Equity in **vocational education** and **training**

Research readings

Edited by
Kaye Bowman

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Contents

Contributors

Editor

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Robert Bean has worked in the fields of equity and diversity management for 24 years at state and national levels. He managed the TAFE SA Workplace Education Service (1979–92) and was national business services manager with Language Australia Ltd (1993–95). Since forming Cultural Diversity Services Pty Ltd in 1995, he has worked with over 200 private and public sector organisations.

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Brian Knight is currently manager of Provider and Financial Collections within NCVER, and for almost eight years has worked in a variety of management and research positions with NCVER. In recent years he has worked on a number of strategically important projects relating to VET in Schools data collection and reporting. Before joining NCVER, he was involved for many years in research at the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia. Brian is also a specialist in educational measurement and assessment and has worked on major projects in these areas in South Australia. He has been the principal researcher and analyst on a number of investigations into the relationship between educational outcomes and background variables, in both Australia and the United Kingdom.

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Banduk Marika, the coordinator of Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare, is the daughter of a prominent Yolngu Rirratjingu Clan leader, Mawalan (1) Marika, who taught her to care for her country and to care for the people who reside there. Banduk and her sisters started the Landcare department in the early 1990s as a family extension of the Aboriginal Caring for Country philosophy. Banduk is a world-renowned artist and has won numerous awards for her commitment to Yolngu rights and the protection of Yolngu culture.

Pat Millar was Tasmanian coordinator for the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium 1999–2002. Her research interests include adult literacy and numeracy, vocational education and training, and community development.

Paul Morgan is a senior research analyst at the Western Australian Department of Education and Training. His research interests include data mining, statistical analysis, outcome measures, survey design, data management and research design. He manages the state student survey of current students across the Western Australian VET sector. Recently he has begun investigating how students use information prior to enrolment to determine whether a course is suited to their requirements, the effectiveness of the decisions they make, and how effectiveness affects progression and student outcomes.

Peter Noonan is a consultant in education and training and is a research associate in the Faculty of Education at Monash University. He is a former general manager and acting chief executive officer of ANTA and deputy director general of the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations in Queensland and a general manager of the State Training Board in Victoria. He was responsible for the development of the first two national VET strategies. He developed a revised national adult and community education policy for the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Taskforce and assisted in the Review of Corrections Education in Victoria undertaken by KPMG Consulting.

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Leanne Reinke is a researcher with the Globalism Institute at RMIT University, undertaking project-based research, and is interested in the impact of communication and information technologies in education within Indigenous communities. She has a knowledge of current education policy debates and before joining RMIT University she spent a year working with the Department of Education, Science and Training.

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Veronica Volkoff is the program manager of the RMIT University Post-Compulsory Education and Training Research Centre. In addition to undertaking research, she teaches in postgraduate professional development programs for vocational and adult educators and trainers. Veronica also works as a consultant on international VET reform and development projects funded by AusAID and the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, including in China, India and South Africa. She has had a long-standing research interest in equity in vocational education and training and, in particular, the experience in VET of people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Loukia Zinopoulos has worked in adult education and migrant service delivery for many years. She is currently designing and delivering education programs for adult learners from non-English speaking backgrounds at the Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE.

Overview

Kaye Bowman

This book of readings was developed as a contribution to the Australian National Training Authority's (ANTA) National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2004–2010 (ANTA 2004). It reviews the achievements realised for the equity groups identified in the national strategy for VET 1998–2003 (ANTA 1998), and reveals the issues these groups are currently facing and how they might be addressed. It also considers whether there are other groups who experience disadvantage and the role that vocational education and training (VET) could play to improve their opportunities. Finally, it discusses approaches and frameworks which need to be developed to bring about further improvements in equity in vocational education and training. This chapter introduces the research and discusses important findings and common messages which occur in the various studies.

ONE OF THE YARDSTICKS of the Australian national vocational education and training system is how well it meets the needs of the disadvantaged. Ensuring that the benefits of vocational education and training are available to all people is one of the enduring objectives of the national strategies for VET which have been developed by Australian governments.

For the period 1998–2003, the equity focus in the national strategy for vocational education and training has been on five groups: women, Indigenous Australians, people with a disability, people from a non-English speaking background and those living in rural and remote parts of Australia.

For the period 2004–2010, what should the equity focus be? By commissioning the contributions to this book, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) set out to answer this question on behalf of ANTA.

How well the five designated equity groups have fared over the period 1998–2003 is investigated within the first eight chapters, and suggested areas for future focus and useful ways forward are provided. Suffice it to say here that progress has been positive but uneven.

The six chapters following seek to identify whether there are other people who are genuinely disadvantaged and who should receive attention. We hear much these days about young people at risk of leaving the education system early, and older workers and their need for retraining. Also considered are groups more hidden from view, including older men in small and remote towns of Australia, people with poor language and literacy skills, and people in prisons. The conclusions are mixed: some of these groups are proposed as

equity groups, others are not. Two further chapters take an empirical approach; that is, they start with the available data and seek to come up with groups who appear to suffer 'multiple' disadvantage.

The final chapter discusses ways of thinking about equity. It notes that the VET response to equity in 1998 was based mainly on a strong social justice and compliance approach, and argues that recognising diversity and its management is an alternative approach which needs greater attention in future.

The contributors and their key findings

In this section each of the chapters in the book are introduced. An identification of the key messages to emerge from the readings follows.

In the first chapter, Dumbrell, de Montfort and Finnegan present a statistical analysis of how the five equity groups designated in 1998 have travelled. Their assessment framework goes beyond a consideration of who gets into VET (that is, access and participation issues), which was the predominant benchmark before 1997, to an examination of how well these groups progress through VET to employment and other outcomes. This broader assessment framework was introduced in 1998 and has been used by all contributors to this book. The framework is illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1: Performance framework for VET equity groups

People *not* experiencing barriers in the training cycle		
PARTICIPATION	**PROGRESSION**	**OUTCOMES**
Participates in formal training	Progresses through elected VET studies	Achieves the outcomes sought from training
Does not participate in formal training	Poor progress through elected VET studies	Poor outcomes from training
PRIORITY GROUP		
People experiencing barriers in the training cycle		

Source: Chapter 16: The equity edge: An empirical approach to determining priority groups

The data presented by Dumbrell, de Montfort and Finnegan show that, since 1998, all five designated equity groups have improved their performance in at

least one of the areas of participation, progression and outcomes. Indeed, as of 2003, the authors show that participation is no longer an issue in relation to four of the five designated equity groups. Nor is achieving passes in VET programs an issue for several of the groups. Obtaining positive employment outcomes is the major issue common to all five designated equity groups in 1998. A summary of how well each designated equity group was doing in vocational education and training in 2003 is summarised in table 1.

Table 1: How well each designated equity group was doing in VET by 2003, relative to all students

Equity group	Participation levels	Pass rates	Employment outcomes
Women	Above average	Above average	Good but below for men
Indigenous people	Relatively high	Relatively low	Relatively poor
People with a disability	Relatively low	Relatively low	Relatively poor
People in regional/ rural areas	Relatively high	Relatively high	Relatively good
People from non-English speaking backgrounds	Slightly below average	Slightly below average	Relatively poor

Source: Chapter 1: Equity in VET: An overview of the data for designated equity groups

Chapters 2 to 8 focus on one or another of the five designated equity groups.

Women are considered in chapter 2. Dickie and Fitzgerald of Quay Connection report on several consultations they held throughout Australia during 2002 and 2003. They note that there was general acknowledgement that women now appear to be doing well in vocational education and training. They argue that the VET choices women are making should be supported, rather than seeking to redirect them into new fields of study, industries or occupations. These authors note that barriers to women achieving as good employment outcomes as men are beyond the VET system alone to tackle. Dickie and Fitzgerald recommend that, to improve further women's performance in VET, a 'life-course' perspective be adopted, and appropriate VET information and support be made available at each key decision-making point in women's lives.

In chapter 3, Boughton and Durnan suggest that what is missing for Indigenous Australians is a good understanding of what they want out of vocational education and training and their preferred modes of participation. They argue that, while Indigenous people participate in VET in high numbers, there appears to be no clear idea of their aspirations in relation to vocational education and training and what is required to ensure their success in this sector. Greater Indigenous input into VET research and program design and delivery is strongly advocated. NCVER has taken up this challenge by working with the Australian Indigenous Training Advisory Council to the ANTA Board on an Indigenous VET research strategy.

The points made by Boughton and Durnan are well illustrated in chapter 4 by Marika, Lane, Smith and Reinke who describe how one Indigenous community is developing its own training model and performance indicators which fit with the community's structures, and local conditions and aspirations.

People with a disability are also a group argued as in need of ongoing special attention. In chapter 5 Barnett confirms that this group of people continue to be the most under-represented in vocational education and training and achieve the poorest outcomes from this sector. However, there is room for optimism. The VET system has come a long way over the past five years in terms of developing the needed 'whole of life' approach to supporting people with a disability, and to connecting up services on the ground. Barnett argues that it is at policy level where more needs to be done to coordinate government services program planning and resourcing. Furthermore, Barnett suggests that the available data on people with a disability be segmented to enable an increased understanding of the diverse needs within this group. NCVER has responded to this challenge with the publication, later this year, of a statistical compendium relating to this group.

On the other hand, from an equity perspective people in rural and remote Australia no longer appear to be in need of special attention. The analyses of Dumbrell and colleagues (noted earlier) show that this group is now doing well in vocational education and training as a whole—achieving above-average results in terms of participation, pass rates and employment outcomes. However, location does matter, as Golding and Pattison explain further in chapter 6. These authors suggest that the VET system needs to change its location indicator. Rather than a strict urban-to-rural-continuum location indicator, the sector should be using an accessibility (to services and facilities) indicator. It is likely that this approach would yield a set of truly vulnerable regions in Australia which could be the focus of future equity considerations. Their ideas on regional segmentation to identify regions of opportunity and vulnerability are now being investigated through further research.

Similarly, the VET experiences of people from a non-English speaking background are more mixed than the aggregate data suggest. This is largely because people from non-English speaking backgrounds comprise a very diverse group. As Volkoff explains in chapter 7, this diversity derives from a broad range of variables, many of which impinge on their capacity to undertake VET studies and to gain benefit from them. These variables include country and region of origin, category and experience of migration, length of time in Australia, level of English language proficiency, education and training, employment experience, family and financial circumstances and community networks. Volkoff takes us through these various variables and how they interlink.

Of the variables which can affect the VET experience of people from non-English speaking backgrounds, two stand out as key future considerations. The first is a person's English ability. The second is related to the community and

business networks which are so important for employment outcomes. Lack of opportunity to learn about local work opportunities and cultures is apparent among many from non-English speaking backgrounds. Moreover, as explained in detail by Cheng and Zinopoulos in chapter 8, this group has very low representation in employment-based training opportunities such as New Apprenticeships.

In chapter 9 arguments are advanced by Kilpatrick and Millar for including all adults with poor language, literacy and numeracy skills as an equity group in the VET sector. These authors note that, according to the International Survey of Adult Literacy carried out in the mid-1990s, at least 2.6 million adult Australians (that is, half of all adults) fall into the category of having poor literacy and numeracy skills. However, they warn that identifying this group is difficult, because members of this group themselves often prefer to avoid identification and to remain hidden. The group includes some people from non-English speaking backgrounds, but also others from English speaking backgrounds who left school early and who have not continued with learning. The solution, according to Kilpatrick and Millar, lies in promoting opportunities within the community and within business to enable people to improve their literacies, and for the VET sector to continue to ensure that literacy and numeracy development is built into all vocational learning programs.

In chapter 10, Noonan considers the prison population, which averages 21 600 daily in Australia. He notes that many prisoners have not completed secondary schooling (less than 25%), have limited literacy and numeracy skills, were unemployed prior to their sentence (75%), have substance abuse problems and noticeable intellectual disabilities. Noonan provides evidence from a number of sources that education reduces re-offending rates among prisoners, but that access to any and all forms of education among prisoners is low overall, and differs significantly by state and territory. Noonan does not advocate prisoners being treated like other equity groups in the VET sector; rather, he argues that VET does have a role to play, but within the context of the prisoner's overall sentence-management plan. It should be noted that discussions elsewhere have indicated that not all share Noonan's view. Others argue that education authorities should play a more important role within the prison system.

In chapters 11 and 12 the focus turns to young people, and vocational learning as an equity strategy for this group. Firstly, Teese looks at those who leave school early and the reasons for this, and discusses the role vocational education and training plays in reducing the impact of their early departure from school. Teese explains that there is a gender gap, with more boys than girls leaving school early in Australia, but that there is evidence that at least two in three of early school leavers come to vocational education and training within three years.

Knight follows on from Teese and points out, in chapter 12, that vocational education and training also contributes to retaining more young people at school. Knight discusses the range of vocational learning initiatives which have been recently introduced into schools, and provides the early evidence that these initiatives do keep young people, who otherwise might have left school early, engaged in learning, especially young people living in rural areas.

Our attention is then turned to older people. Cully, in chapter 13, reviews their position in the VET sector and in the labour force, and concludes that older workers are far too heterogeneous a group to be considered 'disadvantaged' as a whole. Older workers include people at the peak of their career as well as some long-term unemployed on social security payments. What his research suggests is that the segment of older workers most 'at risk' are those who find themselves displaced from work.

Building on the older person theme, Golding presents evidence in chapter 14 that it is adult men rather than women who are in need of suitable learning spaces, particularly in small rural towns. Women, notes Golding, have so completely embraced the concept of lifelong learning that they dominate in adult and community education (in a ratio of 4 to 1). Males in small communities are deterred from attending the female-dominated programs and are therefore most at risk of disengagement from learning.

To round out the discussions, the authors of the next two chapters analyse the available data and seek to identify individual characteristics which affect VET experience. John in chapter 15 and Morgan, Chiem and Ambaye in chapter 16, demonstrate that the likelihood of a student having a successful result is significantly reduced if they are Indigenous, have a disability, are from non-English speaking background, have low prior education levels and are not in full-time employment. Moreover, John illustrates that the notion of 'cumulative disadvantage' is real—that a student's likelihood of achieving a successful subject outcome reduces if they belong to more than one designated equity group. In a similar fashion, the likelihood of withdrawing increases if a student is a member of more than one equity group. Regardless of which equity group people belong to, the common element to their disadvantage appears to be their prior education level.

In the final chapter, Bean challenges the conventional equity group approach. Within the VET sector, particularly within technical and further education (TAFE) colleges, it is common practice to use specialist and dedicated staff, supported by designated funding. While this practice has made a clear contribution, this form of 'bolted on' diversity management has serious limitations, and in many cases results in equity objectives not being understood, driven and supported by all staff. There is mounting recognition, argues Bean, that an integrated approach can better address industry and community needs. Bean subsequently offers an integrated framework for diversity management in

the VET sector, one which can be applied to business plans and delivery strategies to 'build in' equity to vocational educational and training and spread the responsibility across all areas of provider organisations.

Key messages

The thorough and detailed analysis of data and presentation of recent research summarised in the chapters of this book enable the identification of a refined set of social groups which deserve attention in vocational education and training.

The material presented suggests that, from 2004, any list of 'equity' groups should include:

- ❖ Indigenous Australians
- ❖ people with a disability
- ❖ people with low proficiency in English (rather than people from a non-English speaking background)
- ❖ people who live in socially and economically vulnerable regions (rather than rural and regional areas)
- ❖ early school leavers and others with poor educational attainment
- ❖ people in correctional institutions
- ❖ women seeking to re-enter the workforce (rather than all women)
- ❖ older workers who have been displaced from the workforce and those at risk of displacement
- ❖ older men in small rural and regional towns/areas.

In addition, it could be useful to explore low socio-economic status as an indicator of likely disadvantage in vocational education and training.

While the target equity group approach of the past five years has generated a great deal of knowledge and understanding of the complexity of the social and economic disadvantage of various groups and has influenced VET policy and provision in positive ways, this approach has shortcomings.

One of the most important points to emerge from the research is that 'whole group' targeting strategies often fail to recognise diversity within groups.

There is no one best way of tackling equity in vocational education and training. Both the equity group approach and the managing diversity approach have their strengths and weaknesses and need to be used in combination. It is particularly important to ensure more effective integration of equity into the core planning, design and delivery of VET programs and thereby to manage the diversity which is a core characteristic of vocational education and training.

While the past approach of funding designated programs to ensure that training providers implement equity and diversity initiatives is vital, the book of readings strongly suggests that the next development challenge involves actually building equity and diversity into every facet of the VET system.

Implementing a diversity management approach will require the following:

❖ leadership from the top of VET institutions

❖ the linking of compliance, organisational development and market factors

❖ the support of, but not 'ownership' of, equity by equity specialists

❖ monitoring of performance to ensure that diversity management delivers full benefits.

To learn more about how providers can improve equity in vocational education and training I point readers to a report by McIntyre et al. (2004) and another by McKenna (2004) undertaken through the Reframing the Future initiative, as well as to this book of readings.

Before concluding, I would also like to highlight what I see as a deficiency of the current approach to equity. To date we have tended to look at the equity performances of the VET sector in isolation from the other education sectors. However, the links between the school and VET sectors are growing, and the flows between VET and higher education are substantial in both directions. In my view it would provide greater policy coherence if we considered equity from the point of view of the individual rather than from each education sector—a cross-sectoral approach makes much more sense (see Karmel & Nguyen [2003] for example). While some authors in this book have attempted this broader perspective, there is room for further work.

In conclusion, no one would argue that equity considerations are not critical to the VET sector. Much progress has been made, but there is still more to be done. I trust that this book of readings will assist the journey.

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Equity in VET

An overview of the data for designated equity groups

Tom Dumbrell, Rowena de Montfort and Wendy Finnegan

This chapter presents an overview on how designated equity target groups have fared in recent years. Through analysis of vocational education and training (VET), economic and social data, it examines performance to determine participation, achievements and employment outcomes by group and sub-group to identify whether the target groups as currently identified are justified in remaining as equity categories.

The five various designated equity groups are found to have fared quite differently in recent years and sub-groups have further diverse experiences in VET and employment.

Women now participate in vocational education and training in reasonable numbers, and achieve better results, such as good pass rates, but they achieve poorer employment outcomes than men. Indigenous people have a relatively high rate of participation in the Australian VET system and have experienced high growth levels in enrolments, especially for males. Despite improved pass rates and employment outcomes, these are still well below those for non-Indigenous students. VET participation by people from non-English speaking backgrounds is slightly below the average, as are pass rates, but it is their employment outcomes that stand out as particularly poor. In recent years there has been a marked increase in participation by women from non-English speaking backgrounds. The level of involvement of people with a disability in VET is lowest of all, as are their pass rates and employment outcomes. Rural and remote people are achieving above-average results in participation, pass rates and employment. However, this is not the case in some areas, suggesting that specific identification of disadvantaged geographical regions is warranted.

Introduction

THE AIM OF this chapter has been to translate the mass of statistical data in the VET system into a clear, big picture which provides an understanding of how the different equity target groups have fared over recent years in relation to each other, and to the general body of VET students, using input,

output and outcome measures.[1] The input VET data used are 'course enrolments'. This includes a diversity of course types, including long and short courses. The other commonly used measure of inputs is student numbers. As well as considering enrolments in total, the impact of New Apprenticeships on the total enrolment pattern is examined.

The position of those in the currently designated disadvantaged groups is complex. The situation facing sub-sets of these five equity groups, such as older age groups or people living in particular regions and those facing multiple disadvantage, can result in particular difficulties. For example, people living in socially disadvantaged regions, Indigenous women, and women with a disability or living in rural or remote locations, achieve lower educational and/ or employment outcomes in general. Looking beyond the current groups, the plight of older workers, prisoners and juvenile offenders also warrants equity policy consideration.

As an opening remark and to set the context, it is useful to consider how well Australia is doing relative to other countries in educational terms. Australia still has a relatively low proportion of its population having attained at least the upper secondary standard of education. In 2001, 59% of the Australian population aged 25 to 64 had reached this level, compared with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 64% (OECD 2002). This is to say that Australia has not achieved unusually high overall education standards.

The current equity groups

In its 1998 publication, *Achieving equitable outcomes* (ANTA 1998a) the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) points to the importance of moving equity policy away from a focus on equity target groups towards a policy on 'managing diversity'. Such an approach recognises that a wide spectrum of needs which defy categorisation into a few target groups exists. Nevertheless, in establishing the national VET system, one of the initial aims was seen to be the correction of the disadvantages suffered by those in the equity target groups. These groups, as identified in the national strategy for VET 1998–2003 (ANTA 1998b), include women, Indigenous people, people from a non-English speaking background, people with a disability and people living in remote and rural Australia.

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[1] In this chapter the terms 'input', 'output' and 'outcome' measures are used in the same sense as used by the Productivity Commission in its annual *Report on government services*. In this report the input measures used are course enrolments and, in the case of apprentices and trainees, commencements; the output measure most commonly used is load pass rates, while the main outcome measures used are employment and unemployment levels and rates.

Women

Participation

Over the period 1997–2001, women's share of VET course enrolments has declined from about 94% of the male level in 1997 to 91% in 2001. However, this needs to be interpreted in the light of females now participating strongly in higher education and senior schooling. The age-specific entry rate for females to higher education in Australia in 1999 stood at 53% compared with 37% for males. While the overall age-specific higher education entry rate for Australia, at 45%, is the same as the United Kingdom and the United States, both those countries have much closer rates for males and females (48/43 and 48/42 respectively) (Productivity Commission 2002). On another measure, in 2000, females represented over 57% of non-overseas commencing students in Australian universities (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs 2001).

There is a distinct age difference in the pattern of male and female enrolments in VET. Females predominate in the older age groups—those over 35 years—while males predominate in the under-35 age group. However, the age group showing the greatest percentage increase in enrolments between 1997 and 2001 was 15 to 19-year-old females.

In 1997 females aged 35 to 44 years had the largest share of female enrolments, comprising one in five of all female enrolments. By 2001, 15 to 19-year-olds had the largest share, comprising one in four of all female enrolments. 'Other recognised courses' had the greatest share of male enrolments in 1997, and 'non-award courses' had the greatest share of female enrolments.

There are also marked differences between the level of study undertaken. Over the last five years males have predominated in course enrolments at the certificate I and III levels, while females have dominated course enrolments at the certificate II level as shown in table 1. When age is added into the equation, males predominate at almost all qualification levels in course enrolments for students aged under 30, with virtually the only exceptions over the 1997–2001 period being in senior secondary enrolments and at the certificate II level. In recent years a former female dominance among younger students in diploma courses appears to have been disappearing. Even at the certificate II level the female dominance at older age groups seems to be disappearing. Of all qualifications, certificate II showed the greatest increase in enrolments between 1997 and 2001, and this is evident across all male and female age groupings, with the exception of 25 to 44-year-old females who showed a marginally larger increase in certificate III enrolments.

Over the period 1997–2001 the number of 'sex not known' course enrolments declined from 49 417 to 4655 due to improved reporting.

Among students aged 35 to 54, females dominate course enrolments at almost every level for each of the five years examined. There appears to be a

trend in these age groups towards this dominance decreasing over the period as the female dominance of certificate II enrolments declined somewhat.

Table 1: Total course enrolments and female course enrolments as a proportion of males, 1997 and 2001

	Female enrolments as % of males[1]		Total enrolments (persons)[2]	
Qualification	1997	2001	1997	2001
Diploma and above	104.7	102.1	210 611	227 203
Certificate IV and equivalent	91.2	100.9	162 270	222 709
Certificate III and equivalent	71.0	81.7	259 916	429 006
Certificate II	116.2	102.4	166 655	434 367
Certificate I	86.1	70.9	76 414	166 292
Senior secondary	150.7	131.9	5 422	3 664
Other recognised courses	84.0	75.4	370 800	223 691
Non-award courses	111.4	99.4	420 606	377 478
Qualification not known	98.6	107.9	171 544	34 794
Total	**94.4**	**91.5**	**1 846 235**	**2 121 205**

Source: NCVER national VET provider data collections.
Notes: 1 Excludes sex not known.
            2 Total includes sex not known.

Apprenticeships and traineeships for women

Over the period 1997–2001 women have increased their share of New Apprenticeship commencements from about 60% of the male level to around 75% in 2001.

The strongest numerical growth in female participation in apprenticeships and traineeships has occurred in the younger age groups. Growth among males in older age groups has been much stronger than for females. In 1997 females dominated commencements in the over-35 age group; however, by 2001 females had a majority only in the 45 to 49 age group.

Outputs and outcomes

There are three sources of data on outputs of the VET sector and resultant outcomes. The output data include module load pass rates (based on hours). The outcomes data include employment outcomes for graduates (completing whole courses); and employment outcomes for those who complete modules only but not whole courses.

Female load pass rates[2] in almost all states and territories (the Northern Territory being the exception) are slightly higher than for males. In 2001 the

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[2] Load pass rate = the ratio of hours attributed to students who passed assessment to all students who were assessed and either passed, failed or withdrew.

respective national figures for females and males were 76.1% and 74.8%. However, given the different course and age profiles of the two groups, it is doubtful that such gross-level comparisons are very meaningful. At the least, any measures of outputs and outcomes for males and females should be on a like-with-like basis.

Table 2:   Apprenticeship and traineeship commencements by age group and sex, 1997 and 2001

	Males	Males	Females	Females	Males	Females
Age	1997	2001	1997	2001	% change 1997–2001	
14 or under	157	450	105	504	186.6	380.0
15–19	39 451	52 405	19 287	37 584	32.8	94.9
20–24	14 853	23 436	8 996	18 182	57.8	102.1
25–29	6 293	13 982	3 508	9 357	122.2	166.7
30–34	3 650	10 671	2 267	7 025	192.4	209.9
35–39	2 561	8 887	2 572	6 952	247.0	170.3
40–44	1 794	7 291	2 680	7 277	306.4	171.5
45–49	1 246	5 559	2 047	5 727	346.1	179.8
50–54	701	4 154	1 182	3 661	492.6	209.7
55–59	329	2 297	405	1 457	598.2	259.8
60–64	93	767	66	253	724.7	283.3
65 or over	4	105	8	32	2 525.0	300.0
Total	**73 129**	**132 005**	**45 120**	**100 012**	**82.8**	**127.3**

Source: NCVER New Apprenticeship collection, September 2002.

The most obvious difference likely to affect such output measures is age. It might be, for example, that older students can make more informed choices about course and, in so doing, could increase their chances of passing. The markedly higher age profile of female students could therefore be one factor contributing to this difference.

Female graduates regularly achieve poorer employment outcomes than males. In 2001, 70% of female graduates from the previous year were employed compared with 77% of males. In 1998 female graduates from the previous year achieved an employment outcome of 68%, indicating little change over recent years. Again however, the different age and course profiles must be considered in judging the meaning of these results. The authors have published a study (Dumbrell, de Montfort & Finnegan 2001) matching males and females by course, and established widely different outcomes in terms of employment and earnings on an industry basis, indicating continuing employment disadvantage operating against women in some industries.

Over the 1997–2001 period, unemployment rates[3] for female graduates were consistently higher than for their male counterparts, although the gap appears to be narrowing. In 1997 the female graduate unemployment rate was about 20% compared with the male rate of 14.5%. By 2001 these rates had declined to 15% and 13% respectively.

Women who complete subjects or modules only, rather than an entire course, also achieve poorer employment outcomes than males completing modules only. Both female graduates and module completers were also more likely to report that their course did not help them to achieve their main reason for undertaking their course. For example, another study by the authors (Dumbrell et al. 2000) showed the reasons that female diploma graduates and module completers gave for undertaking courses were more ambitious or diverse than those of males. For example, women who tended to be focused on entering new fields, rather than advancing in a current job or to be studying for personal reasons, were less likely to achieve their desired outcome.

There is evidence of some shifts in women's participation, module and course completion and employment outcomes. Female dominance in certificate II and diploma courses is disappearing, while women's participation in the 15 to 19 and 35-plus age groups has increased. The issue is why, when women are realising better educational achievements, these are not being translated into employment outcomes or meeting their main reasons for study. This issue is taken up in the chapter specifically on women in VET.

Indigenous people

Participation

Indigenous Australians have a high rate of participation in the Australian VET system. While making up around 2% (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001) of the Australian population, they comprise an estimated 4.1% of total VET students. Indigenous people also experienced high growth levels in course enrolments over the period 1997 to 2001, nearly three times that of the total population (a 42.2% growth, compared with 14.9% for the total population). The number of course enrolments by Indigenous people increased over that period, from about 55 000 to 78 000 enrolments. The increase was more consistent and larger overall for males than for females. By 2001, female Indigenous enrolments as a percentage of male Indigenous enrolments stood at 83%, well below the overall ratio for all male and female enrolments of 91.5%.

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[3] Unemployment rates quoted in this chapter have been calculated by the authors from data supplied by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), using data from the graduate destination surveys and the more recent student outcomes surveys. The rate has been calculated by taking the known number of unemployed from those surveys as a proportion of the total from those surveys known to be in the labour force. The labour force is the total of those employed full time, part time or hours not known, plus those unemployed and seeking work.

While there is a high representation of Indigenous people in vocational education and training relative to their representation in the community, Indigenous people tend to undertake training at the lower qualification levels, as shown in table 4. A greater likelihood of enrolling in short, lower-level courses may partly explain the increase in enrolments for the Indigenous population, as also might the rise in part-time rather than full-time enrolment by this population over this time period. Just over a quarter of course enrolments by Indigenous people over the five-year period were at the certificate III level or above, compared with over 38% for all students.

Table 3: Course enrolments, Indigenous people 1997–2001

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	1998	1999	2000	2001
Student group		All course enrolments					% annual growth		
Indigenous	54 928	62 115	70 457	70 360	78 096	13.1	13.4	-0.1	11.0
Non-Indigenous	1 411 718	1 501 051	1 607 944	1 639 643	1 699 895	6.3	7.1	2.0	3.7
Not known	377 592	373 461	313 832	398 029	341 213	-1.1	-16.0	26.8	-14.3
Total enrolments	1 844 238	1 936 627	1 992 233	2 108 032	2 119 204	5.0	2.9	5.8	0.5

Source: NCVER national VET provider data collections.

Table 4: Enrolment patterns by qualification 1997–2001 aggregated, for Indigenous and all students, percentage

Qualification	Indigenous students %	All students %
Diploma and above	4.8	11.1
Certificate IV and equivalent	6.2	9.6
Certificate III and equivalent	15.1	17.7
Certificate II	23.5	14.3
Certificate I	17.9	7.9
Senior secondary	0.0	1.4
Other recognised courses	12.5	13.4
Non-award courses	12.4	21.4
Qualification not known	7.5	3.2
Total enrolments	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: NCVER national VET provider data collections.

Enrolment growth for Indigenous people has been very strong among those 19 years and under, where enrolments increased by 92.8% between 1997 and 2001. Enrolments for young males more than doubled (105%) between 1997 and 2001, while growth for young females was also strong at 89.6%. While increases occurred across all age groupings, there was a particularly strong percentage growth in course enrolments for males in the 45 to 54 and over-55 age groups (73% and 64% respectively).

Indigenous students are most commonly enrolled in certificate I, II or III courses, with certificate II showing the largest percentage increase in enrolments across all age groups for males and females between 1997 and 2001. Certificate I and II comprised the greater share of enrolments amongst the 15 to 24-year-old age groups. A low proportion of Indigenous males take diploma courses or above, comprising 3 to 6% of males across each age group. The proportion of females taking diploma courses or above was higher for 20 to 54-year-olds than for males, at 6% to 9%, with slight increases in participation occurring between 1997 and 2001.

Between 1999 (when enrolments in 'other recognised courses' and 'qualification not known' fell markedly) and 2001, the proportion of VET course enrolments for Indigenous Australians increased marginally, from 3.5% to 3.7% (70 457 to 78 096). Course enrolments by Indigenous Australians grew by 10.8% between 1999 and 2001, 4.4 percentage points higher than overall growth. Strongest growth levels occurred at the certificate II, I and III levels or equivalent levels (+40.4%, +20.2% and +19.0% respectively—all higher than growth levels for the total population) and other recognised courses (+37.2%). This expansion of training was partly in response to better collection (declining numbers where the qualification level is not known), but reduced enrolment in non-award courses was also significant.

Apprenticeships and traineeships for Indigenous people

There has been a less than 20% increase in the number of Indigenous Australians undertaking apprenticeships and traineeships over the period 1997–2001. This compares to a doubling of the New Apprenticeship population over the same period. Growth over the period has not been consistent, with the increase in 2001 accounting for more than the total growth of the period. The introduction of the Indigenous Employment Program in 1999 might have contributed to this increase, along with state and territory-specific equity programs.

Table 5: Annual growth in commencement of Indigenous apprentices and trainees compared with total apprentices and trainees, percentage

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	1997–2001
Growth in total commencing apprentices and trainees	-	35.6	28.1	5.9	8.5	99.6
Growth in commencements of Indigenous apprentices and trainees	-	-10.5	9.2	1.2	19.8	18.6
Number of commencing apprentices and trainees	114 260	154 920	198 450	210 160	228 010	113 750
Number of commencing Indigenous apprentices and trainees	4 980	4 460	4 870	4 930	5 910	930

Source: NCVER New Apprenticeship collection, September 2002.

In 2001 Indigenous people accounted for 2.6% of all apprentices and trainees. While this figure exceeds the Indigenous share of the population, it should be remembered that the mean age of Indigenous people is lower than the general population. For example, Indigenous people represent more than 3.1% of all Australians aged 15 to 24 years, one of the prime age groups for apprenticeships and traineeships.

Indigenous students who are participating in apprenticeships and traineeships are doing so at lower AQF levels than are all apprentices and trainees. Indigenous apprentices and trainees represent 4.4% of apprentices and trainees undertaking certificate II level courses, but only 1.9% of those studying at the certificate III level.

Table 6: Share of commencing apprentices and trainees by qualification and sex, Indigenous and all apprentices 2001, percentage

	Males	Females	Total
Commencing apprentices and trainees	%	%	%
All			
Certificate II	27.8	33.3	30.1
Certificate III	67.1	56.1	62.3
Certificate IV	5.1	10.4	7.4
Indigenous			
Certificate II	51.8	50.1	51.1
Certificate III	44.9	44.5	44.7
Certificate IV	2.8	5.0	3.7

Source: NCVER New Apprenticeship collection, September 2002.

Outputs and outcomes

While the input measure (course enrolment) for Indigenous students is, at the gross level, quite good and improving over time, output and outcome measures indicate that a range of factors is having negative effects on the capacity of Indigenous people to complete courses. The employment outcome measures indicate continuing disadvantage in the labour market.

Indigenous people continue to experience lower pass rates than do all students. In 2001, the load pass rate for Indigenous students was 61.5%, noticeably lower than the national load pass rate of 75.4%. However, the load pass rate for Indigenous students increased by three percentage points between 1999 and 2001.

Indigenous people also experience poorer outcomes than students in general. In 2001, 62% of Indigenous graduates were in employment, compared with 73% for all students. The gap between Indigenous module completers and all

module completers was even greater, with only 47% of Indigenous module completers employed compared with a figure of 67% for all students. A contributing factor might be their low rate of employment before their course.

Employment outcomes, while showing improvement, are still a long way behind those of non-Indigenous students. Indigenous graduates experience higher unemployment rates than non-Indigenous graduates, although the situation for Indigenous graduates has improved between 1997 and 2001, declining from around 30% in 1997 to 20% in 2001. By contrast, unemployment rates for non-Indigenous graduates declined by only about 3 percentage points from 17% to 14% over that time.

People from a non-English speaking background

Data from the 2001 census show that almost 21% of the Australian population (all ages) speak a language other than English at home. A slightly smaller proportion, about 20%, appears to have been born in a non-English speaking country. People from non-English speaking backgrounds do not appear to be achieving equitable participation in vocational education and training. In 2001, 12% of VET students (170 621) spoke a language other than English at home, and 15% (204 673) were born in a non-English speaking country. The former group has been steadily decreasing, as has their proportional share of the VET population, falling by 10% over the five years ending 2001. On the other hand, the number of students born in a non-English speaking country increased in recent years, but their proportion has remained constant.

Participation

Course enrolments for the two groups illustrate this. The proportion speaking a language other than English at home fell as a proportion of all course enrolments from 13% in 1997 to 10% in 2001, while there was also a small decline in the proportion born in non-English speaking countries.

While the number of course enrolments in the under-19 age bracket increased for both groups, there were significant declines for those aged 20 to 24, 25 to 29 and 30 to 34 who did not speak English at home. However, within the non-English speaking background group, there was an increase in VET participation among older students, especially for those born in non-English speaking countries in the 45 to 54 age group. Approximately half of recent VET participants with non-English speaking backgrounds were undertaking certificate II, III or diploma-level courses. The number of non-award course enrolments for these students declined by almost a third.

While the participation rates in VET for people from a non-English speaking background are below their population share, the overall patterns of course enrolments by qualification level for students from a non-English speaking background match quite closely those of all students in VET, as shown in

table 7. Students from a non-English speaking background are somewhat more likely than all students to be taking courses at the diploma level or above.

Females from a non-English speaking country outnumbered males in course enrolments by almost 20% in 2001, an increase from 1997, when their enrolments exceeded males by about 7%. Females born in non-English speaking countries outnumbered their male counterparts at most qualification levels, being outnumbered only at the diploma and above level and in secondary school VET courses. A similar pattern applied for those speaking a language other than English at home, with total female course enrolments in 2001 exceeding males by about 15%.

Table 7: Enrolment patterns by qualification, 1997–2001 aggregated, non-English speaking background and all students, percentage

Qualification	Language other than English %	Country of birth other than Australia %	All students %
Diploma and above	15.3	15.3	11.1
Certificate IV and equivalent	8.9	9.4	9.6
Certificate III and equivalent	15.3	14.4	17.7
Certificate II	16.6	16.1	14.3
Certificate I	10.3	9.0	7.9
Senior secondary	0.3	0.3	1.4
Other recognised courses	11.7	12.4	13.4
Non-award courses	16.5	18.4	21.4
Qualification not known	5.1	4.8	3.2
Total enrolments	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: NCVER national VET provider data collections.

Apprenticeships and traineeships for people from non-English speaking backgrounds

People from non-English speaking backgrounds have substantially increased their share of New Apprenticeship commencements over the 1997–2001 period. In 1997 those speaking a non-English language at home made up about 4.9% of New Apprenticeship commencements. By 2001 this share had risen to more than 9.1%. A similar trend occurred for those born in a non-English speaking country, increasing their share of commencements from 3.8% to 7.5% of commencements. This increase was more or less evenly shared between males and females. Students from a non-English speaking background have increased their share of apprenticeships and traineeships across courses at the certificate II, III and IV levels at similar rates. Despite this, equity in New Apprenticeships is far from being achieved by people from non-English speaking backgrounds, an issue which is taken up in a later chapter in this book.

Outputs and outcomes

Output and outcome measures for students from a non-English speaking background are poorer than for all VET students. In 2001 those who spoke a language other than English at home achieved a 69.8% pass rate compared with 71.2% for students who were born in a non-English speaking country and 75.4% for all VET students.

Employment outcomes for both groups of students from a non-English speaking background were much lower than for all graduates. About 58% of graduates speaking a non-English language at home, and 52% of those from a non-English speaking country were in employment after graduation, compared with 73% of all graduates. Graduates from a non-English speaking background also experienced considerably higher rates of unemployment than English speaking graduates, although their situation appears to have improved marginally over the 1997–2001 period. In 1997, graduates from a non-English speaking background experienced unemployment rates around 25%. By 2001 this rate had declined a little to about 21%. Over the same period, English speaking graduates' unemployment rates fell from about 14% to about 11%.

Only 57% of module completers not speaking English at home and 55% of module completers born in non-English speaking countries were in employment in 2001 after completing their training, somewhat lower than 67% of all module completers who achieved employment after completion. Graduates and module completers of an ethnic background also reported less satisfaction with their training in terms of helping to achieve their main training objectives.

Overall, it appears that people from non-English speaking backgrounds have relatively lower participation rates and achieve lower pass rates, but more enrol for higher level qualifications. Employment outcomes are also lower, and point to a need for assistance for appropriate choice of courses and help to improve the transition from study to work.

People with a disability

Participation

At the broad level, students with a disability appear to be under-represented in the Australian VET system, although their position appears to be slowly improving. ANTA reports that about 14.4% of the Australian population aged 15 to 64 (in 1998) were regarded as having a disability, while about 4.1% of all VET students (within the ANTA 'scope') were disabled. Moreover, enrolment data suggest that females with a disability are less likely to be engaged in vocational education and training than males with a disability.

Table 8 examines how the number of people with a disability as a proportion of all students has changed over the last five years. It reveals that there has been

an increase over that period from 3.6% of all course enrolments in 1997 to almost 4.2% in 2001.

Table 8: Proportion of enrolments of people with a disability, 1997–2001, percentage

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Students with a disability as % of all	3.6	3.8	4.1	3.8	4.2

Source: NCVER national VET provider data collections.

Over the last five years enrolments of all female students have fallen as a proportion of all male enrolments from 94.4% in 1997 to 91.5% in 2001. While there is a much wider gap between male and female students with a disability, this gap has narrowed slightly over the last five years, as shown in table 9. The trends shown are probably not of sufficient duration to enable conclusions to be drawn about the future, other than that there is a substantial gender gap between male and female students with a disability. The reasons for this gap are not clear from the available data and should be examined further.

Table 9: Females as a proportion of males, students with a disability and all students

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Students with a disability: Female to male ratio	0.81	0.84	0.88	0.87	0.84
All female students to all male students ratio	0.94	0.95	0.93	0.94	0.92

Source: NCVER national VET provider data collections.

Students with a disability are older than the general population of students. Almost 44% of all male students with a disability were aged over 34, while only 33% of all male students were in this group. The comparable figures for females were 48% to 41%, reflecting that female VET students in general are older than male students. This does not necessarily mean that younger disabled are being disadvantaged in gaining access to VET; rather, it might simply reflect that older people are more likely to have acquired a disability. More work needs to be done to understand the true position of various groups of people with disabilities.

Those students with a disability who do enrol in VET courses appear to show a similar pattern of course enrolment to all students. Table 10 compares course enrolments for all students, aggregated over the last five years, compared with students with a disability over the same period. It suggests that, despite the slightly lower proportion of students with a disability in higher-level courses, the differences between them and all students in the level of study undertaken are not significant.

**Table 10: Enrolment patterns by qualification, 1997–2001 aggregated, students with a
disability and all students, percentage**

Qualification	Students with a disability %	All students %
Diploma and above	9.4	11.1
Certificate IV and equivalent	8.0	9.6
Certificate III and equivalent	14.3	17.7
Certificate II	15.0	14.3
Certificate I	12.6	7.9
Senior secondary	0.3	1.4
Other recognised courses	17.0	13.4
Non-award courses	18.2	21.4
Qualification not known	5.2	3.2
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: NCVER national VET provider data collections.

Apprenticeships and traineeships for people with a disability

People with a disability appear to have experienced a declining share of
apprenticeships and traineeships between 1997 and 2001, although early data
suffer from high proportions of records showing disability status as unknown.
In 1997 the proportion of apprentices and trainees with a disability commencing
their course was 2.3% of the total; by 2001 this proportion had fallen below 2%.
Over the five-year period, total commencements grew by almost 114 000;
however, apprentices and trainees with a disability gained only about 1850 of
these additional positions. In 2001, about 4500 of the 228 000 apprentices and
trainees commencing reported a disability.

While the population from which apprentices and trainees is drawn might
be somewhat younger than the general VET population (and hence be less
likely to have a disability), it is apparent that young people with a disability are
probably not participating fully in apprenticeship and traineeship programs.

Outputs and outcomes

Students with a disability record substantially poorer pass rates and employment
outcomes than students in general. Load pass rates for students with a disability
were about 67% compared with 76% for those not reporting a disability. Students
with a disability are more likely to be module completers than whole course
graduates. Graduates and module completers with a disability are more likely than
members of other equity groups to be unemployed after completing their course.
Less than 30% of graduates with a disability were in full-time employment after
graduation, compared with 52% of graduates not reporting a disability. Despite
this, graduates with a disability are more likely to report an employment benefit
from undertaking their VET course, despite being less likely than all graduates to
report some form of employer support while studying. Graduates with a disability
are more likely to undertake further study than those not reporting a disability.

Unemployment rates for people with a disability have changed very little over the 1997–2001 period and are among the worst of all the equity target groups. In 1997 the rate was about 33% and had dropped only marginally to 32% by 2001.

Rural and remote students

Participation

Students from rural and remote areas enjoy relatively high levels of participation in vocational education and training. In 2001 rural and remote students represented nearly 36% of all VET students, despite the total rural and remote population representing only about 28% of the Australian population. Rural and remote regions are defined by NCVER on the basis of the Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Classification (RRMA) and postcode.

Rural and remote students not only participate at a high level, they also undertake study at levels very similar to all students, unlike some other equity groups. Table 11 shows the cumulative distribution of course enrolments over the 1997–2001 period for both rural and remote students and all students. It shows that, while rural and remote students are less likely to undertake courses at the diploma and advanced diploma levels, the overall patterns match closely.

Table 11: Enrolment patterns by qualification, 1997–2001 aggregated, rural and remote, captial and metropolitan and all students, percentage

Qualification	Rural and remote students %	Capital city and other metropolitan students %	All students %
Diploma and above	6.3	13.3	11.1
Certificate IV and equivalent	8.8	10.1	9.6
Certificate III and equivalent	18.2	18.0	17.7
Certificate II	17.7	14.7	15.6
Certificate I	6.9	6.7	6.7
Senior secondary	0.1	0.3	0.2
Other recognised courses	15.8	12.1	13.4
Non-award courses	21.5	20.6	21.4
Qualification not known	4.7	4.2	4.4
Total enrolments	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: NCVER national VET provider data collections.

Rural and remote students are also very similar to the general student body in their age distribution, with about 27% of each group aged under 19, with the next largest group being those in the 35 to 44 group (about 20% of rural/remote students and 18% of all students).

Over the period 1997–2001, women's share of VET course enrolments in rural and remote areas showed a decline of 10 percentage points, from 94% of the male level in 1997 to 84% in 2001. This represents a sharper decline than for all female enrolments, which declined by only 3% over that period. Women's share of all enrolments comprised 48% in 1997, decreasing to 46% in 2001.

Apprenticeships and traineeships in rural and remote areas

As with the general VET population, rural and remote regions provide a relatively high proportion of apprenticeships and traineeships, although these regions' share of New Apprenticeship commencements has fallen from just under 35% in 1997 to about 32% in 2001. About 33% of male and about 31% of female apprentices and trainees were from rural and remote areas. Capital cities are under represented in apprenticeships and traineeships, accounting for about 64% of the Australian population, but less than 59% of New Apprenticeship commencements. The reasons for this are complex, but are in part the result of different labour market and industry structures in metropolitan and rural/remote areas and the availability of non-training wage employment in capital cities. This supports the notion of not recognising this group as a whole as a disadvantaged equity group.

Outputs and outcomes

Output and outcome measures for rural and remote students are also generally comparable with or better than those for the general student body. Rural students enjoy higher load pass rates than all students, although remote students' load pass rates are a little below the general student population. Remote area students enjoy especially high employment outcomes—85% being in employment when surveyed after graduation compared with 73% for all graduates. Rural and remote students also generally showed positive responses to their VET course helping them to achieve their study aims.

Unemployment rates for rural and remote graduates over the 1997–2001 period indicate no significant disadvantage for rural and remote graduates. Over the 1999–2001 period, data for module completers show generally better unemployment rates for students from rural and remote areas than for urban module completers.

Table 12: Unemployment rates, graduates, rural and remote vs urban, percentage

Region	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Urban	17.6	16.1	14.8	13.5	14.1
Rural/remote	17.8	16.6	16.3	12.4	13.8

Source: NCVER national VET provider data collections.

Unlike data on some other categories of disadvantage, data in relation to rural and remote students do not suffer from the problem of forms not having

been filled in. Thus it can be said with some certainty that rural and remote students in general, as currently defined, do not appear to be justified as an equity target group. Nevertheless, very real issues of regional disadvantage do exist in Australia. Moreover, disadvantaged areas can occur in metropolitan as well as non-metropolitan areas. Clearly the postcode approach needs refinement in order to identify more specific locations.

While there is good evidence that rural and remote students in general are not suffering any disadvantage compared with all students, there is substantial evidence that there are very marked regional disadvantages in some parts of Australia. The socio-economic index for areas (SEIFA) of relative socio-economic disadvantage, for example, shows differences between capital cities and between the non-metropolitan areas of the states and territories. Family income levels vary markedly between the capitals (for example, only 11.7% of families in Canberra were classified as low income compared with 21.8% in Adelaide). Reflecting these differences, only 9.3% of workers in Canberra were classified as semi- and unskilled, compared with 17.3% in Adelaide. Unemployment levels vary both within the larger cities and across the rest of the state/territory, reflecting wide differences in education levels, access to employment, language skills and age of leaving school. Many regional areas around Australia record much lower family income levels than the capital cities and frequently record consistently high unemployment levels.

Discussion

Over the last five years the five equity target groups have experienced different levels of success in achieving better performance measures. The group which has achieved the highest levels of success are students from rural and remote regions. These students have achieved high levels of participation in vocational education and training and higher than average pass rates, and have enjoyed high employment outcomes relative to other graduates. They are also over-represented among apprentices and trainees.

However, a more detailed regional analysis is suggested, focused on two issues. First, it would be desirable to undertake an analysis of existing VET data by classifying students, graduates and module completers into regionally disadvantaged regions and comparing their participation, output and outcome measures with those from other regions. If this analysis produced significantly different results for the two groups, then serious consideration should be given to replacing the 'rural and remote' category with a 'regionally disadvantaged' category. As an initial methodology, the index of relative social disadvantage could be used for classifying students before any attempt is made to develop any VET-specific measure. Updated data from the 2001 census should be used for this analysis.

If such an analysis does not produce significant differences between the two groups, and there are no other factors that explain the good results for rural and remote students, it would suggest that the distribution of VET resources and initiatives, such as various remote learning strategies, have been successful in overcoming regional disadvantage within the VET system.

While female participation in vocational education and training is noticeably lower than the male level, it needs to be kept in mind that females now predominate strongly in higher education.

Those females in Australian VET achieve better pass rates than males, but it needs to be acknowledged that females in some of the other equity groups, especially students with a disability, Indigenous and rural and remote, had fewer favourable outcomes than their male counterparts in those groups. On the other hand, females from a non-English speaking background generally achieved better pass rates than non-English speaking background males. These two situations emphasise the need to adopt a more sophisticated approach to identifying women as an equity group and designing equity policy to allow for the identification of sub-groups who, although less numerous than the larger group to which they belong, are likely to contribute disproportionately to that group's overall disadvantage.[4] Equity strategies which address women as an homogenous group are unlikely to succeed in addressing the specific needs of women in these groups. Women generally also continue to experience poorer labour market outcomes than men, in terms of employment, unemployment and earnings. It also needs to be recognised that findings from the Student Outcomes Survey indicate that women in general continue to experience barriers to continuing in vocational education and training. Many women who failed to complete their course report that family responsibilities were the main reason for leaving their course.

Indigenous students on the surface have achieved relatively good levels of participation in vocational education and training over recent years, although among Indigenous students, female participation rates are well below those of males. However, Indigenous students continue to enrol in lower-level courses than non-Indigenous students. Pass rates for Indigenous students have improved over the 1997–2001 period although they are still at low levels.

Unemployment rates for Indigenous graduates are still above non-Indigenous graduates, although the situation has improved noticeably in recent years, possibly partly assisted by specific labour market programs targeted at Indigenous people. Nevertheless, Indigenous graduates are still much less likely than non-Indigenous graduates to be in employment (62% vs 73%). Under existing Commonwealth employment programs, Indigenous Australians also had relatively poor employment outcomes, when compared with other groups.

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[4] In this regard the Equity Data Cube Project, being undertaken by NSW TAFE, provides an example of a method for identifying such sub-groups at the local level.

They experienced the lowest proportion of employment outcomes of Intensive Assistance participants for Job Search Training and Job Matching assistance. However, in programs directed to Indigenous job seekers, employment outcomes were higher. The Indigenous employment programs, STEP and Wage Assistance, achieved employment outcomes of 45% and 69% respectively. This compared with 28% and 26% for the mainstream programs; that is, Intensive Assistance and Job Search Training.

One issue that is clear in relation to Indigenous people is that there are vastly different employment outcomes on an industry-by-industry basis. Indigenous employment is not distributed in the same pattern as total employment in Australia. While this might to some extent reflect the different geographical distribution of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, data from the 2001 census show that the finance and insurance industry, as well as the manufacturing, property and business services, wholesale and retail industries employed relatively low proportions of Indigenous people. These findings suggest that industry-specific programs coordinating formal VET courses and Commonwealth labour market programs, such as the Indigenous Employment Program, might need to be developed to improve the labour market position of Indigenous Australians.

Indigenous people improved their share of commencements in apprenticeships and traineeships over the 1997–2001 period; however, as with vocational education and training in general, their participation is biased towards lower level courses.

The participation of males from a non-English speaking background in VET has risen much more slowly than for females over the 1997–2001 period. In 1997 male students from a non-English speaking background accounted for just over 48% of non-English speaking background course enrolments. By 2001 this share had fallen to about 45.7% of all people from a non-English speaking background enrolling in courses. Female students from a non-English speaking background predominated in course enrolments at all levels other than diploma and above and in secondary school VET. People from non-English speaking backgrounds have improved their share of New Apprenticeship commencements over the 1997–2001 period, but their participation in apprenticeships and traineeships is still below their population share.

Some policy emphasis appears necessary in encouraging more males from a non-English speaking background to enter post-school VET. The success of school-based VET programs in attracting male students might lead to a higher level of participation of male students from a non-English speaking background in post-school VET. Policies aimed at the transition from school to post-school VET participation might be one strategy. In addition, attention needs to be given to encouraging female students from a non-English speaking background to participate at higher qualification levels.

Employment outcomes for people from non-English-speaking backgrounds remain poor and indicate a need for an increased emphasis on providing labour market support for people from non-English speaking backgrounds exiting VET programs. Job seekers of non-English speaking backgrounds accounted for 14.5% of all Commonwealth income support program participants, but only 10.1% of Job Search Training commencements. Different patterns were evident in different programs; however, non-English speaking background people generally achieved better post-program outcomes from Commonwealth Job Matching, Intensive Assistance and Job Search Training programs than other equity groups.

People with a disability continue to experience low levels of participation in vocational education and training, although the 1997–2001 period saw some improvement in this situation. Their pass rates are lower than students not reporting a disability and their employment outcomes are still poor—again roughly equivalent to the outcomes for Indigenous people. There has been little change in their employment outcomes since 1997. People with a disability have also achieved low levels of participation in apprenticeships and traineeships. Equity strategies for people with a disability need to be strengthened to address both low levels of participation and continuing poor employment outcomes. Looking at particular groups of people with a disability could also be a useful approach to take.

Possible other equity groups

It is not clear why there are not several other groups included in the equity target groups. In the paper, *Pathways to work: Preventing and reducing long-term unemployment* (Boston Consulting Group 2001) the argument (echoing the position of the Finn Report of a decade earlier) is advanced that:

> *All young people should have access to education, training and employment opportunities delivering Year 12 completion or its equivalent, as a minimum expectation for making a successful transition from school. This requires particular support for early school-leavers or those facing other disadvantages. It should be recognised that early school-leavers, who in effect forgo government-financed school education, are entitled to government support in accessing alternative options.* (Boston Consulting Group 2001)

Apart from early school leavers, the Boston paper also addresses the issue of long-term unemployment and associates this problem with seven geographic regions (Mersey-Lyell, Tasmania; Southern and Eastern South Australia; Canterbury-Bankstown in Sydney; Loddon-Mallee, Victoria; Central Highlands-Wimmera, Victoria; Wide Bay-Burnett, Queensland and Richmond-Tweed and Mid-North Coast, New South Wales). These regions should be examined in terms of VET performance in any review of the rural and remote target group.

Long-term unemployment is a problem much more closely connected with mature workers than with young people. Along with a consideration of

improved geographical targeting of disadvantaged students, a related analysis of how well the VET system is meeting the needs of older workers should be considered. While the use of apprenticeships and traineeships for retraining adult workers has become an important feature of vocational education and training in recent years, it would be timely to consider whether alternative policies might meet a wider range of needs of this group, especially those already unemployed or facing redundancy, with no prospect of retraining in their current employment. Such an approach implies a closer liaison between Commonwealth-funded labour market programs and vocational education and training than has been the case for some years.

A further group not currently addressed as a VET equity group are prisoners and juvenile offenders. The Productivity Commission (2003) reported that there were about 21 600 persons in detention on average in 2001–02. Almost 20% of the prison population is comprised of Indigenous people. The Productivity Commission, in reporting on adult prisoners, found that about 44% of prisoners were involved in some form of education and training. VET was the most common form of study, with just over 31% of all prisoners involved. Participation in VET by prisoners varied markedly between the states and territories, with Western Australia scoring a high 54% and Queensland the lowest at 16%. Although the Productivity Commission notes that education and training 'is important for successfully re-integrating prisoners into the community, and in reducing the risk of re-offending', it does not provide data on the relationship between participation in education and training and recidivism. It is clear that an extension of VET equity provisions to the prison population and the development of specifically targeted programs would not embrace a large additional number of individuals relative to the current size of the VET population; however, the contribution that such an initiative might make both to reducing recidivism and targeting Indigenous people could well far outweigh its cost.

Separate data on juvenile offenders (about 90% of whom are male) show that Indigenous people comprise an enormously disproportionate share of this population. In 2001–02 the detention rate for young Indigenous people (aged 10 to 17) was about 276 per 100 000, compared with a rate of just 28.6 per 100 000 for all young people aged 10 to 17 in Australia. As with Indigenous initiatives in VET, it is clear that earlier intervention programs are required to make a serious impact on Indigenous detention rates.

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Appendix

The Equity Data Cube Project

The Equity Data Cube project was established in 2000 to develop a set of uniform electronic processes for collecting, comparing and disaggregating equity data for the New South Wales Department of Education and Training and TAFE NSW. The Equity Data Cube was designed as a user-friendly intranet web-based tool to assist equity personnel to report against such national and state initiatives as ANTA's blueprint for vocational education and training, *Bridging pathways* (ANTA 2000a); ANTA's *Partners in a learning culture* (ANTA 2000b); and *TAFE NSW strategic directions for women 2001–2002* (NSW Department of Education and Training 2001).

The Equity Data Cube is stored in the TAFE NSW Data Warehouse which uses a suite of Cognos products, for example Upfront, PowerPlay and Impromptu, to publish data. The Equity Data Cube can be accessed not only via the web (for intranet users only) but also via a desktop or 'client' version. Users are provided with a password and access according to their appropriate user group.

Data in the Equity Data Cube are updated weekly and contain official TAFE NSW statistics. Data can be retrieved from as far back as 1998. Training in the use of the Equity Data Cube has been delivered to each TAFE NSW institute as well as to all state office equity teams and several TAFE NSW divisions. Training has been, and continues to be, conducted at a local level by the Equity Data Cube project officer.

The Equity Data Cube consists of a series of 'dimensions' or fields of detailed data. This information has been taken from the enrolment forms provided by the students on a voluntary basis. Dimensions include course participation, disability group, Aboriginality, gender, language background, award level and whether or not a student has requested assistance. The statistical page containing the equity information is separated from the rest of the enrolment form and is sent to an outsourced company for scanning. This in turn is transferred to the student information system database and then updated to the Equity Data Cube.

Users can navigate their way around the Equity Data Cube by adding filters and/or by drilling up and down through dimensions to extract information for reporting purposes. The Equity Data Cube can, for example, extract such detailed data as the number of Aboriginal women with a physical disability studying in a particular course at a particular campus, whether or not they are employed and the local postcode area where they live. Recently completion rates have also been added to the Equity Data Cube. Data can be presented as text or as graphs or charts and can then be saved as Excel or PDF files.

Using the Equity Data Cube has had the considerable benefit of enabling institutes to respond to the 'compound nature' of disadvantage experienced by students from equity groups. It has also highlighted the need for the continual review of resources and funding associated with support provision. Information obtained from the Equity Data Cube has assisted in planning effective equity strategies at a local level and in developing more streamlined support provision and reporting procedures for this cohort.

Choice, participation, outcomes
Women in VET 2003

Mary Dickie and Ingrid Fitzgerald—Quay Connection[1]

This chapter is based on a consultation report prepared by Quay Connection for the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA). The report drew together the findings from four research and consultation processes undertaken between April 2002 and February 2003 which supported addressing issues for women in vocational education and training (VET) through annual VET planning and reporting processes. The four investigations were:

❖ Women in VET Futures Forum

❖ survey responses from individuals and groups

❖ document review

❖ stakeholder interviews and focus group research.

This chapter is based chiefly on the synthesis section of the Quay Connection report which draws together the key findings from each investigation against a consistent framework.

Women are noted to be doing well in vocational education and training but not achieving as good employment outcomes as their male counterparts. It is recognised that barriers to employment for women cannot be tackled by the VET sector alone. Partnerships with industry and employer organisations might contribute to addressing this issue. The VET sector clearly can influence the image and branding of VET to women—the other key requirement identified to increase participation and improve outcomes—including at key decision-making points through their life cycle. It is suggested that strategies which support and respect the choices women make are more likely to be successful than seeking to redirect them into new fields of study, industries and occupations.

Introduction

TABLE A.1 IN THE appendix to this chapter provides a snapshot of women in vocational education and training. In this context it is noteworthy that women participate well in VET, have higher load pass rates[2] and obtain a higher proportion of qualifications at all levels of the Australian Qualifications

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[1] Extracted by Sarah Hayman from *Choice, participation, outcomes: Women in VET 2003: Consultation report*, prepared by Quay Connection for ANTA with additional information supplied by NCVER.

[2] Load pass rate = ratio of hours of students who passed an assessed module or unit of competency to all students who were assessed and either passed, failed or withdrew.

Framework (AQF) than men. The annual rate of growth in numbers of female students is 6.1% from 1997–2001 compared to 5% for male students (table A.2). However, not as many women are employed after completion of their course or subjects (nor are as many employed before their course). In particular, more women are likely to be employed on a casual basis (in line with labour market trends).

Recent surveys, consultations and research indicated that, while significant gains have been made for women in vocational education and training, most notably in raising levels of participation, much remains to be done. Key issues raised are persistent and complex. They include:

❖ There has been little progress in shifting the distribution of women across fields of study (see also table A.3).

❖ Female graduates continue to achieve poorer employment outcomes than their male counterparts on a range of indicators, including the number of women in management, women's earnings and women's entry into full-time as opposed to part-time employment (see also table A.1).

❖ Women who are also members of other equity groups do considerably less well on all outcomes indicators. This in part is due to more women than men entering VET while not in the labour force.

These issues are as much concerned with women's attitudes and perceptions of VET and working life as they are about structural and institutional obstacles to participation. The issues are further discussed in this chapter.

Initial engagement

Initial engagement with the VET system—whether at school, or in entry-level VET—is a critical juncture for girls and young women. The issues which need to be addressed include barriers to considering vocational education and training as a viable option and the occupational segregation that occurs once girls and young women engage with VET. Key issues impacting on initial engagement with VET include those outlined below.

Awareness and broad cultural issues

Girls and women continue to study and work in a narrow range of occupations. Occupational choices appear to be made very early, and are difficult to change. Perceptions of particular industries and occupations lead girls to make choices that impact on their employment outcomes and participation in VET. Women make choices based on their assessment about the kind of life an occupation is likely to offer; for example, whether it offers the opportunity to achieve work–life balance. However, these perceptions are not always based on accurate information about specific industries.

Vocational education and training continues to be seen as a 'second-class' option and is associated with trades and other occupations not popular among girls and women.

The fields of study in which female and male VET students train have remained relatively unchanged since 1997 (table A.3). Choice of the fields of study of qualifications varies between female and male students (table A.3). In particular, more females train in the fields of business, administration, economics (26.4%) compared with males (12.8%) and health, community services (12.3%) compared with males (5.7%). Conversely, more males train in the fields of engineering, surveying (19.9%) compared with females (2.9%) and land and marine resources, animal husbandry (8.5%) compared with females (2.7%). Both female and male students undertake qualifications in the fields of services, hospitality, transportation and VET multi-field education in similar proportions.

From 1997–2001 there has been an increase in the number of commencements and completions in apprenticeships and traineeships (table A.4). Although the number of female apprentices and trainees is still lower than the number of males, annual growth is larger. The annual rate of growth for female apprentice and trainee commencements is 22.8% per annum, compared with 16.3% for males. There are differences in the occupational outcomes for men and women from their apprenticeships and traineeships. The majority of females who complete their training are in the occupational group, intermediate clerical, sales and service workers (62%), followed by elementary clerical, sales and service workers (11.1%), and tradespersons and related workers (8.7%). Males who complete their training are predominantly in the tradespersons and related workers area (42.9%), followed by intermediate clerical, sales and service workers (16.1%), and labourers and related workers (15.6%).

Quality of information and advice

The quality of information and advice provided to girls is generally poor. Girls continue to be channelled into academic study, whether or not this suits their interests or aptitudes. Key influencers (parents, teachers, careers advisors and peers) steer girls' choices into a narrow range of occupations, often without accurate information about those industries. Parents are particularly influential, and are likely to be poorly informed about VET and about specific occupations and what they offer to women.

The information and choices on offer to girls are not fully representative of the range of VET offerings, and perceptions about courses and the occupations they relate to are often not well informed. This translates into poorly articulated pathways, and is a particular problem in those industries that do not recruit entry-level employees—they are often not 'on the map' for girls and young women and are not factored into their decision-making.

