensure equitable provision.
3. Individual circumstances mean that individually tailored solutions must be found and a flexible approach maintained. For example:
 - rural people with spinal injury returning home after lengthy stays in rehabilitation units have extra challenges in relation to course availability and meeting Centrelink and other requirements. This impacts on their ability to achieve vocational goals
 - early intervention in regard to vocational education and training is the goal but is not always possible. If the client's priority is physical health, built environment adjustment, pain management or family issues, then pushing the client into the vocational planning and training too early may be counterproductive.

In summary

SpinalWorks has over several years been developed and refined into a highly effective tailored option enabling people with acute spinal injury to engage in vocational education and training options that extend outside rehabilitation units and result in outcomes that reach into the community.

Provision of training to people with spinal injuries will continue beyond *SpinalWorks* Phase 3 using core funding from TAFE NSW. Without the coordination role provided through this project, however, other mechanisms will need to be found to maintain the significant gains made through the 'whole of life whole of government' SpinalWorks approach.

Project details

What is SpinalWorks?

SpinalWorks is an early intervention approach to vocational education and training after traumatic spinal cord injury. It expanded on earlier TAFE NSW projects which have delivered training and support to people who are in spinal acute and rehabilitation units after spinal cord injury.

As detailed in the Executive Summary above, *SpinalWorks* is conducted as an embedded component of the larger *Community Participation Project* (CPP) being undertaken by the NSW Motor Accident Authority (MAA) and the Department of Disability Ageing and Home Care. Funded by the NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training (BVET), the *SpinalWorks* project is delivered by the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) Disability Programs Unit and the Western Sydney Institute of TAFE, Open Training and Education Network (OTEN.)

The current Phase 3 *SpinalWorks* project follows on from, and builds on, the previous phases of the project.

This project has been conducted in tandem with the ongoing TAFE NSW *Spinal Cord Vocational Rehabilitation Project*, in which three TAFE NSW Institutes (Western Sydney Institute OTEN, Northern Sydney Institute and Sydney Institute) have collaborated since 2000 to deliver vocational education and training to clients in spinal acute and rehabilitation units.

A high proportion of *SpinalWorks* participants were initially enrolled in introductory computer and adaptive technology subjects using the TAFE NSW umbrella course Employment Skills - 9422. The Employment Skills course has flexible delivery and includes vocational subjects, adaptive technology assessments and training, teaching and tutoring options and individualised vocational planning. This vocational planning entails making contact with clients when they are in rehabilitation units and maintaining VET involvement after they are discharged and return home to their community. *SpinalWorks* participants move on to a variety of courses and training areas based on individual vocational goals and training needs.

Project governance

The governance arrangements for the *SpinalWorks* project involved a Steering Committee, which met quarterly and comprised representatives from key stakeholder groups including the Disability Programs Unit and Skill Strategy Unit of the NSW Department of Education and Training, Western Sydney Institute Open Training and Education Network (OTEN), and the Lifetime Care and Support Authority. A project management plan was developed to guide the project and endorsed by the Steering

Committee. It was the responsibility of the Project Coordinator to report on the key milestones of the Management Plan at each Steering Committee meeting.

Project outcomes

Phase 3 of the *Spinal Works* project identified four project objectives.

1. Dissemination of information about the Spinal Works project

Information on insights gained and systems established in the Spinal Works pilot project were to be effectively disseminated to TAFE NSW Teacher/Consultants Physical Disability, with the aim of ensuring the uniformity of transitional planning and student placement when returning to the community after spinal cord injury.

This phase of the *SpinalWorks* project involved a state-wide engagement with TAFE NSW Teacher/Consultants Physical Disability, who provide expert support services to students with a physical disability enrolled in TAFE NSW courses.

2. Research into the implications of the Lifetime Care package;

The *Lifetime Care Package* scheme is administered by the *Lifetime Care & Support Authority* (LTCSA), which was established on 1 July 2006. The case management approach adopted provides for whole of life planning with retraining and vocational outcomes a key aspect of long term goal planning.

As stated on the *Motor Accident Authority of New South Wales* website:

The LTCS Scheme was established under the Motor Accidents (Lifetime Care & Support) Act 2006 to provide treatment, rehabilitation and attendant care to people who have been severely injured in a motor accident regardless of who was at fault in the accident. Eligibility for the scheme is determined by the severity of the person's injuries. Most people who are eligible will have a spinal cord injury or moderate to severe brain injury, or in some cases serious burns or amputations.

The scheme will be implemented in two stages: it will apply to children where the accident happens on or after 1 October 2006. It will apply to all severely injured people from 1 October 2007. The scheme will be administered by the Lifetime Care & Support Authority (LTCSA) which began on 1 July 2006. (<http://www.maa.nsw.gov.au/default.aspx?MenuID=249>)

Implications of the Lifetime Care package for VET delivery were to be examined and documented as part of *SpinalWorks Phase 3*. Issues included:

- effect on client demand
- the interface of vocational planning and case management conducted by the MAA with the VET system
- how TAFE NSW can position itself to continue to deliver client services, possibly by tendering as a provider for the MAA

3. Education based on research findings

Feedback and information were to be effectively provided to the TAFE NSW system on the post 2006 framework. The goal was to optimise outcomes for clients through TAFE NSW gaining awareness of the structures and opportunities that will occur in the new environment and by identifying any environmental factors impacting on service provision.

The research undertaken in the *SpinalWorks Phase 3* project identified that there are a range of external issues impacting on people with spinal injury and their interaction with the VET sector and associated service providers. Two recurring issues emerged, however, as the focus of the information requested by Teacher/Consultants. These two issues were *Welfare to Work* legislation and the Motor Accident Authority *Lifetime Care Package*.

4. Maintenance

Interrelationships and linkages established were to be maintained to ensure equity to existing participants, and to provide a link to the post 2006 model for participants who may experience injury during this period. A base co-ordinating presence was to be maintained in the spinal units to achieve this objective.

Project Milestones

The following milestones were developed to achieve the project objectives.

Milestone 1: Production of an information sheet for TAFE NSW staff

An information kit was developed and distributed to relevant TAFE NSW staff working with people with spinal injury informing them of the completed phases of the project and the ongoing aims of the project. (See Appendix 1)

Milestones 2 & 3: Design and conducting of surveys

The aim of these surveys was to access feedback from TAFE NSW Teacher/Consultants Physical Disability and to identify any gaps in knowledge regarding the post 2006 framework for people with spinal injuries.

