

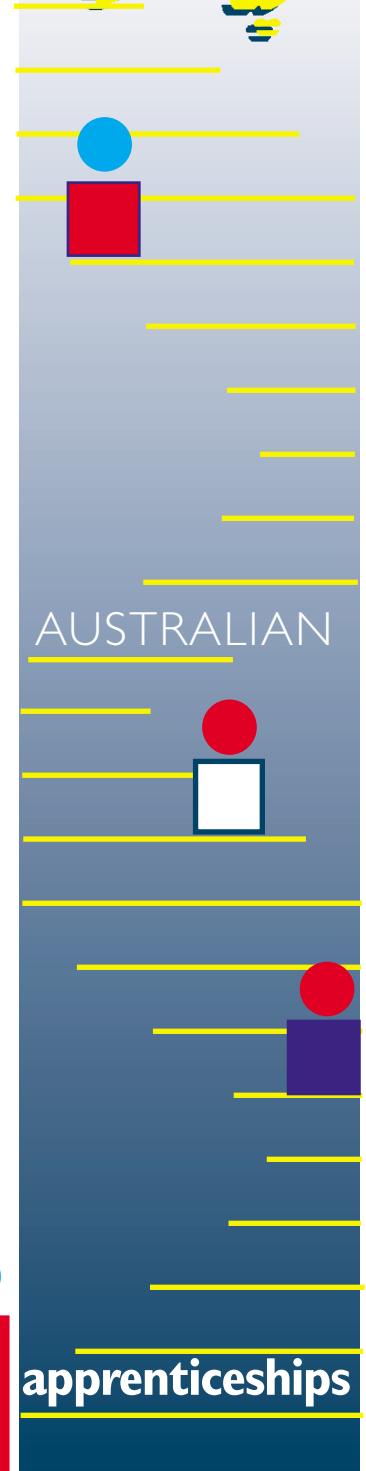


Increasing opportunities for apprenticeships and traineeships in Melbourne's western region

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AUSTRALIAN

apprenticeships

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Glossary of terms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics: provides a national statistical service to both government and the community
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority: was established to provide a national focus for vocational education and training. ANTA exists to support the Ministerial Council (ANTA MINCO), which comprises the Commonwealth, State and Territory ministers responsible for vocational education and training. ANTA is an industry-based board supported by offices in Brisbane and Melbourne
DETYA	Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs: a federal government department
Education sectors	Secondary; technical and further education, adult and community education
ENTER	Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank: the overall ranking on a scale of 0–100 a student can receive, based on study scores. The ENTER is used by universities and TAFE institutes to select students for entry to courses
GTC	Group training company: generally a non-profit organisation that recruits and employs young people into apprenticeships and traineeships
ITB	Industry training board: identifies skill requirements within industry and specifies the quality and type of training needed
LGA	Local government area
Lifelong learning	Education throughout life, particularly adult life
NAC	New apprenticeship centre: provides apprenticeship and traineeship information and services to employers and people interested in becoming an apprentice or trainee
New apprenticeship	Refers to apprenticeships and traineeships
National training package	Endorsed national training package: bring together competency standards, qualifications and learning materials to create a comprehensive resource for nationally recognised training. Under training packages, the learning and assessment process recognises competence through nationally recognised qualifications and statements of attainment
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research: Australia’s national vocational education and training research and development centre. NCVER is also responsible for the collection of national vocational education and training statistics and for managing employer, student and graduate surveys relating to vocational education and training outcomes and performance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development: groups 29 member countries in an organisation that provides governments with a setting in which to discuss, develop and perfect economic and social policy
PETE	Office of Post Compulsory Education Training and Employment (Victoria)
RTO	Registered training organisation: registration by a State VET co-ordinating body is a condition for receiving public funding for VET delivery and for national recognition of VET qualifications. All accredited qualifications issued by an RTO must be recognised by all RTOs throughout Australia and full credit granted.
SCH	Statistical Clearing House: register containing metadata describing survey development, design, and procedures of business surveys involving 50 or more business respondents conducted by, or on behalf of, the Australian government. Non-business surveys are not included. This register is operated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics

TAFE	Technical and further education, most commonly used to refer to vocational education and training provided by public sector institutions
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education: senior secondary certificate of education in Victoria
VET	Vocational education and training: a term used to describe education and training designed to prepare people for work or to improve the knowledge and skills of people already in the workforce. It also describes one of the three major sectors of education and training, the other two being school and higher education
VETiS	VET-in-Schools program: allows senior secondary school students to study vocational education and training (VET) programs at school, resulting in both a senior certificate and national vocational qualifications
VLESC	Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission: recommendation from the Kirby Report
VQA	Victorian Qualifications Authority: recommendation from the Kirby Report
Work experience	Students complete tasks during the work experience, which will enable them to gain a reasonable understanding of the nature and conditions of paid work in an enterprise or industry; usually conducted in Year 10 for a ten-day duration
WREDO	Western Melbourne Regional Economic Development Organisation: a private, not-for-profit organisation. WREDO's purpose is to advance the economy of Melbourne's western region, within the context of both local and global marketplaces

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The research team members included Ms Tess Demediuk (Project Manager), Dr John Martino (Senior Research Officer) and Ms Sue Holden (Project Officer).

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Contribution of participants through focus groups, interviews and questionnaire responses added significantly to the findings of this research project.

Executive summary

The purpose of this study was to identify the barriers inhibiting the growth of apprenticeships and traineeships in Melbourne's western region, and to identify strategies to removing these barriers.

Melbourne's western region, with a population of over half a million people, is one of Australia's fastest growing economic regions. In 1996 the region provided 140 807 jobs. However, 75% of the 207 722 residents with jobs were employed outside the region.

Manufacturing is the staple industry in the western region of Melbourne.¹ There are only 1825 manufacturing businesses in the region, placing it behind retail (4737), property and business services (3887) and construction (2459) in total number of businesses for an industry sector. It is, however, the largest employer in the region.

If transport, warehousing and logistics businesses are included, these key industry sectors will have a direct bearing on the potential growth of employment in the region. If manufacturing is the 'staple', transport and logistics are the 'meaty' areas of new growth. The number of transport-specific companies located in the region is 1301 and growing.² With the completion of the Western Ring Road and the impending completion of City Link,³ there is a noticeable increase in the number of transport and transport-related businesses moving into the region (for example, tyre and equipment suppliers, cold storage, refrigeration, packaging and processing, freight management, heavy vehicle mechanics and calibration mechanics).

However, the take-up of apprenticeships and traineeships, both in the manufacturing and transport and logistics sectors of the region, is significantly low. A regional strategy developed by the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR) and Ratio Consultants forecasts, that in the next 15 years, the rate of population growth in the west of Melbourne will exceed the rate of job growth by a factor of 5 to 1 (Ratio Consultants & NIEIR 1995).

This forecast highlights the fact that a significant effort must be made to provide the regional community with the best possible 'platform' to utilise training and learning opportunities, including VET-in-Schools programs and apprenticeships and traineeships.

This report identifies factors which inhibit the expansion of apprenticeships and traineeships in Melbourne's west and proposes a way to increase the opportunities to access those forms of structured training and employment.

¹ Statistical details are based upon the 1997 ABS Business Register Count.

² *ibid*

³ City Link is a privately funded electronic tollroad linking three of Melbourne's freeways, creating routes between Melbourne Airport, the port and industrial centres.

Outcomes of the report

The first chapter presents the findings and documents the prevailing themes identified through the existing literature, integrating the results of focus groups, interviews and surveys into a comprehensive summary of factors that inhibit the success of apprenticeships and traineeships in this region. This section of the report challenges all participants to make a commitment to providing opportunities for young people by seeking ways of overcoming the barriers that impede their access to the necessary skills and knowledge that will make them a valuable national resource.

The second chapter, 'Students', reveals young people's understanding of apprenticeships and traineeships, and identifies their perceptions and criticisms.

The chapter identifies the struggles young people have in balancing their own expectations with those of others and describes the complex processes and competing interests which influence the advice they receive about career paths and post-school destinations. Perception also plays a major role in determining young people's attitudes towards apprenticeships and traineeships. The influence of the media is particularly strong in this regard. The following provides a summary of the key issues relating to students identified in this chapter.

Role of the school and dominance of the VCE and university

- ❖ In some schools there appears to be a concerted effort to educate students about their post-school options, both academic and vocational. At the same time, in a number of other schools, a narrow and traditional 'academic' view of the purpose of secondary schooling and possible post-school pathways is widespread.
- ❖ The reduction in the number of post-school options being contemplated by students is also being reinforced by family pressures to do well in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and gain a high ENTER score and thus a university place, rather than considering apprenticeships and traineeships as a viable alternative.

Career paths

- ❖ As late as Year 11, some students were unsure of the career paths available to them and the type of post-school destination best suited to them.
- ❖ There is a significant mismatch between when and how students are exposed to career information and advice.
- ❖ Students highlighted the pivotal role played by the careers teacher in the process of selecting VCE subjects and post-school destinations
- ❖ Students spoke highly of school-organised work experience programs as a worthwhile source of practical information about potential careers.

Source and quality of information

- ❖ The origin and quality of information figured prominently in the comments made by students. Ad hoc and informal sources of information appear to play as important a part in career choice as the formal structures and process associated with school-based careers counselling.

VET-in-Schools programs

- ❖ Some students were critical of the manner in which their schools managed the delivery of their VET-in-Schools programs. They specifically referred to examples of poor delivery

and the inadequate provision of staffing, resources and information as well as the inadequate knowledge base of some of the teachers delivering VET-in-Schools subjects.

Community and media images and perceptions

- ❖ Some students felt pressure from community and family to succeed in school. Students from Catholic schools in particular spoke about pressure being exerted from home to do well in Year 12 to enable progression to university.
- ❖ On the other hand, government school students did not appear to be under the same kinds of pressures, and exhibited a disenchantment and lack of engagement with schooling.
- ❖ An unexpected issue to emerge from our work with secondary school students was the apparent negative impact of the State-government-sponsored WorkCover television advertisements. On the other hand, students identified the armed forces—'The Edge' campaign as painting a positive image of what constitutes an apprenticeship or a technical job in the armed forces.

The third chapter, 'Employers in the west', presents a review of responses to an employer questionnaire. It identifies parallels between the size of an industry and the level of employment of apprentices and trainees and some concerns that the anticipated growth in 'new' industries is not evident. There is a significant gap in terms of employer knowledge of the new apprenticeship system. To compound these problems is an apparent reluctance of employers to commit to taking on additional apprentices and trainees in the face of uncertainty surrounding the introduction of the new goods and services tax. A most important finding is the evidence that there is uncertainty, or at best ambivalence, about the benefits to organisations which employ apprentices and trainees. The following summarises the main findings of this chapter in relation to employers.

Structural and economic impediments

- ❖ The largest industry sectors in the economy such as building and construction, manufacturing, wholesale/retail and transport and storage account for the majority of the apprentices reported in the survey.
- ❖ Non-traditional sites of engagement of apprentices and trainees, such as information technology and finance, property and business services, are now opening up to trainees and apprentices.
- ❖ Employers use a combination of informal and formal processes to recruit apprentices.
- ❖ Uncertainty about the short-to-medium term economic situation has meant that employers are unwilling to commit themselves to doing more than maintaining current levels of apprenticeships and traineeships.

The knowledge gap

- ❖ Employers identified registered training organisations (RTOs) and the local technical and further education (TAFE) institutions as the primary source of information on apprenticeships.
- ❖ The proportion of employers reporting that they did understand the concept of apprenticeships (40%), approximately equalled employers who reported that they did not or disagreed (47%).
- ❖ Employers knew little about part-time apprenticeships or traineeships. This lack of knowledge or awareness of the opportunity to engage part-time apprentices indicates that there is an information deficiency.

Attitudinal impediments

- ❖ A number of employers were hesitant to make commitments or comments about apprenticeships and traineeships.
- ❖ The responses to some of the questions reflect the possibility that employers lack useful information about the usefulness of the new apprenticeship scheme for their specific firm or organisation.
- ❖ Another reason for this hesitancy might be the impact of technological change, the continued increase in productivity and the concomitant downsizing of the labour force in many sectors of the economy.

Work experience

- ❖ Employers responded positively that school-organised work experience played a factor in the recruitment of new staff.

Chapter four, 'Employment, education and training perspectives', reports on the opinions of employers and ITBs about apprentices and trainees. It reveals a litany of problems with the system. This chapter also shows us that we have a system in which some employers use government subsidies to upskill their existing employees, rather than take on young people. This short-sighted solution is done in the face of an ageing workforce—who will be the workforce of the future? The issues highlighted in this chapter are summarised below.

Structural/organisational issues

- ❖ Employers and ITBs emphasised the need to examine the strategies and methods used to present information about the new apprenticeship scheme to both employers and young people.
- ❖ The co-ordination and management of the new apprenticeship scheme was also raised in the interviews as needing review and restructuring, in order to make the program more transparent and easy to access and administer.

Skill formation

- ❖ The need for skills does not necessarily translate into recruitment of new apprentices. It was argued that employers are able to increase productivity and at the same time upskill their workforce without taking on new workers or apprentices.
- ❖ The new apprenticeship scheme may be used to upskill existing workers, and to help facilitate the segmentation of the existing labour process in particular industries.
- ❖ The segmentation of workplace training into specialised traineeships has meant that entry-level training, which had been the traditional domain of the four-year apprenticeship in a number of industries, is now seen as having been undermined by short-term and specialised traineeships in these industries.
- ❖ Representatives of the ITBs highlighted the consequences for the economy of an ageing workforce and short-term planning by some employers. In time, the neglect of skill formation could lead to a shortage of skilled workers.

Schools

- ❖ Employers and ITBs highlighted the important role schools play in the transition from school to work and the significance of careers counselling in this process.
- ❖ Respondents also raised the issue that the year students were exposed to vocational education programs was critical.

- ❖ Some of the ITB representatives were unhappy with the emphasis some schools were placing on VET-in-Schools programs as an introduction to a vocational education pathway.
- ❖ The emphasis by schools on the VCE and the goal of a high ENTER score were also questioned by employers and ITBs.

The last chapter of this report offers a number of areas for action on the part of the various stakeholders—schools, employers and government.

Finally, the appendices provide a comprehensive literature review and an overview of the methodology employed. The research team used a variety of techniques, including focus groups with secondary school students, distributing a survey to 400 employers, and one-to-one interviews with key stakeholders.

Main findings

Introduction

The goal of this research project was to identify the factors which might inhibit the full participation of young people from the western region of Melbourne in the new apprenticeship scheme. The research team made use of a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data from students, employers, educators and ITBs, drawing on the resources of a range of agencies and organisations which had an interest in increasing the opportunities for new apprenticeships in the west of Melbourne.

The research themes investigated in this report include the following:

- ❖ an examination and analysis of changes in the labour market and their relationship to changing patterns of participation in new apprenticeships in Melbourne's west
- ❖ an examination of employer and student perceptions and attitudes towards the apprenticeship and traineeship system in Melbourne's west
- ❖ an examination of the role of new apprenticeships in key industry sectors in Melbourne's west

What the literature says

The research team examined the literature (the literature review is given in appendix 1) on the apprenticeship system in Australia and, in particular, on the success or failure of the range of training reforms which successive governments have implemented. During this examination it became apparent that there was a number of underlying factors contributing to the lack of uptake of new apprenticeships. These factors can be divided into the two categories of supply and demand. Supply factors in this context refer to a combination of attitudinal and cultural factors which have helped to restrict the available pool of potential participants in apprenticeship and traineeship schemes in some industry sectors. Demand factors refer to the extent to which changes in the economic structure and technological innovations have led to new methods and structures of production and service delivery. This transformation has meant that many employers no longer see new apprenticeships as the preferred solution to a demand for skilled workers. Technology and the upskilling of the existing workforce appear to be the primary means of solving a wide range of skill shortages within the industries in the west of Melbourne.