There is a significant gap between advice and information provided to girls, and up-to-date information about employment options and current and future labour market trends. As a result, a comprehensive range of options is not presented to girls and women at key decision-making points.

VET in Schools

The range of VET in Schools offerings is narrow and does not adequately represent what VET has to offer. While girls value the hands-on and practical nature of VET in Schools subjects, they tend to be concentrated in a few subject areas.

VET in Schools subject choice is often determined by VET coordinators and influenced by parents who may have outdated perceptions about VET and industry. Many VET in Schools teachers lack up-to-date industry experience and are not well equipped to represent an industry to female students.

Gender distribution of teaching staff in VET in Schools subjects tends to replicate occupational segregation, with male teachers concentrated in trade and other non-traditional subjects, and female teachers concentrated in subjects such as hospitality, retail and office administration.

Work placement opportunities are not always available to VET in Schools students—around half of these students do not currently have access to work placement opportunities. Yet young people and employers view work placement as critical.

The VET brand

The image of VET emerged as a key issue in research for the next national strategy for VET 2004–2010 (ANTA 2003a), and in research and consultation undertaken for the Women in VET project.

The image of VET and of specific occupations continues to deter women from engaging with the VET system and entering some industries. VET is perceived to be 'second class' to university, and is associated with the traditional trades—which are unpopular with women.

The VET brand needs to be updated across the board, to remove stereotypes which deter girls, as well as those which relate to specific occupations. Positioning 'what's in it for women in VET', and updating the image of those occupations which are perceived to be male-dominated/not for women, are important in addressing misconceptions.

There is a need to ensure that any initiatives designed to re-value the VET brand specifically address women as a key target audience. Specific campaigns and tactics targeting women also need to be developed. Campaigns also need to target women at key decision-making points in the life cycle, as well as key influencers such as parents, teachers and peers.

Linking to the world of work

Research and consultation with government agencies, industry, clients and training providers strongly identified the need for much closer linkages between VET and employment—including better linkages between employment trends and opportunities for women—and VET offerings. Key issues include those discussed below.

Representation and 'voice' in industry and the VET system

Women and women's issues are currently not well represented in industry advisory bodies and structures. For example, industry training advice needs to be better informed by women's perspectives. Ongoing arrangements for monitoring and evaluating women-in-VET strategies and initiatives need to be established.

Structure of work and women's choices

The work culture in some industries continues to be dominated by men and this is a deterrent for women seeking to enter non-traditional fields. This culture is extremely difficult to change, with most discrimination covert and difficult to counteract.

Women's choices about whether to enter an industry or occupation are influenced by perceptions about how open that industry is to facilitating a work–life balance and providing opportunities for women; for example, offering maternity leave, or encouraging and supporting women to take up management roles. Women make realistic choices based on their assessment about the kind of life an occupation is likely to offer.

Among younger women (and men) there is a general trend to aspire to running their own business or being self-employed rather than working for someone else. Many young people do not trust employers to look after them or their interests and self-employment is perceived to offer autonomy, independence and the ability to pursue an area of interest.

The 2002 National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) Student Outcomes Survey showed that 4% of VET graduates in 2001 indicated that their main reason for doing their training was to start their own business (39% were female graduates and 61% were male graduates).

Linking VET with industry trends and market demands

There is a need to more efficiently track, identify and promote emerging employment opportunities for women, as well as trends that impact on women's employment.

Employers are increasingly demanding that employees possess generic skills. Integration of generic skills into training packages offers opportunities for women who are often well equipped with these skills.

Investment in training

Enterprise perceptions about return on investment in training tend to exclude training for part-time and casual staff, who are primarily women. Small and medium-sized enterprises are particularly unlikely to invest in training, and if they do, to invest only in training relating to compliance with legislative or accreditation requirements.

Just over 80% (81.1%) of employers provide some sort of training to employees, with 41% of employers providing structured training. Most employers who provided structured training did so to permanent employees. Only one-quarter of employers providing structured training did so for non-permanent employees (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003a). Looking at the breakdown of the labour force, around 66% of persons employed full-time are male, and 34% female. Likewise, more females are employed part-time (72%) than males (28%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003b).

There is a need to leverage financial and other incentives for work-related training to increase women's access to training opportunities at both entry level and for continuing workers.

Continuing engagement and lifelong learning

There are a number of key decision-making points throughout the life cycle, which provide opportunities to leverage women's engagement in vocational education and training. Maximising these opportunities is critical, in particular for those women in low-level, vulnerable occupations, and women with other difficulties, such as a disability, who therefore experience multiple disadvantages. Key issues that impact on engaging women throughout the life cycle include those listed below.

Advice and information

The quality of advice and information about pathways and bridges into training and work is currently patchy and there is no consistent mechanism for providing such advice to women.

Individualised models and approaches to providing information and support—such as brokerage—appear to be critical to engage women and, in particular, women experiencing multiple disadvantage. VET clients express a strong preference for individual, customised advice and information. In

addition, women express a preference for structured advice and support; for example, via mentoring arrangements.

Skill development

Recognition of prior learning is a critical component of the VET system for women, again particularly for those women experiencing multiple disadvantage. However, recognition of prior learning processes are cumbersome, expensive, and often not well understood by women clients and potential clients of VET. As a result, the full advantages of this process have not been realised for women.

The actual difference in recognition of prior learning as a proportion of all enrolments in 2001 for male and female students is not material (3.6% for male students, 3.7% for female students). National data in general indicate that the uptake of recognition of prior learning amongst equity groups is relatively low. This is in part due to a preference for participating in training because of the perceived value of the learning experience and interaction with fellow students (NCVER 2003).

Work placement opportunities are as important for older women re-entering the workforce as they are for young women. 'Tasters' are important in assisting women to make career transitions or to re-enter the workforce.

Lack of confidence is a significant barrier for many women accessing training opportunities; for example, on re-entering the workforce, or re-skilling following redundancy.

Adult and community education (ACE) acts as an important enabler for women re-entering training, returning to work, developing new skills and pursuing leisure interests. It is particularly important for those women for whom low self-confidence or negative prior experience of training acts as a barrier to entry to VET. However, pathways linking ACE and VET provision need to be better developed and promoted to maximise these opportunities for women.

Recent research on planning pathways for women from ACE to VET reveals that 'in most states, the basic conditions to promote pathway development are lacking or poorly developed' (McIntyre & Kimberley 1999). The key developments from this research suggest that:

❖ Credit transfer and recognition for prior learning approaches need to be explicit and clear.

❖ Appropriate support and resources need to be made available.

❖ Open learning strategies should be encouraged.

❖ Strong government support is needed.

❖ Disadvantaged women and their needs should be recognised.

Access to on-the-job training opportunities is critical to engage women in ongoing skill development, and in gaining transferable qualifications. However, the timing and structure of training—whether on or off the job—is inflexible and inappropriate for many women, including women working in part-time and casual positions, and women balancing work and family responsibilities. Many women express a desire for greater flexibility in timing and structure of training; for example, weekend and after-hours courses, and the ability to mix and match components from different training packages to obtain a qualification or a set of skills.

Women's choices

Many women appear to be actively self-selecting away from management or senior roles in favour of an improved work–life balance. Perceptions about what management involves also act as a block to encouraging and supporting women to take up senior positions.

In 2002 an analysis of 387 companies found that women are not well represented in leading roles in companies in Australia and New Zealand. Women represent 9% of directors; 1% of chairmen, and 2% of deputy chairmen (Korn/Ferry International 2002). The gender imbalance of Australian boards can be attributed to the fact that non-executive directors are drawn primarily from the senior executive ranks—where Australian women have been traditionally under-represented.

Many women are also choosing self-employment and/or small business management over working in organisations or for other people. This trend reflects a desire for greater autonomy and control, and also a perception that employers cannot be relied upon to look after their employees.

A strong commitment to lifelong learning is also reported by many women; for example, many women are engaging in learning for leisure or interest.

However, a substantial segment of women—in particular, those in lower-level, vulnerable occupations and those experiencing multiple disadvantage—do not perceive training to offer any benefits, and are managing competing interests which prevent them from being able to participate.

Investment in training

Employers are less likely to invest in training for older workers, part-time and casual staff and those in lower-level positions and occupations. Enterprise investment in training tends to be greatest in senior staff, and in the 'core' of permanent staff who are perceived to add greater value to the business.

Upskilling and retraining of existing and older workers, in particular those in vulnerable industries and sectors, is critical in providing transferable skills

and qualifications, as well as new employment opportunities for many women. This needs to be linked to individual advice and support.

Older workers are discussed in detail in another chapter of this book of readings.

Delivering on the promise of VET

Like other clients of the VET system, women clients of vocational education and training do report high levels of satisfaction with the VET experience—it delivers practical and hands-on skills which relate directly to employment. However, research also reveals that clients and stakeholders have concerns about the quality of the VET product, and want more from delivery—in particular, greater flexibility. There was also a view that the VET system can do more to model equity internally. Key issues identified in consultation and research include those outlined below.

VET workforce

The VET workforce currently mirrors occupational segregation in many industries. While women constitute just over half of the VET workforce, they are concentrated in part-time and casual positions. Gender distribution in teaching tends to reflect industry and occupational segregation. In addition, female VET professionals are less likely than their male colleagues to apply for management roles.

Recent unpublished work by NCVER indicates that the technical and further education (TAFE) workforce is predominantly female (55% of TAFE staff in Australia), and employed on a non-permanent basis (60% are in temporary, contract or casual positions). In addition, the business and community and health fields tend to be the main teaching areas for female teachers. Together, these fields represent 53% of female teaching staff in New South Wales, 68% in the Northern Territory and 44% in Western Australia. This is mirrored in the labour market, where more women are employed in these occupational groups in total (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003b).

Access to professional development opportunities is also an issue for women in the VET workforce. Specifically, this applies to access to return to industry programs and to professional development for part-time and casual staff, who are predominantly female. The VET workforce is ageing. Teachers, in particular those who have entered the VET workforce direct from industry without teaching qualifications, are often ill-equipped to cater for the different learning styles and needs of the increasingly diverse client base in VET.

Flexibility

Flexible delivery is a key issue for enterprise and individual clients of VET alike. For women, flexibility is an important component of access to training. The time and place that training is offered and the mode of delivery are critical to enable women to access training. Access to on-the-job training during work hours is one important mechanism which guarantees easier access for women. For enterprises, greater customisation and flexibility are important to help secure their engagement.

Flexible delivery is concerned with more than online learning and training. Indeed, for many female clients, online delivery is a deterrent and does not encourage or facilitate their participation. Women appear to prefer interaction with teachers and other students, and appreciate the support and social contact offered by face-to-face delivery.

In 2001 a study of the quality of online learning found that there are more female than male online students. Seventy-nine per cent of female students and 81% of male students believed they received quality online learning (Cashion & Palmieri 2002). The important factors affecting quality were different for women and men.

> *The main areas of difference between the genders were that flexibility mattered more to female students than males, as did interaction with the teacher and other students. After flexibility, more males specified quality of materials as a quality factor, where the course design mattered more to the females than the males.*
>
> <div align="right">(Cashion & Palmieri 2002)</div>

As noted above, work placement opportunities are also important for entry-level and older workers, including women returning to the workforce or retraining, to inform decision-making and provide exposure to an industry and work environment.

Navigation

Like other clients, women want help to navigate their way around the VET system, to understand what is on offer, the links between courses, qualifications and employment, and the pathways to access employment in a specific industry.

However, women's preferred information and communication channels appear to differ from those of men, at least in relation to business and training opportunities. For example, men rely more heavily on networks and professional bodies; women seek information from mass media. Tailoring the information and advice provided by registered training organisations is therefore important in ensuring that women are effectively targeted.

Costs and support

Access to support services, such as childcare, is vital to support women's participation. However, smaller TAFE campuses and private registered training organisations are not always able to resource these services.

Problems with literacy and numeracy also act as barriers to engagement and participation in VET.

Women are more likely than men to experience difficulties paying for training. Women are more likely to express the view that employers and governments should fund training—reflecting their more limited capacity to fund their own skill-development.

VET planning

Integration of women's issues into core VET planning processes, such as the development of ANTA's new national strategy for VET (ANTA 2003a) and the Annual National Priorities (ANTA 2003b) and other key planning processes, is crucial to ensure leverage points are identified and utilised.

Local-level planning related to education and training and employment trends also needs to take into account women's issues, for example, via area consultative committees and the local learning employment networks in Victoria.

All major policy and product decisions need to be research-driven and tested with end users, including women. This might include research on women's learning styles, on their product and delivery preferences, and on satisfaction with VET products and services.

Research and funding

Research and funding were identified as underpinning supports which facilitate women's engagement and participation. Research and consultation participants viewed as essential, incorporating women into all research projects and processes, and ensuring that funding arrangements take women into account. Examples are given below.

Further research is required on girls and young women's decision-making and the role of key influencers, as well as research on factors impacting on women's decision-making throughout the life cycle.

Currently research on women's life choices, especially in the field of women's health and equal opportunity, is being conducted. A paper presented at the Australian Institute of Family Studies conference in 2000 (Warner-Smith, Mishra & Dobson 2000) links women's position in the labour force to factors such as marriage, income, income equality between partners and distribution of

housework. Government funding is providing information to women about factors that will influence their careers. An example of this is an Australian Government website, *Government services for women* (<www.women.gov.au>).

The business case for investing in skill development and training for women needs to be developed and linked to the case for investment in training and other industry equity initiatives.

The VET system and registered training organisations need to maintain faith with client expectations, identifying and tracking differences in participation, satisfaction and outcomes, using both quantitative and qualitative techniques.

All government-funded VET research projects should be required to assess whether they have gender implications and propose how these will be addressed in the project methodology.

Any review of funding arrangements in the VET sector needs to take account of women's capacity to self-fund skill development training. Models for funding vocational education and training should be considered with a view to supporting women's participation.

Strategic directions

In the development of policy there needs to be a focused approach which will deliver outcomes that will make a real difference for women in VET. The research projects indicated that there was a shared understanding of the issues and the barriers that continue to exist for women. Advice to the Australian National Training Authority would therefore need to be realistic and achievable, and identify priority strategies capable of delivering the greatest gains for women.

What is and is not within the ambit of the vocational education and training system must be clearly identified. Some issues are clearly within the ambit of VET—such as delivery, research and funding. Some are amenable to influence—such as the image or brand of VET and of specific occupations. Others—such as wage inequity and the 'glass ceiling'—are broader cultural and economic issues that the VET system cannot directly change. Partnerships with industry and employer organisations, and via existing initiatives, may have some potential to contribute to addressing these issues, but the VET system cannot tackle these barriers alone.

The choices women make require understanding and respect. Strategies should encourage informed choice rather than seeking to bring about gender parity. Choices such as the decision not to enter management or particular industries were viewed by many clients as being based on a realistic assessment of the options open to women. Women-in-VET strategies should support women's choices, while at the same time correcting misconceptions and misinformation to ensure that women's decision-making is informed by accurate information and advice.

There should be effective targeting of women at key decision-making points throughout the life cycle—at entry level, during career transition, on return to work or study following maternity leave and when entering into self-employment or small business.

Many of the issues identified in research and consultation have very specific impacts on women experiencing multiple disadvantage. While there are specific strategies in place for Indigenous clients and people with a disability, it would be important to consider the needs of women experiencing multiple disadvantage; for example, women in regional and remote areas, and women from non-English speaking backgrounds.

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Appendix

Table A.1: Key comparisons between female and male students in VET 2001

	Females (%)	Males (%)
Participants		
Proportion of VET students	46.4	50.3
Participation rate[1] 15–64 years	13.2	13.7
Participation rate[1] 15–24 years	23.4	27.8
Proportion of students with Year 12 or higher qualifications	44.5	42.7
Proportion of students enrolled in:		
AQF III or higher VET qualifications	47.2	52.6
AQF I & II VET qualifications	49.1	50.6
Proportion of apprentice and trainee commencements	42.9	57.1
Completions		
Load pass rate[2]	76.1	74.8
Proportion of qualifications completed in:		
AQF III or higher qualifications	53.2	46.7
Certificate I and II qualifications	53.6	46.3
All qualifications	53.4	46.5
Proportion of apprentice and trainee completions	43.0	57.0
Outcomes		
Reason for graduates undertaking course:		
Vocational[3]	72	80
Non-vocational	28	20
Total	**100**	**100**
Employment outcome for vocational graduates:		
Employed after course	75	81
Not employed after course	25	19
Total	**100**	**100**
Of those vocational graduates employed before:		
Employed permanently after	68	75
Employed casually after	27	17
Total[4]	**100**	**100**
Of those vocational graduates not employed before:		
Employed permanently after	47	66
Employed casually after	47	28
Total[4]	**100**	**100**

Source: NCVER national VET provider collection, 2001; New Apprenticeship collection March 2003; Student Outcomes Survey 2002; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001.

Notes: 1 Participation rate = numbers in VET as a proportion of total numbers of the stated social group.
2 From ANTA 2003, *Annual national report of the Australian vocational education and training system 2002*, ANTA, Brisbane: Load pass rate = ratio of hours of students who passed an assessed module or unit of competency to all students who were assessed and either passed, failed or withdrew.
3 Vocational reasons from the student outcome survey include: To get a job (or own business); To try for a different career; To get a better job or promotion; It was a requirement of my job; I wanted extra skills for my job.
4 Also includes employer and self-employed after course.

Table A.2:   Comparison of VET populations—female versus male students, 1997 and 2001

Indicator	Females			Males		
	1997	2001	Annual rate of growth (%)	1997	2001	Annual rate of growth (%)
Number of VET students ('000)	676.7	856.0	6.1	733.8	893.5	5.0
Australian population aged 15 years and above ('000)	7400.5	7839.8	-	7190.6	7586.3	-
VET students as percentage of respective population aged 15 years and above	9.1	10.9	-	10.2	11.8	-

Source: NCVER national VET provider collections; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001.

Table A.3:   VET participation—comparisons of female versus male VET students by field of study, 1997 and 2001

Indicator	Females			Males		
Field of study	1997 (%)	2001 (%)	Annual rate of growth (%)	1997 (%)	2001 (%)	Annual rate of growth (%)
Land and marine resources, animal husbandry	2.6	2.7	7.8	6.5	8.5	12.2
Architecture, building	1.2	0.9	-0.4	9.5	9.0	3.9
Arts, humanities and social sciences	10.9	8.6	-0.1	5.0	5.0	5.4
Business, administration, economics	26.4	26.4	6.1	15.6	12.8	0.0
Education	3.1	3.8	11.0	1.8	2.5	14.6
Engineering, surveying	2.9	2.9	5.9	25.0	19.9	-0.8
Health, community services	12.7	12.3	5.2	4.9	5.7	9.5
Law, legal studies	0.5	0.6	9.2	0.7	0.7	5.4
Science	8.4	7.7	3.7	6.4	8.6	13.1
Veterinary science, animal care	0.3	0.5	17.2	0.0	0.1	39.5
Services, hospitality, transportation	11.3	13.1	10.0	10.6	13.3	11.3
VET multi-field education	17.3	12.3	-2.6	13.2	10.0	-1.9
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**6.1**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**5.0**

Source: NCVER national VET provider collections, 1997 and 2001.

Table A.4: **Apprenticeship participation—comparison of female versus male apprentices and trainees, 1997 and 2001**

Indicator	Females			Males		
	1997 ('000)	2001 ('000)	Annual rate of growth (%)	1997 ('000)	2001 ('000)	Annual rate of growth (%)
Commencements	43.1	97.9	22.8	71.1	130.1	16.3
Completions	15.9	40.9	26.7	35.4	54.3	11.3

Source: NCVER New Apprenticeship collection, March 2003.

Beyond equity?

Indigenous people's rights and the national VET system

Bob Boughton and Deborah Durnan

The five years since the National Centre for Vocational Education Research's (NCVER) last consolidation study on Indigenous vocational education and training (VET) have seen significant system-level changes, and the VET system can legitimately take pride in the extent to which, alone among the major sectors of the Australian education system, it appears to have solved the problem of access in relation to Indigenous people. In every other sector—school, higher education and adult community education—Indigenous people participate at levels significantly lower than non-Indigenous people. In the VET sector, however, the situation is reversed. Indigenous people participate in VET programs and courses at significantly higher rates. Nevertheless, this chapter argues that this does not mean that the question of equity for Indigenous people in VET has been solved. On the contrary, it suggests that there are many significant unanswered questions about the way current equity policies interact with Indigenous people's own development aspirations and their preferred modes of participation in the Australian economy. It argues that there is a need for a more focused and coordinated Indigenous-driven research agenda to help answer some of the policy questions this raises. It also proposes that more attention be paid to the question of Indigenous employment within the sector, including its research arm.

Introduction

MICHAEL WELTON BEGINS his two-volume study of Canadian adult education with the proposition that colonisation initiated, among many other things, a 'pedagogical encounter'. Both European invaders and Amerindian prior owners faced huge learning challenges, he argues, trying to open up 'learning spaces' in which both sides could learn from each other about the country, and how they might live together in it (Welton forthcoming). Australia's national vocational education and training policy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, *Partners in a learning culture* (ANTA 2000a), captures in its title a similar concept—that vocational education for Indigenous people can only be achieved via a partnership which itself builds a learning culture, one in which learning has to go both ways. This is not an entirely new concept, of course. Indigenous educators have been talking about 'both ways'

education for several decades, but for most of this period, people have tended to think of this as a methodology for Indigenous students only. A decade of work by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, which came to an end as the Partners strategy was being produced, helped to shift the focus more towards the learning which a full recognition of Indigenous rights requires from *non-Indigenous* Australians. The Australian National Training Authority's (ANTA) discussion paper on the new national strategy for 2004–2010 (ANTA 2003) has taken this on by including the renewal and sharing of Indigenous learning cultures among key objectives proposed for the whole national system.

The five years since NCVER's last consolidation study on Indigenous VET (Boughton 1998) have seen significant system-level changes, indicating that significant learning has occurred at this level. Firstly, there is now the Partners document, a five-year national VET strategy for Indigenous people adopted by the ANTA Board in 2000, along with an implementation document, *Blueprint for implementation* (ANTA 2000b). Secondly, state and territory training authorities in almost every jurisdiction have developed their own Indigenous VET strategies. Thirdly, Indigenous advisory bodies have been established nationally and in most jurisdictions, to oversee policy and program development, and Dr Evelyn Scott, co-chair of the Australian Indigenous Training Advisory Council, has been appointed to the ANTA Board. Fourthly, VET system agencies have established formal relationships with many other agencies, including government departments, private industry and Indigenous organisations, for whom Indigenous development is a core concern. These changes have occurred alongside and in a sometimes contradictory relationship with other major changes within the 'mainstream' of VET provision.

Whether greater equity in terms of outcomes has resulted from these systemic changes remains debatable. The Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMISS) data series 1997–2001 cannot provide clear answers, not only because many of these changes only took effect at the very end of this period, but also because there is no research rigorously linking better outcomes to systemic changes. At this stage, the most that researchers can add to the policy debate is a critical analysis of the changes, utilising what we know about what works in Indigenous adult education and development (Commonwealth of Australia 2000; Durnan & Boughton 1999; Robinson & Hughes 1999) and point to the trends beginning to emerge from the quantitative data. This chapter does this by drawing selectively on the findings of the first phase of the mid-term review (Boughton et al. 2003) of the *Partners in a learning culture: Blueprint for implementation from 2000 until 2005*, which NCVER undertook at the end of 2002.[1]

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[1] The first phase involved collecting and analysing reports from all partners to the Blueprint for implementation, and focusing on actions taken against the key strategies identified. A statistical analysis was also undertaken. The phase 1 report was fed into phase 2 which involved validation actions on the ground and the production of the final mid-term review report.

We acknowledge the contribution to our thinking from the NCVER team, the Australian Indigenous Training Advisory Council, and the many Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators and managers who contributed to the review. The chapter does not, however, summarise the review findings. Rather, it focuses on a small number of issues the review raised which we found to be the most difficult and challenging. This reflects our editor's encouragement to use this opportunity to open up new areas for discussion and debate in the period coming up to the new national VET strategy.

Our central theme is that the new perspectives which informed the Partners strategy (ANTA 2000a) are still insufficiently understood among non-Indigenous policy-makers and system managers, the major problem being the way Indigenous vocational education is treated as an 'equity' issue. The equity 'discourse' focuses attention on Indigenous 'disadvantage' and the need for programs to generate more equality, defined in terms of quantitative system outcome measures; for example, participation, levels of study and module completions. Although this is valuable in countering conservative attacks on 'special treatment' programs like Abstudy, it remains a one-sided view. Who, or what, we still need to ask, has been doing the disadvantaging? (Moore 1993). It also slides too easily into a deficit analysis, suggesting that Indigenous adults are, educationally speaking, underdeveloped versions of the non-Indigenous majority, requiring a 'top up' to bring them to 'our' level. Furthermore, this incorrectly locates the problems Indigenous people have with the VET system as residual, something that can be 'fixed' simply by the system becoming more inclusive 'at the margins', while the core business of training reform proceeds as planned. In this chapter, we suggest an alternative perspective which tries to move the debate beyond equity as currently defined, to a point where the system acknowledges that Indigenous people's rights to self-determination and development imply a right to negotiate the meaning of the concept of equity itself.

Equity and outcomes

Outcomes are what matter, and outcomes should be equitable. Beneath these two 'common-sense' statements lurk complicated traps for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who work in the field of Indigenous adult education and development. Education systems, after all, are important institutions for the reproduction of human societies. This means that what constitutes 'good' educational outcomes and what an equitable distribution of these should look like are questions determined by society, of which the education system is just one part. The difficulties this causes for educational managers and planners become obvious if we acknowledge that Indigenous societies, despite the longings of the political right for 'one nation', are not identical to non-Indigenous societies. In Australia, they overlap and share a continent as a matter of history, but the terms on which that sharing can lawfully occur are still under negotiation. This is the meaning of the High Court's Mabo decision

of 1992. Reconciliation remains a road, not a destination, and one of the issues to be resolved along the way is the relationship between equity and Indigenous-specific rights.

Equity, from the point of view of most Indigenous commentators over the last two decades, requires society to recognise Indigenous-specific rights, which include native title rights, and the right of self-determination. This is the right of a people, as the United Nations puts it, 'to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic social and cultural development'. But what if the choices those people 'freely make' fail to result in equity, as defined by the dominant, non-Indigenous society and its institutions? In practical terms, if some Indigenous people choose to speak their own language, live on their own lands, and develop their own semi-subsistence-style economies—as many in fact do, in varying degrees—then how does that tally with the requirement of an equity policy that says they will have the same educational and employment outcomes as non-Indigenous people, the vast majority of whom live close to major urban labour markets and a full range of English speaking educational institutions?

This basic contradiction, between a definition of equity which measures itself in terms of numerical equality on quantifiable (and therefore 'unproblematic') outcomes, and one which emphasises choice, difference and the right of self-determination, has bedevilled Indigenous social policy for over 30 years. It is still little understood at a system level within VET, inevitably perhaps, given how recently Indigenous people and their representative organisations have been granted decision-making and advisory roles in that system. At the highest levels of the system, we should not be surprised to find that many people continue to confuse 'treating everybody the same' with equity, unaware of an important tenet of international jurisprudence, that treating people the same when there are major differences, is the opposite of equitable, it is discriminatory (Walton 1997).

Participation, equity and difference

Nevertheless, the VET system can legitimately take pride in the extent to which, alone among the major sectors of the Australian education system, it appears to have solved the problem of access in relation to Indigenous people. In every other sector—school, higher education and adult community education— Indigenous people participate at levels significantly lower than non-Indigenous people. However, in the VET sector the situation is reversed. Indigenous people participate in VET programs and courses at significantly higher rates. In 2001, there were 58 000 Indigenous students in the system, making up 3.3% of the student population, a figure higher than the proportion of Indigenous people in the population as a whole. Compared with senior secondary schooling and higher education, the performance of the VET system is outstanding. VET is the education sector of choice for post-compulsory school-age Indigenous adults. The extent to which this represents an important difference is revealed when we

focus on the working-age population. An Indigenous working-age person is twice as likely to be undertaking a VET program as her or his non-Indigenous counterpart.

Is this producing greater equity? Well, it depends. Firstly, the research to clarify what factors determine people's choice of vocational education and training, rather than other forms of education, or employment, or other kinds of work, is yet to be undertaken. For example, if people are unemployed, they may 'choose' VET because their mutual obligation agreement with Centrelink requires them to do so as a condition of receiving benefits. Or they may 'choose' vocational education and training because there are no secondary schools within hundreds of kilometres, and the VET program is the only way they can continue their general education beyond the post-primary programs which are the only school offerings in many remote communities. Or it may be because the entry standards for higher education courses in their preferred careers are too high, given their past school records. Are such choices equitable ones?

Secondly, how equitable this situation is also depends on the outcomes being achieved, and how they relate to individual and community aspirations. If people are simply being 'parked' in the VET system, as a form of disguised unemployment, or if their experience of programs and courses is negative, invalidating their own social and cultural values, or fails to create a real pathway towards meaningful work and improved health and wellbeing, one would hardly claim this as equity. What this suggests is that the statistics tell us only where to look, but do not of themselves provide real evidence of equity.

Another problem in both policy and the research literature revolves around the classic question of whether the glass is half-full or half-empty. Proponents of equity policy like Robinson and Bamblett (1998) have been keen to argue that such policies work, by demonstrating that they result in better outcomes for Indigenous people, as indeed they do. On the other hand, researchers like ourselves, while not wishing to undermine the already flagging support for such policies, are more sceptical of claims that this amounts to greater equity. Part of this argument is about our differing definitions of equity, as already discussed. But even within the dominant model of quantifiable participation and outcome levels, there is still contention over whether improvements should be measured in terms of changes to relative or absolute disadvantage. When you focus on absolute disadvantage, you measure improvement against progress made by the disadvantaged groups from its 'baseline' or starting point. So if we now have many more Indigenous people with certificate I and II qualifications than we did five years ago, things have improved. From a relative disadvantage perspective, increasing the number with certificate I and II is unlikely to have a real equity effect if, at the same time, the non-Indigenous rate of completions of certificate III and IV has gone up even faster. Our reason for focusing on this second approach is the evidence that it is relative, not absolute education inequalities which contribute most to inequalities on other social indicators, including employment and health.

While acknowledging that our perspective does not sit easily within the hyper-rationalist paradigms of contemporary vocational education planning, we can only conclude, on the basis of this overview, that we cannot say as yet whether current policies are producing greater equity. A policy-maker might see this as an argument for more research, and in a sense it is. But unlike many other studies which draw similar conclusions, we want to 'spin' this a little differently. Part of the problem which must be addressed, we think, is that non-Indigenous researchers like ourselves are ill-equipped, even with two decades of experience in Indigenous VET research, development and delivery across several state and territory jurisdictions, to reach a firm conclusion on this question. Our 'knowledge', like those of virtually every other person writing in this field in Australia today, remains an 'outsider' perspective.

Equity and Indigenous VET research

This became a significant issue for us during the mid-term review. The system has clearly begun to strengthen Indigenous power and control through formal institutional mechanisms such as Indigenous membership on state authorities and ANTA, and Indigenous advisory bodies at every level of the system. But similar developments are less evident among the universities and research centres on whose research the policy-makers and system managers depend for advice. VET research is itself an expanding industry, growing alongside its 'object', the VET system. Unlike their non-Indigenous counterparts who sit with them on committees and boards, Indigenous VET leaders rarely have the benefit of research advice which sits as easily with and reflects their own ideas and experiences in relation to education. In other words, there is little if any Indigenous research culture from which they can draw ideas and critical advice. This is an historical legacy of the educational neglect experienced by Indigenous communities over many generations, resulting in very low rates of entry by Indigenous people into higher education and the research careers it opens up. However, that is not the whole story, because current practices often reinforce rather than counter this historical legacy, such as when equity research projects provide almost no space within them for the employment of 'researchers-in-training' from the group being studied; or when the research paradigms adopted take little or no notice of current best practice emanating, for example, from Indigenous researchers and Indigenous research institutions in other fields of practice and other places (Tuhiwai Smith 1999).

An Indigenous equity agenda in VET research might therefore include at least the following:

❖ fewer non-Indigenous investigator-driven research projects, and more projects developed according to the research priorities of the Indigenous leadership already institutionalised within the system; for example, on the Australian Indigenous Training Advisory Council, within the

Indigenous education consultative bodies operating in every state and territory, and in the 'peak sectoral bodies' of the Indigenous sector; for example, the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and its state and territory affiliates

❖ a systematic program of research training to increase the numbers of Indigenous VET researchers and the proportion of Indigenous VET research funds allocated to projects employing them

❖ a more proactive approach by non-Indigenous VET researchers and their institutions and professional bodies; for example, the Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association, to open up new space for Indigenous researchers, Indigenous research priorities, and Indigenous research paradigms.

In addition to the lack of Indigenous researchers, contemporary VET equity research continues to suffer from the 'silo' mentality now much-criticised among government agencies, in that its consideration of Indigenous issues is only marginally informed by the substantial work of Indigenous-specific research institutions like the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University and the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. This results in a continuing 'lack of fit' between research-based VET policy development, such as the ANTA equity policy process, and the 'mainstream' of Indigenous development research and policy. Within the Indigenous-specific 'mainstream', there is now serious questioning of the limits which equity-based models place around Indigenous people's aspirations. A brief examination of recent Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research work will illustrate this.

Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research and the Indigenous economy

The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research was a product of the 1985 Miller Inquiry and the policy it spawned, the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy, the first national policy to link the education, employment and self-determination aspirations of Indigenous people. In a major review of the last 20 years of the centre's output, Rowse (2002) has done the Indigenous VET research community the great favour of thematically summarising the huge volume of research they have undertaken. He points out that one of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research's key contributions has been to identify and analyse the place of Indigenous people and communities within the overall Australian economy, and to describe in great detail the very distinct and different ways in which Indigenous people participate within that economy. This detail presents major problems for the equity model, in that national and even state/territory-based policies and 'benchmarks' are insufficiently attuned

to the extraordinary diversity of Indigenous Australia. The equity model tends to focus attention on inequalities between two apparently distinct national populations, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, but this has the effect also of pushing diversity on both sides into the background. As the best research shows, and as is now being implemented by whole-of-government pilot projects, many of the problems which equity policies seek to overcome are best dealt with at a regional level (Indigenous Communities Co-ordination Taskforce 2002). The underlying reasons, however, are less well understood. The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research helps us to see that, in part, it is because Indigenous societies are connected culturally and historically to 'place' in ways which the modern economic models underpinning planning in the VET sector (such as human capital theory) can simply not accommodate.

Consequently, while the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research researchers have done more than most to document the extreme problems facing the majority of Indigenous people on key social indicators, especially the exponentially growing unemployment rate (Taylor & Hunter 1998), they have moved beyond simply cataloguing this as an aspect of 'disadvantage' or an 'equity' issue. This has produced a deeper, more finely nuanced analysis, which allows us to see that Indigenous people are not simply 'disadvantaged victims', but are making quite different choices about how they wish to participate economically from those predicted by the 'mainstream' economics models which currently dominate social policy. In this vein, some centre studies (for example, Campbell 2000) have criticised the VET sector's 'lack of recognition of the Indigenous sector as an industry' (Rowse 2002, p.28), which, they say, reflects an underlying problem among policy-makers who, 'while ready to acknowledge distinct features of Indigenous language, religion and art, will not recognise distinct "economic" values and practices … i.e. the "internal indigenous economy"' (Martin 1995 cited in Rowse 2002, p.38).

Indigenous economy, Indigenous industry—these are hard things to see in a landscape still haunted intellectually by the racist doctrine of *terra nullius*. One 'fact', demonstrated convincingly in the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research's analysis of data from the 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey, but which remains largely invisible to policy-makers, is the huge amount of work Indigenous people do 'outside the formal monetary economy', including community work, caring for sick and aged people, working on committees such as in schools or health services, and subsistence hunting, gathering and gardening (Rowse 2002, p.39). If this work counted as employment, as at least some does on International Labour Organisation definitions, not only would the unemployment rate be a lot lower, but it would also be the case that VET programs which helped people move into this work and/or do it more effectively, could be considered as having valuable employment outcomes. This is a point which has been made over and over again in submissions to government by the independent community-controlled providers (Durnan & Boughton 1999).

The problem, from the perspective of the people doing this work, is not that they have no work, but that the work they are doing is not recognised, valued or remunerated by the dominant society's economy. The VET system's 'solution' to this is to help them train, not to do this work better, but to do other jobs which, in many cases, require them to give up the autonomy and 'choice' which they need to reconstruct and reproduce their own societies and communities, communities still suffering from the effects of previous phases of colonisation. Seen from the non-Indigenous side of the frontier, this does not count as real 'work', and is therefore not deserving of much more than unemployment benefits. This is a contradiction about the nature and purpose of work, and it underlies much of the effort expended in Indigenous VET. On one side, system managers try to 'fit' Indigenous people into an economic model that assumes people behave in ways they don't, and won't, unless forced to. On the other side, Indigenous educators and managers, with some support from non-Indigenous people they have taught to see things differently, are working to open up sufficient space inside 'the system' to accommodate people more as they are and want to be, not as the model says they should be.

This is not to say that the 'skill sets' which people can acquire through the VET system are irrelevant to their needs and aspirations. On the contrary, many of these skills are the very ones that make it possible for people to make more informed and better choices and perform more effectively as they go about the work of reconstructing their lives and communities, individually and collectively. The problem lies chiefly in the assumptions about the context in which these skills will be deployed most productively. The mainstream VET system sees equity as primarily an issue of inclusivity, without actually disturbing any of the basic assumptions which have informed the system up until this point. One central assumption is that the ideal outcome of vocational education and training is a job in 'mainstream' private industry. From this flows the view that mainstream private industry, especially its employers, should determine the competencies which VET providers will 'deliver', including to Indigenous clients. The research from the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research provides a refreshing empirical antidote to these ideological assumptions. Put simply, it just doesn't happen that way; nor is it going to. The chances are nil of the private sector generating more than a very small proportion of the several thousand new Indigenous jobs per year required just to keep pace with Indigenous working-age population growth (Taylor & Hunter 1998). As Robert Champion de Crespigny, ex-chief executive officer of Normandy Mines told the 2002 Australian Indigenous Training Advisory Council conference[2], Indigenous employment is not good business, not when non-Indigenous labour is in excess supply, and is considerably more trained and work-ready than the labour that Indigenous communities can supply, even assuming unemployed Indigenous people actually

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[2] Keynote address at Partners, Priorities, Performance: Partners in a Learning Culture Conference, 6–8 November 2002.

wanted those jobs, in the places they are being offered. Employers do accept subsidised labour, in the form of trainees, and some jobs may grow from this. But, on the scale of the problem, it is a very few. Further proof of the futility of this strategy lies in the lack of concern the review found with Indigenous issues among industry training advisory bodies which do not already include significant areas of the Indigenous 'economy' within their industries.

Rather than get people to train to do jobs for employers who do not necessarily want or need them, a more realistic challenge for the VET system is to find ways to devote more of the considerable resources it expends on Indigenous VET to helping people develop their own regional economic development strategies, and then to acquiring the skills which these strategies demand. This will, of necessity, include learning new ways to negotiate adequate funding and other support from public and private sources for the valuable work which Indigenous people and their representative organisations are already doing, to maintain and develop their own communities, languages, cultures and lands within what could become a model of sustainability to the rest of the world (Altman 2001).

Improving the future from the present

In arguing the case for stronger links between vocational education and training and the Indigenous sector, we have to be careful not to understate the extent to which this is already occurring in some places and in some sectors. For example, most jurisdictions have at least some Indigenous-specific courses and programs designed to assist people to work in the Indigenous sector. The national report to Parliament on Indigenous education and training notes that:

> In 2001, six systems delivered 2,407,349 ASCH (or 71 ASCH [actual student contact hours] per student) against modules designed specifically for Indigenous people. (Boughton et al. 2003)

The range of employment for which these programs prepare people includes tourism, community management, legal studies, beef cattle programs, family and community services, dance, and health. In other data from the mid-term review the Indigenous health field stands out, accounting for over half of the Indigenous-specific diploma and advanced diploma courses in the national system (Boughton et al. 2003). There are also innovative programs in Indigenous maritime resources management, native title, Indigenous development studies and Indigenous governance.

Another indicator of the involvement of the VET sector with the Indigenous sector is the growing numbers of Indigenous community-controlled VET providers. In 2001, there were 12 of these reporting under the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program. They had had 6057 enrolments, 10% of the total Indigenous VET enrolments, and a 15% increase on enrolments in this

sector over the last three years (Commonwealth of Australia 2002, p.80). This reflects but does not fully record a trend by Indigenous organisations to becoming registered training organisations, delivering their own workplace training (for example, health services), as well as a growth of Indigenous organisations for whom education and training is core business. The data from this year provided to the review were incomplete, because not all jurisdictions had reliable data. Nevertheless, we identified a total of 33 Indigenous registered training organisations, probably a significant under-counting. With the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and other Blueprint partners now actively encouraging the Community Development Employment Program to gain registered training organisation status, this number is set to climb rapidly, creating what will in effect be a de facto Indigenous VET sector, relating partly if not predominantly to the Indigenous economy. Finally, much of the effort which has resulted in increasing Indigenous VET participation within the public system of technical and further education (TAFE) has originated within the Indigenous units of state and regional TAFE systems, where the majority of Indigenous VET educators, managers and support staff are employed. While not Indigenous-controlled in the same sense as the independent providers, they also create Indigenous spaces within the system where there is more likely to be a connection with other aspects of the Indigenous economy and pathways between VET and employment opening up.

This evidence indicates that practice has moved ahead of theory and research. There is little recognition of how much the system is being re-shaped from below, as increasing numbers of Indigenous people and their organisations gain increasing influence, not just as students, but as teachers, managers, 'industry' representatives, provider organisations, and participants on advisory committees (for example, the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups in Victoria). It is this work, of Aboriginalising VET, that has both supported but has also been an effect of the growing Indigenous VET enrolments figures. Yet in this area, our research for the mid-term review of the national strategy found that the actions needed to accelerate the growth of Indigenous employment in the sector had received very little attention from the majority of partner agencies. ANTA, for example, while it has an Indigenous member on the board, reported during the review that it had no Indigenous employees. While this situation has now been addressed, it illustrates the need for much closer monitoring of Indigenous employment growth within the sector itself.

Conclusion

We concluded from our research for the review that the national strategy's major verifiable achievement to date was the creation of 'a platform' from which significant progress could occur within the next five to ten years. However, increasing paid Indigenous employment within the national VET system and its

partner agencies, including in its research arms, will be a key to progress, because only this can take the system beyond the utilisation of Indigenous consultation and advice, to negotiation of a more equal sharing of operational responsibility and power. Along the way, we have argued, definitions of equity are about to change.

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Working towards an Indigenous training model

Learning from Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare, Yirrkala

Banduk Marika, Colin Lane, Helen Smith and Leanne Reinke

This chapter describes an Indigenous community organisation, Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare, in Yirrkala, in the Northern Territory, an organisation working towards its own model of training. Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare is currently striving to provide a collaborative and sustainable training program which may be adapted and expanded to serve the whole of the community, made relevant to the local environment and conditions, and meet community expectations. The program is intended to formally recognise and enhance the work-based training practices currently undertaken by the organisation's participants.

This chapter documents their vision and some barriers to its realisation, highlighting some disparities between the strategic directions of the national training system for Indigenous people and the realities of training in their community.

Performance assessment based on how training fits within community structures, how programs respond to cultural and family responsibilities, and how training can encourage continued engagement, are shown to be appropriate guides to the achievement of equitable outcomes. Such assessment differs from the current quantitative performance indicator measurement used by the national training system. Individual training providers and community organisations have recognised and are implementing more appropriate strategies. However, while the national system relies on the current measurement system, opportunities for a more equitable and appropriate system may be lost. The chapter suggests that a shift away from focusing on statistical outcome measurement and its associated notions of disadvantaged groups allows us to see the strengths of Indigenous communities in their learning cultures.

Introduction

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE ARE recognised within the vocational education and training (VET) system as one of a number of groups who require specific strategies to enable them to achieve equitable outcomes. These outcomes are measured against performance-based indicators, including rates of participation, satisfactory

completion and successful placement outcomes. This statistical measurement system identifies disadvantaged groups who do not meet mainstream standards. What this system does not do, however, is acknowledge and encourage the development of the capabilities and attributes that enable 'disadvantaged' groups, such as Indigenous people, to create, adapt and transform systems and situations to build positive learning cultures for their communities.

The focus of this chapter is to tell the story of an Indigenous community organisation, Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare in Yirrkala in the Northern Territory, which is working towards its own model of training. This chapter describes the training program, some barriers to its realisation and highlights some disparities between the strategic directions of the national training system for Indigenous people and the realities of training in their community.

Lack of research on Indigenous community development and local community organisations has been identified in previous studies of Indigenous participation in the VET system (Boughton 1998). This chapter is intended to address this deficit in part by allowing the community organisation of Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare and its activities to be heard as directly as possible. However, having said that, we need to acknowledge that it is not possible to provide a written account of this organisation, its staff and the community in which it exists, that is complete and does it justice. A report in this format cannot convey feelings, spirit, and complexity. The Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare story is about connection and engagement with people and country—country that is moulded and transformed each day by the activities of the people who belong to it. If this is not recognised, policy development and implementation will not succeed in bridging gaps, breaking down barriers and enabling visions to be realised.

Through a review of the current research literature and the Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare's experiences, this chapter addresses the following:

❖ the inadequacy of a quantifying performance-based measurement system as a basis for determining VET strategies and policies for Indigenous students and other equity groups

❖ the need for alternative, community-based approaches to training which recognise the specific needs and capacities of each community

❖ barriers to the achievement of well-intentioned equity strategies experienced by Indigenous community organisations

❖ a number of principles fundamental to the vision of the organisation that may be transferred and adapted to local situations in other Indigenous communities.

Project approach

The association between the RMIT University and Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare was formed during the Garma Festival in August 2002. The Garma Festival is held by the Yolngu[1] peoples in North East Arnhem Land annually and is facilitated by the Yothu Yindi Foundation, and aims to provide an opportunity for the sharing of knowledge and culture. The festival is designed to encourage the practice, preservation and maintenance of traditional dance (*bunggul*), song (*manikay*), art and ceremony on Yolngu lands in North East Arnhem Land. During the Garma Festival in 2002 informal meetings and discussions occurred which made explicit a potential for mutual exchange of expertise and need.

The methodology for this chapter involved discussions and consultations between the researchers at RMIT University and collaborators at Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare through teleconferences and email correspondence. This was followed by a two-week, on-site visit to Yirrkala by the university researchers. During this time, all those involved in the project participated in a process of intensive teaching and learning, through experience-based activities and shared insights. This engagement with the community by the university collaborators was an opportunity to begin to develop an understanding of the spirit of this organisation within its community. A draft of this chapter, which was prepared to reflect the discussions by distance before travelling to Yirrkala, was thoroughly and critically assessed and continually revised by the team during this subsequent face-to-face visit and in the weeks following.

In addition, activities included a critical review of existing data groups and outcome measures within the equity categories, a review of research literature in the fields of vocational education and Indigenous issues, and the analysis of additional background material such as reports and background papers from Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare.

Appropriate outcomes and participant engagement

The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), while reforming the training agenda, has pursued an equity-based strategy, a major objective being that all participants in VET shall have the opportunity to achieve equivalent outcomes (ANTA 1998a). The direction in which this strategy moves is one which, rather than focusing on the 'target groups' themselves, gives greater emphasis to measuring the capacity of the system to respond (ANTA 1998b). This shift in emphasis has resulted in the development of an extensive database for collecting and analysing statistical data which measure system capacity in terms of standard performance indicators—participation, module completion

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[1] Yolngu is the name of the Aboriginal people of this local area.

and employment placement or further training on completion.[2] This means that the level and nature of opportunities available to any equity group are measured according to indicators that may bear little relation to the participants' own aspirations or engagement with a training program.

The concern raised by these data is that the performance indicators are neither sufficiently tuned to actual outcomes nor able to capture what is in fact happening during, and as a result of targeted training. As Boughton and Durnan note:

> … it is clear that simple statistical equality on measures such as 'skills' gained, competencies achieved, modules completed or qualifications received do not begin to capture the range of aspirations and expectations that different groups of Aboriginal students, let alone their families and communities, bring to their education. (Boughton & Durnan 1997b, p.13)

Questions need to be asked about whether the Indigenous student's participation was meaningful—to themselves, their families and their communities—and whether the outcome was appropriate for the particular student in their local community.

There are immediate concerns with a performance indicator measurement system for Indigenous participation. Firstly, the determinants used which inherently define successful outcomes are not always appropriate; secondly, a generalisation is made across all Indigenous groups, regardless of location, cultural values and identity; and thirdly, the measurements are based upon a comparison with mainstream needs rather than on criteria developed and based on local community needs. The equity strategy establishes a system in which those who are seen to be not meeting the mainstream outcomes are outside the norm and are constructed as the 'disadvantaged'. The result of this can be that the 'disadvantaged' are then provided with compensatory education, which is not sustainable and does not bring about substantial social change (Schwab & Sutherland 2001).

There is a need to ensure that outcomes are *appropriate* for the groups targeted and this has been recognised throughout the history of Indigenous educational policy (Robinson & Bamblett 1998); however, we are slow to realise this in practice. A critical look at the basis on which the measurement of outcomes takes place, such as the concept of success itself, is required. We need to ask who defines 'success' and what counts as success. The very notion of what is successful for Indigenous people is one which requires 'consideration and redefinition going beyond apparent retention rates or enrolments in

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[2] Any statistics which require self-identification, particularly those that require the identification of backgrounds for Indigenous people, must always be taken with caution due to the request to self-identify being left unanswered. A significant 23.7% were recorded as 'unknown' in statistics collected and reported in 1996 (ANTA 1998b, p.12) and in current unpublished statistics provided by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) this figure is 17.3%.

academic programmes' (Schwab 2001, p.3). Outcomes are also measured by placement in employment or further training on completion. The assessment of successful placement in employment, however, only measures paid employment. There are many examples of Indigenous people working within, and for their communities, which will not be picked up by current indicators which do not recognise the informal Indigenous economy and associated unpaid work such as 'caring for country' (Boughton 1998).

The implications for Indigenous people of the current reforms and strategies have been well documented in a number of previous reports and studies which we have utilised for this critique (Boughton 1998; Boughton & Durnan 1997a, 1997b; Campbell 2000; Schwab 1996b). The fundamental issue is that the national agenda and strategies for addressing equity do not meet the diverse requirements and expectations of Indigenous students and their communities. This chapter attempts to demonstrate this through the presentation of a community-based organisation and the issues it faces with regard to developing an appropriate training program.

In the following documentation of Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare, the vision of the organisation in developing a training program that meets the needs and expectations of their community is presented. It is demonstrated that performance assessment based on how training fits within community structures, how programs respond to cultural and family responsibilities and how training can encourage continued engagement are more appropriate guides to the achievement of equitable outcomes.

A shift away from a focus on statistical outcome measurement and the associated notion of disadvantaged groups allows us to see the strengths of Indigenous communities in their learning cultures. These communities demonstrate capacities in achieving local relevance, being collaborative and encouraging self-development which all contribute to engaging participants in training. Individual training providers and community organisations have recognised and are implementing more appropriate strategies. However, while the national system relies on the current measurement system, opportunities for a more equitable and appropriate system may be lost.

Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare, Yirrkala

Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare, Yirrkala is being used to illustrate an Indigenous community organisation in the process of developing a training model which meets the needs and aspirations of their community. In this section the limitations and possibilities which have been uncovered through this, and previous, research relating to the community will be explored, thereby contributing to the much-needed documentation of Indigenous practices. The documentation and communication of practical models can assist in the development of appropriate alternative accountability models. The details provided in this result from the

experience-based insights of those involved with the organisation, and through reflection and analysis by the contributing partners.

The community and its learning culture

The community of Yirrkala is situated in North East Arnhem Land on the western tip of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Yirrkala is the home of 13 Yolngu clans and has a population of approximately 900 people, which may vary depending on extended family movements. Yirrkala is situated within the Dhanbul Council area and community facilities include a large community education centre and an internationally recognised arts centre. The community is on Aboriginal-owned land and is situated 20km from Nhulunbuy on the Gove Peninsula.[3]

Yirrkala means the place where the fresh water from the creek and the salt water come together. This meaning has influenced a 'both ways' learning culture which the Yolngu people of the area have been using to develop culturally appropriate curriculum since the early 1980s.[4] The both-ways pedagogy ensures that Yolngu knowledge, attitudes, values and understanding is integral to the curriculum in the school. In this way *Napaki* (Western) knowledge does not dominate Yolngu learning cultures, but the two knowledge systems come together in an appropriate format to enable Indigenous students to both maintain their cultural identity and to have academic success (Harris 1990). A similar philosophy underpins the Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare organisation. This philosophy, named 'common unity', is the framework for knowledge generated through the experiences of the organisation to be shared with the younger Indigenous population and the non-Indigenous community with an understanding of each other's needs.

The organisation

Gamarrwa Nuwul is a Yolngu-directed and -driven organisation which respects Indigenous principles concerning care for the land and traditional obligations for clan management, in accordance with Indigenous law. The focus of the association is environmentally sustainable land management and a service provision role within the community. This encompasses diverse duties, such as grounds maintenance, civil works, land rehabilitation, fresh water and marine protection, community participation and environmental awareness and education.

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[3] Nhulunbuy (previously named Gove) is a 'special (company) town' with a population of 4000 which services the nearby bauxite mine established as a result of the 1968 agreement between the Commonwealth Government and Nabalco (now Alcan) for the development of a bauxite mine, refinery, port and town on land excised from the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve.

[4] This philosophy is most often associated with the work of Stephen Harris during the 1980s in the North-East Arnhem area.

The history of the organisation began with Mawalan (1) Marika.[5] He was the leader of the Rirratjingu Clan and witnessed the establishment of the mission on his tribal land and the creation of the Yirrkala settlement. The community lands at Yirrkala were enlarged to accommodate 13 of the 16 clans from the North-East Arnhem Land region. The establishment of the Nabalco mining project in the region created social and cultural fragmentation. Although the Yirrkala-based Yolngu clans united to challenge the decision under Australian law, in 1970 the clans lost their court case against Nabalco and extensive mining started less than 5km from the community.

Five family members formed the Landcare organisation in response to the social fragmentation and environmental impacts that occurred as the community underwent both communal and cultural change as a result of contact with non-Indigenous social structures and the philosophy of a market economy. The organisation has grown from a family-based organisation into a working department of the Yirrkala Dhanbul Community Council Association. Management of Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare is directed by a steering committee made up of the traditional landowners (Rirratjingu and Gumatj clans). Through the Community Development Employment Program, Landcare has become Yirrkala Dhanbul Community Council's largest employer of Yolngu people and is actively reinforcing the values of independence, community pride and self-determination.

For Yolngu people, land represents the livelihood and wellbeing of the community, being at the centre of Yolngu culture and society. Gamarrwa Nuwul is a contemporary continuation of this principle which represents the wishes of the traditional landowners through a combination of traditional Indigenous land management practices and the environmentally sustainable technologies which have been developed through modern science. The work undertaken by Landcare is more than a vehicle of community development; it is an agent which reinstates Yolngu pride and provides the principles of self-determination. This is explicitly reflected in the aims of Landcare and in the projects that it has undertaken.

The projects that Landcare undertakes are varied. Many sites around the Yirrkala community have been severely degraded through past activities, such as soil extraction, agriculture, animal husbandry and waste management, all of which have led to land clearance and the spread of environmental weeds. Rectifying these problems has been an ongoing objective for the Landcare team. The rehabilitation projects manage scrap metal and waste issues, weed control works, and site rehabilitation using plants propagated in the community nursery. Revegetation in cleared areas has also provided a means through which soil erosion has been curbed and topsoil retained. Landcare has also been

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[5] A number appearing after a Yolngu name indicates that more than one person holds this name.

concerned with community planting, involving the planting of bush food species and shade trees. These projects are designed for community beautification, the improvement of Yolngu health by making bush foods available, and community education. Through the extension of invitations to school groups and non-Indigenous participants, the activities promote participation in environmental management and provide opportunities for cultural exchange. Landcare has also established a nursery, a significant achievement being its recognition as a research base for ethnobotanical information. Nursery activities include the collection and propagation of plants and seeds for revegetation and amenity projects. It has now established a seed bank, providing a store of local plants indigenous to the area.

Aims and principles

The primary objective of the Gamarrwa Nuwul Association is to advocate and support Indigenous development towards self-governance for community-based resource management. Landcare has set the long-term goal of becoming an independent body, enabling Yolngu people to establish and maintain autonomous control over land management issues. The principles of self-determination stem from the basic human right to choose to live within a cultural structure which is meaningful and has values deemed appropriate for that community. Landcare recognises the need to re-establish and continue appropriate land management techniques which protect and enhance the unique bio-diversity of the region, while maintaining the integrity of the land for its continued use by traditional owners for social, cultural and community utilisation.

Landcare recognises the need to expand existing enterprises and increase technical skills within the group, and is developing opportunities for commercial enterprises, from the nursery and contracting services to external contractors such as Telstra and a variety of government departments. The desire for an Indigenous training model at Landcare is strongly linked to the aim of self-sufficiency and the reinforcement of Yolngu cultural values. The training model intends to establish and maintain an information base containing practical knowledge about the management of recreational land use, land rehabilitation methods, horticulture and tourism opportunities.

A central theme at Landcare is the combination of traditional land management practices with modern environmental technology in order to develop sustainable environmental practices and provide practical experience. Knowledge generated through projects could have potential application in other areas of natural resource management and nature-based conservation projects. Landcare is actively pursuing opportunities to communicate and share its knowledge with other land agencies and homeland communities. This will help to expand the ethic of sustainable land practices, thereby strengthening the communal bonds of environmental care that have allowed it to develop as an effective Yolngu community organisation. Landcare extends knowledge through broader

community participation, such as general schools programs and the involvement in VET in Schools subjects. Other Indigenous communities, who have learnt of the organisation's activities, have approached Landcare, requesting guidance in the development of community environmental management strategies. The project officer of the organisation travelled to Mer Island in 2002 to assist with the development of an environmental, cultural and heritage plan, which meets the community's needs, expectations and capacities. The organisation would like to broaden this approach by enabling an exchange of participants between the communities to enhance knowledge-sharing and experiences.

Currently Landcare has a training system based primarily on informal training, combined with ad hoc training from external agencies, on their terms. Landcare has been negotiating with the training authorities to acknowledge the in-house informal training models, and to formulate an employee competency-based system of achievement, which recognises the efforts of the Community Development Employment Program participants. Resolving these issues is of great importance, as the reality for Indigenous communities is that full-time employment is non-existent, as is the presence of a robust local economy. This is compounded by training organisations charging high fees to undertake community-based training. All this equates to a high ratio of unemployed people with little or no hope of engaging with the non-Indigenous work-based ethic. This in turn leads to low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence and a distrust of most programs involving outside agencies or trainers. For these reasons the model of delivery in the community must be specific to the local conditions and recognise the realities.

The training model that Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare is working towards is founded upon the following aims and principles:

❖ Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare aims to create awareness and acknowledgment of the unique needs of remote communities, the challenges the community faces, and its enduring capacity to be dynamic and responsive, and how a workable structure can be attained within this environment.

❖ Training in the community needs to be both achievable and practical for all community members, and therefore the model must incorporate Yolngu values of why training is important and must be conducted at a pace in keeping with the workplace structures and the ethics currently practised in the community.

❖ The end result of training should be the provision of a strong commitment to community-based training by Yolngu where possible, and to incorporate practices that Yolngu identify with.

❖ Greater ownership of training in the community is required. In developing a program, all options must be fully considered by the community to ensure all the requirements and obligations of each option are understood.

❖ The program must incorporate the potential for exchange opportunities with staff and students in other communities and areas to assist in engaging with wider concepts of community awareness and knowledge.

Working towards an Indigenous model of delivery

There are a number of issues for Indigenous students involved in the VET system relating to Indigenous values and cultures, which remain hidden within a quantifying performance-based measurement system. The history of Indigenous education policy, and Indigenous people's social situations generally, have shown that the acknowledgement of Indigenous identity and the incorporation of culturally relevant objectives into programs and practices are fundamental to meaningful engagement in education and training. The importance of this to the participants of the Landcare organisation in Yirrkala is clearly obvious in their daily activities.

The issues of significance to the community of Yirrkala, and those being incorporated into the development of the training model at Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare in Yirrkala, include the reinforcement and recognition of the following:

❖ Indigenous identity, culture and values

❖ local community need and relevance to the whole community

❖ expectations of Indigenous students

❖ centrality of land and the ongoing caring for country

❖ appropriate timeframes for completion.

The principles embodied in the model at Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare have also been found to be crucial to other community-controlled Indigenous education providers (Boughton & Durnan 1997b), and could also be transferred to other Indigenous organisations and communities within the education field and across other sectors.

Valuing identity

One of the major themes Indigenous education must carry with it is the valuing of Indigenous cultures and identities. The need for training programs to recognise and reinforce specific community identities and values for Indigenous people is of primary importance, and fundamental to appropriate outcomes and engaging participation. Community-controlled Indigenous education providers have recognised this and all their work, while largely not identified as quantifiable outcomes, is characterised by a community development focus and the preservation of Indigenous life itself (Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers 1996). It is essential to recognise that the way Indigenous culture and identity and community development practices are learned are

specific to local communities and need to be controlled and owned by the communities in which they exist. While the principle can be transferred to other communities, the content may not. It is not satisfactory to have a pre-determined program, such as a 'reconciliation' package, as a compulsory component or module for all Indigenous students. The learning culture of the community, as determined by local communities, is paramount to this discussion regarding values and identities.

It is through the recognition of locally determined cultures, values and identities that the expectations and aspirations of Indigenous students can be properly assessed. Community-controlled training organisations, as an integral component of the broader community, are best placed to accurately determine what is wanted and needed. These organisations have the capacity to assess both the needs and expectations of the students and their community, and to incorporate these into an appropriate training model. Through work-based training by respected colleagues and through a mentoring system, Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare is in a position to undertake such a role in the development of a training program. There is a compelling community need for local people to train local people, wherever possible, so that the local economy is supported, and higher levels of participation can be realised. Local work-based trainers develop high levels of respect and trust with the participants within the organisation and the community, and have a capacity to train using local languages and are able to adhere to appropriate cultural traditions. Where this is not occurring, aspirations and expectations of participants and community members will be limited and will be only partially effective in reaching people in real need of active training.

Local community relevance

Previous studies have suggested that Indigenous students make different choices and pursue different outcomes from non-Indigenous students, and that they specifically pursue educational outcomes which will enable them to gain employment and generally to contribute in their own communities (Boughton & Durnan 1997b; Schwab 1996a; Teasdale & Teasdale 1996). Community training organisations cater to these aspirations. This is recognised by Landcare, and its model of training is being designed accordingly. Landcare seeks participation at a level that Yolngu see as appropriate, for the reasons they perceive as being valuable, so that local people feel that it is themselves and not others who shape their own future. Landcare works with the community to establish participation levels which they support, and have suffered no loss of productivity in the workplace while maintaining a strong association with traditional beliefs. Consequently Landcare has achieved a great deal of trust and cooperation from the community in which it works.

The organisation recognises that its existence within the community goes beyond simply being a place of work or training. Landcare carries out its

activities in a holistic way, ensuring that the participants are not treated merely as employees, but as community members. In this way, the organisation has cultural relevance. The organisation, as a collective body, abides by rules and protocols within a system called *bukmak rrambangi djama* which translates to 'everyone working together'. The organisation is committed to a mentoring program and ensures that participants are allocated with appropriate mentors when they join. The mentoring system ensures that new participants feel connected with the organisation as well as being guided through organisational and cultural principles. The system also allows the mentors to be role models, instils confidence and self-esteem, and encourages responsibility. Landcare also encourages communal experiences to provide their participants with a sense of togetherness. Work practices are carried out in teams to ensure that participants have a network of support and are part of a companionable group. This is assisted through the provision of breakfast and lunch at specified times for eating together. The participants have also created a market garden in the nursery where vegetables are grown and used in cookery classes for lunches by the working teams. This helps to raise awareness of health and nutritional values. Such activities encourage a feeling of belonging, promoting engagement and continued attendance. These principles are supported by activities such as counselling in the case of participants experiencing difficulties in negotiating any of these relationships.

The relevance of Landcare broadens to the wider community and this organisation is relied upon by many more people than its participants. It can act as a point of connection itself or undertakes activities itself to encourage community cohesion. Works have been carried out in preparation for the development of a cultural centre to be established at a site along Nuwul Beach, Yirrkala. At this early stage an area of dune has been cleared and eight portable shade shelters have been erected. The purpose of this cultural centre is to provide a place where Yolngu people from different areas can assemble to share stories, history and culture. The complementary purpose is to provide a means for *Napaki* (non-Indigenous people) to learn more about Yolngu culture, whether they are employees or residents of Yirrkala, or have a general interest in local Indigenous culture.

Collaborative 'both ways' relationships

Currently, the national training system places much of its emphasis on industry needs and expectations in the development of training packages and delivery options (Campbell 2000). The priority of industry demands can result in the needs of the community becoming a secondary consideration—unless the definition of industry specifically incorporates recognition of voluntary community service and acknowledges the place of self-management and the need to balance work, family, and community needs in effective competency development. It is important for training programs to be locally relevant and to

include various sectors of the community in order to provide a coherent and relevant VET program. A shift in emphasis to include the needs of the community can reveal productive and sustainable collaborations within local communities. Taking account of community needs as a whole can identify how different industry sectors relate to communities at a local level. Recognition of local patterns of economic and cultural activity will facilitate community and industry collaboration which offers major benefits for students, their families and communities, as well as being a contribution to the accountability framework for both state or territory government and Commonwealth Government stakeholders.

