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Building community capacity

Terri Seddon

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Social partnerships in vocational education

Building community capacity

Terri Seddon
Monash University

Stephen Billett
Griffith University

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Executive summary

Interest in social partnerships is growing in Australia and in many other parts of the world. Furthermore, their value has been affirmed in the policies of governments and global agencies, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and civic organisations, such as Oxfam, as a means for building social capital—the skills and networks that result from collective, civic activities—and stronger communities.

Social partnerships are based on relationships between government, social agencies and communities or any combination of these. In an educational context, they can provide learning opportunities outside existing institutions such as school, university and vocational colleges, and can target 'at-risk' individuals who may not have access to traditional learning. Social partnerships provide an enhanced regional and local capacity for addressing some of the difficult and often intractable problems which countries currently face—problems relating to community breakdown, unemployment and social exclusion. These problems can be addressed in ways sensitive to localised concerns and environments, which means that the solutions generated will be more in line with local needs and more acceptable to local interests.

Resources are now being deployed to support partnerships attempting to achieve these kinds of goals. In Australia, federal, state and local governments are investing funds into a wide range of social partnerships—in health, community, regional and rural development, welfare support, as well as in education and training. They are encouraging whole-of-government approaches to regional policy-making and service delivery, and are promoting inter-agency cooperation as a way of building community capacity.

Social partnerships are seen to be particularly helpful in addressing the needs of young people, as well as communities whose sustainability depends upon establishing lifelong learning. Learning is seen as a way of helping both of these groups to deal with rapid social and economic change and to actively pursue initiatives—such as getting a job, developing new skills, establishing viable enterprises—which will give them a more secure and independent future.

The aim of this project was to examine the nature of social partnerships and how they may be relevant to the vocational education and training (VET) sector. Vocational education and training, which supports industry, individuals and communities, is increasingly identified as an important means of strengthening local communities. This relatively recent role for the VET sector complements its long-standing role in the development of skills and attitudes necessary for work. This sector also offers 'second chance' opportunities to those who had been unsuccessful at school or university.

In the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) national strategy, community-building is identified as one of four key objectives. It states:

> Communities and regions will be strengthened economically and socially through learning and employment. This will mean: integrated learning and employment solutions will support regional economic, social, cultural and environmental development. Vocational education and training's contribution to sustainable regions will involve linking skills to local employment, stimulating an interest in learning and strengthening TAFE [technical and further education] and other providers to partner with local agencies, businesses and industry clusters. Vocational

education and training will help communities deal with change and take advantage of
opportunities for growth. (ANTA 2003)

What will help ANTA and the national VET system to realise this goal? What kinds of partnerships
will secure these goals? What strategies will be most useful? How will they be established and
sustained? What are the danger points? What evidence and outcome measures will provide a
meaningful basis for monitoring performance?

These questions are important because governments and other agencies are currently drawn to
social partnerships, yet they are not panaceas for complex problems. Social partnerships have their
own complexities and challenges, especially in their establishment and maintenance.

In this study, social partnerships were documented through a desktop review and a phone survey.
In-depth case studies were also conducted in three states (Queensland, South Australia and
Victoria) to provide a detailed view of how these partnerships actually work.

The project has identified *community partnerships* which grow out of community concerns and
commitments and are formed to address local issues or problems. *Enacted social partnerships,* on the
other hand, are initiated by agencies external to local communities, but with a view to developing
and/or supporting particular functions within those communities. Vocational education and
training is characterised by both community and enacted social partnerships which are often
constructed in ways which support vocational learning, particularly for young adults, through a
range of diverse local initiatives. Social partnerships also contribute to broader objectives aimed at
strengthening communities by building relationships, working productively with a diversity of
partners, and enhancing capacity for local governance.

Partnership work is complex and multi-layered and presents particular interpersonal and
organisational challenges. For social partnerships to be successful and achieve the outcomes desired
by both central auspicing agencies and local communities requires all partners to recognise that the
partnership must work in specific ways. These include:

✧ acknowledge and negotiate the interests and expectations of partners, sponsors and organisations
   supporting the partnership. In the longer term, whether the social partnership functions depends
   upon the development of capacity and reciprocity, both of which sustain productive
   relationships between stakeholders

✧ develop resource and support structures which can, first of all, sustain initial partnership
   formation and its development and, secondly, assist in the transformation of the partnership
   into a durable, but responsive body within local or regional contexts

✧ recognise volunteer contributions, the extent to which volunteers are motivated by non-tangible
   rewards (for example, satisfaction, relationships, the experience of supporting others in a
   community-building way), and the challenges of managing a largely volunteer workforce

✧ develop careful specification of outcomes to recognise the full range of achievements and
   definitions of 'success' within partnerships. These achievements include tangible outcomes, like
   education and employment outcomes for youth, and also less tangible outcomes, such as
   enhanced participation, learning through involvement in partnerships, effective coordination of
   local agencies, increased trust and social capital.

Given the benefits of partnerships documented in this research, how might partnerships be initiated
and sustained to better support local decision-making and local learning needs? In summary, key
considerations for policy-makers include:

✧ Processes

   Social partnerships may require processes which support their establishment, development and
   maintenance, with different kinds of guidance likely in each phase.

✧ Establishment

Establishment requires considerations of participation, participants, governance, supporting bodies and resources. Establishing partnerships without community input, interest or concern is likely to be perilous. Certainly, goals of strengthening community capacity are unlikely to be achieved without community interest and participation. Partnerships are most at risk when they are enacted across too wide a geographical area and attempt to cover too diverse an array of community interests.

✧ Development

In the development phase partnerships require assistance with: establishing consensual decision-making and governance; building productive relationships; managing budgets; and obtaining data to guide decision-making. Empowering social partnerships requires that the 'centre' (that is, the central auspicing or initiating body) engages reciprocally with all partners. Communication, recommendations, demands and advice should be a two-way process and be acknowledged by both parties. Rigid bureaucratic processes may need to be adapted in order to ensure successful outcomes. This includes tolerance for difference rather than uniformity, for diverse patterns of participation and decision-making, and for localised needs and priorities. Also, community needs and requests may not neatly fit into individual existing policy portfolios.

✧ Maintenance

Maintenance requires feedback to participants, acknowledgement of contributions, assistance in the management of voluntary effort and access to evaluation tools. The evaluation of social partnerships should focus as much upon the processes of building productive relationships, as it does on producing outcomes, since the actual development of the relationship determines both the immediate results and the future outcomes.

Social partnerships are established, developed and sustained largely by volunteer effort. Traditional government practices for managing partners may need to be modified to engage, support and sustain this voluntary effort. Among other goals and priorities, governments must not overlook the potential for social partnerships as vehicles for learning in and development of communities. It is important to remember that engagement in and with social partnerships constitutes capacity-building.

The project findings provide a basis for considering how community-building through social partnerships might be used to support vocational education and training goals. The findings section of the report reveals dangers inherent to the community-building approach and how they might be negotiated as community-building proceeds. This section also suggests strategies for advancing community capacity-building and monitoring performance through social partnerships.

The project

Aims

The main purpose of this project was to investigate social partnerships in Australia in order to identify different types of partnerships, the characteristics of these partnerships and how they operate. The project defined social partnerships as:

> Localised networks which bring together some combination of local community groups, education and training providers, industry and government to work on various local community and community-building activities.

The research addressed the following specific research questions:

✧ What is the nature of the social partnerships?

✧ How are these partnerships constituted to support localised education and training decision-making and learning opportunities?

✧ How are education and training decision-making processes managed between local partners?

✧ What resources (especially information and knowledge) and infrastructure are available?

✧ How are these resources and infrastructure used to build capacity and secure balances between different interests?

✧ What is the role of government?

✧ What are the consequences of these developments in realising inclusive patterns of decision-making which appropriately identify and accommodate local learning needs?

Procedures

The work of the project progressed through three concurrent strategies[1]:

✧ desktop review

✧ phone survey

✧ case studies.

These data collection strategies have provided a good information base for a better understanding of social partnerships, the way they work and the contribution they make to community-building and vocational education and training (VET).

In reporting these data, we identify key propositions, then illustrate and elaborate them by drawing on data collected in the course of the project. The findings are reported in three main chapters:

✧ about partnerships

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[1] We acknowledge the assistance of Athena Vongalis in the early stages of this project.

✧ establishing partnerships

✧ enabling partnerships.

Desktop review

The desktop review revealed a broad range of literature and web-based resources relating to social partnerships. These data provided insights into the diverse range of social partnerships in Australia. Furthermore, social partnerships are being strongly promoted by governments in Australia, the United Kingdom, Europe and North America, and by global agencies, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Social partnerships are a significant development within the areas of social policy and public administration. Case study research on social partnerships, including the researchers' prior evaluation of local learning and employment networks (LLENs) in Victoria (Department of Education and Training Victoria 2002)[2], provided insights into the character of social partnerships, the kinds of people involved and their distinctive ways of working. The literature relating to social partnerships suggested that there were many different kinds of partnerships which had developed in different ways.

Phone survey

A telephone survey was conducted with 40 social partnerships (see appendix 1) identified through the desktop review. An interview schedule comprising eight trigger questions (see appendix 2) was developed and used to structure the telephone interviews. The survey obtained factual information about each partnership and more detailed stories to provide richer information about the way the partnership worked, its governance processes and the factors contributing to success within the partnership. This information provided a valuable 'snapshot' of social partnerships in Australia (late 2002) and it provided the basis for identifying types of social partnership.

The identification of social partnerships to be surveyed initially proved simple. A great deal of information was available on the web, and networking through these sites gave access to further social partnerships. But this strategy tended to reveal the same kinds of partnerships, with many being sponsored by a small number of funding agencies (for example, the Enterprise and Careers Education Foundation). Looking beyond these easily accessed partnerships proved more difficult. We identified a number through explicit requests for information to individuals involved in community development and community education (for example, via Women in Adult and Vocational Education).

Individual networking revealed further partnerships on an ad hoc basis. These partnerships identified subsequently were often not sponsored in the same way as the original sites contacted. In some instances they were highly localised and often did not have a web presence. They were commonly found in fields outside education and training, and did not see themselves as explicitly focused on learning, although their day-to-day work had learning spin-offs for both participants and for the wider communities they serviced. It was also evident that many of these social partnerships were connected in various ways to various levels of government—to Commonwealth agencies, others to state governments and others again to local government. It was common to find partnerships with all levels of government through sophisticated networking processes.

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Case studies

Detailed case studies (see appendix 3) of social partnerships were conducted in order to develop a more in-depth understanding of the way these partnerships worked. These partnerships were based on:

✧ a program for Indigenous youth organised by Indigenous communities in South Australia—the 'Lands'

✧ a school-focused vocational education and training initiative in urban Queensland

✧ youth learning interventions in metropolitan Victoria.

The German *sozialmarkwirlschaft* partnership was also evaluated and is included in appendix 3. In addition, a cross-section of rural, regional and urban social partnerships in Victoria was considered.

Each case study involved informal observations and conversations, formal interviews with participants, and review of relevant documents. These different sources of information were used to develop profiles of the partnerships. Extracts from these profiles are used to illustrate findings in the report.

About partnerships

There has been a growth in interest in and a proliferation of social partnerships across Australia. Social partnerships can be found in all states and territories. They are also being actively developed in other parts of the world (see for example, OECD 1994a, 1994b; Green, Wolf & Leney 1999; Alexadiou, Lawn & Ozga 2000).

The common feature of social partnerships is their shared commitment to orchestrating collaborative actions and decision-making directed towards objectives held to be important by the members of the partnership. For instance, the Copenhagen Centre (1999) defines partnerships as:

> People and organisations from some combination of public, business and civil constituencies who engage in voluntary, mutually beneficial, innovative relationships to address common societal aims through combining their resources and competencies.

Partnerships are a long-standing feature of public policy; for example, school education was premised on a partnership between government and the teaching profession for much of the twentieth century. Through the 1990s, vocational education and training was based on partnerships between employers, unions and government which were enacted through vocational colleges and institutes of technical and further education (TAFE). Now partnerships are developing in ways which cut across established institutional boundaries.

Supporters of these 'new social partnerships' claim that they overcome bureaucratic rigidities, address unfortunate consequences of market reform and provide solutions to social exclusion and the results of (individual, community and national) poor educational participation and outcomes (Levitas 1998; Putnam 2000).

This paradigm shift is associated with more individualistic approaches to governance, work and learning (Rhodes 1996). New social partnerships display the following characteristics:

✧ *Interest groups and stakeholders:* the partnerships do not actively and directly engage the established interests of organised capital and labour but draw on a diverse coalition of interest groups and stakeholders who are focused and organised at a more localised and individualised level. These are self-governing agencies which associate through horizontal rather than hierarchical relationships (Walters 2003).

✧ *The role of government:* the government is said to function less as a centralised decision-making agency and more as a coordinating and facilitating agency which steers policy by creating contexts for, and helps to build individual and organisational capacities which sustain localised decision-making within networks (Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan 1997), as occurred with the 'local learning and employment networks' in Victoria.

✧ *Management of decision processes:* decision-making in these social partnerships requires careful management because the shift away from corporate organisation (large government, organised capital and labour) to smaller-scale localised interest group participation creates differentiated political systems in which there is considerable cultural diversity and a variety of decision-making centres (Rhodes 1996). There is no single sovereign authority but a multiplicity of actors specific to particular policy arenas. This is a decision-making context which is described as 'governance' rather than 'government' (Jessop 1998).

✧ *Outcomes and accountability:* these new partnerships tend to be oriented to the achievement of specific goals and outcomes, and are judged on their 'fitness for purpose'. Where older partnerships emphasised the socialisation of individuals into ways of thinking and acting endorsed by the partners, new partnerships assume that individuals are relatively free from social constraint. Socialisation is therefore less important and partnerships are judged more on the extent to which they support individuals to learn from their experience in ways which return tangible benefit (Offe 1996; Walters 2003).