A set of semi-structured questions were developed to elicit qualitative data. Full-time Teacher/Consultants Physical Disability across NSW TAFE institutes were contacted and asked to participate. The options for response were telephone, email and mail. The key findings and recommendations are based upon the survey results. There was a 57% response rate. (See Appendix 2)

Milestone 4: Analysis and reporting on findings

Data collation and analysis of TAFE NSW Teacher/Consultants Physical Disability responses was completed and a report prepared to feed back findings and provide recommendations to survey participants. (See Appendix 3)

Milestone 5: Research in response to further information requests on *Welfare to Work*, *Skilling Australia Workforce Act* and the *Lifetime Care Package*.

This research and the associated report focussed on the impact of the above policies and programs on the VET sector and on the participation of students with spinal cord injury. (See Appendix 4)

Particular issues emerged for the over 50% of 2006 *SpinalWorks* participants from rural areas. These issues related to meeting the requirements of the above acts and policies and the availability of required courses in rural areas. (See Appendix 5)

Milestone 6 Feedback

Feedback was provided in a number of formats including presentations, hard copy information and sessions at Disability expos.

One of the significant achievements in this area is the ongoing *SpinalWorks* website development. Usage of the website by *SpinalWorks* participants, their service providers and TAFE NSW Teacher/Consultants Physical Disability is steadily increasing. Accessibility is the key factor for *SpinalWorks* participants and the web development focussed on ease of site navigation, specifically for people using head pointers and puff-and-blow switches. As participants may have more than one disability, the needs of people with visual, hearing, psychiatric and cognitive disabilities have also been considered in the website development.

Milestone 7: Ongoing and developing *SpinalWorks* coordination

The *SpinalWorks* project maintained and developed the interrelationships and linkages established to ensure equity to existing participants, and to provide a link to the post 2006 model for participants who may experience injury during this period, with a focus of a base co-ordinating presence to be maintained in the units. This was achieved in Moorong Royal Rehabilitation Centre in Ryde, and the spinal units at Prince of Wales Hospital and North Shore Hospital.

This entailed:

- designing an information sheet for newly injured people in spinal units and provides information on how they can access computer training during their time in the spinal units. The information sheet is soon to be developed into a brochure. (See Appendix 5)
- Spinal Unit coordination in the area of enrolment tracking, training delivery, and adaptive technology assessment and provision
- consistent record keeping in relation to progress and contact records, Individual Education Plans and referral documents
- post discharge coordination including systemic follow-up to enable individually tailored enrolments and liaison with local TAFE NSW Teacher/Consultants following discharge from spinal units

Milestone 8: Preparation of final report

Project findings

Key findings of the *SpinalWorks* Teacher/Consultant survey

The most frequent and consistent key finding was in regard to educational barriers for students living with spinal cord injury. The three significant barriers that were clearly identified by the Teacher/Consultants were:

- access to the built environment (**84%** of respondents)
- transport issues - cost, reliability and access (**75%** of respondents)
- lack of appropriate courses and loss of courses that were appropriate and without financial barriers (**50%** of respondents)

In addressing the above barriers, the most common strategy identified by Teacher/Consultants is to modify attendance requirements, class locations and timetables. It is important to note that the flexible delivery of courses organised by Teacher/Consultants is more often associated with built environment issues, available courses and transport barriers, than with the need for a reasonable adjustment directly related to the individual's physical disability.

The second key finding was in relation to the referral system for the *SpinalWorks* project. There was wide variation in responses by Teacher/Consultants regarding where students were arriving from. The data indicate that Teacher/Consultants and prospective *SpinalWorks* students were utilizing all the available pathways to the project.

Teacher/Consultants indicated that the most important need in the referral of students with spinal injury was for early notification and consultation to provide time for preparation of equipment, transport requirements and personal care assistance.

This requirement was followed in frequency by Teacher/Consultants placing value on a clear Individual Education Plan for the participant and being supplied with the contact details for the participant's supporting professionals.

These findings suggest that Teacher/Consultants are aiming, within their allocated resources, to provide a holistic training environment to students living with a spinal injury. The data demonstrate that TAFE Teacher/Consultants have naturally progressed towards the 'whole of life' service delivery model and have been using innovative techniques to support a holistic training platform within a mainstream VET environment.

This theme of the need for a holistic training environment is reinforced by the response by Teacher/Consultants on their use and impressions of the *SpinalWorks* Information Kit. Forty two per cent of respondents found the Information Kit very useful, 17% of respondents made improvement suggestions. The most frequent improvement suggestions were for information on Personal Care Assistance within the TAFE environment, and information on access to adaptive technology and training.

The recommendations derived from these key findings are:

- The need to systemically address the environmental factors that Teacher/Consultants are identifying as the most significant educational barrier for students living with spinal cord injuries. The information provided by Teacher/Consultants may be disseminated to the existing infrastructure of TAFE Access Committees. The medium term goal should be to bring VET facilities in line with the minimum requirements of the Building Code of Australia and the proposed Disability Discrimination Act Disability Standard on Access to Premises (Premises Standard.)
- Information collated by the *SpinalWorks* project should be made available to other projects exploring pathways in VET for people with physical

disabilities. Teacher/Consultants for Physical Disability could make a useful contribution towards inclusivity at the stage of course design.

- *SpinalWorks* will implement the improvement suggestions that Teacher/Consultants have offered in the survey project. These improvement suggestions include providing further information on personal care assistance in VET environments, and consistently updating information on access to adaptive technology and training. (This recommendation has been implemented.)

Findings from research into the implications of the MAA Lifetime Care Scheme package

The introduction of this package will substantially decrease resource demands on TAFE NSW, as motor vehicle accidents account for approximately 50% of the existing caseload of people with recently acquired spinal injuries.

However, there will be a significant group of students with spinal injury who will not have acquired their injury through a motor vehicle accident. Consequently, it is important that the VET sector embraces the opportunities offered by the Lifetime Care and Support Authority (LTCSA) while minimising the risk of delivering a two-tiered training model.

The LTCSA pilot has demonstrated that it is an effective and holistic best practice model. *SpinalWorks* students who have had access to this pilot program are able to participate in vocational education and employment planning at an earlier stage, and to a much greater extent, than those who have not had access.

Students with spinal injuries who fall outside the pilot project have presented issues with service providers, personal care assistance coordination, homelessness, access to home modifications, access to adaptive technology, transportation and car modification barriers and advocacy skills to link up their requirements in the rehabilitation phase. As many of these issues are critical, vocational education and employment planning have to be moved down the list of priorities for such students.

As the Lifetime Care and Support Authority program for adults will not be launched until October 01 2007, the effect on client demand and the amount of disparity between people who have access to this best practice model and those who do not can only be estimated at this stage. It would be hoped that once the vocational, economic and life quality outcomes of the holistic and 'no fault' approach can be documented, then other sectors may emulate this model to bring equitable outcomes to those with spinal injury from causes other than motor vehicle accidents.

