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Moving on from enabling courses

Why do some students remain in enabling courses?

Susan Dawe

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ISBN 1 920895 41 8 print edition

ISBN 1 920895 42 6 web edition

TD/TNC 76.13

Published by NCVER

ABN 87 007 967 311

33 King William Street, Adelaide SA 5000

PO Box 8288 Station Arcade, Adelaide SA 5000, Australia

<<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>

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Acknowledgements

Thanks to TAFE staff who contributed generously to this study. Particular thanks are due to interviewees and other contributors.

Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE, South Australia

Jenny Rodgers, manager, human services

Tim Goldsmith, manager, vocational preparation and Aboriginal education

Dianne Bamford, student counsellor, Victor Harbour campus; lecturer, disability program and language, literacy and numeracy class

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Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE, South Australia

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Executive summary

Purpose of this research

The main purpose of this research was to investigate the reasons why some students who have successfully completed an enabling course subsequently enrol in a course at the same level of qualification or re-enrol in the same enabling course. Phan and Ball (2001) used the term ‘enabling’ to describe the lower-level preparatory and pre-vocational courses in the vocational education and training (VET) sector.

Key issues

One of the primary aims of enabling courses is to provide students with remedial education or preparatory activities to facilitate acquisition of the skills necessary for further studies or employment. Successful completion of an enabling course means that the student has demonstrated the competency standards prescribed for that qualification—for example, in South Australia, Certificate I in Employment Skills Training, Certificate II in Introductory Vocational Education (IVEC), or Certificate I, II and III in English Proficiency; and in New South Wales, Certificate I in Work Skills, Certificate I in Foundation and Vocational Education (FAVE), or Certificate II in General and Vocational Education (CGVE). In general, enabling courses are expected to lead to higher-level general or vocational studies or paid employment.

Through an analysis of the national VET surveys data, Phan and Ball reported positive outcomes for most of the students who completed enabling courses. However, they also reported the tendency for about one in every 12 students who re-enrolled in VET studies to enrol in the same enabling course in the following year. In addition, 48% of the enabling course graduates who re-enrolled in the VET sector the following year had undertaken a course at the same qualification level as the previous year. It appeared that an unacceptable number of people might remain in enabling courses for years.

In this study, the data from the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) 2001 National VET Collection are analysed and compared with Phan and Ball’s findings. Further information from three TAFE institutes in metropolitan and rural regions in South Australia and New South Wales elaborates the reasons why students re-enrol in the same course or at the same level of qualification. The case studies focused on students in enabling courses in vocational preparation, disability and Aboriginal education programs.

Findings

About 6% of the total number of students in public VET system courses in 2001 and 1998 were undertaking preparatory or pre-vocational courses; that is, ‘enabling’ courses. However, there is a higher proportion of the ‘disadvantaged’ groups in enabling courses than in mainstream VET courses. For example, students who left school before completing Year 10 are four times more likely to undertake enabling courses than those whose highest school attainment level was above Year 10. There is an even higher proportion of students who belong to more than one disadvantaged group

in enabling courses than there are in mainstream VET courses. In addition, the analysis of data from the 2001 National VET Collection indicates an increasing proportion of students in the 15 to 19 years age group in enabling courses.

Is there a significant problem with students remaining in enabling courses? It appears not, as many of these students had, in fact, progressed to a more advanced course within the same level of qualification or diversified into other areas of learning; for example, to explore vocational or personal interests, such as office skills, information technology or horticulture.

TAFE staff note that, in many instances, the more important objective of enabling courses is to increase the student's self-esteem, confidence and motivation for further study or employment. In particular, students need to become independent learners who are motivated to succeed by their own goals or perhaps community goals, for example, in Aboriginal communities. Most Aboriginal students, like other students, need the motivation of employment opportunities at the end of their training to encourage them to continue with further study.

TAFE staff acknowledge that students who have completed an enabling course and who are looking for work are encouraged to continue in the same or a similar course in order to maintain their self-confidence and skill levels while seeking work. In addition, there are examples of students who complete an enabling course, obtain voluntary or paid work and subsequently re-enrol in the same course with increased self-esteem and motivation in order to achieve higher skill levels, especially in literacy and numeracy or English proficiency.

So, is there a residual group of students remaining in enabling courses who are still a problem? This study found that the return of students to enabling courses was a positive outcome, in that these students had increased self-esteem, and wanted to retain or improve their skills in the hope that they would obtain employment or gain community, personal and social benefits from further learning.

TAFE staff highlight that, for students in vocational preparation courses, there are often multiple barriers to learning to overcome in order to move on from enabling courses. These include low self-esteem, demoralising experiences at school, lack of schooling, immaturity, trouble with the law, and financial or health problems. Students who lack self-esteem or maturity take longer to find their areas of interest and so may remain longer, or try several enabling courses before achieving the self-confidence or motivation to continue with studies for a higher-level qualification. In addition, the 15 to 19-year-old unemployed people undertaking vocational preparation programs often require additional support services, including accommodation, rent assistance, suicide prevention, counselling and crisis intervention.

This report also comments on strategies to help students to move on from enabling courses to higher-level qualifications, paid employment or voluntary community work. Successful strategies include developing clear pathways for students, including work placements or work experience as part of the enabling course, encouraging students to gain either part-time or voluntary work, providing mentoring by mature-aged students or staff, and linking training to employment opportunities or encouraging students to set up small or cooperative business activities to use their skills and create employment opportunities.

Conclusions and implications

This research confirms that a small number of students, generally those with low-level skills in literacy and numeracy, re-enrol in the same enabling course while others re-enrol at the same level in another qualification. However, this outcome should not be considered negatively, as this study concludes that these students are still progressing to a more advanced level of study or exploring a different vocational area. Hence, they are gaining further skills and experience from their re-enrolment in enabling courses. The community also gains benefits through improved health of individuals and positive links between the community and VET. Considered essential however, is the provision of employment opportunities or practical work experience for students in enabling courses.

Introduction

Previous research on enabling courses

Research on outcomes of enabling courses undertaken by Phan and Ball (2001) aimed to examine the effectiveness of these courses in assisting students from various target equity groups to progress to other training programs or to gain employment following completion of their enabling course. These researchers used the term ‘enabling’ to describe lower-level preparatory and pre-vocational courses in the vocational education and training (VET) sector.

Phan and Ball analysed the unit record level data from the 1998 National VET Collection, the Graduate Destinations Survey for 1997 and 1998 and the National Student Outcomes Survey 1999, to determine whether there was a tendency for students to move from one enabling course to another. They examined the outcomes for students who completed an enabling course in 1997 and continued VET studies in 1998. The level of qualification undertaken by these students in 1998 was compared with the level of the qualification of the enabling course which they completed in 1997.

Phan and Ball found that over 5% of the total number of VET students were enrolled in ‘enabling courses’ in 1998 (that is, 83 200 students out of 1.5 million). These researchers also found that students undertaking enabling courses were predominantly those who came from a ‘disadvantaged’ background.

Phan and Ball discovered that, in 1998, students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, students from a non-English speaking background and those with a disability were at least three times more likely to enrol in an enabling course than their counterparts. Students who were unemployed prior to the commencement of their VET course or students whose highest level of secondary schooling was below Year 12 were also more inclined to undertake studies in these lower-level courses.

Phan and Ball also noted that most of the students undertaking enabling courses lived in areas of higher-than-average unemployment rates and lower-than-average household income. For example, almost 65% of graduates of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent received financial support from the Abstudy scheme while they were undertaking the enabling course. Similarly, 60% of graduates who reported having a disability received financial support from government pensions or benefits. Overall, 40% of enabling course graduates indicated that they received government pensions or benefits while undertaking their course.

Phan and Ball found that, like most VET graduates, those from enabling courses chose to undertake their course because they wanted ‘to get a job’, ‘to get into another course’ or to develop ‘personal interests’.

Target equity groups

In the VET sector, target equity groups traditionally include those at risk of preclusion from the labour market such as women (especially young mothers and mothers re-entering the workforce), people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and those with a disability, from rural and remote areas, from non-English speaking backgrounds, or with low-level literacy or numeracy skills.

The Phan and Ball study focused on students who were enrolled in enabling courses from target equity groups including:

- ✧ women
- ✧ people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- ✧ people from non-English speaking backgrounds
- ✧ people with a disability
- ✧ people living in rural and remote areas
- ✧ people who were unemployed prior to commencing their enabling course
- ✧ people who left school early (that is, before completing Year 12).

Golding and Volkoff (1998) pointed out that, within each equity group, there are diverse sub-groups and also factors which, irrespective of the group label, cause 'disadvantage'. They suggested that the impact of low-level skills and unemployment (before or after a VET program) are particularly important in determining outcomes from VET. These cross-factors were believed to be more detrimental in terms of outcomes when they overlap with other group factors. Therefore, Phan and Ball also focused on people associated with sub-groups of disadvantage, including:

- ✧ women from rural or remote regions of Australia
- ✧ women who were unemployed prior to commencing their enabling course
- ✧ women from non-English speaking backgrounds
- ✧ people from non-English speaking backgrounds who were unemployed before undertaking their enabling course
- ✧ people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who live in rural or remote regions
- ✧ people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who were unemployed prior to undertaking their enabling course
- ✧ people with different types of disabilities (for example visual, hearing, physical, intellectual, and chronic illness).

In 1998, students who reported that they had an intellectual disability were much more likely to enrol in an enabling course than students with other types of disability. Enabling course students with an intellectual disability represented 31% of all VET students with a reported intellectual disability. Enabling course students represented nearly 18% of all VET students whose highest level of secondary school was Year 9 or below, 15% of all VET students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, and 11% of all VET students who were unemployed prior to undertaking their VET course in 1998.

However, a much higher proportion of VET students with multiple 'disadvantage' backgrounds were found in enabling courses. For example, enabling course students represented nearly 20% of all VET students who were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and unemployed, and 21% of all VET students who were unemployed and from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Progression of students from enabling courses

One of the primary aims of enabling courses is to provide students with remedial education or preparatory activities to enable them to gain the skills necessary for further studies or employment. It is argued therefore, that students from target equity groups are choosing to study these courses to enable them to progress to a higher-level qualification, the possession of which will improve their employment prospects.

Supporting this argument, Phan and Ball found that over 32% of those students who completed an enabling course in 1997 and enrolled in a VET course in 1998 (that is, 20% of the graduates from

enabling courses) had undertaken a course for a higher-level qualification. In addition, 48% of the students were enrolled in courses at the same level of qualification as undertaken in the previous year. Some of these may in fact be in higher-level courses within the same level of qualification, for example the Certificate I in Work Education II course follows the Certificate I in Work Education I course. However, many of these students had diversified into other areas of learning, for example, information technology, office administration, community services or life skills. Thus, the skills and knowledge gained by these individuals may subsequently assist them to improve their employment prospects.

Phan and Ball also found that the highest proportion of enrolments at the same level of qualification in the following year could be attributed to four groups of students. These were: students from non-English speaking backgrounds; those in the 40 to 64 years age group, those who reported a disability, and those whose highest level of secondary schooling was Year 9 or below. In particular, students with an intellectual disability were most likely to re-enrol in the same level of qualification (75.9%) in the following year, while 81.4% of these students had actually enrolled in the same course. Of the mature-aged students who re-enrolled at the same level of qualification, more than 80% of the 50 to 64 years age group had enrolled in the same course; 82.8% of those students who had not completed Year 10 at school and re-enrolled the following year at the same level of qualification had enrolled in the same enabling course.

In addition, Phan and Ball also found that over 7% of 1997 students who continued their studies in the VET sector in the following year had actually enrolled in a course at a lower-level qualification than the one undertaken previously. Enrolments in lower-level qualification courses account for fewer than 3% of all enabling course students. Students from non-English speaking backgrounds, of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent or over 40 years of age were more inclined to enrol in a course at a lower-level qualification than other students.

Phan and Ball concluded that enabling courses are producing positive outcomes for many people, including employment or further study for higher-level qualifications. However, they also noted that about one in every twelve students enrolled in the same enabling course in the following year. They noted also that some of these students tended to be undertaking longer courses through part-time study.

Factors influencing re-enrolment in enabling courses

Phan and Ball found no difference in the likelihood of students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent or non-English speaking backgrounds enrolling in a course at a higher level of qualification compared with other students. However, students in the 40 to 59 years age group and those with a disability were significantly less likely to enrol in a course at a higher level of qualification than those in other age groups or those students with no disability.

Furthermore, Phan and Ball noted that students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and those whose highest level of secondary schooling was below Year 10 were the only 'disadvantaged' groups to achieve module completion and pass rates below those of their counterparts.

These findings suggested that the inclination for students from some disadvantaged groups to re-enrol in the same course is possibly due to factors other than demographic characteristics or poor performance.

Employment outcomes

The unit record data from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research's (NCVER) Graduate Destinations Survey and Student Outcomes Survey were used to determine the employment status of students six months prior to commencement of their enabling courses and six months after course completion. Following completion of their enabling course, those aged 15 to 19 years had the largest increase in the proportion employed (10%), while the proportion of those aged 20 to 24 years increased by 6%. For those aged 25 to 29 years it was only 3%. There was a

decrease in the proportion of those older students who were employed following completion of their enabling course. The proportion of those aged 50 to 59 years who had been employed six months prior to undertaking their course had decreased by almost 5% six months after course completion. For those aged 60 to 64 years it had decreased by over 11%. Overall, of those students unemployed prior to their enabling course, almost 21% were employed six months after completing the course, while of those who were employed prior to the enabling course, almost 17% were unemployed six months after completing the course.

The proportion of graduates who lived in rural or remote areas gaining employment following completion of their enabling course increased by 5% after course completion compared with less than 2% for the city-based graduates. In addition, there was a 3% increase in the proportion of women employed after completing their enabling course, while the proportion of men employed stayed the same. However, there was no change in the proportion of graduates from other 'disadvantaged' groups (those of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, from non-English-speaking backgrounds or with a disability) who were employed before commencing and after completing their enabling course. By contrast, there was an increase in employment for those graduates who were not from these groups.

These findings indicated that, while some students from disadvantaged groups do get a job following completion of their enabling course, many students from these groups do not. Those who do not get a job, as some have indicated, may have chosen to enrol in a course for personal interest reasons or to get into another course. Others may live in areas where they do not have access to employment opportunities.

The follow-up study

This research was undertaken to investigate the reasons why some students who complete an enabling course re-enrol in the same level of qualification or the same enabling course. Six groups were identified from Phan and Ball's finding as being most likely to include students who were re-enrolling in the same enabling course or a similar course. These included students:

- ✧ in the 40 to 64 years age group
- ✧ from non-English speaking backgrounds
- ✧ with a disability, particularly an intellectually disability
- ✧ whose highest level of secondary schooling was Year 9 or below
- ✧ of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- ✧ who were unemployed prior to undertaking their course.

Literature review

VET sector

The traditional role of public technical and further education (TAFE) training has been to increase the skills of the workforce and to conduct trade apprenticeship training. However, especially in rural areas, the public VET system provider has also been the centre for adult and community education (ACE) and learning.

The demographic, economic and labour market changes in recent years have increased the need for most young people to have further training in order to successfully enter the workforce. In addition to the increased number of unemployed young people, the VET system is providing re-training for older workers to enable them to re-enter the workforce. The changing nature of work also means that there are many casual, part-time or self-employed workers who need to update their training or prepare themselves for different work in the future.

Students remaining in enabling courses, and not moving on to mainstream courses or employment, present a concern for the public VET system because the system is driven by outputs and there is pressure to conform to an efficiency formula for cost per output or graduate.

The recent demographic, economic and labour market changes, especially with rapidly changing telecommunications systems, increased global markets and the focus on innovation, have also impacted on the VET system. Since 1992 an industry-based board of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) has overseen the development of national industry-specific training packages. Also since that time there has been an increased use of employment outcomes for students as performance measures for the VET system.