The concept of collaboration does raise the issue of cross-cultural communication. A significant part of a collaborative and sustainable model encompasses the issues around how engagement is built between the education institution, industry sectors and the community and its organisations. Collaboration with institutional bodies through action research activities can also instil confidence in the systems. Previous studies have established the importance of action research in refining an organisation's own understanding of what is happening in their sector (Durnan & Boughton 1999). The research may allow for better planning and can also provide more rigorous evidence to recognise and support their visions, strengths and contributions.

Equally, collaborative research activity may also assist in resolving how learning or principles may be sustained through the life of a project or transferred into different projects in the future in order to support alternative training models. Principles evident in the work of Gamarrwa Nuwul Landcare that can be identified as possible transferable strategies, include:

❖ prioritising community needs and expectations as defined by the community

❖ communal decision-making principles

❖ inclusion of community governing bodies in organisational priorities

❖ local industry requirements

❖ definition of controlling role which is then supported by others.

The activities which are undertaken by Landcare fall within and across a complex network of external agencies, including: the Northern Territory Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs; the Department of Employment, Education and Training; and Commonwealth agencies such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, and the National Heritage Trust. These agencies do not necessarily recognise the extent of Landcare's involvement as an Indigenous employer and training provider. Landcare has proved that it assists local Yolngu people to develop new skills and experience cultural exchanges in the workplace, which in turn prepares them to cope with cultural changes in and around the community.

Local industry also plays a role in the region and there is potential for the development of relationships that could assist with Landcare's aims. Landcare has undertaken to establish relationships with a number of organisations and industry bodies which can contribute to the direction and vision of the organisation and the community. It undertakes a range of activities throughout the Dhanbul council area, incorporating the Yirrkala community, but has also developed collaborative relationships with other local council areas, land management groups, the mining company, organisations, such as the training organisation operated by the mining company and local business enterprises. This cooperation enables Landcare, in partnership with others, to create opportunities which, for smaller, individual groups, may not be possible. However, there are a number of potential issues in building such relationships. For example, by establishing joint management principles for ventures between Yolngu and *Napaki*, there remains a dependency upon outside interests to manage much of the administration and some elements of the overall operation. This devalues the Indigenous input, and eventually causes the partnership to break down. This is borne out in problems experienced by many small ventures in Arnhem Land, as well as some larger more complex agreements. Partnerships have broken down due to cultural perspectives being different and the needs of each party not being fully understood. These relationships, therefore, must be fully considered and negotiated carefully.

Members of Landcare have participated in exchanges, such as conferences and networks, to assist them in their development of truly community-based initiatives. One such conference was that of Local Agenda 21, an initiative to translate sustainable development into strategies meaningful to local communities. Yirrkala is the first Indigenous community nationally to develop a future strategic plan based on the principles of Local Agenda 21, and, as such, is trail-blazing to a certain extent. This has meant encountering a number of unforeseen problems with the perceptions of external parties on both community life and cross-cultural expectations. The strategic plan includes the issue of those people taking on a supportive or provisional role, with Indigenous people often not appearing to have undertaken any analysis of their own cultural perspectives. This results in external parties tackling the local issues on a completely different plane of reference, thus making decisions and judgements out of place and out of context with the realities of the community.

Sustainability

One of the primary aims of the Landcare organisation is to become a training agency for community members who are trained by community members, to ensure a sustainable and reliable organisation. Since it is imperative that an organisation undertaking this role has the trust of its participants and the broader community, Landcare is just such an organisation. It has proved to be

an organisation with stability and meaning within the community and is trusted to be a place within the community offering consistency and continuity. These principles have enabled Landcare to engage and retain participants on a regular basis. This is significant where there are few opportunities for community members to engage in a work ethic that is being pushed by external agencies as being highly desirable. It is accepted by most people in the community that Landcare's options, while being limited, are also seen as being a different ethic for most Yolngu people. This raises the issue of cultural norms and the expectations of the locals when it comes to doing business in the non-Indigenous sense, in that there is a very different mindset associated with developing *Napaki* ways of life in an Indigenous community. Due to the lack of prospects for those with ambition and aspirations, local Yolngu participants become jaded by the lack of meaningful employment and the stigma of continuing to be a Community Development Employment Program participant. While this program is a valid component of community life, providing a system for the undertaking of tasks around the community, it cannot replace the importance of a significant step towards initiating independence at a personal and community level.

It is believed that the introduction of formally accredited training, through a community-based model, would assist in engaging and retaining the Landcare participants. Such a model would provide participants with the opportunity to express their needs, set and achieve goals and build their self-esteem. It would also allow the community to continually work through the broader community needs and determine how the system can meet these needs. This would ensure that the model responds to the traditional context in which it exists, allowing for traditional practices, family obligations, cultural traditions and the overriding importance of social implications that non-Indigenous culture no longer practises. Landcare requires a framework, facilitated and supported by a registered training organisation, that enables them to continue to carry out this role within the community. The registered training organisation involved must recognise the need for the community to own the training program itself and to facilitate a system that is sustainable within the community. Landcare is currently pursuing links with a number of potential organisations.

Landcare has found that the expectations of the community and participants are not being met by the industry specifications which determine the training packages. While national strategies attempt to provide options through the principle of customisation, the reality of this happening for an organisation such as Landcare has not been achieved, a result of the need to devise a national system which is essentially homogenous, despite there being such diversity in community and student needs. One of the restraints often presented to Landcare by institutional agencies is that of the remoteness of Yirrkala. However, in reality, the community has a Northern Territory University campus only 20km away in Nhulunbuy. The geographical issue should not be as limiting as it is and often the inability or inflexibility to modify training

packages is a reflection of other limitations and constraints. The issue of restricted timeframes has also impacted on the capacity of students to complete modules. As students are undertaking training within a community setting, they are required to participate in activities associated with community cultural values and practices. Family responsibilities are a significant part of their lives and the organisation encourages the students' participation in these activities to strengthen their cultural identities.

In order for a training system to meet community needs and the expectations of its participants, it must be self-sustainable, ensuring the expectations of self-determination and ownership remain within community control. Community-controlled organisations are in a position to understand and meet the local needs and the students' expectations, which in turn ensures that the programs are supported and are continued, sustained and dependable. The community training organisation often has a more significant role within the community than that which is accorded to mainstream training organisations. The site of education can also act as a refuge for other members of the community and in this way helps the whole community (Boughton & Durnan 1997b). For this reason it is crucial that they can be relied upon in the long term.

While self-sufficiency is the organisation's goal, Landcare is still in its infancy and therefore dependent on funding from government departments, as well as from commercial and community groups. Receiving external funding assists in expanding understanding of environmental care, opportunities for Yolngu enterprise, the preservation of Indigenous culture and reinstating Indigenous community pride. Landcare is very aware of its limited capacity to sustain its work without adequate funding. It is debilitating when short-term funding, commonly provided one year at a time, frustrates long-term planning in the community. One of the major barriers to ongoing community development is the continual need to submit applications, report on tasks and expenditure, and to seek out other forms of funding as alternatives if unsuccessful. All this is done in between operational duties, training, administration and maintaining enthusiasm and direction. Landcare has consistently proved that it can do tasks on budget and on time, fulfil its obligations for both administrative and financial reporting, supervise sub-contractors and sub-contract out services to external clients to supplement income if necessary. Landcare has also proved that it has the technical capacity to monitor and report upon scientific data and research-based studies, as well as providing the necessary skills to undertake the hands-on practical tasks that go hand in hand with these duties.

A critical part of this equation is that Yirrkala Dhanbul, as a community council association, is limited in its capacity to raise adequate revenue to promote employment in the community. Most Indigenous communities lack a viable commercial economy and, unlike non-Indigenous society, they do not possess structures that enable them to go about the business of providing

services and administering their governance roles through a variety of economic means. Until communities are sustainable, the inequity of this system will ensure that future development remains limited. The reliance upon external funding grants only amounts to short-term solutions which cannot rectify the systemic issues. Landcare is trying to break the welfare cycle by helping to carry out community tasks, but while the organisation is unable to undertake accredited formal training, or gain valuable recognition from training institutions for the models used, it is clear that the development of truly Indigenous programs remains unattainable.

Conclusion

There can be little doubt that the intention of equity policy is indeed to promote equitable outcomes and, in doing so, to meet the needs of the 'disadvantaged' groups and individuals targeted by the policy. However, equally, there is a gap between these equitable aspirations and the actual outcomes of implemented policies. Reviews of recent literature and experience in the field suggest that this gap can be, in part, explained by three factors: first, the nature of the discourse between policy-makers and target populations about needs; secondly, the discourse within policy-making circles about how to translate these needs into implementable policy and how to assess whether, and to what extent, these needs have been met; and thirdly, the quality and effectiveness of policy implementation tools available to target populations.

Despite the national training system, policy is still piecemeal and the resulting program frameworks short-term. This leads to a considerable administrative burden for program managers who need to source their funding from many agencies, complete multiple applications, address different criteria and set in motion systems to capture data for different sets of performance criteria. This is in addition to capturing the data to demonstrate outcomes in terms of local criteria and reshaping policy frameworks to address those needs. As a result, Indigenous people and other target groups continue to face many barriers to undertaking vocational education and training.

Recommendations to address the issues identified in this paper include the following:

❖ the development of accountability models based on outcomes and evaluation frameworks identified and endorsed by the local communities

❖ timelines and funding parameters that enable policy-makers and target communities to engage in sustained discourse about needs and program options

❖ encouragement for the use of national competency standards to develop local customised programs that can be delivered and assessed by community members with support provided where needed by external registered training organisations and other agencies

❖ documentation of successful training models and facilitation of exchanges for the transfer of knowledge and principles to other Indigenous training programs, and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities for the sharing of knowledge and the building of self-esteem.

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VET-ability

The capacity of the Australian VET system to be inclusive for people with a disability

Kate Barnett

This chapter overviews the issues that need to be addressed in developing a vocational education and training (VET) system that is inclusive for people with a disability, and the key policy directions and initiatives being undertaken to produce this outcome. The challenge faced is evident in the data on participation which show a significant under-representation of people with a disability in VET programs. Since 1996 the proportion of VET students with a disability has decreased from 5.1% to 4.5% of all students. At the same time, Australian Bureau of Statistics data indicate that nearly 17% of 15 to 64-year-old Australians have a disability of some kind.

Equity-promoting initiatives that target people with a disability in VET have the advantage of operating in a context of increasing recognition of equity issues in general, and disability issues in particular. Major program initiatives (such as Australians Working Together), major change initiatives (such as those contained within *Bridging pathways* [ANTA 2000a] and its accompanying *Blueprint* [ANTA 2000b]), legislative reform (the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*) and accountability-driven trends to report against equity outcomes all contribute to this favourable environment for reform.

Working against an inclusive VET system are a number of factors. These include structural barriers to working across sectors and jurisdictions, and to developing 'whole of life' approaches to supporting people with a disability, the absence of a nationally consistent definition of disability and, therefore, of reliable and comparable databases, and of data about the long-term outcomes resulting from equity-promoting interventions. Other factors include the lack of a strong resource base to underpin disability reform, and the need for more effective transition planning and pathway development for students with a disability.

Introduction

THIS CHAPTER HAS been informed by the author's management of the 2002 mid-term review (Kate Barnett & Associates 2003) of *Bridging pathways— the national strategy for increasing opportunities for people with a disability in vocational education and training 2002–2005*, and an overview of the research which shaped this strategy. The review involved widespread consultation with

stakeholders nationally, in each state and territory, and from both the vocational education and training and disability sectors. Consequently, it has provided an opportunity to overview the key issues that need to be addressed to develop an inclusive VET system, the strategies being pursued to address those issues, and the impact made to date of those strategies.

While the focus of the learning that has arisen from the mid-term review concerns people with a disability, the lessons are also generalisable to broader equity issues, and in many cases, involve good practice models for all VET learners, with or without a disability. This chapter has been written to highlight those lessons, as well as the issues that need to be addressed in order to develop an inclusive VET system.

The challenge: Developing a VET system that is inclusive for people with a disability

In terms of the VET student population profile in 1998, around 4.5% identify as having a disability, yet Australian Bureau of Statistics data (1998) indicate that 16.7% of Australians aged 15 to 64 identify that they have some form of disability. Note the 4.5% participation rate may reflect unwillingness to disclose rather than actual disability.

National data provided by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) on participation patterns from 1996 to 2001 show that this under-representation of people with a disability has not improved over the period studied. There has been a growth in the overall numbers of people with a disability undertaking VET programs, but this has been part of a broader growth trend in numbers of VET students. Between 1996 and 2000 the proportion of VET learners with a disability in the total VET population has actually decreased— from 5.1% in 1996 to 4.5% in 2000 and 2001 (NCVER 2000). Although this national average conceals variations at state and territory level, even the highest representation falls far short of the proportion of the Australian community identifying as having a disability in Australian Bureau of Statistics surveys.

Learners with a disability are more likely than other students to be studying full-time and to undertake more hours of training than other students. They are also less likely to be employed while they are studying, to be older and to have left school before Year 10, all of which indicate the importance of a VET qualification for their employability. The data indicate that this is not providing the guarantee of eventual employment sought by them (NCVER 2000).

VET learners with a disability are more likely to withdraw before completion and to have lower rates of module completion. In 2000, 74% of students with a disability were successful in terms of module outcomes, compared with 80% of all VET students. More than half of the unsuccessful outcomes can be attributed to withdrawal, with 13% of students with a disability withdrawing before completion,

compared with 9% of all VET students. However, those who reach completion stage achieve similar educational success rates as other students (NCVER 2001c).

Participation patterns show an improvement in that there has been a decrease in the proportion of learners with a disability enrolling in enabling programs (TAFE multi-field programs) and an increase in their enrolment in main vocational fields. Improvement is also apparent in that learners with a disability are mostly studying at similar qualification levels to other students (NCVER 2000).

Strategic collaboration across and within sectors has been found to improve participation for students with a disability. For example, participation by people with a disability in New Apprenticeships has increased as a result of partnerships between group training companies and disability employment agencies.

Students with a disability who were in an apprenticeship or traineeship achieved more positive post-training employment outcomes than learners with a disability not engaged in a contract of training. However, data for 2001 show that only 1.8% are reported as having a disability, a proportion which continues to be extremely under-representative (NCVER 2001b).

Employment outcomes following graduation are significantly lower for learners with a disability than for all VET graduates. If they obtain employment following graduation, they are less likely to achieve the same income levels as other students (NCVER 2001a).

In dollar terms, Australia is losing several billion annually by not enabling people with a disability to reach their vocational potential (Dockery, Birch & Kenyon 2001). In personal terms, it takes little imagination to identify the costs of under-achievement, exclusion and marginalisation. In social terms, we need to ask what sort of society we create when we fail to commit the front-end resources required to achieve a long-term return for individuals and the community as a whole.

An equity-friendly environment?

Equity-promoting initiatives that target people with a disability in vocational education and training are operating in an environment of increasing recognition of equity issues in general, and disability issues in particular. This means that specific initiatives like those contained in *Bridging pathways* (ANTA 2000a) reinforce and are reinforced by, other major changes also designed to achieve a range of positive outcomes for people with a disability. Currently, these include national initiatives such as, Australians Working Together, as well as local initiatives being driven by state education and vocational education decision-makers. Related influences are found in the significant legislative reform of the 1992 *Disability Discrimination Act* and accountability-driven

initiatives, in particular, equity-focused standard 6 of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF).

In the past five years or so, broader policy directions which recognise the importance of early intervention and capacity-building, including the development of human and social capital, are encouraging the development of cross-sectoral and whole-of-government approaches to complex social issues. It is clear that the VET sector cannot work in isolation from other sectors, particularly the human services sector, if its programs are to be accessible and learner-centred. Cross-sectoral collaboration, at the policy and delivery levels, is becoming a stronger trend and is reflected in the composition of the Australian Disability Training Advisory Council (the Australian National Training Authority [ANTA] Board's advisory committee on disability and training) and the strategies embedded in *Bridging pathways* (ANTA 2000a).

Key influences shaping an inclusive VET system

Legislative and accountability-related influences

Most of those consulted during the mid-term review of *Bridging pathways* (Kate Barnett & Associates 2003) and its accompanying *Blueprint for implementation* (ANTA 2000b) believe that there is now a stronger commitment to being formally accountable for equity-promoting initiatives. This is part of a broader trend towards diversity management principles in both public and private sector organisations.

Existing reporting requirements for VET authorities build on foundations laid to ensure compliance with the *Disability Discrimination Act* and equivalent state and territory disability discrimination legislation. All government levels, including local government, now prepare disability action plans as a direct response to compliance with the act, and to a broader environment of heightened awareness about equity issues. The new Australian Quality Training Framework has continued this trend.

The major legislative and accountability-related influences identified as shaping and assisting a more equity-friendly VET environment are:

❖ The *Disability Discrimination Act* and its accompanying structures (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and state equal employment opportunity agencies) are crucial to this environment.

❖ The education standards of the *Disability Discrimination Act* due for implementation during 2003 are expected to have a major influence on access for people with a disability.

❖ The new standards for the Australian Quality Training Framework encourage accountability for equity. Standard 6 (Access and Equity and Client Service) requires registered training organisations to apply access and equity principles, clear information and timely support to clients with a disability. Registered training organisations must provide evidence of their adherence to this standard to auditors on request.

❖ The increasing trend to reporting against equity issues, within all three levels of government, also plays a significant role in this context.

Policy- and program-driven influences

Most of the policy and program influences shaping a more equity-friendly VET environment are national in focus.

❖ Australians Working Together (2002–2005) is providing an additional $24 million over four years (through ANTA to the states and territories) to assist people with a disability to access and complete a VET program. States and territories have taken advantage of this funding and are supporting a range of disability-related initiatives. These include the implementation of the Disability Co-ordination Officer initiative which is expected to make a positive contribution to the implementation context; for example, through coordinating the efforts of education and employment stakeholders. Disability Co-ordination Officers will work in conjunction with Regional Disability Liaison Officers to develop sustainable pathways linking training and work.

❖ The Department of Education, Science and Training-funded Regional Disability Liaison Officer initiative requires proactive work with individuals and their families: improving networks between schools, registered training organisation and disability support agencies; delivering professional development opportunities for school transition staff and ensuring coordinated service delivery through working closely with the appropriate service providers. The work of Disability Liaison Officers has also been identified as critically important.

❖ Welfare reform (the McClure Report 1999) brings to the human services policy development environment a focus on systems as well as individuals, and promotes the enhancement of social capital, capacity-building, and early intervention to remove disadvantage. Although emanating from the human services sector, its influence has been cross-sectoral and encapsulates current thinking which focuses on the origins rather than consequences of inequity and exclusion. The McClure Report proposed the development of a new participation support system in Australia based on an individualised service delivery system, the removal of gaps and barriers between programs, increased focus on outcomes and further development of partnerships between government and business to employ people at risk of long-term unemployment.

❖ The VET in Schools program builds pathways into the VET sector from school, and offers significant possibilities for young people with a disability, as long as appropriate transition planning and support is provided. Examples of its potential are found in the Enterprise Career Education Foundation's *Lighthouse Initiative*.

❖ The Disabled New Apprentice Assistance Program review in July 2002 (Pearson & Associates 2002), and subsequent changes to apprenticeship allowances are expected to bring a range of benefits beyond those directly related to allowance provision. The review was a response to the need to ensure that the program reflects the changing provision of disability services and the changing nature of VET delivery, including the introduction of New Apprenticeships. Consultation undertaken to develop the *Bridging pathways* strategy had identified an incongruence between policy relating to New Apprenticeships and the Disabled New Apprentices Assistance Program, and a range of issues relating to eligibility assessment and the need for greater flexibility in program funding.

❖ As part of the current ANTA agreement with states and territories, ANTA has provided an additional $100 million over the three-year period 2001–2003 (with a requirement to match). These growth funds have included a specific clause which provides additional funding for programs designed to enable people with a disability to achieve employment outcomes. This has been a positive source for change, as seen in, for example, a national project with Group Training Australia that demonstrates the benefits of collaboration with the disability employment sector and the increased participation of young people with a disability in New Apprenticeship indentured training sponsored under the group training model (ANTA 2002).

Increased collaboration within and across sectors

Bridging pathways mid-term review consultations identified a trend towards greater collaboration across sectors and jurisdictions. This is a clear shift from the state of play seven years ago when an ANTA-funded project explored VET and disability cross-sectoral planning (Barnett & Jardine 1996). At that time the importance of both sectors working in collaboration was beginning to be recognised but was undeveloped, occurring sporadically in response to cooperation between individuals, rather than as part of systemic change.

The project found that collaboration between the VET and disability sectors was far more likely to have occurred at delivery level than at policy and planning level, attributing this to the absence of a systemically endorsed commitment to collaborate. By 2003, this commitment is growing and is reflected in increasing cross-sectoral partnering. Nevertheless, there is considerable scope for this trend to occur with greater consistency.

The broad endorsement that now exists for such collaboration has been progressed by an increasing awareness of the need to take a whole-of-government approach in order to provide 'seamless' and holistic services. The Australian Disability Training Advisory Council's 'whole of life' model is gaining recognition and contributing to the strengthening of cross-portfolio links.

In implementing *Bridging pathways*, the council commissioned a mapping of the programs and policies in the VET, disability and employment sectors, one outcome of which was the understanding that changes to systems in one area of life are ineffective if they are not supported by systems changes affecting other life areas (KPMG Consulting 2002). The systems involved are not confined to government, but include private sector organisations, the non-government sector and communities. The whole-of-life model also acknowledges that people's needs change as they move through life, and it is therefore important that the services and supports required enable a 'seamless transition' from one phase to another. A failure in support in one life domain has a domino effect on other areas of life, and for this reason, all sectors affecting the life chances of a person with a disability must work collaboratively and in a coordinated way if their individual efforts are to make a difference.

The application of this very sound model faces a range of challenges that go beyond overcoming traditions of 'silo' operation and competition, and a major issue needing to be addressed is the development of funding models to support cross-sectoral and whole-of-government policy and programs.

Changed expectations and enhanced awareness about disability issues

Bridging pathways and other significant initiatives designed to increase the participation of people with a disability in VET are supported by heightened levels of awareness about disability and other equity issues, and by increased expectations from the broader community, people with disabilities and their families, and disability advocates in relation to post-secondary training options.

The mid-term review of *Bridging pathways* found that awareness about disability access has increased significantly among state training authorities and registered training organisations. Similarly, there is an improved level of awareness among registered training organisations of their legislative responsibility to provide equitable access for people with a disability. Awareness about the need for appropriate physical access to learning sites is seen as having been enhanced by both the *Disability Discrimination Act* and less directly, through flexible delivery of training. Most stakeholders report that increased awareness among people with a disability of their rights to access training and of the support services that exist to assist this process, are also making an impact on access.

Like any major equity-promoting initiative, *Bridging pathways* can be expected to require a longer lead time for establishment than initiatives that lack this focus. In part, this is because of the need to build collaborative links between a diverse range of stakeholders and across the disability and VET sectors. As with the building of sound relationships and the raising of awareness to a level that invites commitment to change, this requires a reasonable period of time.

Critical to creating an inclusive VET system is a coordinated professional development strategy that ensures that VET policy and delivery staff have the expertise and knowledge needed to respond effectively to the needs of learners with disabilities. At present, a range of initiatives has been developed, but on an individual and ad hoc basis. The commitment by ANTA (as one of its identified actions in the blueprint document accompanying *Bridging pathways* [ANTA 2000b]) of $1 million to support a consistent and coherent professional development program to enable VET staff to enhance outcomes for people with a disability is expected by most stakeholders to make a significant contribution to developing an inclusive VET system.

Key barriers to an inclusive VET system

Attitudinal barriers

One of the major challenges faced by people with a disability is the negative attitudes and expectations associated with that disability, regardless of the reality of the limits that may or may not arise from that disability. There are countless reports of negative attitudes being evident on the part of employers, registered training organisations, VET policy and planning staff, and sometimes the families or carers of the person concerned.

In part, attitudes can be shaped by the degree of information and understanding held by others about disability in general, as well as the specific disability and its likely implications for the training and work environments. For this reason, the opportunity to access and participate effectively in VET programs requires adequate professional development for VET staff and appropriate information and support (such as can be provided by disability employment services) for employers offering workplace training or employment for people with a disability.

Attitudes can also be affected by marketing and other communication strategies. In the past few years, a strong awareness has evolved of the importance of promoting positive images of people with a disability in any marketing or communications strategy, and a variety of creative initiatives have applied this principle. The most commonly targeted audiences for such marketing strategies are employers and registered training organisations, as well as people with disabilities and their families. Promoting employers of people with a disability in a positive manner (emphasising their achievement of business outcomes through social and civic contributions) is another frequently used approach and is evident in the number of awards being presented at major VET events. It is also a key strategy of the *Bridging pathways* accompanying blueprint.

Resource barriers

The resourcing of equity-related initiatives in the VET system does not meet current levels of demand, and it seems unlikely that the gap between supply

and demand will ever shrink to manageable proportions. Equity-targeted resources compete against other areas of need in the system, with program allocations ultimately representing a response to priorities. The question that arises, of course, is what drives those priorities? What underlying attitudes? What levels of articulated demand?

While a number of effective and innovative disability initiatives have evolved, there is a strong trend nationally for those initiatives to be ad hoc rather than coherent, reflecting a lack of dedicated funding, and of long-term funding. The *Bridging pathways* mid-term review received consistent feedback about the inadequacy of funding support being provided by most state training authorities to support learners with a disability, with most VET delivery staff making do with minimum resources, seizing opportunities to supplement these whenever the opportunity arose. In most instances, that opportunity arrives in the form of national funding programs, for example, Australians Working Together, and by leveraging resources from elsewhere (the latter being a positive strategy, but not one that should be a stand-alone strategy).

Preliminary findings (at the time of writing) from Selby Smith and Ferrier (2003) criticised the use of 'top up' rather than general funding to address the needs of students with a disability and found that resource efficiencies could be improved by paying attention to timeliness. They also drew attention to the need for greater flexibility to recognise the specific needs of students with a disability. For example, their consultation and that associated with the *Bridging pathways* mid-term review identified the need for funding which supports any additional time needed by registered training organisations as part of 'reasonable adjustment' processes in ensuring that students with a disability can complete a unit of study.

One of the factors influencing the allocation of resources for disability initiatives is the availability of quantifiable data that demonstrate the impact of such interventions. In particular, long-term outcomes (for example, ten years after graduation from a VET program) are not measured because existing financial accountability systems sustain short-term reporting and are not yet informed by longitudinal data which demonstrate the outcomes of front-end resource inputs. Feedback is sought within the parameters of funding cycles, the longest of which will be typically three years.

However, if real use is to be made of the information that can be obtained from an economic modelling approach (Dockery, Birch & Kenyon 2001), data need to be kept that track individuals over time, measuring input costs from a range of sources (whereas current costings relate to individual funding agencies) against outcomes being achieved in a number of life areas. For example, if positive employment outcomes can be demonstrated as arising from the provision of support to a student with a disability, this front-end outlay can be conceptualised as an investment rather than a cost. This also has relevance to the 'whole-of-life' model.

Knowledge and skill barriers

Lack of information and knowledge has a profound negative impact on access to and participation in VET. Students often do not make informed choices because of the absence of user-friendly and accessible information about the VET system, and because of poor career guidance. While information exists, it is often provided without taking into account the networks by which its targets commonly seek and receive information. It is common to find that industry training advisory bodies, industry groups and employers are not aware of available funding and resources that can assist in training or employing someone with a disability.

Managing diversity at the broadest level, and responding to a person with a disability in such a way that their disability is understood and their abilities are maximised, requires specific expertise, generating the need for both professional development opportunities as well as ready access to disability expertise.

The level of knowledge informing policy and program development is hampered by the absence of a consistent definition of disability across jurisdictions and levels of government. For example, a medical definition is applied to the Department of Education, Science and Training funded Disabled New Apprentice Assistance Program, while self-nomination of disability is applied through programs which fund group training companies. Not only does this mean that individuals need to be constantly re-assessed and that their smooth progress can be halted because they do not meet the entry criteria of different programs, but it means that there are no comparative data with which to inform planning, funding, policy and program development, and no data which assist in building whole-of-government approaches to disability reform.

Systemic barriers

Two of the most frequently identified system barriers to the development of a disability-friendly VET system are the lack of precedence and structures for cross-sectoral collaboration, and the lack of viable pathways that lead people with a disability easily into the system. A major mapping exercise, undertaken by KPMG Consulting (2002) for the Australian Disability Training Advisory Council, identified the programs being accessed by people with a disability in the VET and employment sectors. A major finding of this research was the need to redress barriers between service provision markets to enable individuals to move more easily between programs as their circumstances change. The report also identified a primary policy gap at the key transition points where people move from one program to another, and the importance of developing service pathways that can meet variable need, and need that changes over time.

Some of those consulted during the mid-term review of *Bridging pathways* argued that there is a trend for an 'upward qualifications creep' which is reducing the availability of certificate I courses. These provide a critical pathway for students with a disability and any reduction is viewed with

concern by stakeholders with a role in supporting these students. At one level, the encouragement of participation at higher Australian Quality Training Framework levels is a very worthwhile goal, but at another level, initial pathways are also important, particularly for learners with special needs. There is a need to balance both requirements, and to ensure that any upward qualification drift does not work against those with a disability.

It is also important to develop pathways before Year 10 as part of an early intervention approach that includes enhanced transition planning. Inadequate transition planning is itself a significant barrier, and it has been identified (for example, by the Enterprise Career Education Foundation's *Lighthouse Initiative* projects) that VET is often not presented to school students with a disability as a career option. The tendency for these students to leave school before Year 11 reinforces the need to build a vocational pathway well before this point.

Effective transition planning will involve cross-sectoral input, bringing together disability experts who can advise on the appropriate supports needed, linking students to workplace training and employment opportunities, special education experts who can advise on the learning support required, and VET coordinators (where VET pathways are sought), as well as other individuals as needed. Transition planning is increasingly being understood as a process that should address needs holistically and thus requires collaboration across a range of sectors, with a case-management model to coordinate supports and to link the student to appropriate opportunities. Transition planning for students with a disability is really best practice for all students because it takes an individualised approach that addresses need while seeking to maximise potential.

Developing individual transition plans has become a key strategy across Australia, but one that is often hampered by inadequate resourcing and under-developed cross-sectoral linkages. The importance of individualised, tailored career planning is also a disability good practice lesson that has strong applicability to students without identified disabilities, and is reflected in the draft National Framework for Career and Transition Services.

Addressing the challenge: Good practice exemplars

The development of an inclusive VET system is driven by an increasing knowledge base, and critical to this are innovative approaches that challenge the status quo and provide models of good practice. In this section, three examples are provided of innovative initiatives which have made a significant contribution to the evolving knowledge base. One involves the development of a framework for change focused at the policy and planning level, and the other two exemplify good practice at the delivery level.

The *Bridging pathways blueprint* (2000–2005)

The underpinning vision of *Bridging pathways* is:

> to create a vocational education and training system that leads world's best practice in achieving equitable outcomes for people with a disability.

The strategy is shaped by four goals, from which is derived a blueprint (ANTA 2000b) for implementation structured around seven focus areas with 20 associated strategies and 54 specific actions, each with a designated timeframe, and nominated organisations accountable for its completion. The blueprint provides an overarching framework for reform across the VET and disability sectors and has the endorsement of partners at national level—ANTA, the Commonwealth Departments of Education, Science and Training, Family and Community Services, and Employment and Workplace Relations—and at state and territory level, all state training authorities.

As a change mechanism, the *Blueprint for implementation* is the most significant disability reform process ever implemented in the VET sector, and its design reflects significant consultation with major stakeholders. The responsibility of the Australian Disability Training Advisory Council, it is supported by state-level implementation structures of varying design but lacks a dedicated resource base, relying instead on a leveraging strategy.

The mid-term review of *Bridging pathways* found that, although in its earliest implementation phase, the blueprint had begun to make a discernible and positive impact—sometimes as an independent influence, but usually in combination with other factors contributing to a climate of heightened awareness about disability issues and a gradual process of broader reform. The overall strategy structured by the blueprint was found to have provided a framework for change that is regarded by key stakeholders as relevant, that legitimises demands sought by disability advocates, enables collaboration across sectors and jurisdictions, and requires accountability from blueprint partners. At the time of the review, most partners rated their achievement of the blueprint's 57 actions as being either 'in progress' (50% of partners) or 'complete' (19% of partners).

The Enterprise Career Education Foundation's *Lighthouse Initiative*

A major contribution to current understanding of the potential role of VET in Schools programs for young people with a disability, and the importance of cross-sectoral partnerships has been the Enterprise Career Education Foundation's *Lighthouse Initiative*. This was developed as a direct response to *Bridging pathways* and pursues the theory that the under-representation of people with a disability in the VET system could be linked to the lack of pathways being developed from the school system. It is known that students with a disability tend to leave school early (before Year 11) and this may be because opportunities to engage them in

programs with clear pathways to employment are not being offered—or at least adapted to enable their participation.

There were two key premises of the model underpinning the Lighthouse projects:

❖ The under-representation of students with a disability in the VET system can be addressed by targeting students while they are still in secondary school.

❖ This intervention includes the building of partnerships between schools, employers and disability employment agencies because of the latter's disability expertise and unique links to employers.

The model has these three features:

❖ early intervention (prior to Years 11 and 12) to prevent early school leaving by students with a disability

❖ provision of appropriate learning and other support to enable effective participation in VET in Schools programs and work placement

❖ the creation of pathways to employment based on successful participation in VET in Schools programs, and in some instances, from these to school-based apprenticeships.

The three Lighthouse projects are supporting students through accredited VET in Schools and structured workplace learning programs. One project is based in Western Adelaide (WAVES), one on the Central New South Wales Coast (Work-Out) and one in Launceston (GATE). The projects have broadened the usual education–industry partnerships by adding disability employment agencies to the collaboration.

VET in Schools programs rely on local level partnerships between schools and employers. In order to develop support 'packages' for students with a disability and to effectively negotiate and develop work placements, there is a need to add a third partner with disability-relevant expertise and linkages. Within the education sector, this involves transition/special education teachers and similar support personnel (for example, trained teachers' aides). Within the community services sector, an appropriate partner is the disability employment agency, whose employer linkages and disability expertise are invaluable in relation to student work placement—and more broadly, to individual transition planning. This type of partnership has not been part of mainstream delivery, mainly because the agencies are funded by the Department of Family and Community Services to work with people with a disability who have left school. However, their important linkages were seen as critical to the opportunities available to school students, and their potential value has been central to the pilots.

The projects have challenged limited expectations associated with students by teachers, employers and sometimes students and their families. They have confirmed the importance of disability employment agency involvement and of

cross-sectoral and cross-jurisdictional collaboration. (The significance of disability employment agency involvement in VET delivery was also highlighted by the Group Training Australia action research project [ANTA 2002].) The potential of VET in Schools programs has been made apparent and extremely positive learning and employment outcomes have been achieved. VET opportunities (including structured workplace learning) were achieved for all 158 participating students. Employment opportunities (full-time work, part-time work, school-based apprenticeships or traineeships) were achieved for 29 students. Significantly increased self-confidence was reported for most students. Involvement in the projects has enhanced expectations about career possibilities held by VET and transition education teachers, by employers, by parents and by students themselves.

Particularly positive outcomes have been achieved by Adelaide's WAVES Project which, in its 2000–2001 phase, had 22 of its 45 participants gain employment. Of these, six were full-time, 12 were part-time and four were traineeships. In addition, participants were given the opportunity to obtain a VET qualification. The Becoming a Worker course was completed by 32 participants. The Certificate I in Retail Operations was undertaken by 19 participants and the Certificate I in Engineering was undertaken by 18 participants.

Detailed case study reports of the projects can be accessed from <http://www.ecef.com.au/web/ProjInit.nsf/ECEF/disability?OpenDocument&site=ab>.

The ANTA–Group Training Australia project

National data collection shows that group training companies have been the most successful of the three employer groups in indenturing apprentices and trainees with disabilities. Group training companies nationally have been achieving positive rates of employment for apprentices and trainees reporting a disability. Significantly, group training companies who have successfully placed and supported these apprentices have well-established partnerships with one or more disability employment services.

In 2002, ANTA funded Group Training Australia to raise awareness and establish collaborative networks between group training companies and disability employment services in order to achieve apprenticeships for people with a disability. Group training companies have hosted local networking forums, inviting key stakeholders to develop pathways and alliances between services. The project has also produced a best practice guide, *Key success factors in placing and supporting New Apprentices with disabilities through group training* (ANTA 2002). The guide reflects research designed to identify the key success factors in recruiting, placing, supporting and securing outcomes for apprentices and trainees with disabilities, and exemplifies best practice through six case studies.

Because of the combined impact of the separate expertise of each, one of the project's key findings has been the importance of alliances between group training companies and disability employment services. Twenty of Australia's most successful group training companies were found to have well-established partnerships with local disability employment agencies.

Taking the lessons forward

Performance measurement

A uniform, comparable definition of disability is needed, one which applies across agencies, sectors and jurisdictions. Without such a definition, it will continue to be difficult to progress a 'whole of life' approach, a 'seamless' transition from one life phase to another, and to develop a reliable equity data collection. Definitions also need to be sufficiently comprehensive to reflect different types and degrees of disability, as well as changing disability impact and individual differences in response to the disability concerned. Reflecting concern with the implications for individuals as well as for reliable data collection and planning processes, the recent Senate Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities (2002) recommended that the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs develop a nationally agreed definition of disability (Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee 2002, recommendation 3).

As part of the reform to current disability definition processes, there is also a need to move away from the reliance in some sectors, including the national VET data collection, on self-disclosure. Apart from the lack of rigour of such an approach to measuring disability incidence, self-disclosure requires a well-developed accompanying process. Our current national data collection process depends on enrolling students being willing to disclose their disability without necessarily understanding the implications of that disclosure. Does disclosure mean future restriction on choice and access? Does it bring a guarantee of support to enhance access? What will the information be used for, and by whom? There are no incentives to disclosure, and possibly a number of disincentives. Consequently, our 4.5% participation rate may well reflect willingness to disclose rather than actual disability. Such a low proportion of students must affect resource allocation and raises questions of funding availability for a group who appear not to reach 'critical mass'.

Collaboration and partnering

Organisational cultures are shaped by a tradition of separation rather than one of integration, and while the importance of collaboration is given lip service,

translating this into practice requires significant intervention and change. The most successful examples are driven by incentives that matter to individuals rather than to systems, and broadening the impact of these partnerships tends to be hampered by the absence of structures that promote collaboration.

While improvements are occurring, there continues to be a need for enhanced policy linkages and coordination between sectors and organisations, and in particular, between VET and disability employment agencies. Some stakeholders believe that incentives for collaboration need to be identified and promoted (as described earlier in the exemplars) and disincentives (as seen in differing definitions of disability) removed.

Without systemic frameworks for collaboration across jurisdictions and sectors, individuals become trapped by inter-sectoral boundaries, or fall between those boundaries. VET learners with a disability will not receive the integrated support and pathway access that is so essential unless change occurs at the systemic level. KPMG Consulting's mapping research (2002) identified the need for an agreed planning and consultative process to support cross-program coordination as being a 'constant and critical theme'. The framework provided by *Bridging pathways* offers significant scope for this to occur, but would benefit from a cross-sectoral funding base that promotes a whole-of-life model.

Strengthened pathways

Access to vocational education and training for people with a disability requires clearly defined pathways which reflect the needs of those who require additional support, or additional time, or some other form of flexible treatment. Some of those consulted for the mid-term review of *Bridging pathways* (Kate Barnett & Associates 2003) believe that there is a need to fund a range of certificate I and II pre-employment programs to enable the development of the skills needed to participate in more significant VET courses.

There is also a need to build pathways through VET in Schools programs delivered with a tailored program of support, as part of broader, more effective transition planning. Pathways to vocational education and training need to be developed before students leave school, and before Year 10, as part of an early intervention model based on individualised and informed career planning and development. There is also a need to develop pathways that enable transfer from vocational education and training to employment. The need for a specific strategy to achieve those pathways in order to enhance employment outcomes was identified in the Senate report *Education of students with disabilities* (Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee 2002) which recommended that the transition of students with disabilities from school to further study, employment and lifelong learning be the subject of a specific inquiry (recommendation 9).

Capacity-building

The capacity of the VET sector to respond effectively to the needs and abilities of students with a disability requires appropriate resourcing, new methods of defining and measuring outcomes for those students, and a workforce which is informed and skilled, and not blinkered by negative attitudes to diversity. Resourcing involves the development of both financial capacity to ensure that students can receive the support they need to participate effectively, and the development of a VET sector which has the expertise to develop policy and deliver programs inclusively. A coordinated professional development strategy is seen as needed for the VET sector and the funding that has been allocated by ANTA to support this from 2003 is both timely and essential.

Resources for supporting learners with a disability need to be increased to reflect growth in demand levels. This includes infrastructure resources based on a funding program that does not penalise not-for-profit organisations and which makes special provisions for learners with a disability. It includes identifying ways of achieving improved resource efficiencies and ways of collaborating that enhance resource usage.

However, if real use is to be made of the information that can be obtained from an economic modelling approach (Dockery, Birch & Kenyon 2001), data need to be kept that track individuals over time, measuring input costs from a range of sources (whereas current costings relate to individual funding agencies) against outcomes being achieved in a number of life areas. This of course, relates to a 'whole of life' model.

If we are to develop whole-of-government approaches to disability issues, we also need a funding model that enables cost-sharing. Again, if we cannot measure individual inputs and compare these and outcomes achieved on the basis of a shared definition of disability, we will not move beyond the current impasse based on fears of 'cost shifting' and 'double dipping'.

Inclusive VET as the foundation for an inclusive society

A VET system that does not turn individual disabilities into insurmountable barriers, but instead enables individuals to reach their full potential and maximise their abilities is one that is truly committed to such an outcome. It is a system that therefore gives priority to resourcing the front-end inputs needed to achieve equity of access and participation, is structured to enable a flexible response to individual difference, and builds its workforce capacity to manage disability and other forms of diversity.

Apart from the economic incentives involved, the commitment to building a society which values difference and the need to enable all its citizens to contribute as well as receive, has to be the ultimate reward for building an inclusive training and vocational education system.

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Inequity in Australian vocational education and training by location

Barry Golding and Sandra Pattison[1]

Vocational education and training (VET) students in rural and remote locations form one of the five VET equity groups designated in the national strategy for VET 1998–2003 (ANTA 1998). At an aggregated level, students from rural and remote areas tend to be participating and achieving equal (or better) outcomes than students in capital cities and metropolitan areas. There are, however, underlying issues of accessibility for prospective VET students in rural and, in particular, remote locations. This chapter discusses this equity group, with particular reference to those students considered to have multiple disadvantages, including location. It is argued that inequity in vocational education and training does exist in relation to location, which is largely concerned with issues of accessibility and remoteness to services and facilities. This chapter discusses the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) in relation to the reporting of vocational education and training and possible future directions for the collection of locality information in the national VET data collections to enable pockets of inequity by location to be more successfully identified.

Introduction

Analysis of Australian education and training data usually takes place at the national or state and territory level of aggregation. While some trends are apparent at these broad levels of aggregation, they often mask the demographic and socio-economic diversity that exists within the country. To take account of this, national reporting of VET data has employed variations of the Rural, Remote and Metropolitan classification (Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas [RRMA] 1994) to categorise student location and thereby allow differences in VET participation and outcomes by these three locations to be explored.

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The classification recognises three possible Australian zones at a statistical local area level—remote, rural or urban. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) has further subdivided urban into 'capital city' and 'other metropolitan'. The student's residential postcode is used as the basis for derivation of the four geographic regions and of VET data in relation to each. The latest data based on this classification system is presented in the following sections of this chapter. The shortcomings of the Rural, Remote and Metropolitan classification—that it does not take account of diversity and inequality within and between the four geographic regions—is subsequently addressed in the chapter. The discussion confirms that, while location is important, inequity is not simply an issue of the 'urban to rural' continuum. The chapter finishes off with a brief examination of options for analysing and addressing inequity by location more directly and on a smaller scale.

Recent trends in vocational education and training by four geographic areas

Information from the national VET data collections is reported each year, including by geographic region, in the annual national report on the Australian VET system (volume three) (ANTA 2003). In summary, from the 2003 report we find that:

❖ Participation rates are high in vocational education and training for people from rural and remote locations compared with those residing in capital cities and metropolitan areas.

❖ VET pass rates are also higher for students from rural areas compared with those from other regional groups, while pass rates are slightly lower for students from remote areas than for other students.

❖ The proportion of qualifications completed by students in rural and remote locations mirror those of students in capital cities—except that there are proportionally more diploma and above qualifications completed in capital cities and more certificate I qualifications completed in remote locations.

❖ Employment outcomes are better for students in rural and remote locations than those in capital cities and other metropolitan areas (noting that a larger proportion of rural and remote students are also employed prior to undertaking their training).

❖ More students in rural and remote locations are satisfied with their training and achieve their reason for undertaking their training.

As noted in the introduction, data at the aggregate level often mask underlying issues of inequity. The remainder of this section further segments the rural and regional VET student population.

Inequity by location—not simply an issue of the 'urban to rural' continuum

If it is possible to identify and demonstrate inequities in local and sub-state regional economies and in the labour market for VET graduates, then the potential exists in future equity strategies to identify and target and address inequity more geographically and directly.

When economic prospects for Australian states are closely examined on a sub-state regional basis (for example, Adams 2002), they show 'greater differences between the industrial mixes of the sub-state regions than between the industrial mixes of the states' (p.12). In effect, there are significant differences in the economies of particular regions in each state. In the context of this chapter in relation to vocational education and training, there are therefore very different opportunities for paid work and the vocational education and training to support that work in Australian sub-regions. If sub-state regions in Australia as analysed by the Bureau of Rural Sciences (1999) using Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) national census data are examined, there is ample evidence of significant differences on a wide range of individual socio-economic variables. These differences presumably have a flow-on effect of limiting or enhancing the life opportunities and prospects for wellbeing in particular sub-regions.

By postcode

Pointers to possible ways of more directly identifying indicators of local and cumulative social disadvantage have been provided by Vinson (1999). Vinson focused explicitly on the links between social justice and geography in areas of Victoria and New South Wales using methods pioneered by Smith (1994). Vinson's analysis was based on Smith's notion of 'justice as spatial equalisation' (p.149) which recognises and addresses inequalities in the distribution of services and material resources. Vinson examined and evaluated a series of 'hard' socio-economic indicators (mortality, unemployment, low birth weight, childhood injuries, education, psychiatric admissions, crime, income, emergency relief) to identify factors indicative of localised poverty or socio-economic disadvantage by postcode and which could be aggregated into an index of socio-economic disadvantage.

Vinson's analysis clearly identified particular towns and regions that were severely socially disadvantaged. Vinson argued that the heart of the problem of this localised poverty and spatial separation of the poorest groups:

> … is the exclusion of people from certain parts of the labour market, particularly those positions with high wages, stability, and security, compared with those sections marked by insecurity and little opportunity to advance. This in turn constrains access to better housing and neighbourhoods associated with inferior labour market positions, low education and skill …   (Vinson 1999, p.20)

By town, local neighbourhood or community

McIntyre (1998) argued the case for less attention to particular targeted equity groups and more attention to the interaction between access to vocational education and training and social and economic disadvantage in particular localities. McIntyre's analysis and subsequent studies (McIntyre & Egg 2001) focused on the interaction between provider, area and clientele in metropolitan neighbourhoods in Sydney and Melbourne at a similar level of analysis as that used by Vinson. McIntyre showed that technical and further education (TAFE) participation is highest in areas where relatively 'disadvantaged' people are living.

People in the smallest towns are likely to be most disadvantaged in terms of access to both training and to work associated with that training. Houghton (1997), for example, found that Australian regional communities with populations under 15 000 were the least resilient to negative economic shocks. Golding and Rogers (2001) looked specifically at small (fewer than 2000 people) and remote towns (identified by Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia) most of which had no or very restricted access to TAFE. In such communities, adult and community education tends to become the adult learning sector of choice, particularly for women.

These and other studies suggest a case for re-conceptualising the most significant variables affecting access and outcomes in vocational education and training to include location and socio-economic status. A third key indicator is gender. Table 1 confirms that the ratio of male to female students varies by field of study and that this variation exists across all geographic regions. Segmentation by males in vocational education and training is extreme in three fields of study in all three geographic regions: engineering and surveying; architecture and building; and land and marine resources/animal husbandry. In each of the three fields of study, the segmentation is more marked in rural or remote regions. These three male-dominated fields of study subsume more than one-third (37.5%) of males in vocational education and training in Australia and nearly half (47.9%) of male VET students in remote areas.

Segmentation by females in vocational education and training is pronounced but not as extreme in four other fields of study as well as 'subject only' enrolments (marked * in the table), although the ratio of males to females is reasonably consistent across the three geographic regions. These four female-dominated fields of study and subject only enrolments subsume nearly half (47.2%) of all female enrolments in VET.

One other field (VET multi-field education) shows significant differences by gender across locations. In capital cities the elevated proportion of female non-English speaking students reduces the male to female ratio to 0.7:1. In remote areas the elevated proportion of male non-English speaking Indigenous students increases the male to female ratio to 1:4.

Table 1: Gender ratio (M:F) of VET students by field of study by geographic region, 2001

Field of study	Capital city	Rural	Remote
Land & marine resources, animal husbandry	2.6	3.5	3.4
Architecture, building	9.1	11.9	10.3
Arts, humanities & social science*	0.6	0.6	0.7
Business, administration, commerce*	0.6	*0.4*	*0.4*
Education*	0.7	0.7	0.7
Engineering, surveying	6.4	8.6	12.6
Health, community services*	*0.5*	*0.5*	*0.5*
Law, legal studies	1.0	1.4	2.3
Science	1.3	0.9	0.9
Veterinary science, animal care*	*0.2*	*0.2*	*0.2*
Services, hospitality, transportation	1.0	1.1	1.0
VET multi-field education	0.7	1.0	1.4
Subject only*	*0.5*	*0.5*	0.8

Key: Fields where there are at least twice as many males as females or vice versa are italicised.
'Other metropolitan' has been omitted for the sake of simplicity.
* = female-dominated fields.
M = male
F = female

Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA)

Shortcomings of the Rural, Remote and Metropolitan classifications were addressed in the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia classification (Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia 1999) now being adopted in a modified form by the ABS (ABS 2001). This index interprets remoteness as accessibility to service centres which had populations greater than 5000 in the 1996 census. Remoteness values for all 11 340 populated Australian localities are available in a searchable database. One of this index's advantages is that it is based on an unambiguous geographic criteria—of road distances to service centres of varying population sizes. The objectiveness of the classification and its fine-grained categorisation of increasing remoteness has been found by one of the authors (Golding & Rogers 2001, 2002) to be useful in designing and conceptualising studies of adult learning in small and remote towns.

A comparison of the Rural, Remote and Metropolitan and the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia classifications as they apply to Australian VET students in 2001 is summarised in table 2. For the purposes of this chapter the indexes for VET students in relation to both of these classifications are derived from the student's residential postcode (the only location information currently available in the national data collection).

Around three-quarters of Australians live in areas classified by the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia as 'highly accessible'. One

advantage of this index is that it focuses disadvantage by location on a more objectively limited target area. However, one limitation of it (and indeed of any purely geographic or demographic classification) is that individuals without access to a car or transport have accessibility issues, regardless of locality.

Table 2: VET participation in Australia by RRMA and ARIA remoteness classifications, 2001

RMMA	Capital city	Other metropolitan	Rural	Remote	Overseas
%	55.2	7.3	31.2	3.9	0.8
ARIA	**Highly accessible**	**Accessible**	**Moderately accessible**	**Remote/ very remote**	**Overseas**
%	72.7	14.9	4.9	1.7/1.8	0.8
Australian population (%)	81.3	11.3	4.0	1.2/1.4	-

Note: Terms defined by Rural, Remote and Metropolitan (1994), and the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (1999).
Source: NCVER national VET provider collection (2001); ABS unpublished estimated residential population (2001).

The Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia was developed originally for the health sector in Australia. Its potential lies in its emphasis on identification of service centres with a population of more than 5000 people. Such centres invariably have access to a TAFE campus. An analysis of the 21 Category A and B service centres (48 000 or more persons) confirms that all such centres have ready access to a university campus as well as a TAFE institute. Subsequent research into regional inequity might look more closely at possible mismatches between TAFE accessibility for populated localities in other population ranges with high Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia values (indicating remoteness).

Indeed there is an overlap between the number of students reported by both sets of classifications (see table 3). Almost all VET students identified as residing in a capital city or other metropolitan area have a remoteness index of 'highly accessible'. Interestingly, the majority of students in rural areas also have an index of either 'highly accessible' or 'accessible', with those in remote locations with indexes of 'moderately accessible' through to 'very remote'. Not surprisingly, rural students participate well and achieve good outcomes overall, with the majority also having access to services. Should the interest in inequality therefore lie with those 'remote' and 'very remote' indexes instead?

A comparison of the two classifications as they apply to Indigenous VET students in 2001 is summarised in table 4. While three-quarters of Australians live in areas classified by the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia as 'highly accessible' (table 2), just over a third of Indigenous students live in areas classified as 'highly accessible'. Indeed one in five Indigenous VET

students lives in areas classified as 'very remote'. This figure may indeed be higher due to the inaccuracies of using postcode (which is then mapped to the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia index) as a measure of locality. As noted previously, VET data use residential postcode as the locality information which is then mapped to both classifications.

Table 3: **Proportion of students by ARIA remoteness classifications within each region, 2001**

Region	Highly accessible	Accessible	Moderately accessible	Remote	Very remote	Total
Capital	97.6	0.8	0.2	0.0	0.0	**100.0**
Other metro	87.9	7.5	2.3	0.0	0.0	**100.0**
Rural	39.9	44.2	11.9	2.2	0.4	**100.0**
Remote	0.0	2.2	22.8	26.7	44.4	**100.0**

Source: NCVER national VET provider collection (2001).

Table 4: **VET participation by Indigenous students in Australia by RRMA and ARIA remoteness classifications, 2001**

RMMA	Capital city	Other metropolitan	Rural	Remote	Overseas
%	26.6	5.9	38.2	27.4	0.0

ARIA	Highly accessible	Accessible	Moderately accessible	Remote/ very remote	Overseas
%	35.7	22.9	9.9	6.8/20.3	0.0

Note: Terms defined by Rural, Remote and Metropolitan (1994), and the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (1999).
Source: NCVER national VET provider collection (2001).

Table 5 illustrates the marked inverse relationship between Indigenous socio-economic disadvantage (from recent Commonwealth Grants Commission data) and accessibility/remoteness as measured by the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia. As accessibility increases, socio-economic disadvantage decreases and vice versa.

From table 5 we can see that more than three-quarters (76%) of all 'very remote' Indigenous people are in the 'most disadvantaged' category. Conversely, over half (51%) of all 'highly accessible' Indigenous people are in the 'least disadvantaged' category.

Another way of saying this is that 80% of all Indigenous people in the 'most disadvantaged' category live in 'very remote' areas, and 82% of all the 'least advantaged' Indigenous people live in highly accessible areas.

Table 5: Distribution of Indigenous population by accessibility/remoteness and socio-economic disadvantage (%)

Socio-economic disadvantage	Accessibility/remoteness range					
	Highly accessible	Accessible	Moderately accessible	Remote	Very remote	Total
Least disadvantaged	23.0	4.0	0.6	0.1	0.1	**28.0**
Less disadvantaged	18.0	9.0	2.0	2.0	0.3	**31.0**
More disadvantaged	4.0	6.0	6.0	4.0	4.0	**24.0**
Most disadvantaged	0.0	0.4	2.0	2.0	14.0	**17.0**
Total	**44.0**	**19.0**	**11.0**	**8.0**	**18.0**	100.0

Note: Accessibility/remoteness defined by the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (1999). Percentages greater than one have been rounded.

Source: Socio-economic disadvantage data from experimental Indigenous socio-economic disadvantage index quartiles from ABS 2000, 'Report on experimental Indigenous socioeconomic disadvantage indexes', Consultant's report to Commonwealth Grants Commission, ABS, Canberra, p.409, table 9.

Accessibility to TAFE

A study by Haberkorn and Bamford (2000) examined the relationship between service accessibility to a range of different public and private sector services (including TAFE) across non-metropolitan Australia. They defined access 'in terms of road distance between rural and regional population centres of varying population size and service centres, by applying the ARIA Index' (p.2). Using 80 km ('one hour driving distance outside capital cities and major regional centres') as a critical cut-off point, they demonstrated the relative accessibility of TAFE. Re-analysis of Haberkorn and Bamford's access to TAFE data (1996 census data, 1999–2000 TAFE location data) confirms a number of marked inequities in access to TAFE by state and territory as well as by Indigenous status as summarised in table 6.

Table 6 confirms that TAFE is much less accessible in the Northern Territory, Queensland and Tasmania and least accessible to Indigenous Australians in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia. Indigenous Australians are 11 times more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to experience this limited geographic access to TAFE, primarily in towns and regions that would be classified as remote (Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia 5.8 to 9.08) or very remote (Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia 9.08 to 12).

These data on TAFE accessibility and the data which follow need to be read in parallel with data on accessibility to non-TAFE provision of vocational education and training through registered training organisations for particular groups. For example, non-TAFE provision of vocational education and training accounted for around one-quarter (24.6%) of Indigenous VET students in Australia in 2002. In some locations non-TAFE providers appear to substitute

for TAFE. For example in the Northern Territory in 2002, 43% of Indigenous VET participation was not through TAFE. Although no data were available on registered training organisation accessibility, it is commoner for registered training organisations to be in more accessible locations.

Table 6: Inaccessibility to TAFE by state/territory and Indigenous status

State/territory	% non-Indigenous people inaccessible to TAFE	% Indigenous people inaccessible to TAFE
New South Wales	0.5	1.6
Victoria	0.7	0.3
Queensland	3.1	19.8
South Australia	1.0	13.4
Western Australia	1.7	20.1
Tasmania	3.2	3.4
Northern Territory	9.1	60.2
Australian Capital Territory	0.0	0.0
Australia	1.6	17.6

Note: Inaccessibility defined as being 80+ km from TAFE.
Sources: Based on 1996 ABS census data and 1999–2000 TAFE location data as cited in Haberkorn and Bamford (2000).

Haberkorn and Bamford's analysis revealed particular problems with TAFE accessibility for Australians living in small rural and remote towns. In Queensland, in particular, there are 64 populated localities with more than 200 people more than 80 km from a TAFE institute, including ten towns with populations of more than 2000. Western Australia also has 25 populated localities with more than 200 people which are more than 80 km from a TAFE institute, although this includes a few large towns (>1000 people). Beyond Queensland, only three other towns in Australia with more than 2000 people are more than 80 km from a TAFE institute.

What these data show is that geographic inequity can be demonstrated objectively by service data by location without categorising all small, remote or rural towns and their residents as disadvantaged. Further, the data confirm that inequity through inaccessibility can be considered as structural and caused by inequities associated with the remoteness of service.

It might be useful for future research to identify possible matches (or mismatches) between socio-economic data (for example, those generated by Vinson 1999) and structural inequities in TAFE availability within regions. This might include less accessible suburbs of large cities as well as those inaccessible rural and remote areas.

Despite demonstrable inequity in terms of access to TAFE in some remoter (particularly Indigenous and Queensland) communities, TAFE is generally

much more accessible than university education. Haberkorn and Bamford (2000) show that 9.8% of the Australian population lives more than 80 km from a university, particularly in the Northern Territory (47.5%), Western Australia (15.8%) and South Australia (15.2%). However, the largest numbers of towns with more than 200 people more than 80 km from a university are in New South Wales (53 towns) and Queensland (33 towns).

Stevenson, Maclachlan and Karmel (1999) examined regional higher education and TAFE participation rates, and compared participation rates with distribution of student places in each sector. Analysis of data found university participation to be far more variable than TAFE participation, with a much larger range of participation rates across regions compared with TAFE. The differences in participation rates between metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions are greater for university than for TAFE participation. The study also found that some regions in capital cities with low participation rates had good access to university campuses, indicating that factors other than distance to university facilities play an important role in university participation (Stevenson, Maclachlan & Karmel 1999).

Although Haberkorn and Bamford's analysis did not include adult and community education (ACE), similar substitution effects can be anticipated between TAFE and ACE; that is, TAFE participation might be expected to be less where ACE is available and vice versa. At one extreme in Victoria where over 500 state-funded and networked ACE providers operate in quite small towns and neighbourhoods (sometimes in collaboration with TAFE), adult learning is relatively accessible in most places. By contrast in Queensland where ACE is less developed, funded or networked and where TAFE accessibility is problematic in some smaller and remoter towns, as demonstrated by Haberkorn and Bamford, adult learning is likely to be relatively inaccessible as remoteness increases and population decreases. Analysis of inequity by location in vocational education and training must accommodate the fact that the major campuses of TAFE institutes are most accessible to people living in cities, including regional cities. While most TAFE institutes have extended campus networks or outreach facilities, the complete choice of TAFE programs and levels is seldom available beyond the main campuses, and then only in the larger towns. People without ready access to a TAFE campus in particular towns, neighbourhoods or regions are presumably more disadvantaged than people living in remote cites with ready access to TAFE locally.

Conclusion

Reporting any regional information relies on the collection of locality information in the national VET data collections. Privacy and confidentiality protocols for national data collections ensure individual students are not identifiable—names and addresses are not collected nationally. The only

location information collected on students in any national VET data collection is residential postcode. This is used to derive a geographic region for national reporting purposes, using the Rural, Remote and Metropolitan classifications. However, as explained earlier, these three regions do not reveal any differences in relation to VET at the aggregate level: in general those students in remote and rural areas are participating and achieving equitable (or better) outcomes than those students in capital cities and metropolitan areas.

However, this classification does not deal with the issue of accessibility to services and remoteness from services or any other socio-economic indicators. For the purposes of this chapter, the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia for VET students was also derived from the residential postcode (the only location information currently available) to pinpoint the numbers of students who live remote to services as opposed to in remote areas. The Accessibility/ Remoteness Index of Australia is proposed for further exploration as an indicator of inequity in vocational education and training; so too is the collection of more refined location information than that provided by the postcode.

Recently the National Training Statistics Committee has discussed the inclusion of additional location information (address suburb, town, or locality) in national VET data collections. In particular, there is a perceived need to identify the geographical distribution of students for demographic research purposes in relation to objective 3 of *Shaping our future: Australia's national strategy for vocational education and training 2004–2010.* This objective specifies that 'communities and regions will be strengthened economically and socially through learning and employment' (ANTA 2004). Once this information becomes available, it is envisaged that the information will be geo-coded (coded by location), and indexes such as the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia and other socio-economic indicators can be reported by location.

In future equity strategies, it may therefore be possible to identify, target and address inequity more clearly and effectively by location.

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Tangled threads

Issues faced by non-English speaking background people in vocational education and training

Veronica Volkoff

The purpose of this chapter is to integrate and synthesise the literature on non-English speaking background people in vocational education and training (VET) in Australia in recent years. The review focuses mainly on research and statistical data from 1997–2001. It:

❖ provides a background to the growing cultural and linguistic diversity of the Australian population

❖ explores definitional issues associated with the term 'non-English speaking background'

❖ identifies trends in VET participation and outcomes for people from non-English speaking backgrounds

❖ acknowledges and explores the complex and interrelated issues experienced by VET students from non-English speaking backgrounds

❖ attempts to draw together the key directions and strategies which have been proposed in the literature to ensure a more equitable experience for non-English speaking background students in vocational education and training.

The chapter illustrates that one of the limitations of any approach which targets specific groups in vocational education and training is that the diversity within that target group may be underestimated (Golding & Volkoff 1999). Moreover, such an approach does not recognise that individual students may also be members of other target groups, and that 'cross group' factors, such as long-term unemployment or low literacy skills, have debilitating effects, irrespective of other student characteristics. As McIntyre (1998) asserted, the focus on discrete equity target groups denies 'the harsher realities of social and economic inequality of educational disadvantage' (p.1).

Population diversity—people born overseas

AUSTRALIA HAS ONE of the most multicultural and multilingual populations in the world and the diversity of this population has continued to increase during the last five years. Because the source countries of migrants has changed, diversity has greatly increased.

In 2002, the proportion of Australia's population born overseas (23.6%) was almost the same as it had been at the time of Federation in 1901 (Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2002a). However, in 2002, migrants from the main English speaking countries of Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States of America represented only 9.2% of the Australian population compared with 18.9% in 1901. Over this same period, the proportion of the Australian population born in countries where English is not the main language grew to 14.4%. Of the 24% of the Australian population who were born overseas, one in four was born in Asia.

Overall overseas migration levels have fluctuated according to policy, as have relative proportions of different categories of migration. In recent years, the Family Stream category of the Migration Program has decreased from a high of 68.7% in 1995–96 to 41.5% in 2000–2001 (Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2002a). In addition, people migrating under this category have been more likely to be immediate family members, with 91.1% of Family Stream visas in 2000–2001 going to spouses, fiancés and children of Australian citizens and permanent residents.

The number of skilled immigrants has increased significantly with Skill Stream migration in 2000–2001, providing 55.5% of all new arrivals compared with 29.2% in 1995–96. Skill Stream applicants have to demonstrate high levels of proficiency in English and skill (post-secondary university or trade qualification) and a strong employment history. Therefore it is not surprising that 39% of all Skill Stream migrants in 2000–2001 were from the predominantly English speaking countries of United Kingdom and South Africa and from India (Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2002a, p.60). As a result of the rise in Skill Stream visas, recent immigrants are more likely to have been in employment, have post-school qualifications and speak English proficiently by comparison with those in the 1980s (ABS 2001).