Findings from research into how Welfare to Work and the Skilling Australia's Workforce Act may impact on delivery of VET to people with spinal injuries

The *SpinalWorks* project meets a number of the federal government priorities for people with disabilities in both the *Welfare to Work* and broader *Skilling Australia* reforms.

The *Skilling Australia's Workforce Act* sets participation targets for people with disabilities, and this may have implications for TAFE NSW resourcing of services for students with disabilities.

Welfare to Work presents a changing landscape for people living with spinal injury and the impact of these changes may flow on to TAFE institutes and associated service providers.

For the VET sector, current issues include uncertainty about whether some current course frameworks will meet mutual obligation requirements for Centrelink customers, whether flexible delivery of courses will in some instances exclude people with disabilities from Pension Education Supplement (PES) payments, and how courses will be identified as having a direct employment outcome within a 12 month timeframe.

Since 1 July 2006, people with disabilities seeking a Centrelink payment who are assessed as capable of working 15-29 hours per week have had an obligation and payment reflecting their assumed capacity to work. There is an associated new payment and compliance framework. These people will not receive the Disability Support Pension (DSP). They will receive the Newstart Allowance, and, if assessed as having a partial capacity to work, they may receive a Pensioner Concession Card.

People assessed as not being able to work, or to be retrained for work of at least 15 hours per week within two years, may be eligible for the DSP. For people to receive the DSP they must also have lived in Australia for a total of 10 years as an Australian resident (of which five years need to have been continuous). The Youth Disability Supplement is paid to Youth Allowance recipients with a partial capacity to work. It is also paid to DSP recipients under the age of 21.

For those students with a disability who are in the Newstart allowance category (assessed as capable of working 15-29 hours per week) there are requirements to show that they are actively seeking work in order to remain eligible for a payment.

All of these issues present may impact on students in spinal rehabilitation units seeking to undertake VET programs. The nature of their injuries means that they face added difficulties in complying with requirements to complete courses within a given time. Rural students who return to their home communities after lengthy periods in rehabilitation in Sydney also face a range of added challenges, such as in some cases being deemed ineligible for payment as they are moving from an area of high employment to lower unemployment.

The level of complexity of the reporting requirements for VET providers on mutual obligation compliance means that ongoing education of all TAFE NSW teaching staff needs to occur to support students with spinal injuries in meeting these requirements.

Findings from the maintenance of coordination presence

In 2006 22 people with spinal injuries were case managed through the SpinalWorks coordination program. These people were provided with the required computer and adaptive technology training, advice on pathways, assistance in locating and enrolling in the courses that best met their individual vocational goals and linkages into other relevant support services.

As in previous *SpinalWorks* phases, the TAFE NSW *Employment Skills* course (9422) allowed access to a wide range of vocational subjects as tasters for people who were unsure of their future vocational direction and has provided a pathway into a range of mainstream vocational courses.

Student progress was assisted by the Spinal Works Coordinator who, as in previous phases, undertook a range of duties including:

- coordinating the delivery of vocational courses across the three spinal units in Sydney
- working closely with coordinators from the MAA
- facilitating interagency partnerships
- visiting the rehabilitation units to provide vocational counselling and course advice
- enrolling students in flexible and appropriate learning programs
- liaising with TAFE NSW vocational teachers and teacher consultants
- providing advocacy to ensure students receive equitable treatment and reasonable adjustment
- dispatching learning materials to participants
- procuring and distributing adaptive technology and other project equipment
- supporting clients after discharge from rehabilitation units.

In 2006 the need for increased diversity of course options for people with spinal injuries from rural areas emerged as something of an issue. In 2006 53% of people in the three spinal units were from rural areas. Many of these people were previously employed on agricultural properties and associated businesses. Their family and social networks are firmly in their local areas. *SpinalWorks* has endeavoured to provide training options which ensure that these people return to their localities with relevant and applicable skills. This issue of course diversity for rural areas needs further investigation and work in any future development of the *SpinalWorks* project.

Project Evaluation

Achievements

Phase 3 of the *SpinalWorks* project achieved its project aims and outcomes as outlined in the above report. The project also identified a number of key areas for project improvement.

Twenty-two people with serious spinal injuries were referred to SpinalWorks by the Community Participation Project in 2006 and received case-managed and holistic support to achieve their vocational goals.

The implications of the *Lifetime Care Package* for VET delivery have been examined and documented with a view to developing vocational delivery that is inclusive of all students with spinal injury whether or not they are eligible for assistance through this scheme.

The support and knowledge of Teacher/Consultants for Physical Disability across TAFE NSW Institutes has been a key factor in the outcomes achieved by *SpinalWorks* to date. Phase 3 of *Spinal Works* project is drawing to a close. However, the continued involvement of Teacher/Consultants Physical Disability in remaining engaged and up to date with the *Lifetime Care Package* and other best practice models is a key factor in the future resources available for students with spinal injury.

The *Spinal Works* website <http://www.spinalworks.net.au/> is now being utilised by students in spinal units, teachers and service providers. This resource needs to be maintained and be continually updated, so that it can continue to serve as an important communication and networking tool.

Spinal Works Phase 3 has further developed partnerships with NSW spinal units and their staff, the Lifetime Care and Support Authority, NGO service providers and NSW TAFE teaching sections.

Challenges

Sustainability remains the biggest challenge to the *SpinalWorks* project. The timeframe for the introduction of the adult MAA's *Lifetime Care Package* is now the 1st October 2007. This leaves a coordination gap for people currently receiving support through the project. The coordination gap threatens the provision of consistent service to current students and makes the maintaining of established partnerships and resources more challenging.

There is also the important issue of people with spinal cord injury who will not be eligible for the support provided through the *Lifetime Care Package*.

In conclusion

The *SpinalWorks Phase 3* project has provided real VET outcomes for people with spinal injuries.

TAFE NSW is positioning itself to continue to deliver high quality client services for students with spinal injury and to access the future client benefits of the *Lifetime Care Package*. To succeed in this, all stakeholders need to maintain their currency of knowledge on the development, progress and opportunities presented by the *Lifetime Care Package*.

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Appendix 1: Teacher Consultant Information Kit

SpinalWorks and Vocational Rehabilitation for People with Recent Spinal Injuries Project

Information for Teacher Consultants - Physical

This information kit contains:

1. Introduction
 2. General information on traumatic spinal cord injury (SCI)
 - a) Traumatic SCI in NSW – treatment after injury
 3. TAFE involvement in the spinal units and the SpinalWorks project
 4. Case Studies
 5. Conclusion
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Introduction

SpinalWorks was an early intervention approach to vocational education and training after traumatic spinal cord injury. It expanded on earlier projects which have delivered training and support to people who are in spinal acute and rehabilitation units after spinal cord injury.