The ANTA paper, *Achieving equity outcomes* (ANTA 1998a), offered support for the third objective of 'achieving equitable outcomes in vocational education and training' in *A bridge to the future: Australia's national strategy for vocational education and training 1998–2003* (ANTA 1998b). This paper notes that the participation of women, people in rural and remote areas and people from non-English speaking backgrounds in vocational education and training compares favourably with the participation rate for the population as a whole. However, although the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in VET is higher than their representation in the population, they are poorly represented among TAFE graduates and module completers. In addition, people with a disability are under-represented in VET participation by comparison with their proportion in the population. Consequently, two specific national strategies have been developed and implemented to increase vocational outcomes for these two most disadvantaged groups. The ANTA publication, *Partners in a learning culture* (ANTA 2000) is the national five-year strategy (2000–2005) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Its accompanying implementation blueprint calls for monitoring of participation, completion and outcomes for the students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent in VET (see Saunders et al. 2003). *Bridging pathways* (ANTA 2000b) is the national five-year strategy (2000–2005) for people with a disability and also has an accompanying implementation blueprint designed to increase opportunities for this group of people in VET. Mid-term reviews of the blueprint for implementation of both national strategies have been conducted in 2003 to advise on renewed emphasis or changes required.

The paper, *Achieving equitable outcomes*, also highlights the role of VET in assisting the employment preparation and upskilling of people with literacy and numeracy difficulties. It notes the disparity between the literacy skills of employed and unemployed people. A 1996 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) survey revealed that 80% of long-term unemployed have literacy skills considered poor or very poor (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997).

Access and equity policy

At the 1999 National Workshop on Equity Research, Norton noted that the national strategy for VET 1998–2003, *A bridge to the future* (ANTA 1998b), indicates two types of policy drivers: economic sustainability and inclusivity (that is, benefit everyone and include everyone). Norton also noted that the national strategy asserts that everyone will continue to have access to education and jobs.

Schofield noted that ‘in much of VET, equity policy remains focused on increasing access and participation of specific equity target groups, usually those defined in anti-discrimination legislation plus the unemployed (sometimes) and people in rural and isolated communities (often)’ (Schofield 1999, p.102).

Schofield suggested that the transition to a performance management framework concerned with VET outcomes required the development of measures of equity outcomes. This meant that VET equity policy needed to encompass a far broader outlook than equal opportunity focused on target groups only, and include the role of VET in redressing socio-economic disadvantage.

Schofield also noted that recent trends in the knowledge-based economy, such as individuals taking greater responsibility for initiating and financing their own learning, and increased internet access to information, further marginalise the lower socio-economic groups in the community.

Golding and Volkoff (1999) in their paper, ‘Regrouping equity’, identify three new priority groups who need to be targeted by the VET sector. These groups include ‘the long-term unemployed people, people with limited skills (literacy, numeracy and social) and people in custody’ (Golding & Volkoff 1999, p.44). They also note the specific needs of the young and unemployed, especially ‘early school leavers’, who are more likely to have unsatisfactory experiences of education at school and almost no opportunity for employer-initiated training or stable employment after completing one post-school course. In all probability, they will also experience long-term social and economic disadvantage without targeted assistance.

Traditional equity considerations are lack of access and low income. The report by Watson et al. (2000) also recommended targeting low socio-economic status within all equity groups and two new equity groups: those with low-level skills (literacy, numeracy and social) and the long-term unemployed. However, these researchers note that new approaches to equity policies and programs need to be developed to ensure participation of all workers in lifelong learning. Partnership models such as those for ‘learning cities’ could provide another framework for engaging workers and mature-aged people in VET. As the Australian population ages, the VET needs of mature-aged people wanting to enter or re-enter the workforce will also become more significant. However, older workers may also face certain barriers to training. For example, employers may perceive them as resistant to change, ‘lacking enthusiasm about their own career prospects’ or ‘not good at presenting themselves in a way that is customer friendly’ (Wooden et al. 2001, p.201).

Barriers to accessing VET

Golding and Volkoff (1998) examined the motivation of people from seven target equity groups who enrolled in VET. They highlighted a wide range of training outcomes desired by clients in addition to barriers to access and participation. Norton (1999) also noted a number of barriers to accessing VET which are common to all access and equity groups. These include:

- ✧ lack of knowledge of options (marketing material not user-friendly)

- ✧ courses not 'culture-friendly' (trainers from the equity group needed to overcome language and cultural barriers)
- ✧ lack of appropriate courses (their modes and flexibility) and links to jobs
- ✧ poor language, literacy and numeracy skills
- ✧ lack of self-esteem, confidence or motivation
- ✧ lack of appropriate support or mentoring
- ✧ poor basic life skills and social skills
- ✧ lack of public transport or distance to travel to nearest training provider too great
- ✧ limited apprenticeship and traineeships in the local area (Norton 1999, p.88).

The outcomes of VET courses

While most students who undertake enabling courses do so 'to get a job' or 'to get into another course' or for 'personal interest' (Phan & Ball 2001), there is a wide range of other possible benefits from undertaking an enabling course. These include improved health, or community benefits, such as the reduction of anti-social behaviour in the community.

An 'outcome' can be described as a practical result of undertaking a course. For example, McIntyre et al. (1996) identified many outcomes of courses for students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and listed them as being related to employment, knowledge acquisition, community and personal and social benefits (see box A).

Box A: Examples of outcomes

Employment related outcomes:

- The course gave me the skills I needed to get a job.
- The course gave me promotion on my job.
- The course gave me what I needed to become permanent staff member.
- The course improved my job performance.
- The course helped me meet other Aboriginal workers in the field.

Knowledge-related outcomes:

- The course increased my skills and knowledge.
- The course developed my study skills.
- The course built up my literacy skills.
- The course taught me to look at the politics of society.

Community-related outcomes:

- The course gave me counselling skills for work in my community.
- The course helped us to set up a small business.
- The course has helped to create work for people.
- The course has got people here participating in education.

Personal and social outcomes:

- The course made me stronger made me realise my culture and identity.
- The course gave me computing skills I need to work.
- The course gave me academic skills to get into the course.
- The course gave me the confidence to go on with study.
- The course helped me deal with the loss of my parents.
- The course opened up a new interest for me

Source: McIntyre et al. (1996, p.2)

Robinson and Bamlett (1998) identify as critical the need to ensure that the conditions are created to encourage people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent to achieve appropriate outcomes in education and training.

Saunders et al. (2000) noted that VET participation enhances employability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These researchers concluded that ‘involvement in VET-related learning in itself gives participants satisfaction, a sense of greater control over their lives and can encourage them to seek out new opportunities, enable better informed choices to be made, and to pass on these and other benefits through their interactions with their families and communities’ (p.39).

Employment outcomes

Recent high unemployment rates for young people and increasing skill demands in most industries have highlighted the importance of providing a smooth transition from school to work for young people. However, for students from the disadvantaged groups, problems encountered in entering or re-entering the labour market can appear insurmountable.

Outcomes in terms of employment and training for people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent remain considerably poorer than for other Australians. In 1977 the Commonwealth Government introduced the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme to increase employment opportunities for Aboriginal communities. For example, the Bungala case study (Gray & Thacker 2001) demonstrates that this scheme provides an important stepping stone to ‘mainstream’ employment for participants wishing to make this move.

Gray and Thacker noted that organisations in regional centres and urban areas involved in the Community Development Employment Projects scheme need to maintain a delicate balance between the ‘Aboriginalisation’ of work and the provision of activities which make participants employable. The combination of the two-day-a-week work program (which provides employment within participants’ ‘comfort’ zones) and placements with employers outside the scheme (which provides work activities closer to those found in ‘mainstream’ labour market) represented an attempt to maintain this delicate balance.

Several factors are identified as critical to Bungala’s success. These included:

- ✧ opportunity for promotion to full-time employment and hence an incentive to work hard and develop work skills
- ✧ employment of high-quality supervisors and tradesmen to develop work skills in participants
- ✧ commercial enterprises of Bungala which provided excellent training for participants in the form of apprentices and trainees working with other Indigenous people
- ✧ high-quality finished products which improved the public perception of Bungala and helped participants find unsubsidised employment (Gray & Thacker 2001).

When regional centres with high proportions of Indigenous people experience economic decline, many members of the non-Indigenous population move to areas with better economic prospects. This means that the Indigenous population comprises an increasing proportion of the population in many declining regional centres. Thus, ‘CDEP provides an avenue to assist people who wish to find unsubsidised employment at the same time as providing meaningful work to people who do not wish to find unsubsidised employment’ (Gray & Thacker 2001, p.87).

The impact of learning on health

Participants involved in learning, including enabling courses, often report improvement in their health or their ability to cope with health problems. The National Adult Learning Survey (Department for Education and Employment 1998) provides a definition of learning to assist adult

participants to recognise all possible learning activities in which they have been involved. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (England and Wales) uses the following definition of learning:

By learning we mean both taught and non-taught learning. Taught learning includes:

- ✧ any taught courses meant to lead to qualifications
- ✧ any taught courses designed to develop skills that might be used in a job
- ✧ any courses, instruction or tuition in driving, playing a musical instrument in an art or craft, in a sport or any practical skill
- ✧ evening classes
- ✧ learning involving work on one's own from a package of materials provided by an employer, college, commercial organisation or other training provider
- ✧ any other taught course, instruction or tuition.

Non-taught learning includes:

- ✧ studying for qualifications without taking part in a course
- ✧ supervised training while actually doing a job (i.e. when a manager or experienced colleague has spent time helping an individual to learn or develop skills as they do specific tasks at work)
- ✧ time spent keeping up to date with developments in the type of work done without taking part in a taught course—for example by reading books, manuals or journals or attending seminars
- ✧ deliberately trying to improve one's self-knowledge about anything or teach yourself a skill without taking part in a taught course.

(Department for Education and Employment 1998)

In 1999, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) developed a strategy for learning and health which became a priority for Adult Learner's Week in 2002. Furthermore, increasing numbers of evaluations and studies were indicating a correlation between maintenance of health and increased participation in learning (Aldridge & Lavendar 2000). As part of the institute's learning and health strategy, a small-scale survey was conducted. This research focused on those people who were known to be active learners—the individuals and groups contacted had been nominated for an Adult Learner's Week award during 1998 and 1999. The respondents were asked to comment on what impact, if any, there had been on personal health as a result of learning.

Aldridge and Lavendar conclude that the responses to the survey are 'a strong justification for the belief that learning can make a difference to individuals, their health and well being of their families and friends'. Furthermore, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education survey findings note that 87% of respondents reported benefits to their physical health, while 89% reported positive emotional or mental health benefits. These direct health benefits reflect the greatest general benefits experienced from learning, which include increased confidence and self-esteem, new friends and contact with other people, improved relationships with other people, and new employment or voluntary work.

The findings from this survey support the study by the Institute for Employment Studies, *Learning in later life* (Dench & Regan 2000), which concluded that 'a high proportion of people benefit from learning in terms of general well-being', although some respondents also reported 'dis-benefits' such as stress, anxiety and relationship difficulties.

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education survey also found that 20% of learners were encouraged by education staff to take advantage of adult education opportunities. This is the key method used by one institute project whose aim was to encourage people to begin to become learners. In this project, conducted in collaboration with the Greater Nottingham Learning Partnership, 'a learning advisor' offers 'prescriptions for learning' in three general practice surgeries. The learning advisor offers educational advice and guidance and creates a link between education

providers, primary health care professionals and people who may not have participated in learning since leaving school (Aldridge & Lavendar 2000). This project also builds on findings of another National Institute of Adult Continuing Education survey which noted that participation in adult learning is poor for some groups (Tuckett & Sargent 1999) such as those who associate education with failure and schooling or those who left full-time education later.

In summary

While the national strategy for VET aspires to provide access for everyone and to enable everyone to engage in meaningful work, it recognises that there are equity groups, and more importantly sub-groups of equity groups, which require specific encouragement to enable participation in VET. If unable to participate in VET, these people risk further marginalisation in society and long-term welfare support.

Traditional target equity groups include:

- ✧ women, especially sub-groups of young mothers and women who are unemployed or from non-English speaking backgrounds
- ✧ people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- ✧ people from non-English speaking backgrounds
- ✧ people with a disability
- ✧ people living in rural and remote areas.

More recently identified sub-groups include:

- ✧ people with low socio-economic status within all equity groups
- ✧ people with low-level skills (literacy, numeracy and social)
- ✧ people who left school early (that is, before completing Year 12)
- ✧ people who are unemployed, especially the long-term unemployed people
- ✧ people in custody
- ✧ displaced mature-aged workers.

In some cases, basic life skills and social skills are required in addition to literacy, numeracy and other work skills. There is a challenge to the VET system to provide flexible access to suit a broader range of individuals than in the past. The critical issue is to engage these 'disadvantaged' people in 'culture-friendly', appropriate education and training courses to improve their employment prospects or quality of life.

Research findings

Students by equity groups

Using the unit record data on student enrolments in the National VET Collection, the information shown in table 1 updates the information on those students enrolled in 'enabling courses' as defined by Phan and Ball (2001). However, these data are not directly comparable to the figures in the Phan and Ball study as it is no longer possible to select data by the 'stream of study' description. Nevertheless, the 2001 figures indicate that, of the 1.75 million VET students, at least 106.7 thousand were in enabling courses. This figure represents 6.1% of the total number of students undertaking vocational programs, which suggests a slight increase in 2001 students in enabling courses by comparison with 5.4% of students undertaking enabling courses in 1998, as found by Phan and Ball.

As in 1998, the proportion of women in enabling courses was higher than the proportion of men in enabling courses in 2001 (see table 2). During 1998, much higher proportions of students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and non-English speaking backgrounds were enrolled in enabling courses by comparison with their counterparts and this trend continues in 2001. Similarly in 1998, students who left school before completing Year 10 and those who reported that they were unemployed prior to commencement of their VET course were at least three times more likely to undertake studies in the lower-level courses when compared to their counterparts. In 2001, students who left school before completing Year 10 appear more than four times more likely to undertake enabling courses than their counterparts. In 2001, those students who reported that they were unemployed prior to commencement of their VET course remain three times more likely to enrol in an enabling course.

Students who reported that they have a disability were also more inclined to undertake enabling courses than students who reported no disability. In particular, students who reported that they had an intellectual disability are much more likely to enrol in enabling courses than students with other types of disability.

Students who live in rural and remote regions were less likely to enrol in enabling courses than those students who come from capital cities or capital regions. However, women from rural and remote regions who undertake enabling courses were in the same proportion as all students from these areas.

In general, a large proportion of students undertaking enabling courses belongs to more than one disadvantaged group. These students include those with dual disadvantage, such as women from non-English speaking backgrounds, women who were unemployed prior to undertaking their course, non-English speaking background students who were unemployed prior to undertaking their course, students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and from rural and remote areas, and those of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and unemployed prior to undertaking their course.

Students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent may also belong to multiple-disadvantage groups. For example, they may be from rural and remote areas and from non-English speaking backgrounds and have completed school below Year 10 level. In addition, they may also have low-level literacy and numeracy skills and be unemployed or have few employment opportunities.

Table 1: Proportion of enabling course students, 2001

	Total number of VET students (’000)	Number of enabling course students (’000)	Proportion of students in enabling course (%)
Age 15–19 years	416.0	33.2	8.0
Age 20–24 years	266.6	13.6	5.1
Age 25–29 years	185.8	10.2	5.5
Age 30–39 years	329.5	19.8	6.0
Age 40–49 years	276.8	15.8	5.7
Age 50–59 years	148.1	7.5	5.1
Age 60–64 years	27.4	1.7	6.3
Female	856.0	55.0	6.4
Male	893.5	51.7	5.8
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent	58.0	10.5	18.1
Non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent	1394.0	81.8	5.9
Non-English speaking background	204.7	27.9	13.6
English speaking background	1206.0	61.9	5.1
Has a disability	69.2	11.4	16.5
Visual/sight/seeing	11.2	1.3	11.5
Hearing	9.1	1.2	12.8
Physical	16.3	2.1	13.1
Intellectual	10.1	3.7	36.6
Chronic illness	6.4	1.0	15.0
Other disability	19.1	3.4	17.6
Unspecified disability	5.5	0.8	14.2
Has no disabilities	1456.7	85.5	5.9
From rural or remote regions	616.8	34.0	5.5
From capital cities or capital regions	1098.2	70.6	6.4
Unemployed prior to undertaking VET course	242.7	29.3	12.1
Employed prior to undertaking VET course	862.7	25.5	3.0
Completed Year 12	538.0	21.6	4.0
Completed Year 11	215.4	12.7	5.9
Completed Year 10	371.1	20.8	5.6
Completed Year 9 or below	143.7	28.0	19.5
Women from rural or remote regions*	289.7	16.0	5.5
Women unemployed prior to undertaking VET course*	124.2	15.1	12.1
Women from a non-English speaking background*	111.9	17.3	15.4
Non-English-speaking background and unemployed*	48.7	8.9	18.2
Indigenous students from rural or remote regions*	38.1	6.9	18.0
Indigenous and unemployed prior to undertaking VET course*	13.8	2.9	21.4

Note: * Overlapping demographic groups

Source: NCVER 2001 National VET Collection

Some students who reported a disability may also be unemployed or have fewer employment opportunities, have less than Year 10 schooling and low-level literacy and numeracy skills. Thus, it would not be surprising that some students in enabling courses especially those from low socio-economic regions or with multiple disadvantages, remain in enabling courses, or low-level courses for longer periods of time than those with just one form of disadvantage.