✧ *Sites of working and learning:* partnerships bring individuals together such that the benefits of cooperation are demonstrated. They become more confident, capable and engaged. They create communities characterised by high 'social capital' (Putnam 1993), with strong social networks and trust which facilitate working together for mutual benefit (Woolcock 1998).

✧ *Capacity-building*: learning and development enhance 'the ability of individuals and organisations, or organisational units, to perform functions effectively, efficiently and sustainably' (United Nations Development Program 1997, p.5). Such capacity-building increases individuals' potential for action and participation in local governance. It enables men and women to effect positive changes in their lives, to become active decision-makers in their local contexts. They become 'actors' who can make a difference in everyday affairs rather than being passive subjects within social and institutional processes (Eade 1997; Walters 2003).

✧ *Self-regulating communities:* communities with high social capital are seen to be particularly responsive to policy initiatives. They provide contexts in which individuals can utilise their capacities through activities which realise their aspirations and dreams. The aim of community-building and development is to remove constraints or 'unfreedoms' so that people can apply their capacities to life in practical 'capabilities' or 'functionings', enabling them to 'lead the lives they value' (Sen 1999; Putnam 2000).

In practice, social partnerships illustrate many of these characteristics but there is considerable diversity in their goals and character. Some are self-organising initiatives which develop as a consequence of community-based interests and activities. Others are organised and, to a greater or lesser extent, directed by interests external to communities (for example, government, industry). Some partnerships are quite narrowly issues-focused, concerned, for example, with supporting students in a particular school to access work experience (for example, O'Donahue 2001). Others are more broadly oriented to community issues related to health, welfare or learning (for example, Small Rural Communities Health Consortium 2002). Yet others take on major enterprise-building activities and work along similar lines to the old mutual associations of the nineteenth century (Connell & Irving 1985; Benevolent Society 2003).

Partnerships in VET

Social partnerships related to vocational education and training are a subset of a much broader range of social partnerships and are evident as both organised and self-organised initiatives. The character and diversity of VET social partnerships is illustrated in the next section. More detailed partnership profiles are provided in appendix 3 which reports on four social partnerships investigated in the course of this project. Taken together, these examples illustrate the diversity and character of social partnerships in vocational education, and provide insights into the general features of partnerships outlined in this report.

Types of partnerships

A range of partnerships in vocational education and training has been implemented across Australia, largely in response to the sector's restructuring and the creation of school-to-work programs for young people. The initiatives were mostly top-down government-funded projects with an emphasis on encouraging the community to play a more significant role in shaping training provision for young people.

For example, the federal government policy which established the agenda for partnerships emerged from the Enterprise and Careers Education Foundation (ECEF).[3] A significant focus of the work of the Enterprise and Careers Education Foundation was school-to-work transition, and the organisation was contracted by the Commonwealth to manage support and funding for schools, and subsequently clusters of schools. The Enterprise and Careers Education Foundation established partnerships with industry to develop programs such as work placement, work experiences and school-based traineeships and apprenticeships (Enterprise and Careers Education Foundation 2003).

The kind of support provided by the Enterprise and Careers Education Foundation was valued for developing the interdependencies between partners which are important in sustaining partnerships. For example, the Kwinana Industry Education Partnership attributes its long-standing success to the presence of 'an industry champion' at the heart of the partnership. Such interdependency anchors partnership development over time and strengthens connections. In the development of partnerships through the Alice Springs Workplace Learning Community, on the other hand, it has been more difficult to secure interdependencies, perhaps because the small businesses and shop owners involved have less capacity to support long-term partnership development.

A different trend has been the creation of partnerships from independent community groups. Ford Australia and Youth At Risk Inc., for example, are addressing youth training through provision which targets a section of the community not served by institutionalised education and training and which is in danger of being excluded from the community and all that is implied by community membership. This partnership is creating a learning context in which participants gain skills and training based on production line processes and where workplace learning takes place within Ford industries. In another instance small business operators networked informally to share information and to learn how to implement the goods and services tax, creating new learning spaces which included a tennis club, franchisee meetings and school car parks where wives (who often kept the books for the business) talked while picking up children after school (Billett, Ehrich & Hernon-Tinning 2003).

Viability of partnerships

The long-term viability of partnerships depends upon the relationships between the groups constituting the partnership. One long-standing program is run from the Obley Education Centre in Sydney where, 13 years ago, the Christian Brothers began to assist students from disadvantaged, lower socioeconomic status (SES) and special needs groups to move into TAFE, employment and further study. The partnership includes parents, teachers, project officers, the principal and students who demonstrate shared values and beliefs in the objectives of the project. With a level of trust between those involved, it 'meets the needs' of those involved in the program, but in ways which reaffirm the partnership's values and commitments. There is a shared investment in the programs run by Obley but this investment is social and cultural in its concept and it is a congregation-based organisation. The partnership uses these cultural commitments as a springboard to address economic issues.

The Mildura Koori Open Door Education School (KODE) is also a community-based initiative, formed in 1998 on the basis of the close relationship between the school, its curriculum and the local community. This closeness is apparent in the open door policy where learners from the community are encouraged to use the school as a learning resource. The aim of this initiative is to demystify and make transparent the relationships which exist between employers and Koori students by 'sharing the language', not so much between Koori communities but between other potential partners, such as employers. The partnership works to increase the level of participation

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[3] In September 2003 the Enterprise and Careers Education Foundation, whose predecessor was the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation, was disestablished and its functions absorbed into the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training.

and community ties by fostering unambiguous and ongoing relations with non-Koori sections of the community in ways which serve the mutual interests of Koori learners and potential employers.

Creating and sustaining a viable community which caters for young people and their future is a key challenge in social partnerships. In economically depressed areas with high youth unemployment, the formation and sustainability of partnerships depends on their capacity to offer long-term prospects to students and learners. Without this, young people are likely to leave the community and seek opportunities elsewhere. The Cassowary Coast Work partnership is located in an economically depressed area with a high percentage of Indigenous learners. This partnership aims to support students to enable them to bypass the 'unemployment stage', when students finish school and register with unemployment agencies. Students who go through this unemployment stage experience a loss of self-esteem and see themselves as 'belonging to a different section of the community'. The partnership fosters strong links between school and work and supports the learner through this transition.

Policy implications

From a VET policy perspective, social partnerships are seen to have the potential to offer advice on, or indeed, undertake the organisation involved in supportive education and training provision for young people. Partnerships make a difference by identifying, acknowledging and addressing local needs, and developing local capacity for roles to support learning. They are a means to a range of positive ends, including:

✧ brokering and orchestrating learning opportunities relevant to vocational education and training as well as lifelong learning

✧ serving as a locus for community-building which addresses regional, social and economic challenges

✧ becoming a site for localised decision-making related to vocational education and training and broader community wellbeing

✧ providing local advice which has the capacity to inform centralised policy-making in and beyond vocational education and training.

However, local partnerships are themselves influenced by local interests and often in ways not always in the broader local (or central) interest. The development of partnerships requires the negotiation of these interests and the identificiation of shared goals and outcomes. Partners vary in the knowledge they value and the learning processes they see as most beneficial. Negotiating how learning becomes available through a partnership also requires consideration of the expertise which can be mobilised within the partnership, the qualifications offered and the way learning outcomes are publicly recognised and endorsed.

In many instances, partnerships engage in multiple activities and exist alongside other agencies doing the same or similar work. They may require guidance to avoid an ad hoc approach or duplication in strategic planning and initiatives. To ensure partnership success, it is crucial that networking takes place at this level as well as amongst partners within the partnership. Some partnerships also require support in terms of financial management and accountability. Their establishment, their governance and role need to be carefully managed, supported strategically, and monitored to avoid their domination and takeover by particular interests.

Finding the balance between central direction and local autonomy requires sensitivity and can evolve over time through collaborative interaction and development activities. However, it requires participants with complex skills and understanding who can undertake the organisational work within and between partnerships, and with the cultural sensitivity to accommodate diversity amongst partners.

Role of government

The role of governments in partnerships is complex, since governments, at different levels and in different instances make different contributions. In one context, the government may be a local partner, or an agency which provides sponsorship and direction. In another, it may be a body of review to which partnerships account. Often the government interest is focused on the achievement of specific policy goals through social partnerships. Invariably, the government is the body which establishes the policy framework, defines the regulatory paradigm and provides the civic leadership which enables or disables partnerships.

Summary

In summary, social partnerships are emerging on a worldwide scale in and beyond vocational education and training. They are widely endorsed by governments, including Australian governments, and their goal is often associated with leveraging local or community support and interest to achieve broader or more specific policy goals. Other partnerships develop through community-based activities, often associated with charities or other local governance or service agencies. These organisations may also have particular goals which they seek to realise through social partnerships.

Social partnerships promise a means of addressing local needs through collaborative activities and decision-making sensitive to local concerns and interests. In Australia and overseas, interest in social partnerships is largely concerned with securing local commitment to policy goals. It also represents a way of countering perceptions that central administrative bodies traditionally oriented to centralised decision-making are unresponsive to and ignore the needs of communities. Note, for example, the political disaffection of rural and provincial communities and those on the fringes of large cities.

Finally, social partnerships are consistent with the contemporary paradigm shift from government to governance, and from centralised, hierarchical to decentralised, horizontal decision-making. In this respect they provide practical examples of the new governance in action, and in this changed context, are seen as distinct *projects* aimed at achieving specific goals. Yet they operate in communities where older understandings of the notion of partnership prevail. Partnership-building, collaborative rather than competitive ways of working, and the re-affirmation of social goals are seen as community activities. In these instances, social partnership is understood as a *movement* which rebuilds community. Many partnerships identified in this study were enacted as projects, whereas participants themselves approached them as movements. This distinction between social partnerships as a project or a movement has implications for VET policy which are addressed later in this report.

Establishing partnerships

Origins and forms of social partnerships

The origins, formation and forms of social partnerships can be quite diverse. For example, the local learning and employment networks (LLENs) are social partnerships which have been explicitly created by the Victorian Government to address specific policy issues, particularly the problem of poor school retention and school failure. In other cases, social partnerships have grown from within communities.

In some communities, the drive for social partnerships lies in the community's concern with its own sustainability. For example, the 'Lands' communities in South Australia worked together to provide a better education for its children, including establishing an urban-based senior schooling opportunity. In other cases, social partnerships are developed around single-issue concerns, an example being a group of viticulturists who collaborated to engender interest about viticulture in the local young people and thereby address a skills shortage.

To clarify these different forms of social partnership, we distinguish between:

✧ *Community partnerships:* these constitute localised networks which bring together some combination of local community groups, education and training providers, industry and local government to work on various local community and community-building activities. These community partnerships are often focused on a specific region or particular issues (for example, women's small business networks).

✧ *Enacted social partnerships:* these are constructed by government or non-government sponsors who are external to the community but who have specific policy goals. There are numerous examples of these enacted partnerships being aligned to supporting local decision-making, community-building and enhanced opportunities in vocational education and training (for example, school-to-work partnerships sponsored by the Enterprise and Careers Education Foundation).

These terms signal the originating or driving force for the development of social partnerships. Yet in both types of partnership the process of implementation involves two additional key steps: the negotiation of a resource base for the partnership and a process of locating the partnership appropriately. We describe these processes as:

✧ *Sponsoring of social partnerships:* the negotiation which leads to agreements about the sponsorship or funding of a social partnership, and the determination of the conditions and reporting requirements associated with that funding and support.

✧ *Auspicising of social partnerships:* the locating or hosting of social partnerships in a particular social or institutional context.

Many of the social partnerships focusing on education and training identified in this study were enacted and *sponsored* by government. However, often they were hosted or *auspiced* by community agencies or groups. In most, if not all situations, social partnerships were located in situations which built upon existing affiliations or community interests. For instance, in the Indigenous education partnership, the activities underpinning the central aim of the partnership were located in an urban high school. In the case of local learning and employment networks, the Victorian Government

located the networks in specific geographic areas and brought local interests together to construct a decision-making and functional centre. Yet, the premises in which these centres were located were shaped by the particular collection of interests, existing partnerships and collective organisational governance existing in each geographic area. A clear threat to establishing and sustaining a social partnership occurs when a partnership seeks to be responsive across too wide a geographical area, or to community interests too diverse or simply too large to be reconciled.

The presence of these existing affiliations and community networks highlights the point that, in one sense, social partnerships are not new. There is evidence of well-established and long-standing partnerships both in Australia and overseas. The emerging social partnerships investigated in this project were being layered onto, or around, these existing partnership arrangements and the middle-level organisations (for example, industry associations, unions, professional associations, political parties, community networks, churches) which they have given rise to and sustain. This distinction between old and new social partnerships can be clarified by considering the character of relationships within the partnerships:

✧ *Old social partnerships:* tend to have established and institutionalised reciprocal relationships with central government (for example, the German apprenticeship system or the Australian industrial relations system). Regulation of the relationships and the ways of working within those relationships are often highly codified or are embedded within long-standing tacit understandings held by the partners. Structural arrangements are supported by cultural understandings of the norms, values and expectations associated with the social partnership. These understandings need not be consensual but they rest on shared understandings about what can be fought over, acceptable forms of conflict and how conflict can be demonstrated and resolved.

✧ *New social partnerships:* tend to be characterised by explicit and prescriptive structures, processes and specifications of goals and expectations. The relationship is often controlled by a formal contract or based on quasi-legal understandings which define the roles, responsibilities and performance requirements of the parties. Understandings between partners may be dissonant, and part of the work of the partnership is to build shared vision, goals and commitments. The relative weakness of tacit understandings means that conflicts or disputes between partners have the potential to be more damaging than in established social partnerships where the theatre of ritual conflict is often a widely enjoyed game. It also means that the work of relationship-building is more intense and emotionally demanding because it depends upon careful interpersonal work which is culturally as well as structurally sensitive.