In 2006, the Board of Vocational Education and Training (BVET) has provided funding for a project officer to do the following:

- 1) Maintenance of service and coordination to existing and new Community Participation Project (CPP) clients
- 2) Dissemination of information about the SpinalWorks project
- 3) Research into:
 - ✳ project improvements to maximise client integration into vocational education and training (VET)
 - ✳ implications of the Lifetime care package
- 4) Education based on research findings

The underlying objective is to ensure that TAFE is strategically placed to be a frontrunner in the new environment for the provision of early intervention VET to people with spinal cord injury.

To continue improving our service we need your help.

From late May and continuing into April the project officer will be contacting TAFE Teacher Consultants (Physical) to gain insights into current practice and need.

This research is particularly interested in:

- ✳ the referral process
- ✳ co enrolments
- ✳ skills availability and shortfalls

- ✳ potential areas of collaboration
- ✳ attitudes and experiences related to distance learning and e learning
- ✳ highlighting and utilising best practice.

General information on traumatic spinal cord injury

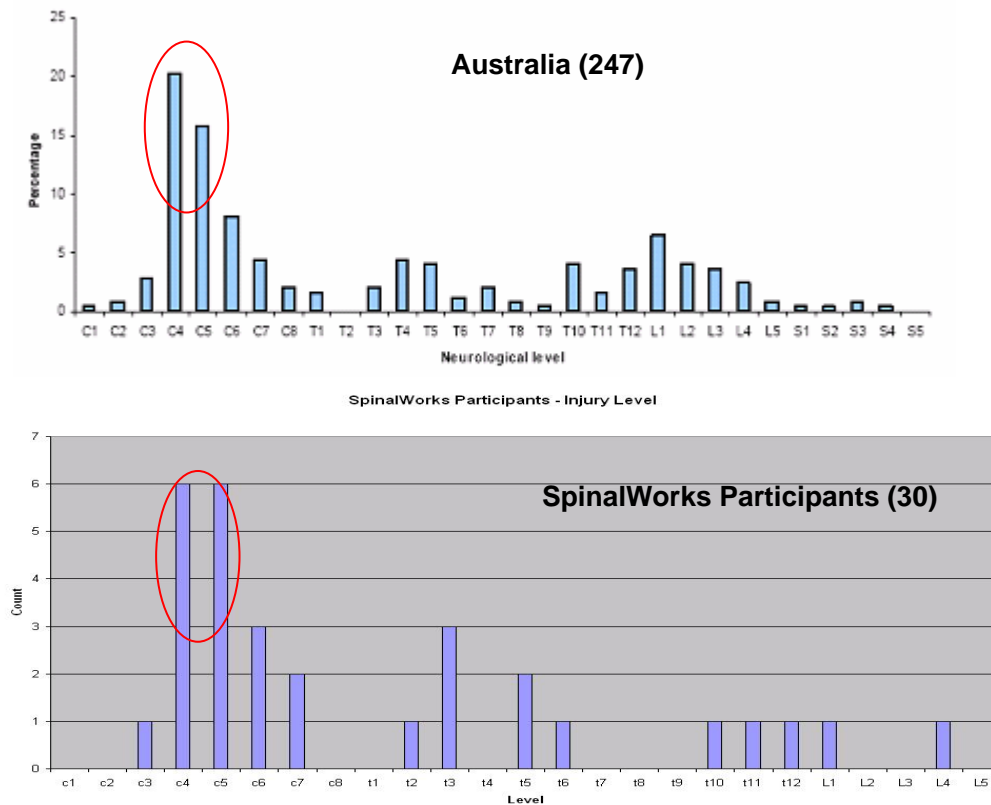
Each year in Australia, there are about 300–400 new cases of SCI to an estimated prevalent SCI population of about 8,500 cases. Based on 1988 cost estimates¹, the ongoing costs associated with the long-term care of the prevalent population of about 8,500 is estimated to be about A\$285 million per year.

About 60 – 65% (>230) of new SCIs cases are acquired from traumatic causes. The main causes are approximately:

- 50% Motor vehicle accident or road use
- 30% Falls
- 10% Water and sports injuries
- 10% Other causes

The following graph shows the distribution of spinal injury from traumatic causes in Australia in 2003-2004². The national distribution closely mirrors that of the SpinalWorks group. This is significant considering that the high number of higher level injuries, as seen in both graphs, has greater needs in terms of technology and assistance.

Figure 1



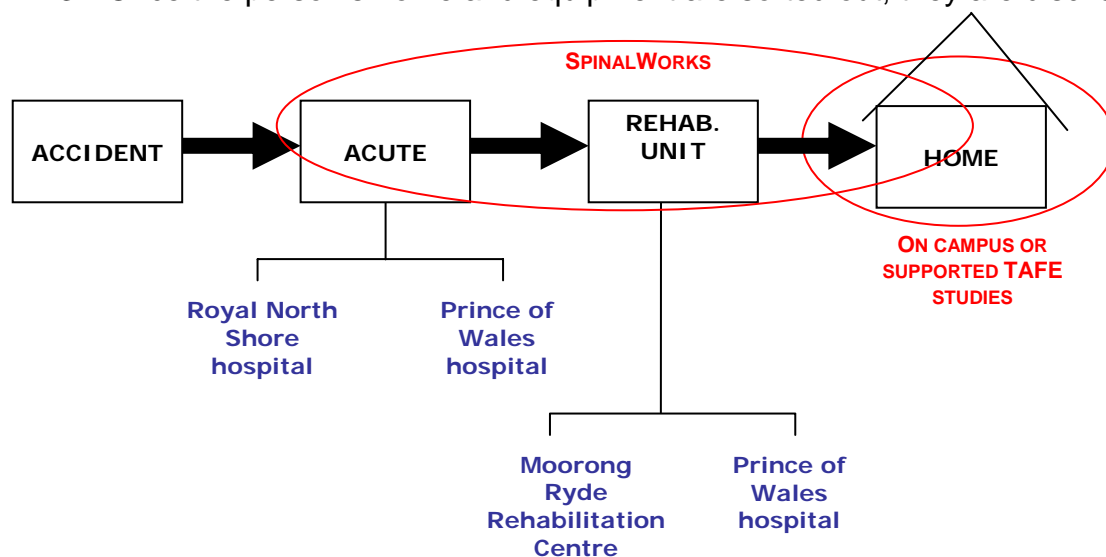
¹ Walsh J 1988. 'Costs of spinal cord injury in Australia'. Paraplegia 26 (6):380–8.

Walsh J & De Ravin J 1995. 'Long term care – disability and ageing. Sydney', The Institute of Actuaries of Australia.