The proportions of students in enabling courses in 1998 and 2001 are compared in table 2.

Table 2: Comparison of proportion of students in enabling courses (%) in 1998 and 2001

Equity group	Proportion of students in enabling course (%) in 1998	Proportion of students in enabling course (%) in 2001**
Female	6.1	6.4
Male	4.9	5.8
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent	15.3	18.1
Non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent	5.6	5.9
Non-English speaking background	14.2	13.6
English speaking background	4.4	5.1
Unemployed prior to undertaking VET course	11.0	12.1
Employed prior to undertaking VET course	2.7	3.0
Completed Year 10, Year 11 or Year 12	4.5	4.5
Completed Year 9 or below	17.5	19.5
Has a disability	14.7	16.5
Has no disability	5.6	5.9
Has an intellectual disability	31.0	36.6
Women from rural/remote areas*	4.5	5.5
Women unemployed prior to undertaking VET course*	11.6	12.1
Women from non-English-speaking background*	17.1	15.4
Non-English-speaking background and unemployed*	21.0	18.2
Indigenous students from rural/remote areas*	14.4	18.0
Indigenous and unemployed prior to undertaking VET course*	19.5	21.4

Notes: * Overlapping demographic groups

** Not directly comparable to 1998 figures as it is no longer possible to select data by 'stream of study' description when defining the 'enabling courses'.

Source: NCVET 1998 and 2001 National VET Collection

Students by age

The distribution of students in each age group in 2001 is shown in table 3. This updates the information on 1998 students enrolled in 'enabling courses' in the Phan and Ball study. However, as already mentioned, the data in table 2 are not directly comparable to the figures of the previous study.

During 1998, the majority of women undertaking enabling courses were in the 30 to 49 years age group, whereas in 2001 they were in the 15 to 19 years age group (see table 4). In 1998, the highest proportion of women in enabling courses who were from rural or remote regions, who were unemployed before the course, or who were from non-English speaking backgrounds, belonged to the 30 to 39 years age group. While the proportion of these groups is still high in this age group in 2001, the proportion of women who were from rural and remote areas or unemployed before commencing their course was highest in the 15 to 19 years age group. By contrast, the majority of men undertaking enabling courses was in the 15 to 19 years age group in both 1998 and 2001, and the proportion in that age group appears to have increased considerably in 2001.

About 25% of students who reported they were unemployed prior to undertaking their enabling courses were in the 15 to 19 years age group and the 30 to 39 years age group in 1998, while the highest proportion of those employed prior to their course was in the 30 to 39 years age group. By contrast, in 2001, the proportion of students, both unemployed and employed prior to undertaking their enabling course, is highest in the 15 to 19 years age group.

Table 3: Distribution of students in each group by age (%), 2001

	15–19 years	20–24 years	25–29 years	30–39 years	40–49 years	50–59 years	60–64 years	15–64 years	60–64 years (’000)
Female	27.0	11.6	9.8	21.5	19.2	8.8	2.1	100.0	52.5
Male	38.6	15.3	10.3	17.1	11.6	5.8	1.3	100.0	49.2
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent	37.7	16.6	12.6	18.7	10.1	3.6	0.6	100.0	9.8
Non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent	32.4	13.0	9.6	19.4	16.0	7.8	1.8	100.0	78.5
Non-English speaking background	7.9	10.3	11.3	28.2	25.5	13.1	3.7	100.0	26.4
English speaking background	40.1	15.6	9.9	16.7	11.8	5.1	0.9	100.0	59.3
Has a disability	26.9	14.9	9.8	18.9	17.1	9.9	2.6	100.0	11.0
Visual/sight/seeing	27.8	12.3	9.6	15.6	18.8	13.3	2.6	100.0	1.2
Hearing	20.3	11.8	9.7	21.4	19.7	12.3	4.8	100.0	1.1
Physical	12.4	10.3	9.7	21.6	25.4	17.1	3.5	100.0	2.1
Intellectual	33.9	20.6	10.7	18.7	10.9	4.4	0.8	100.0	3.6
Chronic illness	20.8	10.3	8.6	20.3	22.4	13.4	4.2	100.0	0.9
Other disability	32.1	14.3	9.2	19.1	16.1	7.6	1.6	100.0	3.3
Unspecified disability	16.8	12.0	9.9	18.9	20.5	13.8	8.1	100.0	0.7
Has no disabilities	34.2	13.2	9.9	19.2	15.0	6.9	1.6	100.0	81.5
From rural or remote regions	40.6	13.8	9.2	17.5	12.4	5.5	1.0	100.0	32.4
From capital cities or capital regions	28.5	12.8	10.2	20.6	17.4	8.4	2.0	100.0	67.3
Unemployed prior to undertaking VET course	32.1	14.2	9.8	19.4	16.5	7.3	0.7	100.0	28.9
Employed prior to undertaking VET course	26.2	15.4	10.9	21.8	17.1	7.4	1.2	100.0	25.1
Completed Year 12	17.0	18.0	13.1	23.4	18.5	8.0	1.9	100.0	21.0
Completed Year 11	56.3	12.0	7.4	12.6	8.4	2.9	0.5	100.0	12.5
Completed Year 10	34.0	13.7	9.5	20.5	15.1	6.0	1.1	100.0	20.3
Completed Year 9 or below	40.2	10.5	8.0	16.4	14.6	8.4	1.8	100.0	26.4
Women from rural or remote regions*	36.4	11.9	8.9	19.4	15.4	6.7	1.3	100.0	15.3
Women unemployed prior to undertaking VET course*	27.6	12.7	10.1	21.6	19.8	7.7	0.5	100.0	14.9
Women from a non-English speaking background*	5.6	9.0	11.2	29.6	27.7	13.0	3.8	100.0	16.4
Non-English speaking background and unemployed*	5.3	9.8	11.7	29.6	28.0	14.0	1.6	100.0	8.8
Indigenous students from rural or remote regions*	38.4	16.5	12.1	19.0	9.9	3.5	0.6	100.0	6.3
Indigenous and unemployed prior to undertaking VET course*	40.1	17.2	12.0	17.8	9.6	3.0	0.2	100.0	2.9

Note: * Overlapping of demographic groups

Source: NCVER 2001 National VET Collection

In 1998, the proportion of students who identified as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent was higher in the 15 to 19 years age group than in the 30 to 39 years age group. The proportion of non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students in these two age groups was similar. This can be contrasted with figures for 2001 when there was a significantly higher proportion of students who identified as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent in the 15 to 19 years age group than in 30 to 39 years age group. This may be an indication of the VET environment being a more attractive alternative to school, or simply reflect the national trend and high youth unemployment figures.

As in 1998, enabling course students who reported that they had a disability in 2001 were most likely to be in the 15 to 19 years age group and in the 30 to 49 years age group. Students who

reported that they had an intellectual disability, however, were most likely to be in the 15 to 19-years age group.

Table 4: Comparison of age group with highest proportion of students (%) in 1998 and 2001

Equity group	Age group with highest proportion (%) in 1998	Age group with highest proportion (%) in 2001**
Female	30–39 years (26.4)	15–19 years (27.0)
Male	15–19 years (29.4)	15–19 years (38.6)
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent	15–19 years (27.8)	15–19 years (37.7)
Non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent	30–39 years (24.2)	15–19 years (32.4)
Non-English speaking background	30–39 years (31.1)	30–39 years (28.2)
English speaking background	15–19 years (34.6)	15–19 years (40.1)
Unemployed prior to undertaking VET course	15–19 years (25.4)	15–19 years (32.1)
Employed prior to undertaking VET course	30–39 years (27.6)	15–19 years (26.2)
Completed Year 12	30–39 years (28.8)	30–39 years (23.4)
Completed Year 11	15–19 years (34.6)	15–19 years (56.3)
Completed Year 10	15–19 years (32.8)	15–19 years (34.0)
Completed Year 9 or below	15–19 years (30.0)	15–19 years (40.2)
Has a disability	15–19 years (23.2) also 30–39 years ((21.7)	15–19 years (26.9) also 30–39 years (18.9)
Has no disability	30–39 years (24.5)	15–19 years (34.2)
Has an intellectual disability	15–19 years (27.0)	15–19 years (33.9)
Women from rural/remote areas*	30–39 years (25.4)	15–19 years (36.4)
Women unemployed before course*	30–39 years (27.1)	15–19 years (27.6)
Women from non-English-speaking background*	30–39 years (32.0)	30–39 years (29.6)
Non-English speaking background and unemployed*	30–39 years (33.5) also 40–49 years (25.4)	30–39 years (29.6) also 40–49 years (28.0)
Indigenous students from rural/remote areas*	15–19 years (27.5)	15–19 years (38.4)
Indigenous and unemployed prior to undertaking VET course*	15–19 years (30.7)	15–19 years (40.1)

Notes: * Overlapping demographic groups

** Not directly comparable to 1998 as it is no longer possible to select 'stream of study' when defining 'enabling courses'.

Source: NCVET 1998 and 2001 National VET Collection

Are students remaining in enabling courses?

The analysis of the national VET enrolment data indicates an increasing proportion of teenagers in enabling courses. Some of these are students leaving school early for personal reasons, including disenchantment with the school system or family problems. Other students may be in special programs, such as students with a disability who are undertaking school-to-work transition programs at TAFE.

VET access and equity managers in three states—New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria—were contacted for this study. They indicated that a few students do appear to remain in the lower-level preparatory vocational education courses without moving on to mainstream VET courses. 'Recyclers' was a term used in one state to refer to this category of student. Those students most likely to remain in lower-level courses were those with low-level literacy and numeracy skills, such as early school leavers, students from Aboriginal communities and unemployed teenagers.

Referrals were obtained to specific TAFE institute program managers, especially those responsible for vocational preparation, disability and Aboriginal programs. Vocational preparation lecturers who were interviewed noted that some teenage students are enrolling in TAFE enabling courses to escape the supervision of school teachers, characteristic of secondary school programs. They also

noted that these students are still immature and not motivated to attend classes at TAFE regularly. However, other students may lack self-esteem but completed the enabling course. Subsequently, on obtaining work experience or part-time work, they tended to improve their self-esteem and motivation to engage in further training. Repeating the courses enables them to gain more knowledge and to continue further studies. Centrelink also makes it possible for their clients to repeat a preparatory course.

Three sites were selected to focus specifically on vocational preparation, Aboriginal education and disability programs. Case studies involving staff and student interviews were conducted at:

- ✧ Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE, South Australia (metropolitan campuses)
- ✧ Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE, South Australia (metropolitan and rural campuses)
- ✧ Djigay Centre of Excellence in Aboriginal Education, TAFE NSW, North Coast Institute, Kempsey campus (regional campus).

The aim of this study was to find out whether the students in preparatory and pre-vocational, or enabling courses, intended to move onto higher-level or mainstream courses, or whether there are impediments to their doing so. A secondary aim was to identify strategies which could assist enabling course students to move into mainstream courses or employment.

Summaries of the case studies appear below while the detailed case studies appear in appendix 1.

Vocational Preparation Centre, Gilles Plains campus, Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE

Vocational preparation courses are specifically designed for the long-term unemployed, women, people with disabilities, people with English as a second language or a non-English speaking background, prisoners, youth and sole-supporting parents. Thus, for students in vocational preparation programs there are often multiple barriers to learning which must be overcome. More common barriers include low self-esteem, lack of literacy and numeracy skills, and financial or emotional problems.

The Vocational Preparation Centre at Gilles Plains campus of Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE was especially selected as a case study for its School to Work Partnership Program for students with a disability. Also of interest were the courses in women's education, Certificate I in Preparatory Education (CPE), certificates in English proficiency (second language) and courses for senior citizens.

School to Work Partnership Program for students with a disability

This three-stage program, a response to the 'Bridging pathways' strategy initiated in 2002, resulted from a partnership between Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE and Community Bridging Services Inc. (CBS), a non-profit organisation.

The first stage targets Years 9 and 10 school students who have a disability and want to gain employment skills. For one day a week these students attend classes at the TAFE campus to undertake the Certificate I in Employment Skills Training.

Stage 2 is the Jobnet School program which is delivered by Community Bridging Services Inc. and is a more community-based program designed to assist potential school leavers prepare for the transition from school to work. The program involves worksite visits, guest speakers from industry, and training in occupational health, safety and welfare requirements, first aid, team building and social skills. It also includes intense job search preparation programs, including the preparation of applications, résumé-writing, interview techniques and telephone skills.

Stage 3 is the Community Bridging Services Inc. Jobnet Employment Program (JEP) which assists school leavers and job seekers to prepare for, find and keep a job. This program offers individual programs, peer group support and job placement. Case-based funding for the program from the

Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services is available for up to 18 months, and services continue for at least five months after the disabled person obtains a job.

Women's education

Students in the women's education programs, including sole-supporting mothers, are often well motivated to improve their own education and are mostly successful. TAFE staff note that those students who tend not to achieve success in the women's education programs tend to have additional problems, including low self-esteem, lack of peer support, inadequate childcare arrangements, financial or emotional problems.

English proficiency (second language)

While students from non-English speaking backgrounds are generally well motivated and successful in achieving the competencies for the Certificate in English Proficiency (Second Language), TAFE staff note that this group often requires ongoing support to retain their skill level. Thus, some students may re-enrol in the same course. For example, those who are in the workforce need ongoing help with their language to manage workplace change, particularly in relation to the use of computers.

Senior citizens

Courses specifically designed for elderly or senior citizens are provided through the ACE program; for example, Computer 55. TAFE staff note that these students are self-motivated and generally have successful outcomes.

The disadvantaged group of unemployed older workers, especially males over 45 years old, may join some of the established courses (such as computer training courses). They may also require assistance with job seeking and career counselling.

Certificate in Preparatory Education

Every six months, between 10 and 15 students undertake the Certificate in Preparatory Education at the Vocational Preparation Centre at Gilles Plains campus. About half of the early school leaver group undertaking this certificate successfully move into the Certificate II in Introductory Vocational Education program at Tea Tree Gully campus.

Those who do not complete the program within the allocated six months are mostly young men who left school at Year 9 and have low-level literacy skills. They are often immature and disenchanted with school and teachers. They attend TAFE irregularly and prefer to be with their mates. The Certificate in Preparatory Education program is classroom-based learning and this may also not suit these students whose preferred learning style is more likely to be 'learning by doing' or based on practical vocational skills.

TAFE staff note that this group of students includes young people with a variety of difficulties, including behavioural problems, homelessness or family problems, mental or other health problems, alcohol or drug abuse, financial problems, learning disabilities, or demoralising experiences at school. In addition, there are also some students who have anger management problems or who have been in trouble with the law. This group of students therefore, requires an enormous amount of assistance from TAFE support services, including accommodation, rent assistance, suicide prevention, counselling and crisis intervention.

One of the major issues for staff in the Certificate in Preparatory Education classes is the increasing trend of young, immature students being placed in classes with mature-aged students. Younger and more immature students are not ready for independent learning and their behaviour is disruptive to the class and causes friction in the adult learning environment.

Strategies used to move students into higher-level courses

Strategies used to motivate Certificate of Preparatory Education students to enrol in higher-level courses include:

- ✧ graduation to Certificate II in Introductory Vocational Education course at Tea Tree Gully campus
- ✧ entry to a pre-vocational program
- ✧ gaining part-time work.

TAFE staff encourage students to pursue contacts for work experience, either part-time or voluntary work to demonstrate a commitment to a work ethic. Lecturers tend to pursue their own contacts to assist individual students to find places in pre-vocational programs. Students are also encouraged to use the TAFE employment services to find part-time work.