During the same period, the Humanitarian Program has remained fairly stable, fluctuating slightly from year to year within the range of 12 000 to 15 000 people.

Also reflecting current immigration policy and global migration patterns, immigrants to Australia at the turn of the twenty-first century have tended to be younger than the Australian population they have joined. They were also more likely to be urbanised, with more than 80% of those born overseas living in a capital city in 1999, compared with 57% of those born in Australia (ABS 2001).

In summary, around the turn of the twenty-first century, Australia had, as a percentage, the second largest immigrant population in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and one of the largest in the world (O'Flynn et al. 2001). Thus:

❖ People born overseas made up almost a quarter of the Australian population, with 14.4% coming from a non-English speaking country.

❖ Almost a quarter of these were born in Asia.

In addition, 27% of Australian-born people had at least one parent born overseas.

People from a non-English speaking background

Definitional complexity

People with a non-English speaking background are not necessarily only those born outside Australia.

People born in Australia of immigrant parents also speak languages other than English at home. Substantial proportions of people who speak the five most common languages, other than English, were born in Australia: 42.7% of Italian speakers; 50.9% of Greek speakers; 20% of Cantonese speakers; 43.2% of Arabic (including Lebanese speakers) and 25.5% of Vietnamese speakers (ABS 2003a).

At least 60 of the more than 200 languages other than English spoken at home in 2001 were Australian Indigenous languages. In 2001, 12% of all Indigenous people responded that they spoke an Indigenous language at home. In the Northern Territory, two-thirds, and in South Australia, 17% of Indigenous people spoke an Indigenous language at home. Thus when using the term 'non-English speaking background', this report considers both people who were born in a non-English speaking country and people who speak a language other than English at home. It is important to recognise this latter category and that it includes people born in Australia, including some Indigenous Australians.

Researchers have identified that there is a complex array of factors which impact on the education and training experience of students from a non-English speaking background, with English language proficiency the most important one.

People who speak a language other than English at home

According to the 2001 census, 16% of the population (2.8 million people) spoke a language other than English at home, an increase of 8% since 1996 (ABS 2003a). The five most common languages other than English spoken at home in Australia were Italian, Greek, Cantonese, Arabic (including Lebanese) and Vietnamese, with speakers of these languages comprising 7% of the Australian population.

Their English proficiency

English proficiency among people who speak a language other than English at home varies, but 18.4% of these people reported in the 2001 census that they either did not speak English well, or did not speak English at all. English

language proficiency tends to vary with age, with the group of people aged 65 and over reporting the lowest levels of English language proficiency.

In summary, around the turn of the twenty-first century:

❖ People who speak a language other than English at home made up 2.8 million people (16%) of all Australians, including people born in Australia, and this proportion was growing.

❖ This group of people collectively spoke more than 200 languages, including 60 Indigenous languages.

❖ Of people who speak a language other than English at home, 18.4% reported having limited English language proficiency.

People from a non-English speaking background as an equity group in VET

In recent years, the use of the term 'non-English speaking background' has been considered to be 'too broad a category' (Watson & Pope 2000, p.6) and not effective in identifying disadvantaged students in education and training. Several researchers have suggested that non-English speaking background as an equity group should be re-defined or replaced by more specific and relevant categories (for example, Watson et al. 2000; McDermott, Baylis & Brown 1998).

Not one group but many

There are sub-groups within the non-English speaking background population who have no difficulty succeeding in the education and training system (Watson & Pope 2000), whereas others face multiple disadvantages. VET students who are born in non-English speaking countries or who speak a language other than English at home can come from a wide range of economic and social backgrounds. For example, this group could include a middle-aged, recent refugee with no English language skills, separated from family support and friends, with very limited financial means, a poor educational and employment history and suffering traumatic stress as a result of their 'migration' experience. However, it could also include a young person from a wealthy family who migrated some years before for the purpose of establishing a new business in Australia, and speaking a number of languages, including English, proficiently, with a strong educational background.

VET students from a non-English speaking background are often also members of other equity target groups, such as Indigenous people, long-term unemployed and those possessing low basic skills. Membership of these additional target groups clearly reflects the potential disadvantages faced by some people from non-English speaking backgrounds (Golding & Volkoff 1998;

Volkoff & Golding 1998b; McIntyre 1998; Golding & Volkoff 1999; McIntyre 1999; Watson & Pope 2000; Watson et al. 2000; Phan & Ball 2001).

If the diverse needs of VET students from a non-English speaking background are to be identified and successfully addressed, then it is necessary to acknowledge that this is not one homogeneous group, but many groups (Volkoff & Golding 1998a; Robertson & Barrera 1999; Watson et al. 2000). Indeed, Watson et al. (2000) have argued that, of all the nominated equity target groups, non-English speaking background VET participants demonstrate the greatest intra-group differences in terms of educational outcomes. The effects of intra-group diversity have been widely reported (Robertson & Barerra 1999; Watson et al. 2000; Watson & Pope 2000).

Factors considered in this chapter

The 'tangled threads' of issues faced by people from non-English speaking backgrounds are all considered in this chapter.

The next section considers general trends in vocational education and training for each of the following:

❖ people born in a non-English speaking country

❖ people who speak a language other than English at home.

Their age, gender and geographic location is also considered.

The following section looks at other factors which have been identified as impacting upon the VET experience of people from non-English speaking backgrounds. These include:

❖ English language proficiency

❖ country of birth

❖ migration history

❖ length of time in Australia.

The chapter also considers their history of employment and socio-economic status.

The final section contains a discussion of these interrelated issues which can cause disadvantage in vocational education and training for people from a non-English speaking background, as well as strategies for overcoming them.

General trends in VET

In the national strategy for vocational education and training 1998–2003 (ANTA 1998a), measurement of the performance of the sector in relation to equity was

extended beyond the traditional focus on participation to include outputs (course and module completions) and outcomes (employment or transition to further study from vocational education and training) (ANTA 1998b; Gibb 1999). More attention has also been given to analysing the reasons why people participate in vocational education and training. All these data sets are considered in this section in relation to both VET students born in a non-English speaking country and those who speak a language other than English at home.

Participation

In 2001, 204 673 VET students reported that they were born in a non-English speaking country, while 170 621 reported that they spoke a language other than English at home. Of the latter group 4% (6840 students) were Indigenous Australians.

As figure 1 illustrates, during the period 1996–2001, the number of students overall in vocational education and training grew by 30%. By contrast, the number of VET students who reported that they were born in a non-English speaking country grew by only 17%. In 2001, VET students who reported they were born in a non-English speaking country represented 11.7% of all VET students, a decline from 13% in 1996. However, the proportion of the Australian population who reported that they were born in a non-English speaking country remained relatively stable at 14.4%.

Figure 1: Number of VET students, by language and country of birth, 1996–2001
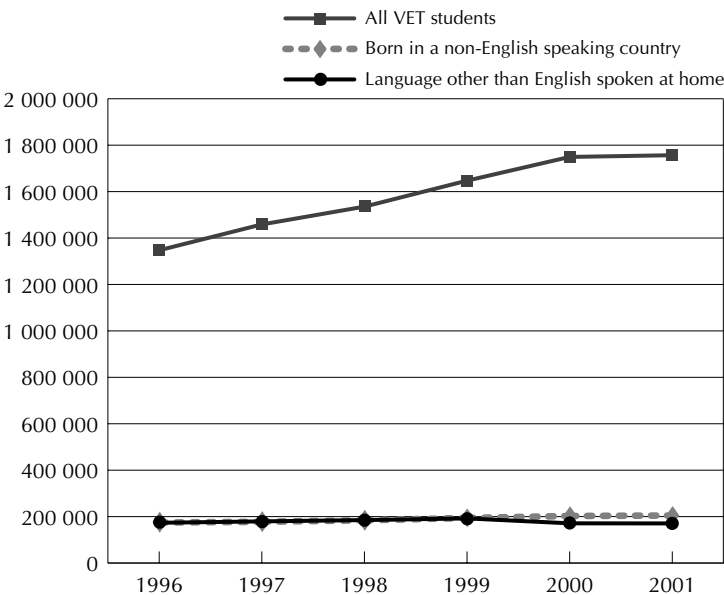
Source: NCVER unpublished VET provider data collection, 1996–2001

Between 1996 and 2001, the number of VET students who reported that they spoke a language other than English at home declined by 1.5%. This represented a significant fall in this group, from 12.9% in 1996 to 9.7% in 2001. This fall is particularly significant given that, during the same period, the proportion of people within the Australian population who spoke a language other than English at home increased by 8 percentage points to 16%.

The factors which may have influenced these declines in participation include the shift in emphasis of the migration program to more highly skilled migrants with greater proficiency in English and the rise in employment opportunities during this period. These issues are discussed later in this chapter.

Gender

Growth in VET participation has varied by gender for all Australian VET students, including those from non-English speaking backgrounds. During the five years 1996–2001, the number of male students participating in vocational education and training across Australia grew by 28.9% compared with 36.5% for female VET students. Compared with these growth patterns, increases in participation of people from non-English speaking backgrounds were significantly lower. The number of male VET students born in a non-English speaking country grew by only 12%. The number of female VET students born in a non-English speaking country grew steadily and increased by 21.5%.

On the other hand, for women who speak a language other than English at home, there was an increase in the participation rates of just 3% between 1996 and 2001, while the participation of men who speak a language other than English at home actually declined by 9% overall during the period 1996–2001. Closer analysis of the data reveals that changes in the labour market may have had an impact on the participation of people who speak a language other than English at home. There was growth in male participation of 8% from 1996–1999 and then a decline of 13.5% during the years 2000 and 2001. That was particularly evident in the age groups 20–24 (20% decline), 25–29 (20% decline) and 30–39 (17% decline). During the period 1996–2001, unemployment gradually declined to a low point of 6.9% in 2001 (ABS 2003b). Similarly, the proportion of unemployed males looking for work during these five years was also at its lowest in 2000. For women who speak a language other than English at home, there was also significant growth in participation by 14% during the period 1996–1999, followed by a sharp decline in participation of 9% over the years 2000–2001 and 2001–2002.

Age

VET students from a non-English speaking background tend to be older on the whole than all Australian VET students. In 2001, 45% of VET students who reported that they were born in a non-English speaking country were between 30 and 49 years of age, compared with 40.2% of those who spoke a language other than English at home and 34.6% of all VET students. VET students who were

born in a non-English speaking country were half as likely to be aged between 15 and 19 (11.3%) as all Australian VET students (23.7%). However, 18.5% of VET students who reported speaking a language other than English at home were in this age group, reflecting the fact that a substantial number of Australian-born offspring of immigrants speak a language other than English at home.

Geographic distribution

VET students from a non-English speaking background are most likely to live in an urban area, with more than 80% in 2001 reporting that they lived in a capital city (80.8% based on country of birth; 81.8% based on main language spoken at home), compared with just 55.2% of all VET students. If all metropolitan areas are included as well as capital cities, then the proportion rises to 85% of VET students of all ages from a non-English speaking background (84.5% identified by country of birth; 84.7% by language spoken at home) compared with just 62.5% of all VET students.

However, during the period 1996–2001, the proportion of rural and remote VET students from a non-English speaking background grew:

- ❖ from 7.4% in 1996 to 8.7% for students born in a non-English speaking country

- ❖ from 5.8% to 9.6% for those who reported that they spoke a language other than English at home.

Increased preparation in vocational education and training by Indigenous Australians is likely to account for much of this latter increase.

What they participate in

As illustrated in figure 2, VET students who reported being born in a non-English speaking country were more likely than all Australian VET students to undertake Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) diploma or higher courses or lower-level AQF certificate I and II courses. The same is true for people who speak a language other than English at home but with a greater a concentration at the lower levels.

This pattern of concentration of participation at the highest and lowest levels of VET qualifications may, in part, reflect the impact of the different migration programs. People who migrate under the Skill Stream are required to have high levels of English language proficiency, prior post-secondary, university or trade qualifications and a strong employment history, and are therefore more likely to undertake training at diploma and higher levels. However, those who migrate under the Humanitarian Program or Family Stream are more likely to have lower levels of English language proficiency and skills and therefore require enabling and literacy programs prior to engaging in higher-level study. It would appear also that those who speak a language other than English at home are more likely to need these lower-level entry courses.

The issue of people from a non-English speaking background and their lower rates of participation in the middle AQF III and AQF II courses, and specifically through the New Apprenticeship pathway, is taken up in the next chapter.

Figure 2: Course enrolments of students by language background and country of birth
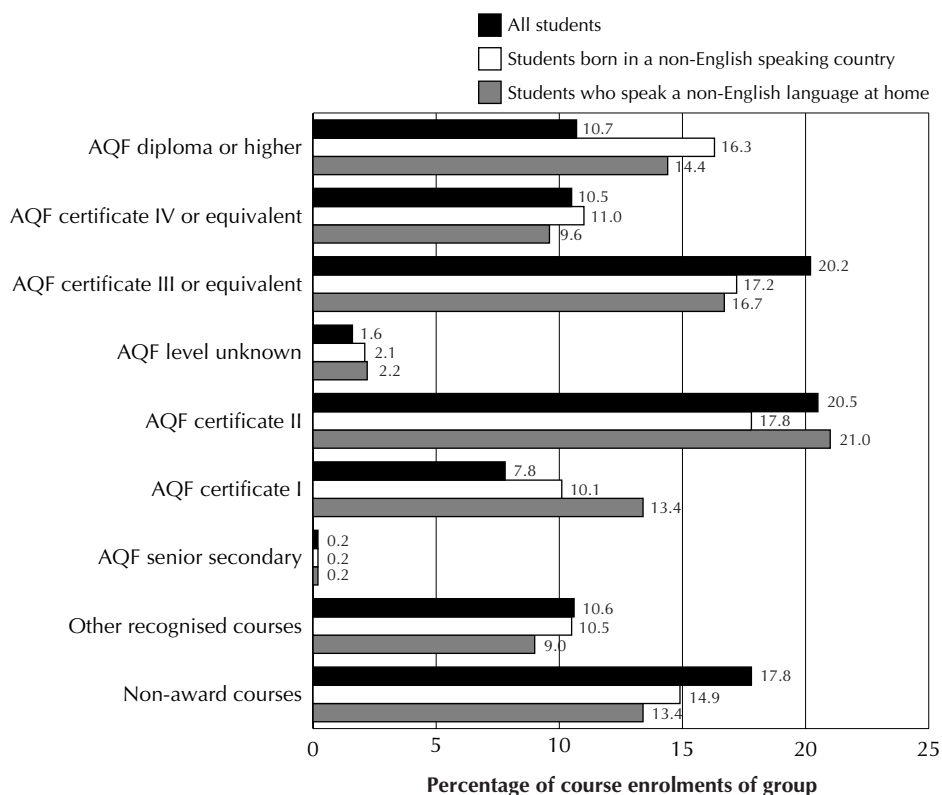
Source: NCVER national VET provider collection, 2001.

Female VET students who reported being born in a non-English speaking country were more likely than their male counterparts to participate in courses at the lower AQF levels, such as certificate I, certificate II or 'other recognised' courses. Women born in a non-English speaking country as well as women speaking a language other than English at home were more likely than all women to enrol in VET courses which were not occupationally specific; that is, to enrol in 'TAFE multi-field education' fields of study (Phan 2001). Phan also reported that, compared with women born in an English speaking country, women born in a non-English speaking country or speaking a language other than English at home were:

❖ twice as likely to enrol in AQF certificate I level courses

❖ more likely to complete the required hours for modules

❖ less likely to pass their course assessments.

In addition, this group of women have a greater proportion of failed modules when assessed, and lower rates of recognition of prior learning granted.

Reasons for VET study

The main most commonly offered reasons why graduates and module completers had undertaken their studies were different for those who spoke a language other than English at home compared with all Australian graduates and module completers. The 2002 National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) Student Outcomes Survey classified former technical and further education (TAFE) students into seven mutually exclusive categories which reflected their motivation for undertaking training (NCVER 2003). These categories were defined as follows:

❖ *Apprentices/trainees*: undertook training as part of an apprenticeship or traineeship.

❖ *Self-employed people*: undertook their training to develop their existing business or to start their own business.

❖ *Labour market entrants*: includes anyone under the age of 25 who undertook their training at TAFE to get a job or someone under the age of 19 who undertook TAFE training to try for a different career.

❖ *Career changers*: are people aged 19 or over who trained to try for a different career or anybody aged 25 or over who undertook training to get a job.

❖ *Skill improvers*: undertook their training to get a better job or promotion, because it was a requirement of their job, or because they wanted extra skills for their job.

❖ *Bridgers*: undertook their TAFE training to get into another course of study.

❖ *Self-developers*: undertook their TAFE training for interest or personal reasons.

(NCVER 2003, p.4)

Graduates who spoke a language other than English at home were more likely than all TAFE graduates to have been classified as bridgers, career changers, self-developers and self-employed. Module completers who spoke a language other than English at home were more likely than all module completers to be classified as career changers, apprentices and trainees, bridgers and self-employed as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Motivation for undertaking training among people who speak a language other than English at home (% of all), 2002

At 31 May 2002	Labour market entrants	Apprentices/ trainees	Career changers	Skill improvers	Bridgers	Self- developers	Self- employed
Graduates speaking a language other than English at home (22% of all graduates)	19	16	27	16	39	24	24
Module completers speaking a language other than English at home (18% of all module completers)	17	23	25	13	22	17	19

Source: NCVER (2003)

From table 2 we can see that the categories of motivation for which employment outcomes were highest across all TAFE graduates were skill improvers and apprentices/trainees. However, these were the categories for which graduates speaking a language other than English at home had the lowest representation. Conversely, the categories which had the highest representation of graduates speaking a language other than English at home were bridgers and career changers, and these had the poorest employment outcomes.

Table 2: Employment status by motivation for study

At 31 May 2002	Labour market entrants	Apprentices/ trainees	Career changers	Skill improvers	Bridgers	Self- developers	Self- employed
Employed	65	88	59	91	46	58	75
Unemployed	23	6	24	5	18	13	10
Not in the labour force	12	5	16	4	35	28	14

Source: NCVER (2003)

Gender

Among graduates surveyed in 2002 who spoke a language other than English at home, there were gender variations in the main reasons given for undertaking studies. While 74.9% of these male graduates reported that they studied for vocational or work-related reasons, close to the proportion of all VET graduates (75.8%), only 58.4% of women who spoke a language other than English at home indicated vocational or work-related reasons for undertaking their study. Women were more likely to have engaged in study for self-development reasons.

Levels of academic success

The 2002 Student Outcomes Survey revealed that VET graduates born in a non-English speaking country were more highly represented among graduates at AQF diploma level (30.8%) and at AQF certificate I level (29%) and at 'other' lower qualification levels (29.5%) compared with their Australian-born counterparts.

In relation to speakers of a language other than English at home, the 2002 Student Outcomes Survey (NCVER 2003) indicated that they made up 22% of all VET graduates and 18% of module completers, consistent with findings for 2000 and 2001. By contrast, VET students who spoke a language other than English at home represented only 9.7% of VET students enrolled in 2001 (NCVER 2001). These data support previous findings that VET students from a non-English speaking background are more likely to complete their program of study successfully than Australian VET students generally.

Graduates born in a non-English speaking country were less likely than Australian-born graduates to report that their 2001 course was 'highly relevant' and more likely to report that it was either 'not at all relevant' or had 'very little relevance'. Compared with members of other equity target groups, VET students from a non-English speaking background were much more likely to report unhelpful attitudes of teachers as a difficulty. They also valued gains in skills more highly than any other achievement and 'a gain in self-confidence, associated with an improvement in communicative competency, was both an important intention and outcome for many interviewees' (Golding & Volkoff 1999, p.275).

These graduates were more likely to be looking for work (both full-time and part-time) than Australian-born graduates and those born in other main English speaking countries. They represented almost 18% of VET graduates surveyed in 2002, but only 12.5% of graduates who had gained employment. In addition, those who were in employment were more likely to be in part-time employment than their Australian-born counterparts and were less likely to have already had a job and more likely to have taken longer ('4–6 months' and 'more than 6 months') than Australian-born graduates to find a job.

VET graduates from a non-English speaking background were more likely than English speaking graduates to undertake further study (43.1% and 36.9% respectively) and the main reasons they reported for this were to 'get a job' (33.4%) and 'to get a better job or promotion' (16.2%) (NCVER 2002, p.34). Graduates born in a non-English speaking country who enrolled in further study in 2002 were much less likely to be studying in a registered private provider than Australian-born graduates or graduates born in an English speaking country.

In summary, VET graduates, and module completers from a non-English speaking background, were less likely to find employment than graduates from

English speaking backgrounds. Of 2001 graduates, 16.4% of non-English speaking background graduates were unemployed compared with 9.9% of English speaking background graduates.

Non-English speaking background VET graduates and module completers who were employed during their course were less likely than their English speaking counterparts to have received employer support (NCVER 2002).

Issues which affect the VET experience

The literature reveals a complex array of factors which impact on the VET experience of people from a non-English speaking background. These include a diversity of factors within the group, and compounding factors which result from multiple equity group membership. Both intra-group factors and multiple equity group factors are considered in this section.

Intra-group factors

English language proficiency

While English language proficiency varies greatly within the group defined as non-English speaking background, the ability to speak English 'well' is of prime relevance in successfully participating in VET programs (Golding & Volkoff 1999), being employed as an apprentice or trainee (Misko 1997) and in gaining employment (VandenHeuvel & Wooden 1999; Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2002a; Richardson, Robertson & Ilsley 2001; Watson & Pope 2000). A higher proportion of graduates (88.3%) than module completers (85.1%) indicated that they spoke English 'well' or 'very well'.

Learners with lower levels of proficiency in English language and literacy are more likely to experience poor outcomes from training programs and reduced access to higher-level courses (Robertson & Barrera 1999). Golding and Volkoff (1999) reported that the major difficulty identified by VET students from a non-English speaking background in their longitudinal study was inadequate basic skills, which referred to both inadequate English language proficiency and insufficient previous education and training. In addition, Richardson, Robertson and Ilsley (2001) reported from their longitudinal study of the immigrant experience that the most commonly reported obstacles to finding a job were English language difficulties and lack of local work experience.

Low levels of parental English language proficiency have been found to limit awareness of training opportunities, such as apprenticeships and traineeships in non-English speaking background communities. The researchers observed that vocational education and careers advice programs in schools were an important avenue for distribution of information about and promotion of interest in vocational education and training (and specifically apprenticeships and traineeships). However, they also noted that lack of confidence in English

language skills and a sense of being an outsider prevented parents from attending school information sessions, and therefore eliminated another potential source of information and guidance for prospective VET students and their families.

Non-English speaking background students are also likely to be disadvantaged by language and cultural factors associated with recruitment and selection processes (McDermott, Baylis & Brown 1998).

Furthermore, several researchers have identified that people from non-English speaking backgrounds are more likely to experience difficulties with training provided through self-paced learning (Inkson & Smith 2001; James 2000; Misko 2000; Choy & Delahaye 2000). The dependence of these forms of delivery on the written word, whether in printed materials or on computer screens, means that people with lower than average levels of English literacy are likely to be disadvantaged. Assessment that is heavily print-dependent, as is often the case in self-paced learning, also disadvantages non-English speaking background students as it may be testing literacy levels rather than competence in a particular skill (Athanasou, Golden & Hoggard 1995).

Finally, the higher likelihood of non-English speaking background parents having negative attitudes to vocational education and training has been found also to reduce participation by young non-English speaking background people (McDermott, Baylis & Brown 1998). The Multicultural Education Unit of the New South Wales Department of Employment, Education and Training (1995) found that the VET label was not generally recognised or widely understood, and that most non-English speaking background communities viewed vocational education and training as inferior to university training. In addition, there was generally a negative perception about the employment value of vocational education and training. Similar lack of awareness by non-English speaking background employers was also seen to limit opportunities for ethnic small businesses (Collins et al. 1997).

Country of birth

Country of birth also has played a role in English language proficiency. Ethnic background has been shown to affect the likelihood of retention of first language and the rate of acquisition of English language skills. The Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (2001) reported that immigrants from countries of Eastern Europe and Indo China were more likely to retain use of their native language and to have slower rates of acquisition of English language skills compared with other migrants, even those whose English language skills on entry to Australia were lower. For Indo Chinese families, in children aged 5 to 14 years, born in Australia and speaking a language other than English, the rate of poor proficiency in English was around 11.7% compared with all Australian-born children of migrants speaking a language other than English, for whom the rate was around 6% (Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2001, p.15).

The source country of any prior qualification has also been shown to have an impact on the employability of migrants (Birrell & Hawthorne 1997; O'Loughlin & Watson 1997) and on the likelihood of recognition of prior learning being granted. Representation in training and employment has also been shown to vary according to ethnic and cultural background, as well as length of time in Australia (Robertson & Barrera 1999). Comparing participation data with graduate and module completion data for specific language groups reveals that rates of completion are higher for some groups than others; in particular, for those born in South-East Asian, Eastern Asian and South-West Asian and North African countries as shown in table 3.

Table 3: Graduations and module completions for language groups

Language spoken	% VET participants 2001 (by LOTE* spoken at home)	% graduates 2002 (by country of birth)	% module completers 2002 (by country of birth)
Eastern Asian	2.3	3.8	2.1
Southern European	1.6	1.7	1.4
South-East Asian	1.6	4.6	4.1
South-West Asian & North African	1.3	2.0	1.9
Eastern European	1.2	0.6	1.0
Southern Asian	0.6	1.2	1.1
Northern European	0.4	0.2	0.2
All languages other than English	*9.7*	*21.5***	*18.3***

Notes: * LOTE = language other than English.
         ** Data identified by language other than English.

Migration experience

The common factors for all migrants are those related to the actual act of migration, of moving countries, separation from family and friends and the task of establishing themselves in a new country. The Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (Richardson et al. 2002) found that around 26% of immigrants surveyed had higher than normal stress levels, compared with 8% of the Australian population. These higher stress levels were most markedly evident among Humanitarian Stream immigrants who entered Australia in the period between September 1999 and August 2000. Of this group, 50% reported that they had higher than normal stress levels, perhaps reflecting the long period of stress-inducing conditions they had experienced prior to migration. As noted previously, the specific category of migration is also related to English language proficiency. People who migrate with Skill Stream visas are much more likely to have high levels of English language proficiency and a strong education and employment history compared with those who enter Australia as refugees through the Humanitarian Stream.

Length of time in Australia

The length of time a VET student born in a non-English speaking country has been in Australia is an important factor to consider because, over time, a student's:

- ❖ English language proficiency is likely to improve.

- ❖ Community support networks are likely to become more established.

- ❖ Stress levels associated with the migration experience are likely to diminish.

- ❖ Awareness of VET options and potential outcomes is likely to be enhanced.

- ❖ Confidence in accessing support services offered by a provider is likely to increase.

It takes time to develop local networks and an understanding of local work cultures and accessing relevant information when required. The availability of helpful networks also depends on cultural/linguistic group factors and the varying strengths of both formal and informal networks already developed within the community. Older established ethnic communities will already have developed community and business networks, while more recently arrived ethnic communities will not. Residential location will also have an impact.

Multiple equity group factors

Several researchers have identified that membership of more than one equity group compounds the educational disadvantage (Volkoff & Golding 1998b; Watson & Pope 2000). In addition, the more equity target groups that a VET graduate belonged to, the more likely they were to be unemployed following the completion of their training (Golding & Volkoff 1999). (Also see David John's chapter in this book, 'Quantifying the impact of equity overlap in VET'.)

Unemployment

Watson and Pope (2000, p.6) proposed that 'Characteristics such as low SES [socio-economic status], low skills, or unemployment, could also be used to identify sub-groups within non-English speaking background who are most disadvantaged in the post compulsory education and training system' because the 'labour market disadvantage faced by VET graduates who are members of targeted social groups is compounded by unemployment and low skills'. Unemployment rates for migrants are closely related to a range of factors, including age, skill level, qualifications and proficiency in English (Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2002a, p.60). While the unemployment rate for all people born overseas in July 2002 was 6%, somewhat higher than the 5.5% for people born in Australia, migrants from main English speaking countries had a 4.4% rate of unemployment compared with a 7.1%

rate for people from non-English speaking countries (Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2002b, p.34). For some settlers from the Middle East region, unemployment was as high as 16.7%.

Through longitudinal surveys of Australian youth, Andrews, Green and Mangan (2002) revealed that young people from a non-English speaking background 'face a significantly higher chance of being unemployed' (p.23). They found that neighbourhood effects, such as lack of contact with adults within the mainstream workforce resulting in lack of access to informal job networks, are compounded for young people from a non-English speaking background by the stronger likelihood of their experiencing racial and/or linguistic difficulties.

Socio-economic status

Watson and Pope (2000) found that low socio-economic status, as a sub-category, was significantly associated with poor educational outcomes across educational sectors and for all social groups (p.2). They stressed the importance of family circumstances as an indicator for predicting outcomes for all equity groups across the education and training sectors and for all social groups, and observed that 'the distribution of education and training outcomes still reflects the distribution of family background characteristics such as wealth and parents' educational attainment' (p.2).

Andrews, Green and Mangan (2002) found that the negative effects of living in low-income neighbourhoods persisted for longer than the positive effects of living in a high-income area. Many researchers have pointed to the need to recognise that poverty is a significant indicator of disadvantage and that there is a case for targeting low socio-economic status students within equity groups. For non-English speaking background VET students from families with limited experience of employment or employment networks within the Australian community, there is a need to facilitate effective pathways between their education and training and employment.

Dealing with the threads of possible disadvantage

The key issue of English language proficiency needs to be adequately addressed for students born in non-English speaking countries and those speaking a language other than English at home. The proportion of people concerned is not a small one: almost one-fifth of those born in non-English speaking countries have reported that they had limited English language proficiency. The people concerned are not only middle-aged or elderly immigrants: reduced English language proficiency also applies to more than 13% of under 24-year-olds born in Australia who speak a language other than English at home. Without adequate English language proficiency as a basis, they are less likely to maintain confidence, succeed in vocational education and training or effectively develop the capacity for successful ongoing learning or employment.

People from a non-English speaking background have a reduced capacity to access accurate information about vocational education and training and to make well-informed choices. Potential strategies to address this problem include:

- ❖ forming stronger relationships between providers and local ethnic community groups, and encouraging providers to work more closely with businesses operated by people from a non-English speaking background
- ❖ providing information and raising awareness about the nature of vocational education and training and potential graduate outcomes aimed directly at specific non-English speaking background communities
- ❖ using local community networks to disseminate multilingual information
- ❖ providing targeted information to non-English speaking background students in enabling courses to offer encouragement and support for them to proceed to higher-level and more vocationally oriented courses.

Clearly, there are also strategies which can be implemented in the design and development of training to reduce the disadvantage experienced by people from a non-English speaking background because of lower English language proficiency and cultural factors. These include:

- ❖ recognition of cultural diversity within competencies
- ❖ inclusion of culturally specific competencies where appropriate
- ❖ use of plain English in all teaching and learning materials and reduction in the use of jargon
- ❖ development of culturally relevant assessment approaches, strategies and instruments
- ❖ use of interpreters where necessary, particularly in workplace assessments of competencies to ensure that a higher level of English language proficiency than necessary to do the work is not required to demonstrate competence.
- ❖ professional development for staff to enhance skills in catering for cultural and linguistic diversity.

In addition, research to identify the reasons underpinning lower than average rates of acquisition of English language proficiency among particular language groups would support the development of potential strategies to address their disadvantage.

It might be helpful also to view graduate transition to employment less as a linear process which occurs simply and smoothly at the conclusion of training; rather, greater emphasis could be placed on the use of partnerships between education and training providers and local employers to provide workplace experiences as an integral part of the training program. Local partnerships are

likely to enhance access to employment for VET graduates, including with non-English speaking background employers, for apprenticeship and traineeship placement and pathways. However, the quality and effectiveness of these partnerships is likely to depend on the extent to which they are based on joint ownership and the degree of real interactivity between stakeholders. Showcasing achievements in vocational education and training by non-English speaking background students and graduates might promote awareness of VET opportunities for prospective students, as well as graduates to prospective employers.

The diversity of factors which impact on outcomes for the whole non-English speaking background group renders it impossible to simply identify and analyse success factors for all non-English speaking background students. Tracking and reporting on participation, outputs and outcomes for specific ethno-linguistic groups might assist in the identification of the reasons why some groups experience more successful outputs and outcomes, and provide some evidence as to whether programs and support strategies are effective.

To address more effectively the needs of those who face multiple disadvantages, equity policies and programs might be more specifically targeted to the members of the non-English speaking background population most in need of assistance. Poverty is a significant indicator of disadvantage within the non-English speaking background group and services need to be targeted specifically at non-English speaking background VET students of low socio-economic status and those who are members of other target groups, such as the unemployed and low-skilled, to address the disadvantaging effects of multiple equity group membership.

The services provided need to be comprehensive in scope and integrated with realistic pathways to employment. Strong rates of participation in vocational education and training and successful program completion have not been sufficient to deliver corresponding rates of employment outcomes for non-English speaking background people. The split of the non-English speaking background VET population into concentrations at the lowest and highest levels of vocational education and training has implications for employment outcomes. Those who complete enabling courses have limited opportunities for gaining employment and need support and guidance to access vocational programs which will provide a pathway to employment.

Effective solutions to improving equity in vocational education and training for people from non-English speaking countries and those who speak a language other than English at home will arise from disentangling, in consultation with specific individuals, groups and communities, the 'threads' which can cause disadvantage. The challenge is to provide targeted interventions and support according to diverse needs, while not losing sight of the fact that these VET students share their own, common characteristics of cultural and linguistic difference from the mainstream.

Another area for further research would be an investigation of the extent to which, and with what degree of success, such diversity management approaches are actually being employed by VET providers.

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Apprentices and trainees from non-English speaking backgrounds

Participation and outcomes

Cheng Lian Sim and Loukia Zinopoulos

This chapter discusses employment-based training opportunities for people from non-English speaking backgrounds with a focus on participation and outcomes for people from non-English backgrounds in the New Apprenticeship system between 1997 and 2001. It seeks to identify non-English speaking background groups who may be especially disadvantaged in accessing New Apprenticeships and achieving equitable outcomes. From the analysis undertaken it becomes apparent that some groups are faring less well than others. Overall, it would appear that equity in New Apprenticeships is far from being achieved for specific non-English speaking background groups, especially young people, the mature-aged, those from more recently arrived small and emerging communities, groups with relatively high numbers of refugees and those with tertiary academic qualifications.

Introduction

OVER THE LAST two decades the apprenticeship system has undergone significant changes aimed at opening up employment-based training contracts to a broader range of Australians. The establishment of the New Apprenticeship system over the past five years within the training package model, has resulted in significant growth in the number and the range of training opportunities combining work and off-the-job training that are available to all Australians. Young males in the skilled trades no longer dominate the apprenticeship and traineeship system.

People from non-English speaking backgrounds[1] do, nevertheless, continue to experience considerable inequality of access to this system compared with other Australians. Furthermore, those who do participate are not achieving a pro-rata share of successful outcomes (NCVER 2001). The reasons for this have not, however, been subject to much detailed examination.

There is very little information that provides an insight into the participation and outcomes for particular groups of people from non-English speaking backgrounds in apprenticeships and traineeships. This chapter seeks to fill this gap. Using the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) contracts of training collection, people from non-English speaking backgrounds have been compared with all others in terms of their participation and outcomes from New Apprenticeships in 1997 and 2001, and across a range of variables. These variables include age, gender, prior educational achievement, Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) level, occupation type (Australian Standard Classification of Occupations), recognition of prior training, employer type and geographic location.

Wherever possible, further information has been presented in relation to the ten non-English speaking background groups identified as being the largest, numerically, in the apprenticeship and traineeship system as at 31 December 2001. The ten countries of birth groups are the Philippines, Vietnam, India, Italy, Fiji, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Greece, China (excluding Special Administration Regions and Taiwan), Sri Lanka and Lebanon. The ten main language groups other than English are Italian, Greek, Arabic, Spanish, Vietnamese, Macedonian, Tagalog, Croatian, Hindi and Chinese.

The participation rates of people from non-English speaking backgrounds in the apprenticeship and traineeship system can also be influenced by recency of arrival, and refugee or special humanitarian status of specific groups and their participation in the higher education sector. Thus, in order to place participation

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[1] Throughout this chapter 'non-English speaking background' is used to refer to both those from non-English speaking background countries and those who speak a language other than English at home.

The descriptor 'main English speaking countries' incorporates all minor groups and countries in the Standard Australian Classification of Countries 1269.0 designated as: Australia (including External Territories), New Zealand, United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, United States of America and South Africa. The term 'non-English speaking background country' includes all other countries in the Standard Australian Classification of Countries.

The descriptor 'language other than English' incorporates all languages other than English identified in the Australian Standard Classification of Languages 1997. As such it includes Australian Indigenous languages and sign languages which are not the subject of investigation in this paper. In instances where the data analysis is affected by the size of the community speaking an Australian Indigenous language or using a sign language, this is indicated in the text.

Within this chapter those from non-English speaking backgrounds are sometimes referred to by the nationality of their country of birth or by the language other than English spoken at home, such as Italian-born, Indian-born, Arabic speakers, or Vietnamese speakers. These are shorthand used to improve the flow of text and are not used to imply citizenship or cultural affiliation.

and outcomes for people from non-English speaking backgrounds in the apprenticeship and traineeship system into a broader context, a range of additional data sources have been drawn upon. Specifically these are:

❖ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census of Population and Housing 1996 and 2001

❖ ABS overseas arrivals and departures data in relation to non-assisted settler arrivals by country of origin and state of stay for the period 1996–2001

❖ NCVER national provider data in relation to all students in vocational education and training (VET) for 1997–2001 by country of birth and language other than English spoken at home

❖ Department of Education, Science and Training data on non-overseas students in higher education by language spoken at home and country of birth, and by gender for the period 1997–2001.

The population from non-English speaking backgrounds

Overall size and major groups

As at the 2001 census, approximately 2.8 million people (15%) spoke a language other than English at home. The proportion of the population of working age (15–64 years) who spoke a language other than English at home was slightly higher (16.1%). The most common languages other than English for those of working age were Italian (1.9%), Greek (1.5%), Cantonese (1.3%), Arabic (1.2%), Vietnamese (1%), Mandarin (0.9%), Spanish (0.6%), Tagalog (0.5%), Macedonian (0.4%), and Croatian (0.4%).

The total number of people born overseas in the 2001 census was approximately 4.1 million (21.9%). Approximately 2.5 million (13.2% of the Australian population) were from non-English speaking background countries. Immigrants tend to arrive in their prime working years and a higher proportion of their number are of working age. As at the 2001 census, the proportion of the Australian population of working age born in a non-English speaking background country was 15.5%.

The ten main non-English speaking background countries of birth for those of working age were Italy (1%), Vietnam (1%), China (0.8%), Philippines (0.6%), Greece (0.6%), Germany (0.6%), India (0.5%), Malaysia (0.5%), Hong Kong—special administrative region of China (0.4%), and Lebanon (0.4%).

Students from non-English speaking backgrounds in higher education

Based on the data analysed for this study, people speaking a language other than English at home are under-represented overall in the higher education sector, whereas those from non-English speaking background countries have a slightly higher rate of access to higher education than the rest of the population. Whereas people who speak a language other than English comprised 15% of the population and 16.1% of the working-age population as at the 2001 census, they made up just 13.8% of non-overseas students in higher education in this same year. The ten main language other than English groups represented in higher education in 2001 were Cantonese, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Arabic, Greek, Spanish, other Chinese languages[2], Italian, Polish and Hindi. Of these groups, those speaking Cantonese, Vietnamese, Mandarin, other Chinese languages, Polish and Hindi appear to be well represented in higher education relative to their share of the working-age population at the 2001 census.

The representation (14%) of those born in non-English speaking countries in higher education in 2001 is higher than their representation in the general population (13.2%) but lower than their representation in the working-age population (15.5%). Students born in South-East Asia and North Asia were over-represented in higher education, whereas those born in Italy, Greece, Lebanon, and Germany had a lower representation relative to their share of the working-age population.

This finding is consistent with Khoo and Birell's (2002) finding that access to higher education for some groups from non-English speaking background countries, particularly those arriving since the early 1980s, is not as favourable as it was for their counterparts arriving in earlier years.

In general, outcomes for those born in non-English speaking background countries are nonetheless similar to those achieved by students overall (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs 1999).

Numbers in vocational education and training

Consistent with the findings of Dumbrell, Finnegan and de Montfort in the first chapter of this book, and Volkoff in the preceding chapter, data analysed for this study indicate that:

❖ People from non-English speaking backgrounds continue to be under-represented in vocational education and training as a whole. For example, while those born in non-English speaking background countries made up 16.1% of the Australian working-age population as at the 2001 census, they were just 11.7% of the VET population in the same year.

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[2] Excludes those Chinese languages (Cantonese and Mandarin) elsewhere counted.

❖ By state, data indicate that, in 2001, the proportion of students from non-English speaking background countries in vocational education and training in the Australian Capital Territory (13.6%), Queensland (7.4%) and Tasmania (3.9%) was in line with their representation in the population of working age in each of these jurisdictions. In all other jurisdictions, students from non-English speaking background countries were under-represented in vocational education and training compared with their share of the population of working age: New South Wales (14.3%), Victoria (13.2%), South Australia (9.3%), Western Australia (9.4%) and the Northern Territory (7.2%).

❖ Students from non-English speaking backgrounds have not achieved the same rate of growth in participation as the general population. While the total number of students in vocational education and training increased by 20.4% between 1997 and 2001, the increase for students from non-English speaking countries was 15.2%.

❖ The ten main non-English speaking background country of birth groups for students in vocational education and training in 2001 were China (excluding special administrative regions and Taiwan), Vietnam, the Philippines, India, Hong Kong (special administrative region of China), Germany, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Republic of South Korea and Lebanon. Of these groups, only those born in China were participating at a level higher than their share of the population of working age.

❖ The proportion of females from non-English speaking background countries (54.7%) in vocational education and training in 2001 was higher than for males from the same group (45.1%) and for females (48.7%) overall. Conversely, male participation in 2001 for those from non-English speaking background countries (45.1%) was lower than for all males (50.9%). This may in general be attributable to the over-representation of non-English speaking background women in career development, employment skills and English language programs.

❖ People from non-English speaking backgrounds tend to participate in vocational education and training either at the lower qualification levels (AQF levels I and II and enabling courses) or at the higher qualification levels (diploma and above). They are far less likely than their counterparts to be enrolled in AQF III qualifications, the level most common for apprentices and trainees.

In summary, people of working age from non-English speaking backgrounds are under-represented overall in post-compulsory education and training. However, those from non-English speaking background countries are over-represented in higher education relative to their share of the total population. Of the ten main non-English speaking background country of birth groups in the vocational education and training and higher education sectors, only those from China and Korea are participating at a level higher than their share of the

population of working age. Of the rest, while those born in Hong Kong, Vietnam, Malaysia, India, Taiwan, Sir Lanka and Indonesia are more highly represented in the higher education sector, they are under-represented in the VET sector, in terms of their share of the working-age population.

Numbers in the labour force

The research suggests that, in general, those from non-English speaking background countries do not fare as well as the Australian-born or the overseas-born from the main English speaking countries in their integration into the Australian labour market (Volkoff & Golding 1998; Richardson, Robertson & Ilsley 2001). Occupational and industry segmentation continues to be evident for people from non-English speaking background countries with their over-representation in the labourer and related worker occupations. However, recent research also indicates that the representation of people from non-English speaking background countries is similar to that of the Australian-born and those from English speaking background countries in a number of higher-skill occupations. These occupations are the managerial, professional, associate professional and tradespersons occupations (Toner 2001, p.1).

Characteristics of apprentices and trainees from non-English speaking backgrounds

Participants who speak a language other than English at home

The working-age population speaking a language other than English at home is markedly under-represented in the apprenticeship and traineeship system. At the 2001 census, those speaking a language other than English were 16.1% of the working-age population, whereas they comprised 8.4% of apprentices and trainees in training in December of the same year.

The ten most common languages spoken at home by apprentices and trainees in training in December 2001 were Italian (0.9%), Greek (0.8%), Arabic (0.8%), Spanish (0.5%), Vietnamese (0.4%), Macedonian (0.3%), Tagalog (0.3%), Croatian (0.3%), Hindi (0.2%), and Chinese (0.2%).

All the main languages other than English groups appear to be under-represented in apprenticeships and traineeships relative to their share of the working-age population.

Participants born in non-English speaking countries

Of the 325 140 apprentices and trainees in training in December 2001, 21 080 (6.5%) were born in non-English speaking background countries. Indeed all ten

non-English speaking background country of birth groups were under-represented in apprenticeships and traineeships relative to their share of the working-age population. The shares of total apprentices and trainees in vocational education and training at 2001 were for the Philippines (0.5%), Vietnam (0.5%), India (0.3%), Italy (0.3%), Fiji (0.2%), Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (0.2%), Greece (0.2%), China (0.2%), Sri Lanka (0.2%), and Lebanon (0.2%). For those from countries such as the Philippines and Vietnam, participation would need to double for equity to be achieved, and for others, including China and Greece, there would need to be a fivefold increase for participation to be equitable.

It is noteworthy that some of the non-English speaking background groups who are under-represented in apprenticeships and traineeships are faring much better in the higher education sector. Specifically these are those born in Vietnam, China, India, the Philippines, China and Sri Lanka. For those born in Lebanon, Italy, Fiji, Greece and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, this is not the case.

Gender

The introduction of the New Apprenticeship system has significantly increased the number of females in employment-based training. The gender imbalance in favour of males is nonetheless still evident. In 2001 the proportion of males was 66%. The gender breakdown for those from non-English speaking backgrounds reflects this same gender imbalance.

In 2001 females constituted 37.8% of apprentices and trainees who speak a language other than English at home and 40% of those from non-English speaking background countries. The participation of females from non-English speaking backgrounds was higher, however, than that for all females. This is not a recent development. In 1997 when female participation in apprenticeships and traineeships was 24.6%, female participation among those who speak a language other than English was 27.7% and 33% for those from non-English speaking background countries. This disparity in participation continues to be evident and is consistent with the higher labour force participation rates for migrant women identified in the literature (Fincher, Foster & Wilmot 1994).

Age

There has been an increase in the numbers of people of all ages in apprenticeships and traineeships accompanied by a decline in the proportion of young people.

Historically young people from non-English speaking backgrounds have been under-represented in the apprenticeship and traineeship system. While the percentage growth between 1997 and 2001 for this group has been significant and greater than that for the general population in the same age group, this growth has not seen the under-representation addressed. Their participation in

apprenticeships and traineeships still remains far less than their representation in the Australian population aged 15–24 years. For instance, at the 2001 census those speaking a language other than English made up 16.1% of the Australian population aged 15–24 years whereas they were only 6.1% of apprentices and trainees in this age group in training in December 2001. Likewise, while young people 15–24 years of age who were born in non-English speaking countries comprised 10.8% of the Australian population in this age group, they were just 3.2% of apprentices and trainees aged 15–24 years in training in December 2001.

The increased presence of older people in apprenticeships and traineeships is more marked for those from non-English speaking backgrounds, and in particular those born in non-English speaking background countries, than it is for the general population of apprentices and trainees. The presence of mature-age workers from non-English speaking background countries increased from 7.4% in 1997 to 23.7% of apprentices and trainees in training in December 2001.

To a large extent, the participation of those who are mature-aged and born in non-English speaking countries in apprenticeships and traineeships reflects their age profile overall. For instance as at the 2001 census, those aged between 45 and 64 years made up 33% of the population from non-English speaking background countries. By comparison, 20% of the population born in Australia fell within this age group. Not surprisingly, the non-English speaking background birthplace groups who came to Australia with the post-Second World War migration waves and who are no longer experiencing high immigration numbers have a higher proportion of their total numbers in the older age groups. Such non-English speaking background country of birth groups include those from the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and Greece.

Educational background

The level of qualifications being undertaken by apprentices and trainees from non-English speaking backgrounds mirrors that for all apprentices and trainees in that they are at certificate III level in the main. However, the previous education backgrounds of these two groups differ as follows.

The proportion of apprenticeships and traineeships taken up by people who have a previous tertiary vocational or academic qualification has increased over recent years (NCVER 2001). This trend is more evident for those from non-English speaking backgrounds. In December 2001, 3.5% of male and 3.3% of female apprentices and trainees in training from non-English speaking background countries had completed a bachelor or higher degree compared with 0.7% of all male and 1.2% of all female apprentices and trainees. The reasons for this difference are not clear. It is possible that apprenticeships and traineeships are affording employment-based training opportunities for the under-employed but skilled from non-English speaking background countries. However, this finding may also reflect the labour market disadvantage that continues to characterise skilled migrants from non-English speaking

backgrounds. The research indicates that, even after controlling for English language ability, settler arrivals from non-English speaking countries are less likely to be employed than those from the main English speaking countries, and were also less likely to be employed in the area in which they have skills and qualifications gained overseas (Richardson, Robertson & Ilsley 2001).

The proportion of apprentices and trainees from non-English speaking backgrounds in training in December 2001 who had completed Year 12 was also higher than that for all apprentices and trainees. In December 2001, the percentages were 54% of male and 55.4% of female apprentices and trainees from non-English speaking backgrounds compared with 37.6% of all male and 42.7% of all female apprentices and trainees in training.

Apprentices and trainees with lower previous levels of education (Year 9 or lower) also make up a small but increasing proportion of total apprentices and trainees. NCVER attributes this to the greater numbers of older people entering the system who tend to have lower levels of education compared with the general population (2001, p.91). This trend is more evident for those in training from non-English speaking background countries. Between 1997 and 2001 the proportion of apprentices and trainees in training from non-English speaking background countries with lower levels of education increased from 3.6% to 9.6% for males, and from 4.6% to 10.6% for females.

In 2001, 8.6% of all apprentices and trainees received credit for prior training. By comparison, a lower proportion of apprentices and trainees from non-English speaking backgrounds received recognition for prior training. In 2001, 6.8% who spoke a language other than English at home and 4.9% of those from non-English speaking background countries received credit for prior training.

Occupation and sector of employment

The occupational distribution of apprentices and trainees from non-English speaking backgrounds mirrors their occupational segmentation in the Australian labour market. In December 2001, for instance, they were under-represented in the skilled trades and over-represented in the labourer occupations. Moreover, in December 2001 they were also slightly less likely to be in training in the managerial and administrative, and professional occupations, although their participation was comparable to that of all apprentices and trainees in the associate professional occupations. This occupation segmentation was found despite the fact that apprentices and trainees from non-English speaking backgrounds contributed at least a third of the growth in apprenticeships and traineeships in the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations trade and related workers occupations between 1997 and 2001.

Different occupational profiles are also evident for specific non-English speaking background groups. Compared with all apprentices and trainees from non-English speaking background countries in training in December 2001, those born in Lebanon and the Philippines were more likely to be in the skilled trades

and clerical sales and service occupations. Those from India were concentrated in the clerical, sales and service occupations. Those born in Vietnam had the majority of their number more evenly distributed between the skilled trades, intermediate production and transport and labourer and related worker occupations. By contrast, higher proportions of those from the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Greece were likely to be found in the labourer and related worker occupations followed by the intermediate production and transport occupations.

Apprentices and trainees from non-English speaking backgrounds are more likely to be in the private sector (some 89% in 2001) compared with all apprentices and trainees (close to 83% in 2001). Further, a lower proportion of apprentices and trainees from non-English speaking backgrounds (some 5% in 2001) are likely to be employed by group training companies compared with all apprentices and trainees (some 10% in 2001). Moreover, although the difference between groups is less marked, a lower proportion of apprentices and trainees from non-English speaking backgrounds (just over 5% in 2001) are afforded employment-based training opportunities within the government sector compared with all (some 6% in 2001).

People from small and emerging communities

The Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs defines small and emerging communities as being those which have 'an Australia-wide population of between 1000 and 15 000 members, of which 30% or more have arrived in the last five years' (Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs website 2003)

Small and emerging communities are characterised by varying skill levels and pre-arrival experiences. They are also communities which tend to have high numbers of those who enter Australia as refugees and special humanitarian program entrants among their populations.

On a national level, seven communities are identified as small and emerging: the Afghan, Eritrean, Kurdish, Ethiopian, Kuwaiti, Somali, and Sudanese (Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs website 2003). Overall, these groups are, at least numerically, well represented in the VET system. However, they are under-represented in apprenticeships and traineeships and, further, there is evidence of differing occupational profiles for these groups. As at December 2001 those from Afghanistan were more likely to be in the labourer and related worker occupations. By contrast, those from Somalia, Ethiopia and the Sudan were more likely to be in the clerical, sales and service occupations, followed by the intermediate production and transport occupations for those born in Somalia and the labourer and related occupations for those from Ethiopia and the Sudan. The extent to which these differences can be attributed to the varying skill levels and pre-arrival education experiences of members of these small and emerging communities is not clear.

People from refugee communities

In 2001–2002 refugees and humanitarian entrants were from the countries of the former Yugoslavia, the Middle East and South-West Asia, including Iraq and Afghanistan, and Africa, in particular, the Sudan, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone and Somalia (Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs website 2003). Many of these recent arrivals have become part of Australia's small and emerging communities whose occupational profiles were outlined above.

Refugees and special humanitarian program entrants have been identified in the literature as particularly disadvantaged in the labour market and in their access to post-compulsory education and training. They are also the least likely to use their qualifications in their work (Volkoff & Golding 1998).

Again, as is the case for all groups from non-English speaking backgrounds, there are inter-group differences evident in the occupational profiles of country of birth groups, with recent intakes of refugee and humanitarian entrants. For instance in December 2001 apprentices and trainees in training from Bosnia and Herzegovina were more likely to be in the skilled trades and labourer and related worker occupations compared with those from Somalia who, as indicated above, were concentrated in the clerical, sales and service occupations.

Completions

Overall, it would appear that apprentices and trainees from non-English speaking backgrounds achieve a lower proportion of completions than their pro-rata share of contracts of training would suggest. For example, in December 2001, those who speak a language other than English at home constituted 8.4% of those in training and 7.4% of completed contracts.

In 2001 apprentices and trainees from non-English speaking background countries accounted for 5.9% of completions, whereas they comprised 6.5% of the total in training in December of the same year. There are, however, variations between groups from non-English speaking backgrounds.

In December 2001, of the ten main groups from non-English speaking background countries in training, those from the Philippines, India, Fiji and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia appear overall to be achieving their pro-rata share of completions. For those from Lebanon, Vietnam, China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Italy this is not the case.

In addition, the numbers participating in the apprenticeship and traineeship system from communities which include recently arrived refugee and humanitarian entrants, or those defined as small and emerging communities, are low. While the data relating to these groups need to be interpreted with some caution, some groups appear to be achieving more successful outcomes than others. For instance, the numbers of contracts completed in 2001 suggest

that those from Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Kuwait were achieving their pro-rata share of successful outcomes, whereas those from Eritrea, Somalia and the Sudan were not.

Educational background and qualifications

Completions are higher at the certificate III level for people from non-English speaking backgrounds as is the case for all apprentices and trainees. However, for those speaking a language other than English at home, completions at the certificate II level (26.8%) were lower than for all apprentices and trainees (32.8%).

Of those completing in 2001, one in five had completed a post-school qualification prior to commencing their apprenticeship or traineeship. Contract completions for females with tertiary vocational or academic qualifications (2.7%) were higher than for males (1.2%) in 2001. An even higher proportion from non-English speaking background countries had gained tertiary vocational or academic qualifications prior to commencement (6.7% of females and 6.5% of males).

Age

The age distribution of apprentices and trainees from non-English speaking backgrounds completing their contracts of training in general reflects their age distribution overall. However, for those aged 45–54 years, completions (18.5%) far exceeded their pro-rata share of contracts of training (8.5%) as at December 2001. This high rate of completions for this group of mature-age workers from non-English speaking background countries suggests that they may be over-represented in short-term training contracts compared with other apprentices and trainees.

Occupation and employer type

Apprentices and trainees speaking a language other than English at home appear to be achieving their pro-rata share of completions in the clerical, sales and service and labourer occupations. However, they are not achieving their pro-rata share of completions (15.9%) in the intermediate production and transport occupations, which accounted for some 19% of contracts of training for the group in December 2001.

For people from non-English speaking background countries, completions by males were highest in the labourer and related worker occupations (24.8%) followed by the skilled trades (20.8%). Completions for females were highest in the intermediate (46.5%) clerical sales and service followed by the labourer occupations (24%).

People from the Philippines had high completions in all occupation groups. Those from Vietnam figured prominently in completions for the

para-professional, skilled trades, advanced clerical, sales and service and intermediate production and transport occupations. Completions were high for those from India in the clerical, sales and service occupations. Those born in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and in Greece were prominent in completions for the labourer occupations. The Italian-born achieved high completions in the para-professional and intermediate production and transport occupations.

People from Germany and the Netherlands were prominent in completions for the professional occupations, and those from Japan comprised a high proportion of completions in the elementary clerical occupations relative to their pro-rata share of in-training contracts for the non-English speaking background country of birth groups in apprenticeships and traineeships in December 2001.

By employer type, completions for apprentices and trainees from non-English speaking backgrounds are in line with the distribution of all those in training in December 2001. In 2001, 84.5% of apprenticeship and traineeship completions for those from non-English speaking background countries were in the private sector, 8.5% were with group training companies and 6.4% were in the public sector.

Cancellations and withdrawals

Levels of cancellations and withdrawals among apprentices and trainees from non-English speaking backgrounds are broadly similar to those for all apprentices and trainees.

Apprentices and trainees with Year 12 or tertiary vocational or academic qualifications are over-represented in cancellations and withdrawals. For instance in 2001, 2.6% of females and 1.7% of males whose contracts were cancelled or withdrawn had tertiary academic qualifications. For those from non-English speaking backgrounds, attrition among those with tertiary qualifications is even greater. In 2001 males with tertiary qualifications accounted for 5.4% of cancellations and withdrawals among those who speak a language other than English. For females the figure was 5.6%. The disproportionately high attrition rate among those with tertiary qualifications is even more evident for those from non-English speaking background countries, accounting for 6.7% of males and 5.8% of females in 2001. Factors contributing to this high level of attrition remain to be investigated.

Cancellations and withdrawals in the trades and related occupations were lower for all groups of apprentices and trainees relative to their percentages in training in these occupations in December 2001. Conversely, cancellations and withdrawals in the labourer and related worker occupations were higher for all groups, relative to the percentages in training in these occupations in December 2001.

For apprentices and trainees speaking a language other than English at home, cancellations and withdrawals in 2001 were highest in the intermediate

clerical, sales and service occupations (30.6%) followed by the trades (21.4%). The pattern for those from non-English speaking background countries differed. In 2001 the highest proportions of cancelled contracts of training and withdrawals were in the intermediate clerical, sales and service area (30.2%), followed by the labourer and related worker occupations (21.8%).

Overall, the data suggest the need to investigate what appear to be disproportionately high cancellations and withdrawals in some occupational areas for those from non-English speaking backgrounds; that is, the clerical, sales and service and labourer and related worker occupations.

Discussion

The introduction of the New Apprenticeship system over the past five years was viewed by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) Ministerial Council as an opportunity to improve access and equity in vocational education and training. It was considered that the increased flexibility in training, and support for growth in training opportunities in an extended range of occupational areas, would provide a real opportunity to improve equity in employment-based training (ANTA 1998).

It is certainly the case that more people, including those from non-English speaking backgrounds, now have access to the public VET system. It is also the case that the New Apprenticeship system has extended employment-based training opportunities into occupations traditionally held by women, and that older people now have access to this contract system of employment-based training.

To a large extent the participation of people from non-English speaking backgrounds reflects their demographic distribution and profile. Compared with all apprentices and trainees, those from non-English speaking backgrounds are:

❖ more highly urbanised, with the majority being located in the capital cities

❖ older to the extent that the age profile for those born in non-English speaking background countries is now quite different from that of all apprentices and trainees.

The issue of how people from non-English speaking backgrounds are faring in the apprenticeship and traineeship system is, however, not straightforward. While inequitable access and outcomes are evident for people from non-English speaking backgrounds in this system, they appear to be impacting on some groups more than others.

The occupational and gender segmentation which characterises the labour market participation of people from non-English speaking background countries and women are mirrored in these groups' participation in

apprenticeships and traineeships. Compared with all apprentices and trainees, those from non-English speaking backgrounds are:

❖ under-represented overall, but they are over-represented in the labourer occupations and, to a lesser extent, in the intermediate clerical, sales and service and the intermediate production and transport occupations

❖ experiencing higher female participation. This higher participation reflects migrant women's higher level of participation in the labour force relative to women in general. Like all female apprentices and trainees, those from non-English speaking backgrounds are also concentrated in the clerical, sales and service occupations in the main. However, unlike all female apprentices and trainees, those from non-English speaking backgrounds are markedly over-represented in the labourer and related worker occupations. This over-representation reflects their occupational segmentation.

Access issues such as the historical under-representation of young people from non-English speaking backgrounds are still evident. While it can be argued that their lower participation may be attributed to their higher participation in higher education, the same cannot be said for all groups. The structural, attitudinal and other factors contributing to this under-representation require further investigation. The potential for group training companies to address barriers to participation in apprenticeships and traineeships needs to be explored in light of the under-representation of people from non-English speaking backgrounds, particularly young people, in apprenticeships and traineeships. This is particularly significant, given that apprentices and trainees from non-English speaking backgrounds are more likely to be employed in the private sector and to a lesser extent by group training companies.

Considering the participation and outcomes for particular non-English speaking background groups in apprenticeships and traineeships, it becomes apparent that some groups are faring even less well than others. Compared with those from non-English speaking backgrounds overall:

❖ Those from small and emerging communities, and from non-English speaking background countries with relatively high numbers of refugees and special humanitarian entrants, are under-represented in apprenticeships and traineeships.

❖ Those from the main non-English speaking background countries and with a high proportion of mature-age workers among their numbers—such as Greece and the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia—are disproportionately represented in the labourer occupations.

❖ Of the main non-English speaking background groups, those from the Philippines, Fiji, India, Sri Lanka and Lebanon, and those speaking Arabic, Spanish, Turkish and Hindi, appear to be experiencing greater than their pro-rata share of training contract withdrawals and cancellations.

People from non-English speaking backgrounds are also not achieving equitable outcomes through their participation in apprenticeships and traineeships. Indeed they are:

❖ achieving less than their pro-rata share of contract completions although the difference is narrowing

❖ experiencing disproportionately high contract cancellations and withdrawals among some groups, especially those who hold tertiary academic qualifications and those in the labourer and clerical, sales and service occupations. This is particularly significant, given that those from non-English speaking backgrounds are more likely to have completed Year 12 prior to commencement and to hold tertiary academic qualifications. This is an issue which warrants further investigation

❖ less likely to receive credit for prior training.

Overall, it would appear that equity, as defined below, is far from being achieved for specific non-English speaking background groups. Groups who seem to be particularly struggling are those from more recently arrived small and emerging communities; groups with relatively high numbers of refugees; mature-age workers; and those with tertiary academic qualifications. As the New South Wales Department of Education and Training notes:

> *Equity in education and training means that there is equitable access to education and training opportunities and that people are able to participate and gain successful outcomes … For individuals this means that they will have equitable access to employment which provides recognised training, the training will be appropriate to and enhance the individual's life skills and the training will meet a diversity of needs, drawing on appropriate support, to allow the individual to complete successfully.*
> (New South Wales Department of Education and Training n.d, p.6)

Conclusion

For some non-English speaking background groups it would appear that more equitable participation could be enhanced through appropriately targeted program initiatives. For mature-age workers and those with tertiary academic qualifications, it is first necessary to consider whether what appear to be inequitable outcomes for these groups warrants a policy or program response. Further qualitative research is necessary to determine this.

The policy and program initiatives which can enhance equitable outcomes for non-English speaking background groups need necessarily to be multifaceted and well targeted. If the apprenticeship and traineeship system is to be more accessible, initiatives are required, for instance, which promote awareness of the system for targeted communities. This is especially important for members of small and emerging communities. Such communities generally

lack adequately developed community infrastructure, collective resources, support networks and links with others in a similar situation. All too often they also have little knowledge of services available to the community (Jupp 1994).

The demand for apprentices and trainees in areas of projected jobs growth and the capacity of those most disadvantaged in the labour market to compete for these must also be considered. Collaboration between governments, communities, training providers and employer groups is required if equitable participation and outcomes for those most disadvantaged in the labour market is to be achieved.

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People with poor language, literacy and numeracy skills

A hidden equity group?

Sue Kilpatrick and Pat Millar

Good literacy and numeracy skills are vital for full participation in modern life. Evidence suggests (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997; OECD & Statistics Canada 2000) that large numbers of Australians have inadequate literacy and numeracy skills. Recognising that literacy and numeracy are indispensable underpinning skills for training and work, the vocational education and training (VET) sector has addressed literacy and numeracy issues through a number of initiatives.

However, the evidence suggests that in Australia—as in other comparable countries— not enough people with lower literacy skills are accessing vocational education and training (Human Resources Development Canada 2000). Comparable countries are addressing this by moving in the direction of community-based and whole-of-government approaches to issues of literacy and numeracy in education and training. It is likely that Australia could benefit from a similar approach.

Introduction

AUSTRALIANS LIVE AND work in a highly literate society. Dispersed throughout this society, however, are large numbers of people whose literacy and numeracy skills are insufficient for modern living and working, and among these is a group whose literacy and numeracy skills are poor. While some of this group are in work, their foothold in it is precarious. The changing nature of work makes their lack of literacy skills an increasing liability. People with poor literacy and numeracy skills are found in every equity group, and many fall into a number of groups of disadvantage. This makes them hard to identify.

Many of them prefer invisibility. Unlike most areas of disadvantage, poor literacy and numeracy may be seen as an individual problem accompanied by lack of confidence and even shame. People with poor literacy and numeracy

skills not only experience inevitable difficulties in learning and training contexts; they often avoid participation altogether.