² Cripps, R. 2006, Spinal cord injury, Australia 2003–04, Injury Research and Statistics Series. No. 25

Traumatic SCI in NSW – treatment after injury

1. In NSW when someone has an accident affecting their spinal cord, they are first placed in one of the two spinal acute care units in NSW; either Royal North Shore hospital or Prince of Wales (POW) hospital.
2. Once the person has stabilised, they are then transferred to a rehabilitation unit (Moorong or POW) where physiotherapy and occupational therapy occur. In addition it is during this time that discharge planning occurs. Necessary home modifications, home care and equipment are also organised at this point.
3. Once the person's home and equipment are sorted out, they are discharged.



TAFE involvement in the spinal units and the SpinalWorks project

The spinal unit based teaching initiatives have been in operation for several years. Since 2000 these projects have utilised Australians Working Together and BVET funding to provide vocational education and training opportunities and intensive learning support to over 200 people with spinal injuries.

The goal of SpinalWorks was to assist participants in the transition through VET programs, commencing in the acute rehabilitation phase through to community placement; including career planning and employment transition planning.

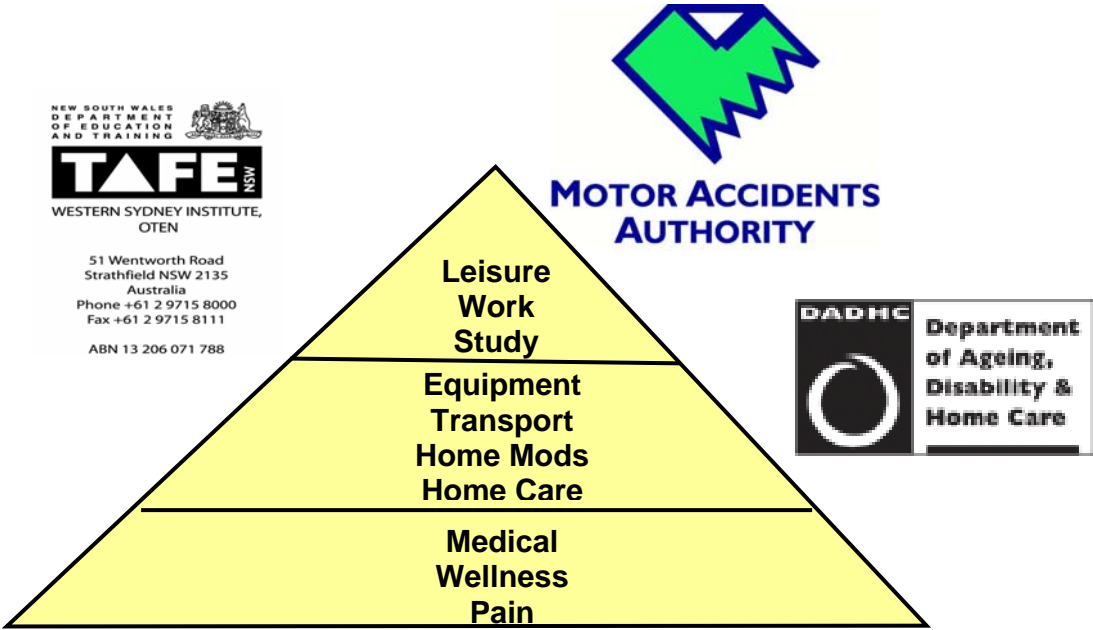
The Community Participation Program (CPP)

SpinalWorks is closely linked to the CPP which is a joint initiative between the Motor Accidents Authority (MAA) and the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care.

The overarching goal of the Community Participation Project is to improve rehabilitation through early intervention and efficient co-

ordination among interagency services working with people with recently acquired spinal cord injuries.

The CPP is also a pilot and precursor to the LifeTime Care and Support Authority which has recently been legislated into existence by NSW State Parliament.



Teaching and learning

Delivery occurs in three TAFE NSW institutes: WSI-OTEN, Sydney and Northern Sydney. Approximately 25 to 30 clients are receiving support and training each week. Over 30 hours face-to-face teaching is delivered each week.

Many of the project participants chose to enrol in distance education courses, which means they can work at their own pace regardless of their location or mobility. A number also co-enrolled at face-to-face colleges.

Coordination

Effective coordination of VET provision to this client group was identified early in the Vocational Rehabilitation Project as an important factor in providing the integrated support which can be critical in successfully readjusting to life after injury.



In 2004 BVET funding allowed the commencement of the SpinalWorks program. A full-time coordinator commenced in December 2004 and was responsible for performing the following duties:

- ✿ coordinating the delivery of vocational courses across the three spinal units in Sydney
- ✿ working closely with coordinators from the MAA
- ✿ facilitating interagency partnerships
- ✿ visiting the rehabilitation units to provide vocational counselling and course advice
- ✿ enrolling students in flexible and appropriate learning programs
- ✿ liaising with TAFE NSW vocational teachers and teacher consultants
- ✿ providing advocacy to ensure students receive equitable treatment and reasonable adjustment
- ✿ dispatching learning materials to participants
- ✿ procuring and distributing adaptive technology and other project equipment
- ✿ supporting clients after discharge from rehabilitation units.

The project also fulfilled formal milestones including:

- ✿ A literature review into the issues impacting the participation in VET training of people experiencing spinal cord injury
- ✿ Development of a designated project website: www.spinalworks.net.au
- ✿ Production of an information pack for clients who are to be discharged from the rehabilitation units

Case Studies

Case Study One

Student X had an accident resulting in complete T9 quadriplegia. He was contacted by an OTEN teacher while he was in an acute spinal hospital unit. He began training in adaptive technologies and computer operation which he had little experience with prior to his accident. During his time in rehabilitation he became competent in both areas and began to explore his vocational retraining options with the coordinator. He made a decision that he would like to retrain but stay in the automotive industry where he had previously been employed. The coordinator made contact with the Teacher Consultant from his nearest campus and after discussion, it was agreed that a co enrolment would be the most appropriate way of enabling a graduated return to face to face study. In practice this meant that in the first semester the student studied 2 subjects by distance through OTEN and one subject face to face on campus at his nearest TAFE.

The teacher consultant's flexibility and use of co enrolment meant that the client is nearly finished a Diploma, after which he hopes to start looking for work in his new field.

Case Study Two

Another client from the farming sector had an L1 injury after a work related accident. After meeting the SpinalWorks coordinator in the rehabilitation unit and discussing training options, he received training in computer operations and office applications useful to running a small business. On return home he was referred to the local Teacher/Consultant Disability and Welding teaching section. He was enrolled and supported in an on-campus Statement of Attainment course in Farm Welding, and has successfully completed a semester. In addition, the coordinator organised a loan computer and Internet account, as well as ongoing computer tuition through the local TAFE Business teaching section.

These computer and welding courses will enable him to broaden his skill-base for working on and managing his farm. Coordination, referral and the involvement of all teaching and support sections when working as part of a team can maximise opportunities for the transition into vocational planning and training after injury.