Supply factors

One of the significant supply issues raised in the literature on new apprenticeships has been the image and status of trades as perceived by the general community (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49). Traditional trades are seen to be unattractive to young people and to lack the status of other jobs. Another factor impacting on the success of training programs, from an employer's perspective, has been the negative perception about the applicant pool. (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49). A further significant factor is the prevalence amongst young people of the view that vocational education and training (VET) in the school system is

a last option—when other more perceived attractive pathways are blocked. This could be partially due to the perception that, for example, manufacturing does not have a future, despite publicity about growing skill shortages. Job losses associated with the restructuring of various industry sectors have created large pools of unemployed middle-aged tradespeople, and thus in the general community, trade qualifications are no longer seen as a ‘ticket for life’ (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49).

Demand factors

Demand factors were identified in the literature and include the unevenness of the current economic recovery, and the uncertainty about long-term economic prospects. Changes in the labour market as a result of the increased use and availability of labour-hire firms have also contributed to the decline in demand for apprentices and trainees. The literature also identified the decline in the level of government support for research and development, the growth of outsourcing and privatisation, the subsequent decline in training levels and infrastructure, and the reduction in government subsidies (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49). The policy of outsourcing and privatisation adopted by all levels of government in the 1990s has been a stimulus to the growth of labour-hire firms and undermined the role played by firm/organisation-specific apprenticeship training.

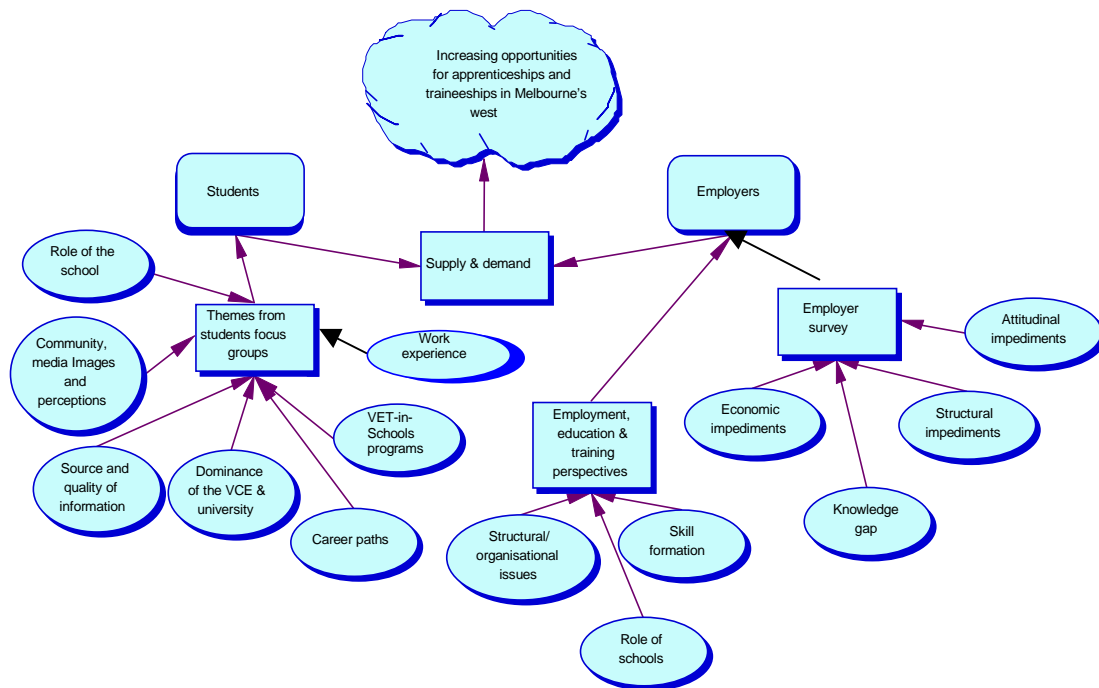
A number of firms have transferred their traditional training functions to group training companies (GTCs), which act as the central training site and provide the brokerage of rotations of apprenticeship placements, often between small firms. GTCs are better able to work within the constraints of the variability of the economic cycle (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49).

Another theme canvassed in the literature related to the perceived high cost associated with the training of apprentices and trainees (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49; Dockery 1997, p.61). The literature has also identified that, in some industry sectors, employers felt that the quality of young people entering the trades has declined, as has interest in technical subjects such as engineering and the electrical trades (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49).

Key themes and issues

Figure 1 summarises the key themes and issues identified from the various data collection sources as an outcome of this research project.

Figure 1: Key themes from the research



Students

The following section addresses each of the themes depicted in figure 1.

Role of the school and dominance of the VCE and university

Students at Year 10 and at the senior secondary level in both government and Catholic schools possess an inadequate understanding of new apprenticeships and the opportunities for its recognition in their Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). In some schools there appears to be a concerted effort to educate students about their post-school options, both academic and vocational. In a number of other schools a narrow and traditional ‘academic’ view of the purpose of secondary schooling and possible post-school pathways is prevalent. The research team describes this process as reflecting a specific type of ‘school culture’. By school culture, we mean the general tenor of a school and the explicit and implicit assumptions about the value of different aspirations and the desired outcomes of schooling, and how these impact on the choices made by young people.

It appears that school culture plays a significant part in influencing student choice. In some schools the school culture promotes a variety of post-school destinations. In others, the narrowing of options is the dominant mode of operation. The dominance of what can be described as an academic school culture in Victoria is narrowing the options of students by pushing new apprenticeships and VET generally to the periphery of student thinking about their possible career paths. This ‘folding-in’ of the options being canvassed by students is also being reinforced by family pressures to do well in VCE and gain a high ENTER score and a university place, rather than to consider new apprenticeships as a viable alternative.

Career paths

The research team found that, as late as Year 11, some students are unsure about what career paths were available to them and what type of post-school destination might suit them.

Distinguishing between career planning and subject selection is crucial: both options need to be made available to students. It is important to note that representatives from particular group training companies (GTCs) identified a significant mismatch between when and how students were exposed to career information and advice. GTCs pointed out that schools encouraged Year 10 students, who were some way off making career choices, to access formal structures such as career expos. Yet, senior students were too busy with VCE to take time to attend career expos and open days. It could be argued that GTCs may not understand how critical the subject choices students make at Year 10 are for a long-term career path, particularly, students who may be choosing a higher education option. By Year 12 it is too late to start selecting subjects which might have a bearing on post-school destinations.

Students highlighted the pivotal role performed by the careers teacher in the selection of VCE subjects and post-school destinations. Our interpretation is that when careers counselling was delivered by teachers in a structured and well-resourced manner, students were able to make realistic career choices in planning a vocational, higher education or work outcome.

Source and quality of information

The origin and quality of information about career options emerged as a significant issue in the comments made by students. Ad hoc and informal sources of information appear to play as important a role in career choice as the formal structures and processes associated with school-based careers counselling. There are both positive and negative aspects to this informal information. Informal information channels can often benefit students in that the student is able to access candid accounts of particular career choices and details from people who have had hands-on experiences in specific training situations and employment programs. However, informal information channels can also be the source of inaccurate and biased information in this area.

Work experience

Work experience, as used in this report, refers to the ten-day work placement students complete in Year 10. Students spoke highly of school-organised work experience programs as worthwhile sources of practical information about potential careers. Students described work experience as a useful mechanism for dispelling misconceptions about the reality of particular careers, asserting that they provided an invaluable source of hands-on experience.

VET-in-Schools programs

Some of the students were critical of the manner in which a number of schools managed the delivery of their VET-in-Schools programs. They specifically referred to examples of poor delivery and the inadequate staffing, resources and information. They were critical of the knowledge base of some of the staff teaching VET-in-Schools subjects and, in particular, felt the training was not adequately preparing them for a vocational pathway.

Community, media images and perceptions

Some students identified the pressure they felt from community and family to succeed in school. Students from Catholic schools, in particular, spoke about pressure being exerted at home to do well in Year 12 and to go on and complete a university course. On the other hand, government school students did not identify the same pressures and exhibited an air of

disenchantment and lack of engagement with schooling in general, and post-school destinations in particular. In a sense, many of the government school students were exhibiting a sense of alienation both from school and from their future options. They did not exhibit the same kind of certainty about where their career path was heading, compared to students in the Catholic system.

One of the most unexpected issues to emerge from the research into secondary school students was the apparent negative impact of the State government-sponsored WorkCover television advertisements. These television advertisements featured a series of images focussing on lack of care in the workplace leading to accidents. Students uniformly identified these advertisements as off-putting and painted a negative picture of apprentice employment. On the other hand, students identified the armed forces—'The Edge'—campaign as depicting a positive and exciting image of what constitutes an apprenticeship. Both advertisements were targeted at distinct groups: WorkCover had been targeting employers in an effort to raise awareness about the dangers of an unsafe work environment, while the armed forces were targeting young people in a recruitment drive.

Employers

Structural and economic impediments

The data generated by the survey instrument indicated that the largest industry sectors in the economy—building and construction, manufacturing, wholesale/retail and transport and storage—accounted for the majority of apprentices. The building and construction and manufacturing sectors have been traditional sites for the employment of apprentices. Of interest from the research team's perspective is that non-traditional sites of engagement of apprentices and trainees, namely, service industries such as information technology, finance, property and business services, are now opening up to trainees and apprentices. The structure of the Australian economy, in particular, the decline in manufacturing, necessitates a growth in apprenticeships and traineeships in the non-traditional sites identified above.

Our research shows that employers relied on two primary methods for the recruitment of new apprentices. The first method involved formal mechanisms, such as recruitment through job interviews (57%) and the second utilised informal practices, including family/community contacts (43%). The use of informal processes to recruit new apprentices raises a number of issues concerning equity and the possibility that some young people are not being encouraged to contemplate new apprenticeships as a pathway because of their lack of connections and/or access through informal patterns of recruitment.

Uncertainty about the short-to-medium term economic forecast has meant that even employers who have employed new apprentices are unwilling to commit themselves to doing more than maintaining current levels of new apprenticeships. Despite favourable conditions in the overall economy, for example, the level of economic growth and consumer sentiment, a recent Reserve Bank of Australia Bulletin stated that:

... businesses reported deterioration in sentiment early in the year, which continued into the June quarter, according to the NAB Quarterly Business Survey. This reflected a combination of concerns about the implementation of the tax changes, the impact of higher oil prices on profit margins, as well as higher interest rates. While the deterioration was reported by firms of all sizes, small firms reported the weakest conditions. The mining industry was a notable exception to the

fall in business conditions, reflecting the favourable combination of rising commodity prices and strong external demand. (RBA 2000, p.85)

While employers did not specifically mention these issues, anecdotal evidence suggests it is unlikely that levels of employment within the firms we surveyed would be quarantined from any negative impact the new taxation arrangements and the deterioration in business sentiment might exert on their firms. Furthermore, an impact could be felt on new apprenticeship numbers with the new apprenticeship 'cap' for private RTOs in Victoria.

The knowledge gap

Employers identified RTOs, particularly local technical and further education (TAFE) institutions, as the primary source of information on apprenticeships. This raises a number of issues relating to the efficacy of the national advertising campaign run by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) and the role of new apprenticeship centres (NACs) and group training companies in disseminating the message to employers. Improving the flow of information about the benefits to employers of the new apprenticeship scheme is clearly an area for more concentrated effort by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), DETYA and the Office of Post Compulsory Education Employment and Training (PETE) in Victoria and other State/Territory training authorities.

The proportion of employers reporting that they understood the concept of an apprenticeship (40%) approximately equalled employers who reported that they did not or disagreed (47%). This breakdown was mirrored in the responses the research team received to questions on the intelligibility of information relating to apprenticeships and traineeships, and incentives to business. This could have been caused by the use of the terms 'apprenticeship' and 'traineeship' rather than 'new apprenticeship' and reflects a level of confusion about the differences between traditional (and historic) notions of an apprenticeship and the rebadged new apprenticeship scheme.

Employers expressed a view that both on-the-job and off-the-job methods of training were highly valued as part of the process of developing the skills of an apprentice or trainee. The apprentice focus groups described in the Schofield report expressed similar views (Schofield 2000b).

The concept of part-time apprentices or trainees was not something that the majority of employers understood clearly. In fact, 46% responded that they did not know whether Year 11 and 12 students made successful part-time apprentices or trainees. This lack of understanding, or perhaps awareness, of the opportunity to engage part-time apprentices, indicates that there is again some type of information hiatus. Any form of information breakdown means that the full range of options available under the umbrella of new apprenticeships is not reaching a crucial audience for this program, namely, the employer.

When asked to comment on the long-standing program of school-organised work experience, the employers' positive response was that this scheme had played a factor in the recruitment of new staff. Work experience has been in place for more than two decades in Victoria and is now an integral component of secondary schooling.

When asked their view on the adequacy of information provided by external agencies and organisations with responsibility for disseminating information on apprenticeships and traineeships, 35% of employers expressed a view that they did not know, 19% stated they disagreed that the amount of information was adequate, and a final 32% agreed that the

amount of information was adequate. The high level of the 'do not know' category could again be interpreted as indicating the inadequacy of information flows.

Attitudinal impediments

Some of the survey results reflected a set of attitudinal impediments among a number of employers in relation to the value of new apprenticeships: basically it would appear that a number of employers are hesitant to make commitments or even comments about new apprenticeships. The reasons for this can only be hypothesised, but it could be the results of the survey indicate employer ambivalence to new apprentices. The responses to some of the questions seem to indicate that employers lack useful information about the value of the new apprenticeship scheme for their specific firm or organisation, a situation which may be due to a wide range of factors, in particular, the timing of the survey. When the survey was distributed by mail, employers were preparing for the introduction of the goods and services tax (GST). Perhaps employers' perceptions about the future may have been influenced by this situation.

Another reason for this response might be the impact of technological change, the continued increase in productivity and the concomitant downsizing of the labour force in many sectors of the economy. For many firms, productivity might be rising, while at the same time, their need for skilled workers is declining. It would follow that, from a practical standpoint, the only reason some firms would take on apprentices or trainees would be out of altruism, rather than as deliberate skill formation or enhancement.

Employment, education and training perspectives

Structural/organisational issues

A number of structural and organisational problems with the new apprenticeship scheme was identified in our interviews with the employers, educators and trainers. This group emphasised the need to examine the methods used to present information about the program to both employers and young people. The co-ordination and management of the new apprenticeship scheme was also raised as requiring restructuring and review in order to make the program more transparent and easier to access and administer.

Skill formation

Employer attitudes towards the process of skill formation also emerged as a significant factor undermining the success of the new apprenticeship scheme. It was argued that employers were able to increase productivity and upskill their workforce without taking on new workers or apprentices.

While the new apprenticeship scheme may be utilised to upskill existing workers, it is also of assistance in facilitating the segmentation of the existing labour process in particular industries. The segmentation of workplace training into specialised traineeships has meant that entry-level training, which had been the traditional domain of the four-year apprenticeship in a number of industries, is now seen as having been undermined by short-term and specialised traineeships.

Industry Training Boards (ITBs) highlighted the consequences for the economy of an ageing workforce and short-term planning by some employers. Over time, the neglect of skill formation could lead to a shortage of skilled workers. Employers will have to be convinced that increases in productivity as a consequence of upskilling their existing workforce and technological innovation can only be effective as a short-term solution. The ageing population will mean that succession planning needs to be addressed by firms if they are to maintain their viability.

Role of schools

Both employers and ITBs pointed to the important role schools play in the transition from school to work and the significance of careers counselling in this process. The point at which students are exposed to vocational education as a post-school option was also raised by ITBs. Some of the ITBs argued that there is no direct relationship between VET-in-Schools programs and post-school vocational education pathways. According to some ITBs, schools do not provide a realistic introduction to potential vocational education pathways.