Literacy and numeracy skills receive wide attention in the Australian VET sector today, but to a large extent, the people who have poor literacy and numeracy skills are hard to target. It appears that community-based approaches are the most effective in addressing this issue.

The changing nature of work

The Australian workplace of the twenty-first century requires flexible, adaptable workers able to engage with a number of career paths, possibly diverse, and including jobs that are part-time or casual (ANTA 2003).

Research indicates that literacy and numeracy demands are increasing in workplaces (Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium 2002). Literacy and numeracy are crucial components in the key competencies for effective participation in emerging patterns of work and work organisation (Finn 1991; Mayer 1992), in areas such as continuous improvement systems, quality assurance mechanisms, decentralised decision-making, teamwork, multi-skilled performance, increased documentation and reporting requirements, and occupational health and safety needs (Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium 2002; ANTA 2003). Like other literacy practices, those of the workplace change, and new workplace literacies are acquired through processes of formal and informal learning (Barton & Hamilton 1998). A broad range of literacy and numeracy skills is required, including computer literacy and technological literacy. Other necessary literacies include cultural literacy (Hull et al. 1996), also termed multi-literacies (Cope & Kalantzis 2000).

Literacy and numeracy are social practices and contribute to people's capacities to function in society (Lankshear et al. 1997). Literacy and numeracy tasks are integrated into all aspects of working life, involving skills both at a basic level and those required for more complex tasks (Courtenay & Mawer 1995). Because they are also important vehicles for learning, issues surrounding language, literacy and numeracy are central to vocational education and training in general.

> *Specific literate and numerate practices enable learning, and … the learners' ability to manipulate such practices according to their needs is key to the learning process.* (Trenerry 2001, p.2)

Australia's literacy levels

Australia's involvement in the Survey of Aspects of Literacy (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997) and the International Adult Literacy Survey (OECD &

Statistics Canada 2000) provides evidence that current Australian profiles do not meet the literacy and numeracy levels necessary for participating fully in modern living and for responding to training and workplace demands.

The Australian Survey of Aspects of Literacy assessed three types of literacy: prose literacy (the ability to understand and use information from various kinds of prose texts, for example, from newspapers, magazines and brochures); document literacy (the ability to locate and use information contained in materials such as tables, schedules, charts, graphs and maps); and quantitative literacy (the ability to perform arithmetic operations using numbers contained in printed texts or documents) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997, p.ix).

Australia ranks in the middle of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, and ahead of the United Kingdom and United States, on the International Adult Literacy scales (2) and numeracy scale (1). However, Australia has a wider distribution of scores on the various scales than many other OECD countries. This means that there are some Australians with relatively poor literacy skills, even though Australia's overall average score is around the mid-point for all OECD countries.

Nearly half of Australia's population was shown to be functioning at levels 1 and 2 on the prose and document scales, while 46% were at levels 1 and 2 in numeracy skills (Norton 1997). A suitable minimum for coping with the demands of everyday life and work in a complex, advanced society is considered to be level 3, which denotes the skill level required for successful secondary school completion and further education entry (Norton 1997; Spierings 2001; Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium 2002). Nearly half of all adult Australians could therefore be seen as not literate or numerate in the light of the demands of the information society or knowledge economy (Falk & Guenther 2002).

There is some evidence that the Australian education system has produced improved literacy and numeracy outcomes over time. People aged up to 44 years performed better on average than older age groups in the survey of aspects of literacy (see table 1). While 15 to 19-year-olds' performance is not as good as those in the next age cohort, most are still in the formal education and training system and the performance of the cohort can be expected to improve over time. However, the evidence about participation in training suggests that, in Australia, as in most countries, not enough people with lower literacy skills are accessing vocational education and training (Human Resources Development Canada 2000).

Table 1: Proportions performing at levels 1 and 2 by age group, by percentage

Age group	All 15–74	15–19	20–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65–74
Prose literacy	47.2	45.2	36.5	39.0	37.8	48.3	65.5	75.7
Document literacy	47.8	44.8	35.0	39.0	39.3	49.0	67.1	77.3
Quantitative literacy	46.4	51.5	37.5	37.2	37.5	45.1	61.8	74.0

Source: Adapted from Australian Bureau of Statistics (1997).

Figure 1: Mean scores and scores at the 5th and 95th percentiles on the scale with range 0 to 500 points, International Adult Literacy Survey prose literacy, 1994–1998
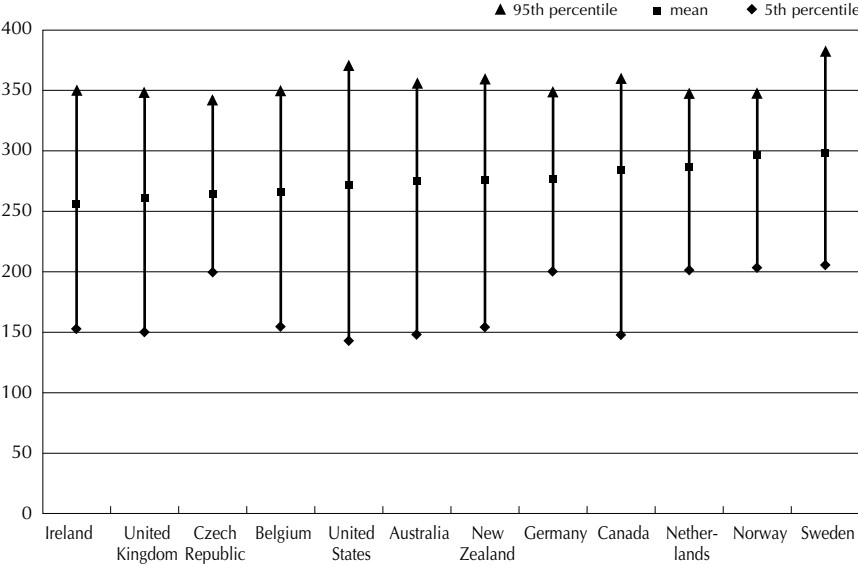
Source: Adapted from Human Resources Development Canada (2000, p.2).

Characteristics of Australians with poor literacy and numeracy skills

There has been limited focus on the nature of the equity group which makes up those who have poor literacy and numeracy skills. This is partly because the group is dispersed across other groups. Disadvantaged people often belong to more than one equity group and this is especially true of those with poor literacy and numeracy skills (National Board of Employment, Education and Training 1990; Golding & Volkoff 1998). Their multiple disadvantage means that their characteristics may be similar to those of others in each equity group, or they may be partly different in some groups. Their dispersal across other groups has made it more difficult to achieve a profile of the group. This dispersal among equity groups is illustrated by the following snapshots from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Aspects of Literacy (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997).

Those more likely to have a low level of English literacy and numeracy skills, that is, to be at levels 1 or 2 on the prose, document and/or quantitative scales:

❖ are older (over 60% of 55 to 64-year-olds and around three-quarters of 65 to 74-year-olds compared with around 36% of 20 to 24-year-olds), with older women being more likely to have low skill levels (around 70% of women aged 55 to 64 and 80% aged 65 to 74). However, 15 to 19-year-olds

are more likely to have low skill levels than people aged 20 to 44, particularly quantitative skills

❖ left school early (around 70%, compared with around 35% who completed the highest level of secondary school)

❖ are not in the labour force (around two-thirds compared with around 37% of those who are employed and around 60% of the unemployed)

❖ have a first language other than English and/or are Indigenous.

People with VET qualifications performed marginally better on the survey than did the population as a whole.

Where are they?

New South Wales has the largest proportion at level 1 on each literacy scale (about 22% compared with a national average of about 19.5%). State differences are largely explained by different socio-demographic profiles. For example, New South Wales has a large proportion whose first language is not English, and Tasmania, which performed poorest on the prose and quantitative scales, has the largest proportion of people aged over 55 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997).

The proportion performing at levels 1 and 2 on the survey of aspects of literacy is higher outside capital cities (Norton 1997). For example, on the document scale, 51.9% of people who lived outside capital cities performed at levels 1 and 2 compared with only 45.5% of capital city residents. Results for the prose and quantitative scales show similar differences (Australian Bureau of Statistics unpublished data).

From an industry perspective, employment in construction, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, manufacturing, and electricity, gas and water supply, was associated with lower literacy and numeracy scores compared with other industries. Occupations in which only small proportions of people frequently performed literacy activities had the lowest proportions of people with high-level skills (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997, p.27).

Australian literacy and numeracy programs

The Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Aspects of Literacy (1997) revealed that around 6.2 million Australians (around 47% of 15 to 74-year-olds) had literacy and numeracy skills inadequate for the demands of contemporary life, with 2.6 million of these performing at the lowest level. This leads to the question of whether these people are accessing literacy and numeracy programs.

At present, demand for language, literacy and numeracy training comes from individuals who self-select into the courses, or who are directed into the

Commonwealth Government's Literacy and Numeracy Training (LANT) program via Centrelink and Mutual Obligation procedures (Rahmani & Crosier 2002). Demand also comes from employers, typically via the Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program. This program is managed by the Department of Education, Science and Training and provides workers with language, literacy and numeracy skills to meet their current and ongoing employment and training needs. Industry and training organisations attribute significant outcomes to their involvement with the Workplace English Language and Literacy program (Millar 2001).

While many workers have access to these programs, itinerant workers, outworkers and labour hire company employees are representative of groups which may not be informed about, or easily able to access, these forms of provision (Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium 2002, p.3). Those not in the labour force and the unemployed do not have access to the programs.

There is no evidence that people are being turned away from language, literacy and numeracy courses because of insufficient places.

Many people who were objectively assessed by the Survey of Aspects of Literacy as having poor literacy skills self-rated their skills as excellent or good. For example, 66% of people whose first language was English and who were at level 1 of the prose scale rated their reading skills as excellent (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997, p.50). The difference for basic maths skills was less marked (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997, pp.9–10).

The adult and community education (ACE) sector also has many programs available to assist those with poor literacy and numeracy skills (see Adult, Community, Further Education, Victoria 2003; Australian Capital Territory, Department of Education, Youth and Family Services 2003). Although the Australian VET sector is not the only source of language and literacy training, it is useful to consider the extent to which the VET sector contributes to the national effort which appears to be required to address the issue of poor literacy and numeracy skills.

Literacy and numeracy education through VET

Significant strategic developments have taken place in the Australian VET sector since the early 1990s, some as a result of findings in the 1996 Survey of Adult Literacy. One of the most important national initiatives of the late 1990s was the integration of literacy and numeracy into training packages. Literacy and numeracy are recognised as vital underpinning skills in training and work contexts (Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs 1996; Fitzpatrick & Roberts 1997; ANTA 1998, 2000; Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium 2002). Literacy and numeracy

competencies have been included in industry standards in training packages since the late 1990s.

Evaluation of the integration of language, literacy and numeracy in training packages was the focus of the 1999–2000 Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium's research program (Haines & Bickmore-Brand 2000; Kelly & Searle 2000; McGuirk 2000; Millar & Falk 2000; Sanguinetti 2000; Trenerry 2000). Integration is generally seen as being a significant step forward, as it explicitly lists the underpinning language, literacy and numeracy skills required, and the language, literacy and numeracy practices required in the performance criteria. In practice, however, embedded language, literacy and numeracy may leave something to be desired, as insufficient attention is given at times to literacy and numeracy elements (Sanguinetti & Hartley 2000; Wyse & Brewer 2001; Falk 2002). Data also indicate that the entry pathways into training for people with low levels of literacy and numeracy are limited.

> *Further mapping of provision and access to training is needed with regard to vocational training offered at lower levels of the Australian Qualifications Framework and the corresponding literacy and numeracy support required and available at these lower levels. Evidence suggests that certificates in general education are available but not always accessible to workers in vocational training. On the other hand, vocational training programs are not always able to meet the literacy and numeracy requirements of participating trainees.*
> (Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium 2002, p.4)

In addition to literacy and numeracy training embedded in training packages, the vocational education and training sector offers courses specifically in language, literacy and numeracy, including enabling courses which contain a focus on these skills. A high proportion of students who are undertaking studies in enabling courses that include language and literacy—which in the VET sector provide remedial education and preparatory activities—are from various target equity groups. These courses are having positive outcomes (Phan & Ball 2000).

Who is participating?

In 2001, 153 300 people, or 8.7% of all VET students, enrolled in literacy and numeracy courses in the VET sector[1] (National Centre for Vocational Education Research [NCVER] unpublished statistics).

The vast majority of literacy and numeracy courses are delivered by technical and further education (TAFE) institutes (83%, compared with 74% of all VET courses [NCVER data]). Community providers are slightly more likely to deliver literacy and numeracy courses than other VET courses (15% compared with 13% of total delivery).

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[1] Defined as lower-level preparatory and pre-vocational courses from the 'VET multi-field education' field of study in the NCVER national VET data collections, with the exclusion of courses whose names did not suggest any relevance to literacy and numeracy.

Clearly, the numbers engaged specifically in literacy and numeracy training are but a tiny proportion of the 2.6 million Australians with below-adequate skills as identified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Aspects of Literacy (1997).

About one-third of literacy and numeracy students take their courses at Australian Qualifications Framework level I and another third of courses are non-award or result in a statement of attainment. Taking all certificate I enrolments in all courses (not only literacy and numeracy) and excluding people still at school, three-quarters are enrolled in social education and employment skills subjects. These subjects generally include some aspects of literacy and numeracy (although not defined in this way).

We have noted that older people, especially women, tend to have low literacy and numeracy skills, and that those aged 15 to 19 are more likely to perform poorly than the age groups from 20 to 44 years. Almost one-quarter of students in literacy and numeracy courses in 2001 were aged 15 to 19 in 2001, slightly higher than the proportion of the age group in all vocational education and training. There was a larger proportion of women aged over 40 (17.5% of women) enrolled in literacy and numeracy courses than men (10.1% of men). The proportion of women aged over 40 enrolled in literacy and numeracy courses was larger than for all VET courses (14.7%).

Consistent with the Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Aspects of Literacy (1997) finding that those who left school early have poorer skills, those who left school before completing Year 10 (18.5%) are over-represented in literacy and numeracy courses compared to all VET (6.8%), and as a proportion of all certificate I students not attending school.

Literacy and numeracy students, as well as Australian Qualifications Framework certificate I students not attending school are more likely not to be in the labour force or to be unemployed than all VET students. Those not in the labour force and unemployed make up 24.8% and 26.6% respectively of literacy and numeracy students, but are only 12.0% and 13.8% respectively of all VET students. This pattern is consistent with the Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Aspects of Literacy (1997) finding that the employed tend to have superior literacy and numeracy skills.

Those whose first language is not English and Indigenous people are more likely to be enrolled in literacy and numeracy courses than other VET courses, as would be expected from the Survey of Aspects of Literacy results.

Where do they participate?

Literacy and numeracy students are more likely than other VET students to reside in capital cities (61.6% compared with 55.2% of all VET). Despite the Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Aspects of Literacy (1997) identifying poorer skill

levels outside capital cities, those from rural and remote regions make up only 28.9% of literacy and numeracy students, compared with 35.1% of all VET students.

There are large variations among the states and territories in the delivery of literacy and numeracy training.

The proportion of all VET students who enrol in literacy and numeracy courses averages 8.7%. It ranges from 3.1% in South Australia to 13.4% in Queensland. There is a similar range for course enrolments (an average 8.3% of all course enrolments are literacy and numeracy). The hours involved in the courses also vary by location.

Nationally, an average of 8.1% of all VET hours are for literacy and numeracy courses, with the highest proportion being New South Wales (10.7%), and the lowest, the Australian Capital Territory and South Australia (2% and 2.8% respectively). Almost half of VET literacy and numeracy courses are fewer than 200 hours, and a further 39% are between 200 and 540 hours. Comparing literacy and numeracy enrolments with hours shows that courses in Queensland tend to be shorter than elsewhere.

The type of qualification gained from literacy and numeracy courses also varies by location. In South Australia, 83% of the course enrolments are in non-award courses compared with a total of 11% in Victoria. Northern Territory has the highest proportion of literacy and numeracy at Australian Qualifications Framework certificate I (62%) level.

Literacy and numeracy policy

The international experience

Overseas countries comparable to Australia are moving in the direction of whole-of-government approaches to issues of literacy and numeracy in education and training, integrating literacy and numeracy within wider cross-sectoral portfolios (Castleton & McDonald 2002). Policies in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada start from recognition of literacy and numeracy skills as social practices in social contexts, with work and training being among these contexts.

The United Kingdom's whole-of-government approach to adult literacy and numeracy issues includes a focus on disadvantaged communities (Castleton & McDonald 2002). One such initiative is in Mid and West Wales, where 'one in six of the working age population have low reading skills … [and] over two-fifths of the working age population have low numeracy skills' (Pester 2002, p.70). There, an informal and flexible service provides guidance to practitioners to inform, advise, teach and enable at a community level.

In Canada and the United States, literacy and numeracy fall mainly under the jurisdiction of provincial/state governments, along with other social issues, such

as education and training. However, federal governments are taking an increasing role. In Canada, there has been a movement since the International Adult Literacy Survey towards developing an overarching adult literacy and numeracy strategy, to expand on the role of the existing National Literacy Secretariat, which would involve partnerships between levels of government, the volunteer sector, business, labour, and the literacy community, to help advance policy development on a national scale (Folinsbee 2001). In the United States, reforms since 1998 in federal employment, and adult education and vocational rehabilitation programs have created an integrated 'one stop' delivery system of education activities, including literacy and numeracy training (United States Department of Education 2002). There are many initiatives combining efforts to improve literacy and numeracy standards with both vocational and community development outcomes (for example, Ewert 1993).

On the whole, it can be said that these countries favour integrated national government policy frameworks involving strong partnerships with communities and regions which are subsequently able to articulate their own strategies and action plans.

Australian policy

National responsibility in Australia for whole-of-government responses to adult literacy and numeracy rests largely within one department, the Department of Education, Science and Training (Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium 2002).

> *Literacy and numeracy delivery has achieved some degree of success with the 'built in not bolted on' model of articulation. DEST [Department of Education, Science and Training] has, therefore, a degree of experience in meeting the challenge of intra-sectoral integration across the domains of training, workplace learning, adult literacy and numeracy, and English language services, and may be able to provide some leadership in extending models of cross-sectoral response.*
> (Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium 2002, p.6)

However, other Commonwealth Government departments do have some involvement in literacy and numeracy. The Department of Family and Community Services, through its Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (2002), is associated with many community development programs which promote local cross-sectoral partnerships and networks, including ones involving educational practitioners and literacy and numeracy teaching volunteers.

Among the states and territories there is some variation at policy level, but all have policy documents which, to varying degrees, include reference to the role of literacy and numeracy skills in VET. The policy statements see this role as encompassing regional community capacity building as well as economic development (for example, New South Wales Board of Vocational Education

and Training 2002; Department of Education and Training, Victoria 2002; Victorian Local Governance Association 2003; Queensland Department of Employment and Training 2001). The whole-of-government and cross-sectoral approach is referred to as desirable.

Victoria is the most advanced of the Australian states in implementing a whole-of-government policy approach in which learning is a key plank. Inter-sectoral planning and development takes place at both state government and community levels, where 'local learning and employment networks' represent a significant move towards cross-sectoral cooperation and community support for trainees (Department of Education and Training, Victoria 2002). The improvement of literacy and numeracy standards is a priority.

In some aspects, the respective roles and responsibilities of the Commonwealth Government and state/territory governments are poorly defined (Schofield 2000). An overarching national policy would be helpful in guiding strategies and resource flows.

> *Australia is experiencing a 'policy void' in the adult literacy and numeracy domain. A number of issues are identified as ways to move forward and meet the challenges … It may be time to revisit the need for a mechanism that draws the states and territories together on a systemic issue, adult literacy and numeracy provision, that goes beyond sectoral boundaries and requires significant amounts of political goodwill amongst a range of stakeholders.*
> (Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium 2002, p.6)

Conclusions

While literacy and numeracy skills are recognised as important in equity considerations, people with poor literacy and numeracy skills are difficult to distinguish as a group, despite their large numbers. People with poor literacy and numeracy skills are from diverse backgrounds and often hidden within other equity groups.

Both socially and economically, Australia cannot afford a situation where large numbers of its citizens are seriously disadvantaged by not having these skills. Modern life—including work—places such a premium on good literacy and numeracy skills that people without these skills may be more seriously disadvantaged by this circumstance. To consider people with poor literacy and numeracy as an equity group is to open the door for more keenly focused attention to be paid to their needs.

All stakeholders need ongoing collection of data relating to literacy and numeracy issues relevant to their area. Information is essential to effective policy-making.

It is important that Australia participates in the upcoming adult literacy and life skills survey, an extension of the international adult literacy survey (OECD &

Statistics Canada 2000). Lack of data will otherwise hinder informed decision-making. The community level is the best place to begin to articulate needs.

The connection between adult literacy and family and community capacity is widely recognised in the literature. Today there is a general recognition that cross-sectoral government and community approaches are the best methods. Better outcomes in vocational education and training participation for people with poor literacy and numeracy skills may be best achieved through using these approaches.

All VET practitioners and workplace trainers need to be aware of the extent of poor literacy and numeracy skills in the population and be prepared to cater for literacy and numeracy 'gaps' as these arise in work- or training-related tasks. These practitioners also need to direct individuals into programs which address their broader literacy and numeracy needs.

More pre-vocational literacy and numeracy programs and pathways to and from other VET programs may encourage greater participation.

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Equity in education and training in correctional services institutions

Peter Noonan

Australia has a significant and growing prison population. Most prisoners have low levels of educational attainment, poor employment histories and face ongoing health and social problems. Recent reports and strategies have sought to more closely align education and training in prisons with the vocational education and training (VET) system and to identify the prison population as a client group under VET equity strategies. Current provision of education and training in prisons varies between the states, and in the nature of program provision. Participation levels appear to be low in relation to need and evidence that improved levels of education can reduce recidivism.

Education and training in prisons has to be considered in terms of broader prison objectives and policies, including the increasing trend towards integrated sentence management and rehabilitation strategies. This trend has major implications for the provision of, and access to, education and training in prisons. Current approaches to equity in VET can be characterised as being based on social justice or managing diversity principles. Neither of these approaches provides an adequate policy basis to underpin the future relationship between the VET sector and the corrections system. Participation levels and outcomes will be improved if VET sector provision reflects emerging broader corrections policy frameworks, most particularly integrated sentence management and rehabilitation strategies. Organisational and adult learning models may emerge from these frameworks, and VET staff and institutions have a potentially important role to play in the development of these models in prisons.

Characteristics of the prison population

IN 2001–02 A DAILY average of 21 672 prisoners were held in Australia's 97 prisons.[1] The prison population comprised 20 241 males and 1431 females, including 4239 Indigenous inmates (Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision 2003, p.7.1).

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[1] These data refer to adults held in custodial institutions, not to those subject to community correction orders or to those held in the juvenile justice system.

While precise and consistent data on the characteristics of the prison population are not available, the 2003 report on government service provision points to the:

> … *increasing complexity of prisoner profiles (that is, those with unresolved drug and alcohol issues and backgrounds of social disadvantage, low educational achievement, poor employment history, significant health problems including mental illness, and unsatisfactory family and social skills).*
>
> (Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/ State Service Provision 2003, p.7.1)

Similar findings are outlined in the *National strategy for vocational education and training for adult prisoners and offenders in Australia* (ANTA 2000). The strategy indicates that:

- ❖ Less than one-quarter of prisoners have completed secondary school.

- ❖ A large number [of prisoners] have limited literacy and/or numeracy in both native English speaking and non-English speaking backgrounds.

- ❖ Over 75% of prisoners are likely to have been unemployed prior to their sentence.

- ❖ Intellectual disability is noticeable especially amongst male prisoners.

- ❖ Over 75% are likely to have substance abuse problems.

In 2003, a discussion paper, 'The review of education and training provision in Victorian prisons—the way forward'[2] (Bearing Point 2003) was prepared for the Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner in Victoria. The paper analysed data from an extensive survey of prisoners to reach similar conclusions about the social and educational background of the prison population in Victoria (Bearing Point 2003, p.20).

The discussion paper also examined differences in gender and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous inmates. It found that female prisoners were:

- ❖ more confident than males about their language skills (both in reading and writing)

- ❖ less likely than males to have done an education centre course at another prison, but more likely to be doing one now and more likely than males to plan to do some training after release

- ❖ very unlikely to have obtained a trade ticket

- ❖ less likely than males to have a computer in their cell.

(Bearing Point 2003, p.69)

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[2] This report was issued for discussion purposes only and, at the time of preparation, a final report had not been released nor government decisions made on the report. For this reason, only data and findings based on research and consultation for the discussion paper have been referred to in this chapter.

Indigenous prisoners had lower perceptions of their skills in all areas but this was only statistically significant in relation to writing skills (Bearing Point 2003, p.72).

Current arrangements for education and training in prisons

Improving prisoners' educational opportunities has long been recognised as an important part of prisoner rehabilitation, and education and training has been available in Australian prisons for most of the twentieth century. In 1989, Australia's correctional ministers formally adopted standard guidelines enshrining the right of offenders serving a custodial sentence to access education and training. However, the application of the standards varies between jurisdictions, as do administrative and resourcing arrangements for education and training in prisons (ANTA 2000).

In Victoria for example, education centres in prisons are part of technical and further education (TAFE) institutes, with provision funded through the VET budget by the Office of Training and Tertiary Education. In New South Wales, the Department of Corrective Services provides a range of programs through the department's Adult Education and Vocational Training Institute. Prisoners also access TAFE programs through a memorandum of understanding between the Department of Corrective Services and TAFE NSW (Department of Corrective Services 2002).

The nature of education and training provision in prisons varies significantly between jurisdictions. The *Report on government services* (2003) noted that:

> *The highest percentage of eligible prisoners undertaking accredited education or training courses in 2001–02 was reported by WA (57.6 per cent) and the lowest by SA (28.0 per cent). The proportion of prisoners undertaking different types of education and training courses varied across jurisdictions, with WA reporting the highest percentage in vocational education and training (53.6 per cent), NSW reporting the highest in secondary school sector courses (38.5 per cent), and Queensland reporting the highest in both higher education sector and pre-certificate level 1 courses[3] (3.7 per cent and 13.2 per cent respectively). Education indicators were not applicable to the ACT because the jurisdiction only accommodates remand prisoners.*
>
> (Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/ State Service Provision 2003, p.7.20)

This report also highlights the variation in participation rates for inmates in education and training between jurisdictions (although these figures are based

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[3] Refers to accredited education courses below the certificate I level (for example, learning to read, recognising numbers and so on).

on a point-in-time census rather than annual figures which may show different outcomes).

Figure 1: Participation rates in education and training programs in Australian prisons 2003
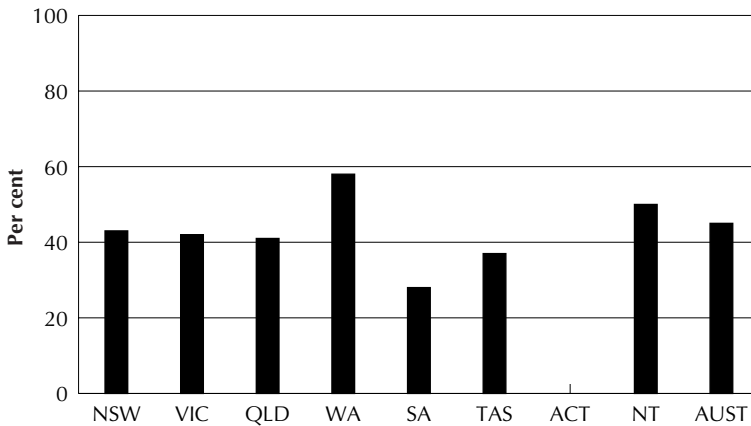
The data outlined in the report indicate that participation rates in education and training are low, given the educational profile and needs of the prison population and that the objectives of aligning provision with recognised training through vocational education and training has been at best only partly achieved.

Prison education and training and VET strategies

In 2000, the *National strategy for vocational education and training for adult prisoners and offenders in Australia* (ANTA 2000) was developed to more closely align education and training in prisons to the VET system. Nationally recognised vocational training and basic/general education through VET was seen to be appropriate to the education and training needs of the prison population. The strategy also emphasised that a relationship should be maintained with higher education as part of the educational continuum available to the general community (ANTA 2000, p.1).

The strategy was developed following the recommendations of the *Inquiry into education and training in correctional facilities* which was conducted by the Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee in 1996. The inquiry recommended that offenders be identified as a discrete group and contained a number of recommendations relating to the continuing development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of vocational education and training for offenders. The inquiry indicated that the implementation of its recommendations would require continued cooperation

between state and territory corrective services administrations and vocational education and training authorities (ANTA 2000, p.1).

A bridge to the future (ANTA 1998a), the national strategy for 1998–2003, contained the objective of 'achieving equitable outcomes in vocational education and training'. The strategy does not define client groups as such, but indicates specific priorities that clearly infer that levels of educational attainment, levels of participation in VET generally, at higher Australian Qualifications Framework levels, by program type (for example, employment-based) and by occupation, are criteria that are applied to identifying groups for whom specific strategies and priorities may be required.

This national VET strategy was consciously framed in broad and flexible terms in its approach to equitable outcomes, as it was not possible during its development to obtain agreement across all jurisdictions to a common approach to defining and redressing disadvantage in VET.[4]

Achieving equitable outcomes (ANTA 1998b), a supporting paper for *A bridge to the future*, is based on a policy view which shifts the emphasis from identifying specific target groups to a position which gives 'greater emphasis on measuring the capacity of the vocational education and training system to respond to the diverse needs of clients and potential clients' (ANTA 1998b, p.1).

However, *Achieving equitable outcomes* goes further than *A bridge to the future* (ANTA 1998a) in more clearly identifying women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with a disability, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, people with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills and people from rural and isolated areas as specific client groups and also as equity client groups. The paper outlines a range of indicators for both participation in and outcomes from VET for these groups. However, citing the Senate inquiry, *Achieving equitable outcomes* also indicates that 'Other clients for whom vocational education and training outcomes need to be improved include, for example, people within correctional facilities' (ANTA 1998b, p.3).

The clear implication of this statement is that prisoners should also be treated as an equity client group.

Issues and barriers

Education and training in prisons takes place in a complex and challenging environment.

The psychological and emotional impact of a custodial sentence, isolation, fear, the possibility of ongoing substance abuse, and low levels of self-esteem and motivation create major challenges for both learners and staff in prisons.

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[4] Based on the author's participation in the development of the strategy.

The Victorian discussion paper and consultations and prison visits[5] associated with its preparation highlighted many other specific challenges. Security and prison management are primary considerations in prisons and can significantly affect prisoners' access to education and training. Facilities are often inadequate, particularly, but not only, in older prisons. Even some newer prisons are poorly designed to maximise access to education and training facilities. Equipment, including information technology and access to the internet, may be limited, due to cost and security considerations. Prisoners are often transferred between prisons, disrupting their studies. They face competition for their time from other programs and from prison industries. Incentives often work against participation in education and training. For example, payments to prisoners for participation in education and training programs may be lower than payments for work in prison industries. A report, 'Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners', reports similar findings in the United Kingdom (Social Exclusion Unit Great Britain 2002, pp.47–9).

The Victorian discussion paper also identified high levels of unmet demand for education and training programs in Victorian prisons. A major decline in average funding per student contact hour in Victoria between 1994 and 2001 was also highlighted. This, in conjunction with a significant increase in student contact hours, resulted in a decline in average student contact hours per module enrolment. Module load completion rates also fell over that period.

While equivalent national and state data are not available, the increasing prison population and the participation rates identified in figure 1 suggest that demand and funding issues are likely to be major issues in all jurisdictions, particularly given the increase in the prison population across Australia.

Corrections system objectives

The role of education and training in prisons must be examined against the broader objectives of the corrections systems.

The following agreed national objectives are set out in the *Report on government services* (Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/ State Service Provision 2003):

❖ *custody:* to protect the community by the sound management of prisoners commensurate with the risks they pose to the community, and to ensure the environment in which prisoners are managed enables them to achieve an acceptable quality of life consistent with community norms

❖ *community:* to protect the community by the sound management of offenders commensurate with the risks they pose to the community, and to ensure the environment in which offenders are managed enables them

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[5] The author was involved in consultations and prison visits.

to achieve an acceptable quality of life consistent with community norms through referral to social support agencies

❖ *reparation:* to ensure work undertaken by prisoners or offenders benefits the community either directly or indirectly (by reducing costs to the taxpayer)

❖ *prisoner/offender programs:* to provide programs and opportunities that address the causes of offending, maximise the chances of successful reintegration into the community and reduce the risk of re-offending

❖ *advice to sentencing and releasing authorities:* to provide sentencing and releasing authorities with advice to assist the determination of the disposition of prisoners and offenders, their release to parole, and necessary conditions for their supervision and post-release supervision.

Education and training and rehabilitation

The *Report on government services 2003* lists a range of performance indicators against these objectives, including education. The Victorian discussion paper contains a summary of recent research into the contribution of education and training to reduced recidivism and improved life and employment prospects for prisoners.

In recent years, there has been considerable research internationally and in Australia into the most effective forms of program intervention in prisons to reduce re-offending rates, including the development of a substantial body of research into the benefits of participation in education and training.

The Victorian discussion paper draws on research and cites studies conducted in the United States and Canada which correlate higher levels of educational attainment with reduced recidivism. The paper points to a growing recognition across the corrections sector of the benefits of provision of education and training to 'lessen as significantly as possible an individual's chances of re-offending' (Bearing Point 2003, p.58).

Similar conclusions are reached in the British paper, 'Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners', which states that 'evidence shows that education and training can have a big impact on reducing re-offending rates'. That report also cites Canadian research arguing that participation in basic skills could contribute to a reduction in re-offending of around 12%, and another study in the United Kingdom that 'those who had not taken part in education and training were three times more likely to be reconvicted than those who did' (Social Exclusion Unit Great Britain 2002, p.44).

There is also evidence to suggest that rehabilitation strategies generally are most effective when they employ treatments based on risk factors (for example, the likelihood of re-offending) and form part of broader cognitive-behavioural therapy employing everyday real-life situations (Bearing Point 2003).

Education and training is therefore an important, but only one, element of overall rehabilitation strategies and frameworks. Assisting offenders to acquire the capability to live and work in the community by accepting responsibility for their actions, to assist them in making informed choices and exercising restraint are essential aspects of rehabilitation strategies.

These strategies encompass employment in prison industries, programs aimed at reducing substance abuse, anger management and life skills. Specific programs are targeted at particular groups such as sex offenders. Career counselling, and pre- and post-release support are also essential components of rehabilitation strategies.

As the *Report on government services* observed:

> *Integrated prisoner and offender management has been adopted as a policy framework and is being developed, implemented, or refined across jurisdictions. It involves a whole-of-sentence planning and management approach across custodial and community corrections. This approach has implications for involvement of prisoners in programs outside the custodial setting, such as work release, and for resource management indicators, such as staff ratios and unit costs.* (Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/ State Service Provision 2003, p.7.10)

This point is recognised in the *National strategy for adult prisoners and offenders in Australia*:

> *The Strategy seeks the inclusion of vocational education and training in the sentence management plan for all adult offenders.* (ANTA 2000, p.2)

Integrated offender management approaches have major implications for the planning and delivery of education and training in prisons and will result in increased targeting of those areas identified as most likely to reduce re-offending levels. The integration of education and training programs with other rehabilitation strategies is a further significant outcome of this particular approach. Decisions about the nature and timing of involvement in education and training will be increasingly shaped by plans developed for each prisoner as part of the initial reception and assessment process.

VET equity approaches: Are they useful?

A large percentage of the prison population would be encompassed within the equity groups identified in *Achieving equitable outcomes* (ANTA 1998b). Adopting an equity approach appears at face value to be justified and appropriate, given the social and educational profile of prisoners, including the significant over-representation of Indigenous people.

However, a closer examination of the basis of equity policy in VET in the context of the trend towards integrated offender management approaches, including rehabilitation strategies, suggests that an equity policy approach is

not in itself an adequate underpinning for the involvement of the VET sector in education and training in prisons.

Achieving equitable outcomes identifies two approaches to equity policy: a *social justice* approach and a *managing diversity* approach.

A 'social justice' approach is characterised as focusing on the broader range of life experiences and circumstances that may affect an individual's participation in vocational education and training and more broadly, their participation in society. It is based on a commitment to ensuring that outcomes are not hindered by factors outside the individual client's control or influence. As this report notes:

> *Within a Social Justice Framework, vocational education and training is viewed as a means through which to overcome social inequality and to achieve an informed and just society.* (ANTA 1998b, p.5)

Managing diversity approaches on the other hand, are seen as most commonly used in workplaces as a means of developing strategies and approaches appropriate to the needs of a diverse client base. An ethos of inclusiveness, respect for difference and input from a range of clients into decision-making, and reflecting these in structures, personnel and employment practices are seen as major aspects of managing diversity approaches. The implications for VET are to 'adjust teaching, training, and assessment to encompass difference' (ANTA 1998b, p.5).

A social justice approach implies that government intervention and priority is justified on the basis of redressing injustice and disadvantage to overcome inequality and barriers to learning. Many individual prisoners have experienced substantial social, economic and educational disadvantage. That disadvantage may have contributed directly to a prisoner's offending behaviour, but it is difficult to argue that specific behaviour and its consequences (a custodial sentence) should serve as a 'trigger' for government intervention and priority to redress injustice and inequality. The limitations of this approach will be particularly evident in cases of serious and violent crime, particularly where offenders have higher than average levels of educational attainment. As such, a social justice framework is not likely to be able to support the case for increased resourcing for education and training in prisons.

Social justice approaches also imply a substantial degree of learner influence and choice over educational options and pathways, based on the life circumstances and needs. However, under integrated whole-of-sentence prisoner management, access to education and training will reflect broader rehabilitation strategies based on risk and need assessments. Under those arrangements, it is quite conceivable that the primary focus of rehabilitation strategies will be to assist prisoners to overcome substance dependence or to address tendencies towards violence or sexual abuse with minimal involvement in accredited education and training. On the other hand, the primary rehabilitation focus for a

young offender with major literacy and numeracy needs, and without any formal qualifications, may be intensive involvement in education and training.

At its broadest level, managing diversity approaches may have some value in addressing the unique and challenging environment of prisons and the diversity of needs of the prison population. However, managing diversity approaches also have to be examined in the context of broader prison objectives and accountability requirements, including rehabilitation strategies. The primary responsibility for addressing and managing the diversity of the prison population resides with prison authorities and operators—not in the first instance with education centres or the VET system generally. Diverse and flexible responses will be required, but those responses will be driven by the needs assessment process and the rehabilitation strategies that flow from that assessment.

This is not to suggest that education and training centres in prisons and the teachers employed in those centres should react to an externally imposed requirement, or indeed that the learning options and strategies should be imposed on prisoners, regardless of their own perceived needs and plans. Far more effective educational needs assessments are required as part of the reception process into prisons, throughout the sentence and also in assisting prisoners to continue with education and training after their release (Bearing Point 2003, p.91; Social Exclusion Unit Great Britain 2002, p.49). Teachers have a vital role to play in working with prisoners and prison authorities in developing and refining the education and training elements of sentence management plans and in the overall assessment of the implementation of those plans.

The motivation for many teachers working in prisons—that they are assisting people with significant social and educational needs—should not be diminished. On the contrary, they should be able to undertake those roles within an environment where their work is more systematically integrated with the other strategies designed to minimise the likelihood of people re-offending.

In that regard, contemporary approaches to adult learning that emphasise 'whole of life' approaches to learning, including the blending of formal and informal learning, re-building confidence and self-esteem and acquiring the skills and knowledge for active citizenship and independent economic living, are especially relevant in a prison environment. Learning must be conceived of as an outcome from the whole rehabilitation process, not merely in terms of education and training programs.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the substantial disadvantage experienced by most prisoners, there are obvious and significant limitations on VET equity approaches as the primary rationale for government intervention in, and priority for, education and training for Australia's prison population. In reality, equity approaches have probably not had a significant influence on resourcing and provision to date and,

as such, they are unlikely to have much influence on increasing participation rates in and improving outcomes from education and training in the future.

The population of Australia's prisons is likely to continue to rise in the future, and there will be increasing priority placed on strategies that reduce the rate of re-offending by prisoners. Participation levels and outcomes from education and training in prisons are far more likely to be improved if they are driven by integrated sentence management and rehabilitation strategies, rather than poorly defined VET equity strategies which cannot be operationalised in any meaningful way in a prison's environment.

However, there are important experiences from the implementation of equity and other strategies in vocational education and training that can be brought into these processes. An objective of the VET sector should be to progressively transform prisons so that prisoners can play an active role in the negotiation and development of their rehabilitation plans and for the achievement of the goals within those plans. Management of their own learning by prisoners across all programs should be an essential part of that process as a foundation for continuing learning after their release. This will require fundamental changes in the organisation and structure of prisons, the way in which programs in prisons are provided and how work is organised and carried out within prisons. VET institutions and staff have growing levels of expertise and experience in the development and implementation of these models of organisational and adult learning, and should play an active role in the ongoing reform and transformation of Australia's prisons.

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Early school leavers and VET

Richard Teese

One in four young people in Australia leaves school without completing his or her senior secondary certificate. This has been a fairly stable pattern throughout the 1990s, although at the start of the decade recession kept somewhat more young people at school. This chapter looks at the context in which early school leaving occurs in Australia, the causes, the consequences, and the ways in which its impact is reduced through vocational education and training (VET).

The two major motives identified for quitting school early are demand for work or an income, and lack of interest in schoolwork. There are large variations across the states and territories, ranging from about 11% who leave school early in the Australian Capital Territory to nearly 50% in the Northern Territory (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002). There are also large differences between boys and girls. About one in five girls does not complete secondary school compared with about one in three boys. As well as the gender gap, and the gap between the states and territories, there are other very significant dimensions of variation, such as by region, socio-economic status, and Aboriginality.

Within three years of leaving school early, between two-thirds and three-quarters of these young people have some contact with VET. The evidence from a variety of sources is that this contact is positive in terms of employment and other social benefits. As is discussed in the next chapter, there also is evidence that including VET in Schools programs contributes to retaining more young people to the end of secondary schooling. Overall, VET plays a large role in ensuring growth of learning among young people.

The context

A QUARTER OF A century ago, around two-thirds of young Australians did not complete school (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002). The level of early leaving has fallen sharply since that time, especially since the 1982–83 recession. This change is associated with the long-term contraction in the full-time labour market for teenagers. In the late 1970s, there were two full-time jobs held by male teenagers for one full-time job today. For girls, the situation has deteriorated more rapidly, with two-thirds of all full-time employment no longer available (Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria 2000). This has meant greater pressure on girls than boys to stay on at school. But both sexes are now much

more economically dependent on completing school. Previous patterns of entry to the workforce without a senior certificate have been eroded as the nature of work has changed. Much of the work now available to teenagers is part-time or casual (Borland, Gregory & Sheehan 2001; Business Council of Australia & Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2002), and the industries in which work is available have shifted towards the credential-rich services sector. Early leaving has not become a thing of the past, but the proportion of young people who continue to base their employment strategy on early entry to the labour force without completing school has more than halved in the last two decades.

Understanding early leaving

Given labour market changes, it may seem surprising that as many as 27% of young Australians should leave school without their senior certificate. The school drop-out rate reaches much higher levels in some regions, including those with high rates of youth unemployment. To understand why early leaving can involve as many as 46% of teenage males in urban communities (Teese 2001), it is important to recognise that retention rates in school are not simply a reaction to labour market conditions. It is true that the recessions of 1982–83 and 1990–91 triggered very sharp jumps in retention, and also that there is a strong long-term relationship between the structure of employment opportunities and the proportion of young people who complete school. But early leaving is a complex phenomenon. Many early leavers are not discouraged by even a weak labour market. Quitting school is largely driven by different motives and experiences.

While employment prospects for teenagers are much more limited than in the late 1970s, survey evidence indicates that the biggest single motive for dropping out of school is demand for work. The fact that work—especially full-time work—is frequently not available to teenagers does not suppress the demand for jobs. Instead this demand is channelled into part-time work combined with full-time study, or into aspirations for entry to higher levels of the labour market which require completed school or tertiary education, or into jobs with a contract of training or, finally, into a sustained pattern of intermittent employment which may or may not involve full-time work in the short-to-medium term. In poorer communities, including those where adult unemployment is high, the demand for work is likely to be stronger rather than weaker, especially if (as in country districts) there is a long cultural acceptance of early entry to the workforce. Dropping out of school in this context can be viewed as an economic strategy (whether ill-fated or not) in which young people seek to relieve economic vulnerability by taking whatever jobs are available. The economic motive for early leaving has important implications for policy development (as will be discussed later).

Another major motive for quitting school without a senior certificate is lack of interest in schoolwork. Again this motive is identified in one research study

after another (Holden & Dwyer 1992; Beresford 1993; Lamb 1994; Teese et al. 2000). Although the economic imperatives for staying on at school are strong, student dissatisfaction with school may outweigh these. Once the legal obligation to attend school has come to an end, students will continue in the post-compulsory years if they see good economic reasons for doing so, if they are able to relate to the programs, and if they can manage the academic demands of the subjects they take. Moreover, to judge from how early leavers describe their experiences, schools have to be socially supportive settings in which young people feel they belong. Friendship is the most attractive feature of school to teenagers (Teese et al. 1996), and this, along with good rapport with teachers, is a major factor enabling them to cope with the increasingly specialised, theoretical and individualistic and competitive nature of schoolwork in the senior years. Weak social bonds make academic schoolwork more difficult to manage, and the combination of poor social integration and low achievement drives many young people from school. This is especially so for boys, whose access to full-time jobs is much greater than girls' and who can thus see a way out of a situation in which they neither enjoy social esteem through friendship, nor have high academic self-esteem through good marks.

The two major motives of demand for work and flight from school clearly converge amongst some groups of early leavers. Since work offers a solution to the problem of low achievement, finding a job removes the individual from a situation of tension and possibly low self-regard based on feedback from the school, and provides a second chance and a new environment in which to gain respect. But there is no necessary relationship between the two motives of finding work and fleeing school. Good students—not just low achievers—drop out of school, and many students who struggle with the academic curriculum stay on at school. Policy responses need to take account of the mix of motives behind early leaving since, if the root causes differ, the strategies and even the policy objectives must also differ. An example of this can be seen in the profiles of two urban regions which have high drop-out rates in Victoria. The north-west of Melbourne has high rates of scholastic failure combined with high rates of early leaving. Mornington Peninsula, on the other hand, has comparatively low rates of scholastic failure, but high drop-out. In the first region, there is a different combination of problems or issues from that found in the second region, although the rates of early leaving are about the same (Teese 2002a).

It should be noted that leaving school early is not always a clear-cut, well-defined action. Some young people leave and return to school several times, or exhibit intermittent attendance patterns, before making a complete break from school. Intermittent or no attendance can be an issue even when the young person is below the statutory age for attending school (that is, truancy).

Who are the early leavers?

A particular socio-economic context underpins the two major reasons for dropping out, since it is young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds who are both more economically vulnerable and more academically vulnerable. Less likely to succeed at school, the economic penalties they pay in leaving early are fewer in the short term, since their chances of gaining a place in university are objectively much lower than for young people of high socio-economic origins. How much do they have to gain by completing two, or even one more year of school, if this makes little difference to the kinds of jobs they will eventually get (even if it influences how long they will wait for these jobs)? On the other hand, if their families are suffering financial hardship, the pressure to help by finding work will be greater, whether or not this involves leaving school. Economic insecurity and academic insecurity thus combine to ensure that most early leavers come from working-class families. However, the fact that failure at school or disengagement from schoolwork is also experienced by young people from socially advantaged families, and that they are also motivated by economic needs, means that their families will also contribute to the ranks of early leavers, although to a very much smaller extent (Ball & Lamb 2001; Teese & Polesel 2003).

From an equity perspective, the tendency for young people from unskilled or semi-skilled manual workers' families to leave school early and take up low-paid, low-skill jobs is a classic illustration of social reproduction. Early leavers are often caught in a process whereby poor marks at school and poor motivation lower expectations and aspirations amongst themselves, family and teachers. As the relationship with school weakens, they compensate by searching outside school for recognition and independence. Nevertheless, they have to be content with jobs which, in the long term, are economically precarious unless they return to education or training to remedy this. While low achievement is the most important mechanism through which low socio-economic status is reproduced—either through early leaving or poorly paid jobs on completion of secondary school—it should be stressed that the economic motive for dropping out is a strong one which may override expectations based on average or even high achievement. As has been highlighted earlier, only part of early leaving can be linked to low achievement.

While lower working-class boys are more likely than other socio-economic groups to leave school early, it is Indigenous Australians who have by far the highest rates of school drop-out. The barriers to their completing school are complex, but include low achievement, a curriculum involving a social model of learning which tends to isolate Indigenous students and distance them from school, lower aspirations, fewer role models of successful students (and teachers), and racism (Hudsmith 1992; Peacock 1993; Gardiner 1996; Teese et al. 2000).

Consequences

The impact of early leaving can be viewed from two perspectives—the individual and the social. In general, the earlier a young person quits school, the greater the likelihood of unemployment. Until recently, the Australian Bureau of Statistics published tables from its monthly labour force survey which compared employment transition by the level at which young people left school. These tables tend to show that the risk of unemployment falls the longer a student stays at school. In 1999 for example, the unemployment rate for young people fell from an estimated 42% in the case of those with compulsory schooling only, to 22% for Year 10 leavers and 26% for Year 11 leavers, to 16% for Year 12 leavers (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1999). Similar patterns have been found in more recent labour force surveys, although less detailed analysis by year level is now published (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000, 2001). The poor employment consequences of early leaving have been documented in other industrial countries as well as Australia (OECD 2001; European Training Foundation 2000).

These findings confirm that it is not in the economic interest of young people to leave school early, however strong their economic motives. But there is sufficient scope within the teenage labour market—including both full-time and part-time opportunities—to absorb many early leavers. Apprenticeship is the most important positive outcome, as this combines a contract of training with substantially full-time work. In addition, many early leavers find full-time work which is not linked to a contract of training. However, very high proportions of early leavers, especially girls, are employed in part-time or casual jobs (Teese & Polesel 2003; Business Council of Australia & Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2002). From this point of view, rather than trying to combine work with study, the issue is whether they should have left school at all. Indeed, many early leavers express regret over their decision to quit school (Centre for Post-Compulsory Education and Training 2000).

The consequences of early leaving are not only individual, but social. The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (for the Dusseldorp Skills Forum) has estimated the total cost of early leaving per individual to be of the order of $74 000 over a lifetime (1999). This includes both the costs to the individual and to the public purse. More recently, the Business Council of Australia has drawn attention to the impact of early leaving in terms of 'lower employment rates, increased welfare payments, lower productivity and lower tax revenue' (Business Council of Australia 2003). However, there are also social consequences which cannot easily be costed, but which are significant. Those early leavers who are in flight from school may have had such a poor experience of education that they never return to study or undertake training. With this history, will they be able to communicate a positive view of learning to their own children? With self-esteem so closely linked to success at school, will they have the confidence to pursue economic and cultural opportunities

based on lifelong learning? Will they have the same allegiance to civic values as their peers who finished school and went on to tertiary education? Some survey data suggest that attachment to democratic values declines with levels of achievement at school (Teese et al. 1996). If so, there will be early leavers who enter adult life with attitudes which are negative to the institutions which celebrate merit and stress individual enterprise and initiative, with success at school being the first and most enduring model of this. Early leaving, where it involves flight from school and is essentially negative in nature, may thus have wider cultural consequences.

Early leaving and post-school education and training

Without a senior certificate—that is, Year 12—early leavers run a high risk of unemployment in quitting school. The majority, however, seeks to offset this risk by undertaking vocational education and training. Utilising VET as part of an employment strategy does not necessarily occur in the first year after school. Many early leavers appear to reject the idea of further education or training, claiming that they lack the time, or do not see the relevance, or do not feel ready for more study (Polesel, Davies & Teese 2000). Within three years of leaving school, however, these reservations weaken, and between two-thirds and three-quarters of all early leavers have at least some contact with VET (Teese 2002b).

The resumption of study over this period varies by award level, gender, and duration. These dimensions are inter-related. Apprenticeships of the traditional kind—the four-year indenture—provide the most sustained form of involvement of boys in VET, and lead to a skilled tradesman's qualification (Australian Qualifications Framework [AQF] certificate III). This is the largest source of post-school VET experience amongst male early leavers (Teese 2002b). Amongst girls, the situation is more complex. Their participation in contracts of training is much lower than boys', and their activity in VET is more concentrated, both in basic courses (certificates I and II) and in middle-level (certificate IV) courses. This also implies differences in the sectors of industry in which young men and young women are working (or seeking to enter); for example, manufacturing and construction continue to attract male apprentices, while financial and human services draw in more female workers.

The spread of training activity across the various Australian Qualifications Framework levels indicates the different roles which vocational education and training plays for early school leavers compared with those who complete Year 12. Table 1 provides statistics for young people who were studying in the public VET system in 2002 according to when they left school and the year level they completed at school.

The first role for VET is that it appears to provide a delayed alternative to Year 12 for students who leave school without completing the qualification. This

is demonstrated by the figures (table 1). Just over a quarter (27.2%) of the young people who went directly into VET without completing Year 12 were studying at AQF certificate III level or higher, whereas over half (55.9%) of those who left school more than a year beforehand without completing Year 12 were studying at the higher Australian Qualifications Framework levels. It should be noted that AQF certificate III programs are generally considered to be at about the same educational level as Year 12.

The second role is that basic VET (that is, AQF levels I and II and non-Australian Qualifications Framework programs) helps those with the least schooling or, at any rate, with the least successful schooling, while also providing specific entry-level training (including traineeships). This is reflected in the situation whereby almost two-thirds of young people who left school without completing Year 12 and who went directly into VET, undertake basic VET programs, at least initially.

For many young people, these two roles of vocational education and training make up for the extra years of schooling which early leavers miss, or provide accredited vocational training where this was not available during their schooling. Of course, not all early school leavers undertake further education or training after leaving school. From a policy perspective, this group is of particular concern.

Table 1: Students up to 19 years of age, by schooling status and Year 12 completion 2002, percentage

Qualification category of major VET program in 2002	Still at school	Did not complete Year 12		Completed Year 12		Schooling status or level unknown	All young students
		Left school in 2001–2002	Left school before 2001	Left school in 2001–2002	Left school before 2001		
				Proportion of total (%)			
Diploma or higher	2.1	1.5	3.8	26.7	29.5	7.4	9.6
Certificate IV	2.6	2.7	5.7	14.9	11.1	4.9	6.3
Certificate III	16.6	22.9	46.5	27.4	35.3	21.0	28.3
Sub-total: Certificate III & above	*21.3*	*27.2*	*55.9*	*69.0*	*75.8*	*33.3*	*44.1*
Certificate II	46.4	42.7	26.7	17.5	15.4	24.6	30.7
Certificate I	11.6	12.4	5.6	2.8	1.4	9.4	7.8
Sub-total: Certificate I or II	*58.0*	*55.1*	*32.3*	*20.3*	*16.8*	*34.0*	*17.3*
Other programs	20.7	17.7	11.7	10.7	7.3	32.8	55.9
Total (%)	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**
Number of students ('000)	79.30	83.10	86.10	58.10	46.80	67.00	420.43

Source: NCVER national VET provider data collection 2002, unpublished statistics.

Economic and cultural outcomes of VET for early leavers

How effective is VET for young people who leave school early? The evidence from a variety of sources is very positive. In relation to both 19-year-olds and 22-year-olds, undertaking vocational education and training significantly improves their chances of employment, as the monthly labour force survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics confirms (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1999). Analysis of graduate destinations by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) also shows that VET has a big impact on employment, especially for labour market entrants and apprentices (NCVER 2002).

Apart from its influence on employment prospects, vocational education and training also has cultural benefits for young people who leave early. To quote from a recent report to the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA):

> *They experience an improvement in their capacity for self-direction and in their capacity to relate well to others … [Their] perception of the relevance of lifelong learning and their ability to exploit learning opportunities grows. Their horizons enlarge and new interests are formed. Their self-esteem is raised and their ability to communicate is enhanced.* (Teese 2002b)

Policy objectives and strategies

Both employment outcomes and attitudes to learning suggest that VET works well for early leavers and tends to offset, or at least lessen, the potentially negative effects of interrupted schooling. This is particularly significant in light of the fact that one major group of early leavers are in 'flight from school', either unable to relate to schoolwork or achieving poorly. Important as this compensatory or 'second chance' role is, however, the question is whether the resources invested in VET are best used by providing programs which can be delivered by schools and which, under different circumstances, could be successfully tackled by students who currently leave. If schools were able to reduce failure and to more fully engage weaker students in learning, the flight from school would decline and the requirement on VET to reverse the effects of this exodus would be lowered. That would enable the post-school sector of VET to focus on the value-added roles of skilled vocational and middle-level training, building on the basis of a successful experience of school (not necessarily completed school).

Is the main policy objective to reduce early leaving, regardless of its causes, or to ensure growth of learning, regardless of the sector in which this occurs? Since not all early leaving can be regarded as negative—especially when it involves transition to accredited vocational education and training—the policy emphasis arguably should be on ensuring growth of learning. Young people's

demand for work cannot be suppressed, but must be accommodated within more flexible arrangements which ensure that recognised learning continues, both on the job and off the job. On the other hand, early leaving due to low achievement or lack of interest in schoolwork needs to be tackled at its roots. This requires more inclusive and engaging programs and more varied teaching strategies targeted at the cognitive and cultural barriers to successful learning. Here the focus ought to be on boosting achievement and learner self-esteem rather than reducing early leaving as such, since cognitive progress and improved motivation need not necessarily translate into greater retention at school.

To provide young people with broader, more flexible education and training options which ensure that they have the knowledge and skills needed for participation in the workforce, post-secondary education or training or for other activities, the states and the Commonwealth have responded with a range of initiatives. These initiatives also encourage young people to stay at school longer and include vocational learning and structured workplace learning for school students, and part-time and school-based New Apprenticeships. These initiatives are discussed in the next chapter.

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Vocational learning in schools as an equity strategy

Brian Knight

This chapter looks at how well the development of vocational learning in schools has worked as a means of keeping young people engaged in education who otherwise might have left school early. It complements the previous chapter which argues that, where the reasons for leaving school early are due to lack of interest in school work or low achievement, this is best tackled at its roots, through the introduction of more varied programs in schools. Although vocational education and training (VET) works well for many early school leavers as a means of offsetting, or at least lessening, the potentially negative effects of interrupted schooling, this pathway perhaps should be promoted mainly to those young people who leave school early for economic reasons.

Introduction

THE STATE GOVERNMENTS and the Commonwealth Government have introduced a range of vocational learning initiatives into schools to provide broader, more flexible education and training, and to encourage young people to stay at school longer. These initiatives include VET in Schools and school-based New Apprenticeships. Although both of these initiatives are relatively new, and complete information about them is not yet available, the statistics and qualitative information that are available allow key trends to be identified. Both programs have shown steady growth in recent years, suggesting that the VET-at-school pathway is increasing in importance relative to the more traditional pathway, whereby young people left school early and then entered vocational education and training, and there is evidence that students who may otherwise have left school early are engaging in vocational education and training at school, especially in rural Australia.

The main purpose of vocational learning in schools is to prepare young people for the world of work; it is not usually regarded as an equity strategy. However, there is considerable potential for vocational learning in schools to function as an access and equity strategy, even though this is not its primary purpose.

Teese, in the preceding chapter, discussed the disadvantages likely to be experienced by young people who leave school early. He has also shown the positive benefits which can result from post-school participation in vocational education and training for young people who left school before they finished Year 12. In these situations, post-school vocational education and training fulfils a remedial function, imparting knowledge and skills which would have been developed or refined further had the students not left school.

On the other hand, vocational learning while still at school can also perform a preventative function. It allows young people to develop work-related skills while still advancing their general education. If broader, more flexible education and training encourages young people to stay at school longer, then there are potential benefits in both the general education and vocational learning areas. Some forms of vocational learning undertaken while still at school, such as school-based and part-time New Apprenticeships, also provide students with a modest income.

Although vocational learning in schools has existed in Australia for many years, the more recent initiatives—including VET in Schools (as defined by the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs), structured workplace learning and part-time and school-based New Apprenticeships—have yet to be comprehensively evaluated. However, there are now sufficient research findings and statistical information to indicate, in broad terms, what impact these programs have had, at least in the short term. A statistical summary of VET in Schools activity from 1998–2002 inclusive, and a comparison with the public VET system activity for 2002, is provided in tables 1 and 2 at the end of this chapter.

Role of vocational learning in schools

Vocational learning has been part of secondary school programs for many years. However, since the mid-1990s there has been a concerted push to expand vocational learning in schools through programs such as VET in Schools (that is, recognised vocational education and training undertaken as part of a senior secondary certificate), school-based New Apprenticeships and structured workplace learning (a program promoted particularly by the former Enterprise and Career Education Foundation).

Vocational learning undertaken while still at school has two potential benefits for students at risk of leaving school early. The first is, that if students do leave school early, they may be better prepared for post-school activities, particularly employment, if they have already undertaken some vocational learning. The second is that, with a broader range of programs on offer, students who may otherwise have left school early stay on.

The situation in the mid-1990s

Before the recent, rapid growth in the VET in Schools program and school-based New Apprenticeships, a joint National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) and Australian Council for Educational Research study (Lamb & Ball 1999) explored links between subjects taken in Year 12 and further education and labour market outcomes, using data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth. Students in the study were tracked to 21 years of age to establish the post-school outcomes according to their senior secondary subject choices.

The research had some sobering implications for school-to-work transition at that time, although it should be noted that young people were facing quite adverse labour market conditions around the time covered by the study. With the exception of students who took agriculture-based subjects, students who studied a vocational education and technology curriculum in Year 12 in the early 1990s often struggled to make a successful transition to full-time employment during their teenage years. For those who did not obtain an apprenticeship, the outlook was particularly bleak, with employment outcomes for Year 12 students similar to those experienced by early school leavers. Comparatively few students who took this curriculum continued with formal education or training after senior secondary school.

Some overall employer views were provided in a 1997 study undertaken by NCVER on employer satisfaction with vocational education and training, which revealed that:

❖ 84% of employers said that there should be more work experience or work placements as part of vocational education and training.

❖ 81% of employers said they should have more input into course content.

(NCVER 1997)

The current situation

VET in Schools

The Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs VET in Schools program involves training which is recognised under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and undertaken as part of a senior secondary certificate, usually in Year 11 and/or Year 12. Although complete information about VET in Schools activity is not yet available, the statistics we have are sufficient to allow the key trends over time to be quantified (table 1).

From the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs and Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data, it is clear that the number and proportion of Year 11 and 12 students undertaking a VET in Schools program has grown steadily since 1998. This trend is against a backdrop of a small increase in retention rates in the same period. Thus the shift towards

VET in Schools programs is not being driven by changing numbers in the upper secondary group of students. Indeed, until 2000, the number of young people who left school in the previous 12 months who were studying with VET providers was more than double the number studying with VET providers while still at school. In 2001, however, the gap has narrowed considerably, suggesting that the VET-at-school pathway is increasing in importance relative to the more traditional school-to-VET pathway. This shift is also reflected in New Apprenticeship commencements.

School-based New Apprenticeships

New Apprenticeship commencements for young people (that is, up to 19 years) grew from 62 600 in 1998 to 82 400 in 2001 and 100 000 in 2002. Commencements in school-based New Apprenticeships have also grown rapidly since their introduction, from 1100 in 1999 to 10 100 in 2002. School-based New Apprenticeships represented 10% of the commencements by young people in 2002. It should be noted that the take-up of school-based New Apprenticeships varies significantly among the states and territories. Some of the major features of vocational education and training undertaken by school students in 2002 can be seen in the statistics derived from the national collection of data from VET providers (table 2).

Participant characteristics

The numbers of females and males undertaking vocational education and training while still at school are close to equal. This is slightly different from the pattern for school leavers in the public VET system, 52% of whom are male, and for other young people in the public VET system who are no longer at school, 57.5% of whom are male (table 2). The fact that traditional apprentices are more likely to be male accounts for part of this difference.

Provider characteristics

The distribution of students at school among the provider sectors, namely technical and further education (TAFE), community providers, private providers and schools, is very different from that for other groups. Although schools are the major providers of VET programs to students at school, most of the remaining delivery is undertaken by the TAFE sector, usually on a sub-contracting basis. In some states, community providers which are also registered training organisations are able to tender for the delivery of accredited VET programs to school students.

VET programs undertaken at school

A majority of the programs undertaken by school students in vocational education and training are at AQF certificate I or II level. This contrasts with the programs undertaken by other young people, most of which are at AQF certificate III or higher level. In general, therefore, the VET programs

undertaken by school students do not provide an equivalent alternative to mainstream upper secondary studies, since AQF certificate III is generally regarded as equivalent to the upper secondary certificate. Among school leavers, diploma and higher-level programs are also important, being taken by 11.9% of this group.

Management and commerce (29.6%) was the most popular subject field of education undertaken by VET in Schools students, followed by mixed-field programs (17.3%) and engineering and related technologies (12.8%). While management and commerce and engineering and related technologies are comparable with the rest of the public VET system as being among the most popular fields of education, mixed-field programs are ranked sixth in the public VET system overall.

Motivation for undertaking vocational learning at school

Research studies have indicated how vocational learning at school is viewed by young people and how it can assist those who might or do leave school early.

Although the available information is patchy, sufficient is known about reasons for undertaking vocational learning at school to suggest that the reasons are more varied than might be expected. They include the value of vocational learning as a career pathway, general interest, attraction to a mix of study and employment, and obtaining skills and qualifications which will help gain paid employment during post-secondary study.