These differences between old and new social partnerships are contextual in character. They differ because they developed at different times in history when different ideas about governance and social organisation prevailed. Old social partnerships were part of a widely held commitment to centralised government which was characterised by hierarchical relationships between those who governed and those who were governed. Nevertheless, those who were the 'governed' had the capacity to contribute to centralised planning and decision-making. New social partnerships are also a medium for participation, but in relationships which are less hierarchical in character because of a commitment by governments to the philosophy of a 'small state steers rather than provides'. These partnerships encourage relationships which are more horizontally ordered, promoting active decision-making by agencies which appear to be self-regulating (Osborne & Gaebler 1992).

These historical shifts in the way governance is operationalised mean that the emerging new social partnerships are framed somewhat differently from the more centralised social partnerships of the past. However, this contemporary framing and the everyday practices of partnerships are still influenced by different national and local traditions in the ways in which social functions, such as vocational and lifelong education are organised (for example, Kearns & Papadopoulos 2000). They are also shaped by structural factors determined by social interests in their resolution of differences in the negotiation of jurisdictions, membership and decision-making processes, funding and regulatory arrangements, and other arrangements.

In summary, social partnerships take many forms and are oriented to different ends. Yet, in the process of building new social partnerships, certain key issues have to be resolved:

✧ determining purposes and goals

✧ accessing a resource base or sponsorship

✧ auspicing the partnership with a host organisation

✧ negotiating sustainable ways of working

✧ managing the processes of dialogue, partnering and networking, as the partnership develops, so that they are consolidated as sustainably organised social functions.

This process of development and maturation appears to depend, firstly, upon the partnership's growing capacity in the negotiation and maintenance of its specific function and, secondly, its capacity to sustain reciprocal relations between the partnership and key stakeholders. In community partnerships, these stakeholders include sponsors, the auspicing agent, and the wider community interests which the partnership represents. In enacted social partnerships, similar stakeholders exist but there is a stronger orientation toward the enacting agency which is often also the sponsor.

Partnerships, therefore, face two ways, with accountabilities to both community interests and to the sponsoring, auspicing, enacting agencies which serve as a kind of 'centre' within partnerships. This is shown in figure 1. Successful realisation of partnership capabilities seems likely to be the basis for ensuring their longevity, maturity and efficacy.

Figure 1:   Opportunities to expand reciprocity and capacity

Community

↕

Social partnership

↕

Centre
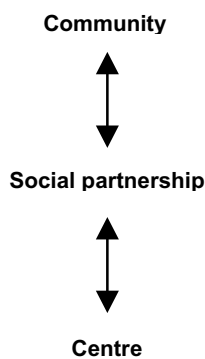
Establishing social partnerships

Most of the new social partnerships considered in this project are endorsed by government or by another agency (for example, a business) external to the community in which the partnership is located. The process of development entails the resolution of four major issues:

✧ determining goals

✧ sponsoring

✧ auspicing

✧ developing ways of working.

These are addressed in turn.

Determining purposes and goals

A social partnership begins with a vision of what can be achieved by a group of people/agencies working together. It often originates as a result of some kind of problem-solving process. For instance, the communities on the 'Lands' were concerned about their young people, their need to become literate in the dominant Australian culture, and about the future of their communities. Consideration of these problems led to urban residential schooling as a solution. With this vision, the work of partnership-building began.

The Victorian Government established the local learning and employment networks following a similar problem-solving process operationalised through the Kirby Inquiry (Kirby 2000). Reflecting later on the inquiry, Peter Kirby recalled that:

> In a number of country areas [where networking had emerged], a strong assembly of local stakeholders who were forging better pathways for young people and better correspondence between education and training and work … It struck us as how odd it was that solutions were being found that not only stalled any further fall in retention but actually increased retention rates. This had been achieved despite the system not because of it.   (Kirby 2002)

Building on this evidence of local partnerships, the inquiry recommended the establishment of local planning networks in the regions. The role of these planning networks would be to develop collaborative approaches towards the planning and improved delivery of post-compulsory education and training programs and services. Their role would also include an investigation and trial of key elements of regional coordination and delivery of programs (Kirby 2000, p.125).

The process of moving from vision to the realisation of goals often entails considerable improvisation. Early partnerships determine what works and build on success. This process was described in all of the partnerships studied in depth. Participants talked about 'feeling their way', 'taking up opportunities as they arose' and 'not getting bogged down when things don't work'.

In enacted social partnerships the enacting or sponsoring agency often provided a framework for the early stages of development. These were sets of prescriptions about the purpose of the partnership, how they are to be organised, their roles and bases for performance—all of which are premised on funding. The Enterprise and Careers Education Foundation, for instance, specified the governance structure to be followed when it sponsored partnerships. The Victorian Government provided a template for the early work of local learning and employment networks. Yet, despite these structuring devices, participants still talked of the complex array of activities involved in finding a way forward and building relationships and trust, so that decision-making and initiatives could proceed. In the processes of developing a shared vision, resolving the resources question and locating the social partnership within a particular host or auspicing organisation, there was the potential for tacit or overt conflict between localised needs and existing networks, and the demands on enacted partnerships.

Sponsoring

In the case of enacted social partnerships, the process of sponsorship is usually already resolved. An external agent which enacts a social partnership is also likely to fund it, at least for start-up costs. For instance, local learning and employment networks were enacted by government and simultaneously sponsored in this enactment. Each local learning and employment network received a three-year grant ranging from $250 000 to $380 000 per annum. This funding was to be used for the establishment of the learning networks and meeting their goals and targets. The expenditure had to be in accordance with the funding agreement between the network and the Victorian Learning, Employment and Skills Council (VLESC), the government agency which oversees the networks. In such cases, the negotiation related to sponsorship occurs within government policy and administrative decision-making processes.

In community partnerships, the question of funding is often more complex since there are only limited sources of funding for these kinds of initiatives and sometimes the ties associated with funding are seen to be inappropriate or unhelpful in sustaining the work of the partnership. For instance, funding is available for projects or other specific initiatives through government tenders or through philanthropic agencies, but such funding is often insufficient to cover the infrastructure costs of the partnership. People talked about the way project-based funding creates a 'treadmill' by not enabling the partnership to consolidate its resource base in any sustainable way. Our research identified a Central Australian Indigenous community organisation which had the resources and capacities to be selective about the partnership projects its members became involved in. Even when approached by government agencies with requests to fund or manage projects, this organisation evaluated each request in terms of its likely benefit to the community. However, the kind of independence enjoyed and exercised by this organisation was not widely reflected in others identified in the survey. This seems to reinforce the point that, during the establishment phase, social partnerships may be susceptible to engaging with sources of funding which are difficult to resist, yet not in line with their purposes.

The sponsorship of social partnerships is commonly seen in terms of sources of funding available through large agencies—government, businesses or specific funding agencies. In all cases, the large agencies tie their funds to certain rules and reporting requirements. Government funding attracts at least two requirements. The first is to direct the partnership to the kinds of policy goals connected with the funding. The second is the need to be accountable for expenditure of public funds. If too demanding, these requirements can undermine the early stages of the social partnership. For instance, it seems that many schools found the reporting requirements of the Enterprise and Careers Education Foundation so onerous that they withdrew from programs aimed at forming partnerships with schools at their centre.

Currently, these reporting requirements and the organisation of VET in Schools programs are addressed through regional networks. However, while the partnership burden has been removed from individual schools, the school's capacity to build relations with its own community has now been undermined. During this process something of the intimacy which smaller partnerships provide and which are important for the purposes of organising school-to-work transitions are lost. For instance, it was claimed that knowing something about each student and their background as well as something of the workplace permitted the most efficacious work placements. Similarly, building relations with employers engaged in providing work experience created in them a tolerance to problems with some students. These conditions are far harder to achieve across large social partnerships. The point here is that the rules and reporting requirements of sponsorship may well be antithetical to the goal of establishing effective small-scale social partnerships.

However, both enacted and community partnerships also mobilise resources from the local community. Very often these are 'in kind' resources—time, expertise, care, sociability, enthusiasm, networks of information and/or influence. They are critical resources in social partnerships but do not appear on conventional balance sheets or reporting formats. In some instances, monetary resources can also be mobilised locally. They add to the funding base of the partnership but are often given as gifts rather than as tied grants. The rules and reporting requirements associated with formalised sponsorship (for example, outcomes measures, targets etc.) are less visible and relate more to culturally embedded expectations. For example, one enterprise provided work experience opportunities for 'at risk' young people but then wanted to have follow-up information about those particular students' progress in subsequent education and training. Companies are often happy to contribute to partnership activities, if they can be profiled as good corporate citizens.

Auspicing

The auspicing or host organisation has the capacity to shape the establishment of the social partnership and its mode of operation. For instance, some local learning and employment networks

were auspiciled by local government or by educational institutions. In the former, the representational and consensual decision-making practices inherent in the organisation provided competence in governance, yet also embedded the partnership in local politics. In the latter, existing educational networks provided a foundation for engaging community interests but in ways which tended to be distanced from local politics and wider partnerships beyond education and training. Those auspiciled outside local government and educational networks required the building of networks and capacities for governance. Similarly, with VET in Schools networks, the hosting organisation did much to shape the network's standing and practices. In one instance, the auspicising school had a strong commitment to social justice and inclusiveness which it was able to exercise through hosting workplace-based learning experiences for its students. In this case, the auspicising school did more than provide expertise to the partnership; its interests were reflected in the goals of the partnership.

How an endorsed social partnership is located and where it is placed in relation to the array of local interests is often critical in shaping the purposes, character and achievements of the partnership. Consultations with local learning and employment networks executive officers indicated, for example, that the act of physically locating the partnership was often symbolically significant for local interests. There were debates about the location of local learning and employment network offices. Schools were often not acceptable locations because other partners feared an 'education takeover'. Local learning and employment networks commonly resorted to rented space because the commercial nature of the accommodation separated the office from the partners, ensuring that the office was neutral ground within the partnership.

Locating the partnership with a host organisation can also define the relationships between the hosted partnership and other interests and agencies, and their ways of working. This is largely due to the structural and cultural framing of the host organisation. This framing is generally not acknowledged by the host organisation because 'it's, like the air we breath, something that seems quite natural, just the way things are'. For instance, as already noted in the local learning and employment networks which were auspiced in local government buildings, the consensual decision-making practices required by these partnerships were already well understood by local government practitioners and representatives. In at least one of these networks, members commented on how easy it was to commence consensus-related processes, and questioned the need for guidance by the sponsor in this area. Yet, for other networks, developing the capacities for such processes was a key feature of and goal for their establishment.

One of the potential disadvantages of auspicising social partnership within an existing network is that wider interests outside that network may not be included. This exclusion may be a consequence of historical patterns of association and dissociation. It may equally be a consequence of the style of the host culture, or 'organisational habitus' (Clegg & McNulty 2002), whereby, knowingly or not, some groups are excluded or made to feel uncomfortable. Such cultural dissonance can be a source of tensions within and between social partnerships because what seems to be a natural and obvious way of working within the auspicing agency can seem quite alien to others who are not familiar with that organisational culture. For example, a group of Victorian trade unionists talked at length about the way they felt marginalised by local learning and employment networks. They valued the initiative but when they tried to contribute their perspective, they found difficulty engaging with the network and felt that their concerns were not seriously heard or acknowledged. Employers sometimes reported a similar experience. They joked that working in local learning and employment networks meant sitting in interminable committees rather than getting on and getting things done.

Such jokes offer an astute assessment of the cultural differences within social partnerships—between local learning and employment networks which are bound by government procedures and reporting and the organisational cultures in industry. Yet, such responses may also indicate a recognition that, for some participants, such as employers and unions, working in partnerships means no longer sitting

at the 'head of the table' and negotiating bipartite decisions in which their particular interests are foremost. In social partnerships, employer and union issues are just two of the many concerns which must be considered in the context of broader concerns and priorities. For those used to having special decision-making authority, this role may be more or less easy to adapt to.

Developing ways of working

The early formation of social partnerships, in particular, but also the ongoing work of the partnership, involves complex negotiations between partners. These negotiations are set in a particular cultural milieu and entail working around the goals, priorities, preferred ways of working and definitions of success of each of the partners and other key stakeholders.

Social and cultural context

The particular social cultural context in which partnerships are located can complicate the establishment, sponsoring and auspicising of social partnerships. A premise of social partnerships is collaboration and shared concerns about the goals. However, this premise is complicated by the current social and cultural environment with its commitment to competitive individualism (Rose 1996). For instance, the local learning and employment networks initiative was cast in an environment where competition rather than collaboration had been established as the operating norm. Educational institutions (schools, TAFE) had learned to become competitive. Secretive practices and 'silo' formation have been championed in the search for competitive advantage. Hence, their participation in local learning and employment networks was not easily reconciled with their everyday work.

The agencies representing interests of young people were also accustomed to competing for funds, often against those with whom they were now asked to work collaboratively. In another example, the local learning and employment networks initiative sometimes brought together representatives of different local governments whose geographical boundaries were transcended by the networks. In one case, two local governments embraced by a local learning and employment network area already had a long tradition of working collaboratively in the provision of services for young people. These two local governments collectively supported the local learning and employment network in its partnership-building activities. However, in another local learning and employment network hostility existed between the two local governments which led to quite different levels of support provided to the local networks, as well as some degree of conflict.

Schools linked to the recently disbanded Enterprise and Careers Education Foundation whereby VET in Schools networks were established sometimes demonstrated quite different goals in relation to vocational education. On occasions schools supporting high academic profiles used these networks to place students viewed as not contributing to the school's profile. Other schools which recognise the importance of pathways other than tertiary entrance had quite different expectations of and involvement in such partnerships.