The dominance of the VCE and the goal of a high ENTER score as the most desirable outcome for students were also questioned. ITBs believe that non-university, post-school pathways such as the new apprenticeship scheme are not adequately promoted within schools. It was clear that ITBs saw Years 11 and 12 as the pivotal time for promoting new apprenticeships to students. This could be interpreted as indicating a misunderstanding by ITBs of the process of subject selection and career counselling within secondary schools.

It appears that the relationship between VET-in-Schools programs, part-time apprenticeships and the new apprenticeship scheme needs to be streamlined in order to make the transition from school to work as seamless as possible. The current situation appears to be creating a mismatch between the goals and aspirations of young people and the way in which schools, ITBs and other agencies promote new apprenticeships to secondary school students.

It could be argued that there needs to be some overall plan or agreement to streamline the process and to encourage young people to consider a number of pathways which can lead to work, further study, vocational education and training or a combination of these options. The current dominance of the VCE over other options is a serious factor in limiting the perception of new apprenticeships as a viable alternative to either job hunting or the uncertainty of the graduate employment market.

Further analysis

A short-term solution

This research has highlighted the growing disparity between government policy and the reality of what companies are actually using training to achieve. This issue was raised in the recent Senate inquiry into the quality of VET. It was made clear to the research team that some firms are utilising the existing system to augment their internal training regime by signing up existing workers to short-term traineeships. This short-term solution has significant implications for the long-term skill base of the economy and the viability of new apprenticeships. The need to upskill existing workers and to promote the concept of lifelong learning is a defensible strategy. However, to do this while at the same time restricting the places available to new entrants, including young people, poses both moral and political

dilemmas. In relation to youth employment outcomes in an employment-depressed region—such as the west of Melbourne—such a policy could exclude large numbers of young people who might otherwise access an entry-level position through the new apprenticeship scheme.

This project coincided with the publication of two significant documents in the area of post-compulsory education and training in Victoria. These two reports were *The independent review of the quality of training in Victoria's apprenticeship and traineeship system* by Kaye Schofield (2000b) and *The ministerial review of post-compulsory education and training pathways in Victoria*, chaired by Peter Kirby (2000) and known as the Kirby Report.

The central objective of the Schofield report was to undertake an investigation into the quality of the apprenticeship and training system. Although this aspect was not part of our research project, Kaye Schofield, in summarising the findings of her recent work, made comments which have a bearing on the research undertaken in this project.

Schofield identified that in Victoria, both the management and administration of the provision of apprenticeships and traineeships have a detrimental impact on quality. Schofield also pointed out that her previous research on the Tasmanian and Queensland training systems helped her to formulate an overall critique of current arrangements across the three States. Schofield asserts that:

The apprenticeship and traineeship system is concerned with two core policy objectives: increasing young people's access to vocational education and training and ensuring entry-level skills development in the labour force. Yet more and more traineeships and, to a lesser extent apprenticeships, are being captured by adults and the skills objective has been sacrificed in some policy decisions, especially those of the Commonwealth, to the employer objective. In the final analysis, no traineeship program can be expected to deliver measurable outcomes against objectives which are too diffuse or even, on occasion, mutually exclusive. (Schofield 2000a, p.9)

Recent research

Again, referring to work undertaken by Kaye Schofield, the question of the roles and responsibilities relating to the management of apprenticeships and traineeships was addressed. Schofield argued that:

... the respective roles and responsibilities of the Commonwealth Government and the State/Territory Governments are not clear and there is considerable overlap between the work of States through their apprenticeship and traineeship units and the work of the Commonwealth through the New Apprenticeship Centres. (Schofield 2000a, p.9)

During her review of the Tasmanian training system, Schofield noted:

... concern about the long-term sustainability of the apprenticeship and traineeship system. The new economy has different workforce requirements and is a different mix of primary industry, manufacturing and services industries. New service based industries have not yet developed training traditions and have different commitments to training. (Schofield 2000a, p.15)

Our research highlighted the predominance of the traditional models of apprenticeship and traineeships in sectors of the economy, such as manufacturing, wholesale, building and construction. These sectors, while still large in terms of production, have declining levels of employment. The newly emerging industry sectors based around information technology and

personal services, such as call centers,⁴ are the types of industry sectors identified by Schofield.

The other major report which had immediate bearing on the outcomes of our research, was *The ministerial review of post-compulsory education and training pathways in Victoria* (Kirby 2000). A number of key recommendations from this review would help to facilitate an increase in opportunities for young people to engage in new apprenticeships throughout the State, but particularly in Melbourne's west. Kirby points out that:

... The findings of the Review endorse the Government's decision to move towards a consolidation, rather than a fragmentation of the post-compulsory phase. This approach provides opportunities for more coherent and outwards-looking policy frameworks, greater collaboration and integration between providers, stronger linkages between education and training, industry and other government agencies and community, and a more 'seamless system' for young people.

(Kirby 2000, p.8)

This is in keeping with comments made by key stakeholders concerning the need to create a partnership between education and training, industry and other government agencies and community. The shift to a whole-of-government and a whole-of-community approach called for by Kirby (2000) in the provision of training would help to overcome some of the complaints made about careers counselling and how students arrive at their choices regarding post-compulsory pathways.

Furthermore, the creation of a Victorian Qualifications Authority (VQA) from Recommendation 27 and the Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission (VLESC) from Recommendation 29 (Kirby 2000) would have the potential to regulate the administration of the training of new apprentices. The latter has the potential to foster, through local networks, the provision of programs which are tailored to the needs of the employer and the needs of the new apprentice. The creation of the VQA would enable a more flexible approach to the integration of the VCE with other learning paths and would open the way for innovative mixes of pathways and learning outcomes. This could have the effect of removing some of the uncertainty relating to new apprenticeships in general, and in particular, part-time apprenticeships for secondary school students.

If the current Victorian government implements the action plan outlined by the Kirby review, it is likely that there would be a positive impact on the uptake of new apprenticeships in the western region of Melbourne. The specific goals set for the State government by the Kirby review include establishing:

- ❖ *post compulsory education, training and employment programs and services that are oriented towards the needs of young people, rather than those of institutions*
- ❖ *a provider 'system' that is integrated, where institutional and sectoral boundaries are blurred, and programs and services are designed and delivered in a more flexible manner*
- ❖ *more 'seamless' programs and services that allow young people multiple options and continuous support through the transition process*

⁴ In a recent *Four corners* report the following statement was made concerning the economic role of the emergent call centre industry: '*... We believe there's over 4000 call centres in Australia, so ... and the service sector, this particular sector, is growing at around about up to 30 per cent per annum. It's worth \$700 billion globally to the economy. So that was enough for us to start thinking we needed to start doing some serious research in understanding how these call centres worked and, in fact, what the future held for them*'. Catriona Wallace, PhD Candidate, Australian Graduate School Of Management, University Of NSW, quoted at abc.net.au, Four Corners, Archives URL: www.abc.net.au/4corners/s168558.htm

- ❖ *improved education, training and employment outcomes for young people, and improved learning platforms for lifelong learning*
- ❖ *a 'system' that is more flexible and responsive to change*
- ❖ *greater responsibility and accountability on the part of education and training providers, collectively and individually, for a broader range of outcomes for young people*
- ❖ *a state-wide pattern of cooperative planning networks of education and training providers and other stakeholders*
- ❖ *improved guidance and support services, and better information on the outcomes for young people*
- ❖ *improved systemic knowledge of labour market, industry, and regional development conditions and developments*
- ❖ *financial arrangements that provide for improved, more efficient and more flexible planning and delivery of programs and services*
- ❖ *a system that has better reconnaissance and leadership* (Kirby 2000, p.159)

The emphasis on partnerships, whole-of-community, and whole-of-government approaches to the post-compulsory phase of education, as well as the recommendations concerning information dissemination, administrative arrangements, accountability and guidance, have the potential to establish a more coherent post-compulsory education environment. The integration of sometimes disparate structures and practices, highlighted by recent reports, into a new set of institutions and modes of regulation and operation, has a great deal of potential for improving the access to relevant post-compulsory options and subsequent outcomes for young people in the western region of Melbourne.

Conclusion

Many of the issues identified by the research team as contributing to the poor uptake of new apprenticeships in Melbourne's west are not unique to the region. For example, criticism of the source and quality of information available to students about new apprenticeships could be applied to other regions of Melbourne. So also, the dominance of the VCE and university as desirable outcomes for secondary school students applies equally to other regions.

Melbourne's west is unique because of the constraints upon young people in the identification of a post-school pathway. Young people have a desire for upward mobility, but the backdrop of an employment-depressed region and the attitude of employers to entry-level training, has in a sense contracted in the range of options open to young people in the region.

Students

Context

One of the aims of the project was an examination of employer and student perceptions and attitudes towards the new apprenticeship scheme in Melbourne's western region. This section details the results of a series of focus group discussions held with secondary school students.

In order to gather data about student perceptions and attitudes about new apprenticeships, the research team used the focus group technique to conduct a series of interviews with secondary students from schools located within three local government areas (LGAs). These LGAs provided the basis for the analysis and were selected according to whether there was a small, medium, or large take-up of apprenticeships within their boundaries (WREDO 1999, p.32).

Three government secondary schools and three non-government (Catholic schools) were selected. The non-government schools were selected on the basis of their being part of a large system of schools and comparable in size and scope of facilities and curriculum offerings to the government system. Two of the non-government schools were single sex schools and this enabled the research team to address issues of gender bias in the research sampling.

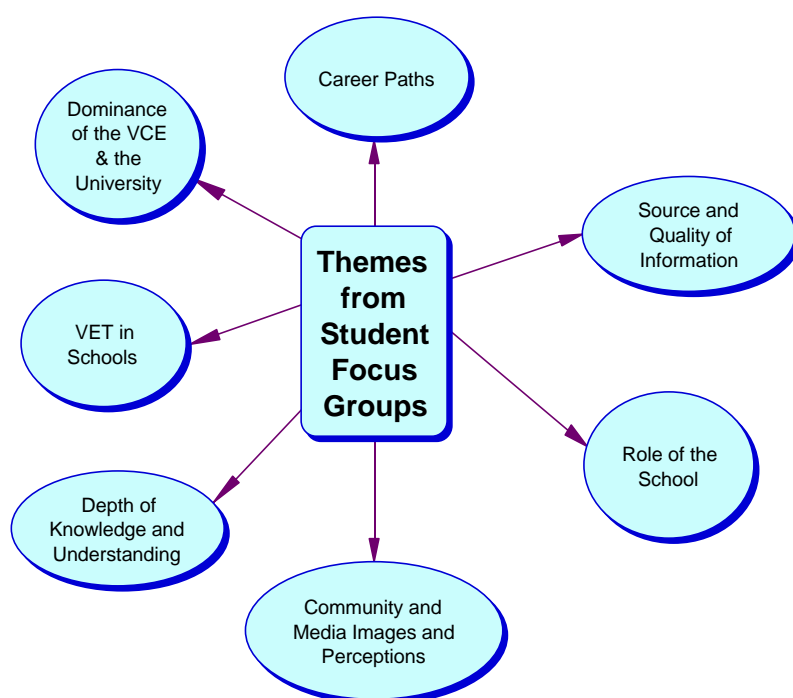
The size of the each focus group varied from between 8 and 10 students. Three focus groups were conducted in each, with the student profile being Year 10 students, Year 12 VCE students with VET and Year 12 VCE students with no VET. The research team selected two schools per municipality, one government and one non-government. In total 18 focus groups were conducted involving a total of 180 students. Further details on the focus groups are included in appendix 5. In each school the careers teachers were asked to assist the research team in the selection of students based on the following criteria:

- ❖ *Year 10 students*: one group of males and one group of females. The research team was interested in testing their understanding of VET and the nature of the labour market in the western region of Melbourne early in the academic year before they had been asked to select VCE subjects.
- ❖ *Year 12 VCE students*: a group of non-VET students who had chosen purely academic subjects and a group of VCE VET students comprising equal numbers (where possible) of students enrolled in VET subjects with a work placement and students enrolled in VET subjects without a work placement.

Themes

Figure 2 summarises the key themes which emerged from the focus groups conducted within the target schools. The themes were surprisingly uniform, regardless of gender, system (government and non-government), year level and VET or non-VET.

Figure 2: Key themes from student focus groups



Depth of knowledge and understanding

The research team found amongst the students a lack of awareness and of depth in the level of knowledge and understanding of apprenticeships in general, and of the recently rebadged new apprenticeships scheme in particular. When asked to define or describe what VCE students understood an apprenticeship to be, responses from VCE students varied from a simple recognition that an apprenticeship involved some form of a job with training, to an awareness that the program involved a mix of both on-the-job and off-the-job training. As one VCE student put it:

Boy 3: You get training on-the-job. (School E – 1)

The lack of any real concept of what an apprenticeship might entail for a young person can be illustrated by the following extracts from VCE students from the non-VET stream:

Girl 2: In an apprenticeship for a couple of days you go to school, and a couple of days you get hands on. Like if you want to be a hairdresser, you go to a hairdressing school. (School D – 2)

Girl 5: Someone takes you on and trains you. I don't know who takes you on, but certain groups take you on and like if it is a chef, I have been told that I will be taken on into a restaurant and they train you... On-the-job training. (School B – 8)

Even VCE students with some VET subjects in their current course structure were unsure about the details of an apprenticeship. When asked to describe an apprenticeship, comments such as the following were common:

Boy 1: You go with someone who already owns a business. For a couple of days you have to go to school. (School C – 12)

When VCE students were asked if they had heard of the new apprenticeships scheme the following was a common response:

Girl 4: Yeah, but I don't know what it is.

The lack of understanding among VCE students was also reflected in the responses of the Year 10 students who participated in the focus groups. These Year 10 students had yet to make a choice about their career and select VCE subjects. When asked to define or describe an apprenticeship, the students in one group responded in the following terms:

Girl 3: [Isn't it] like something that you are interested in and go on and do it for two years and get enough experience and [it] helps you get into the job? (School A – 6)

Boy 1: I am not too sure either, but I think it is like a job that you like and you want to stick with that job for three years. (School A – 6)

In another group a respondent pointed to the relationship between successfully completing an apprenticeship and then being in a position to work for oneself.

Boy 4: You work for a boss, and you do it over a four-year period, and you get to know all the things you have to do, and after your apprenticeship you can start up your own business. (School D – 3)

The lack of understanding about the nature of an apprenticeship is apparent in the responses of participants in the Year 10 student focus groups. It also included confusion over the comparability of an apprenticeship to other forms of post-compulsory education.

Girl 1: Usually somebody with no particular skills, they go to an employer and they teach you and you can go first, second and third [year] and I think you end up getting as qualified as going to uni. (School B – 10)

The paucity of knowledge and awareness of apprenticeships in the responses of both Year 10 and VCE students was even more pronounced when they were examined on the nature of traineeships. While a number of students were aware of the term, when pushed to give details they responded in the following manner:

Girl 2: Yes, I was going to go for one last year, they don't pay that much and it is the same thing [as] on-the-job training but it is usually more in the office, stuff like that. (School F – 16)

When asked to describe a traineeship a Year 10 student responded:

Boy 1: I am not sure of the details; I think it is training in a workplace. (School A – 6)

Dominance of the VCE and university

One of the consistent themes which emerged from the focus groups was the relevance of apprenticeships to the career choices or life aspirations of the participants. Apprenticeships were not seen as a first option for a post-school activity. A view that attendance at university was the most desirable end-product of a secondary education, regardless of the school, system or level emerged in our discussions with students. As the following responses illustrate, some students cannot conceive of the place an apprenticeship might hold in their life or where it might lead them.