In a recent study, Kilpatrick (2004) has compared VET and non-VET school students in rural areas. She found that students were motivated to choose school VET courses (including VET in Schools programs as defined by the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs) mainly for general interest or as a career pathway. Those students motivated by career showed distinctive educational outcomes, being less likely to finish Year 12, yet more likely to go on to post-school education and training than other school VET students.

Smith and Wilson (2002) reported that students' motivation for undertaking a school-based New Apprenticeship was found to be primarily to gain the associated qualification or to gain specific experience in an industry area. Some found the prospect of a mix of work and study attractive. A small group undertook school-based apprenticeships and traineeships primarily to help get part-time work while at university. Generally, the students had found out about school-based New Apprenticeships through school. This was particularly the case for those who were working for group training companies rather than directly for an employer. Exactly half of the school-based apprentices and trainees were working in retail or fast food, cafés and restaurants, while farming, forestry and

mining accounted for almost 11%, perhaps reflecting the greater popularity of VET in Schools and school-based New Apprenticeships in non-metropolitan areas.

Those students undertaking school-based New Apprenticeships were found to be more likely than average to be living outside a capital city and less likely to aspire to immediate university entrance than other students. There was some evidence that they were drawn disproportionately from students of a lower socio-economic status. Most were trainees rather than traditional apprentices, undertaking shorter contracts of training and doing qualifications at AQF certificate II level.

Outcomes from vocational learning in schools

The results of the most recent Student Outcomes Survey show that around 7% of the graduates who completed a VET qualification in 2000 began their training while still attending secondary school. By contrast, 17% of the 2000 graduates started training as school leavers; that is, within a year of leaving secondary school.

School students in rural areas

For VET in Schools students in rural areas, Kilpatrick found that work placements were a significant pathway to initial employment after leaving school, with about half of all work placement students being offered employment or a New Apprenticeship by their work placement employer. As a consequence, however, work placement students were less likely to complete Year 12. Also, the survey found that two or three years after leaving school, work placement students had the same employment outcomes as students who had not done work placements at school, suggesting that the major benefit of doing work placements while at school lies in expediting their transition from school to employment.

Some students undertook VET in Schools where the objective is a pathway to local employment. This group was more likely to report that their school VET course had influenced their decision to continue with senior secondary school, and that it had helped to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. They were also most likely to have been offered a New Apprenticeship from their work placement. School VET students with local employment as their objective and who also participated in a work placement were more likely to have stayed in their home community than those who did not do a work placement or who attended a school not having this VET purpose.

Other findings of note were:

❖ Those who did vocational education and training at school, in general, are no more likely to be currently employed than those who did not do vocational education and training at school.

❖ All 31 early school leavers in the study were employed.

❖ Of those school VET students currently working, 62% indicated that their job was in the same broad industry area as their school VET course. The industry area with the strongest link was human services (mainly hospitality) and, with the weakest link, business and clerical.

❖ At the time of the survey, two to three years after they had left secondary school, 70% of respondents normally resided in a rural area, 10% in a remote area, and 20% had moved to a metropolitan area. Most students surveyed indicated their intention to live in a rural community at some stage in their working life, with school VET students more likely to intend to do this than school non-VET students.

School-based New Apprenticeships

Smith and Wilson (2002) have recently reported on a survey of 641 school-based New Apprenticeships in three states.

The number of hours spent at work differed very little from the average for normal part-time work for Australian school students. The average number of hours worked was 10.5 per week. More than half of the students worked extra hours in the school holidays and many also undertook 'blocks' of off-the-job training in the holidays. Some students undertook all their work outside school hours while others missed school time. This quite often created severe timetabling difficulties and many did not receive much help from their schools in resolving the difficulties. However, few students found it difficult to fit study in as well as work, in a more general sense.

Most students were very satisfied with their jobs, although the degree of satisfaction varied with industry area. They were more likely than students in ordinary part-time jobs to enjoy their job, to have the close attention of a supervisor, to work with adults rather than other teenagers, and to have higher levels of responsibility. The comparisons with ordinary part-time jobs were made on the basis of results from a previous study by the research team.

Off-the-job training was generally seen by the school-based apprentices and trainees to add to their learning, in both theoretical and practical ways. Most, however, preferred on-the-job to off-the-job training. Some students had complaints about their training providers. Schools scored lower than other training providers on some measures, as did distance and online learning. About a quarter of the school-based apprentices and trainees were undertaking 'fully on-the-job' apprenticeships and traineeships. Retail and fast food apprenticeships and traineeships were more likely to be fully on the job than those in other industry areas.

While the overall findings of the study were very positive, a number of areas of concern were identified. These included:

- ❖ the low number of hours worked when compared with the total number of hours normally involved in the completion of a traineeship or apprenticeship
- ❖ the possible consequences for student wellbeing of spending school holidays catching up working hours or attending a training provider
- ❖ the concentration of school-based New Apprenticeships in those industries which are also the most common site of ordinary part-time work
- ❖ the evidence of poor-quality training provision by some registered training organisations
- ❖ timetabling problems and the apparent unwillingness of some schools to offer solutions to them.

Conclusion

The actual extent to which vocational learning in schools functions as an equity strategy is unclear at the present time. However, the limited information which is available for recent years is positive.

Firstly, the rapid expansion in programs such as VET in Schools, school-based New Apprenticeships and structured workplace learning has coincided with a small but significant increase in the retention rate to Year 12. This suggests that vocational learning programs are helping to keep young people at school until the end of Year 12. These programs have also proved beneficial to young people, in that they have been provided with the opportunity to develop work-related skills while also advancing their general education. Some school-based vocational education has also enabled students to earn a small income while at school.

Secondly, there is some evidence from the research that vocational learning in school is viewed positively by students and employers, and that it expedites the transition to the workforce for young people who leave school before completing Year 12. This is particularly the case for students in rural areas, with about half of work placement students being offered employment or a New Apprenticeship by their work placement employer. Nevertheless, despite the benefits of undertaking vocational education in schools, there are a number of problems associated with this pathway, and includes the low number of hours undertaken in the workplace by comparison with a normal traineeship or apprenticeship. Also, the fact that students often had to spend holidays working or undertaking training with a provider was perceived as having the potential to impact adversely on their wellbeing.

Another issue relevant here is that the majority of VET in Schools activity, the largest vocational learning program for upper secondary school students, is undertaken at AQF certificate I and II levels, below senior secondary certificate level. Although VET in Schools, by definition, is part of a senior secondary certificate, for most students the vocational learning they undertake is below the level of Year 12 and AQF certificate III. At the time of writing, a number of states and territories are considering whether this is an anomaly which needs to be addressed to enhance the effectiveness of the VET in Schools pathway.

Table 1:   Selected VET in Schools and New Apprenticeship statistics, 1998–2002

		1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
	Relevant ABS and MCEETYA statistics			Number		
1	Total young people aged 16–18 yrs	785 653	800 855	811 025	816 576	825 401
2	Total full-time students in Years 11 & 12[a]	390 911	402 429	404 212	411 535	418 992
3	Number doing VET in Schools[b]	117 000	136 710	153 616	169 809	185 520
4	Proportion (*3 as a percentage of 2*)	*30.0%*	*34.0%*	*38.0%*	*41.0%*	*44.0%*
5	Apparent retention rates to Year 12[d]	*71.6%*	*72.3%*	*72.3%*	*73.4%*	*75.1%*
	Statistics from the national VET provider collection			Number		
6	Students in the public VET system—all ages	1 514 167	1 617 740	1 713 358	1 684 498	1 690 139
7	Students in the public VET system—age up to 19	313 490	339 528	361 409	368 991	374 836
8	School leavers in VET[c]	137 543	153 867	147 233	137 006	146 799
9	Proportion (*8 as a percentage of 7*)	*44%*	*45%*	*41%*	*37%*	*39%*
	Relevant New Apprenticeship statistics			Number		
10	New Apprenticeships: in training—all ages[e]	216 861	255 182	294 893	325 135	369 088
11	New Apprenticeships: in training—age up to 19[e]	81 248	91 578	99 103	101 264	108 428
12	NA commencements, all ages[f]	154 922	198 445	210 156	228 014	266 757
13	NA commencements, up to 19	62 612	75 770	77 657	82 367	100 022
14	NA commencements, school-based[f]	Not available	1 162	3 347	5 633	10 120
15	Proportion (*14 as percentage of 13*)		*1.4%*	*3.9%*	*6.2%*	*10.1%*

Notes: (a) These figures are for all ages in Years 11 and 12, full-time students only (source: ABS 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002).
(b) Source: Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (2001).
(c) Estimated figures for those up to 19 years of age, derived by distributing missing data on a pro-rata basis. School leavers are defined as those who left school within the previous 12 months.
(d) Retention from Year 7/8 to Year 12, for full-time students only (source: ABS 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002).
(e) Number in training at 31 December of the year. In-training figures exclude New Apprentices who started and completed, cancelled or withdrew within the calendar year.
(f) All New Apprenticeship commencement figures are the total for the whole calendar year. New Apprenticeships reported as school-based or at school are for those up to 19 years of age only.

Table 2: School status and other characteristics of students in the public VET system, 2002

Student characteristic	Students in the public VET system(c)					Students doing a VET in Schools program(b)(c)			
	At school(a)	School leaver	Other young people	Students over 19 years	All students	Year 11 or lower	Year 12	Unknown	All students
	Proportion of total students (%)					*Proportion of total students (%)*			
Sex									
Males	49.9	52.0	57.5	50.9	51.8	50.4	49.0	51.3	49.7
Females	50.1	48.0	42.5	49.1	48.2	49.6	51.0	48.7	50.3
Place of residence									
Capital city or other metropolitan	57.9	62.1	63.1	62.5	62.6	66.7	64.4	77.3	66.1
Rural or remote	41.4	36.8	35.0	36.2	36.1	33.3	35.6	22.7	33.9
Overseas	0.6	1.0	1.9	1.4	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Provider sector									
TAFE or other government provider	84.3	85.9	82.9	78.2	78.2	16.0	11.0	90.0	17.8
Community provider	4.6	2.5	5.1	13.0	12.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Private provider	11.1	11.5	12.0	8.8	9.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
School	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	84.0	89.0	10.0	82.2
AQF level of major course									
Certificate I/II	55.9	40.8	30.5	19.1	22.3	71.7	86.6	70.8	78.6
Certificate III/IV	19.9	32.5	40.4	34.2	34.3	9.1	6.2	13.0	8.0
Diploma & above	2.8	11.9	10.6	12.4	11.8	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
Non-AQF programs or not known	21.4	14.8	18.5	34.3	31.6	19.1	7.2	16.2	13.4
Field of study of major course									
Natural and physical sciences	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Information technology	6.0	5.8	4.8	4.8	4.9	17.8	18.9	13.1	17.8
Engineering and related technologies	15.6	17.1	19.6	15.5	15.9	11.0	7.2	14.6	9.5
Architecture and building	3.9	5.5	7.4	5.0	5.4	4.5	4.5	3.4	4.4

Table 2: School status and other characteristics of students in the public VET system, 2002 (cont.)

Student characteristic	Students in the public VET system(c)					Students doing a VET in Schools program(b)(c)			
	At school(a)	School leaver	Other young people	Students over 19 years	All students	Year 11 or lower	Year 12	Unknown	All students
Field of study of major course (cont.)	*Proportion of total students (%)*					*Proportion of total students (%)*			
Agriculture, environmental & related studies	5.7	4.9	4.5	6.0	5.6	4.3	3.3	4.2	3.9
Health	2.4	2.1	3.1	5.9	5.2	0.8	0.2	1.4	0.6
Education	2.8	1.6	0.8	3.9	3.3	0.0	0.5	0.3	0.3
Management and commerce	22.1	24.0	20.2	21.9	21.8	20.5	28.1	28.3	24.6
Society and culture	7.7	8.4	7.9	10.7	10.0	4.9	5.2	8.8	5.5
Creative arts	5.7	5.2	3.5	3.3	3.5	5.0	2.6	4.7	3.9
Food, hospitality and personal services	15.3	14.7	13.7	6.8	8.4	20.8	15.9	12.5	17.8
Mixed field programs	10.2	9.4	11.9	9.2	9.5	7.8	10.0	8.5	8.9
No major course or unknown	2.1	0.9	2.2	6.5	6.0	2.6	3.6	0.1	2.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No. of students—national database ('000)	86.05	141.64	220.77	1,272.26	1,690.14	67.07	63.36	7.62	142.82
No. of students—MCEETYA ('000)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	185.52

Notes: (a) The 'at school' category for the public VET systems includes school students doing their VET in Schools studies with a TAFE institute plus any other school students undertaking VET while still at school, such as school-based apprentices and trainees and school students doing a part-time New Apprenticeship out of school hours.
(b) Reporting of VET in Schools activity to the national VET database is as yet incomplete. Consequently, the number of students on which the proportions are based is about 25% less than the number reported to the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (see table 1). However, the base is sufficiently complete to allow the proportions to be used with confidence.
(c) Because there is an unknown amount of overlap between the students studying in the public VET system and the students doing VET in Schools, the number of students in each category cannot be added together.

Source: NCVER unpublished statistics.

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Older workers

Mark Cully

This chapter reviews the labour market circumstances and vocational education and training (VET) participation of older workers.

Examined as a whole, older workers (those aged 45 years or more) can be said to be disadvantaged relative to prime age workers (25 to 44 years) in the labour market. However, older workers are far from a homogenous group. The segment of the older worker population who are genuinely 'at risk' are those who find themselves displaced from work. Their chances of regaining work are low compared with younger workers.

Training can be seen as a form of employment protection insurance for existing older workers, while for displaced older workers it is a potential means of restoring skill differentials against younger workers. Evidence on participation rates in both the formal VET system and employer-provided training shows that older workers saw substantial gains between 1997 and 2001. Access to training has clearly improved for older workers, but what remains in doubt is whether such training helps to redress the problems of the at-risk group identified above. The evidence suggests training, on its own, has limited returns.

Identifying older workers as an equity group which should be targeted in the provision of VET would not do much to improve the circumstances of those older workers who are genuinely at risk in the labour market. Active labour market assistance to the more narrowly defined group of displaced older workers, for whom re-training would be an important element, would yield greater returns. A number of the state government programs already in place provide potential good practice models.

Introduction

THIS CHAPTER FOCUSES on older workers, sometimes referred to as mature-aged workers. Older workers are defined as people aged 45 or more who are able-bodied,[1] in the civilian population, and either in paid employment or willing to work if the opportunity presents itself. Forty-five years of age is,

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[1] As people age, the chances of their becoming disabled increase. However, the very rapid rise in the incidence of older persons receiving the disability support pension during the 1980s and 1990s— for instance, 25% of men aged 60 to 64 were on this pension in 1997, up from 8% in 1972—is largely a response to deteriorating labour market conditions (O'Brien 2000).

we accept, an arbitrary limit. Some people may have experienced age discrimination at an earlier age than 45, while others may never experience it and withdraw contentedly from the labour force at an age of their own choosing. Nevertheless, 45 years is something of a turning point: there are, for people of this age, demonstrable differences in labour market circumstances and training participation by comparison with people below this age.

While older workers may be an 'emerging equity group' for the purposes of those concerned with vocational education and training (VET) in Australia, it has been the case for some time now that age has been one of the main dimensions by which labour market difference can be understood—for *younger* workers, as much as for older workers. A number of factors explain why the position of older workers has increasingly become problematic:

❖ mandatory age retirement clauses in legislation, industrial awards and registered agreements, which mostly take effect from age 60 to 65

❖ provision of an age pension, first introduced in Australia (at Commonwealth level) in 1909, and other means of generating an income stream once in retirement (that is, superannuation schemes)

❖ rising life expectancy—a gain of more than 20 years over the course of the twentieth century—meaning that, in conjunction with the ability to draw a pension and/or access superannuation funds, it became increasingly possible to withdraw from employment and enjoy the 'third age' of life

❖ return of mass unemployment from the mid-1970s, allowing employers to be more selective in recruitment, with the result that many older people have experienced 'involuntary' unemployment.

Older workers have, therefore, been caught in a pincer: the chances of their living longer have increased, requiring more funds to provide for them in retirement, but at the same time, the chances of their experiencing a spell of unemployment while of 'working age' have increased, with consequences for their ability to privately provide for themselves in retirement. More recently, demographers have begun to draw attention to the consequences of fertility rates well below the natural replacement level for the age composition of the population. This, in conjunction with rising life expectancy, means that the median age of the Australian population is forecast to reach our older person threshold of 45 years sometime around the middle of this century (compared with the current median age of 34 years).

The population projections, coupled with people's expectations of a reasonable living standard in retirement, means the status quo is no longer sustainable. One or more elements of the mix has to alter, which explains the pressure to abolish mandatory age retirement, increase superannuation coverage and contribution rates, and tackle age discrimination in the labour market.

Where does vocational education and training fit into this mix? To the extent that it has focused on older workers at all, it has done so under the banner of 'lifelong learning', the idea that workers must continually adapt to technological change and work re-organisation to preserve their employability. Growing appreciation of the scale of the impending changes in the age distribution of the population has led some (for example, Ball, Misko & Smith 2000) to suggest that, as a matter of necessity, employers will increasingly turn to older workers to meet their needs and, as a corollary of that, more training will need to be undertaken.

This chapter examines the evidence that older workers face exclusion from the labour market and barriers to training participation. Also examined is the evidence that employers are beginning to alter their behaviour in relation to older workers. Finally, the evidence that training leads to an improvement in the labour market circumstances of older workers is assessed. Before turning to the evidence, it is important to briefly review the policy context surrounding ageing and older workers.

Policy background

Australia, in common with much of the industrialised world[2], has become increasingly preoccupied with the plight of older workers. Discussion on older persons' engagement with the labour market first came to prominence in the 1980s. This was partly because age was, together with sex and ethnicity, seen as one of the main dimensions on which people might be denied equal opportunity. It was also in the 1980s that public policy shifted towards private provision of retirement incomes, rather than reliance on the age pension, as governments began to appreciate the scale of the changing demographic composition of the population.

All of the states and territories now have some age discrimination legislation in place, usually embedded within equal opportunity legislation. At present, there is no overarching Commonwealth age discrimination legislation, although there are specific provisions in some acts (for example,

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[2] The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have both highlighted ageing issues in the recent past. The OECD considers declining labour market participation of older workers to be supply-driven, caused 'in large part' by incentives to retire early. They have called for reforms to eliminate these 'distortions', together with additional measures to support training of older workers (OECD 2002). The International Labour Organization (1999) has identified displaced older workers as one of four especially vulnerable groups in the labour market, and called for a range of measures to improve the skills of older workers. On developments in a range of individual countries, see Taylor (2001).

the *Workplace Relations Act 1996* includes a clause prohibiting termination on the grounds of age).[3]

Two recent inquiries have given added impetus to the call for the Commonwealth to act in this area. The first was undertaken by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, which led to the 2000 report, *Age matters*. The second, in the same year, was a House of Representatives Committee Inquiry chaired by the Hon. Brendan Nelson, MP which produced the report, *Age counts* (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations 2000).

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report concluded that there was widespread evidence of age discrimination in recruitment and promotion and in access to education and training, and recommended that the Commonwealth address this through community awareness programs, targeting labour market programs (including training) and introduction of age discrimination legislation (together with repealing age-specific provisions in existing legislation). The Nelson Report, which focused specifically on the employment position faced by older persons, put forward 38 recommendations to the government, several with training as the focus.

In 2002, in response to those two reports, the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department issued an information paper containing the government's proposals, the major thrust of which is to make discrimination on the basis of age in employment, education and in a range of other areas, unlawful. Responses to the proposals will be considered before any bills are presented to the current parliament.

The Commonwealth Government has also developed a 'national strategy for an ageing Australia'. In the area of employment, the main goals of the strategy are removal of barriers to the continued participation of older workers and recognition of the importance of re-training older workers. A range of actions is proposed to meet these goals, although there are no specific actions put forward which are solely the Commonwealth's responsibility. Among present initiatives the Commonwealth has in place are the Pensioner Bonus Scheme which provides older workers with a lump-sum payment to remain in the workforce after they have become eligible for the age pension, and the foreshadowed increase in the age at which individuals can access superannuation payments.

There are several state and territory government and local initiatives with the goal of improving outcomes for older workers. These are mostly focused on

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[3] According to Creighton and Stewart (2000, p.292) all states and territories except Tasmania expressly prohibit compulsory retirement at a set age, but these can be overridden by federal awards or statutes. More generally, in interpreting the age discrimination provision in the *Workplace Relations Act*, the courts have concluded that invoking compulsory retirement at a set age in awards or contracts of employment is *not* termination.

supply-side measures, including wage subsidies to employers, provision of training, and job placement services.

Taylor (2001), in a comparative review of national policy initiatives, makes the case that, while there has been much discussion at governmental level in Australia, this has not yet translated into a coherent and integrated policy[4], and employer attitudes and practices have not yet changed significantly.

How much disadvantage do older workers face in the labour market?

An overview of the position faced by older workers in the labour market was provided by VandenHeuvel (1999) using Australian Bureau of Statistics data. Her 'compelling conclusion' was that 'mature age workers are clearly a disadvantaged group in the Australian labour market' (p.22).

Four years later, reviewing updated evidence from the same sources, the same conclusion is again reached, although it is perhaps a little less compelling than it once was.[5] There are four points of comparison between older workers and those in their prime years (25 to 44) which support this conclusion.

First, and most importantly, older workers are less likely to be in paid work. Employment rates, when plotted against age, show an inverted-U shape and display the following characteristics.

- ❖ They peak at 35 to 44 years for men and at 20 to 24 years for women.

- ❖ For persons aged 55 or more they were a lot lower; for example, 67.4% of men aged 55 to 59 were in paid work, compared with 86.6% of men aged 35 to 44 and 83.8% of those aged 45 to 54.

- ❖ Between 60 and 64 years of age, the rate for men is half that for the prime age group.

For women a similar tale applies. For example, 49.0% of women aged 55 to 59 were in paid employment in 2001, lagging well behind 45 to 54-year-olds, among whom 67.3% were in paid work.

Most people aged 45 years or more who are not in paid work have left the labour force as conventionally measured; that is, they are not actively seeking work. Encel (2001) is correct in describing this phenomena as 'early exit' rather than 'early retirement', as the latter implies a voluntarily chosen state. The fortunate are those whose lifetime savings generate a sufficiently large income

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[4] An example of an apparent policy conflict is that people who have received a redundancy package may be precluded from social security benefits and, as a result, are also denied access to labour market programs which would provide them with re-training.

[5] The data in this section are sourced from the following publications: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2001d.

stream that they can genuinely opt for leisure over labour. However, retirement may be the least unpalatable option for someone who finds themselves out of work beyond the age of 45. For example, an Australian Bureau of Statistics survey on the topic of retirement found that among men aged 45 or more who had 'retired' from full-time work, 44% had done so because they had lost their last job.[6] O'Brien (2000), in a carefully constructed econometric study, points unequivocally to a deficiency in labour demand as the prime explanation for declining participation rates over time among older men.

This gives rise to the second point of comparison: older workers experience higher rates of unemployment than do prime age workers, once those who have become 'discouraged' by their job search experience are taken into account. Discouraged job seekers are identified in the labour force survey as those who want to work and are available to start work (within the next four weeks) but are no longer actively looking because they believe that they would not find a job (for specified reasons). The specified reasons are:

- ❖ considered to be too young/old by employers
- ❖ lacked necessary schooling, training, skills or experience
- ❖ difficulties because of language or ethnic background
- ❖ no jobs in their locality or line of work
- ❖ no jobs available at all.

On the standard measure of unemployment, rates are lowest for men aged 45 to 54 (at 4.7%), and women aged 60 to 64 (with a rate of 2.5%). Once discouraged workers are taken into account, the lowest rates are found among men aged 35 to 44 (at 4.9%) and women aged 45 to 54 (at 6.0%).

Older people who are unemployed believe that age is the main factor standing in the way of their obtaining further work. When asked about their job search experience, 26.8% of unemployed men aged 45 to 54 and 55.7% of those aged 55 or more said their main difficulty in finding work was their age, compared with 7.7% of unemployed men aged 35 to 44. The figures for women are near identical to those of men. These estimates almost certainly understate the true extent of age as a barrier to employment as the question is not asked of discouraged job seekers.

Third, those who continue to actively seek work, experience longer spells of unemployment than people of prime age. In May 2001, the average unemployed man aged 55 or more had been unemployed for more than two years (120.2 weeks), double the duration of unemployed men aged 25 to 34 (51.5 weeks). Older women, too, spend more time unemployed, although the difference is less marked than it is for men—48.7 weeks for those aged 55 or more, compared with 33.7 for women aged 25 to 34.

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[6] This does *not* include those who had reached compulsory retirement age in their job (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1998b).

Fourth, and following on from the previous point, older workers who have been retrenched or made redundant are less likely to find alternative employment than those younger than them. In July 2001, 6% of people who had worked over the previous three years had experienced redundancy. Contrary to popular wisdom, this was very even across all age groups. However, while 76.4% of 35 to 44-year-olds were employed at the time of the survey, this was the case for only 68.6% of those aged 45 to 54 and 50.7% of those aged 55 to 64.

Reviewed as a whole, the evidence suggests that problems for older workers mainly arise if they are displaced from work. Where that occurs, the chances of their regaining work are considerably less for those who are younger. For many, displacement leads to prolonged periods of unemployment and exit from the labour force as they become disillusioned about the prospects of ever finding work. The threshold at which this age effect operates appears to be when people enter the latter half of their forties. Employers' (age-related) hiring preferences appear to be a major factor in explaining the outcomes observed.

It must be noted that the findings presented above discuss older workers in the broad when it is, in fact, a highly heterogeneous group. While some experience long-term unemployment, others are reaching the peak of their careers—older workers are more likely to be employed as managers than workers of any other age group. The proportion with degree-level qualifications is as high among those aged 45 to 54 as it is for those aged 25 to 34, but the proportion who did not complete 12 years of schooling is far higher.

What of the argument that the changing demographic composition of the workforce will force employers to adjust their attitudes and behaviour as the pool of younger workers shrinks? There are indications of change over the past decade. Figure 1 shows the rate of employment growth between 1992 and 2002 for older workers by comparison with those in their prime age. It very clearly shows that employment growth was biased towards older workers over the period. This was especially the case for older women workers, with employment doubling for those aged 55 to 64, albeit from a low base (177.3 thousand in 1992 to 358.7 thousand in 2002). Part of the growth is, of course, due to the rising share of older persons in the population, but that is not an *adequate* explanation. If age was all that mattered, the pool of unemployed people under 45 was sufficiently large to have provided an alternative labour supply for many of the new jobs created. The change should be seen for what it is: a relative shift in hiring preferences towards older workers.

Similarly, the magnitude of the discouraged job seeker effect on the unemployment rate has fallen since the VandenHeuvel study (1999), especially for older women. She reports, for example, an official unemployment rate of 6.4% for women aged 55 to 59 in September 1998, which rises to 12% once discouraged workers are taken into account. In September 2001 the official rate had fallen to 3.6% and the revised rate almost halved to 6.7%.

Figure 1: Employment growth, by gender and age, 1992–2002, by percentage
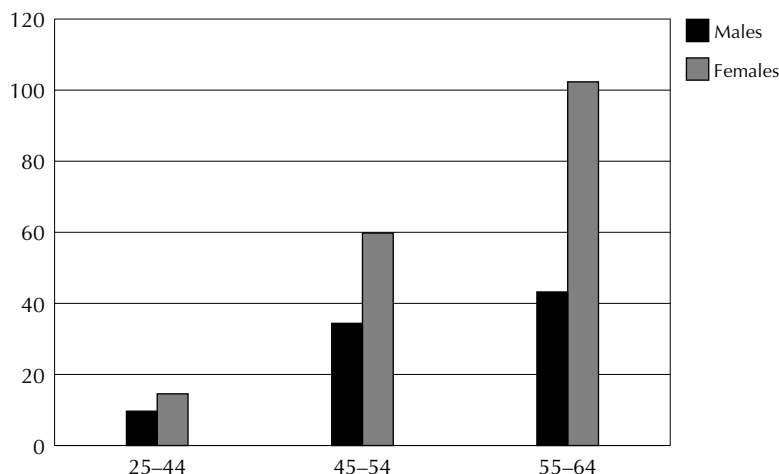
Source: Derived from Australian Bureau of Statistics (1992–2002).

Participation in education and training

Issues identified in past studies

In addition to the public inquiries mentioned earlier, the subject of older workers has become a growing topic of investigation in Australia. Among the more recent important studies are Keys Young (2000) and Wooden et al. (2001) which, because of their central focus on education and training, are particularly relevant to this chapter.

Wooden et al. (2001) comprehensively review the existing academic literature from around the world, drawing on studies from several disciplines— psychology, economics, and education. They find clear evidence that older workers are less likely to participate in training, which they attribute to:

❖ managers who, as a group, hold stereotypical views of the low productive potential of older workers relative to younger workers (for example, older workers are more predisposed to accidents and ill health)

❖ older workers, who typically take longer to learn new skills than younger workers, which raises the relative cost of their training—a finding borne out by many psychological studies of cognitive behaviour

❖ a belief on the part of many older workers that there is little to be gained from taking part in training, partly because the expected pay-off is much lower than would accrue to younger workers as the remaining working life span is much shorter.

The strength of the study by Keys Young is the qualitative evidence they gathered from a wide variety of respondents who have regular engagement with older workers: the Mature Workers' Program providers in New South Wales, industry associations, and individual employers. There is a good deal of consistency in the findings reported across these three groups. Key findings are that older workers:

❖ lack computer skills and familiarity with the most recent software

❖ are often fearful of acquiring new skills and, more generally, do not adapt as well to change as younger workers

❖ may have obsolete skills and/or training, and may also have lost the ability to learn.

At the same time, it was acknowledged that older workers often have invaluable experience which could be accredited through recognition of prior learning programs.

One of the findings identified by Wooden et al. (2001) was that, while older workers did participate less in training than younger workers, the extent of relative disadvantage was less marked in 1997 than it had been in 1989. Do more recent figures suggest that this trend is continuing?

Formal VET

Table 1 draws on information from the various National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) data collections on the formal VET system to show changes in training participation rates between 1997 and 2001.[7] The rates are derived by expressing the number of participants as a percentage of the civilian population of the same age.

Growth in students in VET occurred across all age groups, but was most concentrated among people at either end of the age distribution. The proportion of young people studying went up by a third from 18.9 to 25.1%, while it increased by a quarter for older people. It is still the case, however, that VET participation is strongly inversely associated with age, with roughly one in four of those aged 15 to 24 enrolled in 2001 compared with one in 15 of those aged 45 to 64.

A somewhat similar tale applies to apprentices and trainees. Growth between 1997 and 2001 was very substantial among 25 to 44-year-olds and even more so among 45 to 64-year-olds, but in both cases was from very low bases. It remains the case that most apprentices and trainees are young people. In total

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[7] There is some overlap within these three measures. Other than those who receive their training fully on the job, apprentices and trainees are included within the students in VET count, as are all people doing a vocational course in an adult and community education institution.

they accounted for around two-thirds of all apprentices and trainees in 2001. Within their respective age cohorts, there were ten times as many young as old apprentices and trainees, and twice as many when comparing those in their prime age with older people.

There is no apparent association between age and participation rates in vocational courses undertaken at adult and community education (ACE) institutions, with participation rates ranging from 1.2 to 1.5% in 2001. The rate of 1.4% for older workers was the same as it had been in 1997, against a small overall fall of 0.2 percentage points.

Table 1: Participation in formal VET system, by age, 1997 and 2001 (percentage of civilian population)

Age group	Students in VET		Apprentices and trainees		ACE students doing vocational study	
	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001
15–24	18.9	25.1	5.5	7.1	1.4	1.2
25–44	10.3	11.4	0.4	1.5	1.9	1.5
45–64	5.2	6.5	0.1	0.7	1.4	1.4
Total	**10.5**	**12.5**	**1.4**	**2.4**	**1.6**	**1.4**

Source: Derived from NCVER unpublished data, Australian Bureau of Statistics (2002b).

Employer-provided training

Taken as a whole, table 1 suggests that access to formal vocational education and training has considerably improved for older people, although participation rates remain strongly inversely associated with age. Outside the formal system of courses leading to a nationally accredited qualification, extensive amounts of training take place. The most recent information on this topic comes from the 2001 Survey of Education and Training conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It is used to focus on the extent to which workers participate in training courses (not leading to a formal qualification) offered by their employer, and the extent to which participation is associated with age.

Employer-provided training courses can be divided into those conducted in-house and those conducted externally. The distinction between the two is straightforward: in-house courses involve (mainly) employees from a single employer, whereas external courses are open to employees from any number of employers (and also, in many instances, to non-employees).[8] By definition, in-house courses are provided by the employer, while external courses may be done at the request of the employer or of a worker's own volition. It is possible,

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[8] See Australian Bureau of Statistics (2002a) for full definitions of 'in-house', 'external', 'employer financial support' and 'training course'.

however, to identify whether external courses are, in some way, financially supported by the employer (for example, payment of course fees, paid time off or study leave). The analysis which follows attempts this.

Tables 2 and 3 demonstrate the incidence of participation in these courses and their average duration (for those taking part), and how these altered between 1997 and 2001, controlling for age.

Overall, 37.7% of workers took part in one or more in-house training courses in 2001 (in the 12 months preceding the survey), up from 34.2% in 1997. At the same time, the average duration of this form of training fell from 36.2 hours to 30.6 hours. The net effect of these two changes is a decline in total training hours per employee between 1997 and 2001 of 6.8%. Over the same period, participation in employer-supported external training courses rose from 12.2% to 13.2%, while the average duration of this form of training fell from 33.3 hours to 30.6 hours. The net effect is a small fall in total training hours per employee of 0.6%.

Tables 2 and 3 show that the pattern of wider participation in courses of a shorter average duration occurred within each age band for both forms of training. For older workers, the evidence suggests, on the whole, that access to training improved relative to other workers. Participation in in-house training courses rose by more for older workers than it did for workers as a whole. The change between 1997 and 2001 means that it is no longer possible to conclude, on the basis of the two-way association between age and participation, that workers aged 45 to 54 have inferior access to in-house training compared with those aged 35 to 44. However, workers older than 54 continue to have lower participation; indeed, they experienced a fall in total training hours per employee of 20% because of the very large decline in average training hours.

Table 2: Participation in in-house training and duration, by age, 1997 and 2001

Age group	Participation[1] (%)		Duration[2] (average hours)	
	1997	2001	1997	2001
15–19	18.4	24.3	35.2	19.1
20–24	29.4	32.2	35.4	29.4
25–34	37.0	38.6	37.6	36.3
35–44	38.8	42.1	38.9	29.9
45–54	36.3	42.5	31.7	29.1
55–64	25.0	29.4	34.1	23.3
Total	**34.2**	**37.7**	**36.2**	**30.6**

Notes: 1 Persons with a wage or salary job in last 12 months, excluding secondary school students.
2 Duration is average hours of those taking part in training. Persons recording duration as greater than 1000 hours have been capped at 1000.
Source: Wooden et al. (2001, tables 3.17 and 3.18); Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Education and Training 2001, unpublished data.

Table 3: Participation in employer-supported external training and duration, by age, 1997 and 2001

Age group	Participation[1] (%)		Duration[2] (average hours)	
	1997	2001	1997	2001
15–19	3.6	5.0	56.9	32.7
20–24	9.8	9.8	47.8	45.4
25–34	13.1	14.6	30.4	29.9
35–44	15.1	15.7	31.7	28.4
45–54	12.9	14.4	30.1	27.5
55–64	8.3	9.9	30.7	29.9
Total	**12.2**	**13.2**	**33.3**	**30.6**

Notes: 1 Persons with a wage or salary job in last 12 months, excluding secondary school students.
2 Duration is average hours of those taking part in training. Persons recording duration as greater than 1000 hours have been capped at 1000.
Source: Wooden et al. (2001, tables 3.21 and 3.22); Australian Bureau of Statistics, Survey of Education and Training 2001, unpublished data.

Participation in employer-supported external training also rose for older workers by more than it did for all other workers, and while average duration fell, the net effect was for total training hours per employee to rise. A consequence of this is that the gap between workers aged 35 to 44 and those aged 45 to 54 narrowed, such that total training hours per employee for the older group was just 12% below the younger group. While they improved their relative participation, those aged 55 to 64 continued to lag well behind.

Multivariate analysis

The question remains whether the lower relative training participation of older workers is strictly a function of their age, or could be (partly) explained by other factors which vary with age and which are also known to be associated with training participation. Among these factors are personal characteristics, such as qualifications and gender, and employment characteristics, such as sector of employment and working hours. For example, older workers are more likely than prime age workers to be employed part-time, and it is known that those working part-time are less likely to experience employer-provided training. This being the case, is the lower training participation of older workers due to their age or to their hours of work? The only way this question can be answered is through multivariate analysis.

The approach adopted by Wooden et al. (2001) in their analysis of the 1997 survey is replicated. A logit (that is, binary) model of training participation was developed, with the inclusion of many potential control variables in order to isolate a 'pure' age effect. Two refinements have been made to the model

estimated by Wooden et al., both of which hinge on the definition of training used, which was:

- ❖ participating in an employer-provided training course in the 12 months preceding the survey, defined as either an in-house training course and/or an external course financially supported by the employer

- ❖ the training provided by the 'main period employer'; that is, the employer with whom the worker had the greatest tenure during the year preceding the survey.

The purpose of these refinements was to focus on employer provision as the key to determining who participates in work-related training. By including training that may have been undertaken without employer support or undertaken with a different employer, the decision-making role of the main period employer is diluted in the analysis. That is not to say that individual workers play no role in decisions over training, just that employer-provided training does not occur *without* the approval of the employer. As employer-provided training with the main period employer accounts for the vast bulk of training done outside the formal VET system, this restricted model is likely to be a more useful predictive tool and provide more insight into the issue of age discrimination.

In all other respects, the model estimated was identical to that deployed in Wooden et al. (2001).[9] Figure 2 reports the age results using the more tightly defined measure of training for both 1997 and 2001. What it shows is the estimated odds of different age groups of employees participating in employer-provided training, relative to otherwise identical employees aged 30 to 34 (the reference group, whose odds are set at one). For example, a person aged 45 to 49 had an estimated odds ratio of 0.89 in 2001; that is, taking account of all other factors, they had about nine chances in ten of taking part in employer-provided training compared with someone aged 30 to 34. In 1997, the equivalent figure was 0.83. This confirms the results presented in tables 2 and 3 in showing a relative improvement in the situation of older workers. In broad terms, as can be seen from figure 2, the age profile of participation in employer-provided training flattened out between 1997 and 2001, most notably at either end of the age distribution. The steep decline in the odds of training participation for those aged 55 or more is, however, still marked.

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[9] Save for some minor differences between 1997 and 2001 in the definition of some control variables.

Figure 2: Estimated odds of participating in employer-provided training, by age, 2001
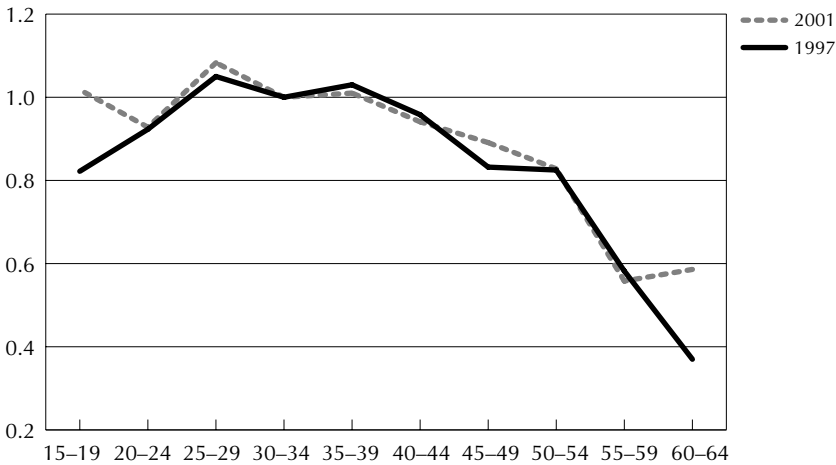
Notes: Persons with a wage or salary job in last 12 months, excluding secondary school students.
             The figure reports the estimated odds of having undertaken an in-house training course or employer-
             supported external training course while working for the main period employer conditional on age and
             other control variables.
Source: Estimates based on Australian Bureau of Statistics, Survey of Education and Training 2001, unpublished
             data.

Barriers to training

As identified at the start of this section, several factors help to explain why
either management does not offer training to their older workers, or the
workers themselves have no desire to participate. It has been shown that an age
effect still prevails in employer-provided training, and that it is most evident for
workers aged 55 to 64. The supposition is that this arises because employers are
selective in allocating training places, but the role of the older workers
themselves should not be denied. It may be rational for older workers not to put
themselves forward for employer-provided training because they consider the
size of the likely pay-off not to warrant it.

Table 4 provides evidence on workers' preferences on training—whether
they wanted to take part in (more) training—combined with information on
whether they did, in fact, take part over the past year. As can be seen from this,
around three in four workers did not want to take part in any more training.
Between the ages of 25 and 54 this apparent demand for training was largely
independent of age. Moreover, the ratio of those who wanted training as a
proportion of those who had not taken part was roughly stable across these age
groups, ranging from between one in four down to one in five.

By contrast, a clear majority of workers aged 55 to 64 (53.2%) neither took part
in training nor wanted to take part, and the ratio of those who did want training

among those who had not experienced it was just one in ten. This suggests that for many older workers, there was a congruence between their own preferences for training and employer selection processes. There were still 16.9% of older workers, however, whose desire for (more) training was not realised.

Table 4: Training preferences, by age and whether took part in training, 2001 (by percentage)

Age group	Wanted (more) training		Did not want (more) training	
	Took part	Did not take part	Took part	Did not take part
15–19	8.5	11.0	25.8	54.8
20–24	13.9	12.6	30.7	42.8
25–34	18.0	11.7	34.3	35.9
35–44	19.8	9.9	34.8	35.5
45–54	17.5	8.5	37.6	36.4
55–64	10.8	6.1	29.9	53.2
Total	**16.6**	**10.2**	**33.7**	**39.4**

Note: Persons with a wage or salary job in last 12 months, excluding secondary school students.
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Survey of Education and Training 2001, unpublished data.

Does training improve employment prospects?

Having established that there remains, for whatever reasons, a difference in participation in training by age, the next question to ask is whether the provision of training helps to redress the disadvantage faced by older workers at risk in the labour market. For those who are out of work, the expectation is that training provides a means to learn new skills (such as use of information technology) which can narrow any skill shortcomings they face when competing for vacant jobs against younger people. For those already employed, it would be expected that keeping skills up to date acts as a kind of employment protection insurance.

Examining post-training outcomes begs the question of whether the outcome is determined by the training per se or by the decision to participate in training; that is, if the more able workers choose or are chosen to take part in training, then any positive employment outcomes cannot be accurately attributed to the training. This is the problem of 'selection bias'. There is no way of satisfactorily disentangling the two with the data to hand. What can be shown, however, is how outcomes vary by age. If there are age differences, that would suggest there is an independent training effect.

Table 5 shows pre- and post-training employment status for technical and further education (TAFE) students by age and gender. Dealing first with graduates, it is apparent that, in a majority of cases, the training is undertaken by people *already* in employment, ranging from two-thirds to three-quarters (by adding numbers in the first and third columns). There is an inverse association between age and employment post-training, although it is relatively slight. For

men, 79.6% of 15 to 24-year-olds were employed post-training, compared with 72.4% of those aged 45 to 64. The respective figures for women were 75.1 and 67.8%. A difference of just 7 percentage points across the age spectrum might be considered tolerable. However, given the warning above about possible training selection bias, a stricter test of the returns to training is whether it assists the non-employed into employment. This shows a much more discernible age effect. The success rate of young male graduates was around three in five (that is, 23 as a fraction of 36.7) compared with one in four for older men. For female graduates, a little over half of those aged 15 to 24 moved from non-employment to employment, compared with one in three of those aged 45 to 64.

For module completers—TAFE students who are no longer in study or training, but who have successfully completed some modules (or units of competency)—the employment pay-off to training is lower for *all* age groups than it is for graduates. However, consistent with the outcomes for graduates, it is much lower for older people. Just one in five module completers aged 45 to 64 who were not employed before commencing, found work afterwards, compared with around two in five of those aged 15 to 24.

Table 5: **Employment outcomes post-training, by pre-training employment status, age and sex, 2001 (percentage of TAFE graduates and module completers)**

Sex and age group and student status	Employed both periods	Moved into employment	Moved out of employment	Not employed both periods
Male graduates				
15–24	56.6	23.0	6.8	13.7
25–44	69.9	7.4	8.9	13.8
45–64	64.5	7.9	6.9	20.7
Female graduates				
15–24	57.3	17.8	7.7	17.3
25–44	53.6	13.4	8.1	24.9
45–64	57.8	10.0	7.5	24.7
Male module completers				
15–24	49.5	15.9	11.9	22.7
25–44	74.4	5.7	7.5	12.4
45–64	70.9	4.2	7.7	17.2
Female module completers				
15–24	52.3	12.9	11.9	23.0
25–44	57.2	9.7	9.3	23.8
45–64	60.2	6.6	7.6	25.6

Note: Each row sums to 100%.
Source: NCVER Student Outcomes Survey 2001, unpublished data.

It is also possible to examine whether training not leading to a formal VET qualification enhances people's employability. The results of this are shown in table 6. The first set of figures relates to people who completed an in-house or

external training course while in employment. The second set relates to people who completed an external training course while not in employment. With the first set of results, the problem of training selection bias is once again apparent. Differences across age groups are small, and are consistent with selection bias. For example, while older workers were less likely to report that the most recent training course had helped them to obtain a promotion or pay rise, they were more likely to be employed at the time of the survey. This suggests that this type of training, which is mostly employer-provided, does provide older workers with some employment protection insurance. For those who were not employed while undertaking an external course, the age effect was much more pronounced, with the returns to training for older workers being quite modest: just 12.6% reported that the course had helped them to obtain a job, while 29.5% were employed at the time of the survey.

Table 6:   Job outcomes from most recent training course, by age, 2001 (percentage of persons completing a training course)

Job outcome	Age group			All persons
	15–24	25–44	45–64	
Completed course as an employee				
Helped to obtain a promotion/pay rise	13.9	9.8	5.9	9.4
Employed at time of survey	91.5	96.3	97.1	95.8
Completed course while not working				
Helped to obtain a job	32.2	21.3	12.6	22.0
Employed at time of survey	44.3	39.1	29.5	38.1

Note: Persons who completed a training course, excluding secondary school students.
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Survey of Education and Training 2001, unpublished data.

Conclusion

Much of the discussion surrounding the employment and training circumstances of older workers has become sidetracked by the concern over declining fertility rates, and its corollary of the 'greying' of the population and how that population might be supported. It is important that this is set aside, because, while the scale of the forecast demographic change is tremendous, the year-on-year change is slight.[10] The pool of new entrants to the labour market *will* shrink, but this will not occur until sometime around the end of this decade. Meanwhile, in the here and now, youth unemployment remains high, higher

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[10] For example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics projects that in 2003 the number of 15 to 19-year-olds in the labour force will be 770.2 thousand, and they will make up 7.8% of the labour force. Five years later in 2008 when their younger brothers and sisters make up that age cohort group, the number is forecast to *rise* to 782.9 thousand (and the labour force share to fall slightly to 7.5%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1998a).

indeed than it is for older persons. The imperative for employers to adapt their behaviour to an ageing workforce is not yet upon them, and exhorting employers to do so rings hollow.

This does not mean that we should be blithe about the situation faced by older workers; rather, it suggests a return to first principles in examining the issue of disadvantage:

- ❖ Is the lower employment rate of older workers a result of voluntary withdrawal from the labour force or deficient demand?

- ❖ Is the evidence presented consistent with older workers facing discrimination in gaining employment and accessing training?

- ❖ For those older workers taking part in training, does it result in improved outcomes and, if so, to what extent does it offer a means of redressing disadvantage, in general, for older workers?

The disadvantaged group is not older workers per se. They are far too heterogeneous a group to be assembled under the label of 'disadvantage' since this group includes many people at the peak of their careers, as well as many long-term unemployed and many 'parked' on social security payments, such as the disability support pension.

The older workers who are most 'at risk' are those who, for whatever reason, find themselves displaced from work. In searching for jobs, they face competition from younger people who may be better qualified and whose education and training will, most likely, be more up to date. There is sufficient accumulated anecdotal and survey evidence (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 2000; Keys Young 2000) to suggest that employers, on average, have a preference for prime-age workers over older workers when it comes to recruitment.

For older workers as a whole to be identified as an equity group in the provision of vocational education and training runs the risk that resources will be allocated to those not necessarily in need. Most older workers participating in training are already in employment. For older workers not in employment, the returns to training are generally modest and are inferior to the outcomes experienced by unemployed younger workers. This suggests that training should be seen as only one element in a suite of active labour market assistance measures to help displaced older workers back into work. Several state governments already have such programs in place, and much would be learned by studying what has worked well in them.

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Acknowledgements

Who's doing the hunting and gathering?

An exploration of gender segmentation of adult learning in small and remote communities

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This chapter[1] examines patterns of gender segmentation in adult, community and vocational learning in small and remote towns in Victoria. Exploration of the evidence and some issues associated with such patterns form the basis of the chapter. While acknowledging that Australian country towns and their educational infrastructures are extremely diverse, the chapter presents evidence that males in many small communities are in need of learning spaces that meet their needs.

This chapter poses (but does not answer) the question of how community organisations and services might better adapt to changes in learning needs in small and remote communities, particularly the extent to which they have become segmented or less accessible by gender. It raises questions about ways in which existing organisations might be made more accessible to, and inclusive of, a wider range of male as well as female adult lifelong learners.

Introduction

GENDER SEGMENTATION OF adult learning in small and remote Australian communities takes several forms—by sector, by field of study and by type of work. Recent research by the author (Golding 2002a, 2002b; Golding & Rogers 2002) in a large number of small and remote towns in Victoria[2] has revealed that women typically need to learn locally in order to adapt to changes in their lives, their family businesses, and in the rapidly changing world of work. In the smaller and remoter towns, much of this women's learning takes

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[1] An earlier version of the ideas in this chapter was presented to a conference on Lifelong Learning, Adult and Community Education in Rural Victoria, Ballarat, 30 September 2002 (Golding 2002c).

[2] The research included 26 small and relatively remote towns in Victoria in 2000–2002 and focused on adult, community and vocational education. The research primarily used evidence from extensive recorded focus group interviews.

place by necessity through adult and community education (ACE), and through work and informal learning, rather than through accredited vocational education and training (VET).

The chapter's title alludes to the argument advanced below and backed up by research evidence that, in several senses, many women are the new 'hunters and gatherers' for learning: for themselves, for their families and in some instances, for and on behalf of their male partners. By comparison, to extend the analogy, it is possible to argue that many men, traditionally seen as the hunters of food, are either not as 'hungry' for the necessary learning, or else are unable to access a local, appropriate, convivial space in small and remote towns to acquire that learning. To complete the analogy, it is possible to argue that men, particularly older men, often get their learning in male-dominated learning contexts 'in the cave'—at work, on the job, on the farm or through public safety organisations—or else are not engaged in formal learning at all. In explicating this argument, the analysis will firstly examine the context and then the evidence.

Issues around gender inequity

Issues associated with gender and equity are far from simple to define or to resolve. On one hand, it is widely acknowledged in most sectors and levels of learning in Australia that women are now consistently out-participating and out-performing men. The House of Representatives (2002) inquiry into the education of boys presents 'undeniable evidence that gender is a factor in education' (p.2). For example, girls' results in literacy are higher than boys and the gap between the two is widening. Girls' retention rates to Year 12 are higher than those for boys and over 56% of students in higher education are women.

On the other hand, women VET graduates still experience poorer employment outcomes than men. While women have an apparent advantage in terms of university participation rates, some of this participation is concentrated in female-dominated fields (arts, nursing, education) which do not necessarily lead to higher income streams on completion (House of Representatives 2002, p.41).

The idea that some men might be disadvantaged in vocational education and training has been difficult to discuss in an environment where government policies and international literature have consistently identified women as a disadvantaged group. Sweetman (1998, p.12), in an international treatise on gender, education and training, observed that: 'Lack of education clearly disadvantages women in their participation in both productive and community spheres: the two spheres which conventionally confer status on individuals'. Some educators are clearly concerned that the efforts to raise the achievement of men do not threaten the gains made by women in both these spheres. However, while many women and their daughters have experienced new opportunities and aspirations through all forms of education and training in recent decades,

there is new and firm evidence that young boys are experiencing declining rates of achievement and retention at school (Trent & Slade 2001).

Existing gender inequities in VET participation in rural, and particularly remote areas, confirm that both women and men become disadvantaged both in and as a consequence of VET, although in different ways. The formal VET system, as Cully argues in the chapter on older workers, is strongly biased towards the provision of training for people aged 15 to 24, as well as for people *already* in employment: the very groups most likely to be missing from many small and remote towns by virtue of their need to leave to seek work, post-compulsory tertiary study or both. Moreover, it is well known that the complete choice of technical and further education (TAFE) institute programs and levels is seldom available in rural and remote areas beyond the larger towns.

Inequities in VET are also structural. TAFE is shown by Haberkorn and Bamford (2000) to be much less accessible in the more remote areas of particular Australian states and the Northern Territory, and least accessible to remote Indigenous Australians. It is speculated that the elevated proportion of male VET participants in remote areas and in three particular fields of study may be an indication that other choices are available for women to learn *outside and parallel to VET* in the larger, remote towns and cities. Nevertheless, a higher proportion of women in rural and remote areas achieve higher-level VET qualifications than men and are at the forefront of the lifelong learning process.

The changing importance of learning in small and remote towns

Small and remote towns and their residents have experienced significant changes in the past decade (Rogers & Collins 2001). There has been a trend towards more income being generated off the farm and outside small and remote towns. These trends have required adults to change direction, in part through 'new learning' (Kalantzis & Cope 2001). State governments and the federal government have tended to promote capacity-building initiatives as a basis for economic and social regeneration in small and remote towns in order to address the perceived need for local enterprises and communities to embrace new learning and new forms of work.

There have been moves by individuals and families taking up cheap housing in small towns, despite the lack of services or jobs (Fincher & Nieuwenhuysen 1998). These moves have been exacerbated by rapidly rising house prices and rents in cities and positive incentives to relocate to cheaper housing in small towns through the federal first-home-buyer scheme. The need for new learning by these new adult residents and by existing, older, long-term residents in difficult socio-economic circumstances is a critical issue in some small towns if inter-generational disadvantage by location is to be avoided.

Globalisation has led to the need for enterprises, including farming enterprises and their workforces, to learn to be globally competitive. As remoteness increases, a smaller number of people need to have a wider range of knowledge and skills. In this context, the extent to which learning may or may not be segmented by gender and/or associated with disadvantage by gender, becomes a critical issue in Australian rural and remote towns.

Golding and Rogers (2002) demonstrated a significant degree of learner segmentation based on gender and the organisational environment in which adult and community learning takes place. Adult learning opportunities were closely mapped in 20 small and relatively remote towns throughout rural Victoria, including towns with and without current adult and community education provision or formal VET provision. The findings confirmed previous research by Falk, Golding and Balatti (2000) that local adult learning can and does play a critical role in social capital[3] development in non-metropolitan communities. In particular, it showed that the ability of a local learning organisation to be inclusive, to cooperate and network inside and beyond the town is central to the ability of communities to achieve their goals, including building of community capacity to achieve economic, social, and cultural renewal.

As the need to build community capacity has increased, the ability to retain and replace community leaders has often decreased. Australian Bureau of Statistics census data confirm that many small and remote pastoral and agricultural communities are aging and experiencing loss of youth. As town population size decreases and the degree of remoteness increases, the ability for adults to learn locally decreases, while the need to learn remains high. Adult learning is a critical success factor for small and remote community sustainability. Communities where people learn together, share information and knowledge, are creative and innovative, and where wide participation and involvement is fostered, are more likely to be successful. It is these community capacities that need to be built upon through VET and adult and community learning organisations, particularly where no other local learning options exist.

Rogers and Collins (2001) identified a need to value the role of learning in community development more highly. People in small and remote communities often need access to informal learning pathways which begin as a process more akin to building social capital than education and training (Falk, Golding & Balatti 2000). Toms et al. (1999) identified the critical importance of informal learning in a regional town. While vocational education and training, in their study, was found to be of importance in getting an education and a job, the most valued subsequent learning was non-credentialled, non-formal and informal. There is evidence also from the extensive literature on disengaged learners that once people gain confidence by belonging to a local learning network, they are then able to consider a variety of other formal or accredited learning opportunities.

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[3] 'Social capital' refers collectively to trust, networks, reciprocity, networks and shared norms.

Men as learners in small and remote towns

Evidence from the research cited above indicates that, with some exceptions, rural men, by virtue of their attachment to farming and traditional skills associated with rural businesses, have been less able than women in the last few decades to adapt to the new and emerging flexible world of work, and particularly to the 'new learning' in a rapidly changing labour market which is required to enter and compete in that much changed world. Men are less able in general to develop the 'soft skills' in new industries where service, presentation, client communication and continuous learning are essential (House of Representatives 2002, pp.50–1).

AC Neilsen (2003) included an 'outreach segment' of males aged 45 to 60 years in regional areas in their national evaluation of Adult Learners' Week. They hypothesised that regional people generally would be more likely to embrace available learning since they have fewer options available (p.35). However, they found that for older regional men, learning tended not to be seen as a positive experience. Such men were more likely to be positively influenced 'by technology and practical course material' rather than by reading and writing/classroom activities' (p.56). The 'passionate learner' segments in the AC Neilsen study were found to be skewed towards older women. The 'unenthusiastic' and 'forget it' learner segments were found to be young to middle-aged men (18 to 44 years) and older (55 to 64 years) men, respectively.

In remote situations and small towns where TAFE is at some distance and where many of the adult and community local learning organisations, spaces, programs and pedagogies are comprehensively feminised, men have tended to withdraw from, or avoid formal or community learning, except on 'safe', primarily male ground in particular fields of study in TAFE, at field days, through farming, or through landcare or fire and emergency services organisations.

In studies of small and remote Victorian communities (Golding & Rogers 2002; Golding 2002a) it was mainly the women who were quietly but deliberately shaking, moving and building families and community learning organisations. In some senses, it can be argued that while more men are in paid work, more men than women are 'dead in the water' when it comes to adapting to change through learning. The Leigh Report (Leigh 1997) emphasised three groups of under-represented adult learners, including 'rural dwellers' and 'men'. The report's explanations for low participation rates of men (after Hurworth 1995, p.37, cited in Beckett & Helme 2001, p.17) are pertinent in the context of this chapter's thesis:

❖ Unlike women, men have gained fulfilment from work and want to rest.

❖ Men prefer outdoor activities such as bowls, gardening and fishing.

❖ Women are better at joining groups and networking.

- ❖ Men are tentative and have a fear of the unknown and are afraid to appear weak by not knowing things.

- ❖ Neighbourhood houses and community centres are perceived as 'women's domains'.

- ❖ Men don't respond to a structured learning environment.

While the participation data and research indicate that men are nonetheless learning on the farm and in businesses, they are particularly learning 'by doing'. However, the learning men do tends to be less long-term, strategic or discretionary. Typically men learn what *has* to be learned just in time for a particular practical purpose: such as a farm chemical users' course, a recreational boat licence or a shooter's licence. In essence, while men's participation in VET in quantitative terms is not radically different from that of women, men's learning in VET tends to lack '*the quality of engagement* (or perhaps *immersion*) in the community' (see Beckett & Helme 2001, p.13, their emphasis).

It is likely that the reluctance of men to return to, or engage in, formal learning is in part an outcome of negative experiences at school by rural boys who did not 'go on' to further education. These experiences are far from historic. Slade (2002, p.283) demonstrates that many present-day Australian schoolboys experience 'mass disinterest, mass disaffection and a growing rejection not only of schooling but of organised learning'. Slade suggests that boys generally '… have neither the expectation or the desire to continue their education beyond the point of getting a job', leading to 'a negative and necessary association between formal learning and what they understand as an institutionalised and unpleasant waste of time' (2002, p.283).

These negative attitudes towards recurrent and formal learning, formed partly by negative experiences at school, place rural men at a considerable disadvantage in relation to women. Since rural men, including those on farms, work largely on their own and for themselves, they are not embedded in modern workplaces where they are surrounded or encouraged by a positive culture of workplace learning. Few rural males interact regularly with information and computer technology, as many city-based male employees do. At a time when a need to think globally as well as learn and act locally has become essential, it is possible to argue that men and boys who remain in small and remote towns are at a considerable disadvantage in relation to women and girls.

In the past decade in particular, as a direct consequence of globalisation, fierce competition in markets, rural industry restructure and most recently severe droughts, Australian farming families have typically found the need to generate income and work off the farm and sometimes out of town. While men have had to significantly change farming and business practices to remain competitive in small towns, they have tended to undergo somewhat different and less radical personal and workplace transformations than women. Women have been forced by necessity to do their 'hunting and gathering' for learning to

renew, replace or re-create their previous vocational skills. While much of this learning and the part-time, poorly paid casual work it tends to generate, have been concentrated as close to home and family as possible, there is also evidence men, and more recently women, are commuting longer distances to try to juggle the perceived benefits of rural life and family connections with the need to work and seek more education and training in larger centres.

Some of these trends towards female participation in learning are not restricted to rural and remote areas. In adult and community education in Victoria women have regularly comprised more than 70% of all learners in all older-age cohorts (Beckett & Helme 2001, p.25, 2000 data). In VET in New South Wales 'A larger proportion of older adults in training are female' (Young 2000, p.25). In the 40 to 49-year-old cohort, women comprise nearly six out of ten of all VET learners in New South Wales (Young 2000, table 17, p.18) and are in a majority for all age cohorts from 25 to 69 years. Looking across sectors, even in the younger age cohorts (20 to 24), females comprise a higher proportion of the Australian population who are studying—females 21.4%, males 17.4% (Wooden & VandenHeuvel 1999, p.39; House of Representatives 2002, p.39).

Adults with the most extensive prior learning tend to be the most active lifelong learners. The research literature, as Ridoutt et al. (2002, p.67) summarise, '… provides unambiguous evidence that workers with post-school qualifications are more likely to initiate and complete formal training than workers without similar education backgrounds'. Other research into workplace training shows that men at a higher level in stable, tenured employment are more likely to be trained than women in similar jobs.

Women tend to have less access to stable, tenured employment and this makes the need for women to independently engage in their own local learning more critical. Males who do learn tend to engage in technical training more than women. However, research also shows (Groot 1997) that the technical skills men learn depreciate more quickly, become obsolete faster than other skills and tend to be more firm-specific. In small and remote communities the choices over where adults learn are very limited and in part constrained by previous (often negative) experiences with formal learning, particularly for men.

Smallness and remoteness

How is smallness and remoteness related to accessibility to learning?

VET data which primarily include TAFE participants provide a window into the tip of the most accessible, accredited learning iceberg where men are relatively equitably represented. In the south-eastern Australian states a different picture emerges beyond the larger towns, where TAFE itself tends to become remote and other forms of adult and community education become relatively

accessible. VET (mainly TAFE) tends to become particularly inaccessible in 'small and remote' populated localities in Australia with fewer than 3000 people where the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia[4] (Department of Health and Aged Care 1999) is in the range between accessible (ARIA 1.84 to 3.35) and very remote (9.08 to 12). This index is useful in conceptualising and defining 'small and remote towns' since it acknowledges in its design that accessibility to 'goods, services and opportunities for social interaction' tends to increase as geographic accessibility to increasingly large population centres increases.

The mere presence of a TAFE institute, campus or outreach facility does not mean that specific vocational training is available in that facility. Many basic vocational courses require on-site, residential training facilities or access to specialised trainers. KPMG Consulting (2001), in a study of the impact of Australian vocational education and training policies including 'user choice', concluded that: 'User choice is not a reality in many parts of regional and remote Australia: often there is limited or no choice about provider, content, timing or location of training' (p.4).

ACE is accessible in a variety of forms (learning centre, neighbourhood house, community enterprise or information centre) in some small and remote towns where few other local adult learning options exist, although the scope and accessibility of ACE varies significantly between states and territories (Golding, Davies & Volkoff 2001). By way of illustration, in 2000 there were around 510 ACE providers in Victoria and 78 in New South Wales. In several states and in the Northern Territory, ACE as a widespread, networked, state-supported organisation remained undeveloped in 2003. Looking broadly across Australian ACE where it *does* exist, only around one in five learners in ACE in Australia are men. In some small communities, males rarely come in the door of a community centre or neighbourhood house. But women learning in ACE is only part of the adult learning story.

Golding and Rogers (2002) identified the importance of surrogate adult and community learning organisations in the smallest towns and populated localities where even ACE does not reach. Hayes, Golding and Harvey (2004) show that, in these situations, the most regular, local, accredited (albeit largely technical) learning takes place in male-dominated rural fire brigades and emergency service organisations. These public safety organisations reach deeper into small and remote communities than ACE or even primary schools. In 2002 there were around 1200 Country Fire Authority brigades and 145 State Emergency Service units in Victoria, and 2400 rural fire brigades and 230 State Emergency Service units in New South Wales. Hayes, Golding and Harvey (2004) have identified and are researching the potential for Australian public safety organisations to be

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[4] ARIA gives a value between zero and 12 to all populated localities in Australia, which reflects their accessibility/remoteness based on proximity to population centres of increasing size. Zero is highly accessible, 12 is very remote.

better connected to communities and perhaps to play a greater role in using their existing local infrastructure and membership: re-engaging men and boys to wider social community roles beyond their important community role in preparing for and responding to public emergencies.