The prevailing social and cultural environment influences the interplay between partners, sponsors and auspicers, and their relationships. In some cases, the social partnerships play a role in transforming established cultural practices within particular organisational units, as occurred when the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services accommodated the partnership with the 'Lands' communities and their aspirations and goals. Equally, these social and cultural factors can become the rocks on which social partnerships founder, unless careful attention is paid to the ways in which the partnership will function. The long-term challenge of social partnerships is to develop capacity and reciprocity between the enacted partnership and both the local communities and sponsors (for example, the centre) (figure 1). In the early stages, the immediate challenge is to identify ways to support productive dialogue and decision-making between these partners, as shown in figure 2.

Not all social partnerships experience success. In some instances, conflict is a consequence of the local history or a product of the social and cultural environment. In other cases, partnerships reported competing affiliations, cliques or personal differences. Research in the United Kingdom, for example, found that such conflicts were often structural in character. For instance, Rees (1997) reported that enterprises tended to be preoccupied with their own internal goals, making it difficult for them to take a broader perspective on local needs. Jones and Bird (2000), in their examination of Education Action Zones, found considerable diversity in interests but only some exerted significant influence on the participative processes. Where differences did exist, it was only those partners able to negotiate on a common cause who ultimately formed strategic alliances. In these decision-making processes government agencies were sometimes placed in an ambivalent situation—between supporting local decisions and looking back to more traditional bureaucratic ways of working.

Figure 2: Negotiating interests within partnerships
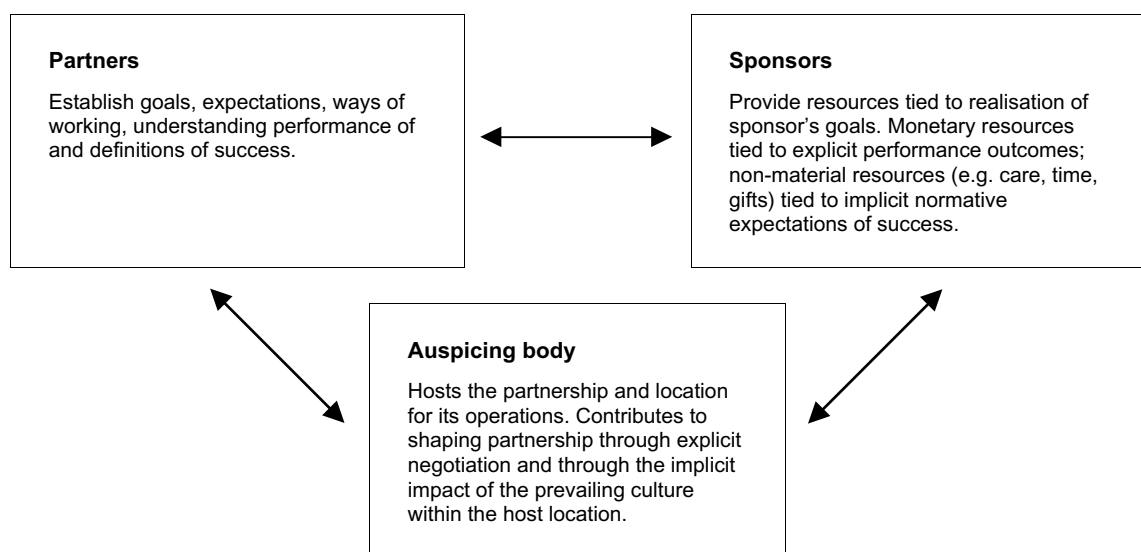
Underpinning these negotiations and shaping the transformations of social partnerships in their establishment phase are the goals of inclusivity, readiness and engagement.

Inclusivity

The degree to which social partnerships are able to achieve their goals is shaped, in part, by their capacity to be inclusive of the range of interests within the community. In particular, in focused social partnerships, such as those associated with vocational education and training, identifying those who can contribute (for example, employers, educational institutions) and those who need to be understood (for example, young people, different communities, cohorts most in need) was a key goal. Defining the parameters which dictate who should be represented and in what proportion, and then securing that representation, was also an early goal. Crucial to the success of the partnership, whether the focus was on a partnership associated with work placements for school students, or on one which addressed local needs, was developing an intimate understanding of individuals' needs, or cohorts of individuals' needs.

Within enacted social partnerships, membership or representation (for example, local learning and employment networks, VET networks) is often prescribed. However, it is not always possible to secure an adequate representation of particular interests (for example, Indigenous community, local businesses, all ethnic groups). The research also identified instances of willing volunteers being excluded because they did not fit into, or exceeded the quota of categories of representative interests. The larger and more diverse the community being represented by the social partnership, the greater the potential problems of achieving inclusivity. Yet, such inclusiveness might be

complicated by timeliness of participation. For instance, it was reported that, while local industry representatives were willing to participate in the early phases of the local learning and employment networks, they sometimes reported feeling superfluous and subsequently withdrew. The deliberations about how best local businesses might contribute had not been fully resolved. Their role in the formation stages of the partnership was sometimes not clarified.

Readiness

Not all participants in social partnerships have the immediate ability to represent their interests adequately. Similarly, not all participants are familiar with consensual decision-making or have the kinds of skills required for effective participation in committees and groups. So, existing capacities or readiness of members of the social partnership to engage in representative decision-making cannot be assumed.

These abilities were apparent in some social partnerships, but had to be generated in others. In some local learning and employment networks, for instance, it was difficult to recruit members and mobilise the committee because the individuals were not confident of their skills. In other local networks, the committee was over-endowed with highly skilled professionals with relevant knowledge and expertise. Each case presented its own challenges to the executive officers who were responsible for managing the relationship-building within the committee. One executive officer, for instance, commented on the difficulties he faced in getting the committee to take responsibility for decisions—they wanted to follow his lead. He resolved this dilemma by providing the necessary resources to the committee and then simply absenting himself from the decision stages of key meetings.

Engagement in common goals

Individuals' participation in social partnerships, for example in relation to VET in Schools and local learning and employment initiatives, was often premised on the assumption of common and worthwhile goals—in these instances, helping young people. However, common ground could not always be assumed and, even when shared goals were articulated, they were often understood and enacted in different ways. This diversity of goals and practices arises because social partnerships are structured in ways which institutionalise the differing interests of the various partners which result from different lived experiences and access to and control of resources. This means that, because of the different geographies, economic resources, knowledge and cultural capital, status and values across the partners, there is always potential for conflict or competition, despite efforts to harmonise shared goals. Such conflicts of interest, commitment and priority should not be denied because they are both intrinsic to, and a valuable and energising feature of partnerships.

Many partnerships acknowledged and celebrated the differences between partners and seriously engaged with the question of how they could all work together. For example, in the Queensland VET in Schools partnership, the liaison officer struggled with the name of the partnership. Its original name was felt to be exclusive and extensive consultations were conducted to find a more inclusive title. This partnership also arranged for some of the decision-making to be conducted via short meetings for particular groups within its community. Breakfast meetings were held for local businesses. Another meeting was held with the local Indigenous community. It was felt that targeting specific groups in this way allowed the partnership to develop nuanced relationships relevant to different partners. It was claimed that this strategy generated considerable good will and helped to profile the goals of the partnership and build stronger support.

Local learning and employment networks also reported using distinct strategies to build relationships with particular categories of partners. Koorie liaison officers were appointed in a number of the local learning and employment networks. One local learning and employment network appointed young people to act as liaison officers, which enabled them to build relationships with youth in schools and in TAFE, in jobs and on the street. In another, a youth advisory panel was established. Schools nominated one or two students to be involved in leadership

training. These were not established leaders but ordinary kids whom teachers thought had potential or who would benefit from the experience. Some were high-functioning students, others were illiterate. After a one-week training program, the students formed the youth advisory panel. Only a couple had fallen out. The rest had identified issues and established working parties to deal with issues, such as undertaking a survey of drug use in schools in the area, talking with the police and preparing a brochure for use in schools.

As these examples suggest, procedures can be implemented to address conflict and reconcile differences, while acknowledging the diversity of perspectives and needs. Success in this area is a substantial achievement in a context where difference can never be finally resolved.

It is likely that individuals participate in social partnerships in ways which support their personal and professional goals. For instance, in a VET in Schools program, the chair was seen to enjoy the status role afforded him. Moreover, it was suggested that some individuals chose to participate in high-profile committees which accorded them prestige. In one of the local learning and employment networks, the chair was a local government politician whose role dovetailed nicely with his other roles in the community and afforded him the status he believed highly desirable. However, it is questionable whether such individuals would be willing and satisfied participating as committee members.

Social partnerships are based upon complex local and personal interests which need to be consolidated and focused on the particular concerns which mobilise the partnership. It is essential however, to reconcile conflicting interests in order to establish and subsequently enable the partnership to function.

Summary

In summary, there is considerable variation in social partnerships. One element of the diversity relates to the structuring of social partnerships within the formal relationships existing between partners, enactors, sponsors and auspicers. The wider relationships between government and communities also affect variation in partnerships. Added diversity arises in the socio-cultural formation of partnerships in specific times and places, and through the negotiations within communities and between agencies, each of whom have their own histories, practices and aspirations.

In establishing sustainable partnerships, complex structural and cultural relationships must be negotiated in ways which meet the expectations of partnership and other stakeholders. The functioning of the partnership is an organic process which takes time and considerable interpersonal and communicative capacity. It cannot be resolved formalistically or according to specific rules except where the authority of particular agencies is accepted and seen to be legitimate by the partnership. When other partners or agencies make demands, their influence tends to be established on the basis of the validity and legitimacy of the demands.

Enabling partnerships

Once a social partnership is established, effort is required to ensure that the desired goals and outcomes are achieved and that the partnership is maintained and sustained over time. The evidence from old social partnerships, largely built on abiding and common concerns, indicates that much of their impact was realised from their ongoing contribution to community-building as well as from economic and social benefits. For instance, it seems that German unions and employers collaborated in maintaining quality in vocational education provision in order to avoid government intervention (Koch & Reuling 1994). The evidence to date suggests that new social partnerships have the potential to return social benefits comparable to those of social partnerships—albeit differently configured. Realising this potential depends upon the durability of the partnerships, the way relationships between partners and the wider community mature, and their capacity to make a difference within communities through the development of shared understandings and the accommodation of difference.

There are significant challenges in developing the capability of social partnerships so that valued outcomes can be realised. These challenges are partly associated with the effective consolidation of the partnership so that they support defined social and economic benefits. Challenges are also inherent in issues relating to the resources available to support partnerships, the infrastructure which permits sustainable partnership operations and the creation of a conducive context in which 'unfreedoms' or constraints to partnership-working are removed or managed. These issues are addressed in turn.

Consolidating partnerships

Shared purpose

The capacity of the social partnership to develop shared understandings about its purpose is central to the partnership's continuity and efficacy. Shared understanding between partners, and with the communities embraced by the partnership, are significant achievements. The importance of this achievement should not be underestimated.

The process of building shared understandings is slow and time-consuming and probably emerges alongside the development of capacity for governance within the social partnership. As participants mature as sophisticated decision-makers, and base their decisions on more integrated assessments of the situation and the problems to be addressed, the character of the shared understanding between partners and with communities changes. For instance, the Indigenous communities on the 'Lands' began by focusing their decision-making on the physical assets which would facilitate their children's education. As the decision-making capacity of the partnership grew, they focused more on policy and resource questions—the kind of learning experiences they wanted for their children and how they could be made available.

Building and managing relationships

The capacity of the social partnership is contingent upon the way relationships within the partnership, between partners and the local community, and with external agencies and interests

beyond the partnership are built and managed. This is a complex process which demands considerable cultural understanding and social skills from those who engage in it. Within the local learning and employment networks, executive officers often talked about the difficulties they faced in making real contact with different groups in the community. They had to develop explicit strategies to make meaningful contacts with employers, young people and local Indigenous communities. Even then, there was a lot of behind-the-scenes work undertaken to build preliminary contacts and find ways of talking which permitted communication while being appropriately sensitive to difference.

Very often the demands of this work are not recognised. It is a kind of 'invisible work'. Some people do seem to have an almost innate ability for social interaction, for engaging people in conversations and for exciting their imaginations—in the case of partnerships, towards cooperative goals. But the success of social partnerships has to rely upon more than stereotyped and often gendered assumptions about innate capacity for sociability.

The sustainability of partnerships depends not just on the occasional 'good talker' but on capacities for inter-cultural communication, inclusive cultural sensitivity and risky border-crossing across partnership participants. This requirement was evident in a number of social partnerships in which partners had made accommodation in their usual ways of working to recognise and respect the concerns of another partner or parts of the community. The Queensland VET in Schools program had developed alternative communication strategies for working with different groups: a breakfast for businesses and separate meetings with Indigenous communities with careful attention to Indigenous governance structures.

In each of the social partnerships, relationship-building entailed a double process. On the one hand, there was a focus on the explicit purpose of the engagement which was often couched in practical and pragmatic terms—there was something to do and this justified working together. On the other hand, there was a focus on the process of encouraging and supporting participation. Partners, volunteers and community interests did not always enter the partnership with a commitment to be active participants. This orientation had to be developed as part of the relationship-building process, a process which hinges on developing confidence, confirming the importance of people's contributions, supporting them as they learn to engage, and building their capacity as actors and participants. Good governance depends upon this developmental process. It demands careful attention to what has been termed the 'pedagogy of governance' (Ranson 2003) and how it can be supported.

Defining success and managing accountabilities

As the complexities of relationship-building suggest, social partnerships often have complex and often ambiguous definitions of success. Each partner, each individual and community, has expectations about the success the partnership will bring. The early work of partnership-building involves addressing these different expectations in order to define 'success' in agreed ways and what counts as 'successful achievements' or outcome.