Students who repeat modules or courses

Because of immaturity, low self-esteem, irregular attendance or other reasons, some students achieve only minimal levels of the competencies in the allocated time. These students may repeat the program at a later stage; for example, after gaining employment or work experience, and with maturity and higher self-esteem achieve much more from the course. In addition, some students lose the skills they gained in a vocational education program and need to update skills by repeating the course or module at a later stage to better equip them when seeking employment.

Similarly, English as a second language students often want to maintain their skill levels and seek ongoing support by continuing to attend English proficiency classes even though they are employed.

However, in South Australia, the Office of Vocational Education and Training has introduced a policy which states that, unless students pay the fee-for-service costs, they can enrol only twice in government-subsidised modules or courses. The TAFE student management system, using a unique identity code, can be used to track student enrolments in the same or other TAFE courses.

Vocational preparation, disability program and Aboriginal education, Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE

The specific areas investigated at Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE were the vocational preparation, disability and Aboriginal education programs.

Vocational preparation and disability program

TAFE staff noted that, for students in vocational preparation courses, there are often multiple barriers to learning to overcome. These barriers may include:

- ✧ disenchantment with the school system
- ✧ demoralising experiences at school
- ✧ high levels of truancy at school
- ✧ low self-esteem
- ✧ low-level literacy and numeracy skills
- ✧ school attainment levels below Year 10
- ✧ alcoholism or drug abuse
- ✧ family problems
- ✧ financial problems
- ✧ health problems

- ✧ learning disabilities
- ✧ anger management or law enforcement problems (repeat offenders).

Supporting strategies

Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE believes in providing a supportive learning environment to help students overcome lack of literacy and numeracy skills as well as inadequate formal school education, self-esteem and confidence.

In order to improve their prospects for employment, students are often referred from Centrelink to these courses. It is recognised that raising students' self-esteem and confidence is important and is linked to raising literacy and vocational skill levels. Thus, students who have graduated from these courses will often re-enrol in courses or modules in order to maintain confidence and skills while seeking work.

Successful strategies include developing curriculum materials specifically to suit the students (for example, relevant project-based activities) and flexibility in assessment and demonstration of competency. Another strategy introduced at Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE in the vocational preparation program is the inclusion of work placements or work experience as part of the curriculum for Certificate I in Employment Skills Training, the Certificate I in Preparatory Education and the Introductory Vocational Education Certificate. It is hoped that this will assist students to gain the necessary work ethic.

While half of the students in the disability program are already working, lecturers assist students who are not in work to apply for supported employment with agencies such as Bedford Industries Rehabilitation Association Inc. or open employment with agencies such as Career Systems Inc.

Strategies are also in place for providing learning support to students who move into higher-level courses or employment. The institute's student services unit provides bridging courses for some students before they commence a mainstream course, or learning support during an existing course. Career counselling and employment referral services are also made available.

Aboriginal education

The Aboriginal education coordinator notes that the most important requirements for Aboriginal students to successfully study at TAFE are:

- ✧ culturally sensitive learning environments and adequate facilities
- ✧ lecturers who are culturally aware and supportive of an Aboriginal learning style
- ✧ a curriculum which is adapted to meet the needs of the Aboriginal community
- ✧ assessment strategies which allow flexibility whereby some students need longer to achieve competencies or students have a choice of assessment methods
- ✧ clearly defined pathways for education and training which lead to employment outcomes.

Staff also note that Aboriginal students often have multiple barriers to learning to overcome. These barriers include:

- ✧ low-level literacy and numeracy skills
- ✧ non-English speaking backgrounds
- ✧ disenchantment with the school system or lack of European-style schooling
- ✧ racial discrimination or harassment in the school system and community
- ✧ few employment prospects due to low-level work skills and school attainment
- ✧ few employment prospects due to remote location

- ✧ ties to family and community difficult to break (for example, three generations of unemployment)
- ✧ unwilling or financially unable to move away from family for work
- ✧ emotional, health, nutrition or substance abuse difficulties
- ✧ lack of peer support on campus.

Reasons why some of these groups do not move on

Vocational preparation, disability and Aboriginal education students often need longer than the allocated time to complete preparatory courses. This is usually because of low levels of literacy and numeracy, self-esteem and confidence. In addition, some of these students prefer to complete courses by undertaking only one module initially. Thus they take longer to complete all of the requirements for the course.

Since many students commence preparatory education courses with low self-esteem and confidence, it is not surprising that, after a break from studies, some students may want to repeat the same or a similar course. This may be due to students having forgotten prior learning or having gained further confidence from their involvement in work experience. Increased confidence allows them to learn more from the course the second time around. Staff also encourage graduates from preparatory courses to enrol in a similar course while they are seeking work. This enables them to maintain their self-confidence and skills for longer periods of time. Staff also believe that, in many instances, recent school leavers lack the maturity or incentive for applying themselves to their studies. These students are perceived to require further support prior to entering mainstream VET courses. They may also need to be involved in work placements to increase their understanding of what they can gain from the course.

Supporting strategies

Staff in the Aboriginal Education Unit are careful to demonstrate respect for students and show that they value them as individuals with special needs and abilities. They also ensure that they make time to provide face-to-face support for students undertaking flexible delivery programs. The Aboriginal students need a supportive, safe and secure learning environment and a long-term, trusting relationship with lecturers. It is important in building these trusting relationships for TAFE staff to have an understanding of Aboriginal students' culture, communities, families and health situations. Flexibility in teaching and learning and assessment methodologies is also important to ensure a match between the preferred learning style and experiences of students.

In Aboriginal communities where unemployment is entrenched, a community-TAFE partnership is required such that community leaders are involved in determining the curriculum. Moreover, a TAFE liaison officer acts to promote trust in the partnership. In this way the students will have community support as well as trust in TAFE lecturers, a situation designed to ensure the progress of their education and training.

An important strategy is the provision of pathways for Aboriginal students to enable them to find employment at the end of their training. Aboriginal people generally do not like to leave their community and families to move to jobs. Aboriginal enterprises or Community Development Employment Project schemes which involve industry-recognised training, assist the community to provide the incentives for young people to undertake training and gain work skills.

In order to provide Aboriginal students with the peer support and supportive learning environment required to move into higher-level mainstream courses, the Aboriginal Education Unit staff are themselves undertaking training to qualify as trainers in mainstream courses such as community services.

In November 2002, to recognise and value the support of the community, the Aboriginal Education Unit held its first Aboriginal graduation ceremony at the Raukkan campus with the

elders and families from this rural Aboriginal community. The Aboriginal elder presented nine students who had completed Certificate III in Community Management with their certificates.

General strategies which were important to the success of students in vocational preparation, disability and Aboriginal education programs at Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE include:

- ✧ selection of students for appropriate preparatory education or vocational preparatory courses
- ✧ flexibility in the courses to suit individual needs or locations
- ✧ flexibility in assessment methodologies (for example, the Aboriginal students may choose oral assessment)
- ✧ provision of pathways so that students are motivated to progress to mainstream courses and employment opportunities (for example, inclusion of work experience in enabling courses or subsidised work placements)
- ✧ providing learning support in mainstream courses
- ✧ mentoring and encouragement from Aboriginal staff and mature-aged students
- ✧ role models for Aboriginal students through employment of more Aboriginal tutors and support staff
- ✧ appropriate curriculum which respects Aboriginal culture and community interests
- ✧ establishing community–TAFE partnerships and liaison officers for Aboriginal communities
- ✧ ensuring mainstream course VET staff and students learn from Aboriginal culture and community.

Djigay Centre of Excellence in Aboriginal Education, TAFE NSW, North Coast Institute, Kempsey campus

The model of education and training used at Djigay Centre is based on providing students in access courses with a supportive learning environment to help them to overcome a lack of literacy and numeracy skills, formal school education or self-esteem. Staff believe that, if students are to acquire vocational skills, they need to become independent learners motivated to succeed by their own or community goals. Allowing Aboriginal students a longer time to explore different areas is often necessary to enable them to identify their particular interest or talent and to set their goals. In addition, it is often the support within the learning group which nurtures and encourages individuals or the collective to achieve higher levels. Twenty Aboriginal staff are employed at the Kempsey TAFE campus, a situation which, it is believed, increases local ownership of the courses and provides role models for the students.

Ages of students in the Certificate I in Work Skills course ranged from 17 to 63 years and included school leavers, young people who were unemployed, young mothers with children at school, and Aboriginal elders. A few students were found to be ‘repeating’ enabling courses after being unemployed for years or because they liked learning and the social contact available to them at TAFE. The latter were often mature-aged students who were restricted from finding full-time paid work because of the location, or because of health problems or family and community responsibilities.

Successful strategies

A variety of strategies are used at Djigay to help students move from enabling courses to mainstream VET courses or employment. Students are involved in the Djigay work-based learning enterprises, including the Wigay Aboriginal Food and Culture Park and the college café. Here, students are involved in actual work, for example, horticulture and hospitality, while undertaking their training. This provides the students with self-confidence and pride among their peer group and the wider community. The park attracts tourists and the café attracts outside catering contracts. In this way, alternative employment opportunities are highlighted. The curriculum is adapted to local

community needs and Aboriginal staff are employed to deliver the training whenever possible. This helps to create a sense of community ownership of the courses.

Another important strategy used at Djigay is to allow students to remain in the Certificate I in Work Skills course for a longer time to demonstrate to them that they can be successful at a higher level. This also motivates them to move into mainstream courses. Students enrolled in the Certificate I in Work Skills course are allowed to select from a wide choice of electives (including Certificate III modules). Thus, students enrolled in the Certificate I in Work Skills course may be undertaking modules from courses in horticulture, hospitality, office skills, sports science, multi-media, art (painting or ceramics) or Aboriginal cultural resources (including documenting their traditional language). Some students are also learning to work with horses. This approach is used to help students to find their areas of interest and to develop the self-confidence to move into higher-level mainstream courses. Flexible delivery and assessment methodologies are also believed to be essential as these are perceived to support learning orally, learning through practice, and continuous, oral assessment.

Djigay also identified definite pathways for students. This approach was found to be particularly successful in the Certificate I in Work Skills course which was linked to one of the work-based learning enterprises. In addition, linked courses were offered in consecutive years so that, for example, students in certificate II courses were encouraged to progress into certificate III courses. Djigay also offered what are called 'selected study programs'. In these programs, modules from certificates II and III could be undertaken by the same students in the one year to allow them longer time to finish a course.

Role models were also considered to be very important to new students in assisting them to develop goals for their future. These included former Djigay students or local school assistants engaged in further studies. Djigay was also involved in a number of outreach programs and links to local school students were established.

General strategies that were considered important included:

- ✧ allowing Aboriginal students longer, where necessary, to successfully complete courses
- ✧ continuity of staff employment so that Aboriginal students build long-term, trusting relationships with teachers and support staff
- ✧ mentoring and encouragement from Aboriginal staff and mature-aged students
- ✧ encouraging excursions for Aboriginal students to broaden their experience (for example, visits to major art galleries or exhibitions or to employment opportunities such as the extension to the Mid-North Correction Centre or local schools)
- ✧ encouraging students to set up small or cooperative business activities to use their skills and create employment opportunities.

A major impediment to students moving into higher-level training was the lack of employment opportunities, especially apprenticeships and traineeships, in the local region. Another impediment to continuing to higher levels was the need to travel to distant TAFE campuses to undertake more advanced courses. For example, level III certificates in horticulture, commercial cookery, and building and construction were not available at the Kempsey campus.

There were also other obstacles to students progressing to more advanced courses. A small number of students, particularly mature-aged students in the Aboriginal cultural resources (language) group, had health problems which prevented them from engaging in full-time paid employment. Most of these had a realistic goal of looking for part-time or voluntary work, including assisting students in local schools with literacy and numeracy, or helping them to learn their traditional Aboriginal language. In the Aboriginal cultural resources group there were also younger students who were interested in learning about their own culture and language. These skills may assist them in looking for paid work in the future, or help them to teach their culture to their own children.

Where preparation for tertiary studies was undertaken at TAFE, the students made use of the Adult Study Centre provided at Kempsey TAFE campus. In addition, Djigay and other TAFE staff provided part-time tutorial support and mentoring for local students who went on to higher education. These strategies were especially important for supporting local students undertaking higher education courses at other institutions.

Conclusions and implications

Overview

This study has confirmed the findings of Phan and Ball (2001) that students undertaking enabling courses generally have positive outcomes. It has also confirmed that a small number of students re-enrol in the same enabling course, or at the same level of qualification. The students who re-enrol in the same enabling course generally have low-level skills in literacy and numeracy or have a disability, especially an intellectual disability. It is also found that, although students re-enrol in a course at the same level of qualification, they may still be progressing to a more advanced level of study (for example, students moving on from Certificate I in Preparatory Education to the Certificate II in Introductory Vocational Education or a pre-vocational course). Other students may re-enrol in a different enabling course but be focusing on a different vocational area or be exploring a new area (for example, different pre-vocational courses or elective modules from different mainstream courses).

It was also found that students may re-enrol in the same enabling course or in a course at the same level of qualification because they want to maintain their learning engagement. These generally comprise students who are unemployed or who have a disability or who are from non-English speaking backgrounds or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. Other students, especially mature-aged students, may re-enrol to maintain their quality of life through further training and the ongoing social contacts available in training programs. Students have a variety of reasons for re-enrolling in the same or different enabling course, or sometimes in a course at a lower level of qualification. These include:

- ✧ re-visiting prior learning
- ✧ maintaining skills and self-confidence while seeking paid work
- ✧ gaining additional skills and knowledge in new areas of learning
- ✧ maintaining the social contacts available at TAFE
- ✧ supporting other students' learning.

Some students enrol in enabling courses for personal interest reasons. However, if they experience success, this may lead to further studies or paid employment at a later stage. Other benefits of students continuing in enabling courses were also noted. These include:

- ✧ improved lifestyle and health of individuals
- ✧ increased networks for support and a sense of belonging to a community
- ✧ increased community ownership of courses (for example, Aboriginal elders attending TAFE)
- ✧ increased mentoring of students by mature-aged students.

This study has shown that there are direct and indirect benefits for students in enrolling in the same enabling course on more than one occasion. Direct benefits may include increased self-esteem and skill levels, maintaining skill levels and confidence while seeking work or improved health. Indirect benefits, may include maintaining supportive networks through the contacts available at TAFE, personal interest which may lead to part-time or voluntary work, or community benefits, such as mature-aged students providing role models and encouragement for younger people in marginalised groups.

The 'disadvantaged' groups, especially sub-groups, such as early school leavers and long-term unemployed people, need specific strategies to facilitate their chances of moving on from enabling courses to further study or employment. Five successful strategies identified in this study are summarised below.

Customising curricula and assessment methodologies

An important strategy for encouraging participation, and successfully moving students on from enabling courses is to increase their motivation by customising the curriculum to suit the location and the needs of students. For example, using project-based learning in a local community and adapting delivery to the preferred learning styles of students. The study found a preference for oral and practical learning by many of the students in enabling courses.

A variety of assessment methodologies should also be developed for enabling courses to ensure these students have as much opportunity as possible to demonstrate their achievement in the required competencies. For example, students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent may prefer oral assessment to written assessment.

Allowing students longer, when necessary, to successfully complete courses

Students with low-level literacy and numeracy skills or those with a disability or who have left school without completing Year 10, often need time to overcome multiple barriers to learning. They may lack maturity, trust in teachers and the self-esteem to believe in their own ability to learn. These students need extra support and time to build confidence to become independent learners and to move on from enabling courses to mainstream VET courses. In these instances, providing longer than the allocated number of hours for an enabling course, or allowing students to repeat the same course is usually beneficial. For example, Aboriginal students often require additional time to successfully complete courses. At Djigay the students remain in the Certificate I in Work Skills course until they are ready to move into courses for a higher-level qualification.

Supporting students with definite pathways to employment

Students with low self-esteem generally do not know what they want or what they are able to achieve, and hence are often unable to set their own long-term goals or identify a pathway which leads to paid employment. A primary aim of enabling courses is to increase students' feelings of self-worth, confidence and motivation.

Initially, some students may be referred to TAFE by Centrelink or be enrolled in enabling courses to access government allowances (for example, Abstudy or Austudy allowances). Often these students do not have access to trusted others, such as parents, for support and guidance in career education. They often rely on lecturers and student services officers for long-term support and guidance in relation to potential further studies and employment opportunities.