While presence or absence of a range of services within a one-hour travel time, hypothesised by Haberkorn and Bamford (2000), are very useful inaccessibility criteria, they are not the only factors impacting on inaccessibility. For young people and families without a reliable car or the income to run or fuel it, services, including adult learning, are inaccessible at a distance of only a few kilometres. An inaccessibility threshold of 80 km also takes no account of the effect of the geography, seasonal road conditions and climate found across Australia.

The presence/absence of a service also says nothing about equity for particular groups and sub-groups. For example, Indigenous people are grossly over-represented in inaccessible communities for every service type. Similarly, a measure of theoretical accessibility to a particular service says nothing about the quality or appropriateness of the service, the service range or choice, as it applies generally or to particular groups.

Why are these issues more critical in small and remote communities?

Accessibility to services such as learning in small and remote communities goes well beyond geography. There is social and community pressure on country people with local choices to use and maintain local services or else lose them. Residents in small and remote communities are seldom living on an undifferentiated 'level playing field'. The choices about where they learn and where their children learn are affected by history and traditional expectations. Research by Golding and Rogers (2002) in the 20 small and relatively remote communities in Victoria confirms that the *social* distance between adjacent communities can be as important a barrier as the *physical* distance between them. Several people interviewed in small towns described a 'line on the road' which divides adjacent towns on the basis of their historic community of attachment.

The issue of accessibility to community organisations, particularly learning organisations, is typically tied up with gender. While issues of gender segmentation are not restricted to small and remote communities, it is striking that, as towns become smaller, such segmentation becomes more obvious. For example, in the smaller populated localities where the only regularly used public infrastructure is a fire station and a primary school, it is not unusual to find most of the adult volunteer involvement between these organisations divided on gender lines. In somewhat larger towns of around one thousand residents, if an adult learning centre or neighbourhood house is available locally, it is typical to find minimal use or management of the centre or house by men, and minimal involvement in emergency services by women.

The trends observed in gender segmentation of adult learning in the United Kingdom by McGivney (1999b) have some parallels in Australia. McGivney for example noted that British women 'tend more than men to engage in learning activities which are connected with self development and which will expand their interest' (p.7). This segmentation would not be such an issue if the penalties for not learning had not become so severe and debilitating for men and also their boys. An ability to learn at school is a factor which largely determines whether young people without an enterprise to inherit or a workplace to go into, will go or stay in a small or remote community. Those who can 'learn to learn' tend to be educated and encouraged by educated parents and teachers to leave. Only those young people who have least learning or employment options elsewhere tend to stay or return. Lifelong adult learning for those who do stay or return is becoming recognised as a critical success factor in communities experiencing change.

What are some of the difficulties and success factors in small and remote towns?

Most of the small and relatively remote Victorian communities studied by Golding and Rogers (2002) have traditionally been dependent, directly or indirectly, on farming. And yet by 1999, off-farm income in Australia accounted for over half of total household income on broad-acre farms (Levantis 2000). In effect, people in and around small towns have increasingly had to learn new skills and develop new enterprises which enable them to work beyond the family farm or business.

Average incomes are significantly and consistently lower than for capital cities, major urban areas, regional towns and also surrounding rural areas in all Australian states and territories (Lloyd, Harding & Hellwig 2001). The average household income in rural towns in Victoria in 1996 (at 58% of Sydney average income compared with 91% for Melbourne) was the lowest of all major demographic regions in Australia for any state or territory. Further, in the prior period, 1991 to 1996, average Victorian rural town income declined by 1%. This decline in income is only exceeded nationally within Adelaide and in regional and rural towns in Tasmania.

The Victorian towns research confirms that declining smaller towns without a secondary school in socio-economically disadvantaged regions (Vinson 1999) are most at risk. Other research also confirms '… a strong inverse relationship between the size of a town and the level of expenditure by farmers in the town economy. The larger the town, the lower the expenditure by farmers per town resident' (Levantis 2000, p.39). Such expenditure in towns below 1000 people nationally in 1999 amounted to an average $12 000 per resident (compared with $200 per resident for towns of greater than 50 000 people). However, 60% of small Australian towns (with fewer than 1000 residents) declined in population in the decade to 1996. Conversely, 80% of towns with over 20 000 people

increased in population. The loss of population and the associated direct and indirect economic losses have affected smallest towns hardest.

The Victorian towns research shows that adult learning in many small and remote communities is taking place with considerable difficulty in a dramatically changing environment where community sustainability is at stake. Traditional economic activities are sometimes no longer viable. The demographics are in flux and social values and community identities are changing. Many small rural communities have recently lost their municipal offices, resulting in the loss of legal, financial, political, information, and organisational resources. There are opportunities for governments (local, state and national) to reach deeper into regions and small towns, through partnerships with other government initiatives, and by supporting community development through community-based learning.

One critical success factor for adult learning is the intervention of key people 'who inform, motivate, enthuse, encourage and advise individuals and groups and act as intermediaries' (McGivney 1999a), particularly between governments and regional and local learning organisations. Other important success factors include opportunities for progression and provision of informal as well as formal learning on one site. For all of the above reasons, learning has become a critical 'must' even in the smallest and remotest towns.

Segmentation in adult and community learning

A reasonable body of literature suggests a disparity in gender, race and class with regard to accessing adult and community education, especially in rural and isolated locations (Butler & Ferrier 1999; Franklin, Short & Teather 1994; Grace 1998; McGivney 1999b; McDaniel & Flowers 2000).

In relation to ACE, Johnson and Hinton (1986) in a national study concluded, on the basis of female participation rates approaching 80%, that women 'almost own' Australian adult education. The *Beyond Cinderella* (Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee 1997) Australian Senate inquiry into the adult and community education sector deliberately singled out 'the great under-represented in ACE' (pp.49–62). While the Senate report noted that male ACE participants were 'heavily outnumbered by females', it did not include a section about men. In endorsing a picture of the 'standard ACE user as female, financially better off than the general population, and a committed lifelong learner', Campbell and Curtin (1999) argued that this picture suggested 'too narrow a focus by the ACE sector'.

Golding, Davies and Volkoff (2001) in a national review of ACE concluded that: 'Most national and State ACE research confirms that women clearly outnumber men as learners and workers in ACE. This phenomenon is historic and ongoing' (p.68). They also concluded, on the basis of an extensive national review of research, that 'ACE is profoundly oriented to the educational needs of

women' (p.69). The only previous, major quantitative study of ACE (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1995) showed that only 20% of ACE participants surveyed in the three states (Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia) were male.

It is widely recognised that ACE, where it exists in Australia, typically has predominantly female clients, staff and committee members. There is some evidence that bias in the ACE client base in favour of particular groups, ages and backgrounds may be inadvertently excluding other groups, including men and young people in small communities. Golding (2002b) has shown that a number of emerging organisations and community-based initiatives such as 'Networking the nation' service providers, rural transaction centres and community enterprise centres appear to be attracting more male clients.

Golding and Volkoff (1999, p.24) showed that adult learner intentions and outcomes varied significantly by group, including by gender and rurality. Where gender and rurality overlapped with factors such as low skill and unemployment, the impact on outcomes from learning was particularly devastating. There is evidence from other research that access to adult learning organisations provides rural and remote adults with tangible advantages with regard to job opportunities and improved education status (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1995, pp.94–5).

It has been suggested that adult education centres structure learning in a way which attracts women rather than men (McGivney 1999b). The tendency for rural communities to retain conservative and traditional values, especially around gender socialisation (Cheers 1990), may affect the way men perceive the learning programs offered by adult learning centres. Moreover, there is an absence in the literature on how socio-economic status, race and social status in small communities may create, intentionally or unintentionally, barriers to equitable access to rural adult education centres. As a consequence, adult learning centres are often viewed as feminised spaces (McGivney 1999b), regardless of whether women themselves receive the kinds of advantages that men do from access to education (Butler & Ferrier 1999; Carrington, Mills & Roulston 1999).

Male withdrawal (or perhaps exclusion) from adult learning spaces is a particular issue in smaller and remoter towns where there is no alternative local learning organisation inclusive of men. There is evidence from a range of studies of the link between wellbeing and learning, including decreases in morbidity rates for men associated with connectedness to communities and an ability to learn.

Despite much comment about continued inequitable access in adult education centres across rural and isolated communities, little Australian research material exists. There is a need for more research to address the gap in this area. In particular, there is a need to know:

❖ How, where and in what contexts does adult learning (formal, non-formal, informal) and segmentation of that learning occur by gender and what are the effects?

- ❖ How might that segmentation and its effects be measured and conceptualised?

- ❖ What particular roles do adult and community education providers and neighbourhood houses play in adult learning and segmentation, separately or together?

- ❖ In what ways do organisations having some adult learning or service function deliberately or inadvertently include or exclude prospective adult learners by gender?

- ❖ What factors, contexts and strategies encourage access and participation in adult learning across organisations and gender lines?

- ❖ What are the key drivers that shape why men and women do or don't participate in adult learning?

- ❖ What can be done to minimise any observed gender segmentation and increase learning opportunities for men or women currently under-represented or excluded by such segmentation?

- ❖ Are there relationships between 'the issue of declining achievement and retention for boys' (Slade 2002, p.55) and the reluctance of some adult males to learn?

Such research should identify how accessibility to existing learning organisations (including community-based, surrogate learning organisations) might be broadened to include a wider range of participants by age, Indigenous and socio-economic status as well as by gender. Such research would also identify opportunities to improve status and access to adult and community education, already widely referred to as the Cinderella sector (Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee 1999), for the particular benefit of Australians in small and remote towns without access to alternative adult learning opportunities.

Conclusion: *What's next for men?*[5]

In conclusion, it is important to recognise that 'girls and women remain at a considerable disadvantage socially and economically and still require strategies to reduce sexual discrimination and harassment' (Slade 2002, p.55). In most countries, including Australia, 'men occupy overwhelmingly the well-paid and secure skilled jobs available' (Sweetman 1998, p.11). Recent research in Italy (Shavit & Muller 1998) found that the chances of being employed or otherwise vary considerably by sex. Further, they found that while 'Men's employment status is independent of education … the educational qualifications of women profoundly affect their risk of exclusion from the labour force' (p.279).

[5] The sub-heading is taken from a title in Lloyd, T and Wood, T (eds) 1996, *Working with men*, London.

As a submission to the House of Representatives (2002) report into the education of boys noted: 'A number of assumptions developed during two decades of activity in girls' education have been uncritically carried forward into the renamed gender strategies'.[6] While it may not fashionable to argue male disadvantage, it is important to recognise the extent to which boys and men in small and remote towns are particularly disengaged from learning and therefore disadvantaged. Boys require creative strategies in rural schools to prevent disengagement from learning and men require community-based strategies to positively re-engage. The current extreme gender-based segmentation of the public VET system, as well as adult and community learning, is an obvious issue that needs addressing.

It is important also to stress, in conclusion, that the issues raised in this chapter do not apply equally to all small and remote towns. The current reality of Australian country towns is indeed diverse (Rogers & Collins 2001), as are the predicted future economic prospects for Australian regions (Adams 2002, figure 2, p.6). Nor does this chapter or the available research suggest that all males are disengaged from learning or that gender segmentation affects all organisations in the same way. Nevertheless, there is copious evidence from the author's recent research that males in many small and remote towns desperately need accessible learning spaces that meet their particular and different needs, not only to enhance their immediate vocational utility, but also to enable them to become better people, parents, partners and learners over a lifetime.

McGivney (1999b) in her United Kingdom research accurately summarises the similarly cruel dilemma facing men in small and remote English towns. That is:

> *… their sense of identity is so bound up with traditional labour that they find it difficult to engage in different jobs or alternative activities. Some are consequently failing to adjust to changed social and economic conditions and their basic assumptions and expectations, especially regarding gender roles have not caught up with the cultural transformations that have taken place over the last decades. It is this cultural time lag that is affecting the well-being of some men.* (McGivney 1999b, p.67)

There is a strong argument on the basis of the above that male learners should come into high relief if Skilbeck's (2002) challenge to reach the 'learning poor' or 'unreached learner'[7] through adult and community education is seriously taken up. McGivney (1999b) gets close to the heart of the problem when citing Grant's (1998) observation that there is still 'a male culture which exists unchanging while everything else has been transformed all around'. This

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[6] R Fletcher, Submission no.166, p.4, cited on p.62.
[7] Skilbeck's seven points (box 7, p.45) that identify 'unreached adult learners' apply directly to men. Some solutions to the issues raised in this chapter might be addressed by meeting the Skilbeck's 'superior conditions of learning' (box 10, p.54) specifically as they apply to men and boys.

is arguably one of the greatest barriers to adult male participation in education. As Baker (1996) also suggests from United Kingdom-based research:

> *While it is easy to applaud the demise of male domination in the workplace—an outcome certainly long overdue—it is nevertheless still crucial to acknowledge the profound effect such a change has on men's sense of themselves. It cannot be right that so many men are left feeling confused, angry; dispossessed and powerless without that experience being publicly acknowledged and discussed.*
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> (Baker 1996, p.32)

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Quantifying the impact of equity overlap in VET

David John

To date, little in the way of empirical analysis has been carried out which quantifies the impact of diversity within student equity groups on the likelihood of success within vocational education and training (VET). This study attempts to address this situation. Using the national VET providers data collection, the primary student characteristics which affect subject outcomes are examined, and their impact on the likelihood of success is identified for each of the main designated student equity groups, and also overlapping sub-sets of these groups. The designated groups include women, people within rural and remote Australia, people who are Indigenous, people who have a disability, and people from a non-English speaking background. In addition, two other student groups previously identified as 'at risk' groups[1]—unemployed students, and students aged 19 years or less—are considered.

The results indicate that a student's likelihood of having a successful outcome is reduced by being a member of a designated equity group. In particular, the likelihood of a successful subject outcome is significantly reduced, and the likelihood of withdrawing significantly increased, for people who are Indigenous, have a disability, are of non-English speaking background, are unemployed, or a teenager. Female students on the other hand, have a higher likelihood of achieving a successful outcome than their male counterparts, as also do people from rural and remote Australia compared with their urban counterparts.

The results also indicate that a student's likelihood of having a successful outcome is further reduced if they belong to more than one equity group.

Introduction

ACCESS TO VOCATIONAL education and training and the under-representation of particular groups in further education have been the subject of ongoing debate for several years. There is growing recognition that, in addition to the main identified equity groups, other disadvantaged student groups exist within VET.

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[1] See, for example, Golding & Volkoff (1999); Dusseldorp Skills Forum (1999).

Ball (1998) found that the probability of success or completion of VET subjects was significantly reduced for certain student groups. This included the usually recognised equity groups, such as Indigenous people, people with disabilities, and people from non-English speaking backgrounds, along with young people and the unemployed. However, no evidence was found that students living in rural and remote areas were less likely to succeed. The analysis indicated that women were actually more likely to pass or complete than men.

To date, little in the way of empirical analysis has been carried out which quantifies the effects of overlap of student equity groups and the diversity within specific student groups on the likelihood of success. These are important issues and, as pointed out by Golding and Volkoff (1998), failure to fully acknowledge them has the potential for focusing on strategies aimed at overcoming inequity doomed to failure.

The aim of this study was to revisit the analysis carried out by Ball and extend it to quantify the impact that overlap and diversity have on individual equity groups.

While it is recognised that the chances of passing will differ across the various fields of training and qualifications being offered, the focus here is on identifying the main characteristics which impact on a student's likelihood of passing. There is scope to extend the analysis to determine the effect the various types and modes of training have on passing within various student groups.

This chapter considers three subject outcomes: withdrawing, passing assessed subjects, and achieving a successful outcome. The key student characteristics influencing each outcome type are also considered.[2]

The results show that, in general, a student's likelihood of passing or having a successful outcome reduces if they belong to more than one designated equity group. In fact, the results show a student's likelihood of achieving a successful result is not only reduced by being a member of a target equity group, but further reduced if they are a member of more than one group. Similarly, a student's likelihood of withdrawing increases if they are a member of more than one designated equity group.

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[2] A 'successful outcome' is defined as either a pass for an assessed subject or satisfactory completion of a non-assessed subject. It does not include status or credit granted through recognition of prior learning or credit transfer arrangements. See appendix A for more details in connection with methodology.

The key student characteristics

Initial analysis identified several demographic and life-stage characteristics which influence a student's subject outcome. These included:

- ❖ the student's residential location
- ❖ the student's highest educational level
- ❖ the student's employment status at the time of enrolment
- ❖ the student's age at the time of enrolment
- ❖ the student's sex
- ❖ whether the student comes from a non-English background[3]
- ❖ whether the student is Indigenous
- ❖ whether the student has a reported disability.

Table 1 shows the resulting parameter estimates and predicted probabilities for individual student characteristics for each of the three outcomes analysed: withdrawing, passing assessed subjects, and obtaining a successful subject outcome.[4]

In general, the probability of a student achieving a successful result after enrolling in a VET subject is high, while the probability of withdrawing is low.

The residential location of a student has a significant impact on VET subject outcomes. Students from capital cities are the least likely to achieve a successful outcome and are also the most likely to withdraw. The probability of students from major urban centres and rural areas having a successful outcome is more than two percentage points higher than for students residing in capital cities. Students residing in remote areas are only slightly more likely to have a successful outcome than those living in capital cities. It is important to note that capital cities comprise a broad range of urban areas which, when analysed as a single group, often mask differences in the underlying profile of students who live there.

The probability of a successful outcome is lower for males than females. However, males are less likely to withdraw than females.

A student's age has some influence on the likelihood of success in VET subjects. There is some evidence that younger people have a lower probability of subject success. However, the results indicate that students of school age, in addition to those of post-labour force age are less likely to withdraw.

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[3] A student was categorised as having a non-English background when both their country of birth was a non-English speaking country and the main language spoken at home was not English.
[4] The predicted probabilities for each characteristic have been derived using the regression output and holding other characteristics constant at their average values. This method was adopted by Martin, Maclachlan and Karmel (1999).

Table 1: Predicted probabilities for key variables analysed*

Characteristic of interest	Successful outcome	Passing an assessed subject	Withdrawing
Region of residence (reference group: capital city)	78.6	87.8	8.2
Other metropolitan	80.9	90.0	7.4
Rural	81.6	89.9	7.0
Remote	79.8	88.2	6.9
Outside Australia	83.7	90.7	5.6
Prior education level (reference group: Year 12)	82.9	89.9	6.4
Degree	80.8	90.0	7.3
Diploma	81.0	89.7	7.0
Certificate	80.8	89.7	7.3
Year 10 or 11	76.7	87.1	8.9
Year 9 or less	74.0	84.7	10.4
Employment status (reference group: not in the labour force)	76.4	86.3	9.2
Employed full-time	85.0	91.9	5.6
Employed part-time	78.7	87.8	8.1
Self-employed	79.4	87.8	7.5
Employer	79.5	87.2	7.1
Unpaid family worker	79.6	86.8	7.2
Unemployed	74.1	84.8	10.1
Age groups (reference group: age 25 to 64)	82.4	90.8	7.5
Ages 12 to 17	77.3	86.2	6.8
Ages 18 to 19	76.8	86.5	8.1
Ages 20 to 24	77.6	87.6	8.8
Ages 65 to 99	87.5	88.0	4.8
Sex (reference group: females)	80.6	90.0	8.1
Males	78.9	87.3	7.3
Background (reference group: English speaking background)	80.8	89.5	7.7
Non-English speaking background	76.8	85.6	7.8
Indigenous (reference group: non-Indigenous)	80.1	88.9	7.5
Indigenous	68.2	81.6	12.9
Reported disability (reference group: no reported disability)	80.0	88.8	7.6
Disability	75.0	85.8	9.8
Total (all students)	**79.8**	**88.7**	**7.7**

Note: * The predicted probabilities were derived by holding other characteristics constant at their average values.

The likelihood of a successful result is enhanced if a student is employed at the time of enrolment, and even more so if they are employed full-time. By contrast, the likelihood of success diminishes markedly if the student is not employed at the time of enrolment. The chance that a student will withdraw after enrolment is higher if the student is not employed at the time of enrolment.

There is a strong link between a student's prior educational attainment and their likelihood of success or withdrawing. Students who have Year 12 or higher qualifications are much more likely to achieve a successful result and less likely to withdraw than those students who have qualifications no higher than Year 11. While there are only marginal differences in the probabilities between students with Year 12 certificates, or post-school qualifications, the probabilities change substantially for students with Year 11 or lower qualifications.

Students from a non-English speaking background are as much as four percentage points less likely to achieve a successful result than those students whose country of birth is English speaking and whose main language spoken at home is English. There is, however, very little difference in the probability of withdrawing between students of English speaking and non-English speaking backgrounds.

Indigenous students fare least well of all designated equity groups. The probability of an Indigenous student passing an assessed subject or achieving a successful result is around seven and 12 percentage points lower respectively than for non-Indigenous students. In addition, Indigenous students are the most likely to withdraw of all student groups, having a probability of withdrawing more than five percentage points higher than non-Indigenous students.

The probability of success for students reporting a disability is significantly lower than for students not reporting a disability. In addition, their probability of withdrawing is higher.

The impact of equity overlap and diversity

The real story behind inequity can be masked if analysis of student equity groups is undertaken at aggregate levels alone. It is therefore important to consider the diversity that exists within individual student groups, and acknowledge that an individual may in fact be a member of multiple, overlapping groups.

To date, little in the way of empirical analysis has been carried out on quantifying the effects of overlap of student equity groups and the diversity within specific student groups on the likelihood of success. These are important issues and, as pointed out by Golding and Volkoff (1998), failure to fully acknowledge them has direct implications for the success of strategies aimed at overcoming inequity.

The regressions also allow for analysis on the impact that overlap and diversity have on each of the three outcome types: passing assessed subjects, a general successful outcome, and withdrawing.

The model parameters are additive. In other words, if a characteristic reduces or increases the probability of an outcome, it will do so in combination with other characteristics. For example, being Indigenous or unemployed reduces the likelihood of a successful VET outcome. Therefore, those students who are both unemployed and Indigenous are even less likely to achieve a successful outcome than students who are either Indigenous and employed, or unemployed and not Indigenous.

In addition to the usual designated equity groups, two additional student groups previously identified as 'at risk' groups[5]—unemployed students, and students aged 19 years or less—were considered.

Predicted probabilities were derived for each group analysed and are provided in appendix B.

Closer inspection of the resulting probabilities suggests that, in general, the likelihood of a student achieving a successful subject outcome is enhanced if the student is either female, employed, aged 25 years or more, and not a member of another target equity group. The nature of the models used means that the more of these characteristics a student has, the greater the likelihood of achieving a successful subject outcome.

On the other hand, the likelihood of a student achieving a successful subject outcome is significantly reduced if they are male, not employed, young, or a member of a target equity group. Again, the nature of the model means that the more of these characteristics a student has, the less the likelihood of a successful subject result.

To illustrate this effect, consider the selected predicted probabilities in table 2. The probability of passing an assessed subject is 85.8% for disabled students and 81.6% for Indigenous students. If the Indigenous student is not disabled, his or her probability increases slightly to 81.7%, while the probability for a disabled student who is not Indigenous marginally increases to 89%. However, if the student is both Indigenous and disabled, their probability of passing an assessed subject reduces to 77.4%. This compares with 89% for students who are neither Indigenous nor disabled.

Inspection of the probabilities in appendix B also indicates that the likelihood of withdrawal from VET subjects is, in general, increased if the student is female, from a rural or remote area, not employed, Indigenous, or disabled. Again, the more of these characteristics a student has, the greater their likelihood of withdrawing.

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[5] See, for example, Golding & Volkoff (1999); Dusseldorp Skills Forum (1999).

Conversely, the likelihood of withdrawing from VET subjects reduces if the student is male, not from a rural or remote area, employed (particularly if full-time) and neither Indigenous nor disabled. The more of these characteristics a student has, the less likely they are to withdraw.

Interestingly, students of school age up to 17 or post-labour force age—that is, 65 years or more—are less likely to withdraw than other students. In addition, there is only a marginal increase in the likelihood of withdrawing for students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Consider again the selected probabilities in table 2. Disabled students and Indigenous students have probabilities of withdrawing from a VET subject of 9.8% and 12.9% respectively. However, if the student is both Indigenous and disabled, the probability of withdrawing increases to 16.2%. This compares with a predicted probability of only 7.5% for students who are neither Indigenous nor disabled.

Table 2: Predicted probabilities for subject outcomes for Indigenous and disabled students

| | Passing assessed subjects | | | | | |
| Characteristic | Indigenous | | Non-Indigenous | | Assessed subjects | |
	Number of subjects	*Predicted probability*	*Number of subjects*	*Predicted probability*	*Number of subjects*	*Predicted probability*
Disability	18 087	77.4	291 824	86.1	309 911	85.8
No disability	271 189	81.7	8 080 450	89.0	8 351 639	88.8
Assessed subjects	**289 276**	**81.6**	**8 372 274**	**88.9**	**8 661 550**	**88.7**
	Subject withdrawal					
Characteristic	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		Assessed subjects	
	Number of subjects	*Predicted probability*	*Number of subjects*	*Predicted probability*	*Number of subjects*	*Predicted probability*
Disability	24 548	16.2	379 015	9.6	403 563	9.8
No disability	338 909	12.8	9 686 533	7.5	10 025 442	7.6
Total subjects	**363 457**	**12.9**	**10 065 548**	**7.5**	**10 429 005**	**7.7**

Conclusions

The results of this study confirm previous findings (see Ball 1998) that passing vocational education and training subjects is significantly influenced by demographic factors and, furthermore, some student groups will not achieve the same outcomes from their studies as other Australians. The results also support statements by Golding and Volkoff (1998, 1999) that issues associated with overlap and diversity within equity groups are important.

The results indicate that, in general, a student's likelihood of achieving a successful subject outcome reduces if they belong to more than one designated equity group. This means that the likelihood of a successful result is not only reduced by being a member of a target equity group, but *further* reduced if a member of more than one group. In a similar fashion, the likelihood of withdrawing increases if a student is a member of more than one equity group.

In particular, the likelihood of a successful outcome is significantly reduced for people who are Indigenous, have a disability, are of non-English speaking background, are unemployed, or young—particularly if aged 19 years or less. There is also strong evidence that the unemployed and the young are important student groups in relation to having a lower likelihood of achieving a successful result. These groups are also more likely to withdraw.

The results also confirm previous findings that being in employment, particularly full-time employment, increases the likelihood of passing or another successful outcome. This result was consistent across all student groups analysed. In other words, while a student's likelihood of success is reduced if a member of a target equity group, their likelihood of success will be enhanced if they are employed when they enter vocational education and training. Being in employment also reduces the likelihood of withdrawing.

Female students show an equal or higher likelihood of achieving a successful subject outcome than their male counterparts in general, and in relation to all sub-equity groups considered. They are, however, more likely to withdraw from VET subjects than males.

The results for residential regions tend to suggest that students residing in rural or remote locations are less likely to withdraw than those residing in capital cities or major urban areas. Rural and remote students are also more likely to achieve a successful result than those students residing in capital cities. It should be noted, however, that capital cities comprise a broad range of urban contexts which, when analysed as a single group, mask differences in the underlying profile of students who live there. This problem is likely to be exaggerated for smaller sub-populations such as equity groups.

The approach used here provides a deeper insight into the areas of inequity that exist in the sector and suggests that more detailed information relating to student participation and general employment outcomes is warranted.

Naturally, other variables related to the training itself, such as the field of study, the amount of training and the level of qualification, should also receive consideration as these will also have links to various outcome measures.

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Appendix A: Methodology

Data and variables

The analysis was undertaken using the 2000 VET providers data collection. These data are collected by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research under the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard.

The unit record data were used to analyse subject success. As most of the student record data are qualitative in nature, most explanatory variables were constructed as dummy variables; that is, the variable takes the value of '1' in the presence of a particular characteristic, and takes the value of '0' otherwise. The exception was the student's age which was initially left as a continuous variable and then defined as a set of dummy variables in later analysis.

In those situations where the student information associated with the student's subject outcome did not provide information on the student's age and sex, the observation was deleted from the analysis. In addition, only those records indicating a student's age as 12 years old or greater were kept.

Analysis was restricted to any subject enrolment having an outcome of assessed–pass, assessed–fail, not assessed–satisfactorily completed, not assessed–not satisfactorily completed, and withdrawn. Those subject enrolments where the outcome was a credit transfer, recognised prior learning, continuing studies, or unknown, were omitted from the analysis. It was felt these outcomes needed separate treatment. This resulted in over 85% of the 12.1 million subject enrolments in 2000 being analysed, comprising more than a million students.

Statistical analysis

Initial exploratory analysis using 'decision-tree' techniques was undertaken to identify the main demographic and life-stage variables for predicting whether a student passes or not. The results from the tree were used for subsequent input into logistic regressions.

Statistical analysis using logistic regression was undertaken to model the influence of the key student characteristics on the likelihood of a particular result of interest. This determines which student characteristics have the greatest impact on the chance of a student having the result of interest. Those characteristics identified through the decision-tree analysis were modelled to quantify their influence. All output and diagnostics resulting from the logistic regressions are available from the author.

By holding each of the characteristics constant and varying one at a time, it is possible to measure the impact of each characteristic on the likelihood of subject outcomes. This is normally achieved by analysing estimated odds ratios and their associated confidence intervals. As odds ratios are difficult to interpret, the

results were analysed through the derivation of predicted probabilities. The predicted probabilities for each characteristic are derived utilising the regression parameter estimates and the average values for each characteristic. Predicted probabilities for the major groups analysed are provided in appendix B.

Appendix B: Tables of predicted probabilities

Table 3: Predicted probabilities for female and male students*

Characteristic of interest	Successful outcomes		Passing assessed subjects		Withdrawing	
	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males
Region of residence						
Capital city	79.5	77.7	89.2	86.4	8.6	7.8
Other metropolitan	81.7	80.1	91.2	88.9	7.8	7.0
Rural	82.4	80.8	91.1	88.7	7.4	6.7
Remote	80.6	78.9	89.5	86.8	7.2	6.5
Outside Australia	84.4	83.0	91.8	89.6	5.9	5.3
Prior education level						
Degree	81.6	80.0	91.2	88.8	7.7	6.9
Diploma	81.9	80.3	90.9	88.5	7.4	6.7
Certificate	81.6	80.0	90.9	88.5	7.7	6.9
Year 12	83.7	82.2	91.1	88.7	6.8	6.1
Year 10 or 11	77.7	75.8	88.6	85.6	9.4	8.5
Year 9 or less	75.0	73.0	86.4	83.0	10.9	9.9
Employment status						
Employed full-time	85.7	84.4	92.9	91.0	5.9	5.3
Employed part-time	79.6	77.8	89.2	86.4	8.5	7.7
Self-employed	80.3	78.6	89.2	86.4	7.9	7.2
Employer	80.4	78.6	88.7	85.8	7.5	6.8
Unpaid family worker	80.5	78.8	88.3	85.3	7.6	6.8
Unemployed	75.1	73.1	86.5	83.1	10.7	9.7
Not in the labour force	77.4	75.5	87.9	84.8	9.7	8.8
Age groups						
Ages 12 to 17	78.3	76.4	87.7	84.6	7.2	6.5
Ages 18 to 19	77.8	75.9	88.1	85.0	8.6	7.7
Ages 20 to 24	78.5	76.7	89.1	86.2	9.3	8.4
Ages 25 to 64	83.2	81.7	91.9	89.7	7.9	7.1
Ages 65 to 99	88.1	86.9	89.4	86.6	5.1	4.6
Sex						
Female	80.6		90.0		8.1	
Male		78.9		87.3		7.3
Background						
English speaking background	81.6	80.0	90.8	88.3	8.1	7.3
Full non-English speaking background	77.7	75.9	87.2	84.0	8.2	7.4
Indigenous						
Non-Indigenous	81.0	79.3	90.2	87.6	7.9	7.2
Indigenous	69.3	67.1	83.6	79.6	13.5	12.3
Reported disability						
No disability	80.8	79.1	90.1	87.5	8.0	7.3
Disability	76.0	74.1	87.4	84.2	10.3	9.3

Note: * Probabilities have been derived by holding other characteristics constant at their average values.

Table 4: Predicted probabilities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students*

Characteristic of interest	Successful outcomes		Passing assessed subjects		Withdrawing	
	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.	Non-Indig.	Indig.
Region of residence						
Capital city	79.0	66.6	88.0	80.2	8.0	13.6
Other metropolitan	81.2	69.7	90.2	83.6	7.3	12.4
Rural	81.9	70.7	90.1	83.5	6.9	11.9
Remote	80.1	68.2	88.4	80.8	6.7	11.6
Outside Australia	84.0	73.6	90.9	84.7	5.5	9.5
Prior education level						
Degree	81.1	69.5	90.2	83.6	7.2	12.3
Diploma	81.4	69.9	89.9	83.2	6.9	11.9
Certificate	81.1	69.6	89.9	83.1	7.1	12.2
Year 12	83.2	72.5	90.1	83.4	6.3	10.9
Year 10 or 11	77.1	64.2	87.3	79.2	8.7	14.8
Year 9 or less	74.4	60.7	85.0	75.8	10.2	17.1
Employment status						
Employed full-time	85.3	75.5	92.1	86.6	5.5	9.6
Employed part-time	79.0	66.7	88.0	80.3	8.0	13.6
Self-employed	79.8	67.7	88.0	80.2	7.4	12.6
Employer	79.8	67.8	87.5	79.4	7.0	12.0
Unpaid family worker	79.9	67.9	87.1	78.8	7.0	12.1
Unemployed	74.5	60.8	85.1	75.9	10.0	16.7
Not in the labour force	76.8	63.8	86.6	78.1	9.0	15.3
Age groups						
Ages 12 to 17	77.7	64.9	86.4	77.9	6.7	11.5
Ages 18 to 19	77.2	64.3	86.8	78.4	8.0	13.6
Ages 20 to 24	78.0	65.2	87.9	80.1	8.7	14.7
Ages 25 to 64	82.8	71.8	91.0	84.8	7.3	12.5
Ages 65 to 99	87.7	79.2	88.2	80.5	4.7	8.3
Sex						
Female	81.0	69.3	90.2	83.6	7.9	13.5
Male	79.3	67.1	87.6	79.6	7.2	12.3
Background						
English speaking background	81.1	69.5	89.7	82.9	7.5	12.9
Full non-English speaking background	77.2	64.2	85.9	77.1	7.6	13.0
Indigenous						
Non-Indigenous	80.1		88.9		7.5	
Indigenous		68.2		81.6		12.9
Reported disability						
No disability	80.3	68.4	89.0	81.7	7.5	12.8
Disability	75.5	62.0	86.1	77.4	9.6	16.2

Note: * Probabilities have been derived by holding other characteristics constant at their average values.

Table 5: Predicted probabilities for students from English and non-English speaking backgrounds*

Characteristic of interest	Successful outcomes		Passing assessed subjects		Withdrawing	
	Non-English	English	Non-English	English	Non-English	English
Region of residence						
Capital city	75.5	79.6	84.5	88.7	8.3	8.1
Other metropolitan	78.0	81.9	87.3	90.8	7.5	7.4
Rural	78.8	82.5	87.1	90.7	7.1	7.0
Remote	76.8	80.8	85.0	89.1	6.9	6.8
Outside Australia	81.1	84.5	88.1	91.4	5.6	5.6
Prior education level						
Degree	77.9	81.7	87.2	90.8	7.4	7.3
Diploma	78.2	82.0	86.9	90.5	7.1	7.0
Certificate	77.9	81.8	86.9	90.5	7.4	7.3
Year 12	80.3	83.8	87.1	90.7	6.5	6.4
Year 10 or 11	73.4	77.8	83.7	88.1	9.0	8.9
Year 9 or less	70.5	75.2	80.8	85.8	10.5	10.3
Employment status						
Employed full-time	82.7	85.8	89.6	92.6	5.7	5.6
Employed part-time	75.6	79.7	84.5	88.7	8.2	8.1
Self-employed	76.4	80.4	84.5	88.7	7.6	7.5
Employer	76.5	80.5	83.8	88.2	7.2	7.1
Unpaid family worker	76.6	80.6	83.3	87.8	7.2	7.1
Unemployed	70.6	75.3	80.9	85.9	10.2	10.1
Not in the labour force	73.1	77.5	82.7	87.3	9.3	9.2
Age groups						
Ages 12 to 17	74.1	78.4	82.6	87.2	6.9	6.8
Ages 18 to 19	73.5	77.9	83.0	87.5	8.2	8.1
Ages 20 to 24	74.4	78.6	84.4	88.6	8.9	8.8
Ages 25 to 64	79.7	83.3	88.2	91.5	7.5	7.4
Ages 65 to 99	85.4	88.2	84.7	88.9	4.9	4.8
Sex						
Female	77.7	81.6	87.2	90.8	8.2	8.1
Male	75.9	80.0	84.0	88.3	7.4	7.3
Background						
English speaking background		80.8		89.5		7.7
Full non-English speaking background	76.8		85.6		7.8	
Indigenous						
Non-Indigenous	77.2	81.1	85.9	89.7	7.6	7.5
Indigenous	64.2	69.5	77.1	82.9	13.0	12.9
Reported disability						
No disability	77.0	80.9	85.7	89.6	7.7	7.6
Disability	71.6	76.2	82.1	86.8	9.9	9.8

Note: * Probabilities have been derived by holding other characteristics constant at their average values.

Table 6: Predicted probabilities for students with a disability and students without a disability*

Characteristic of interest	Successful outcomes		Passing assessed subjects		Withdrawing	
	Disability	No disability	Disability	No disability	Disability	No disability
Region of residence						
Capital city	73.7	78.8	84.7	87.9	10.4	8.1
Other metropolitan	76.4	81.1	87.5	90.1	9.4	7.3
Rural	77.2	81.8	87.3	90.0	9.0	7.0
Remote	75.0	79.9	85.2	88.3	8.8	6.8
Outside Australia	79.7	83.8	88.3	90.8	7.1	5.5
Prior education level						
Degree	76.2	80.9	87.4	90.1	9.3	7.2
Diploma	76.5	81.2	87.1	89.8	9.0	7.0
Certificate	76.2	81.0	87.1	89.8	9.3	7.2
Year 12	78.7	83.1	87.3	90.0	8.2	6.4
Year 10 or 11	71.6	76.9	83.9	87.2	11.3	8.8
Year 9 or less	68.4	74.2	81.1	84.9	13.1	10.3
Employment status						
Employed full-time	81.3	85.2	89.8	91.9	7.2	5.6
Employed part-time	73.8	78.8	84.8	87.8	10.3	8.0
Self-employed	74.6	79.6	84.7	87.8	9.6	7.5
Employer	74.7	79.7	84.0	87.2	9.1	7.1
Unpaid family worker	74.8	79.8	83.6	86.8	9.1	7.1
Unemployed	68.5	74.3	81.1	84.8	12.8	10.0
Not in the labour force	71.2	76.6	83.0	86.3	11.7	9.1
Age groups						
Ages 12 to 17	72.2	77.5	82.8	86.2	8.7	6.7
Ages 18 to 19	71.7	77.0	83.2	86.5	10.4	8.1
Ages 20 to 24	72.5	77.8	84.6	87.6	11.2	8.7
Ages 25 to 64	78.2	82.6	88.4	90.8	9.5	7.4
Ages 65 to 99	84.2	87.6	84.9	88.1	6.2	4.8
Sex						
Female	76.0	80.8	87.4	90.1	10.3	8.0
Male	74.1	79.1	84.2	87.5	9.3	7.3
Background						
English speaking background	76.2	80.9	86.8	89.6	9.8	7.6
Full non-English speaking background	71.6	77.0	82.1	85.7	9.9	7.7
Indigenous						
Non-Indigenous	75.5	80.3	86.1	89.0	9.6	7.5
Indigenous	62.0	68.4	77.4	81.7	16.2	12.8
Reported disability						
No disability		80.0		88.8		7.6
Disability	75.0		85.8		9.8	

Note: * Probabilities have been derived by holding other characteristics constant at their average values.

Table 7: Predicted probabilities by region of residence*

Characteristic of interest	Successful outcomes				Passing assessed subjects				Withdrawing			
	Cap. city	Oth. met.	Rur.	Rem.	Cap. city	Oth. met.	Rur.	Rem.	Cap. city	Oth. met.	Rur.	Rem.
Region of residence												
Capital city	78.6				87.8				8.2			
Other metropolitan		80.9				90.0				7.4		
Rural			81.6				89.9				7.0	
Remote				79.8				88.2				6.9
Prior education level												
Degree	79.6	81.9	82.5	80.8	89.2	91.2	91.1	89.5	7.7	7.0	6.7	6.5
Diploma	79.9	82.1	82.8	81.0	88.9	91.0	90.9	89.3	7.5	6.8	6.4	6.3
Certificate	79.7	81.9	82.6	80.8	88.9	91.0	90.9	89.3	7.7	7.0	6.7	6.5
Year 12	81.9	83.9	84.5	82.9	89.1	91.1	91.0	89.4	6.8	6.2	5.9	5.7
Year 10 or 11	75.5	78.0	78.8	76.7	86.1	88.6	88.5	86.5	9.5	8.6	8.2	8.0
Year 9 or less	72.6	75.3	76.2	74.0	83.6	86.5	86.3	84.1	11.0	10.0	9.5	9.3
Employment status												
Employed full-time	84.1	85.9	86.5	85.0	91.3	92.9	92.9	91.6	6.0	5.4	5.1	5.0
Employed part-time	77.5	79.8	80.6	78.7	86.9	89.3	89.1	87.3	8.6	7.8	7.4	7.2
Self-employed	78.3	80.6	81.3	79.4	86.8	89.2	89.1	87.2	8.0	7.2	6.9	6.7
Employer	78.3	80.6	81.3	79.5	86.2	88.7	88.6	86.7	7.6	6.8	6.5	6.3
Unpaid family worker	78.4	80.7	81.4	79.6	85.8	88.4	88.2	86.3	7.6	6.9	6.6	6.4
Unemployed	72.7	75.4	76.3	74.1	83.6	86.6	86.4	84.1	10.7	9.8	9.3	9.1
Not in the labour force	75.1	77.7	78.5	76.4	85.3	87.9	87.8	85.7	9.8	8.9	8.4	8.2
Age groups												
Ages 12 to 17	76.1	78.6	79.3	77.3	85.1	87.8	87.7	85.6	7.2	6.5	6.2	6.1
Ages 18 to 19	75.6	78.1	78.9	76.8	85.5	88.1	88.0	86.0	8.6	7.8	7.5	7.3
Ages 20 to 24	76.3	78.8	79.5	77.6	86.7	89.1	89.0	87.1	9.4	8.5	8.1	7.9
Ages 25 to 64	81.4	83.5	84.1	82.4	90.0	91.9	91.8	90.4	7.9	7.2	6.8	6.7
Ages 65 to 99	86.7	88.3	88.7	87.5	87.0	89.4	89.3	87.4	5.1	4.6	4.4	4.3
Sex												
Female	79.5	81.7	82.4	80.6	89.2	91.2	91.1	89.5	8.6	7.8	7.4	7.2
Male	77.7	80.1	80.8	78.9	86.4	88.9	88.7	86.8	7.8	7.0	6.7	6.5
Background												
English speaking background	79.6	81.9	82.5	80.8	88.7	90.8	90.7	89.1	8.1	7.4	7.0	6.8
Full non-English speaking background	75.5	78.0	78.8	76.8	84.5	87.3	87.1	85.0	8.3	7.5	7.1	6.9
Indigenous												
Non-Indigenous	79.0	81.2	81.9	80.1	88.0	90.2	90.1	88.4	8.0	7.3	6.9	6.7
Indigenous	66.6	69.7	70.7	68.2	80.2	83.6	83.5	80.8	13.6	12.4	11.9	11.6
Reported disability												
No disability	78.8	81.1	81.8	79.9	87.9	90.1	90.0	88.3	8.1	7.3	7.0	6.8
Disability	73.7	76.4	77.2	75.0	84.7	87.5	87.3	85.2	10.4	9.4	9.0	8.8

Note: * Probabilities have been derived by holding other characteristics constant at their average values.

Table 8: Predicted probabilities by employment status*

Characteristic of interest	Successful outcomes				Passing assessed subjects				Withdrawing			
	Full time	Part time	Un-emp.	NILF	Full time	Part time	Un-emp.	NILF	Full time	Part time	Un-emp.	NILF
Region of residence												
Capital city	84.1	77.5	72.7	75.1	91.3	86.9	83.6	85.3	6.0	8.6	10.7	9.8
Other metropolitan	85.9	79.8	75.4	77.7	92.9	89.3	86.6	87.9	5.4	7.8	9.8	8.9
Rural	86.5	80.6	76.3	78.5	92.9	89.1	86.4	87.8	5.1	7.4	9.3	8.4
Remote	85.0	78.7	74.1	76.4	91.6	87.3	84.1	85.7	5.0	7.2	9.1	8.2
Outside Australia	88.1	82.8	78.8	80.8	93.4	90.0	87.4	88.7	4.0	5.9	7.4	6.7
Prior education level												
Degree	85.8	79.7	75.3	77.5	92.9	89.2	86.5	87.9	5.3	7.7	9.6	8.7
Diploma	86.0	80.0	75.6	77.8	92.7	88.9	86.1	87.6	5.1	7.4	9.3	8.4
Certificate	85.9	79.7	75.3	77.6	92.7	88.9	86.1	87.5	5.3	7.7	9.6	8.7
Year 12	87.5	81.9	77.9	80.0	92.8	89.1	86.4	87.8	4.7	6.8	8.5	7.7
Year 10 or 11	82.6	75.5	70.5	73.1	90.8	86.1	82.8	84.5	6.5	9.4	11.7	10.6
Year 9 or less	80.4	72.7	67.3	70.0	89.0	83.6	79.8	81.7	7.6	10.9	13.6	12.4
Employment status												
Employed full-time	85.0				91.9				5.6			
Employed part-time		78.7				87.8				8.1		
Unemployed			74.1				84.8				10.1	
Not in the labour force				76.4				86.3				9.2
Age groups												
Ages 12 to 17	83.1	76.1	71.2	73.7	90.1	85.2	81.6	83.4	5.0	7.2	9.0	8.2
Ages 18 to 19	82.7	75.6	70.6	73.2	90.4	85.5	82.1	83.8	6.0	8.6	10.7	9.7
Ages 20 to 24	83.3	76.4	71.5	74.0	91.2	86.7	83.5	85.1	6.5	9.3	11.6	10.5
Ages 25 to 64	87.1	81.4	77.3	79.4	93.5	90.1	87.5	88.8	5.5	7.9	9.9	8.9
Ages 65 to 99	91.0	86.7	83.5	85.2	91.4	87.1	83.9	85.5	3.5	5.1	6.4	5.8
Sex												
Female	85.7	79.6	75.1	77.4	92.9	89.2	86.5	87.9	5.9	8.5	10.7	9.7
Male	84.4	77.8	73.1	75.5	91.0	86.4	83.1	84.8	5.3	7.7	9.7	8.8
Background												
English speaking background	85.8	79.7	75.3	77.5	92.6	88.7	85.9	87.3	5.6	8.1	10.1	9.2
Full non-English speaking background	82.7	75.6	70.6	73.1	89.6	84.5	80.9	82.7	5.7	8.2	10.2	9.3
Indigenous												
Non-Indigenous	85.3	79.0	74.5	76.8	92.1	88.0	85.1	86.6	5.5	8.0	10.0	9.0
Indigenous	75.5	66.7	60.8	63.8	86.6	80.3	75.9	78.1	9.6	13.6	16.7	15.3
Reported disability												
No disability	85.2	78.8	74.3	76.6	92.0	87.9	84.9	86.4	5.6	8.0	10.0	9.1
Disability	81.3	73.8	68.5	71.2	89.8	84.8	81.1	83.0	7.2	10.3	12.8	11.7

Notes: * Probabilities have been derived by holding other characteristics constant at their average values.
NILF = not in the labour force.

Table 9: Predicted probabilities by age group*

Characteristic of interest	Successful outcomes				Passing assessed subjects				Withdrawing			
	<20	20–24	25–64	65+	<20	20–24	25–64	65+	<20	20–24	25–64	65+
Region of residence												
Capital city	69.2	76.3	81.4	86.7	78.9	86.7	90.0	87.0	7.9	9.4	7.9	5.1
Other metropolitan	72.1	78.8	83.5	88.3	82.4	89.1	91.9	89.4	7.1	8.5	7.2	4.6
Rural	73.0	79.5	84.1	88.7	82.2	89.0	91.8	89.3	6.8	8.1	6.8	4.4
Remote	70.7	77.6	82.4	87.5	79.5	87.1	90.4	87.4	6.6	7.9	6.7	4.3
Outside Australia	75.8	81.8	85.9	90.1	83.5	89.8	92.5	90.1	5.4	6.4	5.4	3.5
Prior education level												
Degree	72.0	78.6	83.3	88.2	82.4	89.1	91.9	89.4	7.0	8.4	7.1	4.6
Diploma	72.3	78.9	83.6	88.4	81.9	88.8	91.7	89.1	6.8	8.1	6.8	4.4
Certificate	72.0	78.7	83.4	88.2	81.9	88.8	91.6	89.1	7.0	8.4	7.1	4.6
Year 12	74.8	81.0	85.2	89.6	82.2	89.0	91.8	89.3	6.2	7.4	6.2	4.0
Year 10 or 11	66.9	74.3	79.7	85.4	77.8	86.0	89.5	86.3	8.6	10.2	8.7	5.6
Year 9 or less	63.5	71.4	77.2	83.5	74.3	83.4	87.5	83.8	10.0	11.9	10.1	6.6
Employment status												
Employed full-time	77.7	83.3	87.1	91.0	76.6	91.2	93.5	91.4	5.4	6.5	5.5	3.5
Employed part-time	69.3	76.4	81.4	86.7	85.6	86.7	90.1	87.1	7.8	9.3	7.9	5.1
Self-employed	70.2	77.2	82.1	87.3	78.9	86.7	90.0	87.0	7.3	8.6	7.3	4.7
Employer	70.3	77.3	82.2	87.3	78.9	86.1	89.6	86.4	6.9	8.2	6.9	4.5
Unpaid family worker	70.4	77.4	82.3	87.4	78.0	85.7	89.2	86.0	6.9	8.2	7.0	4.5
Unemployed	63.6	71.5	77.3	83.5	77.4	83.5	87.5	83.9	9.8	11.6	9.9	6.4
Not in the labour force	66.5	74.0	79.4	85.2	74.3	85.1	88.8	85.5	8.9	10.5	8.9	5.8
Age groups												
Ages 12 to 19	70.7				80.3				7.4			
Ages 20 to 24		77.6				87.6				8.8		
Ages 25 to 64			82.4				90.8				7.5	
Ages 65 to 99				87.5				88.0				4.8
Sex												
Female	71.8	78.5	83.2	88.1	82.4	89.1	91.9	89.4	7.8	9.3	7.9	5.1
Male	69.6	76.7	81.7	86.9	78.2	86.2	89.7	86.6	7.1	8.4	7.1	4.6
Background												
English speaking background	72.0	78.6	83.3	88.2	81.6	88.6	91.5	88.9	7.4	8.8	7.4	4.8
Full non-English speaking background	66.9	74.4	79.7	85.4	75.5	84.4	88.2	84.7	7.5	8.9	7.5	4.9
Indigenous												
Non-Indigenous	71.1	78.0	82.8	87.7	80.6	87.9	91.0	88.2	7.3	8.7	7.3	4.7
Indigenous	56.7	65.2	71.8	79.2	69.7	80.1	84.8	80.5	12.5	14.7	12.5	8.3
Reported disability												
No disability	70.9	77.8	82.6	87.6	80.4	87.8	90.9	88.1	7.4	8.7	7.4	4.8
Disability	64.8	72.5	78.2	84.2	75.8	84.6	88.4	84.9	9.5	11.2	9.5	6.2

Note: * Probabilities have been derived by holding other characteristics constant at their average values.

The equity edge

An empirical approach to determining priority groups

Paul Morgan, Sonia Chiem and Haregu Ambaye

This chapter highlights the central role that a focus on equity can play in contributing to the continuous improvement of the vocational education and training (VET) sector. The approach adopted here is based on the premise that there are essentially three discrete stages at which groups of people with similar characteristics may be at risk of exclusion from the VET system, and that their low representation in any one of these stages identifies them as a priority group. The three stages of the VET pathway are as follows:

❖ current participation or previous successful participation in formal post-secondary education and training
❖ progression through elected studies in VET
❖ outcomes achieved as a result of VET training.

A separate analysis was performed for each stage of the training cycle, using a variety of Western Australian data sources and analysis variables. Hence results may not necessarily be applicable to other jurisdictions.

Introduction

THIS STUDY SEEKS to contribute to the development of a model that allows empirical data to define equity through the identification of priority groups within the context of the vocational education and training (VET) system.

The approach is based on the premise that there are essentially three discrete stages at which groups of people with similar characteristics may be at risk of exclusion from the VET system, and that their low representation in any one of these stages identifies them as a *priority group*. The three stages of the VET pathway are as follows:

❖ *current participation or previous successful participation* in formal post-secondary education and training

❖ *progression* through elected studies in VET

❖ *outcomes* achieved as a result of VET training.

This study will use empirical data as a basis for identifying those who are experiencing barriers within the system and at which stage within the cycle. The national VET system, the Western Australian Office of Training and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) all collect valuable information which has provided the foundation to an empirically based analysis and approach.

Through a greater focus on participation, progression and outcomes, the approach emphasises VET system performance, rather than a focus on equity groups per se. It aims to promote the vision of an efficient and effective training system, responsive to the needs of all learners. The approach seeks to highlight those clients whom the system is currently not accommodating, and to provide increased opportunities for more effective targeting of interventions and strategies.

The performance of priority groups is a significant factor guiding interventions and strategies within the system, and this new perspective will be important in providing empirical support to the equity agenda. The intention is to give equity a sharper focus, with a central role in the continuous improvement of the VET system.

The approach is presented as both emergent and exploratory, and is intended to promote discussion and further development.

This study has analysed the Western Australian VET system only; hence, results may not necessarily be applicable to other jurisdictions.
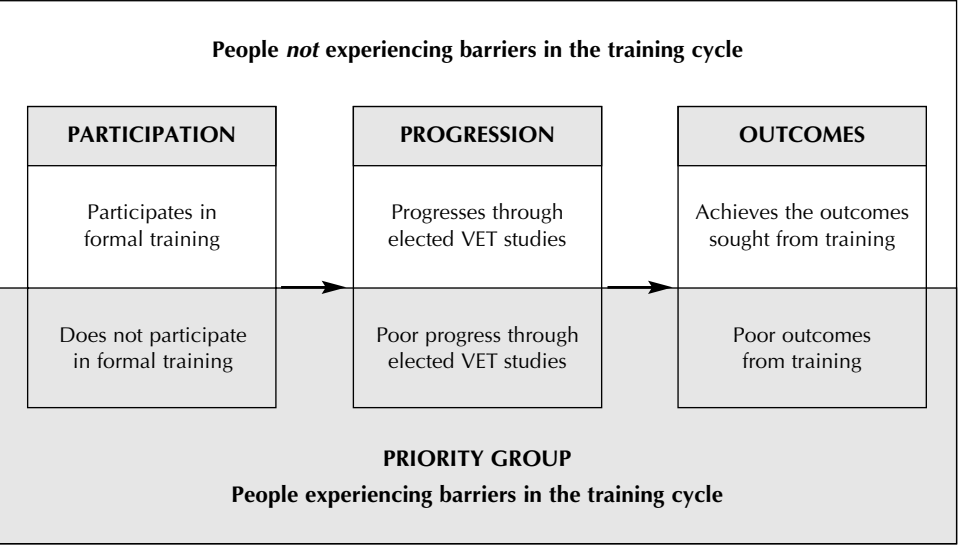
Proposed model

Figure 1 outlines the proposed model. The model is based on the assumption that a group of people is defined as a priority group if they are experiencing barriers and only in relation to the stage(s) in which they are experiencing them.

The vision is for all people to be able to access and perform in the VET system equally. When a group is experiencing barriers at a particular stage, a break occurs in the training cycle for the respective group. (For example, females may participate in vocational education and training and progress through their courses, but not achieve the same outcomes from training as males. Thus, at the outcomes stage there is a break in the training cycle for females, and in this respect, they would be a priority group). Strategies and interventions need to be targeted to address any imbalances in the training system and engage or re-engage the priority group within the cycle.

In seeking to identify empirically those groups experiencing barriers to participation and success in the training system, this project is restricted by the scope of information in the relevant data sets. This factor needs to inform the interpretation of the project outcomes.

Figure 1: Proposed conceptual framework for defining priority groups at each stage within the training cycle

Research questions

Specifically, this research seeks to explore the application of the proposed model within the context of the Western Australian VET system. This will involve identifying groups within the system who are experiencing barriers, and to determine at which stage of the training cycle the barriers are encountered. The following research questions underpinned this investigation:

❖ Are there groups of people with similar characteristics who are more likely to experience barriers at any stage of the training cycle? If so, what are the demographic and labour market characteristics that distinguish them from non-priority groups?

❖ To what extent are the identified characteristics associated with priority groups? Are some characteristics more influential than others in identifying priority groups?

❖ Given certain demographic and labour market characteristics, what is the probability of experiencing barriers for identified priority groups?

Procedure

Research design

The research design involved three separate analyses, one at each stage of the training cycle. In each analysis the research questions listed above were

investigated, using differing data sources and variables appropriate to the training stage. Table 1 provides an overview of the research design.

Table 1: Research design at each stage of the training cycle

	Stage within the training cycle		
	Participation	Progression	Outcomes
Data file	2001 survey of education, training and information technology	Western Australian AVETMISS[1] VET data collection, student enrolment records from 1998–2001	2001 student outcomes survey
Data file source	Australian Bureau of Statistics	Western Australian Department of Education and Training	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
Scope	Western Australian general community aged 15–64	Western Australian VET students (ANTA scope) aged 15 or older	Western Australian VET graduates and module completers
Sample size (usable records)	3307	108 803	9312
Response variable	Current participant or previous successful participant in formal training[2]	Progresses through elected VET studies[2]	Achieves the outcomes sought from training[2]
Explanatory variables (hypothesised)	Gender	Gender	Gender
	Age	Age	Age
	Indigenous	Indigenous	Indigenous
	Disability	Disability	Disability
	Highest secondary schooling	Highest secondary schooling	Highest secondary schooling
	Non-English speaking background (NESB)[3]	NESB[3]	NESB[3]
	Employment status	Employment status	Employment status before course and during course
	Marital status	Area of residence	Area of residence
	Child under 3 years old	Qualifications	Qualifications
	Year of arrival in Australia		
Analysis technique	Logistic regression	Logistic regression	Logistic regression

Notes: 1 AVETMISS = Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard
2 Detailed definitions for each response variable are provided in the results section of the chapter under respective sub-sections.
3 Defined as the first language spoken at home in one other than English.

Analysis

The analysis technique selected for the investigation was logistic regression. This procedure determines the extent to which *explanatory variables* have a

significant and unique relationship with each respective *response variable* (see table 1) (Tabachnick & Fidell 2001). By identifying which variables are important in predicting each of the response variables and the magnitude of its influence, it becomes possible to accurately target priority groups.

Analysis using the logistic regression procedure involves building models. The models consist of explanatory variables which significantly explain outcomes in the respective response variable. In the present analysis, three final models were built, one for each stage within the training cycle. Design principles have been used to ensure valid models were built for each stage:

❖ Each model was designed using 70% of the sample only, and then tested or cross-validated against the remaining sample. Models which did not remain stable across populations were rejected.

❖ Models were also rejected if they did not lead to significant improvements in predicting priority groups, or the data did not fit the model adequately.[1]

❖ Only significant (and unique on a multivariate level and within a 95% confidence interval) explanatory variables were retained, and usually only if the relationships were supported by descriptive (that is, univariate) explanations or previously considered hypotheses. Variable interactions were also examined where determined appropriate.

❖ Direct and sequential procedures were used, rather than statistical (that is, stepwise) procedures (see Tabachnick & Fidell 2001), ensuring that no explanatory variables were unduly excluded from the model.

The models were used to estimate the likelihood of barriers occurring, given certain characteristics. In the results section to follow, tables are provided which present the probabilities for each training stage. These tables provide an understanding of the nature of priority groups at each stage of the VET cycle.

Results

This section presents the results from the logistic regression analyses. It also provides an overview of the methodology as it relates specifically to each stage within the training cycle. The results section is divided into three parts:

❖ participation in formal training

❖ student progression through training

❖ student outcomes from training.

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[1] The model built for progression did not have a very good data-to-model fit, although it was better than chance (at the 0.001 level) at explaining progression. There are interactions within the model which, when accounted for, provided a much better fitting model, but added to the complexity of interpretation. The proposed model for progression is not, therefore, optimum.

Participation or previous successful participation in formal training

Background

The initial phase of this research project identified the characteristics of those in the population who were not participating, or had not previously successfully participated in formal post-secondary education and training. To undertake this analysis, the Survey of Education, Training and Information Technology (SETIT) conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, was used. This is a national survey which collects information on individuals' educational attainment, participation in education and training, and use of information technology. For the purposes of this research project, Western Australian responses collected during 2001 were used in the analysis.

The data file consisted of 3324 records in total. Only 17 records were removed due to non-responses, leaving 3307 records for analysis purposes.

A definition of participation was developed for this project and is given in table 2. This definition encompasses all forms of formal post-secondary education and training, not just vocational education and training. It also captures those currently undertaking some form of formal post-secondary education and training, and importantly, those who have previously completed a formal post-secondary education and training course.[2] From this point forward, the notion of participation is used liberally to encompass this definition.

Table 2:   Definitions of participation

Participation	Description
Participant	❖ All individuals who are currently participating in some form of formal post-secondary education, or
	❖ All individuals who have previously completed some form of formal post-secondary education which was of a certificate III level or above.*
Non-participant	❖ All individuals who are currently not participating in any form of formal post-secondary education, and
	❖ Who have not previously completed some form of formal post-secondary education of a certificate III level or above.

Note: * For those who previously successfully participated in formal studies, the certificate III level has been chosen as a cut-off point, due to people with higher qualifications being better positioned in the labour market.

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[2] Incorporating previous successful participation was considered essential in defining participation, as it better isolates those people who are excluded from accessing the system. Without this aspect of the definition, people who had previously successfully participated but were not current participants would have been considered non-participants. This was considered appropriate, given that people who were previous successful participants had already been able to successfully access services from the system, and thus could not be appropriately considered an equity group.

Using the above definitions, approximately 51% of the sample were classified as non-participants and 49% were classified as participants.[3]

Which characteristics have the greatest influence in predicting current participation or previous successful participation?

A model to predict an individual's probability of participating in formal post-secondary education and training was developed. The model identified five explanatory variables which were significantly associated with participation. It is acknowledged that one set of variables—labour force status—are essentially outcome variables: education tends to lead to better employment outcomes. Their inclusion means that basically we have a description or identification of those who have participated, rather than a prediction of whom will participate. In table 3, the explanatory variables have been ranked according to their degree of influence on participation, and attached to each are the *characteristics* most associated with non-participation. The characteristics identified will define the priority groups in relation to participation.

Table 3: Explanatory variables and their degree of importance in predicting participation

Hypothesised explanatory variables	Importance	Characteristics associated with non-participants[2]
	Ranking[1]	
Highest school level	1	Left school prior to completing Year 10
Gender	2	Female
Employment status	3	Not in labour force
Born or time lived in Australia	4	Either born or lived in Australia for more than 5 years
Parent with a child under 3 years old	5	Have a child under 3 years old
Disability	Not significant	-
Area of residence	Not significant	-
NESB	Not significant	-
Age	Not significant	-

Notes: 1 The variables were ranked according to the reduction in the chi-square statistic of the model following the removal of the respective variable from the final model. This statistic was determined from the likelihood ratio test.
2 Determined by a low logistic regression coefficient for the respective characteristic.

Students who could be targeted as a priority group would be those possessing one or more of the five characteristics (see last column of table 3). For example, people who left school prior to completing Year 10 might be targeted especially if they were also female and not in the labour force.

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[3] It is important to note that participation is not referenced to the social or vocational needs of particular groups. For example, it may be that people from a particular group need to have a higher rate of participation in education than the norm to redress a greater level of social or economic disadvantage. Such groups were not identified in this methodology.

Explanatory variables not found to have a significant effect on the response variable were excluded from further analysis.

Table 4 presents the probabilities of each significant characteristic. The higher the probability, the more likely it is that the individual with the characteristic(s) will participate in training. The intent of the table is to inform the targeting of programs and interventions to those who are most disadvantaged:

❖ The likelihood of *males* participating in post-secondary education and training was substantially higher than *females* (50% compared to 38%).

❖ Consistent with expectations that the higher the individual's secondary educational attainment, the more likely he/she would have participated in post-secondary education and training, there was a considerable increment in the likelihood of individuals participating with each level of secondary schooling completed (*Year 10*, 18%; *Year 10/11*, 38%; *Year 12*, 70%).

❖ In relation to labour force status, the model results clearly show an association between education and labour market success. At one level this demonstrates the return realised by education. At another level, the unemployed and those not in the labour force are likely to be educationally disadvantaged and hence candidates for further education and training.

❖ The probabilities also suggested that individuals who *arrived in Australia in the last five years* (55%) were more likely to participate in post-secondary education and training than those who were born in Australia or have lived in Australia for more than five years (38%).

❖ *Parents with one or more children under three years of age* (31%) were less likely to participate in post-secondary education and training compared to those who did *not have a child under three years of age* (38%).

Student progression in training

Background

This section profiles characteristics of students who were failing to progress through their elected studies. Student progression was analysed using the Western Australian component of the National VET Provider database.