Girl 1: I was thinking about doing that, but I just couldn't drop everything and just do that for months. Like it is good to get paid for learning and stuff but I couldn't just drop everything. (School F – 15)

Girl 3: Like an apprenticeship will go one, two years, what happens after that? Are we back where we started from, and like if you don't like it, could you transfer, or change what you wanted to do without too many hassles. (School F – 15)

Students see apprenticeships as short-term experiences and not as a career option. This type of response may also indicate that, in the minds of some young people, an apprenticeship is perceived as being part of a rigid and highly complex system, which leads to an uncertain future. The possibility of an apprenticeship offering a desirable post-school destination comparable to the high status of a university course, or being a better option than the low-skill/low-paid work they had already experienced, was not considered. Apprenticeships were a low priority among the focus group participants—it was something they might fall back on if all else failed.

When the research team probed this issue in more depth by explicitly asking the students the question: If you were offered an apprenticeship would you take one? The following rather telling responses were given:

Boy 6: On whether I would take an apprenticeship over uni? No, not really, because we did work experience, and the guy told me that I could do the apprenticeship and after eight years I would get paid the same as someone who went to uni and came in four years later. So, works out much better to go to uni. (School E – 1)

Girl 5: Yes, I think so, if I didn't get the grades to go to uni. I think anyone would take any opportunity that there is. (School E – 1)

Clearly these young people did not see an apprenticeship as providing a good return for the time invested in training. If they did consider signing up for an apprenticeship it would be only if other options were not available.

Career paths

When asked to discuss career aspirations and the process of choosing one career path over another, a complex picture began to emerge about the interplay between the sources and quality of advice and information, and the role of the school in disseminating information.

A number of students commented during the focus groups that they were unsure about where their careers would take them. For example, many students responded in a manner similar to the following VCE student when asked if a career choice had been made:

Boy 1: No decision. (School D – 2)

On the other hand, many responses reflected a determination to follow a specific career path and if that did not work out, then the students were adamant that there would be other options open to them. VCE students made the following statements:

Girl 1: ... depending on my TER score, I would like to do law at university, if I don't have a high enough score, then I will join the army and do legal studies. (School D – 2)

Another student commented in the following terms:

Girl 3: I want to go to TAFE and try and be an air hostess, but if I don't make it as an air hostess, I'll go back to the work I do now. (School A – 5)

The question of how realistic the career aspirations of students are needs to be addressed. The list of possible careers students identified for themselves included: nursing, childcare worker, auto electrician, air hostess, lawyer, sports administrator, accounts clerk, teacher and

journalist. It is interesting to note that, as anticipated, those students doing traditional VCE non-VET subjects spoke about career paths which were closely linked to further study at university level. Even those students enrolled in VET-oriented programs in a non-government school at the VCE level highlighted paths for which university and or TAFE courses were available, or a pre-requisite. For example, VCE VET students at one school identified the following post-school destinations for themselves:

- Boy 1: *I don't know whether to go into sports or horticulture? I have done a 3-week TAFE course on general horticulture and I have done three different work experiences.* (School C – 12)
- Boy 2: *I want to go into sport or marketing. I haven't done much marketing subjects.* (School C – 12)
- Boy 3: *I want to do sports administration, business management.* (School C – 12)
- Boy 4: *I want to be a sports teacher.* (School C – 12)
- Boy 5: *I want to go into sports management.* (School C – 12)
- Boy 6: *Personal trainer.* (School C – 12)

Students in the focus groups identified a wide range of post-school destinations for themselves, ranging from those listed above to army, nursing, the legal profession, social work, teaching, small business, and journalism. The list goes on. What is significant is that few students reported that they saw apprenticeships or traineeships as being something to aspire to. Students in the west of Melbourne aspire to work in middle-class jobs and do not consider what we might describe as 'working-class' jobs as viable career options. As one student pointed out to the research team:

- Girl 1: *Who wants to be a fitter and turner.* (School A – 5)

Young people see this kind of work as 'dirty', 'unglamorous' and 'low paid work'. This is a view which is often supported by families who see education as a means of upward mobility and access to a higher standard of living.

Choices about which post-school paths would suit individuals were determined by the source and quality of information.

Source and quality of advice and information

It can be argued that student choices about which post-school path to select have been influenced by a variety of factors ranging from what we might describe as personal disposition to institutional factors. By personal disposition, we mean that home experiences, personal interest and peer relationships are identified by some students as having played a part in helping them to make up their minds. In this context the following comments made by VCE VET students highlight this fact:

- Boy 1: *...Working at home in the garden, I enjoyed it and I thought it could be a career path. I enjoy football and cricket, so I did the course here.* (School C – 12)
- Boy 2: *I love sports and I think I know a lot about it, so I want to do sport.* (School C – 12)
- Girl 3: *I just liked the business work. That is why I want to be a secretary.* (School B – 8)
- Girl 4: *I am doing legal studies this year, and I like the subject, I understand it, and I enjoy it.* (School B – 8)

Parents and family members were also important influences on students, both in determining their career choices and in providing them with opportunities to experience the workplace through part-time and holiday work experience. The opportunity to engage in both school-organised and privately organised work experience is a positive experience for most young people and helps to develop a positive attitude to VET pathways. The extracts that follow highlight this process:

Boy 7: *I worked in distribution for a motor transport company over the holidays with my grandfather, moving boxes between vehicles.* (School A – 5)

Researcher: *So you found out a bit of how that part of the automotive business works?* (School A – 5)

Boy 7: *Yes, I was working with my grandfather because he got me the job.* (School A – 5)

Girl 4: *I think it was society really; I wanted to be a social worker, help homeless people.* (School D – 2)

As the following extract illustrates, peer groups also emerged as a source of influence and advice about career choice. A VCE VET student comments on why she had a negative view of apprenticeships as career choice:

Girl 2: *I don't know. We know some apprentices and they say stay at school, it is heaps better, just stay, because at school if you want to bludge you can bludge, I shouldn't be saying this, but you can, you can do what you want. But when you are out in the workforce you have to work, to get your money.* (School E – 1)

Even apprentices are dissuading other young people from taking up an apprenticeship because, unlike school, you cannot 'bludge' in the workforce, you actually 'have to work'.

Institutional factors can be described as a combination of school-based processes. These processes are, for example, formal careers counselling, work experience, availability of structured workplace learning, curriculum, and what can be described as 'school culture'—explicit and implicit assumptions about what are worthwhile aspirations and what should be the end-process of an individual's school education. School culture also encompasses what can be described as the general tenor or atmosphere of the school—do students feel safe, valued and above all, heard? An example of how school culture can influence career choice includes the extent to which a school seeks to actively promote a variety and diversity of post-school destinations, or whether a limited range of options is promoted. It is in a sense another form of the so-called 'hidden curriculum' that Michael Apple (1990) and others have discussed.

Role of the school

The complex relationship between a combination of school-based institutional processes, such as work experience and structured workplace learning, and the impact of school culture on the shaping of young people's aspirations emerged as a significant theme in the focus groups. When students were asked to indicate the sources of advice, a key individual identified was the careers teacher.

As one VCE non-VET student pointed out, the role played by her careers teacher was as a source of 'guidance' rather than 'influence'. The student stated that the:

Girl 1: *Careers co-ordinator at my junior campus...didn't influence us, she sort of guided us, and she asked us what we wanted to do. It was really limited though, we probably spent half an hour altogether on that, we really didn't have enough time to go*

through everything. We told her what we wanted to do, and she then advised us on what subjects to take and whether to do a course or not. (School D –2)

Once again the critical role subject choice plays in mapping-out a post-school pathway is clearly perceived by students as a crucial function of the school in general and, in particular, the careers co-ordinator.

Work experience

Another source of information students identified as helping to formulate their ideas about careers was work experience. This was seen as a valuable opportunity to examine career options first-hand. As one student pointed out:

Boy 1: I wanted to be a financial adviser, but then I changed my mind not from the influence of anyone, I think I realised that after doing work experience, I didn't want to be in an office. (School D – 2)

When encouraged to expand on the significance of work experience, the student stated:

Boy 1: Because you get the basic outline of what people do everyday like you see in the office, what they require, what skills they require, how hard they have to work. I don't think I was cut out for an office job. (School D – 2)

Another student in the same group pointed to the value of the experience gained in her placement:

Girl 3: Like how they put me in the younger grades, I was in for two days in Grade 5/6 class and I didn't really enjoy that working with the older kids. They were smart alics and that. But when I got in with the Grade 2s and 3s, they were absolutely brilliant. I love working with them, I love being with them. (School D – 2)

The importance of work experience in the formation of student views on possible post-school destinations emerged as a common theme in the focus groups. However, as the following quote highlights, there are some structural issues that are of concern.

Girl 1: The problem I found was I did work experience in June/July, and I was still deciding between law and youth working. After you do work experience with a youth worker, I definitely did not want to do that, and then I only had a couple of months to work out the whole law thing so before you get into Year 11 to pick your subjects. You don't have a big enough space of time between work experience and picking your VCE subjects to feel comfortable. (School D –2)

It is evident that careful thought needs to be given to the timing of work experience in relation to subject choice. For some students, the short work experience program in Year 10 is the only experience of work which they have prior to subject selection and career goal-setting. It is the research team's view that, since work experience is such an important program, it needs to be restructured to maximise the benefit young people gain from being involved.

Students also identified other sources of information.

Girl 3: We had a careers day, and they explained everything there. But people just find out that there are other people like a lot of other friends doing apprenticeships and that's how a lot of people find out. (School E – 1)

When asked to talk about what students perceived as their school's view of apprenticeships, they painted a picture of a complex environment. The role of the school as a neutral source of

guidance was not always the case. For example, as one non-government VCE student from a school with a significant VET program states, the school:

Boy 1: ... push[es] you to get a good score and get into uni. It depends on the person. If you want to do an apprenticeship, the school will help you out. There were a few kids who left last year because people rang up and asked if there was anyone who wanted an apprenticeship. (School C – 11)

This statement raises the question of whether or not schools have a realistic understanding of the job market in their local area. Do they only promote new apprenticeships when an employer contacts them directly? If this is so, then schools are acting judiciously. If the positions are not there, why promote a non-viable pathway?

According to some students, information about non-traditional pathways (for example, new apprenticeships) is not always readily available and is often dependent on students actively seeking out information for themselves. As one VCE non-VET student pointed out:

Girl 4: No, we don't know much about that, they don't tell us unless we go and see our careers teacher or something and say that I am interested in looking at apprenticeship and traineeship, otherwise we don't get told much. (School F – 15)

Girl 1: From people who I had spoken to, people at work do apprenticeships. Not at school, they want you to stay at school, not leave and do an apprenticeship. (School D – 4)

When questioned further on whether their school had a positive or a negative attitude towards apprenticeships, another student responded that the school only supported such a path if:

Boy 2: ... you're in trouble. You leave school if you are a troublemaker. (School D – 4)

One group of Year 10 students also painted a bleak picture of how they perceived their school's attitude to apprenticeships:

Boy 2: I think it is negative. (School D – 3)

Researcher: How do you mean it is negative? (School D – 3)

Girl 3: They want to keep you at school. (School D – 3)

Boy 2: They won't push it. (School D – 3)

Researcher: How do you think the school is promoting traditional VCE? (School D – 3)

Girl 3: They don't speak about it, apprenticeships. Only VCE subjects. (School D – 3)

Researcher: What about VET? (School D – 3)

Boy 2: I don't even know what it is. (School D – 3)

These perceptions could be explained by the fact that the interview was conducted early in the school year and students had not undergone the formal process of counselling which prepares them for VCE subject selection. Nevertheless, the views expressed by these students raised questions.

On the other hand, some groups talked about their schools' support for apprenticeships and VET in positive terms. As one VCE VET student pointed out:

Girl 1: In Year 10, we had a business class, our careers teachers told us about VET courses. We had like a little interview. Our careers teacher came in and talked about work placement, and explained about apprenticeships and interview skills. (School A – 5)

Researcher: How did the positive attitude towards VET come across? (School A – 5)

- Boy 2: *Teachers ask how you are going, they actually talk to you about it.* (School A – 5)
- Girl 1: *If you have any problems, they go out of their way to help you.* (School A – 5)
- Girl 2: *They encourage you to do the VET course, you have an advantage over every one else who doesn't have a VET course. Instead of wasting your half day, you are actually doing something.* (School A – 5)

Participants in the student focus groups also raised concerns relating to how schools handle the delivery of VET subjects. The question of whether or not schools are adequately resourced to provide a rich learning experience appears problematic. The following passage of dialogue highlights this issue:

- Researcher: *Why did you choose that area? Why did you think of doing a VET subject?* (School E – 1)
- Boy 1: *I want to get into the electronics field, so I started doing the VET course in electronics at school. But then due to getting stuffed around a bit, I gave it up.* (School E – 1)
- Researcher: *What messed things up for you—the system, the school?* (School E – 1)
- Boy 1: *The teacher we had didn't know that much about the subject we were doing. We were doing occupational health & safety and he couldn't really answer it, he just gave us the books and we had to work from that. Part way through the course we got another teacher.* (School E – 1)
- Researcher: *So there wasn't that much hands-on stuff. Was it mainly book-based?* (School E – 1)
- Boy 1: *It was half-and-half. It was just the way it was organised, it wasn't very good.* (School E – 1)

It is clear from the comments above that, in some schools, the effectiveness of VET-in-Schools is being undermined by the quality of information and the low level of VET-related skills held by some of the teaching staff teaching these courses. It is also clear that continuity in staffing is central to doing well in most courses of education, not just VET-in-Schools.

Community perceptions

How the community (friends, family and the wider society) perceived apprenticeships as a career choice emerged as an important theme in our discussions with the students. When asked what they thought their friends' attitude to their taking up an apprenticeship would be, the overwhelming response was that it would not concern them:

- Girl 2: *As long as I am happy, they should be happy too.* (School D – 3)
- Boy 1: *You have to be happy with what you want to do not what your friends want.* (School C – 13)

Students reported that the apprentices they knew (relatives or friends) gave positive comments about their career. As one VCE non-VET student pointed out:

- Girl 2: *My brother is doing a bricklaying apprenticeship and he likes it. Better than school and he is learning about bricklaying.* (School B – 8)

When questioned on what their parents would think about their enrolling in an apprenticeship, students from non-government schools believed that their parents would look unfavorably on such a decision. The following comments highlight the degree of influence that parents exert over students' choices.

Boy 2: *My parents are pushing me to go to uni and get into a course. It wouldn't be an option.* (School C – 11)

Boy 3: *Most people here don't want to leave school. My Dad would let me do an apprenticeship but Mum is pushing me into uni.* (School C – 11)

The pressure exerted on students to choose an academic path for their post-school destination has its origins in a range of social, cultural and historical factors. In particular, the opportunity to climb the social status ladder was a theme that emerged in our discussion with students in the non-government schools. The following passage illustrates the view that some families see university as the only desirable outcome for their children and that this predisposition restricts students' awareness of other options. When asked if they would be concerned about what their family would think if they took up an apprenticeship, the following comments were made:

Girl 2: *I would worry what my parents would think.* (School B – 8)

Researcher: *Do you think they would have a positive or a negative view?* (School B – 8)

Girl 2: *Negative.* (School B – 8)

Researcher: *Why?* (School B – 8)

Girl 2: *Because they want me to go to university straight after school. They wouldn't want me to do an apprenticeship.* (School B – 8)

Researcher: *In your family backgrounds, are you the first generation who has wanted to go to university?* (School B – 8)

Girl 2: *I'm not the first.* (School B – 8)

Researcher: *Have your parents been to university?* (School B – 8)

All: *No.* (School B – 8)

Girl 3: *My brother is going to university, but no one else has had the opportunity.* (School B – 8)

Researcher: *Is there a lot of pressure to do academic studies, go to university, is that family pressure?* (School B – 8)

Girl 2: *They would like that for me, it would please them if I did that.* (School B – 8)

In the government school focus groups, the issue of post-school destinations also emerged as an issue of concern. The research team found that overwhelmingly, government school students, both VCE VET and VCE non-VET, identified university education as a desirable post-school destination. What stands out when analysing the data from the government school focus groups is the lack of confidence in choosing any specific path.