Making it possible for students to undertake electives selected from suitable modules from mainstream courses is one way to assist students to explore further studies options. Keeping students in the same class groups in the following year may also assist students to progress to the next level of study. Courses may be timetabled in consecutive semesters (for example, the Introductory Vocational Education Certificate or pre-vocational course follows the Certificate in Preparatory Education) or years (for example, certificate III course follows certificate II course) to encourage and direct students into the next level course. Another successful strategy is to implement a 'selected study program', which extends the time the student has to finish the course by combining modules from two levels of qualification in the one year (for example, finishing some certificate II modules and undertaking other modules from certificate III in the same year).

Supported and directed pathways to employment opportunities should be provided for all 15 to 19-year-old students who are unemployed.

Providing work experience

Most students, but particularly those of low socio-economic status or low self-esteem, are motivated by work experience to encourage them to become independent learners and undertake further study or set their goals. A commendable strategy is therefore to include work experience and work placements as part of the enabling course curriculum.

Using skills in the community

Encouraging students to use their skills and knowledge in a voluntary capacity in the community, in campus-based business enterprises, or in small or cooperative businesses for the community is another strategy which may help students to move from enabling courses to more advanced mainstream VET programs or paid employment

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Appendix

Vocational Preparation Centre, Gilles Plains campus, Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE

Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE has four campus locations around Adelaide, South Australia. These are Gilles Plains, Tea Tree Gully, Cheltenham (Horse Industry Skills Centre), and Urrbrae Education Centre.

The Vocational Preparation Faculty is located at the Gilles Plains campus, along with building and finishing trades, para-dental studies, veterinary and applied science, and community services.

Vocational preparation courses are specifically designed for the long-term unemployed, women, sole-supporting mothers, prisoners, youth and people with a disability, with English as a second language (ESL) or with non-English speaking backgrounds. Accredited courses in vocational preparation include:

- ✧ Certificate I in Personal Management
- ✧ Certificate I in Preparatory Education
- ✧ Certificate I in Employment Skills Training
- ✧ Certificate II in Introductory Vocational Education
- ✧ Certificate II in Women's Education
- ✧ Certificates I and II in English Proficiency (Second Language)—Basic/Intermediate
- ✧ Certificate III in English Proficiency (Second Language)—Advanced

A short course in bridging maths is also available to prepare students for vocational courses or to develop confidence in mathematics.

The Vocational Preparation Centre at Gilles Plains campus of Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE was especially selected as a case study for its School to Work Partnership Program for students with a disability. This study also highlights the women's education and English proficiency (second language) courses as well as those for senior citizens, and the Certificate I in Preparatory Education conducted at the Vocational Preparation Centre.

The coordinator of the vocational preparation programs, a lecturer in the disability program and the student counsellor at Gilles Plains campus were interviewed for this study. Staff explained that there had been a recent dramatic change in the disability program at Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE.

Previously Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE had a group of students with disabilities, some of whom had been undertaking the same program at TAFE for more than 10 years. This provided many disabled people with activities and social contact. It also provided their carers with respite for one day per week.
(Lecturer, disability program)

TAFE staff explained that previously, disabled students had been re-enrolled in the same program because their learning had reached a plateau and they were unable to progress beyond this point. Re-enrolment, however, enabled these students to continue to attend a learning environment where

they could retain their level of development, and continued to provide respite for their carers. It should be emphasised that repetition enabled these students to maintain a level of social functioning and ability. Unfortunately their re-enrolment resulted in new clients being precluded due to lack of places.

Demand from new client groups, in conjunction with the change in focus from providing the previous recreational programs to the new 'Bridging pathways' strategy, emphasises the focus on vocational outcomes for clients in TAFE. The strategy is accompanied by an implementation blueprint designed to increase opportunities for people with disabilities.

In addition, in 2002, the Office of Vocational Education and Training in South Australia introduced a new policy which limits the number of times a student can enrol in a module and receive a government-subsidised place. This means that students can only enrol in the same module twice and those who do not achieve competency in the allocated time must either pay the fee-for-service cost of the module or enrol in an alternative module to allow other clients entry into the program.

Unfortunately for those students with multiple disabilities who do not achieve competency or show improvement after the allocated time, there is little choice but to stay at home, as there are few alternatives available. This leaves them without the benefits of social interactions and the stimulation of going to TAFE once a week. The result has been that carers of former students still phone TAFE staff seeking respite. The closure of the recreational programs has created a service gap which can no longer be filled by TAFE but needs to be picked up by other Government sectors.

(Lecturer, disability program)

School to Work Partnership Program—the response by TAFE and Community Bridging Services Inc. to the 'Bridging pathways' strategy

Significantly, in response to the change in focus towards vocational outcomes, Gilles Plains campus introduced a new program specifically for students with disabilities. This program, implemented in 2002, is called the School to Work Partnership Program.

The School to Work Partnership Program between Community Bridging Services Inc. and Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE is conducted in three stages. TAFE lecturers deliver the Certificate I in Employment Skills Training as the first stage. By December 2002, the first six students had completed Stage 1. However, Stage 2 was also conducted in 2002 with other students.

Community Bridging Services Inc. is a non-profit community organisation located at the Gilles Plains campus of Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE and provides services to assist individuals with a disability to develop their potential and achieve their goals in the areas of recreation, further education and employment.

The Commonwealth Government funds the Community Bridging Services Jobnet School Program which helps people with disabilities to acquire the skills necessary to gain employment. The Jobnet program ensures that people with disabilities, whether they are physical, sensory, intellectual, psychiatric or acquired brain injury have every opportunity to participate in the wider community.

- ✧ Stage 1 of the School to Work Partnership Program targets Year 9 and 10 school students who want to gain employment skills. It aims to develop a mature outlook and prepare the students to proceed to the Jobnet School Program. For two semesters, students are released from school for one day per week to go to TAFE to undertake the Certificate I in Employment Skills Training.

To ease their transition from school to work, these students experience the TAFE culture and environment. They also benefit from the interactions with young people from different backgrounds.

The modules in Certificate I in Employment Skills Training involve a general skills component and are mostly classroom-based. They emphasise working and training in a group setting and enhancing communication and social skills.

- ✧ Stage 2 of the School to Work Partnership Program is the Jobnet School Program delivered by Community Bridging Services Inc. A more community-based program is designed to assist

potential school leavers to be better prepared for their working future and is mostly utilised by Year 10 to 12 students. The program involves work site visits, guest speakers from industry, team building and social skills development, occupational health, safety and welfare requirements, preparation for Duke of Edinburgh Award and basic first aid. It also includes an intensive job search preparation program, including the preparation of applications, résumé-writing, interview techniques and telephone skills.

The emphasis of the Jobnet School Program is to assist transition to either part-time or full-time employment, depending on individual goals, and to provide a pathway to Commonwealth funding to proceed to the Community Bridging Services Jobnet Employment Program.

- ✧ Stage 3 of the School to Work Partnership Program is the Jobnet Employment Program delivered by Community Bridging Services. This assists school leavers/job seekers to prepare for, find and keep a job. Individuals are supported in developing a vocational plan to achieve career goals and to find and keep a job in open employment.

Case-based funding for the Jobnet Employment Program from the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services is available for up to 18 months. This program helps people with a disability in rural and city locations to build on skills, strengths and interests, decide what to do next (for example, find a job, undertake more training or further education) and network with Centrelink and other employment agencies. Jobnet Employment Program offers individual programs, peer group support, real choices and work experiences, including job placement. Services from the program continue for at least five months but program coordinators may arrange for a person to receive ongoing support through networking with other agencies. The department notes a successful outcome of the Jobnet Employment Program when a client holds a job for at least six months.

Program clients may be eligible to receive long-term job search and job support, with staff provided to help job seekers or workers learn a job with full support.

Women's education

Women's education programs cater for those women who have left school early, often due to motherhood, or those who want to update or improve their education and vocational skills. The coordinator of vocational preparation programs noted that many students, including sole-supporting mothers are successful in the women's education programs. They are often well motivated by the opportunity to improve their own education, or support their child/children's education, and improve their employment prospects or financial resources through future employment.

Most students in the women's education program are successful. These graduates refer to the staff of vocational preparation programs as 'the angels of TAFE.'

(Coordinator, vocation preparation programs)

However, some of these women have negative views of their own ability to succeed, or are dominated by partners, and so need help to improve their self-confidence. It is beneficial to them to be in a positive environment with peers who are trying to achieve in their education. They often also need professional assistance with career counselling and career planning.

Those students who do not achieve success in women's education programs tend to have additional problems which may include:

- ✧ partners or peers who ridicule their efforts to improve their education
- ✧ financial problems or difficulty budgeting
- ✧ inadequate childcare arrangements
- ✧ emotional problems.

The TAFE student counsellor noted that women with low self-esteem and confidence often have partners or peers who 'put them down', and without support at home they struggle to continue

their studies. Others may struggle financially; for example, they spend the extra \$60 a fortnight, which is paid to them for study, on food or other things for the child and find they have no petrol to get to TAFE. In addition, waiting lists for professional childcare places mean that the decision to use childcare must be made well in advance.

For example, the on-site childcare centre at Gilles Plains TAFE campus has only four places available for children under two years. The students need to put their name on the waiting list several months in advance and these women do not commit that far ahead.

(Student counsellor)

Although the student counsellor advises the students that it is better to use professional childcare services, they are often out of reach for these women because they only make the decision to study just before the commencement of the class. Those women who rely on friends or family for childcare often find that it is withdrawn at the last minute. This results in irregular attendance at classes and causes some of them to 'drop out' of class.

Notwithstanding the obstacles faced by many students, the program has a strong history of success, with the majority of students moving into employment or further study.

TAFE staff acknowledge the important role of the job, education and training (JET) advisers from Centrelink in referring their clients to the program, and the financial support Centrelink provides to these students. They also emphasise the continued demand for this service.

The Centrelink advisers help each client identify the barriers to employment and discuss the range of assistance available to overcome these barriers. They refer clients to educational institutions, childcare services, labour market assistance or state/local services. In addition, they provide advice on Centrelink-related issues such as extra help available and the impact of any earnings on payments from Centrelink. The advisers provide ongoing support for clients.

English proficiency (second language)

Certificates I, II and III in English Proficiency (Second Language) are designed for students from non-English speaking backgrounds. While these students are generally well motivated and successful in achieving the competencies for the certificates, TAFE staff note that this group often requires ongoing support to retain their skill level in a changing environment. For example, as the nature of work changes, the non-English speaking background client groups in the workforce need ongoing help with their language to manage workplace change, particularly in relation to the use of computers.

This client group attends night classes and individuals are reluctant to cease attendance as they need the ongoing support to retain their skill level.

(Coordinator, vocation preparation programs)

Senior citizens

Courses specifically designed for elderly or senior citizens—for example, 'Computer 55'—are provided by the ACE program. These students are self-motivated and generally have successful outcomes.

Unemployed older workers

The disadvantaged group of unemployed older workers, especially males over 45 years old, may join some of the established courses (such as computer training courses). They may also require other assistance with job seeking and career counselling and be referred to specific employment agencies, for example DOME Association Inc. (Don't Overlook Mature-aged Employees).

Certificate I in Preparatory Education

TAFE staff note that another group of students undertaking vocational preparation programs at TAFE are young, unemployed people with a variety of problems. These problems include:

- ✧ low self-esteem
- ✧ low-level of schooling (early school leavers)
- ✧ disenchantment with the school system
- ✧ mental health problems
- ✧ drug problems
- ✧ homelessness
- ✧ no parental support
- ✧ family or home problems
- ✧ immaturity or needing to mature
- ✧ behaviour problems at school.

This group of students requires an enormous amount of assistance from TAFE support services, including accommodation, rent assistance, suicide prevention, counselling and crisis intervention. This is often hindered by the lack of funding to the mental health unit in the community. This has resulted in a TAFE staff member being personally responsible for students in need.

The Certificate in Preparatory Education consists of 10 core modules usually of 20 hours duration (for \$10 fee per module) plus elective modules from Stage 1 and Stage 2. At Gilles Plains Vocational Preparation Centre, between 10 and 15 students undertake this preparatory certificate every six months and these include early school leavers and pre-release prisoners.

There are many success stories

After six months of the preparatory certificate, about half of the early school leaver group move into the Certificate II in Introductory Vocational Education program at Tea Tree Gully campus.

Reasons why some of this group do not move on

TAFE staff interviewed at Gilles Plains noted that non-achievers in the Certificate in Preparatory Education group of students are mostly young men who left school in Year 9 and have low-level literacy skills. These students are unable to complete the Certificate in Preparatory Education within the allocated six months. They are often immature and have come with their mates to TAFE to get away from teachers who hassled them at school. They attend TAFE irregularly, using a large variety of excuses (for example 'no bus fare') and they make little academic progress even though the requirements are minimal (for example Year 8 level mathematics and able to write 150 words by the end of six months). There is peer pressure on these young men to have their own car and be independent financially. However, there are few manual jobs available and even then, there is competition for jobs such as spray painting or metal fabrication. This means that employers generally require applicants to undertake a literacy test as a selection criteria.

The Vocational Preparation Centre staff consider that one of the major issues in Certificate in Preparatory Education classes is that increasingly younger, immature students (14- and 15-year-olds) are joining classes with mature-aged students. This tends to cause anxiety and friction in the group in an adult learning environment. The immature group are not ready for independent learning and their behaviour is disruptive to the class and not conducive to learning.

Most young people today seek to try things out and learn by doing. Many of these students left school because they were disenchanted with the school system and sitting in the classroom or being hassled by teachers. Vocational preparation program staff noted that the fact that the Certificate in

Preparatory Education classes are classroom-based causes problems. TAFE lecturers regret the lack of flexibility to take students out of the classroom to other areas on campus; for example, building and construction or hairdressing. Such activities at TAFE must be funded and since this is a low-fee course, there are insufficient funds for these additional activities.

TAFE staff also expressed their concerns with the TAFE funding agreement which was bound to a set allocation of hours per staff member, with students needing to achieve competencies within the time allocated to the course or module. This did not take into account students with problems such as mental health issues or homelessness which prevent regular attendance at TAFE. Students with low-level literacy skills or other problems often require additional time to achieve these competencies. They also require large amounts of assistance from the TAFE support services and additional emotional support from lecturers.

Vocational Preparation Centre staff are also carers and support workers and follow up students by telephone after an initial interview with each student which lasts one hour. The student counsellor noted that most young people in this group lacked parental support.

Many students have amazing coping skills—for example, one disabled student whose parents had recently moved interstate to live was fighting Centrelink to get financial support to live here and continue her studies at TAFE. (Student counsellor)

Many of the students had been expelled from secondary schools because of behaviour problems. The lecturer is required to separate the student behaviour from the disability. For example, the TAFE staff can ask a student to leave the classroom if their behaviour is unacceptable and the institute director can suspend the student from class for a period of time. However, only the state government minister can expel a student from TAFE and this has never been done.

In addition, the Vocational Preparation Centre staff are expected to deal with students with mental health issues. This has resulted from the health system moving patients into mainstream society without providing adequate ongoing medical support. The student counsellor at Gilles Plains campus is responsible for about 6000 students and deals with crises (for example, suicide counselling) and usually makes appointments for students to receive help from professionals in the specific problem area.

Strategies used to move students into higher-level courses

The TAFE staff who were interviewed noted strategies they used to motivate Certificate in Preparatory Education students to move into higher-level courses. These strategies include:

- ✧ graduation to the Certificate II in Introductory Vocational Education course at Tea Tree Gully campus
- ✧ entry to a pre-vocational program
- ✧ gaining part-time work.

Students are encouraged to pursue contacts for work experience, either part-time or voluntary work. In this way they are demonstrating a commitment to the work ethic. Furthermore, this work experience can be added to their resume. Lecturers tend to pursue their own contacts to assist individual students to find places in pre-vocational programs. While the Vocational Preparation Centre does not have direct links to employers for students to obtain work experience (apart from the partnership with Community Bridging Services Inc. for disabled students), students are encouraged to use the Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE employment services to find part-time work.