From Western Australia a sample containing 108 803 records was available for analysis. Due to non-responses in one or more of the analysis variables, it should be noted that, of the 358 702 student enrolment records in the data file, 249 899 cases had to be excluded. This level of non-response may have introduced a level of non-response bias in the findings.

Table 4: Relative probability (%) of being either a current or previous successful participant in post-secondary education and training by characteristic

Demographic characteristic	Probability of being a participant (%)[1, 2, 3]
Male	50
Female*	38
No Year 10	18
Year 10/11*	38
Year 12	70
Employed—full-time*	38
Employed—part-time	36
Unemployed	28
Not in labour force	25
Born or lived in Australia for more than 5 years*	38
Arrived in the last five years	55
Have child under 3 years old	31
No child under 3 years old*	38

Notes: * Denotes reference category.

      1 Table provides relative probabilities only. Relative probabilities need to be considered in relation to the reference category of the respective variables. Comparison across variables is not appropriate.

      2 All variables listed in the table are significant to at least the 95% confidence level.

      3 Probabilities were calculated using standard probability formulas for logistic regression models, involving the use of the logistic regression coefficients (for further detail see Tabachnick & Fidell 2001, p.525). A base case scenario methodology was used to calculate the probabilities. The methodology assumes that the population of interest is average, as determined by the mode responses to each of the variables, except in the case of the characteristic(s) of interest.

The measure of progression used in this section was based on a method developed by the Western Australian Department of Training (Drozdowski 2002). The definition of progression considers the proportion of elected studies completed (typically referred to as 'client module load completion rate') and the exit point of the student from the VET system, as described in table 5.

Table 5: Definition of high and low progression

Progression	Description
Low progression	Students who did not graduate from any course and failed to complete at least 90% of their elected study (in their first year of study)
High progression	Students who graduated from their course or another unrelated course, or have completed 90% or more of their elected study (in their first year of study)

Using this definition, 37% of students were classified as having low progression and 63% as having high progression.

Which characteristics have the greatest influence in predicting progression?

Table 6 indicates that the results of the analysis suggested that there were six characteristics which influenced student progression. These variables and their associated characteristics have also been ranked according to the degree of their influence on progression.

Table 6: Explanatory variables and their degree of importance in predicting progression

Hypothesised explanatory variables	Importance	Characteristics associated with low progression[2]
	Ranking[1]	
Age	1	Age 15–24
Indigenous	2	Indigenous
Employment status during course	3	Unemployed
Area of residence	4	Capital city
Highest school level	5	Left school prior to completing Year 10
Disability	6	Disability
Qualifications	Not significant	-
NESB*	Not significant	-

Notes: 1 The variables were ranked according to the reduction in the chi-square statistic of the model following the removal of the respective variable from the final model. This statistic was determined from the likelihood ratio test.
2 Determined by a low logistic regression coefficient for the respective characteristic.
* NESB = non-English speaking background

The results indicated that age had the strongest influence on progression, suggesting that progression is better related to life stage.

Table 7 presents the estimated probability of students progressing through the VET system:

❖ The probability of people *aged 15 to 24* (60%) progressing through the system was considerably lower than those *aged 25 to 44* (67%) and *aged 45+* (70%).

❖ There was a slight, yet significant difference between the progression probabilities of students with a disability (62%) and those *without a disability* (67%).

❖ The probabilities also indicated that students in *regional* areas were more likely to progress through the VET system than those in the *capital city* (71% and 67% respectively).

❖ With regards to a student's employment status, those *employed full-time* (67%) were more likely to progress through the system than any other

labour force status category (*employed part-time*, 64%; *not in labour force*, 64%). Those who were *unemployed* had the lowest likelihood of progressing (61%) than all other labour force status categories.

❖ One of the most substantial differences in probabilities was found between *Indigenous* students and *non-Indigenous* students. Students who were Indigenous were considerably less likely to progress through their studies than non-Indigenous students (52% compared to 67% respectively).

❖ The results also indicated that the higher the educational attainment in secondary schooling, the more likely the student would progress through the VET system (*Year 10*, 64%; *Year 10/11*, 67% and *Year 12*, 70%).

Table 7: Relative probability (%) of achieving a high progression in the VET system by characteristic

Demographic characteristic	Probability of achieving high progression (%)[1, 2, 3, 4]
Age 15–24	60
Age 24–44*	67
Age 45+	70
Disability	62
No disability*	67
Regional	71
Capital city*	67
Employed—full-time*	67
Employed—part-time	64
Unemployed	61
Not in labour force	64
Indigenous background	52
Non-Indigenous background*	67
No Year 10	64
Year 10/11*	67
Year 12	70

Notes: * Denotes reference category.

1 Table provides relative probabilities only. Relative probabilities need to be considered in relation to the reference category of the respective variables.

2 Interactions between variables have not been fully exhausted. Thus it is possible that other meaningful interactions may exist, that could affect probabilities for all groups.

3 All variables are significant to the 95% confidence level.

4 Probabilities were calculated using standard probability formulas for logistic regression models, involving the use of the logistic regression coefficients (for further detail see Tabachnick & Fidell 2001, p.525). A base case scenario methodology was used to calculate the probabilities. The methodology assumes that the population of interest is average, as determined by the mode responses to each of the variables, except in the case of the characteristic(s) of interest.

Student outcomes from training

Background

This section identifies the characteristics of students who are not achieving their desired outcome upon completion of their course.

The 2001 national Student Outcomes Survey conducted by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) provided the sample. Samples from graduate and module completer data files were merged to ensure broad representation of students. The data file consisted of 13 049 records, of which only 9312 were useable. Of the usable records, 62% were graduates and 38% were module completers.

Students were determined as achieving their outcome, if they achieved their *primary outcome* from training. Primary outcome has been defined in relation to the individual student and what each hoped to achieve as an outcome from their studies. A full definition is provided in table 8.

Table 8: Definitions of achieving outcomes

Outcomes	Description
Achieved primary outcome	Students do achieve their main reason for study six months after completing their training
Did not achieve primary outcome	Students do not achieve their main reason for study six months after completing their training

This definition requires each student to be individually assessed to determine his/her reason for study and whether this was achieved after completing his/her training. The framework for assessing student outcomes developed by the Western Australian Department of Training (2002) provides a methodology to make this possible, and was applied to this analysis. This framework divides the student population into segments based on their purpose for undertaking training. Each segment was then attributed with one or more outcome(s) that would fairly represent success for that segment. It is believed that this approach to determining outcomes more fairly represents student success than the traditional measures of employment outcomes alone, because it acknowledges the varied reasons of why people engage in study and defines success from their unique perspectives.

Table 9 outlines the characteristics of these segments and lists the primary outcome(s) associated with each segment.

Using this methodology and the definitions given in table 8, 58% of all students achieved their primary outcome from training, with graduates achieving a slightly higher rate (58.3%) than module completers (56.7%).

Table 9: Description of student segments and the primary outcome(s) they are seeking from training

Student segment	Description	Primary outcome(s)
Labour market entrants	Seeking an initial skilled job as a result of training	No job to job
		Exiting to better job
Career changers	Aspiring to start a new or different career	Relevant job
Skill improvers	Studying to update their skills to gain a promotion or improve their career	One or more job-related benefit
Apprentices and trainees	Undertaking study as a requirement of an apprenticeship or traineeship	Same or better job
Further education	Studying for personal development or to improve themselves	Achieved reason for study

Source: Adapted from Western Australian Department of Training (2002).

Which characteristics have the greatest influence in predicting training outcomes?

Table 10 provides a ranking on the importance of each exploratory variable and lists the characteristics associated with not achieving outcomes.

Table 10: Explanatory variables and their degree of importance in predicting outcomes

Hypothesised explanatory variables	Importance Ranking[1]	Characteristics associated with not achieving primary outcome[2]
Age group by employment status before course	1	Age 45+ *and* Not employed Age 24–44 *and* Not employed
Employment status during course	2	Not employed
Age	3	Aged 25 to 44
Disability	4	Disabled
Area of residence	5	Capital city
NESB by employment status before course	6	NESB *and* Not employed
Gender	7	Female
Qualifications	8	No previous qualification
Indigenous	Not significant	-
Highest school level	Not significant	-

Notes: 1 The variables were ranked according to the reduction in the chi-square statistic of the model following the removal of the respective variable from the final model. This statistic was determined from the likelihood ratio test.
2 Determined by a low logistic regression coefficient for the respective characteristic.

Table 11 presents the estimated probability of students achieving their primary outcome from training:

- ❖ The probability of *males* achieving their primary outcome from training (61%) was slightly higher than the comparison group of *females* (58%).

- ❖ People *aged 25 to 44* had the lowest likelihood of achieving their outcomes from training (57%), especially compared to those *aged 45+*, who had a very high probability of 65%. People *aged 15 to 24* had a moderate probability of 58%[4].

- ❖ People aged 45+ were substantially less likely to achieve their desired outcome when they were also *unemployed prior to their course*. For those aged 45+ and unemployed prior to their course, the likelihood of achieving their outcomes dropped to a very low 35%.

- ❖ For people with *disabilities* (46%), the probability of attaining a primary outcome from training was considerably lower than those *without disabilities* (58%).

- ❖ People from *regional* areas (64%) were considerably more likely than those from the *capital city* region (58%) to achieve their primary outcome from training.

- ❖ People with a *bachelor's degree or higher* prior to the course had better outcomes than those with either *no qualifications or other qualifications*. The likelihood of obtaining a successful outcome for each of these respective groups is 65%, 58% and 59%.

- ❖ Those who were *unemployed during* the course (49%) were considerably less likely to achieve their primary outcome from training by comparison with those who were *employed during* the course (58%).

- ❖ People from a non-English speaking background were less likely to achieve their outcome only if they were unemployed during their course. The likelihood of attaining their outcomes drops from 58% to 50%.

Discussion

Overview

This section provides a synopsis of the results from the investigation, and discusses these in relation to each of the explanatory variables and the three stages of training.

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[4] It is important to consider the nature of the outcomes sought by each age group. For example, those aged 45+ tend to undertake courses for personal interest, while those aged 25–44 undertake their courses in order to obtain a new job or a promotion. See the further research section for a more complete explanation.

Table 11: Relative probability (%) of achieving primary outcome from training by characteristic

Demographic characteristic primary outcome (%)[1, 2, 3, 4]	Probability of achieving
Male	61
Female*	58
Age 15–24*	58
Age 25–44	57
Age 45+	65
Disability	46
No disability*	58
Regional	64
Capital city*	58
No previous qualifications*	58
Other previous qualifications	59
Bachelor degree or higher previous qualifications	65
Unemployed during course	49
Employed during course*	58
Age 15–24 Unemployed before course*	58
Age 15–24 Employed before course*	58
Age 24–44 Unemployed before course	46
Age 24–44 Employed before course*	58
Age 45+ Unemployed before course	35
Age 45+ Employed before course*	58
NESB Unemployed during course	52
NESB Employed during course*	58
ESB Unemployed during course*	58
ESB Employed during course*	58

Notes: * Denotes reference category.
   1 Table provides relative probabilities only. Relative probabilities need to be considered in relation to the reference category of the respective variables.
   2 Interactions between variables have not been fully exhausted, thus it is possible that other meaningful interactions may exist that could affect probabilities for all groups.
   3 All variables listed in the table are significant to at least the 95% confidence level.
   4 Probabilities were calculated using standard probability formulas for logistic regression models, involving the use of the logistic regression coefficients (for further detail see Tabachnick & Fidell 2001, p.525). A base case scenario methodology was used to calculate the probabilities. The methodology assumes that the population of interest is average, as determined by the mode responses to each of the variables, except for in the case of the characteristic(s) of interest.

Table 12 indicates whether a characteristic is negatively or positively associated with participation, progression or outcomes. A negative association, for example, indicates that this characteristic is more likely to predict poor participation, progression or outcomes.

Table 12: Overview of the equity characteristics and the nature of their relationship with the three key stages of training

Equity variables		Participation	Progression	Outcome
Gender	Female	▼	▬	▼
	Male	▲	▬	▲
Age	Age 15–24	▬	▼	▼
	Age 25–44	▬	▲	▼
	Age 45+	▬	▲	▲
Disability	Disability	▬	▼	▼
Indigenous	Indigenous	•	▼	▬
NESB	Non-English speaking background	▬	▬	▬
Year of arrival in Australia	Arrived in Australia in the last five years	▲	•	•
Highest secondary schooling	Left school prior to Year 10	▼	▼	▬
	Left school at Year 10 or 11	▼	▲	▬
	Left school at Year 12	▲	▲	▬
Previous qualifications	No previous qualifications	•	▬	▼
	Other previous qualifications	•	▬	▼
	Bachelor degree or higher	•	▬	▲
Region	Capital city	▬	▼	▼
	Rural/regional	▬	▲	▲
Labour force status	Employed—full-time	▲	▲	•
	Employed—part-time	▲	▲	•
	Unemployed	▼	▼	•
	Not in labour force	▼	▲	•
Employment status before course	Employed before course	•	•	▬
	Not employed before course	•	•	▬
Employment status during course	Employed during course	•	•	▲
	Not employed during course	•	•	▼
Parent with a child under 3 years old	Child under 3 years old	▼	•	•

Notes: ▲ = positively associated; ▼ = negatively associated; ▬ = not significantly related; • = not tested

Gender

Gender was significant at both the participation and outcomes stage of the training cycle. Females were less likely than males to participate in training and to achieve their outcomes from training. Gender was not an issue in relation to student progression.

Age

People within the age group of 15 to 24 were less likely to progress through their training and to achieve their outcomes. People aged 45+ had better outcomes than the other two age groups, unless they were unemployed prior to commencing their course, when their outcomes became significantly worse than any other equity group.

The results suggest that effort focused on improving outcomes for people aged 45+ might be better spent on people aged 45+ who were *also* unemployed prior to commencing their course. Some effort also needs to be focused on people aged 15 to 24 to assist them to progress through their course and to achieve better outcomes.

Disability

Disability alone was not a significant variable in relation to participation. This finding was contrary to expectations. It appears that disability was not significant because its effects had been accounted for by both *labour force status* and *highest school level*. Further research into the relationship between disability and these variables is required.

In respect to progression and outcomes, people with disabilities were less likely to progress through their course and were substantially less likely to achieve the outcomes they sought from their training.

Indigenous people

Due to an unavailability of data, it was not possible to test whether people who were from an Indigenous background were less likely to participate in formal study than the general population. Previous studies, however, have shown that Indigenous people are well represented within the Western Australian VET system (Chiem 2002).

Being Indigenous was the second most important driver of progression, with people from an Indigenous background having a low likelihood of completing their elected studies. A more positive finding was that those who make it through the system experience training outcomes which were comparable to those within the general population.

The results strongly suggested that effort within the system should largely be concentrated on assisting Indigenous people to progress through the system. The research suggested that Indigenous people who were *also* unemployed, had a disability, and/or were aged between 15 and 24 had increasingly lower likelihoods of progressing through their course.

Non-English speaking background

People from a non-English speaking background were found not to have lower rates of participation, progression or outcomes than the norm. This finding is contrary to expectations, and can also be explained in terms of other associated characteristics, as described above (see under disability). Associated characteristics relevant to non-English speaking background people might include being unemployed, or not completing Year 10.

The year of arrival in Australia was found to be a significant driver of participation, with people who had arrived within the last five years being substantially more likely to participate in formal training.

Highest year of secondary schooling

Highest year of secondary school completed was a significant driver of participation. People who did not complete Year 10 were substantially less likely to participate in formal post-secondary education. Any attempts to increase participation within the system would almost certainly need to target those people who did not complete Year 10.

In relation to progression, highest school level was also a significant driver of progression. People who had left school prior to Year 10 were significantly less likely to progress through their course. It was not, however, found to be a significant driver of outcome attainment.

Previous qualification

People with a bachelor degree or higher were substantially more likely than any group to achieve their outcomes. Previous qualification was not a significant issue for progression, and it was not tested for participation due to overlap with the response variable.

Region

Region was found to be a significant driver for both progression and outcomes attainment. Data on region were not available in the Survey of Education, Training and Information Technology data set to enable an examination of its effects upon participation. Interestingly, people from the capital city appeared to be more disadvantaged than those from other areas. It is possible that there may exist particular socio-economic and system contexts within regional areas which naturally contribute towards better client progression and outcomes. It would be interesting in future research to separate rural from remote to examine whether remote emerges as an issue.

Labour force status

Labour force status was the only available issue to remain an important driver across all training cycle stages. Unemployment is strongly related to non-participation, low progression and not achieving outcomes. The evidence strongly suggests that this group should be targeted as a priority group right across the system.

There are only minor differences between people employed full-time and people employed part-time in terms of participation, progression and achievement of desired outcomes.

Parent with a child under three years old

Parents with children under three years of age were significantly less likely to participate in training than parents with children over the age of three. No further information on this variable was available with regards to progression and outcomes.

Conclusion

Contributing to the development of a new model for the identification of priority groups was the major objective of this study and involved the development of an empirical model to identify groups of individuals with similar characteristics who experience barrier(s) at one or more stages within the VET training cycle (that is, participation, progression and outcomes). The model was applied using Western Australian data and the findings need to be considered in this light.

A key tenet of the study was to 'let the data speak for itself'. This study intended to create an analytical structure not limited to any previous definitions of 'equity groups'. However, it was inevitable that the hypothesised variables were comprised from groups of people traditionally categorised as equity groups, and so to a certain degree would reflect previous definitions of equity groups. Despite this, the findings provide empirical support for current priorities in relation to policies and strategies targeted at these groups. It is important to note that not all of the traditional variables emerged as significant at all stages of the training cycle.

The model also provided the opportunity to identify new and emerging groups which may be potential priority groups. One group which emerged from the analysis was that of parents with children under three years of age. Issues relevant to the experience of this group need to be further researched and understood.

In addition to these findings, this study was able to take the conceptualisation of the VET system one step further by developing a model which identifies the point(s) at which these 'priority groups' are experiencing barriers within the training cycle. By doing this, the research indicated that various population groups experience barriers at different stages of the training cycle. It also indicated that additional variables associated with each priority group influenced the relative success in relation to the model. For example, the variable *people from a non-English speaking background* alone did not emerge as a significant variable in relation to outcomes, but emerged as a significant variable when these same individuals were also *unemployed*.

The model's ability to chart the movement of priority groups across the stages of training successfully, clearly illustrates how different groups engage with the VET system in different ways. Understanding the patterns of engagement for each identified priority group provides information on which to base interventions. The model's ability to rank identified priority groups in regard to the strength of their association with their stage of the training cycle also allows groups to be prioritised for intervention strategies. This is essential within the context of a system with limited resources.

The models which were built at each stage can only represent a snapshot of the available data. It would be interesting to test the robustness of the models across time or jurisdictions. It would also be useful to test alternative definitions of participation, progression or outcomes, or investigate other stages within the training cycle which may be also be critical in determining relative success.

Further research

This project represents an initial stage in providing an empirical foundation for the identification of populations which may be at some disadvantage in terms of the three stages of the training cycle. Further research is required to identify authoritatively specific populations and issues which require consideration in the planning of vocational education and training.

Areas for further research include:

❖ testing the suitability of the model across other jurisdictions, and apply it to identify *region-specific* priority groups

❖ exploring other ways of conceptualising both the exploratory and response variables

❖ exploring the full effects of interactions between the explanatory variables and the effects of these upon the models. This is particularly important in respect to age, which would almost certainly have significant interaction effects with a large number of indicators

❖ refining the identification of populations experiencing barriers to participation by considering the extent of the need for education in those populations

❖ further developing the definition of populations experiencing barriers to participation as those who are at some economic or social disadvantage (that is, those whose circumstances suggest some need to participate rather than those who may have attained social or vocational benefits by routes other than education)

❖ refining the treatment of participation to consider the level of education (that is, distinguishing between participation in higher and lower-level courses)

❖ further developing the identification of populations not gaining a successful outcome from training by examining the respective purpose(s) for training. (The 15 to 24-year age cohort has a lower success rate because most of this population is seeking success in terms of labour market outcomes, whereas many of the 45+ year age cohort is seeking success in terms of non-vocational outcomes.)

❖ identifying causal factors linked to under-representation in training and successful training outcomes

❖ referencing the size of the populations experiencing barriers, to determine the 'materiality' of the issues for planning and prioritisation purposes

❖ identifying variables associated with barriers to progression and successful outcomes which might usefully be included in the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard and the Student Outcomes Survey

❖ for each traditional equity group not identified as a priority group (for example, non-English speaking background), understanding the extent to which it is a de facto priority group, in the sense that these groups may contain greater representations of people with actual priority characteristics (for example, unemployed people)

❖ understanding fully the effects of non-response upon the resulting models, especially in respect to the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard data file, through non-response analysis, and developing methodologies to reduce the effects of non-response bias.

Acknowledgement

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Built in or bolted on?
Managing equity and diversity in VET

Robert Bean

Social and human diversity is a fact of life. Equity is a core Australian value. Over the last 20 years, the Australian vocational education and training (VET) system has made significant progress in responding to the diversity of students and improving access and equity in service delivery.

Addressing the needs of specific groups by funding designated programs run by dedicated staff has ensured that equity and diversity initiatives have been 'bolted on' to the core business of training providers. The next development challenge is to ensure that consideration for equity and diversity is 'built in' to every facet of the VET system.

The first part of this chapter discusses the emergence of an inclusive management framework for equity and diversity in the delivery of vocational education and training and the management of diverse workforces. It argues that managing equity and diversity is a natural part of good management and produces real benefits for organisations and their customers. It is not just a theory or a policy. It cannot be separated from the main business of the organisation.

A diversity management framework is presented which links compliance, organisational development and market factors in a model which can be applied by every manager to every functional area in a process that would be supported—but not owned—by equity and diversity specialists.

The second half of this chapter describes how the framework can be applied to the VET system. In this way, VET providers have the opportunity to model ethical and socially responsive practices within their organisations and to prepare their students to work effectively in diverse workplaces.

Towards an integrative management framework for equity and diversity
Introduction

EQUITY AND DIVERSITY factors are central to thinking about vocational education and training in terms of the society we have become and the society we wish to become.

Recent consultations with industry, community, government and education sector leaders commissioned by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) identified several trends and issues for the next national strategy for vocational education, all of which are influenced by equity and diversity dimensions. These are:

❖ social cohesion and community development

❖ responses to the changing labour market

❖ need for a renewed commitment to equity and diversity

❖ globalisation and the growth of global markets

❖ increased customer service expectations

❖ increased role of VET in economic and social policy

❖ community, regional and small business development.

Reinforcing this analysis, the *Shaping our future: A discussion starter* (ANTA 2002f) identifies in its section on principles for guiding the future, client focus, inclusiveness, innovation and collaboration. It flags ideas and issues that are 'fundamental to achieving inclusiveness', including promoting the benefits of diversity to employers, overcoming barriers and empowering individuals, furthering the skills of training organisations to cater for the diversity of students and working with outside agencies to support individuals. It strongly reiterates the importance of the role of vocational education and training in 'assisting the integration of people from all backgrounds into our society and the workforce, and perhaps contributing to a tolerant society that embraces our diverse cultural heritage' (ANTA 2002f).

The integrity of the system requires a broad-based recognition that equity and diversity are inseparable from every aspect of life and work and are significant factors in teaching, learning and education program management.

If the VET system is to take an increased role in economic and social policy, and to contribute to greater inclusiveness and a stronger knowledge economy, attention to equity and diversity issues will have to be factored into core business thinking and planning.

Working definitions

While the subject of terminology is complex and contentious, this paper broadly defines key terms as follows:

❖ *equity:* the principles and practices of fairness and impartiality in ensuring that all members of a community have appropriate and equitable access to and potentially equal outcomes from the opportunities, resources, goods and services provided by an enterprise

❖ *diversity:* all of the human and social differences within a population, particularly those differences that are significant in terms of access to goods and services and participation in the workplace and the community

❖ *equity and diversity management:* the continual organisational process of recognising the effects of social and human differences on the provision of goods and services and workplace participation and incorporating that recognition into policy and practice to minimise the potential disadvantages of diversity, to optimise its benefits, to ensure social justice and ethical behaviour, and to promote and maintain inclusiveness and social cohesion.

The search for a set of acceptable and workable definitions continues to be a point of contention among specialists. For non-specialists, however, theories and definitions are less important than the creation of structures to improve organisational performance. This chapter's working definitions are an attempt to synthesise the range of current thinking and research in a way that will make sense to all members of an organisation and permit them to begin constructing a practical conceptual framework to suit their particular circumstances and needs.

The cases for actively managing equity and diversity

The first task in building equity and diversity management into the core business of vocational education and training providers is to establish that there are compelling social and economic arguments for a renewed emphasis on equity and diversity directly relevant to the enterprise context. What are the standards and drivers that the enterprise must address in order to sustain itself and realise its mission? How will effectively managing equity and diversity benefit the organisation?

Social and economic standards and drivers

To compete and survive, all enterprises must meet the highest possible standards of quality of goods and services, customer service, value for money, productivity, efficiency and flexibility in managing change, legal compliance, due diligence and effective governance.

In addition to these core standards, a 1999 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) study found that organisational excellence was characterised by high standards of knowledge management, innovation and social cohesion (Bengtsson 1999). As the study notes, without workforce social cohesion, knowledge management suffers from the loss of staff who don't 'fit in' and the failure to attract diverse talent. Innovation suffers from the lack of diversity in teams.

All vocational education and training enterprises must strive to meet these standards in order to operate effectively and produce graduates with the skills

required by industry and the attributes required for good citizenship and social cohesion. Including equity and diversity in teaching and management practices can contribute directly to meeting these standards. However, while inclusiveness, equity and diversity management are rhetorically on the list of standards, they are rarely ever measured in the same ways as are the core business standards, although there is an emerging trend to rebalance the social and economic drivers, as a recent commentary illustrates:

> *A feature of the 80's reforms was the weight given to outcomes that put a premium on equity, a point under-appreciated in the public debate … the blending of economic reform with championing of the disadvantaged is the approach that is needed.* (Dawkins & Kelly 2003)

Two significant emerging drivers for vocational education and training are the increasing demand from employers for students to have attitudes and behavioural skills appropriate to their organisational cultures, and community concern regarding the increasing gap between the haves and have-nots.

A powerful economic driver is the need to increase the national capacity to compete in the global knowledge economy. This includes addressing the under-utilisation of skills in the labour force, recognising and enhancing overseas qualifications and attracting diverse students.

There is evidence (Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2002b) that actively managing workforce and customer diversity adds value to an organisation through tangible benefits, including reduced labour turnover and absenteeism, decreased incidence and costs of grievances, increased market share in niche markets and improved effectiveness in international business operations. Less tangible but equally valuable benefits include increased ability to attract and retain talented staff, improved capacity for innovation, improved market reputation and higher workforce morale.

However, a recent Australian study reports low levels of interest in diversity management and observes that: 'Absenteeism, staff turnover, low job satisfaction, low commitment and litigation are all symptoms of inadequate diversity management' (Nicholas et al. 2001).

The legal and policy drivers

The most obvious and strongest driver for managing equity and diversity is the social justice legal framework of equal opportunity, anti-discrimination, anti-harassment and occupational health and safety, which applies to public and private sector enterprises alike. Policy, on the other hand, has not been a strong driver to date.

As stated in the 2001 Commonwealth Government's access and equity report, there is:

> *… a wide range of approaches to diversity management. Some agencies seem to view diversity reporting as … a compliance obligation. Other agencies have*

identified a business rationale … and have implemented some innovative and practical strategies to leverage diversity to achieve their business outcomes … In a few cases, strategies used to address diversity are integrated with corporate planning and reporting processes.
(Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2002b)

That policy drivers need to be developed, particularly in the education area, has been highlighted by the National Multicultural Advisory Council to signal the importance of managing cultural diversity:

Future multicultural policy [should] give high priority to initiatives in education and training that promote productive diversity principles and develop the skills needed to maximise the diversity dividend. This could be done in the first instance in business education and training in both university and TAFE sectors and … through partnerships between business educators and the business community. (National Multicultural Advisory Council 2000)

In the vocational education and training sector, the policy context to date has driven initiatives aimed at designated equity groups. Both legal and policy drivers are responsible for the development of 'blueprint' programs to address the needs of Indigenous and disabled students. Another response has been the inclusion of direct references to equity and diversity in the Australian Quality Training Framework standards for training organisations. They require compliance with all social justice legislation, the inclusion of access and equity principles in policies and procedures, assessments that 'are equitable for all persons, taking account of cultural and linguistic needs' and the identification of 'delivery modes and training and assessment materials which meet the needs of a diverse range of clients' (ANTA 2002a).

A commonly expressed view, in the literature and in VET industry consultations, is that policy drivers have been less influential than legal drivers in influencing those providers not already committed to equity and diversity principles and practices.

The two equity and diversity challenges

Once training providers recognise that their capacity to attain high standards would be strengthened by more effectively responding to these drivers, they face two challenges.

Firstly, they must ensure that they model ethical behaviour and good practice in equity and diversity management within their own organisations and services. Secondly, they must prepare students with the knowledge and behavioural skills to operate effectively, ethically and equitably in diverse workplaces, communities and markets.

Their capacity to meet these challenges is limited, however, when equity and diversity issues and initiatives are usually 'bolted on' to the core business of training providers and their industry clients. They are easily identifiable as

'special' programs for 'designated' groups, carried out by specialist and dedicated staff with 'tied' funding. They are treated and positioned separately and listed as separate issues rather than being 'built in' to the normal operations of the system.

This separate listing and treatment is a prime indicator of the 'bolted on' status of equity and diversity issues in public discussion. It has been and remains necessary for them to be raised as separate issues because they would otherwise not be accorded the attention they require in the face of 'the remarkably stubborn continuing problems of discrimination' (E Cox 2002). As the research shows, progress has indeed been made for equity groups—but never without the 'bolted on' efforts of designated funding and dedicated staff.

In view of the need for the VET system to respond effectively to the issues and challenges of the coming decade, this approach needs to change. But change never occurs without the strong motivations of necessity and incentive. What will drive vocational education and training providers to actively build equity and diversity management principles and practices into their core management systems is the recognition that they cannot fully meet industry and community needs without doing so. In reality, equity and diversity are not and cannot be separated from the main work of organisations.

There is an emerging recognition of the need to incorporate equity and diversity principles into the main business of the organisation, but at this point in the evolution of the vocational education and training system, the required alignment, commitment and structure to effect this change are elusive. A major reason for this is a lack of agreement on the core concepts, terminology and aims of equity and diversity management. Resolving this debate is the first step to changing the approach to equity and diversity.

The diversity debate

How the members of an organisation or a system think and talk about equity and diversity dictates how they react and respond to the issues and what will be done. The current debate about terminology and conceptual frameworks is symptomatic of a lack of organisational alignment regarding equity and diversity—in thinking, in values and in understanding—which has resulted in a general reluctance to engage in system-wide discussion and negotiation on the way ahead, which is impeding progress.

Social justice *or* managing diversity

In Australia's national strategy for VET 1998–2003, the supporting paper *Achieving equitable outcomes* identifies 'social justice' and 'managing diversity' as alternative conceptual frameworks for achieving equity. The social justice

framework's focus on student equity is quite clear and is predominant across the system, particularly in the public sector. In this model:

> … *vocational education and training is viewed as a means through which to overcome social inequality and achieve an informed and just society … A social justice model supports government intervention and equity programs aimed at narrowing differences in education and training outcomes for specified groups … while taking less account of the market and individual client needs.*
>
> <div align="right">(ANTA 1998, p.4)</div>

The diversity management conceptual framework described in the same document is not as clear, and responses to it have been characterised by confusion regarding its scope and objectives:

> *Managing diversity … stresses corporate responsibility to create and develop strategies and outcomes that are responsive to the needs of a diverse client base … to optimise the investment in vocational education and training by encouraging a full diversity of clients. The [VET] system becomes a means by which the workforce and the society at large can recognise and benefit from diversity. Managing diversity calls on a system to reflect the diversity of its client base in its structures, personnel and employment practices and … to adjust teaching, learning and assessment to encompass difference … [It] offers a positive response to changing workforce and population characteristics, without targeting specific groups or identifying specific areas of disadvantage.* (ANTA 1998, p.5)

The debate over diversity management, when it is held at all, centres on a perceived dichotomy between the social justice framework in VET, and the managing diversity framework. Managing diversity is seen mainly in terms of internal equal opportunities compliance while the business case is poorly understood and is rarely on the agenda.

The view held most widely by respondents consulted in the development of this chapter is that equity in the delivery of VET services should be 'bolted on *and* built in'. There is a common view that responding to the social, policy and economic drivers for addressing equity and diversity issues depends on reconciling the social justice and business cases in a way that permits enterprises to move towards an integrated management approach.

Reconciling the social justice and business cases will logically require a new conceptual framework for diversity management. To develop this, senior managers will first need to gain a better understanding of their existing models and approaches.

Diversity management models and approaches

Vocational education and training providers, like most Australian enterprises, currently practise diversity management strategies based on one or more of four main types of models, each of which has advantages and disadvantages.

The 'compliance model' enables an enterprise to comply with equal opportunity and discrimination laws, reflect local demographics and increase diversity and fairness, but it tends to ignore the potential contribution of diversity to business learning and growth. This appears to be the predominant model in the vocational education and training system.

The 'niche markets model' focuses on attracting clients from diverse markets by adjusting services and marketing and recruiting diverse staff to serve specific market segments. Its disadvantages are its narrow focus and tendency to 'pigeonhole' and stereotype staff. The VET system utilises a range of these strategies to attract and serve diverse market segments.

The 'business benefits model' takes a pragmatic view of managing diversity as competitive advantage, competing for talent, improving performance and raising returns on investment. Its disadvantages are its disinterest in equity issues as such, and its focus on business, sometimes at the expense of wider social interests. The model receives more management attention among private than public sector providers.

A fourth approach is the 'productive diversity' model. In Australia, the term 'productive diversity' first appeared in the early 1990s, referring to the benefits of cultural diversity in developing international trade. It has evolved, particularly through the work of Cope and Kalantzis (1997), to encompass the management of a full range of social differences in a workforce in response to the diversity of markets and communities. The management framework for VET presented later in this chapter is based on the productive diversity concept.

Lessons from equity and diversity research

The early emphasis for diversity management research was on cultural diversity. The Galbally (1978) and Fitzgerald (1988) reports identified the critical aspects of managing education and training in a multicultural society. Guides such as *Managing cultural diversity in the workplace* (United Trades and Labour Council of South Australia 1993) and *Best practice in managing a culturally diverse workplace—A manager's manual* (Office of Multicultural Affairs 1994) identified standards and competencies in core business functions, including planning, communication, training, supervision and customer service which were the precursors of current training package performance criteria.

The *Enterprising nation* report revitalised the discussion of diversity management, noting that:

> One of the five key challenges for senior managers over the next 10 years is the requirement to work well with new sorts of colleagues and to manage diversity in the workforce. (Karpin 1995)

This prioritisation was seen as a significant development, but managing diversity slipped to a distant fifth place on the agenda while the major effort

went into reforming VET and management education. However, these very reforms have brought the education system back to the diversity challenge and the Karpin report's recommendations of most relevance to diversity management in VET. These are:

❖ *education of managers about the business rationale for managing diversity*

❖ *recognition of diversity management in best practice models*

❖ *use of benchmarks including evidence of … commitment, awareness programs for managers and employees and integration of … diversity initiatives into HR* [human resource] *management*

❖ *inclusion of diversity management in management education.*

(Burton & Ryall in Karpin 1995)

Since then, some government departments and VET enterprises have made progress in these areas and the concepts and practices of managing diversity are gradually finding their way into the broader VET system, supported by a steady stream of Australian research projects.

A study of the economic impacts of workplace literacy programs demonstrated the benefits of a built-in approach, showing that '… the programs which were integrated with the specific agenda of the workplace drew the highest ratings' (Pearson 1996).

A survey of 270 managers revealed that organisational cultures which valued diversity were seen to be far more open to change than those practising either assimilation or anti-discrimination (Erwee 1998).

A critical review of the research literature on equity for women in VET argued that achieving equity for women 'entails systemic and structural changes, recognising equity as an area of expertise as well as policy and practice' (Butler & Ferrier 1999).

The Productive Diversity Partnerships Program (Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2002a) aimed to specify the nature of equity and diversity management expertise and to articulate the business case in terms of tangible benefits. Its numerous research projects into corporate awareness, business benefits, diversity leadership and the responses of its corporate partners confirmed the need for a whole-of-business approach, recognising that, 'Diversity management is not an end in itself. It is just one cog in the complex machinery of good HR management, sustainable business practices, workplace innovation and performance, and having a better understanding … of customers needs' (Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2002a). One project found that 90% of business educators agreed that diversity management should be part of core curriculum (Hay in progress).

Building equity and diversity into management systems

The actual building of such an integrative model at a systems level in vocational education and training has been hindered in part by the compartmentalisation of equity and diversity. Neither are closely related or mutually supportive. As a result, both struggle for legitimacy in terms of core business.

In developmental terms, the 'bolting on' stage of the last two decades has had varying degrees of success and has firmly established the legal, ethical and social justice frameworks and related management standards. The 'building in' stage has begun through incorporating equity and diversity into training packages and the Australian Quality Training Framework, but it is hampered by ideological and definitional debates and a lack of agreement on suitable management models, performance measurements and incentives, reflecting the diversity among VET providers.

In effecting a renewed commitment to equity and diversity in the next national vocational education and training strategy, four key questions stand out.
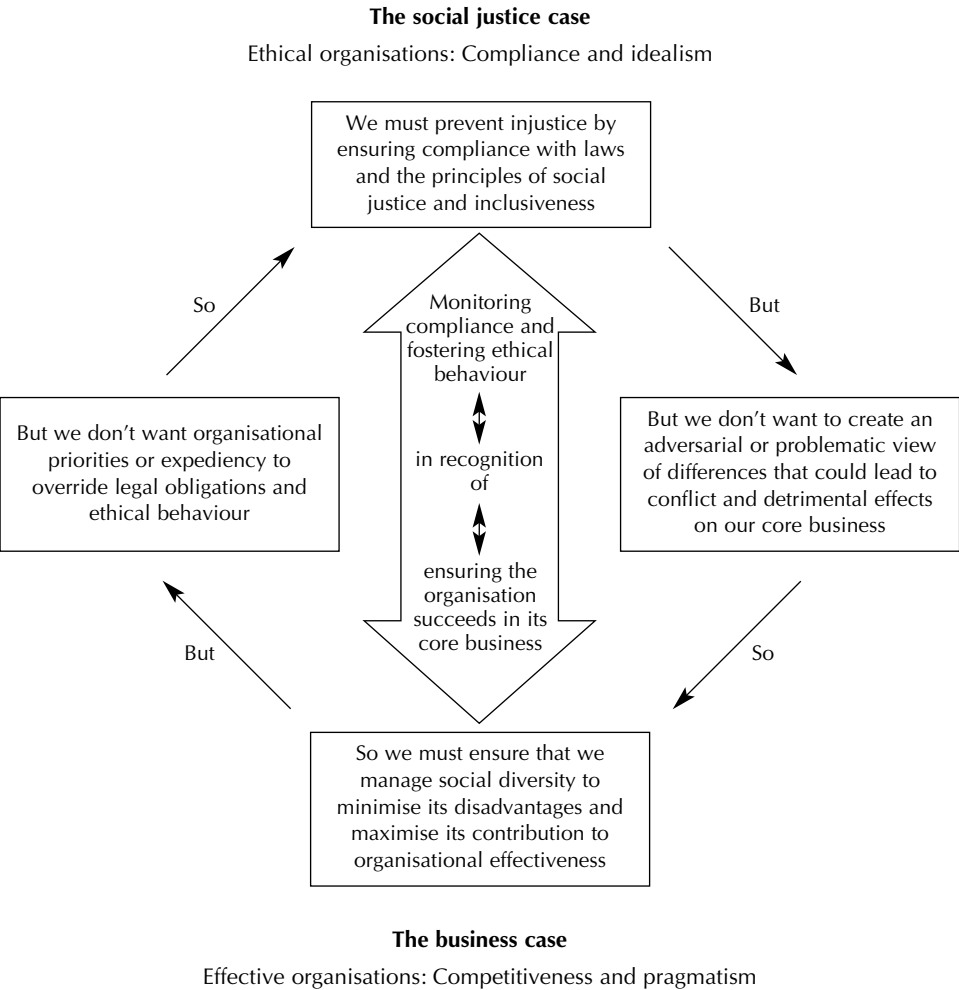
- ❖ How can we build on our efforts and experiences to improve our performance?

- ❖ How can we most effectively incorporate equity and diversity management principles and practices into core business?

- ❖ How can we reconcile the social justice and business cases for managing equity and diversity?

- ❖ What financial and other resources are available to develop and sustain a core business approach to equity and diversity?

The answer to the first question lies in the wealth of actual experience gained to date through programs which are contributing to the identification of best practice standards. The answer to the second question may be found by looking at the experiences of other industries, but is more likely to require a solution specific to the vocational education and training system.

The third question poses deeper and more subjective challenges, as discussed above. The VET system has a clear bias towards the social justice case, although its innate idealism has cost implications and its 'bolted on' status limits its effectiveness. The pragmatism of the business case is seen to threaten social justice, although the approach delivers proven benefits. The possible reconciliation of the two cases is illustrated in figure 1.

The fourth question goes to the heart of the industry's worst fears about sustainability and effectiveness. Investing resources in a core business approach to equity and diversity can only be justifiable if it delivers benefits and, in effect, pays its own way.
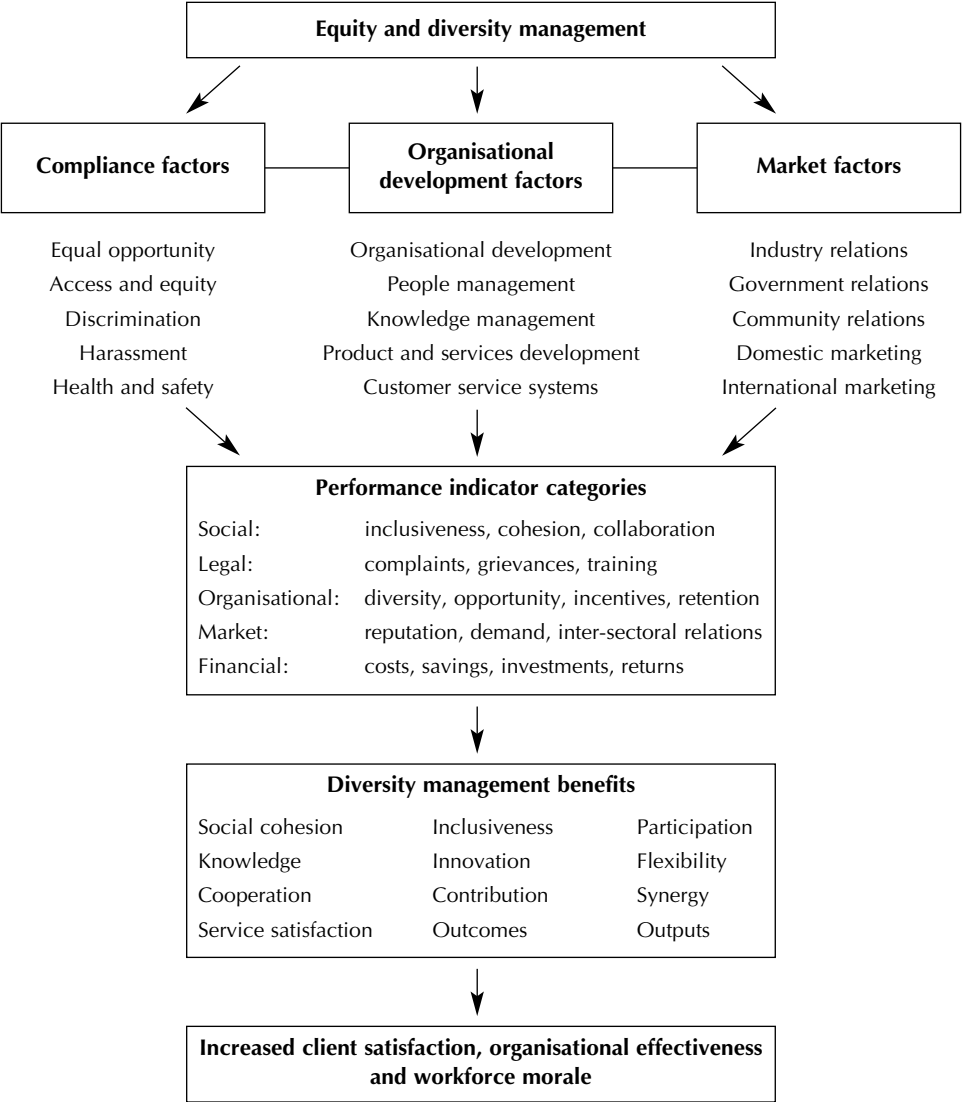
Figure 1: Reconciling the social justice and business cases for equity and diversity management

The social justice case

Ethical organisations: Compliance and idealism

We must prevent injustice by ensuring compliance with laws and the principles of social justice and inclusiveness

So

But we don't want organisational priorities or expediency to override legal obligations and ethical behaviour

Monitoring compliance and fostering ethical behaviour

in recognition of

ensuring the organisation succeeds in its core business

But

But we don't want to create an adversarial or problematic view of differences that could lead to conflict and detrimental effects on our core business

So

So we must ensure that we manage social diversity to minimise its disadvantages and maximise its contribution to organisational effectiveness

The business case

Effective organisations: Competitiveness and pragmatism

Adopting the integrative diversity management framework presented in figure 2 would enhance the ability of enterprises and systems to answer these key questions, respond to the dilemmas of reconciling the two cases and build equity and diversity factors into all business systems.

Its application would enhance the ability of training providers to meet the needs of industry and the community, to model best practice and prepare students to work with diversity, and to contribute to the achievement of the broad equity and inclusiveness aims of the new national strategy.

Figure 2: An integrative framework for equity and diversity management in VET delivery

Equity and diversity management

Compliance factors	Organisational development factors	Market factors

Equal opportunity	Organisational development	Industry relations
Access and equity	People management	Government relations
Discrimination	Knowledge management	Community relations
Harassment	Product and services development	Domestic marketing
Health and safety	Customer service systems	International marketing

Performance indicator categories

Social:	inclusiveness, cohesion, collaboration
Legal:	complaints, grievances, training
Organisational:	diversity, opportunity, incentives, retention
Market:	reputation, demand, inter-sectoral relations
Financial:	costs, savings, investments, returns

Diversity management benefits

Social cohesion	Inclusiveness	Participation
Knowledge	Innovation	Flexibility
Cooperation	Contribution	Synergy
Service satisfaction	Outcomes	Outputs

Increased client satisfaction, organisational effectiveness and workforce morale

An integrative framework for equity and diversity management

This framework represents a new approach to perceiving and managing equity and diversity by amalgamating the three main management models and all of the factors influencing the decision-making processes of vocational education and training providers into a single 'productive diversity' model which also reconciles the social justice and the business cases.

The framework links compliance factors, organisational development factors and market factors in a management model in which provisions for access and equity would remain firmly 'bolted on' while work progresses on equity and diversity strategies to ensure that they are permanently 'built in' across the organisation and the system, documenting the benefits in order to motivate managers to adopt these strategies into their areas of responsibility.

The framework is not a panacea. Whatever the merits or risks of adopting a diversity management model, its limitations must be recognised. Diversity management alone is no more capable of revolutionising an organisational culture than is organisational development or human resources or business process re-engineering or any other single process. Real change results from system-wide commitment and effort.

The framework represents an evolution of management thinking arising from the equity reforms of the past 20 years and the increasing recognition of the need to address the implications of diversity in teaching, learning, work and life. It offers a sound platform for developing management structures to ensure an effective response to the call for 'a renewed commitment to equity and diversity'.

The evolution of this model comes at a time when there is a growing trend among Australian organisations towards acceptance of an integrative approach. As the summary of the Commonwealth Government's *Access and equity annual report 2001* concludes:

> *Until now, work to articulate a business rationale for diversity management has been part of the Productive Diversity program, rather than access and equity. Given the common elements of the Charter principles and Productive Diversity, there appears to be merit in … articulating a new diversity management approach which brings together the issues raised in this report.*
> (Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2002b)

Implementing an equity and diversity management framework in VET

How does the theoretical diagram in figure 2 fit into the real world? Who will own it? Who will run it?

The proposed conceptual framework requires a departure from the current approaches, whereby most equity and diversity management policies and programs are imposed rather than integrated, owned by designated managers, supported by specialist staff, separately funded and monitored. It is not intended for a special position on the organisational tree as a separate function. It is not to be the responsibility of any one manager. It will not be the responsibility of equity specialists.

Rather, it is a template to be applied to *every* business plan and delivery strategy of *every* enterprise and *every* unit by *every* manager to ensure that equity and diversity management is actually and permanently 'built in' to vocational education and training.

Establishing and maintaining the framework will certainly require the advice and assistance of designated equity and diversity specialists. But they will not own it. They will ensure that it stays 'bolted on' during—and after—the transition to being 'built in'. In this framework, specialists will not be solely accountable for ensuring the achievement of equitable outcomes by an institution or unit. They will not be accountable for realising the benefits of workforce diversity in areas such as knowledge management, innovation and social cohesion.

However, the actual prospects of such a shift occurring in the VET system are remote without the key ingredients of leadership, practicable strategies and support and clear motivation and incentives.

Leadership

Establishing a comprehensive, integrated framework for equity and diversity management will require committed leadership and senior management support based on clear policy, realistic strategies and budgets, and practical implementation, with measurable performance indicators based on the VET sector's standards and drivers.

There are in fact strong equity and diversity 'champions' in the upper echelons of the VET system and among the community, industry and government leaders who have confirmed that equity, social cohesion and diversity are important issues in developing the VET strategy for 2004–2010. Many managers and practitioners agree on the need for 'a renewed commitment to equity and diversity' and continue to work to improve the achievement of equitable outcomes, often with the help of passionately committed specialists.

Practicable strategies and support

With leadership commitment and a clear rationale, the next step is to formulate a strategic plan for introducing the integrative framework. The plan must recognise and incorporate the organisation's existing equity and diversity practices, structures, specialist staff and resources as the platform for further development.

The limits of human, financial and physical resources must also be recognised. The proposed framework will require an initial investment in the change process but does not require additional long-term funding or new infrastructure as its applications will be embedded in core business systems. The main investment in support will be an educative process which could be

largely funded from a re-allocation of existing professional development and in-service training budgets.

Motivations and incentives

The implementation of an integrative diversity management process as a way of thinking and dealing with differences depends on motivated individual managers, team leaders, teachers and support staff.

Successful, 'best practice' equity and diversity initiatives have been achieved largely through the dedication of individuals. But because they have been 'bolted on', their efforts often required additional financial and physical resources and time, and even personal resources by individuals and teams. There is no assurance therefore, that they will be sustained over time without the perseverance of their champions and the maintenance of their funding. Despite the successes of special programs, this is the fundamental weakness of the 'bolted on' approach.

Some equity and diversity champions move on to other roles, perhaps recognising it is not in their career interests to maintain a focus on a single student segment. Others get 'worn down' by the constant advocacy required. Those who persevere are often accused of being strident, single-issue people who often feel they and their students are marginal in their institutions. But as a pioneer of equity in training commented 20 years ago:

> *You have to ask yourselves: Are we marginalised in our equity programs because our students are marginal or are the students marginalised because we are marginal in our institutions?* (Gubbay 1983)

Having observed the trials and dilemmas of equity specialist colleagues, what will motivate the majority of busy managers and staff to fully incorporate equity and diversity management approaches into their own work?

The compliance motivators—the big stick

The main motivating factors for most Australian organisations to address equity and diversity are the fear of loss of funding due to failures of compliance with equal opportunity and related legislation, avoidance of the costs of grievances, damage to their own and their organisation's reputation and negative effects on team relationships, including the loss of staff and the knowledge they have developed.

In a recent survey of 1480 human resource managers, 83.6% said their main motivation for having a diversity management policy was to comply with equal opportunity legislation and 62.5% said it was to attract and retain staff (Hay in progress). With such a reactive motivation, it is no wonder that diversity management as a conceptual framework has negative connotations for the majority of managers. The compliance motivation alone, as strong as it is, does not provide the 'passion' needed for high performance.

Organisational development motivators—the carrots

There is documented evidence, discussed earlier, that adopting equity and diversity management practices provides numerous benefits for managers, staff and customers which act as positive motivators. Benefits can be realised in every one of the organisational development factors in the framework. The organisational development process is improved through greater inclusivity and consultation. For staff, recognition of their diversity and their contribution to strategic plans improves their acceptance and support of the implementation.

The people management motivators are even stronger and the results more easily measurable. Equitable, 'diversity friendly' organisations, the so-called 'employers of choice' attract and retain the best staff as well as increasing the diversity of staff, a situation which has proven benefits in the areas of knowledge management and services development. Research demonstrates that diverse teams outperform homogeneous teams in the creative, divergent phases of problem-solving and product and services development when team diversity is acknowledged and factored into work processes (T Cox 1994; Adler 1997).

Providing training and professional development in equity and diversity is another motivational aspect of people management. Staff provided with equity and diversity training directly linked to their job responsibilities consistently report high levels of satisfaction with the training, and appreciation of the opportunities to discuss issues that are commonly glossed over.

Market motivators—more carrots

One of the main motivating factors for educators and trainers is the feedback that tells them their work is valued by their students, their industry clients and their government and community stakeholders. Training providers regularly conduct satisfaction and outcome surveys which provide equity officers with valuable data. Identifying and publicising improved satisfaction rates among diverse students translates into enhanced provider reputation and attractiveness to diverse clients.

Taking an active equity and diversity management approach in its relations with industry, government and the community can greatly enhance the VET system's ability to contribute to social and economic policy.

Disincentives and de-motivators

A note of caution should be inserted at this point. Few of these motivators will have much meaning in a system that continues to be driven mainly by quantitative measures such as 'actual student contact hours'. Nor will the adoption of a whole-of-enterprise approach to equity and diversity be successful if responsibility for it is allowed to devolve back upon those units and individuals currently responsible for it. The high level of ownership, expertise and commitment that currently resides within the cohort of

designated equity officers, specialist teachers and resource staff is an ideal foundation on which to build an integrative equity and diversity management framework, but the prospects for the successful adoption of the framework are entirely dependent on its ownership by all staff and its comprehensive application to all programs.

Applications of the management framework

Although the implementation of a whole-of-business equity and diversity management approach is a complex and long-term activity, as soon as the leadership, strategy and support elements are in place, units can begin to apply the integrative framework practically in all functional areas; for example, in:

❖ policy review and business planning

❖ program planning and development

❖ curriculum and resource development

❖ training and professional development

❖ industry and community consultation and liaison

❖ performance measurement and reporting.

Initiatives in any of these areas can be directly related to the inclusiveness and skills issues identified in the consultations for the 2004–2010 national VET strategy. Many of the *Shaping our future* (ANTA 2002f) questions 'flagged' as being 'fundamental to achieving inclusiveness', are relevant to one or more of the functional areas. For example, the following two questions are relevant to every functional area: 'How can vocational education and training "join up" with other local services to share resources and promote learning across communities?' and 'How can we further skill the registered training organisation workforce to cater for the diversity of their students and potential students?' The question: 'How do we promote the benefits of a diverse workforce to employers?' is most relevant to the industry liaison function.

Policy review and business planning

The integrative management framework can be used to review existing access and equity and diversity management policies in terms of the organisational priorities and business plans, as well as the priorities of the national VET strategy.

Before engaging in detailed business planning, organisations may need to undertake a great deal of preliminary work. This could take the form of policy review, workforce attitude surveys, benchmark reviews, option costings, budget reviews and a skills and resources audit. Public and private sector providers alike will find value in government manuals such as *People mean business:*

Managing diversity in the South Australian public sector (Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment 1999) where a great deal has already been accomplished in specific equity categories.

One suggested business planning process involves management teams analysing a specific service function in terms of *The charter of public service in a culturally diverse society* (Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 1998) principles, such as responsiveness, communication and efficiency. Teams then identify which business systems, such as management structure or communications, are most relevant to the service functions. These are then plotted across the three factor categories of the framework to ensure full coverage of all equity and diversity management elements and issues. The resulting information is then used to develop a detailed business plan for the service function where equity and diversity have been built in, complete with measurable objectives. This process virtually guarantees the elimination of rhetoric and 'waffle' from the organisation's business plans for equity and diversity.

Program planning and development

The foundation work for factoring equity and diversity objectives into program planning has largely been done. Equity and diversity are included in training packages and in National Quality Training Council quality principles for support materials. The Australian Quality Training Framework standards further reinforce the importance of equity and diversity provisions. There are resources available to guide the achievement of equitable outcomes such as *Partners in a learning culture* (ANTA 2002e), *Bridging pathways* (ANTA 2002b), *Introducing TAFE services to NESB customers: A customer service guide for TAFE staff* (TAFE NSW 1996) and *Bridging the intercultural communication gap: A guide for TAFE teachers of international students* (Mezger 1992).

Using these tools in conjunction with the integrative equity and diversity management framework would enable program planners to identify with greater specificity which factors are relevant and requiring attention in which organisational functions.

The program planning process involves asking four best practice key questions:

❖ What occurs in this program area in terms of the compliance, organisational development and market factors that is problematic or not best practice?

❖ What are the equity and diversity dimensions of best practice in this program area?

❖ What are the effects of student, staff and/or workplace diversity on this program area?

❖ What specific best practice strategies and actions need to be incorporated into this program to meet our equity and diversity objectives?

Based on this analysis, decisions can be made regarding the composition of teams, training and communication needs and so on. Key stakeholders and support agencies, as well as representatives of diverse student groups, can be brought in at early stages of program planning.

This process can effectively be introduced and started in team workshops and be completed in the workplace. Once completed, it serves as a framework for ongoing program development.

Curriculum and resource development

Possibly the most important measure of a training provider's commitment to modelling good practice in equity and diversity management and preparing students for working in diverse workforces is the degree to which equity and diversity are built into the curricula of every discipline.

Recent research on employability skills has confirmed that, in addition to strong cognitive and technical skills, students entering the workforce need appropriate behavioural skills. As Mournier notes:

> … these skills are composed of personal abilities to act in a given hierarchy, to command and obey, to act and collaborate, to solve problems and resolve conflicts, and to adapt oneself to a social environment. In other words, they are personal qualities to cope with interpersonal relationships required by the division of labour. (Mournier 2001)

In a society and a workforce characterised by multiple dimensions of social diversity, the importance of behavioural skills cannot logically be over-emphasised.

Training packages now include diversity units. For example, the Business Services Training Package (ANTA 2002c) includes the elements, 'working effectively with diversity' in the certificate and 'managing diversity' in the diploma. But diversity influences most facets of human endeavour, and there are significant equity and diversity dimensions to such core units as project management, employment services, industrial relations, international services, corporate governance, knowledge management, market research, business communication, marketing and risk management.

Modelling good practice in teaching and learning will necessitate formal recognition of these dimensions throughout the curriculum. The growing demand for appropriate behavioural skills should alert curriculum developers to the likelihood of calls for the inclusion of additional units on ethical behaviour and citizenship.

Designating equity and diversity as stand-alone subjects has served the purpose of putting them 'on the map', but it fosters the impression that, like

equal opportunity training, it is something that, once 'done' can be safely ticked off, competency achieved.

The alternative approach of 'embedding' equity and diversity within the curriculum also presents problems. During the national debate over the eighth key competency, 'using cultural understanding', the decision was taken not to create a separate competency field but to integrate cultural understanding across the seven key competencies. As a result, curricula such as the Frontline Management Initiative include performance criteria such as 'the diversity of individuals' knowledge and skills is used to enhance team performance' and 'communication takes into account social and cultural diversity' (ANTA 2002d). However, based on anecdotal evidence, it appears that Frontline Management Initiative trainers usually skim over these topics. They are not even 'bolted on'.

Training and professional development

Teachers, support staff and education managers are critical to meeting the diversity challenges of modelling good practice in equity and diversity, and of preparing students to work effectively in diverse workplaces. They generally know what the legislation is about and why equity and inclusiveness efforts are required. They are beginning to hear more about the broader concept of diversity management. Their main questions are: 'How do we do this?', 'What resources are available?', and 'How will my role change?'.

Training and professional development is essential, beginning with pre-service training and continuing with in-service training, mentoring, coaching, work-based learning and postgraduate education. Managers, teachers and support staff alike need to understand how to apply the principles and practices of equity and diversity management to service planning, delivery and support.

Teachers need to continuously improve their ability to address the impacts of diversity in the classroom, across the curriculum, in learning and teaching styles, in flexible delivery and assessment and in the workplace. Student diversity necessitates a continuous examination of the expectations of teachers and learners and the nature and functions of assessment, particularly where cultural diversity is a factor, whether among a multicultural Australian student body or among international students studying here or abroad. Responding to issues of gender, age and disability also requires more sophisticated teacher training and development. Students must also be prepared to operate in workplaces where diversity is problematic, ignored or even discouraged.

Industry and community consultation and liaison

When employers are increasingly seeking staff with 'effective behavioural skills', as described by Mournier (2001), equity and diversity program planning and curriculum planning must be informed by industry consultation.

A number of international models for industry liaison on equity and diversity issues which warrant further investigation are currently available, including the New Zealand EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) Employers' Group program, the Employers' Forum in the United Kingdom and the enterprise Diversity Councils model in the United States.

In Australia, the Productive Diversity Partnerships Program has forged ties with several large enterprises which have proactive diversity management approaches and has conducted a study of the diversity management issues for small-to-medium enterprises (Pinto 2002). The study recommended the inclusion of diversity management in small business training materials but because business owners and managers rejected the notion of additional material, it was included in existing units. The study also pointed to the success of engaging with industry associations, local government and chambers of commerce on issues of equity and inclusiveness. The networks already developed by training providers with local business communities are the logical starting point for a discussion of issues of inclusiveness and social cohesion of concern to small-to-medium business owners and managers.

Community liaison networks have been established by training providers, and involve community-owned colleges and members of disadvantaged groups in course design. Two best-practice examples of effective liaison are the *Bridging pathways* (ANTA 2002b) and *Partners in a learning culture* (ANTA 2002e) blueprint programs. However, other equity groups still have to be engaged in such a way. For example, a report on the low proportion of women of non-English speaking background who go on from bridging courses to further vocational study identified the failure of traditional forms of marketing and recommended: 'That … VET service providers consciously form relationships with community groups in order to access migrant communities' (Western Australian Department of Training 2002).

Performance measurement and reporting

Taking as a starting point the old business adage, 'if it doesn't get measured it doesn't get done', VET providers who decide to integrate equity and diversity management into core business need to identify actual performance measures, as discussed above, in terms of motivators and business planning.

How will our equity and diversity management efforts benefit providers, students, industry, the community and staff? How will they enhance service to industry and service to the community and the individual? What can be measured?

In the management framework, performance in all of the categories of compliance, organisational development and market factors can be assessed quantitatively or qualitatively according to five performance indicator components: social, legal, organisational, market and financial.

For example, under 'organisational development' factors, performance in the 'people management' area can be measured quantitatively in terms of workforce demographic profiles, recruitment, retention, absenteeism, career development and promotion. Quantitative measurements are already in place for many areas, including all of the 'compliance factors'. Under 'customer service systems', providers already measure student satisfaction, outcomes and outputs. Flexibility and innovation in service delivery can also be measured in these areas.

Performance measurement in the more subjective aspects of the 'organisational development' area require more qualitative methods. A research project on diversity management feedback systems (Bean & Dillon 2000) developed a diversity climate survey for assessing the intangible aspects of equity and diversity management by quantifying the degree to which all staff feel they are treated with respect and dignity, or are included by their colleagues. A parallel survey was developed to assist managers to review their diversity management competencies and performance. Elements of both surveys can be incorporated into broader attitude surveys to assess workforce cohesion, inclusiveness, participation, cooperation and collaboration.

Established performance measurement standards can apply to some objectives. Others are extremely subjective and more likely to be measured in terms of their contribution to the objective, quantitative measurements. For example, attaining higher levels of innovation, cooperation, participation and synergy will translate into outcomes that may not fall within the parameters of key performance indicators in vocational education and training. But the very fact that such objectives are listed as being desirable and of value to the organisation, sends a very different message from that sent by the requirement only to measure actual student contact hours against dollar inputs and student outputs. Obviously, building the subjective and objective dimensions of equity and diversity into a management system places new and different demands on accountability systems. For each training provider, identifying relevant key performance indicators will necessarily follow from the design of the actual organisational framework for equity and diversity management.

Conclusion

A variety of equity and diversity management approaches are already policy or are in use by vocational education and training organisations, 'built in' or 'bolted on' to varying degrees.

In meeting the equity and diversity challenges of the next national strategy for VET, providers must make choices which will be heavily influenced by the demographics and the needs of their industry and community stakeholders.

While equity and diversity management strategies are not in themselves the solution to meeting all of the system's challenges, the importance of social

cohesion to organisational sustainability is undeniable, and the desire of the community for inclusiveness and ethical behaviour in institutions and organisations is becoming stronger.

The best practice approaches to equity and diversity of the current national strategy have achieved significant results as the research statistics demonstrate. But the gains are not pervasive and the approaches are not self-sustainable without a truly integrative model which meets the needs of all parties as part of normal practice.

If we can assume that the men and women of the VET system are, like all other people, simultaneously fair-minded and self-interested, then a management framework which protects against injustice while improving the achievement of such goals as effectiveness, sustainability and personal job satisfaction has a chance of working. However, this can only occur if the approach is 'built in' to every facet of the system, owned by every member of the organisation and part of the process of growth and change that is required of vocational education and training in the coming decade.

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