Some students from these schools failed to understand that, in order to attain a specific career goal, they were required to work extremely hard for the VCE. Students appeared unable to take responsibility for their own academic progress and attempted to find an external focus for their growing sense of failure. As one VCE non-VET student states she received:

Girl 1: *Negative attitudes from every adult basically. If you don't work a lot now, you are not going to make it. I get told constantly how if you don't start working harder in class, you are never going to be a lawyer, you are never going to make it. Same with you with nursing, she was told by her Year 10 co-ordinator, not to bother, you won't make it. Like it is becoming an impossible goal to have the career you want now, because there is so much competition, and hard to get the TER score and everything else.* (School D – 2)

Government school students did not point to parents as a significant source of pressure to do well at Year 12 and get into specific university courses. It was almost as if students were disengaged from the process of schooling and in a sense they were just going through the motions. At the time we conducted our focus groups, students could not fully come to terms with their prospects post-VCE, as it seemed too far into the distance.

The media

The media portrayal of apprenticeships also emerged as a significant theme in our conversations with students. The research team asked students to identify any positive or negative images of apprentices portrayed in the media and was surprised by the responses. Across all focus groups, students identified the negative images displayed in the Victorian WorkCover authority's series of advertisements. These commercials depicted a series of mishaps befalling young apprentices in variety of work settings.

As students stated:

Girl 4: Those commercials, not the good commercials, but [the one] where the apprentices get hurt. I don't think that it's a good commercial. They are really bad. Like you hear stories about apprentices that are slave labour and all that stuff. So, I don't think a lot of people go for it, some do, the ones that really hate school that is why I think our school doesn't promote it very well. (School E – 1)

Girl 2: One of my friends was doing one and he was doing spray painting. He got stuck in a room, with no windows open, no air ventilating through and he got treated pretty poorly. One of my good friend's, her brother was involved in a WorkCover—the toilet, that was based on him. (School F – 15)

The advertisements run by the WorkCover authority are a necessary tool in a campaign aimed at making apprentices aware of unsafe work practices, but the impact of these advertisements on young people's perceptions of apprenticeships should not be understated. It can only be hoped that the elimination of unsafe work practices might help to raise the status of new apprenticeships.

Students were asked to expand on their view of how the media portrays tradespeople, and more specifically apprentices. The following is the response of one government school VCE student:

Girl 1: ... apprenticeships, [they] seemed to have been given a certain image. A certain type of people [sic]. They seemed to be people who have left school, dropouts, it is not a positive thing to leave school and do an apprenticeship, oh, you left school, it is more negative. (School D – 2)

When asked to identify a positive media image of apprentices, students pointed to the armed forces—'The Edge'—series of advertisements with the portrayal of a high-tech and exciting workplace. Students also pointed to the role of 'Billy' in the Network 10 drama *Neighbours* as a sympathetic portrayal of an apprentice.

Conclusion

The following conclusions can be drawn from the research team's analysis of the themes emerging from the focus group discussions with senior secondary students in both government and non-government schools. In summary, students view apprenticeships:

- ❖ as being a short-term option and not leading onto a 'career'
- ❖ as 'dirty' and low-status manual work
- ❖ as being a poor return on investment, in that it leads to a low-paid low-status job
- ❖ as potentially dangerous (with reference to WorkCover advertisements)
- ❖ as a last option for 'drop-outs', failure, and 'trouble makers'

These perceptions may have their origins in the following:

- ❖ It appears that at both Year 10 and at VCE level, students in government and non-government schools do not possess an adequate level of knowledge or understanding of new apprenticeships which enables them to make informed choices. In some schools there appears to be a conscious attempt to inform students of their options, both academic and vocational. In others a rather narrow and 'academic' view of the purpose of secondary schooling and possible post-school pathways prevails.
- ❖ From comments made by students in the focus groups, it appears that as late as Year 11, some students are unsure about what kinds of post-school destinations or pathways are open to them. The issue of the source and quality of information was characterised by the comments made by students. Ad hoc and informal sources of information appear to play as important a part in career choice as the formal structures and processes associated with school-based careers counselling. There are both positive and negative aspects to this informal information. Informal information can often benefit students as they can access candid accounts about particular career choices and gain information from people who have had hands-on experiences in specific training and employment. However, informal information channels can also be the source of inaccurate and biased information.
- ❖ 'School culture' was a term the research team used to describe the issues raised by the students and related to the general tenor of a school. This included explicit and implicit assumptions about what are worthwhile aspirations and what should be the outcomes of school. It appears that school culture plays a significant part in influencing student choice.
- ❖ Students also highlighted the important role played by the careers teacher in the process of selecting VCE subjects and post-school destinations. Where students were exposed to a full range of options, including VET, they felt able to make realistic career choices.
- ❖ Students also identified work experience as a valuable source of information about careers. According to the students, work experience helped to dispel misconceptions about the reality of particular careers and provided an invaluable source of hands-on experience.
- ❖ Students were critical of the manner in which some schools managed the delivery of VET-in-Schools programs, citing examples of poor delivery and inadequate staff skills and resources.
- ❖ Another issue to emerge during our discussions with students was the impact of community expectations. Students from non-government schools spoke about pressure being exerted from home to do well in Year 12 and to complete a university course. Government school students did not appear to be under the same kinds of pressures and generally exhibited a degree of disengagement with schooling and, in particular, had unrealistic perceptions of the processes and efforts involved in achieving career aspirations.
- ❖ Students identified a series of Victorian government WorkCover advertisements as depicting apprentices negatively. On the other hand, they saw positive image of apprentices in the armed forces—'The Edge'—advertising campaign.

Employers in the west

Context

This chapter contains a discussion of the themes and issues which emerged from an analysis of data generated by a survey of employers in the western region of Melbourne. In the past, a large segment of Australia's industrial and manufacturing sectors⁵ was located in the western region of Melbourne. Consequently, this has been a region which has traditionally provided pathways into employment through apprenticeships.

The research team was interested in determining how the historical relationship between the industrial base of employment in the western suburbs of Melbourne and apprenticeships has been affected by changes in the economy, such as the restructuring and downsizing of the industry and manufacturing sector in the region. The team was also keen to investigate the impact of the 'sunrise' industries associated with the new technologies and the expansion of the service sector in this region. In the context of these structural changes, the research team was also interested in finding out how the arrangements concerning the new apprenticeship scheme were being received by employers in this region. To undertake this research, the team constructed the following questions as the starting point of its analysis:

- ❖ What are the perceptions and attitudes of employers to apprenticeships and traineeships?
- ❖ How appropriate are apprenticeships and traineeships as a method of skilling the workforce in key industry sectors?

In seeking answers to these two questions, a range of strategies and methods was utilised by the research team. Data on the perceptions and attitudes of employers towards apprenticeships and traineeships were generated through the survey instrument.

Themes

Results of the survey

Table 1 illustrates the total number of the intended sample for the survey, the actual number of respondents, the response rate and the refusal rate.

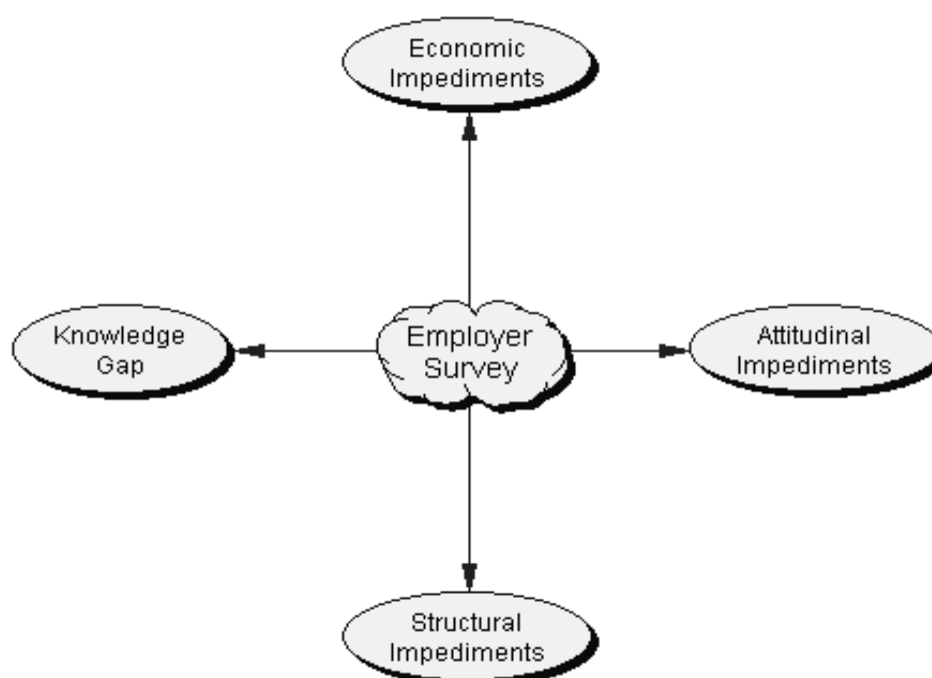
Table 1: Summary of survey responses

Number of surveys mailed out	Number of surveys completed	Response rate
400	111	27.75%

Figure 3 draws together the key themes which emerged from the research team's analysis of the survey data.

⁵ For a brief discussion of this argument please refer to the literature review attached to the main document as appendix 1.

Figure 3: Key concepts in the survey data



The research team asked employers to identify the industry category which best describes their business activities. Table 2 describes the responses we received to the question.

Table 2: Industry category by actual number of responses and percentage

Industry category	Number	%
Building/construction	8	7
Community services	12	11
Finance, property & business services	7	6
Information technology	7	6
Manufacturing	23	21
Recreation, personal & other services (Incl. hospitality & tourism)	9	8
Transport and storage	8	7
Wholesale	19	18
Other	18	16
Total	111	100

The respondents to the survey listed the following industry descriptions under the other category: education, employment, enrolment/voting, export, food research, government department, import and distribution, manufacturing/testing, marketing, design and printing, project management/implementation/research/materials production, recruitment, service delivery in agricultural sector, shipbuilding, tourism/education/cultural services, veterinary medicine and video production.

The survey requested information on the location of firms. Respondents were asked the location of their business, to which 88% reported a western suburb's postcode. The survey asked employers whether or not they currently employed apprentices or trainees. Table 3 provides their responses to the question.

Table 3: Employers employing apprentices or trainees

Employer status	Number	%
Yes, I do currently employ apprentices or trainees	46	41
No, I do not currently employ apprentices or trainees	65	59
Total	111	100

As indicated in table 3, the majority of employers in the sample did not employ apprentices or trainees. As a consequence these employers would appear to represent an untapped reserve for apprentices and trainees. These are the employers who need to be encouraged to see apprenticeships or traineeships as a valuable addition to their overall human resources strategy.

Table 4 identifies the locations where the respondents who did employ apprentices and recruited apprentices and trainees.

Table 4: Numbers of apprentices by location

Location	Number	%
Eastern Melbourne	13	6
Inner Melbourne	18	8
Northern Melbourne	22	11
Western Melbourne	153	70
Southern Melbourne	10	5
Total	216	100

The responses from employers described in table 4 indicated that the bulk of the apprentices reported by respondents to the survey were recruited from the western region of Melbourne.

Table 5 illustrates the numbers of apprentices employed by industry category.

Table 5: Number of apprentices and trainees by industry category

Industry category	Number	%
Building/construction	8	4
Community services	1	0.5
Finance, property & business services	4	2
Information technology	1	0.5
Manufacturing	72	33
Recreation, personal & other services	6	3
Transport & storage	41	19
Wholesale/retail	29	13
Other	54	25
Total	216	100

The four largest industry sectors in the region—building and construction, manufacturing, wholesale/retail, and transport and storage—employ the bulk of the apprentices engaged in the region.

Table 6 depicts employer responses to the question of the specific reasons for employing apprentices or trainees.

Table 6: Reasons for employing apprentices/trainees

Reasons for employment	Number	%
Formal recruitment	17	36
Family member	12	26
Work experience person you liked	10	21
Son/daughter of employee	5	11
Informal recruitment	3	6
Total	47	100

Employers were then asked two questions. Firstly, they were asked to indicate whether or not in the past five years they had increased, maintained or decreased the numbers of apprentices in their firm. Secondly, they were asked to indicate whether or not in the next five years they would increase, maintain or decrease the numbers of apprentices in their firm. Table 7 summarises the employer responses to these two questions.

Table 7: Apprentice employment levels in the past five years and in the next five years

Level	Past five years	%	Next five years	%
Increased	21	46	16	33
Maintained	18	37	26	54
Decreased	8	17	6	13
Total	47	100	48	100

The final question in this section of the survey asked employers to identify the work experience opportunities they offered school students in their firms. According to 75% of the respondents, the primary mechanism they use to provide young people with work opportunities within their firm is the traditional work experience model. In Victoria, work experience is an intensive two-week-on-the-job learning experience. Year 10 students are paid a nominal amount to cover transportation and other incidental costs. A further 15% of the respondents identified casual work as the primary mechanism used by their firm to offer students opportunities within their company. The remaining 10% of employers reported that they utilised structured work placement and part-time work to offer students opportunities within their organisations.

In the next section of the survey employers who had reported that they did not employ apprentices were then asked to consider whether they might contemplate employing apprentices or trainees sometime in the future. Of the employers who responded to the question, 60% reported that they would not consider employing an apprentice in the future. The remaining 40% of employers responded that they would consider taking on an apprentice at sometime in the future.

The employers were then asked to identify factors which might encourage them to take on apprentices in the future. Their responses are shown in table 8.

Table 8: Reasons why an employer would engage apprentices or trainees in the future

Reasons	Number	%
Growth of business	16	36
Finding a suitable person	10	22
Skill shortage in business	10	22
Government subsidies	7	16
Improved knowledge of apprenticeships/traineeships	1	2
Other	1	2
Total	45	100

The results described in table 8 suggest that economic growth is the most important factor in influencing employers to engage apprentices and trainees, followed by finding a suitable person and a skill shortage in the business. Respondents to the survey also identified government subsidies as being significant factors in motivating them to take on apprentices and trainees. An improvement in the knowledge of the apprenticeships and traineeships was also a factor identified by respondents as a reason for taking on apprentices and trainees in the future.

Employers were then asked to rank the reasons why they would not employ apprentices or trainees in the future. Table 9 illustrates the variety of factors which have discouraged them from engaging apprentices and trainees.

Table 9: Reasons why employers would not employ apprentices and trainees

Reasons	Number	%
Amount of government subsidy	1	2
Bureaucracy	4	8
Business too small	13	27
Decline in business	3	6
Industrial relations	2	4
Lack of demand from young people	1	2
Lack of information	2	4
No training support in the workplace for Apprentices/trainees	5	11
Prefer skilled staff	10	21
Too expensive	1	2
Uncertainty of future	1	2
Other	5	11
Total	48	100

Respondents to this question identified the small size of their business as being a factor preventing them from employing apprentices and trainees. In this context group training companies could play an important role in providing the support and infrastructure which would enable small firms to take on apprentices. Another significant factor identified by employers is their preference skilled staff, which could be provided by labour-hire firms.

Employers were then asked to identify the areas of concern they had with the current system of apprenticeships and traineeships. A significant number (41%) of employers responded that they were concerned with the standard of training for apprentices and trainees. A further 35% of employers indicated that they were not familiar with the apprenticeship and traineeship arrangements.