Students who repeat modules or courses

It has already been noted that students with low-level literacy and numeracy skills, especially those with below Year 10 school attainment, most often require longer than the allocated time to achieve the competencies in vocational preparation programs. Because of immaturity, low self-esteem or other reasons, some students do not attend classes regularly and so do not achieve the competencies

in the requisite time or reach only minimal levels. These students may repeat the program at a later stage; for example, after gaining employment or work experience, and with maturity and higher self-esteem achieve much more from the course. In addition, some students lose the skills they gained in a vocational preparation program and need to update skills and knowledge by repeating the course or module at a later stage to assist in their search for employment.

Similarly, English as a second language students often want to maintain their skill levels and seek ongoing support by continuing to attend English proficiency classes even though they are employed.

However, as noted earlier, the South Australian Office of Vocational Education and Training has introduced a policy whereby students can only enrol in government-subsidised modules or courses twice unless they pay the fee-for-service cost.

Student destination information

The Vocational Preparation Centre staff collect information on student destinations at the end of each semester. Generally, staff know if students are moving into another course. The TAFE student management system, which uses a unique student identity code can be used to track student enrolments in other TAFE courses. This management information system will also be able to detect students enrolling in the same course more than twice, and exclude them unless they pay the fee for service.

Vocational preparation, disability program and Aboriginal education, Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE

Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE has five campus locations, Noarlunga and O'Halloran Hill in southern suburbs of Adelaide, Mount Barker in the Adelaide Hills, and Murray Bridge and Victor Harbor in rural towns. It also has learning centres at Raukkan Aboriginal community, Kangaroo Island and Pinnaroo and an alliance with the South East Institute of TAFE.

Onkaparinga Institute acknowledges its heritage on Aboriginal land and honours the three Aboriginal groups who lived in the region. The Ngarrindjeri People lived around Lake Albert and Lake Alexandrina and along the River Murray and the Coorong. The Permangk people lived on the eastern side of the Adelaide Hills in the district surrounding Mount Barker and direct descendents now live around the Mannum district. The Kurna people established themselves in a narrow corridor along the eastern shore of Gulf St Vincent, including the Adelaide plains, to near Crystal Brook.

The human services manager and the faculty manager for vocational preparation and Aboriginal education were interviewed for this case study. The student services officer at Victor Harbor campus of Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE who is also a lecturer in the disability program at Noarlunga campus was interviewed. She also teaches a language, literacy and numeracy class at Victor Harbor campus. In addition, a language, literacy and numeracy lecturer at Victor Harbor contributed students work for the graduate vignettes.

The Aboriginal Education Unit manager and Aboriginal education coordinator were also interviewed by the researcher, while semi-structured interviews were conducted with Aboriginal education students at Murray Bridge and Noarlunga campuses by Aboriginal education program staff. These responses on survey forms were then forwarded to the researcher for use in this study. The researcher also visited the Raukkan TAFE campus for the Aboriginal graduation ceremony in November 2002.

Vocational preparation program

Onkaparinga's Vocational Preparation Faculty provides general education programs which can help with:

- ✧ entry into further study
- ✧ preparation for the workforce
- ✧ entry tests for careers and courses
- ✧ reading, writing, computing, numeracy.

Courses offered include:

- ✧ English as a second language
- ✧ disability program
- ✧ preparatory education (certificate I)
- ✧ introductory vocational education (certificate II)
- ✧ English proficiency (certificates I, II, III)
- ✧ spoken and written English (certificates I, II, III)
- ✧ women's education (certificates II, III, IV)
- ✧ advanced English for migrants
- ✧ short courses.

The manager of human services noted that the South Australian Office of Vocational Education and Training introduced a new policy in 2002 which limits the number of times a student can enrol in the same module or course and receive a government-subsidised place. This means that students who do not achieve competency in that time either pay the fee-for-service cost or enrol in an alternative module to allow other clients to enter the program. It should be noted that this policy does not apply to the Aboriginal Education programs. This new policy has further increased the focus on students in enabling courses to achieve competencies and employment outcomes. While this recent change in policy has yet to be evaluated, it is obvious that vocational preparation programs are geared to students achieving successful outcomes, either in open or supported employment or with entry to higher-level mainstream courses.

In addition, the manager notes that there have been more referrals of clients from Centrelink and other agencies to the vocational preparation program in 2002 than ever before. It is assumed that these referrals also reflect the new government strategy whereby, even if entitled to a supporting pension, people with a disability are expected to participate in some employment-related activity; for example, part-time or voluntary work, or community service, in order to improve their quality of life.

Vocational preparation courses are an approved activity by Centrelink and enable eligible people to access Austudy or Abstudy allowances rather than unemployment benefits.

Selection for the appropriate course

The national reporting system (NRS) levels are used as the basis of selecting students for the preparatory programs. This system is a nationally recognised mechanism for reporting outcomes of adult English language, literacy and numeracy programs and contains indicators of competence assessed under fair and reliable circumstances. They comprise statements about achievement in terms of reading, writing, oral communication, numeracy and learning strategies. The minimum level for a student to be enrolled is the ability to write their own name and address and carry on a conversation with a sympathetic person. In the Certificate I in English Proficiency reading and

writing tasks are set, for example, read safety signs, use technology, write notes and messages, and report accidents and incidents.

The Certificate I in Preparatory Education moves into letter writing, reading instructions and procedures, basic mathematics, money skills, personal income, measurement, basic word processing, internet, text production, keyboard speed and accuracy. Learning strategies and resources used include games and role play, interactive software, newspapers and magazines.

About half of the students in the Certificate I in Preparatory Education are recent school leavers who have had bad experiences with the school system. Most students want to finish the course, but it is often difficult to turn all these students into successful students, as is indicated by the following comments.

About half the Certificate I in Preparatory Education class are school leavers but also one student is 49 years old, and another student is 25 years old. Occasionally a non-achiever slips through the selection process. For example, there is one student in the class who is currently not progressing. This 17-year-old student is on disability pension, has a personality disorder and is not motivated to learn. This student's motivation for enrolling in the course is apparently the extra money associated with education supplement for undertaking 25% or more of a course workload.

The intake of new students into the preparatory education class can be continuous if there is a vacancy in the class. But most students want to stay and finish the course and so at present there is a waiting list to get into the class. (Manager, human services)

The manager noted that vocational preparation graduates and students surveyed state that TAFE is a positive environment and that TAFE staff relate to them and assist them. In addition, students state that staff develop materials specifically for them and assist by allowing flexibility, especially flexibility in assessment and demonstration of competency. For example, students do a penguin survey on Granite Island, Victor Harbor, and Aboriginal students can repair cattle grids and make children's play equipment which can be used in the community.

Reasons why some graduates repeat

The manager noted that some students who complete the Certificate I in Preparatory Education and then leave TAFE for a while, subsequently return and argue that they need to re-enrol in the same course because they have forgotten what they learnt. In addition, some mothers with small children may re-enrol in a business services module to keep their keyboard skills up to speed. It is recognised as important for students to maintain their self-confidence and skills, as the following comments illustrate.

In fact, the contract with DEST—the federal government Department of Education, Science and Training for students to complete Certificate I in Preparatory Education allows for students to do it twice. This is because the biggest problem is the confidence factor and the course builds confidence and motivation. For example, 'Kenny' was shy with low self-esteem and so struggled to complete CPE. Then, he got a job in a furniture factory and developed confidence. He wanted to come back to do CPE again. He gained more advanced skills from doing the course a second time and also progressed at work. He was given a full-time job. (Manager, human services)

There are many success stories

The manager noted that the courses with the most successful outcomes of students progressing to higher-level mainstream courses were the Introductory Vocational Education Certificate and women's education courses. For example, two students undertaking the former had completed a preparation course to sit the special tertiary admissions test (STAT) for university entrance and two women's education course graduates went on to become career counsellors. The manager noted that,

in the Introductory Vocational Education Certificate course, 90% of the students had paid the fees themselves, a situation which would seem to indicate high levels of motivation among these students.

Supporting strategies

General strategies used to support TAFE students at Onkaparinga Institute include:

- ✧ learning support in addition to the existing course (funded through student services)
- ✧ 4 to 5-hour bridging course 'Getting ready for TAFE', provided for some students to prepare them before they start their course and thus reduce drop-out rate
- ✧ career counselling by student services officer in class or individually
- ✧ job placement/employment referral officer to assist students.

The human services manager also noted that in 2003, work placements or work experience would be included as part of the curriculum for the Certificate I in Employment Skills Training, and the Certificate in Preparatory Education and the Introductory Vocational Education Certificate. In the past, employers have given feedback that some students are not job-ready after completing the Introductory Vocational Education Certificate alone. In particular, they lack a positive work ethic and pattern of regular attendance. It is hoped that the inclusion of work experience in the curriculum will assist students to gain the necessary work ethic.

Language, literacy and numeracy class

The lecturer noted that the language, literacy and numeracy class at Victor Harbor campus follows a recognised curriculum but focuses on individual progression with flexibility in the number of hours of tuition. A positive indicator of success in this course is the increased level of confidence shown by the students. This is reflected by changes in the body language and self-esteem during the course. It is one of the key outcomes of the course. The value of the course in developing a positive self-image is illustrated in the following examples.

When they start the course, students are often unable to speak to the lecturer and have low self-esteem. But as they develop their language, literacy and numeracy skills, their body language changes to reflect a positive self-image. By the end of the course, they are successful in organising their own work experience placements. This is the greatest benefit of the course—having the self-confidence to walk out the door and knock on other doors to ask for work experience.

(Lecturer, language, literacy and numeracy)

Graduate vignettes

Well first I feel that my outlook on life has changed. I no longer look at the bad things in life but the good things ... I feel that I have gained confidence in everything I do. I know that my knowledge about my maths has increased considerably, also my all-over computer knowledge. And I feel also that, as well as writing faster, I also know what I want to write.

I have already started a class on spreadsheets. In a few weeks time I intend to enrol in the IVEC course. Then next year I would like to enrol in one of the business courses at TAFE, to improve my job prospects and to gain more experience hopefully. My goal is to have my learner's licence and be driving on my own, in about 12 months, in my Mum's car. In a few years time I might get my own car; as well, I hope to move out of home. And live with a friend maybe.

(Female graduate after 12 months in language, literacy and numeracy class at Victor Harbor TAFE campus)

In future I hope my studies will help me to do things I couldn't do before, and maybe I can help look after people with a disability like myself. Perhaps I could also care for the aged, because I like to help people if I can—other people come first. I would rather go without.

(Female graduate, language, literacy and numeracy class at Victor Harbor TAFE campus)

Disability program

New funding arrangements for the disability program were introduced in 2002. In the past, many students with low-level ability remained in the disability program for many years (for example, the Down's Syndrome adults from Minda Home) but now the program is funded on the basis of students achieving the competencies set out in the curriculum. The class size is limited to ten students who are all at different ability levels, as illustrated below.

The theoretical part of Certificate I in Employment Skills Training which we offer to disabled students has 100% success rate. We don't offer the vocational module as it is not within our budget at present to provide work experience but 50% of the students are already working. It would be possible for these students to get a statement from their employer to cover the vocational module, if they wished to get the certificate.

All students in this course are aiming to work and those not already employed are filling the gap between school and work. Some students leave the program because they get jobs. Most students are registered with one of the employment agencies: Career Systems Inc. for disabled workers, Competitive Employment Placement and Training (CDEP-funded agency) or JobNet members for support in open employment.

Some students are aiming for the New Apprenticeship Access Program [NAAP], an initiative of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs ... NAAP support is only available to those students registered with JobNet for open employment. However, some students have a lot of work to do to get into a mainstream apprenticeship (for example, an intellectually disabled student with significant learning difficulties wants to be a mechanic). Whereas other students with good computing skills are able to do an office traineeship.

(Lecturer, disability program, Noarlunga campus)

The Certificate I in Employment Skills training is a shorter course than the Certificate I in Preparatory Education so that disabled students can complete the course, with modules chosen specifically for them, within six to 12 months. Two or three students may take longer because they try one subject first, then later move up to eight hours of training per week. They want to complete the certificate as they want it to show to potential employers.

At Noarlunga campus some disabled students progress from Certificate I in Employment Skills Training to CPE and the Certificate in Introductory Vocational Education. Some disabled students have good computing skills and could work in an office situation.

(Lecturer, disability program)

Linkages with other organisations

The manager of human services notes that the vocational preparation programs at TAFE provide an alternative to school for students who may have brain injury, an intellectual disability, substance abuse such as alcoholism, or be repeat offenders. Hence, obstacles to learning for some of these students include anger management, substance abuse and health problems.

It is noted that Christies Beach High School does have a special education class. There is also the Southern Vocational Education College but this is not open to students with a disability; for example, the commercial cookery class is selected on merit and entry is very competitive.

The manager notes that the personal adviser at Centrelink refers clients to vocational preparation programs at the institute.

There have been more referrals in 2002 than ever before, probably due to new government strategy that, even if entitled to a supporting pension, people with a disability are expected to do something; that is, part-time or voluntary work, or community service in order to raise self-esteem and improve quality of life.

(Manager, human services)

The manager notes that other students are referred from:

✧ CRS Australia (before 1998 known as Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service)

- ✧ Royal Society for the Blind (RSB)
- ✧ Career Systems Inc., Marion Branch
- ✧ Options coordinator (Intellectual Disability Services Council)
- ✧ Workskil Inc.

The Intellectual Disability Services Council (IDSC) is a part of the Department of Human Services and plans, develops, purchases and evaluates services for people with an intellectual disability. Workskil Inc. provides a complete range of employment, training and recruitment services to both jobseekers and employers.

Career Systems Inc. is a recruitment service which aims to secure open employment for people with disability. It also provides some training, for example, for personal identification and driver education. The TAFE lecturer in the disability program communicates with staff at Career Systems Inc. in order to place students in employment or work experience.

The TAFE lecturer also assists students to fill out application forms for work with Bedford Industries and other supported business enterprises. Bedford Industries Rehabilitation Association Inc. is one of the largest and most diverse training and employment organisations for people with a disability in Australia, equipping many people with a disability with the skills to gain employment in the community, live independently and enjoy more meaningful lives. By operating a number of successful businesses, employees at Bedford can learn skills in many different industries.

Aboriginal education

Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE has an Aboriginal Education Unit with central office operating from the Noarlunga campus, and also services Aboriginal students at Murray Bridge and Raukkan campuses. It prepares Aboriginal people for employment in specific industries and entry into higher-level studies. It also aims to develop self-management skills in Aboriginal people. Studies can lead to occupations such as:

- ✧ Aboriginal affairs administrator
- ✧ clerical officer
- ✧ community development officer
- ✧ community services aide
- ✧ developmental care worker
- ✧ health assistant
- ✧ home care worker
- ✧ personal care worker.

Courses offered include:

- ✧ Aboriginal preparatory education (certificate II)
- ✧ Aboriginal introductory vocational education (certificate II)
- ✧ Aboriginal community management (certificate III).

Additional courses are also being offered through the Aboriginal Education Unit; for example, Introduction to Community Services. The staff are being further trained to qualify in higher-level Community Services Training Package courses. An Advanced Diploma in Community Management course with a continuous intake of students is being offered. A special lecturer with non-English speaking background is provided to support the Aboriginal students.

The Aboriginal Education Unit (AEU) conducts courses in the Certificate in Foundation Education for Aboriginal students who need English literacy (reading and writing) and numeracy skills. But

Aboriginal students also have other special needs (such as emotional, financial or substance abuse problems). The staff of this unit accommodate the special needs of the Aboriginal students. Thus, they are required to be knowledgeable about the students' communities, families and health situations. Flexible delivery is used for the courses along with face-to-face support by staff in Aboriginal Education Unit.

In 2003, there are 73 Aboriginal students enrolled in courses through the Aboriginal Education Unit at the Murray Bridge campus, 67 at Noarlunga campus and around 12 students at the Raukkan settlement (formerly Port Macleay). Around 12 Ngarrindjeri families live at Raukkan where there is a Community Development Employment Project scheme. In addition, small numbers of Aboriginal students are enrolled in the wider curriculum at Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE.

The Aboriginal community needs to identify with the curriculum and ensure the quality of what is delivered. Thus, a community–TAFE partnership is required, with community leaders involved in determining the curriculum and a TAFE liaison officer appointed for the community. This is very important, for example at Murray Bridge, where there have been three generations of unemployment in the Aboriginal community. A community–TAFE partnership assists the community to realise the importance of education while recognising that their identity will not be threatened during the process.