However, agreed definitions of success are complicated by the 'double agenda' of social partnerships. Invariably social partnerships appear to have explicit project outcomes and also community-building outcomes. This was recognised by Kirby in the original proposals for the local learning and employment networks. His inquiry provided a substantial list of activities which these networks should undertake (Kirby 2000, pp.120–1). However, when the networks were being established, the list was refined to highlight two main purposes for them: enabling education and employment outcomes for young people and building community capacity. The former is the explicit project outcome for which local learning and employment networks were established. The latter is the implicit or infrastructural outcome generated by working together. However, expectations about and reporting of outcomes tend to become focused on the tangible outcomes needed to sustain the political agenda. They are often less concerned with the processes which inevitably are the focus of the initial work.

The significance of this second, community-building outcome, should not be underestimated. It is a critical goal in our current climate even if it is more diffuse and difficult to report on than tangible outcomes. Collaboration establishes relationships between different groups with different expertise and capacity. Building such relationships across difference provides a powerful context for learning from one another. Here mutual supports are created so that the capacity for communities to act are increased. These relationships also enable a pedagogy of governance which supports the learning and confidence-building to allow communities to become more active in determining their own futures.

Defining success within partnerships is important for the management of partnerships, for accountability purposes and for sustaining sponsors' support. Establishing a framework of outcomes provides ongoing guidance and permits priority-setting within partnerships. It also allows the partnership to monitor performance in relation to these defined goals. The challenge lies in who defines the outcomes and the reporting framework, and to whom the partnership reports. As the Enterprise Careers and Education Foundation partnerships show, sponsors can, in some instances, dominate success, outcomes and accountability elements of partnerships. Sponsors who are also governments, which fund and also determine the operating context for partnerships, have an even greater capacity to shape partnerships and their activities. Yet sponsors, even governments, are only one of the partners. Financial probity is important, but so are the expectations of other parties.

The legitimacy of social partnerships does not reside only in being a good financial manager and returning the outcomes required by the sponsor/government. Also crucial is being responsible to all partners and communities served. There are risks associated with accountability requirements which require partnerships to report just to those who pay or dominate. Accountability and reporting requirements should be negotiated in relation to each partner and the local communities. Their different goals and expectations should be accommodated, for example, by having outcomes and performance indicators specified by the community as well as the centre. This is the course adopted in many social partnerships beyond education and training (for example, Salvaris 2000; City of Onkaparinga 2000).

Delineation of limits

The capacity of a social partnership to achieve its goals and be accountable to its partners and communities goes hand in hand with the delineation of the limits of the partnership. Many of the partnerships surveyed by phone had quite specific purposes. For instance, they broker school–industry relationships; provide regular work experience for Year 11 students; create links between students and employers from Year 5. In contrast, the local learning and employment networks in their early establishment phase, were often overwhelmed by the range of things they could do. Executive officers responded differently to this abundance. Some moved opportunistically from initiative to initiative, focusing on building up local support to carry each of these opportunities forward. Other executive officers focused on and set priorities for specific initiatives and programs, retaining a stronger engagement in each of the initiatives.

The scope of partnership work is linked to other factors, such as the number of partners involved, their geographic spread, their diversity of interests and their knowledge and skills, especially in relation to governance. Each of these factors affected the character of relationship-building and the level of support, encouragement and capacity-building which had to be undertaken.

The character of the community in which the partnership was located was also a limiting factor. For instance, partnerships in regional areas or centred on specific ethnic, faith or institutional locations had a good understanding of their communities and this knowledge allowed them to target needs and projects appropriately and effectively. Where the 'community' was more ambiguous, partnerships found the community harder to know and target in strategic ways. This uncertainty was reported by a number of the local learning and employment networks in metropolitan areas. They indicated that 'community' has no real meaning where it was comprised of many different

groups and had no real spatial boundaries. In such situations, these networks tended to focus on specific networks, like young mums at school.

Trust and trustworthiness

Social partnerships work on the assumption that modest funding can be supplemented by volunteer labour—either the community service activities of professionals undertaken as part of their main job, or via self-funded volunteers opting to help. Given this basis for partnership operations, and the impossibility of mandating support, it is essential that trust be generated within each partnership. Our interviews indicated that, in many partnerships, community participation was accompanied by the belief that the partnership was working in the community's interest. This led to rich and profitable connections with the community. For example, schools with VET in Schools programs generated trust and a sense of good will which was then reciprocated. In some cases, community members used the school as a drop-in centre, or a source of advice about personal, social, employment and legal matters. While such community support could become overwhelming, it did build trust, although it also highlighted the need for the school to have the kind of information being sought.

The idea of trust is linked to judgements of trustworthiness. In the examples noted, the community's trust was based on their judgement that the school was trustworthy, that it was responsible and respectful in its dealings with the community and its students. But trust is fragile, especially if there is no long-standing history of working together. Breaches of trust can often be simple things—an insensitive comment, lack of recognition of the effort being put into an initiative, failure to follow through on an activity. Such breaches of trust, especially when they are rooted in cultural misunderstandings, are often almost unrecognisable to the breaching party. Yet they require a lot of repair work.

Establishing trustworthiness at the local level can be time-consuming but usually returns results. It is more difficult for physically distant partners or stakeholders. In the Indigenous partnership with the 'Lands' communities, considerable effort went into ensuring that the urban education and residential facilities had a presence at the local level. The people involved had to be seen locally, and judged as individuals, as part of the process of establishing their trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness is more difficult for sponsors, especially sponsors who are also governments or otherwise remote. They just hand over the money but often have a dominating presence within partnerships. The money flow can also be disrupted for all sorts of reasons: justifiable business decisions, changes in priority, shifts in policy, a tight state budget. Yet at the local level, heavy-handed influence or the interruption, reduction or withdrawal of funding slides quickly to the view that these partners are untrustworthy. It is a problem for businesses or brokering agents but they can walk away from the situation. The judgement of 'untrustworthy' is far more significant in relation to governments because it fuels public cynicism about governments, undercutting their legitimacy and may have electoral consequences.

Resourcing partnerships

The capacity of a social partnership to consolidate and achieve its agreed outcomes is dependent on the resources the partnership can call upon to support and drive its activities.

People

All social partnerships identified in the study relied on and were sustained by voluntary effort. Without volunteers, social partnerships would not exist since they provided sectoral perspectives and advice, contacts and access to networks, and sometimes the energy to sustain the social partnership. For instance, in the local learning and employment networks, all the senior office bearers are

volunteers (that is, chair, treasurer). However, while this is the strength of social partnerships, it is also a key weakness. Volunteers may exhaust easily and frequently. Willing volunteers may also be exploited. Volunteers may not be available as required. They might also be selective and exercise a preference for high-profile social partnerships. In all, the willingness of particular volunteers will shape much of the advice received and interests promoted.

Two kinds of voluntary effort sustained partnerships. In the first group individuals are paid by another organisation to participate in the social partnership and may be representatives of educational institutions, youth agencies, local government or business representatives. The other group is comprised of individuals who are self-funded but who choose to participate in social partnerships. These individuals or representatives of local community groups are unlikely to be remunerated for their time or efforts. Both these forms of voluntary effort present complications. The former may be under pressure to demonstrate how their time benefits their employer; they may also have a range of competing interests and demands impinging upon their time. These constraints may necessitate some attention to some tasks/areas to the detriment of others. For instance, it has been suggested that some members of the community might be drawn towards more high-profile social partnerships because of the personal benefits that might result. Others balancing competing interests (for example, family, professional, social networks etc.) may show high turnover through exhaustion.

Volunteers make heavy demands on partnerships. They must be managed appropriately and have roles which return relevant personal benefits as reward and recognition for their volunteer contribution. High turnover in volunteers compounds the work associated with a volunteer workforce, adding to the workload associated with training, capacity-building, recruitment and maintaining enthusiasm for projects. High turnover also presents risks; for example, loss of continuity and partnership memory, loss of representation for groups whose members quickly exhaust, and the danger that depletion in some areas may lead to other interests dominating the partnership by their continued presence in the social partnership.

In addition to volunteers, social partnerships employ staff whose major responsibility is to ensure the ongoing work and sustainable development of the partnership. These individuals undertake a very complex work role, requiring considerable innovation, risk-taking and responsibility. There appears to be little consistency in the way these employees are remunerated or the knowledge and skills demanded on appointment. Opportunities for skill development appear limited. A number of partnerships organised staff development activities or encouraged networking with other partnership employees, but such activities are allocated from the partnership's time budget. Local learning and employment network executive officers, for example, commented that they very rarely got the opportunity to meet as a group, without other stakeholders present, to discuss their activities.

Working successfully as a partnership employee provides an opportunity to learn an enormous range of skills on the job and to build extensive networks across sectors, industry and communities. This occupational learning makes these individuals attractive to other employers. The pressure of work within partnerships, coupled with growing demand for employees with good networks and sophisticated networking and cross-cultural communication skills raises questions about supply and demand in relation to partnership workers. This issue, and its relationship to volunteer labor, skill development and recognition and reward, is worthy of further investigation, since it has significant implications for the overall sustainability of partnership activities.

Knowledge, skills, capacities

Those who work in social partnerships require a diverse range of knowledge, skills and other capacities in order to maximise their role and the interests they represent. These capacities include understanding and articulating the perspectives they represent within a decision-making process based on consensus, and subsequently maintaining communication with the interest group and sustaining that group's involvement in the social partnership. The practice of consensual decision-

making requires tolerance of and engagement with multiple discourses; that is, the way in which participants relate, their conceptions of their needs and the way they express them.

All participants require skills and knowledge in these areas, although they are most critical for paid employees, largely because employees provide some continuity within the partnership. Moreover, paid employees possess the level of institutional memory required to maintain the work of the partnership and to assist the changing flow of voluntary participants. In addition, paid employees are required to support other participants as they develop their capacities for partnership-working through a pedagogy of governance. No assumptions can be made about the capabilities of different participants in partnerships. This flags another skill required by paid employees—the capacity to identify and diagnose the learning required by individuals, learning which will facilitate the work of the partnership. Paid employees will also be required to provide training opportunities in areas where skills are deficient.

As social partnerships become more widespread, it is conceivable that there will be a need for formalised development opportunities organised and funded by the sponsor or other agencies to enable policy goals to be achieved. Such development is offered, for example, to school council members in Victoria, organised through the peak school council organisation supported by the Victorian Government. Specific training for people taking on the role of chair, treasurer and secretary may also be necessary to broaden the range of participation in these activities. Such support may be provided through: public vocational education and training (for example, TAFE or the adult and community sector); community interests (for example, professional development programs which prepared TAFE teachers to become industry consultants) or specialist social business initiatives (for example, the School for Social Entrepreneurs 2003; Social Ventures Australia 2003)

Organisational resources

The message from many partnerships was that, in the establishment phase, constant improvisation and innovation took place, although in most, complex problem-solving persisted beyond establishment. As a result of having to solve problems, partnerships develop ingenious and localised solutions for addressing difficult issues. This is one of the great strengths and prospects of social partnerships.

Yet the constant call on imagination and ingenuity can be exhausting. Why re-invent the wheel when it can be modified to fit local needs? The Enterprise and Careers Education Foundation provided a framework to facilitate partnership formation, and the Victorian Government prepared a template for local learning and employment networks in their early development. Local learning and employment networks are currently addressing the question of how to measure qualitative social outcomes which demonstrate their success in community-building. The department field officers have provided support, but from within the department, and from within education and training. Consultants have been contracted to assist in this process. This is unfortunate since a wealth of experience and administrative technologies are already available in other sectors and in other countries which could be utilised. In local government, tourism, social welfare, environment and justice, groups committed to social benefits are working to define outcomes and establish indicators which will permit intangible community benefits to be recognised within performance regimes—but the exchange of information seems modest (Seddon, Clemans & Mertova in progress).

Partnerships require organisational processes and administrative technologies which are in line with their values and commitments but which also enable them to accomplish the organisational goals effectively. This includes the organisation of the partnership and its routine and non-routine (for example, dispute resolution processes) activities; organisation and management of partners; and the management of a networked organisation, a task which requires attention within and between networked sites (Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan 1997). Technologies transplanted from bureaucratic contexts are generally not appropriate. The reporting mechanisms established by the government

department responsible for local learning and employment networks, for example, were subject to extensive criticism. There is a need for research on the ways of working within partnerships and comparable organisations, in and beyond education and training, in order to identify the administrative technologies which would facilitate the most effective operations. This initiative might lead to resource banks to support organisational partnership-working.

Time and money

In one sense, time is money, especially in social partnerships where there is always too much to do. In another sense, social partnerships encourage working together in ways which break the nexus between time and money. They create contexts where sociability is reaffirmed and where people can do things because it is right for them. In these instances there is some evidence of time cycles different from those commonly associated with the pursuit of strategic objectives.

This tension between time and money, between purposive rational action and sociability, lines up with the (already noted) distinction between social partnerships as projects and as movements. These tensions can be addressed through the negotiation and clear specification of expectations and feasible outcomes which acknowledge different conceptions of 'success'. If partnerships know what the game is, they can adjust their work to those demands. There is some funding ambiguity because volunteer labour doesn't 'cost' in book-keeping terms, but the absence of salary is offset by the organisational and capacity-building development actually required to harness volunteer labour to support partnership outcomes. Clarifying these budget implications would be helpful (another possible research topic), especially where partnerships are operating in a dispersed community where there is considerable heterogeneity and volunteer turnover.

Where expectations of partnerships are ambiguous or changing, it is very difficult to prioritise activities so that they are contained within a reasonable budget—in terms of both funds and effort. Work priorities and the management of the partnership economy are also confounded when reporting against project outcomes favours some outcomes over others and the related infrastructural community-building outcomes are not acknowledged. Such accountability arrangements do not make sense in partnership work because outcomes which depend upon working together cannot be tackled without building relationships. Community-building is the infrastructure for project outcomes. Diminishing it by not recognising it as work is not an economy but a death sentence.