Table 10: Areas of concern employers have with the current apprenticeship and traineeship arrangements

Factors of concern	Number	%
Standard of training for apprentices and trainees	33	41
Not familiar with apprenticeship and traineeship arrangements	28	35
Lack of government support	10	12
Other	6	7
Level of government subsidy	4	5
Total	81	100

The next section of the survey requested employers to identify their primary source of information on apprenticeships and traineeships. Table 11 highlights the employer responses to this question.

Table 11: Primary source of information on apprenticeships and traineeships

Primary source of information	Number	%
Registered training organisation	29	32
TAFE	14	15
Industry association	10	11
New apprenticeship centres	6	7
Industry training board	4	4
Group training company	3	3
Government department	3	3
Trade journals	2	2
Media	1	1
Employment agency	1	1
Never received any information	18	21
Total	91	100

Employers responded that the main source of information on apprenticeships and traineeships is a registered training organisation (32%). This is closely followed by their local TAFE (15%) and their industry association (11%). A large number of employers (21%) reported that they never received any information. This is an unacceptably high number and warrants closer examination.

Employers were then asked whether or not the information they had received on apprenticeships and traineeships was adequate. The majority of employers who responded to this question—58%, did not regard the information they had received as being adequate. The remaining 42% described the information they had received on apprenticeships and traineeships as being adequate.

The next question in the survey asked employers to indicate whether or not they had heard of the term ‘new apprenticeship’, to which 51% responded that they had not. The remaining 49% responded that they had heard of new apprenticeships.

The final section of the survey dealt with employer perceptions of apprenticeships and traineeships. The first question in this section of the survey asked employers whether they believed that the concept of apprenticeships or traineeships is well understood.

Table 12: The concept of apprenticeships or traineeships is well understood

Concept of apprenticeships/traineeships	Number	%
Strongly agree	9	8
Agree	45	40
Do not know	26	24
Disagree	26	23
Strongly disagree	5	5
Total	111	100

In the next question the employers were asked whether or not they believed that information about apprenticeships and traineeships is easy to understand.

From Table 13, we can see that more respondents either did not have a view on the question, or disagreed that information on apprenticeships and traineeships is easily understood.

Table 13: Understanding information about apprenticeships and traineeships

Information easily understood	Number	%
Strongly agree	5	5
Agree	40	36
Do not know	35	31
Disagree	27	24
Strongly disagree	4	4
Total	111	100

The next question in the survey focussed on employer attitudes towards the issue of government incentives for businesses employing apprentices and trainees. Employers were asked whether or not they believed the level of government incentives to businesses is adequate.

Table 14: Adequacy of government incentives for business

Adequate incentives	Number	%
Strongly agree	2	2
Agree	23	20
Do not know	44	40
Disagree	32	29
Strongly disagree	10	9
Total	111	100

Once again the majority of respondents answered that they either did not have a view, or that they disagreed with the statement put to them.

Employers were then asked two questions which dealt with the provision of on-the-job and off-the-job training as mechanisms for the acquisition of work-related skills for apprentices and trainees. The first question asked employers to indicate their attitude towards on-the-job training. Table 15 reports on their responses to this question.

Table 15: On-the-job training is an effective means of gaining work-related skills

On-the-job training	Number	%
Strongly agree	67	60
Agree	33	30
Do not know	8	7
Disagree	3	3
Total	111	100

The second question asked employers to indicate their attitude towards off-the-job training. Table 16 illustrates the results to the question.

Table 16: Off-the-job training is an effective means of gaining work-related skills

Off-the-job training	Number	%
Strongly agree	31	28
Agree	50	45
Do not know	18	16
Disagree	12	11
Total	111	100

The majority of respondents to both questions detailed in tables 15 and 16 agreed or strongly agreed that both on-the-job and off-the-job training are an effective means of gaining work-related skills.

Employers were then asked to respond to the proposition that secondary students undertaking Years 11 and 12 make successful part-time apprentices or trainees. Table 17 depicts their response to this question.

Table 17: VCE students make successful part-time apprentices or trainees

VCE students make successful part-time apprentices or trainees	Number	%
Strongly agree	3	2
Agree	34	31
Do not know	51	46
Disagree	19	17
Strongly disagree	4	4
Total	111	100

Table 17 illustrates the point that more respondents reported that they do not know than agreed or disagreed with the statement.

The next question in the survey dealt with the how relevant employers regarded work experience when employing new staff.

Work experience has been a long-standing means of promoting the world of work and has been an effective introduction to the workplace for young people.

Table 18: Relevance of work experience

Relevance of work experience	Number	%
Strongly agree	27	24
Agree	62	56
Do not know	13	12
Disagree	7	6
Strongly disagree	2	2
Total	111	100

Employers were then asked to indicate their view on the adequacy of information being provided by agencies and organisations charged with the task of promoting apprenticeships and traineeships.

Table 19: Adequacy of information being provided by agencies and organisations

Adequacy of information	Number	%
Strongly agree	4	4
Agree	36	32
Do not know	39	35
Disagree	21	19
Strongly disagree	11	10
Total	111	100

The responses to this question can be interpreted as reflecting the sense of ambiguity towards young apprentices and trainees identified earlier in this chapter. A large segment of the employer sample who responded to this survey seem to have little if any definite views on the current training arrangements.

The final question in the survey asked employers whether or not they agreed with the statement that apprenticeships and traineeships are a positive means of meeting the needs of employers.

Table 20: Apprenticeships and traineeships are a positive means of meeting the needs of employers

Apprenticeships and traineeships are a positive means of meeting the needs of employers	Number	%
Strongly agree	7	6
Agree	46	41
Do not know	32	29
Disagree	24	22
Strongly disagree	2	2
Total	111	100

What is striking about this response to the statement is not so much the level of agreement or disagreement, but the high level of uncertainty reflected in the 'do not know' response. This could be interpreted that while a significant number of them value the program, an almost equal number are unhappy or have not yet made up their minds about the efficacy of the scheme.

Conclusion

In analysing the data gained from the survey of employers, the following interpretation can be made.

The employers who reported that they employed apprentices or trainees indicated that they recruited them predominantly from the western region of Melbourne. While this response is important, it should be noted the majority of employers who responded to the survey indicated that they did not employ apprentices.

Structural and economic impediments

The pattern of apprenticeship employment reported in the survey indicates that the largest industry sectors of the economy, such as building and construction, manufacturing and wholesale/retail and transport and storage account for the majority of the apprentices described in the data. The first two industry sectors have been traditional sites for the employment of apprentices. Of interest to our research is that non-traditional sites for apprentices and trainees, such as information technology and finance, property and business services are now opening up to trainees and apprentices. While this trend is not yet firmly established, there are indications that the potential is there.

The process of taking on apprentices combines a formal recruitment element (57%) and informal family/community recruitment element (43%). The use of the latter to recruit apprentices is an area which necessitates closer examination since it is quite possible that large numbers of potential apprentices are dissuaded from contemplating apprenticeships and traineeships as a pathway because of their lack of connections or access to informal patterns of recruitment.

Employers are unwilling to commit themselves to doing more than maintaining current levels of employment of apprentices in the medium term. One interpretation of the reluctance to employ apprentices could be due to a number of factors; firstly, an uncertainty about the

continuation of current high levels of economic growth; secondly, the uncertainty surrounding the introduction of the goods and services tax (GST) and its implications for employers. While employers did not specifically mention this, it is unlikely that levels of employment within their firms would be quarantined from any negative impact the new arrangements might have for their firms.

The traditional form of work experience was reported by 75% of employers to be the primary means of providing students with a window to the world of work. The under-utilisation of structured workplace learning by employers is a matter for concern and warrants further examination.

In light of the comments made above, it is interesting to note that employers listed the growth of their firm (36%), or the size of their firm (27%) as being factors which would either encourage or discourage them from taking on apprentices. The relationship between sustainable economic growth and the potential for and willingness to engage higher levels of apprentices was a significant theme to emerge from our analysis of the survey responses.

Employers reported that they were concerned with the standard of training of apprentices (41%). Kaye Schofield's report on Victoria's apprenticeship arrangements also recorded similar concerns from employers about the quality and standard of the preparation of apprentices.

The knowledge gap

Employers identified RTOs and the local TAFE institution as the primary source of information on apprenticeships. This could largely be explained by the established relationship employers may have with their local RTO/TAFE for traditional apprenticeship industry sectors. This raises a number of issues relating to the effectiveness of the national advertising campaign run by DETYA and the role of new apprenticeship centres in disseminating information to employers about the new arrangements, including the expanded range of new apprenticeships available. Improving information on the benefits to employers of the program is clearly an area for more concentrated effort by ANTA, DETYA and the Office of PETE.

The proportion of employers reporting that they understood the concept of an apprenticeship (40%), approximately equalled employers who reported that they did not or disagreed (47%). This breakdown was reflected in the answers the research team received to questions on the intelligibility of information on apprenticeships and traineeships, and incentives to business. This could have been caused by our use of the terms 'apprenticeship' and 'traineeship' rather than 'new apprenticeship' and reflects a level of confusion about the differences between traditional notions of an apprenticeship and the recently rebadged new apprenticeship scheme.

On-the-job and off-the-job methods of training were highly valued by employers as part of the process of developing the skills of an apprentice or trainee.

The majority of employers did not have a strong view on the concept of part-time apprentices or trainees. In fact, 46% responded that they did not know whether Year 11 and 12 students made successful part-time apprentices or trainees. This lack of understanding or perhaps awareness of the opportunity to engage part-time apprentices, who continue with their Year 12 studies while undertaking an apprenticeship, indicates the lack of effective information channels. This means that the full range of options available under the umbrella of

apprenticeships and traineeships is not reaching a crucial audience for this program—the employer.

On the other hand, when asked to comment on the long-standing school-organised work experience program, employers responded overwhelmingly that this was an important factor in recruiting new staff.

When asked to comment on the adequacy of information provided by external agencies and organisations with responsibility for disseminating information on apprenticeships and traineeships, more employers expressed a view that they did not know (35%), or disagreed (19%) than agreed (32%). The high level of the 'do not know' category could be interpreted as an indication that information is not reaching the appropriate destination—the employers.

Attitudinal impediments

While a significant proportion of the respondents to the survey indicated that they agreed (41%) with the proposition that apprenticeships and traineeships are meeting the needs of employers, a significant number of respondents answered that they did not know.

Like many of the responses reported in this chapter, the response by employers to the final question may reflect the lack of real understanding among this group about the role and purpose of apprenticeships and traineeships. A number of employers appear to be reluctant to make a commitment to hiring an apprentice or trainee or even comment about apprenticeships and traineeships. The reasons for this can only be hypothesized, but it could be inferred from the results of the survey that the employer responses to reflect the real possibility that employers lack useful information about the new apprenticeship scheme as it impacts upon their specific firm or organisation. This could be due to a wide range of factors, in particular, the timing of the survey. Firms were engaged in introducing the goods and services tax, hence, they might not have felt in a position to respond to our questions about the future.

Another reason for this uncertainty may relate to the impact of technological change and the continued increase in productivity and the concomitant downsizing of the labour force in many sectors of the economy. For many firms, although productivity may be rising, at the same time their need for skilled workers is declining. It would follow then from a practical standpoint, some firms would take on apprentices or trainees as an act of altruism rather than as part of a human resource strategy.

Employment, education and training perspectives

This chapter describes the issues emerging from a series of interviews with employers and ITBs. The individuals interviewed are divided into two groups. Group one was comprised of employers, and group two includes representatives from education and ITBs. Representatives from the ITBs were selected primarily because of the level of economic activity their particular industry sectors generated in the western region of Melbourne and the potential for growth in those sectors. Table 21 indicates the level of employment in the western region of Melbourne by selected industry category.

Table 21: Employment level in western region of Melbourne by selected industry

Industry category	Actual employed residents
Manufacturing	53 475
Wholesale/retail	50 275
Transport and storage	24 811
Total	128 561

The employers were randomly selected from the original sample used for the survey of employers described in the previous chapter and represent small, medium and large-scale enterprises operating in the western region of Melbourne. The group training company was selected on the basis that the sector, hospitality and tourism, is a growing sector within the overall economy.

Table 22 lists the participants' organisations. Each organisation has a generic description to disguise their identity.⁶

Table 22: Participants interviewed for this project

Participants	Firm/Organisation/Industry type
Employer A	Domestic service company
Industry A	Industry training board
Employer B	Information technology service provider
Industry B	Industry training board
Employer C	Scientific laboratory
Educator A	School sector
Trainer A	Group training company
Industry C	Industry training board
Employer D	Managing director, automotive service provider
Employer E	Personnel recruitment

Context

The interviews focussed on individuals who have an ongoing involvement in delivering training, counselling students, managing school-based apprenticeship pilot programs and employment of apprentices and trainees. They offered the opportunity to canvas some of the

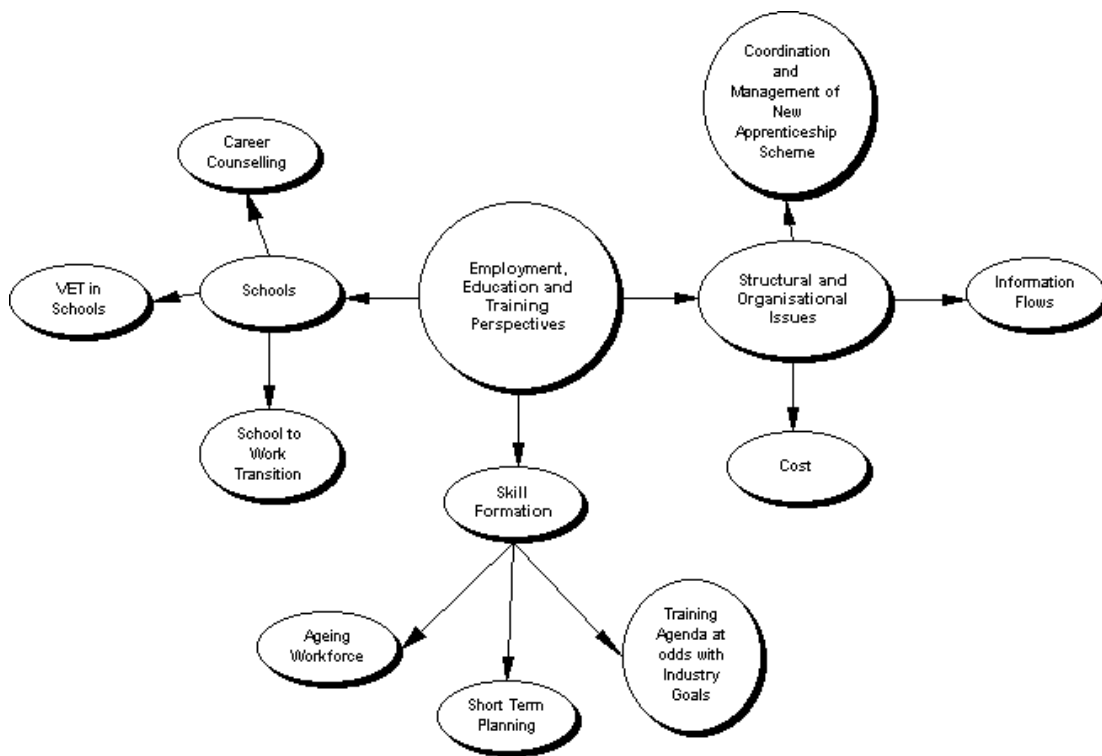
⁶ One of the requirements of our ethics committee was that where possible we protect the identity of individuals who participated in the study.

issues raised in the student focus groups and employer survey. Apprentices and trainees were not interviewed as a group because the research team believed that while they would have interesting comments to make, they have already decided that this form of post-school destination is appropriate to their future. The key aim of our research was to identify blockages or barriers to increasing opportunities for young people to make the decision to engage in an apprenticeship or traineeship. Hence, the people selected for interview were in a position to offer a practical comment on what was going on in organisations and industry sectors in relation to apprenticeships and traineeships.