The Aboriginal education coordinator notes that the most important requirements for Aboriginal students to successfully study at TAFE are:

- ✧ culturally sensitive learning environments and adequate facilities
- ✧ lecturers who are culturally aware and supportive of the Aboriginal learning style
- ✧ assessment strategies which allow flexibility when some students need longer to achieve competencies or students have a choice of assessment methods
- ✧ curriculum which is adapted to meet the needs of the Aboriginal community
- ✧ clearly defined pathways for education and training which lead to employment outcomes.

Aboriginal people are good listeners and so teaching and assessment methods should reflect cultural awareness of this. Students should be able to choose an appropriate assessment method, such as oral assessment. In addition, there are other cultural differences for lecturers to take into account. For example, Aboriginal students may not understand the meaning of the term plagiarism. Traditionally, Aboriginal people have accepted what elders say and so tend to accept what is written in a book and may copy it exactly without acknowledging it as a quotation.

(Aboriginal education coordinator)

Aboriginal Education Unit staff also noted that Aboriginal students often have multiple barriers to learning to overcome. These barriers include:

- ✧ low-level literacy and numeracy skills
- ✧ non-English speaking backgrounds
- ✧ disenchantment with the school system or lack of European-style schooling
- ✧ racial discrimination or harassment in the school system and community
- ✧ few employment prospects due to low-level work skills and school attainment
- ✧ few employment prospects due to remote location
- ✧ ties to family and community difficult to break (for example, three generations of unemployment)
- ✧ unwillingness or financially unable to move away from family for work
- ✧ emotional, health, nutrition or substance abuse difficulties
- ✧ lack of peer support on campus.

There are many success stories

The first Aboriginal TAFE graduation ceremony which was held in November 2002 at Raukkan, near Meningie, was a very special event for this Aboriginal community and Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE. Nine Aboriginal students graduated in the Certificate III in Community Management and were presented with their certificates and congratulated by the Aboriginal elder. About half of these graduates had not completed Year 12 at school.

Reasons why some of this group do not move on

Some mature-aged Aboriginal students at Onkaparinga Institute may never have been to school (one student was 72 years old) but these students may have a record of active participation in community committees. They want to encourage change in their communities and so enrol in TAFE. They find in the Aboriginal Education Unit a friendly environment and support to achieve mathematics and English literacy competencies for the first time.

Aboriginal students, like many other students, need the motivation of employment opportunities at the end of their training to continue with further study. Notably high unemployment levels in Aboriginal communities and the lack of job opportunities are de-motivators such that students often leave school early. They also have low-level literacy skills. This means that many Aboriginal students, especially those with limited school experience or low self-esteem after their school experience, will take longer to achieve the competencies required and will need more than the hours allotted to complete a TAFE course. The multiple barriers to learning are illustrated by the manager.

The Aboriginal students need face-to-face support by qualified and supportive staff.

Aboriginal students often get lost if pushed too quickly in a course. Aboriginal students often need twice the time of other students to achieve required competencies. Mature-aged students may never have been to school or had lessons in mathematics, English and Aboriginal studies.

(Manager, Aboriginal Education Unit)

If Aboriginal students are seeking work after completing a course and are initially unsuccessful, the Aboriginal Education Unit staff encourage them to enrol in a course similar to the one they had previously undertaken at TAFE. This enables the student to remain in a supportive environment in order to maintain or improve their English language and communication skills, their motivation and self-confidence to continue to seek work. In addition, the following comment by the manager would seem to support the hypothesis that some Aboriginal students remain in enabling courses longer for reasons of multiple disadvantage, such as low-level literacy skill levels and less optimistic employment opportunities.

Aboriginal students may take longer than the set number of hours to achieve the competencies required in a course. They need to build self-confidence. Staff also encourage the students to continue in a similar course to maintain their confidence and skills while they are still seeking work.

The young people, particularly, need to understand what happened in the past and undertake Aboriginal studies to better understand their feelings. Many Aboriginal people need someone say to them 'you can do that!'.
(Manager, Aboriginal Education Unit)

Traditionally, Aboriginal students want to live near their families and do not like to leave their community to move to other places to find jobs. Thus, there is a need for Aboriginal enterprises or Commonwealth government-funded Community Development and Employment Projects, involving recognised industry training, to be located in regional areas such as Murray Bridge and Raukkan. Subsidised work programs, including nationally recognised training, would also assist students in urban areas. The regional Aboriginal corporations often act as brokers for contracts, labour hire or New Apprenticeships, all of which provides pathways into unsubsidised mainstream employment.

The Aboriginal education coordinator noted that the drop-out rate at TAFE by Aboriginal students was still a concern which he wanted to investigate further. He noted that most Aboriginal students

need face-to-face learning assistance provided by supportive staff and, where possible, Aboriginal lecturers and support staff, as well as contact with other Aboriginal students. In addition, Aboriginal students need to build trust through long-term relationships with caring staff in order to achieve learning outcomes.

The coordinator also notes that the number of Aboriginal students grouped together on TAFE campuses is often smaller than at some universities. It should not be surprising that Aboriginal students feel more comfortable when able to congregate with their own community members or friends. The coordinator had found from past experience that mainstreaming Aboriginal students with staff or students who lacked understanding of Aboriginal culture and were insensitive, often caused the Aboriginal students to 'drop out' of the course. It is important for TAFE staff and the community to understand the different cultures, and for staff to learn from their students as well as the students learning from teachers and other students.

While joining their friends at TAFE, or receiving the Abstudy allowance, may be the initial incentive for some students to enrol in TAFE, this situation could be reversed by supportive staff, as illustrated in the following comments:

Some students may at first enrol for the money [Abstudy allowance] but staff encourage and support these students to learn. Additional motivation through some success at learning, and being able to see employment prospects, enables those students to continue in their studies.
(Aboriginal education coordinator)

Interviews with students

Semi-structured interviews with current students undertaking the Certificate II in Aboriginal Preparatory Education were conducted by the Aboriginal education coordinator at both Noarlunga and Murray Bridge campuses. Students recorded their responses on a survey form. The eight male students who responded did not indicate any problems with the English language although one older student indicated a problem with written English. Only one respondent had left school after completing Year 12, two had completed Year 11 and another one had completed Year 10. Two other students left school after completing Year 9, one after Year 8, while one indicated undertaking no schooling.

Students indicated their reasons for studying at TAFE, in particular in the Aboriginal Preparatory Education course, and future aspirations, as illustrated by the following comments:

To get something out of the course—achievement. [In AE] easy, feel comfortable. Good for me to be able to learn. Helps me become better than school. My aunty, mother [family] encouraged me to enrol in 2002. [In future] work in a skate board shop.
(19-year-old male student, unemployed but has grape picking experience)

To update my knowledge to gain employment. [In AE] feel more comfortable with other indigenous students. I encouraged myself to enrol in this course [5 years since first enrolled in TAFE and had completed the Foundation course]. [In future] would increase in TAFE courses e.g. art, woodwork etc.
(27-year-old male student, who is unemployed but has work experience as a labourer)

Something to do for knowledge. Need qualification for job. [In AE] easy to get to. My girlfriend encouraged me to enrol in January 2003.
(20-year-old male student, no paid work or work experience)

To change career and to give myself a better opportunity in life. [In AE] on recommendation and to have a better understanding of Aboriginal culture, enrolled in February 2003. Previously completed a Military catering course—cook grade 1. [In future] I would like to enrol in Cert. 4 in Aboriginal Community Management also heavy articulate driving licence.
(31-year-old male student, previously employed as a Chef, currently seeking paid work 'because not enough money on Abstudy to support a family')

To update knowledge because I left school at an early age [Year 8]. [In AE] only part I knew about. Nobody encouraged me to enrol in TAFE—just myself in February 2000. Enjoy the group interaction and discussion. I would like to see a woodworking class offered.

(51-year-old male student, unemployed, never had paid work)

To update knowledge, learn more. Have problems writing English and with numbers [left school at Year 9]. [In AE] to study with Aboriginal students. Enrolled four years ago. [In future] Would like to enrol in other courses.

(55-year-old male student, who has never had paid work and is not seeking work at present because of household duties, supporting two children)

To further my education, update knowledge and [most importantly] gain promotion. Self-motivated, first enrolled at TAFE in 1994 and previously was enrolled in Aboriginal community management course but did not complete it. Have worked previously with CDEP Port Lincoln Aboriginal Council. [In future] would like to enrol in Business Assessment.

(27-year-old male student, supporting two children and currently working in Community Development Employment Project activity)

‘To learn a bit more than I know [no previous schooling]. To learn about our culture and [most importantly] because I don’t know much. Self-motivated to enrol. [In future] would like to enrol in Business Assessment.

(52-year-old male student with health problems, currently unemployed)

Djigay Centre of Excellence in Aboriginal Education, TAFE NSW, North Coast Institute, Kempsey campus

Kempsey campus is one of 17 campuses of the North Coast Institute and provides vocational education and training across automotive, engineering, fine arts, ceramics, information technology, administration services, business services, retail, welfare and general education study areas. This campus also incorporates the Djigay Centre of Excellence in Aboriginal Education ensuring access for Aboriginal people to courses relevant to their cultural and educational needs.

Programs and courses designed specifically to suit the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the region are developed by the Aboriginal Education and Training Unit (AETU) of the North Coast Institute. Aboriginal coordinators negotiate with communities to develop, monitor and evaluate these courses. The Djigay Centre offers general education courses as well as an extensive range of vocational education and training. The work-based learning program provides opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to explore a wide range of learning experiences.

Kempsey in context

Surrounded by fertile beef and dairy farmlands, Kempsey, a large service town on the Macleay River, is 49 km north from Port Macquarie on the north coast of New South Wales and home to a prominent Aboriginal population: the Dunghutti people. Following European settlement in the mid-1800s, Aboriginal reserves were established in the Macleay Valley and coastal regions. This means that mature-aged local Aboriginal people have had little engagement with formal learning at school, except as experienced on the Aboriginal missions, and many have a negative attitude to European-style schooling.

The Dunghutti people were still holding traditional ceremonies as late as the 1940s. However, in the 1960s the spread of urban residential, leisure and tourist development on the coast began to erode the peoples’ living areas and access to subsistence. In addition to its refusal to maintain facilities on smaller reserves, the Welfare Board imposed managers on previously independent reserves like Burnt Bridge and Bellbrook in the Macleay Valley. These processes marked an

intensification of Welfare Board control over Aboriginal lives. Thus, the Gumbaynggir and Dhungutti peoples, like many other tribes, struggled to maintain links to their culture and identity.

The current employment outlook for the Macleay Valley, including Kempsey, is depressed. Kempsey Shire experiences unemployment, approximately double the national average and, in particular, 86% Aboriginal unemployment, even with Community Development Employment Projects taken into account (Submission to House of Representatives 2002). The New South Wales Department of Education and Training estimates approximately 17 to 25% absenteeism/truancy daily; that is, up to 300 high school students absent from school in Kempsey. The lack of employment opportunities, especially for Aboriginal people, undoubtedly contributes to lack of motivation to stay at school.

As noted by Djigay Centre staff in interviews for this study, Aboriginal people tend only to be employed by the Aboriginal corporations in the region. However, staff are optimistic about new employment opportunities being created by the extension, from 350-bed capacity to 500 beds, of the Mid-North Correction Centre near Kempsey.

An Aboriginal recruitment and project officer appointed by the New South Wales Correctional Services Department is working with TAFE staff in order to find Aboriginal people with appropriate skills and knowledge for employment. It is anticipated that Aboriginal people may fill many of the 50 to 70 new jobs created by this extension to the gaol.

TAFE staff also noted that new jobs will be created by the opening of a new Dreamtime Centre (like the one in Rockhampton) in Kempsey—the home of country singer Slim Dusty—and the associated Slim Dusty Museum.

Work-based learning program at the Djigay Centre

At the Djigay Centre, a number of Aboriginal students are enrolled in the Certificate I in Work Skills and a particular vocational pathway is determined over time—when they are ready. The Djigay Centre staff find that allowing the Aboriginal students to undertake Certificate I in Work Skills before entering a certificate II vocational course enables the students more time to adapt to the TAFE learning environment and increases their chances of successfully completing a certificate II or above course. Many Aboriginal students require the additional preparation time to improve basic literacy and numeracy skills, and build trusting relationships with staff and other students. The support of staff and fellow students plays a major part in the Aboriginal students' motivation to complete a certificate II or III course.

The Certificate I in Work Skills focuses on skills in literacy and numeracy, giving and getting information, job seeking and work placement. A feature of the Certificate I in Work Skills is that electives can be undertaken from different faculties, such as arts and media, horticulture, tourism and Aboriginal studies. This enables students to try different vocational areas to discover what suits them. The students range from early school leavers through to elders in the Aboriginal communities.

The Djigay Student Association Inc. has eight work-based learning enterprises. These include the Wigay Aboriginal Food and Culture Park, the college café, mentoring program, outreach programs for youth, including Juvenile Justice Outreach and Grounds and Maintenance—Landscaping and Outreach. The Djigay Centre manager liaises with local Aboriginal communities to further develop the work-based learning enterprises.

Wigay Aboriginal Food and Culture Park

In 1993, the Djigay Centre took over management of an adjacent site in Sea Street owned by the Kempsey Shire Council. Over two hectares in area, the site had previously been a garbage dump on which some local trees had been planted. The Djigay Centre's view was to set up an Aboriginal food and culture park, carrying on work-based programs with Aboriginal students enrolled in horticultural and landscaping.

As the project progressed, interested groups began visiting the park to learn about Aboriginal culture. This enabled some of the students to become tour guides and for the park to become a major tourist attraction in the Macleay Valley. In addition to a guided tour around the park to see the traditional Aboriginal bush tucker and medicinal plants, billy tea and damper or barbecue and bush tucker are prepared on site for tourists. They are also entertained with didgeridoo or gum leaf playing, and cultural talks. Five part-time staff now receive support from the Community Development Employment Project scheme to run the tourist side of the park. These part-time staff are also students completing further training courses at TAFE.

The supervisor for the park is one of the Djigay Centre lecturers. Besides horticulture and landscaping courses, the park is also used for students in tourism (Aboriginal guides) and hospitality (bush tucker catering) courses. A current project for the students is the landscaping of the area around the new toilet facilities recently built in the park with the assistance of local government funding.

Interviews with horticulture students

Around 10 students were undertaking the Certificate I in Work Skills in the horticulture group at the time of the interviews. When interviewed, these students indicated that they were interested in learning, and also enjoying the social contact at TAFE.

Most of these students are 'early school leavers' and expressed a preference for work-based learning and oral assessments. While some students previously had labouring jobs, such as 'fencing with Dad', they are aware that these jobs were now scarce and qualifications are needed to obtain work these days.

Two students expressed the opinion that lack of their own transport or a driving licence prevented them from finding work in their previous field or in the new positions being created at the local gaol (Mid-North Correction Centre at Kempsey).

Several students had previous experience of TAFE, for example at Port Macquarie, through the Community Development Employment Projects scheme or even at Kempsey campus, as illustrated in these vignettes:

I have been to TAFE before—seven years back in Work Skills at Kempsey—no park then. About two years ago did first aid certificate, landscape certificate and met lots of people so I wanted to come back to TAFE. I was offered a job at the gaol but no driving licence so it was not possible to get to work. I like seeing things grow and achieving goals. (Male student)

I spent two years at high school, 1972 to 1974, then went fencing with Dad but now no labouring jobs. Did mechanics course with CDEP and then had a delivery job. When that stopped I moved to Armidale for 12 months then came back to Kempsey last year. I like outdoor work so joined the horticulture group in work skills at Djigay. (Male student)

First time in work skills at Kempsey. CDEP in Port Macquarie for 4 years but don't get all the ones you would like. I like outdoors work—landscape gardening, but need qualifications. Spent 4 weeks learning the names of plants and then lecturer asks us their names [oral assessment]. (Male student)

I am 19 years old and this is my first day in work skills at Kempsey. Previous experience of TAFE was spent 2 years in Port Macquarie. (Male student)

I was the only Aboriginal student to finish Year 12 at High School last year—two other students dropped out before the end. I started Certificate I in Work Skills last year to look at different careers. I reckon the work opportunities at the new gaol look promising. (Male student)

College café

The Djigay Student Association Inc. has the contract to manage the café on the Kempsey TAFE campus. A graduate from the Certificate II in Hospitality course at Kempsey last year was appointed as the manager of the college café. In fact, the hospitality teacher notes proudly that five out of six students from last year's hospitality class are already employed elsewhere (at a Newcastle motel, the RSL Club and a building company).