Another issue which vexed some partnerships related to the role of the partnership in brokering innovative projects and in maintaining those activities in the longer term. This presented some complex questions of priority-setting and required judgements about the extent of partnership involvement in specific projects (how long does it take for the initiative to become self-sustaining?). This was particularly acute in relation to local learning and employment networks which had a stronger brokering role by comparison with other partnerships studied (for example, Enterprise and Careers Education Foundation partnerships, VET in Schools etc.). This issue highlights the importance of clarifying, not only expectations about the specific task of the partnership but also the partnership 'genre' itself. We return to this point below, but it is clear that partnerships play different roles and present different challenges.

Infrastructural supports

Social partnerships appear to be a successful innovation in public policy. They are already achieving successes by building on the substantial social infrastructure which has been built up through voluntary activity and through the prior public provision of goods and services. Where these social resources are eroded, due to rapid economic and social change or community distress, partnerships can begin to rebuild social capital and encourage community renewal.

Yet, these established resources are not enough by themselves to sustain social partnerships. The findings of this project suggest that four major infrastructural supports are necessary to maintain social partnerships. These are noted briefly in turn.

Funding security and genre clarification

Partnerships take different forms and play different roles in harnessing social effort for community benefit. The genre of the partnership has implications for funding arrangements. For instance, short-term or seed funding is appropriate if it is clear to the social partnership that it is a short-term initiative which is intended to kick-start local activity and/or establish self-funding arrangements within a specified period. In this respect the partnership is a project. Alternatively, the partnership might be a long-term initiative which is self-funded (like the small business network which met at the tennis club), sponsored by communities (for example, the 'Lands' communities) or long-term benefactor, or be a 'social business', or not-for-profit agency which charges for its services but re-invests earnings in the partnership (for example, Benevolent Society 2003).

Problems arise when there is a mismatch between funding sustainability and partnership genre. For instance, short-term funding arrangements can have an impact on employment security and can affect the kinds of people and levels of expertise recruited to positions. The breakdown of longer-term funding arrangements also creates problems by challenging the view that the partnership is a long-term initiative (for example, oriented to cultural change in a sector, industry or community) and undercutting the legitimacy of partnerships. For example, in England, Southwark Council established a public–private partnership to manage education in the Borough of Southwark as part of the British Government's agenda for the long-term administration of education within particular education areas. It suffered a serious setback when the private partner, W S Atkins, requested termination of the contract three years early, on the grounds that the contractual arrangements did not make economic sense for the company (Ford 2003; McAlister 2003). This decision was not fickle but made on the basis of sound business decision-making by the private partner. While the company's share market price increased following this announcement (which justified the decision in the company), it presented the other partners, local and central government, with the problem of administering local educational provision within the borough and also covering the substantial legal costs associated with the premature termination (Smithers 2003).

The recent announcement by the Victorian Minister for Education, the Hon. Lyn Kosky (2003) that local learning and employment networks will receive a further two years funding and then be reviewed to assess their contribution to education and employment outcomes, has also caused some consternation amongst network executive officers. While they accepted that they were funded for specific periods to achieve outcomes for young people and recognised that the state budget was tight, many felt themselves to be part of a new but durable feature of the education and training landscape. The intimation that local learning and employment networks might be reconfigured to focus purely on youth outcomes and possibly be reduced in scope was met with some disquiet.

Workforce development

Working in partnerships entails distinctive work practices different from both private and established public sector (that is, bureaucratic) work. Paid employees and volunteers require distinct knowledge and skills and often these must be developed on the job. There is a place for targeted professional development opportunities to support this work, and education and training in this context would help to ensure that there is an ongoing labour supply to enable partnership work to be carried forward, even if there is growing staff turnover. It would also provide rewards and recognition for those individuals (paid and volunteers) engaged in partnerships which could benefit them as individuals, and thus ultimately industries seeking to appoint staff who would support innovation and culture change. The provision of workforce development could prove particularly important for young people who are drawn into partnership-working since their developing

capacities can be publicly recognised in ways which enhance their opportunities in the labour market. Our interviews provided many examples of young people growing substantially in confidence and skills but still having no public recognition of these capacities.

The interconnections between supply and demand, skills and knowledge, recognition and rewards for paid and voluntary staff, vis-à-vis partnerships warrants further investigation. This area is more complex than other aspects of workforce development because paid and unpaid labour are included in this workforce. Moreover, partnerships cross administrative, portfolio and professional boundaries and jurisdictions. All of these features mean that workforce development for social partnerships is an area which needs to be approached seriously, particularly if the partnership and all its relationships are to be sustained.

Networked resource base

Organisational and administrative resources can facilitate partnerships-working if they are tailored to fit the distinctive features of networks and networking. However, our evidence indicates that one-size-fits-all approaches are not appropriate in relation to social partnerships which are distinguished by their local character and orientation.

Given the range of social partnerships which cross sectoral, portfolio, professional and national boundaries, it is a given that there are considerable resources of an administrative and organisational kind already available. While centrally provided resources are unlikely to be immediately accepted, mapping these resources would identify different models and formats which could be used by local partnerships seeking to address various problems, tasks or situations. Such resources might be helpful if they were readily available through, for example, a resource bank that offers examples which can be adapted and redesigned for local use. Items such as problem-solving stories, access to people with relevant knowledge and skills, administrative technologies to support particular organisational work, strategies for dealing with funding or reporting, and information about other partnerships could be included. A number of agencies already offer resources such as these, although they tend to be restricted to particular policy areas (for example, Enterprise and Careers Education Foundation and Dussledorp Skills Forum in training) and are unrelated to one another.

The value of modern technologies is that they permit networked resource banks, like Education Network Australia (EdNA). A parallel initiative to support social partnerships reaching across government, private, and not-for-profit agencies and communities would undoubtedly prove most useful.

Policy and endorsement and support

The proliferation of social partnerships in recent years has been supported by governments and endorsed through government policy. Their public support is critical for their further development or their institutionalisation as durable features within the public policy terrain, including education and training. There is some evidence to suggest that the application of partnerships in education and training may be somewhat more difficult than in some other policy domains because of the long-standing tradition of centralised and bureaucratic governance which has prevailed in Australia, and because of historic attitudes to private and not-for-profit education and training. For instance, in Victoria the establishment of local learning and employment networks has been treated circumspectly by some schools and regions, and within the bureaucracy, a situation which may be attributed to the relative newness of the networks. However, there also appear to be attitudinal issues related to the government's emphasis and promotion of the networks over schools ('which is where most of the 15 to 19-year-olds are'), the priority given to vocational education, and the expectation that teachers and managers will take on the work of the networks over and above their other responsibilities—with no workload or salary recognition.

While our data do not reveal any indication of declining support for social partnerships amongst Australian governments, there is little indication of how partnerships might be integrated into established education and training provision in the longer term. Partnerships are risky business, especially for those individuals who take on the hard and little recognised task of making them work. In the course of our interviews we did talk with people who were beginning to measure the cost of partnership work in terms of just how much effort they put into them. This was often at the expense of their family, other areas of interest, or their day job. Partnerships are also prone to conflict because cultural difference is built into them. Living with the potential for conflict and dealing with it when it erupts, also takes its toll on individuals. Yet in none of our interviews were formal dispute resolution strategies discussed. There was no indication what would happen if partnership takeover occurred, or if partnership failure became publicly visible.

The role of government

Our data indicate that governments are working to support partnerships in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. Every level of government (federal, state and local) and diverse arms of government are currently active within social partnerships. A great range of portfolios are engaged in partnership-working and there is a commitment to 'joined-up' government whereby a range of portfolios are engaged in cross-departmental activities (for example, Victorian Local Government Association 2003). However, as with much government activity in Australia, anomalies occur; for example, the Victorian Department of Education and Training is very focused on local learning and employment networks but does not appear to actively promote connections with other state-level partnership activities in Victoria, such as the Victorian Social Benchmarks Project, or with those in other states (for example, Tasmania Together). There is little formal acknowledgment of Enterprise Careers and Education Foundation projects by local learning and employment networks, and it seems that these networks focus on self-funded activities or those supported through local contributions. Little attempt has been made to seek alternative sources of funding; for example, by seeking further funding from other funding schemes or by combining different levels of funded government activity.

This separate development may be appropriate but, in Tasmania, Tasmania Together has provided a regional development focus which has enabled education and training activities to become more integrated with other community development work. This integration acts to consolidate partnerships and enhance their sustainability, while also returning wider community benefits. Our research also suggests that, despite their importance in identifying local needs and responding to those needs through the provision of advice or enacting initiatives, the social partnerships and their role in localised decision-making relating to employment, education and training still benefits from guidance from the 'centre'. This helps to avoid duplication (for example, all communities pursuing information technology or biotechnology education and employment outcomes), ad hoc decision-making (for example, pursuing policies which inadvertently exclude), and domination by particular interests. The operation of partnerships requires some separation from the centre, but not complete autonomy at the local level.

The future of social partnerships ultimately rests on policy endorsement by governments. There is no doubt that this endorsement is currently forthcoming at the general level. However, there would seem to be value in policy clarification in relation to the longer-term roles envisaged in education and training, partnership genres, funding arrangements, and how jurisdictions and policy interfaces might be negotiated within government departments, both in and beyond education and training. Such policy clarification should be accompanied by the development of organisational resources and administrative technologies sensitive to the complexities of partnership-working (for example, monitoring and reporting strategies which allow the documentation of performance in relation to community-building outcomes and also the establishment of dispute resolution strategies). The creation of strategies to build awareness of and support for partnerships within government agencies

would also assist in assuring a strong future for partnerships. These strategies could be made public through the documentation of cross-jurisdictional and cross-portfolio partnership initiatives.

The role of government in social partnerships is both global (ensuring an environment which facilitates and enables partnerships) and specific in character (for example, policy directives, reporting priorities). These activities bring governments closer to communities. Working with communities builds trust and, through the pedagogy of governance, may begin to address the worldwide disaffection which appears to exist between citizens and their democratically elected representatives. But with trust comes the expectation of accommodation. The closeness of partnership brings increased risk of perceived untrustworthiness when accommodations are not made, cultural sensitivities are not respected and obligations are not seen to be mutual. The challenge for governments is to find ways of organising, endorsing and working with partnerships which permit the double role of government to be respected—as the central authority ultimately responsible for social order within its jurisdiction, and as a partner with communities in supporting social and economic development.

Implications for further research

This project demonstrates that social partnerships are an increasingly significant feature of public policy. They are endorsed by Australian governments at all levels and across a wide range of policy portfolios. They take many forms and are oriented to different ends. Yet they all bring together diverse stakeholders who work together for local benefit. However, these benefits will not be realised without processes which support, develop and consolidate sustainable working partnerships. Effective 'joined-up' government will also require support aimed at building bridges between partnership initiatives within and across policy portfolios.

Community partnerships grow out of community concerns and commitments to address local issues or problems. *Enacted social partnerships* are initiated by agencies external to local communities but with a view to developing and/or supporting particular projects within those communities.

Partnership work is complex and multi-layered and requires the careful negotiation of local and central interests to produce the desired outcomes, and success involves acknowledging and working with the explicit or tacit expectations of partners, sponsors and auspicising organisations. In the longer term, the successful functioning of the social partnership depends upon the development of capacity and reciprocity to sustain productive relationships between stakeholders and, in enacted partnerships, between the local community and the centre (that is, government departments and agencies which sponsor these arrangements).

Given the benefits of partnerships documented in this research, how might partnerships be enhanced to better support local decision-making and local learning needs?

Initiating and sustaining social partnerships

Enhancing social partnerships requires resource and support structures which, first of all, have the ability to sustain initial partnership formation and the development of these capabilities, and secondly, realise the transformation of the partnership into a durable, but responsive and functional entity within local or regional contexts.

These challenges are currently being addressed through procedural and reporting frameworks which accompany public funding allocations to social partnerships. While they help at the establishment phase, it is not clear whether they can:

✧ sustain social partnerships through their establishment into sustainable bodies. Our data suggest that there may be considerable 'churning' or instability and discontinuities in social partnerships with initial development unable to be sustained in the longer term

✧ support partnership work in ways which consolidate and organise local and regional centres for cooperative activity and self-governance (that is, small-scale institution-building) but also remain open and responsive to a multiplicity of interests and changing social and economic circumstances. Our data suggest that concern for sustainability can encourage a focus on single programs and the bureaucratisation of partnership operations (creating new organisational silos) by sponsors rather than supporting relationship-building and networked organisations.

Sustainable partnerships depend upon organisational arrangements which actively encourage and support reciprocity between partner agencies and with the 'centre' or sponsoring agencies (for example, through two-way processes of policy and practice formulations). It seems likely that sustaining such reciprocity will require some re-orientation of the current bureaucratic and market modes of governance towards processes sympathetic to the cooperative and voluntary effort at the heart of social partnerships.

The regulatory arrangements, infrastructure and resource requirements which ensure the sustainability of social partnerships and their operation as networked organisations committed to building relationships, warrants further investigation. It might include more detailed examination of:

✧ categories of social partnerships which have stood the test of time, achieved their goals and dissipated and transformed their purposes over time

✧ ways of working within partnerships, the capacities and organisational arrangements which have facilitated success, how these have been developed and recognised

✧ resources and infrastructure which make a difference within different types of social partnerships

✧ tangible and intangible benefits of social partnership as a basis for clarifying their valued outcomes

✧ reporting frameworks for social partnerships which accommodate social as well as economic accounting methodologies, acknowledge outcomes valued by partners, sponsors and communities, and provide outcome measures which can be used to monitor outcomes, their realisation and benefits.

Partnerships as project and movement

Social partnerships embody a double agenda as a project and a movement.

The promise of social partnerships lies in their capacity to create local and regional centres for cooperative activity and decision-making which remain open and responsive to multiple interests and changing circumstances. The realisation of this promise requires agencies enacting and sponsoring social partnerships to recognise that there are significant differences in the way a partnership must work to achieve outcomes relevant to these central agencies and to local communities. It should be acknowledged that there are as many ways of working in a partnership as there are partnerships and definitions of success and valued outcomes.