Themes

Figure 4 outlines themes and issues which emerged from an analysis of the series of interviews, conducted by the research team with individuals from either an employment, education or ITB background.

Figure 4: Employment, education and training perspectives



Structural/organisational issues

One of the central themes emerging from the discussion with individuals from an employment, education or training background related to structural and organisational issues, issues which concern the implementation and delivery of apprenticeship and training programs. In particular, the participants identified the following matters as issues of concern: information, co-ordination and the cost of apprenticeships/traineeships.

Information flow

The method of distributing information about the benefits and requirements for the implementation of the new apprenticeship scheme was a source of concern for a number of

participants. One of the spokespeople for an industry training board argued that information on apprenticeships:

... is totally confusing. I mean it is information overload to people who are out there trying to make money. They don't want to know all the jargon—they are grappling with GST. They don't want to know that it has changed from a traineeship to a new apprenticeship, but it means the same, so what? I think the bureaucrats have lost the sense of these people are out there struggling.

(Industry A)

This participant went on to point out that information about the program was only one part of the 'equation' and might be getting in the way of information about the potential for apprenticeships and traineeships as the first step in a long-term career path. As the participant went on to argue:

... [t]he wording is one aspect, I think it is one part of the equation, I think the biggest part of the equation is the perception by the potential employee about the industry. If they hear the good news story about an industry and they have young people who talk their language, telling them, yes, I have succeeded in this business, this is a career I can go from the shop floor to become a department manager to a store manager to a buyer, to a visual merchandiser, whatever the career may be, students start to think, there are some real potential in this industry.

(Industry A)

The promotion of a positive image, and the dissemination of 'good news' about the program would seem to be a desirable goal for those dealing with publicity about New Apprenticeships. But this is not the whole picture. Passing on timely and accurate advice and information would also seem to be a desirable goal. However, as one of the employers pointed out, getting information about how to engage an apprentice or trainee is not always a straightforward procedure. For example, Employer A describes the drawn-out process involved in engaging a trainee (a cleaner). Employer A begins by describing what happened after she had made initial contact:

The first agency I chose 18 months ago sent someone to meet with my cleaners and myself to explain the full procedure. Unfortunately they were based on the other side of town, which was too far for my cleaners to travel. They advised me that there was nowhere else they could do the training which I later found to be incorrect. They did not explain that I could choose another agency closer who may offer the same course; they just said there was nothing closer. The second agency gave absolutely no support. Even telephone conversations were difficult in finding out how the system worked, particularly in filling in the forms. It was difficult to work out which forms had to be sent in and when, and difficult to understand the questions on the forms.

(Employer A)

For this employer there was definitely a failure to transmit advice and easily understandable information about the program. As Employer A went on to point out:

Most business people I have spoken to are not even aware of traineeships which I believe could be excellent if the system was easier and training more relevant to actual business ... More needs to be done to make businesses aware of the traineeships. I had expected ... someone connected with traineeships to be represented at the Business Expo. I was totally amazed that there was no presence at this expo as it appeared to me to be a perfect opportunity for traineeships to be promoted to people who are looking for business solutions.

(Employer A)

The negative experiences described leads us to consider the importance of the effective co-ordination and management of complex schemes such as the new apprenticeships.

Co-ordination and management of the new apprenticeship scheme

A common thread which has emerged from the interviews and consultations was the lack of confidence employers had in the administration of the program. Employer B describes an unsatisfactory experience with a new apprenticeship centre:

... I called and stated I required a trainee office person, they told me I needed to find the person then they would do the paper work. I lost interest. (Employer B)

Employer B goes on to describe another unsatisfactory experience:

... [m]y son was looking for an apprenticeship and we went to the new apprenticeship place to see how they could assist him, they said they do the administration and do not assist people find work, another waste of time. (Employer B)

Employers feel that there is no support forthcoming, even when a trainee or apprentice has been employed and ready to begin training. Employer A explains that:

There needs to be a list of guidelines provided with the forms if the agency is not committed to assisting companies. It could be just one sheet stating the order of how and when the forms should be completed. The agency should be made accountable to assist businesses in setting up the traineeship initially then guiding the business through the procedures if they are not familiar with the system. (Employer A)

When asked what the level of support or contact with relevant agencies was, the employers were hard pressed to make positive comments. As Employer D states:

... The only interaction we have with the training institutions is that they generally report to us if the person is absent, if they pass their exams each year, when they are qualified and then we get in touch with the apprenticeship board to make sure everything is okay, and that is basically about it. (Employer D)

Employer D also points to the complex process involved in simply managing problems which might be encountered during the period of the apprenticeship. Employer D pointed to two issues relating to the co-ordination of the program, which as an employer, he found to be problematic:

I think there are two other issues. At least one other important issue that other people talk about and I certainly think it has changed our mind a little bit and that is the difficulty with transferring an apprentice once you have taken up that obligation to train this person for four years. You sometimes discover they are not the person you thought they were, or they are not capable of carrying out the job, or they may even lose interest in some cases, but the transferability is not there. You have to go through a lot of red tape, there is a lot of paperwork to fill out. You have to go through the apprenticeship centre, there are a lot of things to be done, and I think it is detrimental to both the employer and the young apprentice because what happens at the end of the day is, you have people working there that are unhappy doing the job and employers who are unhappy having that person there. So as not to get involved in all this red tape, they continue leaving them there and putting up with the situation, which is not satisfactory to anybody really. I have a few situations like that at the moment. (Employer D)

The following passage expresses the sense of frustration with current arrangements felt by some of our respondents:

What does the new apprenticeship group do at (name withheld)? These centres need to be better equipped to assist both the person looking for work and the companies looking at employing people. Not just a paper-moving centre with an attitude. They need to get out there and assist. I see a lot of

money injected into administration and not to the apprentices. Where is the assistance to kids trying to get work, would you stay in apprenticeship if your wages were so low you could hardly feed yourself, when you know of other people getting assistance all the time because they don't work, what's fair? (Employer B)

The issue of how well current arrangements involved in engaging and then supporting apprentices and trainees operate would seem to be a fundamental problem and one which can have a long-term negative impact on the success of the program. As the co-ordinator of a pilot VET- in-Schools program points out, effective co-ordination is an integral component of successful apprenticeships, particularly for part-time school students. While this pilot program was not a traditional apprenticeship program, it does have something to tell us about what does and does not enhance post-compulsory education programs. Educator A explains how important a presence on the ground coupled with effective co-ordination has proved to be:

I think our project ... worked very effectively because we had some co-ordination outside the schools to give schools support in implementing part-time apprenticeships. Schools were fairly reticent initially to take them up. They felt that it would be impinging on their time and it might be difficult to set them up and they might not be able to provide adequate support for students. So I think once they felt there was support, I think they took it up and ran with it and they were encouraging, and they worked positively. (Educator A)

The comments made by respondents have led to the conclusion that the new apprenticeship scheme would benefit from a more active form of co-ordination and a more responsive and client-based approach. The close relationship between co-ordinators involved in VET-in-Schools programs and the school and its part-time apprentices warrants closer examination for the model it can provide for other programs.

Cost

One of the respondents raised the issue of the cost of employing an apprentice or trainee and argued that this was a significant factor in dissuading his firm from taking on more apprentices. Employer D argues that:

... when you consider the fact that you are paying them at 18 and I could be corrected here, but I think the wages are between \$250–\$300, but they are always missing a minimum of one day a week, and I think it is one week every month, so at the end of the day, you are lucky if you get possibly, with four weeks annual leave ... you would be lucky if you got 30 weeks a year worth of work out of them, and that has to be supervised work anyway, so there is an extra cost involved. (Employer D)

Employer D went on to state that he believes that government subsidies are insufficient:

... I think they are quite inadequate actually, they should offer private enterprise a little more in that area, and I would be surprised if they didn't employ a hell of a lot more apprentices. (Employer D)

Skill formation

The next group of issues is concerned with skill formation and relate to the way in which training programs such as the new apprenticeship scheme and the introduction of endorsed training packages are being used to meet the skill requirements of firms. One of our respondents argued that the advent of endorsed training packages has had a beneficial effect

on the employment levels of apprentices and trainees in particular industry sectors.

According to Industry A:

... [f]rom an industry perspective, and I am talking about retail, retail historically did not embrace accredited training. The retail industry's training very much depended on the particular store you worked in, and whether that store owner embraced training and saw it as an integral part of the growth of their business. The training that was delivered was very much during the course of the working day; it was not at any stage, structured training, it was very much on the job. With the introduction of the training package, we have seen a major turn-around to that concept. Before when you were only getting training delivered from the Coles-Myer organisations that had the infrastructure and the dollars to be able to do it, we have gone from having those companies still embracing it in a formal way, but to your one and two man stores, your franchises, to the point we have approximately 4000 retail trainees in Victoria this year. What I am trying to demonstrate is that we have gone almost from a zero base of a handful of trainees, you would have been lucky to have had 200 trainees in say 1996–1997 to 4000 in year 2000. We have had a dramatic increase.

(Industry A)

The spokesperson from Industry A continues by contrasting the success of retail with the failure of hairdressing to modernise and adapt to changes in the economy. According to Industry A:

... if I take hairdressing as another industry perspective, which is one of our other coverage areas, that has always had a very, very strong history of training. So they are quite the opposite of the retail industry, they have traditionally had an apprenticeship. An apprenticeship in hairdressing is probably 50 years old. Very strong training culture, and in fact, led the way in training back in the 50s, 60s, 70s and even 80s, were viewed by other industries with envy because of the passion they had for accredited training and the amount of apprentices that went into the industry. They were seeing the absolute opposite in the year 2000. For the last 7 years hairdressers across Australia have been screaming that they cannot get an apprentice, they cannot get a qualified operator. We actually do a survey of the jobs that are available, apprenticeships and qualified operators, you know, right through, in the Age every Saturday, and we have done that every week for the last two years, and there are on average, 80 positions available each week for hairdressers at varying levels, from first year apprentice through to qualified part-time, casual. That has been consistent for the last two years. Now, what has happened in that industry is that we are particularly suffering now from the fact that 5 to 6 years ago through fairly hard economic times, hairdressers, qualified hairdressers, salon owners, employers stopped employing apprentices. So at the time, that was due to economics and saying that apprentices are too expensive, they are out of the salon, I have to give them a day off, and I have to give them a day off to go to school. So, they are out of the salon two days a week. When I add four weeks holiday pay, in those days, I added loading, I added eleven public holidays, so I have 32 days that they are at school, so there is six weeks, I have got 4 weeks when they are on holidays, so that is ten weeks, I have got eleven days public holidays, there is twelve weeks, and then I have sick leave if they take that, so there is thirteen weeks. Thirteen weeks out of the 52, they didn't think they were getting economies of scale. So they stopped employing.

(Industry A)

The growing skill shortage outlined above is a consequence of short-term planning in the mid-1990s which is now having an impact on the hairdressing industry and could even undermine the viability of firms. Another complication in the process of skill formation has been the 'segmentation' of training. By segmentation we are referring to the manner in which small firms are training apprentices or trainees to work within their organisation, which might have a narrow and highly specialised focus. This means that apprentices and trainees

are being trained to be able to operate as specialists who possess a narrow range of skills. Trainer A describes this in the following manner. In the past:

... if you took on motor mechanics, you could say I am going to have an apprenticeship as a motor mechanic which covers these sectors, so you have a general service station or a place like the local Ford dealer, who would employ someone as a motor mechanic, but then as you break that down, you have Mr Muffler, all these other component people. Like today, you don't take your car to the local Ford dealer you turn around and say, if it is a muffler, you take it to Mr Muffler, or if it is a transmission, you take it to a transmission place. Previously, you took it to a motor mechanic. Now, what we have done, we have looked at traineeships and we have broken those up into those sets of areas. Now if we look back on what the philosophy behind that was, I think if we research that, is the fact that, I can go and do a traineeship as a muffler repairer. So again, it was that stage-by-stage situation, where I could become a specialist. (Trainer A)

This has meant that skills which had previously been quite distinct from traditional apprenticeships, are now incorporated under the general term 'new apprenticeship,' regardless of how much skill or technical knowledge the position might entail.

Trainer A explains this in following manner:

Prior to traineeships, the employer might just put someone on as a muffler hand or a lube attendant. But now you have it broken down into traineeships, now we have gone in and said okay we have the traditional traineeships and apprenticeships, now they are calling the whole lot new apprenticeships. (Trainer A)

The segmentation and over-specialisation described by Trainer A can be interpreted as meaning that the traditional notion of a skilled tradesperson associated with the term 'apprentice' has been watered down. If a wide range of tasks is now incorporated within short-term highly focussed traineeships under the new apprenticeship scheme, then we could ask the question: What is the attraction of the traditional apprenticeship?

Training agenda at odds with industry goals

The apparent dilution of the concept and reality of what constitutes an apprenticeship or traineeship has opened up the potential for firms to access programs such as new apprenticeships to enable retraining and reskilling of the existing workforce. Employers may exercise this option, rather than take on new young workers who require the kinds of support mentioned earlier in this chapter by Employer D. As Industry B points out:

... it is important to understand the culture of manufacturing industries ... When you look at the profile of the industry over the last fifteen years, we have largely got industries that have been impacted by economic conditions that haven't been too favourable. The actual increase in productivity hasn't been great. Actual employment of people hasn't been great. And largely what we find is, larger companies through training, if anything, are reducing their workforce, and as a direct result of training, people are becoming more productive, do a better quality job, so we are looking at more reductions through attrition rather than bringing people on. (Industry B)

In this industry, training has been used as a means of improving productivity and in turn this has meant that employers have been able to reduce their workforce. As a consequence, the environment for young people looking for work or access to training is not very promising. As Industry B goes on to say:

When we say to our industries, how about taking on apprentices, young people, they say we are not employing, let alone young people. So we are sort of in that nexus at the moment, we can see there

is a kick in the market and when we look at apprenticeships for example, our industries in general, average 35 intakes per year over the last five years, which is very low. This year, we can see a real kick in the market, we haven't got the statistics through yet, but we know they are significantly higher, we know they are in the 100s. Also the government having introduced new apprenticeships for existing workers had a big impact because industries have been saying they are not employing people, but they are desperate for upskilling our existing workforce. So, we are in that situation where companies would look at employing an apprentice more as a 'good citizen' thing and a lot of company managers have said that. We have concerns about bringing an apprentice on board for the 'good citizen' thing, knowing we don't have a job for them at the end, so hence, we don't want to be put into that situation where we feel bad about that, it is easier if we don't employ new apprentices.

(Industry B)

In this situation, employers take on an apprentice to be a 'good citizen' when employing an apprentice of trainee should be a component of a long-term skill formation strategy aimed at ensuring an adequate skill base in their industry.

Short-term planning and an ageing workforce

A number of the respondents expressed the view that employers were not focussing on long-term issues such as the need to establish succession strategies for their skilled employees. As Industry C points out:

... There is a growing awareness amongst employers that they need to do something fairly rapidly in terms of trying to introduce young people into this industry or to make young people aware of this industry. Statistically, the workforce, a few years ago it was 45, it now appears to be more 50 or 50 plus. The bottom line is if they want operators and in that case, vehicle drivers, they are looking at a 3 to 5-year time frame to actually have those people come through and just satisfy the licensing regime. We are not talking about any other training regimes, simply saying the current licensing regimes that are in place. To get an articulated licence you need to hold a preceding license, in some cases categories, for at least twelve months to 2 years. So it is a staged effect. So in real terms to go through the licensing regime, you must look at three years.