The teacher spends 15 hours a week with the hospitality students at Kempsey and runs a private catering business in Port Macquarie. He notes that the key to the success of the students is the long-term relationship with the teacher as the students need that security ('very shy with new lecturer'). The teacher also needs to understand the Aboriginal learning style ('talk their language and introduce terminology orally'). In addition, he notes that continuous oral assessment is used as 'no one would turn up for a written examination'.

The teacher explains that the work-based learning enterprise for hospitality students at Kempsey TAFE campus is essential because local employers do not train staff and work experience is not available (or 'limited to peeling potatoes').

The students start with the Certificate I in Work Skills then undertake the Certificate II in Hospitality for restaurants (and bar course is available also). The manager does the ordering for the college café but the particular menu for the day is determined by the ingredients which are available on that day. The recipes are demonstrated once and the students keep the recipes in their memory. All students practise the health and hygiene requirements for preparing and storing food. They also service customers and balance the till each day—the practical skills and knowledge required for working in this industry.

The students may also be involved with outside catering contracts (for bush tucker, or other menus as required). The teacher also suggests future enterprises in which the students might engage, such as 'dial a dinner' or 'cooking pies' to sell at the local football matches.

Interviews with hospitality students

This year there are at least 12 students enrolled in the hospitality class. Six of the students were in Year 11 at school last year (five of them are cousins). Other students include an Aboriginal community elder with work experience but now needing a qualification. They all like learning new things and cooking. One student interviewed had already completed the bar course at Port Macquarie and returned to complete the Certificate II in Hospitality for restaurant work. Their stories are illustrated in these examples:

I started in Certificate I in Work Skills last year and after three months transferred to the certificate II bar course in Port Macquarie. The assessment for that included meeting, greeting and serving cocktails to 30 invited guests. I am really good at making scones now.
(Female student)

I previously went to Wollongong TAFE but travel to TAFE by train and bus was too hard when I had young children (6 and 8 years old). I really like cooking and the Kempsey hospitality classes from 9.30 am to 2.30 pm allow me to collect the children after school.
(Female student)

I have four children with their own families in Kempsey and my brother is also at TAFE. I used to work in a hospital and café—cleaning and cooking (supervisor of cleaning). I like learning new skills and changing jobs. I cook for parties and would like to get a job in a kitchen—for that I need a certificate.
(Female elder)

I was in Year 11 at school last year. I would like to do Year 12 but wanted to try the Hospitality course first (four of the other boys in the class are my cousins). I love cooking and serving customers and usually eat what I make at TAFE before I get home. Mum and sisters share cooking at home. I often eat take-away.
(Male student)

Interviews with TAFE staff

The Djigay Centre manager proudly notes that there are now 20 Aboriginal part-time and full-time teachers on the staff at Kempsey TAFE campus. Having Aboriginal people teaching the course, he believes, increases the ownership of the course by the students. It also increases the supportive environment for the Aboriginal communities and encourages other students with role models and employment opportunities. In addition, TAFE staff at Kempsey have the opportunity to undertake Certificate III in Aboriginal Studies as professional development.

While some Aboriginal students may first come to TAFE for monetary reasons (Abstudy allowance), the manager notes they see TAFE as 'neutral ground' and feel safe and secure. There is also a trend to integration within the Kempsey campus, as described by the Djigay Centre manager:

At first, Aboriginal students at Djigay did not go up to the main campus which is referred to as the 'White House'. However, gradually students integrated for fashion classes in the White House and now for art classes, three or four days a week, so that Aboriginal students now relate to staff in the White House as well as those at Djigay Centre. In addition, non-Aboriginal students have classes in the Djigay Centre: for example, foundation and vocational education classes.

(Djigay Centre manager)

Integration within the Kempsey campus was also illustrated when the students in the sports, health and fitness class recently organised a fun day at Crescent Head on the coast for the whole campus. In earlier years, fun days were organised excursions for the Djigay Centre students but non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students mixed together at this year's fun day.

Students may have their Abstudy allowance suspended if they are not attending at least 80% of their course hours. In order to prevent a growing debt for the weeks that students are not attending TAFE, the Aboriginal student administrator produces weekly reports of attendance. However, poor health, community meetings or funerals lasting several days often reduce the regularity of students' TAFE attendance. The mature-aged students, who often suffer from poor health, are able to produce doctor's certificates for their absences.

The Djigay Centre manager has a course brokerage role and actively negotiates with faculty representatives to set up courses for Aboriginal students using staff from the other faculties on the Kempsey campus. In particular, the arts and media faculty had a class of Aboriginal students who had completed the certificate IV last year and had wanted to continue at TAFE and so 12 students had commenced a diploma course.

At least three former Djigay students are teaching at TAFE this year. Two of these were available for interview. One of these former students returned to Kempsey this year and is teaching a new course in sport, health and fitness. His motivation for returning to the Djigay Centre was to increase the possibility of gaining employment in the Mid-North Correctional Centre, as he illustrates in the following vignette.

I came back to Djigay this year to try and build my resume so that I could apply for a job at the new gaol. Previously I spent two years in the Djigay Food Park but I was not interested in getting my hands dirty so it was a waste of time for me.

I had worked in Sydney but the pay was low and it was too expensive to live there without family so I came back to Kempsey. There is a literacy and numeracy test for working in Correctional Services and so I sought help through Aboriginal access to further studies program.

I wanted extra qualifications to help get a job at the gaol so I did a Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment through a private provider in the holidays. Other students also did security guard training courses in the holidays. They need Aboriginal peer support from custodial officers in new gaol and are hoping that half the new jobs will go to Aboriginal people. Correctional Services is a registered training organisation and they need Aboriginal teachers also. I plan to be a teacher.

(Former student, now teacher of sports and fitness course at Djigay Centre)

Another former student is currently doing Certificate IV in Aboriginal Sites and Conservation at Djigay. Recognised by the Djigay Centre manager as a 'natural teacher', this student is also a trainee trainer with the Djigay horticulture class while completing the small group trainer course. His motivation for returning to the Djigay Centre is the work-based learning environment and the opportunities available in this location, as illustrated in the following vignette.

I come from down south but I liked the climate in Kempsey. I left school in Year 11 and found a job in the meat works but in 1980, when the live export trade ended, I was not working. My school experience put me off TAFE but my first TAFE experience was with CDEP. When CDEP ended I was recommended to go to TAFE. I like the outdoors so did the Certificate I in Basic Horticulture and then Certificate II in Horticulture but horticulture III course is run at Wauchope which is too far to travel.

During the Sydney Olympics I did six-month Aboriginal tour guide course. I conduct tours of the Park (Wigay). I just started Certificate IV in Aboriginal Sites and Conservation—a two-year course to be a cultural site officer. For this course, I have been involved with RTA [Road Transport Authority] project to identify local sacred sites for survey of new road. I went out with RTA for on-the-job training with elders and archaeologists. Last year there were focus meetings every few weeks for a whole day and night trips to do nocturnal animal surveys.

Previously I worked as a farm hand but I needed qualifications. The main attraction of Djigay is the work-based learning. (Continuing certificate IV student and trainee trainer)

The head teacher in arts and media faculty took over the diploma class of Aboriginal students on moving from Victoria to Kempsey TAFE campus last year. He found that, although the diploma students had been successful at certificate III and IV level, and community spirit had held the group together, most of the students were not aware of the commitment required to complete a diploma level course. In addition, he noted their lack of confidence in using the library as a resource for learning.

The diploma students included some students who were sixty years old and were stressed by the demands of the diploma course. After discussion with the group, a number of students decided to change to a less demanding and less stressful course, while others decided to stay with the group until the end of the year but not complete the requirements for diploma—only three students remain in the diploma class. The head teacher is also encouraging those students in this close social group to form a cooperative to use their designing and drawing concepts in a manufacturing enterprise. However, for this endeavour, as he notes, the Aboriginal students 'need small business skills which are not picked up in the mainstream course'.

In the Certificate IV in Ceramics course, the head teacher has introduced a 'selected study program', including certificate III/IV modules to provide more time for the Aboriginal students to complete the certificate IV course successfully.

In future, the Arts and Media Faculty at Kempsey TAFE will not deliver the diploma course but will deliver certificate I, II and III in consecutive years. Students requiring higher-level mainstream courses will need to go to other campuses. At present, several students travel to Wauchope, sharing rides by car, to complete certain modules for the arts and media course and one student travels from Port Macquarie three days a week to attend the class at Kempsey.

New arts and media courses are being introduced at Kempsey, such as Certificate II in Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Practices (AACP II) including printmaking, which Aboriginal people enjoy undertaking. This course also includes 10-week packages on related study skills such as information technology and library skills.

Art is about making decisions—being bold. We need to build on the Aboriginal students' innate skills. Kooris love printmaking but there is none run in Kempsey.

In addition, local role models and mentors, such as teacher Richard Campbell [currently doing a Masters degree course at Deakin University] are important to Aboriginal students so that they are aware of where the course can lead and what is involved.

(Head teacher, Arts and Media Faculty, Kempsey)

Access courses at Djigay Centre include:

- ✧ work skills (certificate I)
- ✧ Aboriginal access to further education (certificate III)
- ✧ Aboriginal perspectives on the legal system (statement of attainment)
- ✧ Aboriginal studies (certificate III)
- ✧ Aboriginal education assistant (certificate I, II and III)
- ✧ teacher's aide special (certificate I, II and III)—part-time opportunity for further development for those who work in schools.

Other access courses include:

- ✧ foundation and vocational education (certificate I)
- ✧ work opportunities for women (statement of attainment)
- ✧ career education for women (certificate II)
- ✧ tertiary course preparation (certificate III)
- ✧ general and vocational education (certificate II).

The head teacher for the Access Faculty noted the strategy used at Djigay included the Aboriginal students undertaking Certificate I in Work Skills in order to develop a vocational education pathway. This may take two years. The next step is for them to move into a business enterprise at Djigay to further develop skills and knowledge with on-the-job training and gain a qualification. The final step was to find them employment outside TAFE campus.

There is a push to get skilled students out into the workforce. The 35 or so Aboriginal organisations in the community are generally the only ones that employ Aboriginal people but, at present, the recruitment officer is looking for students with qualifications for new jobs at local gaol (Mid-North Correction Centre at Kempsey).

(Head teacher, Access Faculty, Kempsey)

When asked to outline the strategies which were used at Djigay to ensure successful access to vocational education and training, and to encourage Aboriginal students to go on to higher studies, the head teacher noted the following:

- ✧ mentoring
- ✧ tutorial support
- ✧ developing own curriculum which is adapted to the local community,
- ✧ flexible delivery and assessment
- ✧ definite pathways for students
- ✧ large choice of elective areas in Certificate I in Work Skills (including access to certificate III modules)
- ✧ providing longer time to finish the course
- ✧ providing preparation course for tertiary studies (Certificate in General and Vocational Education and Tertiary Course Preparation).

In his experience, most Aboriginal students take two years in the Certificate I in Work Skills. Those students who repeated the course or remained in the same access course for more than two years had very low-level literacy and numeracy, and low self-esteem or other disabilities. Most of these students could not be employed due to illness or lack of skills. He notes that, in these cases, 'going to TAFE gives these people a life. They get a taste of success and social contact with other people who like them'. For unemployed families with low self-esteem, 'once going to TAFE gets into the family, it is like going to work for other people'—a habit or way of living. Once the student has self-confidence, 'you can't kick them out' and they are much healthier and help other students.

Some may have forgotten what they did at the beginning of the year but eventually it makes a difference. Going to TAFE makes a huge difference to their quality of life—huge improvement. Most have an illness but don't want to stay home, so going to TAFE stops other illnesses. There are a number of success stories; for example, two older women who had been told all their lives that they 'were no good' went on to tertiary preparation course (TCP) and another into a business course. Another older student had spent his school days being told that he could not learn by the teachers who sent him out of the classroom to do gardening. He has spent three years in FAVE [Foundation and Vocational Education] course but is now an independent learner and organises his class. There are younger students in the FAVE class also now.

(Head teacher, Access Faculty, Kempsey)

Interviews with Aboriginal cultural resources students

The cultural resources class consists of about 23 students, mostly elders, who meet from 9.00 am to 3.00 pm Monday to Wednesday each week at Djigay Centre. They are working on recording their traditional Aboriginal language. They are a social group to whom 'going to TAFE' has greatly improved their lives as illustrated by these vignettes.

I wanted social contact and education. I was encouraged by peers to come to TAFE. Here I have the opportunity to learn, no pressure and lovely staff. I would like casual employment—teaching our Aboriginal language or voluntarily helping students in schools with literacy and numeracy.

(Male elder)

I have been at TAFE for eight years. My children were all at school and I was left home alone and so wanted to do something. I left school at 15 years old and so I wanted to learn more and meet with people. TAFE was better than school. Firstly, I did CAFE [Certificate of Adult Foundation Education] for two years then sewing, computers, screen printing, arts and now language. My main group of social contacts is at TAFE.

(Female student)

I met new friends at TAFE. I started with a night class doing clothing production 15 years ago. Then joined the art course four years ago. Diploma course got too hard so I swapped to cultural resources class this year.

(Female student)

I've been at TAFE for about eight years. Did Certificate I in Work Skills, 12 months in multimedia and also hospitality course. Worked in canteen at TAFE and on contracts that TAFE got for outside catering. I wanted new learning and would like to teach the younger generation. My goal now is to be an Aboriginal education assistant [AEA] in schools. There are some AEAs employed at West Kempsey Primary School.

(Female student)

I wanted access to computers, PhotoShop and internet as my 11-year-old child knew more than I did. So three older daughters and I did multimedia course last year. The youngest daughter, who is 18 years old, got work in Kempsey with multimedia. The other two daughters want to learn the Aboriginal language and have joined the cultural resources class also this year. Course offered at this location are really important as Certificate IV in Multimedia is not available at Kempsey. There were 12 students in the Certificate III in Multimedia course last year but none went onto Certificate IV in Multimedia as this would have meant travelling to another TAFE campus.

(Female student)

I did three-and-half years in hospitality course and would have liked to have been a chef [no commercial cookery course at Kempsey] but probably there was no work anyway. For the Hospitality course, TAFE ran a bus to Port Macquarie for block release study but finding

accommodation was still difficult so I joined the small business skills course. Last year I did short courses in language and literacy and now I am in cultural resources. I would like to help students in classrooms.

(Female student)

Outreach programs for younger students

Djigay Centre attracts funding to run a number of outreach programs for younger students. These include employment and education options using project-based learning outside the classroom (for example, building a boat or restoring a car) for juvenile justice or 'at risk' groups. The New South Wales Department of Education and Training provides funding for the 'links for learning' program which includes both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, and the Juvenile Justice program which involves mostly Aboriginal students from the local secondary schools. There is also an outreach station hand course to help students 'at risk' from poor school attendance to get employment opportunities and an Aboriginal outreach teacher spends one day a week in the high school.

The Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training provides funding for Djigay to run one-off programs on enterprise learning developed by the Aboriginal Program Unit for Year 8 to Year 12 students. Aboriginal students volunteer for these five- or ten-week courses. For example, 15 Year 9 students recently completed a hospitality program culminating in their cooking for a dining room of guests.

There are also links with local schools with visits to Djigay from students in 'Kooris on the job' program. Students from Kempsey High School who joined the cultural resources class for two lessons were reported to really enjoy singing the Aboriginal songs and hearing the stories told by the elders. There is also a coordinator at the 'House of Youth' in South Kempsey, a drop-in centre which conducts TAFE courses and provides a bridge into TAFE. A volunteer tutors program helps students learn to read.

Access for tertiary students

The Kempsey TAFE campus supports an adult study centre and a tertiary access pathway to university for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Some Djigay Centre TAFE staff also provide links for the Aboriginal students by acting as after-hours tutors for university courses (paid by Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training and the university).

This department also funds the Aboriginal Secondary School Parents Association which encourages Aboriginal parents to be more involved with their children's education and school. Many of these parents, who may have received minimal school education on the mission, now access TAFE courses.



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ISBN | 920895 41 8 print edition
ISBN | 920895 42 6 web edition