For the centre, particularly government but also other sponsors, the social partnership is a project— a means to a particular end. This end is often precisely defined in the project specification, outcome measures and reporting requirements. In this respect, the social partnership is an instrument of the centre, a project whose task it is to achieve a specific outcome of relevance to the centre.

Our data suggest that, for communities, social partnerships are seen as community activities, a way of being sociable and of giving something back to the community. People participate because it is enjoyable or important to them. They want to make friends, talk to people, work with others towards outcomes which help people in the community. The issues identified by the community rarely align with policy portfolios but sprawl across policy concerns because they are targeted at helping particular individuals or groups. The participants are largely volunteers whose activities towards the goal are not always most effectively managed or directed by edict or by policy goals. They are not employees. Their interests, values and energies guide their participation in the project.

In community contexts, the partnership is not a *project* with its connotations of purposive activity, leading to a specific end point; rather, it is a community response to need—that is, the needs of individuals to be sociable, hold out a helping hand and renew trust in others. It is a local *movement* which, today, is coalescing with parallel movements around the world. In policy language we describe this movement as 'rebuilding community'. We measure community's social capital. But to those in communities, it is just community life, centred on particular people, relationships and

activities. In this context, understanding the potential mismatch between policy goals and community and individual actions and needs is crucial.

Nevertheless, the social partnership itself can be the locus of both instrumental and community activity. It is defined by both central and community expectations. If it is too responsive to one set of interests, it runs the risk of alienating the other interests. Whether it functions effectively depends upon its capacity to mediate the two, to find synergies which optimise instrumental outcomes but also consolidate community support in a sustainable way.

This research suggests that, in VET policy, social partnerships are being conceptualised as policy projects to be enacted, but without full recognition of their status as community movements. Furthermore, the reciprocity which must exist for partnerships to be sustainable also appears not to be acknowledged or guaranteed. The danger is that over-emphasising project performance against narrowly defined outcomes will undermine the partnerships, as well as the community relations on which they depend for their effective functioning. While the social partnerships are required in some ways to be responsive to the political and policy agenda, they may be at risk of ignoring the wishes of the community and stakeholders.

There is value in investigating further the tensions which exist within social partnerships between centre and community, and between government agencies (marked by bureaucratic traditions) and the partnership. Research in this area should acknowledge the complexities and conflicts of interest and culture which are a fact of life in partnerships and also identify strategies to more effectively facilitate their operations and management.

Such research might consider the way:

✧ partnership-working is different from bureaucratic and market ways of working, and the extent and consequences of its interface with these other patterns of organisation

✧ policy conceptualises social partnerships, the models and understandings which inform policy approaches and what they mean for funding, procedural and reporting requirements

✧ policy developments enacted through bureaucratic cultures relate to the organisational cultures developing within social partnerships and the way individuals working at that interface are re-configuring established practices

✧ other policy domains have developed and supported social partnerships, whether there is evidence to support the view that education and training is a distinctive domain as a consequence of its history, and what the implications might be for sustaining social partnerships in education and training.

Capacities and commitments in partnership-working

Our data suggest that, by and large, social partnerships are operationalised by professionals from different walks of life who enter into these activities because of the personal and professional benefits they offer. Sometimes these professionals are paid as public servants, in other cases they are purely volunteers, but in both cases, their core motivation seems to lie in the non-material benefits to be acquired (for example, satisfaction, relationships, the experience of supporting others in a community-building way).

Their work in social partnerships is sophisticated professional work. It requires them to move across cultural boundaries, translate across diverse discourse communities (that is, communities which have different modes of and capacities for expressing their interests and concerns), and work towards universal goals in which all can share. It also requires them to juggle the desires and parochial tensions of community life in the context of sponsors' tied funding, and the regulatory and reporting requirements of the centre. This work is 'public service'. It mediates the relationships on which partnerships are premised. However, in some instances the work–life experience of professionals does not always equip them to fully realise the range of processes demanded in partnerships and may not

always include cross-agency communication, managing volunteers and consensual decision-making. Specific professional development in these areas may therefore be beneficial.

If the potential of partnerships is to be fully realised, there will be value in investigating the nature of the capacity-building workforce (that is, those whose collective efforts are directed to building capacity in the community), its composition, the skills and knowledge it possesses, the work it undertakes and its patterns of supply and demand, for example:

✧ the nature of the work involved in partnerships to reveal the complex but often invisible work of relationship-building, its contribution to public service on behalf of communities and governments, and how it might be better understood, supported, acknowledged and rewarded

✧ the professional expertise and skills of those who undertake partnership work, and how these capacities contribute to sustaining and operationalising open and responsive networked organisations

✧ the labour market for professionals involved in partnerships, the learning and work careers which lead to the development of these capacities and how these capacities can be both maintained and made more available to Australians in all communities and occupations

✧ the implications of having a volunteer and paid workforce in terms of skill supply, labour turnover, professional development, recognition and reward, and the sustainability of partnership capacities in the community.

Research in these areas can inform policy in relation to the sustainability of this specific workforce and its requirements in relation to workforce development.

Supporting a pedagogy of governance

Social partnerships are said to contribute to local governance and to the development of communities as self-determining agencies with capacities to build productive social and economic futures. This project has provided some evidence to support this claim and the more general point that partnerships encourage learning by bringing people together for mutual exchange of views.

Our work in other projects highlights that learning is enhanced in contexts where there are opportunities to learn from other people and from participation in shared activities. However, questions are raised about what kinds of learning are being supported in social partnerships and to what extent this situated learning supports the development of socially desirable capabilities. For instance, it cannot be assumed that capacities for consensual decision-making will necessarily be learned through participation in social partnerships. Some social partnerships have a history of, and provide a context for learning about consensus-style decision-making, but not all. There may be justification for specific activities within partnerships aimed at developing capacities for governance.

Given the significance of social partnerships as community-building initiatives and sites of learning, there is value in investigating:

✧ the specific character of learning within partnerships

✧ the way partnership organisation can shape, or enable or disable learning amongst diverse participants

✧ the specific learning which contributes to a pedagogy of governance by facilitating active engagement with partnerships, participation in decision-making, the acceptance of decision-making responsibility and the capacity to assess risk in judging alternative courses of action and priorities.

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Appendix 1
Forty social partnerships

List of social partnerships contacted:

◇ About The Beanbag Net Centres Project

◇ ActiveAGL, a joint venture with the Australian Capital Territory Department of Education, Youth and Family Services

◇ ACENET

◇ Alice Springs Workplace Learning Community

◇ Waltja Northern Territory

◇ Ardoch Youth Foundation

◇ Asian Women at Work

◇ BAYSA Geelong West

◇ Brotherhood of St Laurence

◇ Cassowary Coast Work

◇ Corinda District Work Education Program

◇ Corporate Citizenship Consulting

◇ Corporate Citizenship Manager Youth at Risk

◇ Dusseldorp Foundation

◇ Education for Work Coalition

◇ Enterprise and Vocational Education, Goldfields

◇ Enterprise and Vocational Education (EVE)

◇ Foundation for Young Australians

◇ Goulburn Murray Vocational Education Cluster, Victoria

◇ IYPI Ananga Pitjantjatjara Community Vocational Pathways Program

◇ Junee High School, VOCED program

◇ Kwinana Industry Education Partnership (KIEP)

◇ Logan Industry Training Network

◇ Microsoft eMpower Australia Campaign

◇ Mildura Koori Open Door Educational School

◇ Multicultural Communities Council of South Australia

◇ Murray Adult Community Education (Swan Hill)

- ✧ National Centre for Education and Training on Addictions (NCETA)
- ✧ Northern School and Industry Network, Victoria
- ✧ Regional Development Through School–Industry Partnerships
- ✧ Obley Education Centre, Project: Pathways
- ✧ Peninsula Employment Education and Training
- ✧ Pilbara Cluster Enterprise and Vocational Education Development
- ✧ Pine Shire Industry Schools Links (PSISL)
- ✧ Queensland: Investing in the community
- ✧ St James Cluster Working on the Margins
- ✧ Sunshine Coast Schools Industry Links Scheme Inc
- ✧ VECCI (the Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry), Business and Education
- ✧ Werribee Community Centre
- ✧ Youth Advisory Forum
- ✧ Youth Unit Development Officer, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT)

Appendix 2
Trigger questions for case study interviews

⬦ Introduction: Who is being interviewed

⬦ Can you tell me about your social partnership—its partners, links with government?

⬦ What do you think is your social partnership's most significant achievement?

⬦ How were decisions made within the partnership in this successful process?

⬦ Whose voice was heard most in your discussions?

⬦ What do you think made the difference enabling you to achieve this success?

⬦ Can you tell me about another achievement that didn't work so well?

⬦ What happened in this case? What made the difference?

⬦ How do you see your social partnership contributing to community-building?

⬦ What do you think is distinctive about the things your social partnership can do, that other agencies cannot do?

Appendix 3
Models of partnership

A program for Indigenous youth organised by Indigenous communities in South Australia—the 'Lands'

This partnership supports, directs and administers an urban-based secondary school program for students from remote Indigenous communities in South Australia. The program provides educational and residential services to students who are selected by their communities to come to the city for educational purposes. It also provides educational support for the communities by enabling collaborative attempts to build the communities' capacity for self-determination and sustainability.

The partnership developed because the communities on the 'Lands' decided that, as well as young people being culturally literate in their own language and ways, it was important for them to be literate in the dominant Australian language and culture. Schooling was seen to contribute to these goals. The communities could have operated their own school system wholly on the 'Lands' but opted to establish residential facilities and programs in a metropolitan school. This location allowed young people to become immersed within the dominant culture. It also provided different experiences from those of the 'Lands' where unemployment was chronic. Most paid work was held by non-Indigenous people and many young people had not seen community members working. There used to be work available for Indigenous Australians on the 'Lands' but in the times of their grandparents rather than their parents. Good outcomes from schooling were urgent, otherwise the value of schooling may not be understood—'why bother when you end up sitting under a tree'. Learning was seen to be important not because these young people would work in the cities for they are more likely to live on the 'Lands', but because it was important to consider what can be done at the local level to can sustain, and be sustained by, the local communities.

The educational component was conducted in an urban high school which provides support and administrative facilities for the students. In the junior school, students from the 'Lands' had special literacy, society and environment, and technology classes, as well as receiving one-to-one reading assistance. The literacy gap between these students and their non-Indigenous peers has been decreasing. The rest of the program was conducted in mainstream classes where the Indigenous students engaged with many others, a large number of whom do not have English as a first language. As well as students from the 'Lands', there were Indigenous students from provincial centres (for example, Alice Springs) and other states. The teaching context aimed to be supportive, relevant and based on an understanding of the students' backgrounds. Success depended upon teachers being open with the students and building respect. Positions (for example, deputy principal) mean nothing to the students. Staff have to gain the respect of students, rather than being granted it. While being supportive, teachers were concerned not to drop standards or expectations of the students. 'If a student has been absent, it's tempting to make things easy for them but this doesn't extend or challenge them.' So teachers maintained a complex balance between accommodating needs for participation, and pressing students to perform at levels which reflected and extended their capacities.

The partnership consisted of a peak educational advisory committee on the 'Lands' which was open to all community members: the schools on the 'Lands'; a section within the urban high school which facilitates students' learning in the high school environment; and a residential facility near

the high school which provides educational and community support. This residential unit hosted the partnership. The partnership was supported and sustained by the communities on the 'Lands' and institutions—the Department of Education and Children's Services and unions—based far from the 'Lands'. The partnership was enacted under arrangements established by the state government and was sustained by experience, reciprocity in relations and a shared history. Managing the balance between the needs of the different partners helped to develop the relationships. Over time the interactions resulted in the department developing practices inclusive of 'Lands' communities; for instance, staff selection procedures were modified. In a recent school principal selection, '3 white fella and 5 community members' were involved in the process. The teachers' union also established more flexible processes, allowing community members to be appointed as education workers. These accommodations returned benefits which went beyond the partnerships. For instance, literacy scales used with the communities' young people were adopted from English as a second language scales but were found to be inappropriate because of their language structure. These scales were modified and have now been found to have application with other groups of South Australian students whose initial language development is not high.

Local governance has long been a feature of communities on the 'Lands'. In 1987 the South Australian Government handed governance of educational provision over to the communities. At that time there were no models for this, so communities and their partners improvised as they enacted their new decision-making role. The education advisory committee was established as a sub-committee of the land-holding body. Lawyers for the communities drew up an agreement about how the committee was to operate. It had elected positions and all community members could participate. Between 50 and 60 members participate at each meeting. There are strong relationships between the education committee and the communities because of direct representation, and the roles which community members play in the committee and in the wider work of the communities. There are also school councils in each community which determine local priorities, direct the school principals on the 'Lands' and are themselves accountable to local governing councils. These councils are inclusive of all family groups.

Over time, the decision-making capacity of the education committee has matured. The people on the 'Lands' are as concerned about the quality of education as any other group. Education is important because of what it means to their children's education and also the community's future. Early deliberations tended to address assets but, now the committee focuses on education policy and practice. For instance, the decision to have an urban residential facility arose from a groundswell of community concern about earlier accommodation arrangements. Over time, the current arrangements were negotiated as a co-educational residential facility, although there was ongoing concern about co-habition. Some families refused to participate because of the proximity of young girls and boys to one another. The facility is very aware of these concerns and exercises considerable effort to ensure high-level care for the students. Mutual understanding has developed over time and is maintained by frequent contact between the urban residential and school staff and the 'Lands' communities. The scope for decision-making has also been extended. The communities can now make decisions which influence employment. For instance, under the Good Food policy adopted by the land-holding body, each community store is required to have six trainees from the communities, provide good food and have fair prices. This arrangement presents some continuing issues related to the communities' lack of capacity to enforce rules, existing social obligations and the lack of work experience models available in the communities. Yet, recent moves by the South Australian Government to endorse local partnerships through *Partnership 21*, have complemented the communities' growing experience in local governance. The education committee was able to argue that it was already achieving the policy goals and had service agreements in place. As one informant said, 'They are talking the same language' and in this way, *Partnership 21* legitimises much of what has been achieved by the 'Lands' communities, while also providing a model for other communities.