Case Study Three

When he had his accident, the client was studying at university and was into the fourth year of a five-year double degree in Commerce and Law. He has finished the Commerce component, in Human Resources and Marketing. He was just about to do his fourth year exams when he had his accident, which resulted in C 5-6 complete tetraplegia.

To finish the Law component, he now needs to do another one and a half years of study. He re-enrolled in his degree but owing to the demands of his rehabilitation had to wait until the second semester of this year to restart. Using the Employment Skills 9422 course he enrolled in a MYOB subject to augment his Commerce degree.

This client had a lot of existing computer expertise but during his time in rehabilitation has had to adapt to his changed circumstances, which he did through tuition and use of the project's adaptive technologies and software. In addition, with the assistance of the SpinalWorks coordinator and his teacher, the client successfully applied for a \$5000 scholarship, which allowed him to buy adaptive technologies and study materials for use when he returned home and to his university studies.

The use of the 9422 Employment Skills course meant that a highly motivated student did not lose contact with the study process while waiting to resume his tertiary studies.

Case Study Four

Another client had a high-level SCI as the result of a sport-related accident. Due to unconsciousness at the time of injury it is likely he sustained a brain injury in addition to C6 Quadriplegia. He is not fluent in English, his academic achievement was not to a high level and he appears to have some learning difficulties. Furthermore, he has a young family and struggles financially, which although not directly related to his studies, can have a major impact on both motivation and ability to study.

After consultation with the teacher consultant from his nearest TAFE, it was decided to place him in a supported class. This has provided an environment, where specialist educators are aware of, and able to cater for, his particular needs.

Multiple disabilities and complex needs require a coordinated team-based approach.

Conclusion

1. The right time for intervention

Throughout the project and in the literature the need for allowing for individual differences in the timing of VET interventions has emerged as a key issue. The time frames required to support these clients require long-term relationship building between agencies and flexibility in the practices of the enrolling organisations.

2. Provision of support services across TAFE Institutes

There is a need for a consistent approach across institutes and colleges to ensure equitable access for all. A degree of flexibility and proactivity are also required when accommodating the reasonable adjustments necessary to ensure students with physical disabilities have an equal chance of success in the TAFE system.

3. Co-enrolments

It is recommended that the use of co-enrolments between OTEN and face-to-face TAFE colleges be further developed and utilised as a means of providing flexibility and maximum support for clients during integration into training after injury.



Appendix 2: Teacher Consultant Semi-structured Interviews



Telephone Survey of Teacher Consultants

(Duration -15-20 minutes)

1) Impressions of the project information kit

2) New students: Breakdown of where new students come from
(1 = most to 5 = least)

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3) Exploration of T/C process: What do you do when referred a new student?

- **What service(s) do you typically offer newly referred students**

4) Issue identification:

- **Barriers to successful integration of students in face-to face study**
- **Exploration of strategies used by TCs to circumvent identified issues and TC recommendations for future actions**

5) What would you require when a student is being referred as part of the SpinalWorks project

6) Any other comments you would like to make?

Appendix 3: Teacher Consultant Survey Analysis

Spinal Works – Milestone 4 Report

'Survey of TAFE Teacher / Consultants for Physical Disability'

This phase of the *SpinalWorks* project involved a state-wide engagement with TAFE NSW Teacher/Consultants Physical Disability. Teacher/Consultants Physical Disability provide expert support services to students with a physical disability studying through TAFE NSW.

Milestone 4 of the project includes the provision of feedback on the collated survey information, and consideration future continuous improvements from key survey findings. This contributes to the wider goal of ensuring that information is disseminated regarding the insights gained and systems established in the *SpinalWorks* pilot, with an aim of ensuring the uniformity of transitional planning and student placement when returning to the community after spinal cord injury.

Methodology

The project used a semi structured interview of full-time Teacher/Consultants Physical Disability across TAFE NSW institutes. The options for response were telephone, email or mail. The key findings and recommendations are derived from the survey results.

The survey gathered both qualitative and quantitative data, with nine questions ranging from student referral sources to impressions and expectations of the *SpinalWorks* project. The survey also requested that Teacher/Consultants identify the educational barriers for students living with spinal cord injury. This was further explored by questions seeking information on strategies that were currently in use to circumvent identified barriers, and by requesting Teacher/Consultant recommendations for future actions.

There was a 57% response rate to the survey.

Key Findings

Key findings are based on thematic analysis of the frequency and consistency of responses occurring within the survey. However, several responses were isolated in frequency due to individual needs and geographically specific issues.

The most frequent and consistent key finding emerged in the question regarding educational barriers for students living with spinal cord injury. The three significant barriers that were clearly identified by the Teacher/Consultants are:

- access to the built environment (**84%** of respondents)
- transport Issues - cost, reliability and access (**75%** of respondents)

- lack of appropriate courses and loss of courses that were appropriate and without financial barriers (**50%** of respondents)

In addressing the above barriers the most common strategy identified by survey respondents is to modify attendance requirements, class locations and timetables. The flexible delivery of courses being coordinated by Teacher/Consultants is more often associated with built environment issues, available courses and transport barriers, than with the need for a reasonable adjustment directly related to the individual's physical disability.

The second key finding is in relation to the referral system for the *SpinalWorks* project. The data demonstrates that Teacher/Consultants and prospective *SpinalWorks* students are utilizing all the available pathways to the project.

The most frequent response to the questions on what Teacher/Consultants require when a student is being referred was early notification and consultation to provide time for preparation of equipment, transport requirements, personal care assistance and other adjustment needs.

This requirement was followed in frequency by Teacher/Consultants requesting clear *Individual Education Plans* and the contact details for participants' supporting professionals.

The above findings indicate that Teacher/Consultants are aiming, within their allocated resources, to provide a holistic training environment to students living with a spinal injury. The data suggest that TAFE Teacher/Consultants have naturally progressed towards the 'Whole of Life' service delivery model and are using innovative techniques to support such a holistic training platform within a mainstream VET environment.

Teacher/Consultant awareness of the need for a holistic training environment is again evident in the key finding on Teacher/Consultant use and impressions of the *SpinalWorks Project Information Kit*. While 42% of respondents found the kit informative, 17% of respondents made improvement suggestions. The most frequent improvement suggestions were for information on *Personal Care Assistance* within the TAFE environment, and information on access to adaptive technology and training.

Recommendations

The survey contained scope for Teacher/Consultants to put forward recommendations.

The recommendations derived from the key findings are;

- The need to systemically address the environmental factors that Teacher/Consultants are identifying as the most significant educational barrier for students living with spinal cord injuries. The information provided by Teacher/Consultants may be disseminated to the existing infrastructure of TAFE Access Committees. The medium term goal should be to bring VET

facilities in line with the minimum requirements of the Building Code of Australia and the proposed DDA Disability Standard on Access to Premises (Premises Standard.)