A school-focused VET initiative in urban Queensland

This social partnership, located in a culturally diverse, inner-city Catholic college, managed and supported work placements and structured vocational education experiences for students, predominantly with learning or study difficulties. Many placements were in retail, food and services for which the program relied on local employers. The college enrolled many Indigenous students, recent migrants, English as a second language and other students prone to disadvantage. It also attracted students from more distant suburbs, some travelling as far as 60 km to attend. Attending the school was a family tradition for some. Others saw it as 'a good place to be'.

The partnership was established in 1997 with assistance from the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation. Two other schools were initially also part of the cluster, one close by and one quite some distance away in an outer city suburb. The schools had a shared perspective on Catholic practice and schooling, and in this college there was a strong social justice commitment. In keeping with the requirements of the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation, the partnership had a management committee which met regularly. It comprised industry representatives from small and large business sectors, school staff, a group training scheme representative, parents and the liaison officer who also acts as an executive officer to the committee. A local industry representative chaired the committee. The partnership, guided by this committee, placed students in structured workplace experiences, organised student participation in school-based traineeships and apprenticeships, reported to the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation, directed the liaison officer, guided partnership development and promoted the overall purposes of the partnerships supporting vocational education and training.

The partnership was hosted by the Catholic college where the liaison officer was situated and where clerical and administrative tasks were conducted. It was also the source of electronic and telephone communication and where meetings of the management committee took place. This meant that the college played a key role in administering the partnership. It also provided further sponsorship—salary subsidy for the liaison office, a car, and underwriting costs of the liaison officer's work. The school sought cost offsets in relation to this sponsorship. One option was for the liaison officer to provide a work placement service for other schools in the area for a fee—an increasingly common arrangement across clusters of schools. This interest in reducing costs did not compromise the college's commitment to social justice goals through the partnership, including provision of quality vocational education programs for its students.

The liaison officer's role was key. He serviced and maintained student participation in local workplaces and training programs, visited workplaces, organised student and teacher visits, and initiated activities. Through this work he saw the value of the partnership and its dependence on shared understandings. While most placements were successful, student behaviours sometimes caused difficulties. In one workplace where a student's behaviour was an issue, the employer proposed ways of addressing the problem. The employer indicated that if they knew about particular issues before the student arrived, the company could manage them through standard workplace and personnel processes. This example demonstrated the power of good relationships. Mutual understanding meant that the employer learned more about students' learning, while the partnership found positive solutions to problems.

Strategic decision-making centred on the management committee, including responding to sponsor's requirements for reporting and accountability. The withdrawal of two of the three schools, one to pursue other objectives and the other out of concern for its students' readiness to participate in work placements, led to a reappraisal of the partnership and urging by the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation to find other educational partners in the same geographical area. This sponsoring body believes in consolidating partnerships in the local geographical area to facilitate organisation, administration and sustainability of partnerships. The need to respond to the sponsors' views influences decision-making in and activities of the partnership. Yet there was ambivalence about

expanding the partnership. Its success depended upon intimate knowledge of the students and their fit with the workplaces. It was felt that such knowledge was best achieved through a modest scale which allowed a depth of understanding. While small partnerships may be harder to sustain because their work demands can become exhausting, there were also costs in larger partnerships which placed extra demands, in terms of communication and reporting, on participants. This was especially the case with volunteers who contributed in addition to their day jobs.

Balancing this complex economy, which traded intimacy of knowledge and outcomes against scarce resources of time, energy and expertise, was no mean feat. It was made more complicated because much of the activity of the partnership focused on addressing the needs of its major sponsor, the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation. Decision-making and reporting are subject to sponsor requirements set down in the funding contract and had to be verified by the committee. The Enterprise and Career Education Foundation's concern about one-school partnerships became a core issue for the partnership because of the link with funding. In these ways, the voice of the sponsor is at the heart of the partnership. One committee member suggested that the demands of these processes may threaten the achievement of a partnership's goals because they overlook the demands these reporting processes place on volunteer effort, in addition to the work of sustaining the partnership and its activities. The imposition of these processes fails to recognise that volunteers manage their participation in ways they find useful and rewarding. This means that there are real limits on volunteer efforts. Some do not have the capacity for certain activities. Others lack time. Others again saw an imbalance between enjoyable and dutiful work relative to the satisfaction and recognition they would receive. Even where participants could be identified who met the required participant criteria, there was always a threat of exhaustion. As one committee member with experience across a number of partnerships noted, much of the success of VET in Schools programs is the product of individual effort but this highly intensive work leads to burnout—especially when the high demands of reporting, maintaining sponsors and answering to sponsors seems like a distraction from the main game.

A youth learning intervention in metropolitan Victoria

This social partnership is in its early stages of development. It is one of the first 16 local learning and employment networks established by the Victorian Government. These networks, an initiative of the current Labor Government, are intended to reinvigorate localised, cooperative approaches to planning, community renewal and effective service delivery. They have a special responsibility in supporting and building shared responsibility and ownership for post-compulsory education and training, especially for 15 to 19-year-olds. The initiative was the outcome of a ministerial review (Kirby 2000) which recommended urgent action on the part of government, education and training providers, and the broader community, if young Victorians were to realise better and more secure futures. The stakes were seen to be high, with the concern that existing post-compulsory education and training provision was failing to meet the needs of many young people. Two phases of local learning and employment network establishment have occurred, providing coverage across Victoria. Implementation has been structured through centrally designed templates which specified procedures for the development, governance and operations of networks. This included the structure of committees and a membership comprising education and training providers, industry, and community representatives. The areas designed as local learning and employment networks were also centrally defined, as was the requirement to conduct an environmental scan as a way of better understanding these areas in terms of the local community. These steps were mandated for all networks.

This particular local learning and employment network is located across two local government areas in an outer city area. Much of the area enjoys relatively high performance on socioeconomic indicators, although there are pockets which experience higher unemployment. The two local governments have a history of collaboration but the nature of the communities they serve has led to

the development of different policies and priorities. One is more focused on environmental issues; the other provides the community services expected in an affluent urban community, including providing programs for young people. The whole area is well serviced educationally, but there is a lack of interaction between post-compulsory providers. In contrast to many areas, private schools are said to be more engaged with VET programs than local public schools. This emphasis has arisen because schools are very focused on tertiary entrance, compounded by the development of a competitive culture (for example, due to the publication of school league tables) and an entrepreneurial orientation in public institutions since they have been required to take up private business practices. This environment presents some challenges for an initiative which seeks to develop collaborative activities to support young people. While there are no functioning VET clusters in the area, there is a long-standing youth services network associated with youth agencies and local government.

The local learning and employment network was originally established in donated premises remote from both education and local government but supported by both sectors. The chair was a recently retired school principal and the executive officer was also well known in the schools sector. The chair believes that partnerships based around individual schools are likely to be ad hoc and based on personal affiliations. Yet schools seem reluctant to commit to the local learning and employment networks. They, and some other agencies, appear to have a watching brief—to be involved but in ways which advance their own agenda. The executive officer says that schools are interested because they must deal with issues of school drop-out—increasing retention when there are limited options for youth not interested in tertiary entrance, and youth homelessness. But these interests are shaped by the competitive environment. Some collaborative activities had commenced, including an effort to get VET in Schools by running a Jobs Now Expo, establishing an alternative senior program at a high school, researching and workshopping alternative programs, identifying what would suit kids who were severely at risk, supporting drug promotion programs, and responding to local business needs. This last issue is complicated because of the number of small businesses in the area. The local learning and employment network has held a joint promotion with the Chamber of Commerce and a local council but recognises problems in interfacing effectively with employers. Employers are not negative but there is uncertainty about how to proceed.

Local learning and employment networks are incorporated bodies separate from government but dependent on government for policy direction, support and funds. They also depend on volunteer effort, some of which is provided by people employed in their day jobs by government. Local learning and employment networks do not have administrative or financial power and schools have resisted efforts to divert some of their Managed Individual Program funding (another Victorian Government initiative) to local learning and employment networks. This means that networks must win support by adding value and being creative. Governance arrangements are stipulated in the local learning and employment network contract. Each has a chair and an executive officer who is the paid officer (supported by a paid administrative assistant). The four-member executive includes a treasurer and secretary (both voluntary positions but requiring almost day-to-day involvement with the committee). There are two standing committees (Finance and Human Resources; Planning). A larger committee is made up of specified categories of membership. This led to some difficulties in filling some positions (industry, Indigenous, ethnic representation) and the need to exclude willing volunteers where the positions had been filled. This raised questions about who should represent a group. For instance, in another local learning and employment network, rival unions vied for representation. The executive officer is pivotal. One of the first jobs of each local learning and employment network is to advertise and select this position but, unlike other aspects of their operation, there was little central guidance about the level or remuneration or requirements of the role.

Some local learning and employment networks have experience of consensus decision-making and can move quickly into collaborative activities. This was not the case in this network. The chair argued for proceeding cautiously. A committee member suggests that governance remained problematic a year after establishment. There was a lack of understanding of local politics and the

local learning and employment network was still trying to sort out roles. She indicated a tension between establishing local partnerships and 'getting runs on the board'. The relevant government department is explicit about the need for tangible and quantifiable outcomes to justify the initiative, but building relationships takes time. The chair believed that time spent in building the basis for consensual governance was well spent and would provide a stronger base for moving forward. The danger is that slowness is accompanied by unresponsiveness which could be seen as resistance to change. The executive officer respected this commitment to building the capacity in the network, but felt a relationship existed between the network being seen to have something to offer and gaining the confidence of the community it serves. She sees the local learning and employment network enjoying good will but it must have made achievements, with positive impact in the community to build influence. These issues of accountability to community are compounded by accountability to government. The local learning and employment networks indicated some ambiguities about the lines of reporting and the heavy burden on volunteers to demonstrate evidence of performance. Yet this evidence-based accountability is critical because it is the basis for continued funding, including remuneration for the executive officer and administrative support.

Getting 'runs on the board' was sometimes difficult. There was widespread good will towards young people but different groups approached this differently. They addressed children's needs through cultural experiences, through peer group expectations, or through opportunities for employment and vocational preparation. There were also structural barriers to some of these initiatives. For instance, schools do not have VET networks and some institutions which do offer VET programs had become bastions, more concerned with their own goals than collaboration. TAFE institutes were willing but school students had to pay for the gap between TAFE charges and the funding which the government pays TAFE institutes for schools students' participation. Within this local learning and employment network there was optimism that these issues could be resolved and there was support for the government in advancing the local learning and employment network initiative. The governance structure had been helpful in getting things going but, overall, they recognised that the local learning and employment network was quite 'top-down'. It would take time to become effective in relation to government priorities and to mature as a social base in the community.

The German *sozialmarkwirlschaft* partnership

German vocational education is premised on partnership and collaboration which has been developed as a consequence of the *sozialmarkwirlschaft* (social market economy) policies initiated after the Second World War. A culture of cooperation establishes critical and durable infrastructure to support the development of learning and skills responsive to local needs and conditions.

The key principles guiding the governance of vocational education are, first, the allocation of responsibility for education policy to the Länder (units of regional government in the Federation of German states), independent of the centralised power of the federal government and, secondly, a pluralist governance and legal system which guarantees a strong role for non-government partners. The federal minister can only issue a training regulation after consultation with social partners. This includes the participation of experts from industry, associations, and the school system in the drafting of the legislation. Consensus decision-making operates at a number of levels.

The structures for determining training policy are developed with employers' associations and trade unions. For instance, the move to uniform vocational education provision to support the standardisation of qualifications took the form of broad objectives and guidelines about how training enterprises would organise educational arrangements. It did not displace localised decision-making. Teachers were able to define their own detailed objectives for the classroom situation and were allowed to coordinate learning with local enterprises (Koch & Reuling 1994, p.91). These arrangements are designed to exploit local expertise and contributions, rather than constrain them, although teachers' discretion is limited through nationally developed course guidelines.

At a local level, trade associations assist in planning and maintaining the currency of in-company vocational training. Chambers of commerce advise and monitor the conduct of training in local companies. These processes are based on partnership rather than regulation. Employers work to maintain the standard of training to avoid imposition of government regulations which might arise from criticisms of its quality. Localised networks are used (including feedback from workplace representatives, shop stewards) to identify problems with the quality of training early on. These networks feed into decisions at all levels. With small-to-medium-sized enterprises, syndicates of enterprises and/or relations with external training centres are used to manage the provision of vocational education on a regional basis which permits localised requirements and specialities to be addressed and developed.

These arrangements developed over a decade of concerted relationships-building and collective problem-solving (Laura-Ernst 1997). The partnerships are based in a particular professional or vocational organisation. Many people working in training enterprises are involved with local trade associations and are on committees which make decisions about the quality and nature of vocational education. These partnerships benefit states' vocational training policy by co-opting the expertise of the parties, allowing these partners to find compromise and achieve consensus, rather than the state using (more risky) political processes to generate outcomes. Delegation of authority to the partnership includes the governance of potentially contentious regulatory arrangements. Self-regulation is viewed as indispensable to a system of entry-level training premised on enterprise commitment and engagement. The partners participate in ways which go beyond representing members' interests in negotiations with authorities to demonstrate their commitment to building a high-quality training system.

German social partnerships supporting vocational education show cultural sensitivity in seeking consensus with a range of social partners and at different levels in the decision-making process. Partners are co-opted in ways which balance their needs, leading to shared beliefs in the ultimate efficacy and value of these social partnerships. However, as Laura-Ernst (1997) points out, these relations were developed and matured over time and with persistence and guidance.

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