- Offering of information collated from the duration of the *SpinalWorks* project to mainstream projects that involve the exploration of courses and pathways for VET. The inclusion of Teacher/Consultants Physical Disability and all relevant stakeholders in course design projects and process would also be of benefit to students with spinal injuries.
 - *SpinalWorks* project staff to implement the improvement suggestions that Teacher/Consultants have offered in the survey project. These improvement suggestions include providing further information on Personal Care Assistance in VET environments, and consistently updating information on access to adaptive technology and training.
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Appendix 4: Information for Teacher Consultants on impact of policies of other government agencies on service provision to people with spinal injuries

Milestone 5 of the *Spinal Works* project includes the provision for further research and development to enable the systematic transition and reintegration of people from hospital spinal units to vocational training and employment planning. The information below addresses requests for further information by TAFE Teacher/Consultants Physical Disability who participated in the survey associated with this phase of the *SpinalWorks* project.

The information from survey respondents indicated that the *Welfare to Work* policy and the *MAA Lifetime Care Package* present opportunities and challenges in delivering vocational education and training services for people with spinal injury.

Welfare to Work

The *SpinalWorks* project encompasses some of the federal government current priorities for people with disabilities in both the *Welfare to Work* and wider *Skilling Australia* reforms.

However, *Welfare to Work* also presents a changing landscape for people living with spinal injury, and this impact will flow on to TAFE institutes and associated service providers.

For the VET sector issues include whether current course frameworks and delivery modes will meet mutual obligation requirements for Centrelink clients, whether flexible delivery of courses will exclude people with disabilities from *Pension Education Supplement* (PES) payments, and how courses will be identified as having a direct employment outcome within the required 12 month timeframe.

Under *Welfare to Work* legislation people with disabilities applying for welfare who can work part-time will be required to seek part-time work or undertake appropriate training. The federal budget reform package includes an extra 12,300 (\$43 million) vocational education and training places over 3 years. (This is a total population figure and not specific to the disability sector.)

Since 1 July 2006, people with disabilities seeking a Centrelink payment who are assessed as capable of working 15-29 hours per week have had an obligation and payment reflecting their assumed capacity to work. There is an associated new payment and compliance framework. These people will not receive the *Disability Support Pension* (DSP). They will receive the *Newstart Allowance*, and if assessed as having a partial capacity to work, they may also receive a Pensioner Concession Card.

People who are assessed as not being able to work or be retrained to work at least 15 hours per week within two years may be eligible for the DSP. People who are assessed as 'permanently blind' are the exception to the 15 hour cut off and they will be eligible for the DSP. For people to receive the DSP they must also have lived in

Australia for a total of 10 years as an Australian resident, of which five years must be continuous.

The *Youth Disability Supplement* is paid to *Youth Allowance* recipients with a partial capacity to work. It is also paid to *DSP* recipients under the age of 21.

The changes have not to date affected people who were on *DSP* before 10 May 2005.

For those students with a disability who are in the *Newstart* allowance category (i.e. assessed as capable of working 15-29 hours per week), there are requirements to show that they are actively seeking work in order to remain eligible for a payment. These requirements include:

- accepting what Centrelink deems as 'suitable work offers'
- attending all job interviews
- not leaving a job, training course or program without a valid (as deemed by Centrelink) reason and evidence of this reason
- entering into an Activity Agreement and meeting all the terms of the agreement.

If certain participation or activity test requirements are not met, then students with disabilities may have a 'participation failure' recorded against them. This will result in their payment being stopped for a period of time. If the 'participation failure' is not resolved, then an eight week payment suspension will result. The eight week non-payment period cannot be waived.

If people with disabilities who receive the *Newstart* Allowance change address and this change of location results in reducing their prospects of finding work, then Centrelink may suspend their payment for 26 weeks.

If VET students were previously receiving *PES* immediately prior to 1 July 2006 and are continuing the same course and are now receiving *Newstart* Allowance or *Youth Allowance*, under certain circumstances they may continue to receive the *Pensioner Education Supplement*.

At the time of writing there is a lack of clarity about whether *TAFE Statement of Attainment* courses in NSW will now qualify for the *PES*. A number of TAFE Teacher Consultants Physical Disability have reported students being refused *PES* at Centrelink due to changes in what constitutes 'one quarter load of study'. This issue is being investigated by the DET NSW Disability Programs Unit.

Students may be eligible for a one-off *Education Entry Payment* regardless of whether or not they qualify for *PES*. This one-off payment of \$208 is described by Centrelink as assistance with the up-front costs of taking up study.

If students participate in certain activities such as paid work, voluntary work, vocational training (or a combination of these) and cannot use public transport, they may also qualify for the mobility allowance.

MAA Lifetime Care Package

As stated on the *Motor Accident Authority of New South Wales* website:

The LTCS Scheme was established under the Motor Accidents (Lifetime Care & Support) Act 2006 to provide treatment, rehabilitation and attendant care to people who have been severely injured in a motor accident regardless of who was at fault in the accident. Eligibility for the scheme is determined by the severity of the person's injuries. Most people who are eligible will have a spinal cord injury or moderate to severe brain injury, or in some cases serious burns or amputations.

The scheme will be implemented in two stages: it will apply to children where the accident happens on or after 1 October 2006. It will apply to all severely injured people from 1 October 2007. The scheme will be administered by the Lifetime Care & Support Authority (LTCSA) which began on 1 July 2006. (<http://www.maa.nsw.gov.au/default.aspx?MenuID=249>)

The case management provides for whole of life planning with retraining and vocational outcomes a key aspect of the long term goal planning.

The introduction of this package will substantially decrease resource demands on TAFE NSW, as motor vehicle accidents account for approximately 50% of the existing caseload of people with recently acquired spinal injuries.

However, there will be a significant group of students with spinal injury who will not meet the eligibility criteria of LTCSA, and who will not have acquired their injury through a motor vehicle accident. Consequently, it is important that the VET sector embraces the opportunities of LTCSA while minimising the risk of delivering a two-tiered training model.

The LTCSA, as developed and delivered by the *Motor Accidents Authority*, has demonstrated that it is an effective and holistic best practice model. *Spinal Works* students who have had access to this pilot program are able to participate in vocational education and employment planning at an earlier stage, and to a much greater extent, than those who have not.

Students with spinal injuries who fall outside the pilot project have faced issues with service providers, personal care assistance coordination, homelessness, access to home modifications, access to adaptive technology, transportation and car modification barriers and gaining advocacy skills achieve their requirements in the rehabilitation phase. As many of these issues are critical, vocational education and employment planning then tend to be moved down the list of priorities.

As the *Lifetime Care and Support Authority* program for adults will not be launched until October 01 2007, the affect on client demand and the amount of disparity between people who have access to the MAA's best practice model and those who do not can only be estimated at this stage. It is hoped that once the vocational, economic and life quality outcomes can be documented, then other sectors may emulate the MAA's model to bring equitable outcomes to those with spinal injury outside of motor vehicle accidents.

In summary, the issue for TAFE in this significant stage of development is to maintain the interface of vocational planning and case management conducted by the MAA with the VET system. The implications of the *Lifetime Care Package* for VET delivery need to be further examined, documented and disseminated to ensure that clients'

best interests are served and with a view to developing vocational delivery that has inclusive capacity for all students with spinal injury.

TAFE NSW is positioning itself to continue to deliver high quality client services for students with spinal injury and to access the future client benefits of the *Lifetime Care Package*, possibly, for example, by tendering as a provider for the MAA. For these options to continue to be a reality for students with spinal injury, all stakeholders need to maintain their currency of knowledge on the development, progress and opportunities presented by the *Lifetime Care Package*

The support and knowledge of Teacher/Consultants Physical Disability in TAFE NSW Institutes has been a key factor in the outcomes achieved by *Spinal Works* to date. This stage of *Spinal Works* project is drawing to a close. However, the continued involvement of Teacher/Consultants Physical Disability in remaining engaged and up to date with the *Lifetime Care Package* and other holistic best practice models, is a key factor in the future resources available for students with spinal injury.

Resources

Centrelink - Disability Entitlement Information

http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/individuals/iid_index.htm (Accessed 14 November 2006)

Centrelink – Pension Education Supplement

<http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/pes.htm> (Accessed 14 November 2006)

National Welfare Rights Network - Independent Social Security Handbook

http://www.welfarerights.org.au/iss/isssh_nsw.htm (Accessed 14 November 2006)

Motor Accidents Authority – Lifetime Care and Support

<http://www.maa.nsw.gov.au/default.aspx?MenuID=249> (Accessed 14 November 2006)

Response to the 2005/2006 Federal Budget ‘Welfare to Work’ Package
Disability and Participation Alliance

http://www.pwd.org.au/alliance/documents/dpa_policy_response_july05.rtf (Accessed 14 November 2006)

Australian Network of Students with Disabilities – current issues page

<http://www.answd.com/Current-Issues/> (Accessed 14 November 2006)

Women with Disabilities Australia WWDA - Submission to the Australian Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee on the Employment and Workplace Relations

Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work and other Measures) Bill and the Family and Community Services Legislation Amendment (Welfare to Work)
<http://www.wvda.org.au/w2wsen.htm> (Accessed 14 November 2006)

Appendix 5: Spinal Unit Adaptive/ Assistive Technology Information Sheet

TAFE Computer Training

Would you like to learn new or expand existing computer skills?

Do you need to learn new ways of using the computer – for the short or long term?

TAFE offers a training program, specifically for people with a recent spinal cord injury, within the hospital and rehabilitation environment. We have a range of state of the art adaptive technologies and specialist teachers who come to you to teach you, on your own, according to your needs. Regardless of the physical ability you have at this stage and regardless of your previous computer experience we will welcome you into the program. Everyone can use a computer.

With the help of a computer, the internet and adaptive technology everyone CAN....

Read

Newspapers

Magazines

Free ebooks

Ebooks you pay for

Articles on websites according to your interest

Communicate

Communicate with friends using email

Keep friends up to date with a weekly/monthly newsletter

Keep a diary or blog

Write the story of your life/ a short story/ a novel

Speak to people using the “voice over internet” facility. (An emerging technology)

Educate

Learn new or expand existing computer skills

Enrol in a distance education course with TAFE or a university

Research SCI – in all parts of the world

Research new or old interests

Find a recipe to suit your current craving.

Find the encyclopedia, dictionary and Thesaurus that best suits you.

Entertain

Create or download music

Rip your favourite CDs onto your computer and create playlists of just the tracks you like.

Watch DVDs

Write jokes

Create photo albums and slide shows

Relax

Play computer games by yourself / with a friend / over the internet
Solve puzzles
Go surfing (on the net)
Read to and play games with your kids

Access services

Go net shopping for clothes/books/wine/toys
Send your partner some flowers
Visit the supermarket and see your order delivered into your kitchen the next day
Manage your finances with internet banking

Work

Learn new or supplement existing skills for work
Try an online careers questionnaire.
Research training options
Find out about workplace support

Explore

Explore your mind – learn meditation
Explore philosophy – who said/says what about life, the universe and everything...
Explore other parts of the world

Contribute

Chat rooms
Share your knowledge and experience with others
Join special interest groups
Mentor

Computing skills offer something for everyone. Whether for work or leisure, your TAFE teachers can help you to learn new skills that will increase your ability to be truly independent in accessing information and services over the internet.

We promise to take your mind away from hospital routine, and that there will be no pressure and that we'll plan together what you'll learn.

Are you interested? Your Occupational Therapist can arrange for one of the TAFE teachers to visit you in the coming week.

This program is funded by TAFE and is free of charge.

Appendix 6: Project Contacts

Names and details of all people with a significant involvement in this phase of the project, the organisations for which they work and their individual contribution to this phase of the project.

Name	Organisation	Position	Contribution
Sandra Mackay	OTEN - WSI	Manager Equity Support	Project management and budget monitoring Chair <i>SpinalWorks</i> Steering Committee
Graham Agnew	OTEN - WSI	Previous SpinalWorks Coordinator (January to August 2006)	Project coordinator Member <i>SpinalWorks</i> Steering Committee
Maya Verma	OTEN - WSI	Spinal Works Project Coordinator (August to December 2006)	Project coordinator Member <i>SpinalWorks</i> Steering Committee
David King	OTEN - WSI	Teacher/Consultant Physical Disability	Project mentor and teacher in Spinal Units Member <i>SpinalWorks</i> Steering Committee
Merren Dargan	TAFE NSW	Teacher/Consultant Physical Disability	Teacher at Prince of Wales Hospital, Moorong Royal Rehabilitation Centre in Ryde, and North Shore Hospital Spinal Unit.
John Gray	OTEN - WSI	Adaptive Technology Consultant	Website development Spinal Unit Technical Support
Carol Barton	DET	Project Officer Skills Strategy	Attended several <i>Spinal Works</i> Steering Committee Liaison with OTEN SpinalWorks project team on behalf of NSW BVET
Raj Narchal	DET	Senior Project Officer Skills Strategy	<i>Spinal Works</i> Steering Committee member
Julia Shepherd	MAA Lifetime Care and Support Authority	Coordinator	<i>Spinal Works</i> Steering Committee
Maree Marsh	DET Disability Programs Unit	Senior Education Officer	<i>Spinal Works</i> Steering Committee