(Industry C)

Industry B also made the point that in their industry there was a growing realisation that the question of an ageing workforce is an issue which will require serious consideration in the coming years in order to avert a crisis. When asked how soon firms in manufacturing might be taking on more young new apprentices, Industry B stated:

It is around the corner, we have largely an ageing workforce, and ageing workforce with companies that haven't really looked at succession planning. I think it is operative employment in Victoria, companies that employ operators, they are largely in the same boat, we are responding to economic circumstances, we are doing the best we can and what we then get caught up into, we are thinking of today, if we are lucky we are thinking of tomorrow but not next year. With an ageing workforce, in five years time, we are going to have a crisis ... there just won't be skilled people because they will have all moved on. What we are encouraging, and I think this year is a bit of a reflection with the extra numbers coming on board, and it is not just existing workers, it is new entrants—there is a larger number coming on board, is a recognition that we need to seriously consider our ageing workforce. But also I think our company attitude and thinking is changing as a result of experience. Our concrete sectors have been the first one to articulate it, by saying we have probably gone as far as we can with upskilling our existing workforce from the point of view of attitudes, culture and all sorts of things in the way now, but this still won't allow existing workers to progress to the skills we need. We can see now our salvation will be with young people, their experiences employment and unemploymentwise will provide a much greater flexibility to attune to working with our

company and having the flexibility to learn to understand where our company needs to go.
(Industry B)

Employer D also highlighted the importance of firms engaging young people as apprentices for the company's long-term economic health and viability. Employer D states that:

It is important, it is imperative that it continues, because at the end of the day, whether you are in our industry or in plastering or bricklaying industry, wherever you may be, it seems they are the skills that are slowly being forgotten, they are the skills that we will want desperately in the years to come, and if we don't bring these young people up to wanting to do these jobs and give them a bit of pride in wanting to do them, that could be taught at school level, I think we are all going to suffer in the long run, as we are suffering now.
(Employer D)

The choice made by some employers seeking to remedy their skill shortages by retraining existing staff is at odds with the rhetoric of the national training agenda and, it could be argued, sends out the wrong messages to young people looking towards some form of post-school pathway. While this might benefit some firms in giving them access to a pool of funds to use for their own form of professional development, in the long run, it might have the effect of blocking access to work for young people.

This leads us to the question of the age of the existing workforce and the need to make succession plans so that a skill gap does not emerge in the medium-to-long-term. The issues raised so far in this section need serious consideration and have a significant bearing on the question of how we might increase opportunities for young people to take up a new apprenticeship.

Schools

Most of the participants consulted in the research for this chapter had strong views on the role schools should play in preparing young people for work in general and, in particular, for apprenticeships and traineeships. The school-related themes which emerged during the interviews included the:

- ❖ importance of a successful school-to-work transition for young people
- ❖ importance of effective school counselling and careers information for the successful move from the classroom to the workplace
- ❖ significance of VET-in-Schools program

We will now deal with each of these themes in turn.

School-to-work transition

The successful transition from school to work for young people was a theme which was highlighted by a number of our respondents, in particular, the significance of partnerships between schools (or the specific training provider) and employers. As Industry A points out:

... I think that partnerships are important when you are in those formative years, those support mechanisms are absolutely vital, and if you are not getting it from one side of your partnership, hopefully you are getting it from the other. This could be the parents, the work or the employer, but there is that partnership, which I think is very important.
(Industry A)

The success of part-time apprenticeships for secondary school students co-ordinated by Educator A was partly the consequence of the establishment of an effective partnership between schools in the region. According to Educator A:

... [t]he project was successful in the sense that we developed partnerships in that region and got people actively involved and raised the profile of part-time apprenticeships in schools. Schools became more aware of the apprenticeships and the potential students could achieve through apprenticeships. (Educator A)

Linking schools more closely to employers through partnerships would enable students to feel less isolated in the workplace and would, in the case of part-time apprenticeships, give that vocational pathway greater exposure amongst potential participants.

Careers counselling and VET-in-Schools programs

The significant role that careers counselling can play in assisting young people to choose a vocational pathway was also highlighted by our respondents. While career forums were seen to be a useful mechanism for disseminating information to young people, they were not always successful. Even well-organised sessions do not guarantee the type of positive responses they are intended to generate. As Industry C recounts:

... [w]e were going to run some stuff with students at a TAFE recently. What they were doing was asking the students to nominate what sectors they wanted to talk to—we were one of them. We got no one. We got no students who actually put their hand up to say, I want to investigate further what career options there are open in transport and distribution. But part of that is the fact that there is an absence of information out there of any form, whether correct or incorrect. There is a lack of awareness from careers teachers, parents, all the rest of them, about what this industry is really about. That adds to the fact that when you ask someone if they have thought about a career in this industry, they look blankly at you and go, 'no'. That is what you are faced with. For in things like the west, it becomes fairly critical because it represents about 18% of the industry. (Industry C)

Convincing careers teachers, students and their parents that an entry-level, post-school VET course is a viable alternative to university or unemployment was a significant issue raised in the interviews. One of our respondents raised the matter of the apparent mismatch between what employers and ITBs are looking for and what schools see as their task of promoting. This mismatch is most apparent in the manner in which schools use Year 10 as the crucial point at which students select 'academic' VCE subjects or some form of VET-in-Schools program. As one of our respondents points out:

Our experience with schools lately has been that the target group of people who should be making decisions about where careers teaching is going are not attending the careers expos, they are not accessing the information. We were recently at Moonee Valley about a week ago, and that was a very large careers expo run by the Area Consultative Committee. It was to run for a couple of days, they linked it with the Jimmy Stynes motivational talks, and that brought kids in, careers teachers were all for it, the target group was Year 10, where it should have been perhaps Year 11/Year 12. We did a recent one out in Box Hill and we had exactly the same sort of response. We were talking amongst the other exhibitors, they were saying you have these Year 10 kids coming in to look, because they may believe that in Year 11 and Year 12 the kids are too busy to be able to be released to go out and make these decisions. They may believe the fact that while we have VET-in-Schools programs going, they should have made the decision as to where they want to go, so that you find that when we go out and talk at the careers expos, you are talking to Year 10. That becomes a real problem. Schools are pushing this ... I don't know, because they are getting more and more into the VET-in-Schools programs, are careers teachers focussing more on those activities? (Trainer A)

The notion that school students can make an informed decision at Year 10 about their post-school careers is problematic. Trying to cram as much career information as possible into Year 10 student so that he/she might be persuaded to undertake a VET-in-Schools program

also raises significant questions. For instance, are these courses a real introduction into a specific 'vocation' or do they promote a false and unrealistic impression of what that career might actually be like? Are the skills and learning that occur in these programs actually effective and lead into a more intensive apprenticeship scheme? Trainer A thinks that:

We are losing the situation where an outcome for a school is a person who is in the workforce rather than the traditional measure of possessing a good academic record and going to university. On the other hand if you have a school which really takes the 'bull by the horns' and shows that it has kids actually going into vocational education and training at an entry level, doing an apprenticeship, are they in actual fact promoting this pathway. (Trainer A)

The question about what is seen as a desirable outcome for students once they complete Year 12 is an important dilemma for students, parents and schools. It is evident that there is a growing tension between the needs of industry as represented by industry training boards and the advice students are receiving at school. On one hand, the representatives of ITBs and GTCs have an interest in getting as many students as possible into their respective new apprenticeship schemes. On the other hand, schools are judged both in the media and also by their local community, not by how many new apprentices they produced, or how many students found work after completing Year 12, they are judged by VCE results and ENTER scores.

A number of people interviewed also argued that the shift towards bringing employment and schooling closer together was not always in the best interest of young people:

People will say to you, most secondary school students will do a part-time job regardless, so why should they not get a qualification or something toward a qualification. I mean, part of me says I agree with that, but the other part of me says are we putting pressure on the under-achievers, on the people who need the school and parental support to be able to cope day to day with academia without putting the new apprenticeship scheme on to them as well. (Industry A)

It appears that VCE and a high ENTER score are the main goals of secondary schooling. Educator A pointed out that there is a dominant belief that students who choose a vocational path by taking part in a part-time apprenticeship or even a VET-in-Schools program might be harming their ENTER score. As Educator A puts it:

I think it is also the fact that they may be concerned that students would be disadvantaged by not completing their VCE—that the apprenticeship component of their VCE may not contribute to their ENTER score as much as their other VCE units would. I think that is one other reason. I think that perhaps they are concerned that it might be overtaxing for students, it might stretch them too much to be juggling three things—a workplace, a training program and school program. I think there are those welfare issues that they might have at heart also, they may think that in some cases, unless it is a well-structured program, there may not be benefits flowing through to the students. (Educator A)

Determining the benefits or otherwise of choosing a vocational path in the senior years of secondary schooling is beyond the scope of this report. What is clear, however, is that a number of issues need to be addressed concerning the relationship between employment, education and training.

Conclusion

The following conclusions can be drawn from the research team's analysis of the themes emerging from the interviews with participants from the employment, education and training sector:

- ❖ Structural and organisational issues relating to the co-ordination of the new apprenticeship scheme emerged as a significant issue in the interviews conducted. In particular, the manner in which information about the program is presented both to employers and to young people needs to be addressed. The co-ordination and management of the new apprenticeship scheme was also raised in the interviews as an area which needs to be revitalised if it is to become more attractive to employers.
- ❖ Issues relating to the process of skill formation also emerged as important during the interviews, in particular, the manner in which for some industry sectors, the national training agenda is at odds with industry goals. Employers are able to increase productivity and at the same time upskill their workforce without taking on workers or apprentices.
- ❖ The segmentation of work into specialised traineeships, traditionally the domain of an apprenticeship, was seen as detracting from the appeal of new apprenticeships both for employers and for young people.
- ❖ The representatives of the ITBs highlighted the consequences for the economy of an ageing workforce and short-term planning by some employers. In time, the neglect of skill formation could lead to a shortage of skilled workers. Employers will have to be convinced that increasing productivity as a consequence of upskilling their existing workforce and technological innovation can only be effective as short-term solutions. The ageing population will mean that succession planning needs to be addressed by firms if they are to maintain their viability.
- ❖ Employers and trainers pointed to the important role schools play in the transition from school to work and the significance in this process of careers counselling. The point at which students are exposed to vocational education was also raised by some participants. In particular, some of the ITB spokespeople were less than satisfied with the emphasis some schools were placing on VET-in-Schools programs as an introduction to a vocational education pathway.
- ❖ The dominance of the VCE and the goal of a high ENTER score as the only desirable outcome for schools was also questioned. The relationship between VET-in-Schools programs, part-time apprenticeships and the new apprenticeship scheme (in general) needs to be carefully examined in order to make the transition from school to work as seamless as possible. The current situation seems to be creating a mismatch between the goals and aspirations of young people and the way in which new apprenticeships are promoted to school students by ITBs and other agencies. There needs to be some overall plan or agreement to regulate and help direct young people into a number of pathways which can lead on to either work, further study or vocational education and training.

Areas for action

In order to increase the opportunities for apprentices and trainees in Melbourne's west the research team has identified the following areas for action by the various stakeholders:

Schools

- ❖ Schools need to be encouraged to present to their students, parents and the wider community, a comprehensive picture of the various post-compulsory choices without favouring any particular pathway.
- ❖ The modern economy and world of work demands a flexible and adaptive attitude. This entails the capacity to embrace and thrive within the context of lifelong learning and an information-rich work environment. Schools should encourage the development of such capacity which includes the acquisition of a set of skills which will empower young people and prepare them for the ongoing process of economic and structural change within the future workplace.
- ❖ Students should be adequately prepared for the rigours of lifelong learning while they are still at school. This preparation for lifelong learning should include an understanding of the wide range of options open to them, including academic programs, vocational education and training, paid employment, structured workplace learning and work experience. Movement within and between these pathways should be premised on the basis of flexible exit and entry.
- ❖ The concepts of lifelong learning and an adaptive attitude can be fostered by providing students with the opportunities to enter, exit and re-enter the education sectors and the workplace while participating in senior secondary schooling in order to establish or consolidate a post-school pathway.
- ❖ Students should be encouraged to consider a wide range of pathways with multiple entry, exit and re-entry points. Student destinations identifying the various exit and re-entry points need to be adequately documented and researched.
- ❖ Pathways' planning is an organic process, which empowers the individual by providing them with information and skills/knowledge to enable them to maximise their current interests and experience to plan for their short, medium and long-term education and vocational futures. Pathways' planning draws on the advice and support of a wide range of individuals, groups and organisations. For example, family/guardians, teachers, employers, government and the wider community.
- ❖ A pathways planning model should be developed and piloted. This would incorporate the development of a pathways portfolio in Years 9–10, which would be consolidated over the subsequent years.
- ❖ The pathways portfolio would be a document used by students to work through the various stages in the creation and implementation of their pathway. It would contain a statement of student goals, aspirations and values and would also include a series of work tasks related to the specific worksite or pathway they are currently researching or visiting. The pathways portfolio would provide students with the opportunity to collect information, keep a journal and generally document their evolving skills and knowledge base about careers and the world of work.

The infrastructure required to successfully implement this innovation should incorporate a case-management approach. The case-management model should be commenced in the middle years of schooling and continue for a period of time to enable

the collection of useful information. Schools provide the best setting for this process of flexible entry, exit and re-entry since they provide a nurturing and supportive environment suitable to young people.

This process is a new role for schools and as a consequence, adequate resources need to be made available. It is also important that the personnel undertaking this role possess specialised skills and knowledge and are able to operate within the context of a case-management approach.

- ❖ The relevant senior secondary authorities need to recognise the validity of structured work placement and part-time work as contributing to desirable educational outcomes. This is to be done on the basis that structured work placement or a program of work orientation should be integral to an endorsed/accredited qualification recognised by the senior secondary authority.
- ❖ Experience in the workplace is recognised as a valuable learning experience and the initial phase of the individual's pathways plan. However, secondary students or employers do not generally regard the current work experience programs offered by secondary schools favourably.
- ❖ The current work experience program needs to be partially reconstructed and could be renamed 'orientation to the world of work'. Students would be encouraged to develop generic skills valued by the workplace, for example, communication, occupational health and safety and industrial relations. In combination with this, would be the development of job-seeking skills, for example, interviewing skills, resume development and a positive orientation to the idea of paid work.
- ❖ A work orientation program needs to be an integral component of the students' regular program within the recognised and assessed school curriculum in the middle years. Work orientation has the potential to facilitate work readiness and encourages an ongoing engagement and commitment to work. In order to strengthen this program, work experience should occur for an extended period and not for a short two-week, one-off occurrence. Instead, it could occur one day a week over a year, in more than one site, or even in more than one industry. To ensure the success of this program, students need to be adequately prepared for the requirements of the modern workplace, for example, dress, language, manners and workplace culture. Students also need to be adequately supported when they are in the workplace.
- ❖ The VET-in-Schools program is an integral addition to the school curriculum; however, it needs to be taught by educators who demonstrate up-to-date skills and knowledge which is directly related to the content they are being asked to teach. VET-in-Schools teachers need to have recognised industry training to maintain credibility with both students and employers.

Government

- ❖ A more effective media and information campaign needs to be developed which targets employers and informs them of the support available through the new apprenticeship scheme. Non-traditional sites of employment for apprentices, such as information technology and the service sector should be encouraged to examine the benefits of the new apprenticeship scheme.
- ❖ The new apprenticeship centres and other agencies need to expand the level and extent of support provided to employers. Employers need assistance in managing the reporting and administrative demands imposed by the scheme. Further research needs to be undertaken to examine the extent to which employers are using the new apprenticeship scheme to reskill their existing workforce and the implications this has for youth unemployment levels and the process of long-term skill formation.
- ❖ The WorkCover advertisements should be reviewed as they are negatively impacting on student perceptions of apprenticeships and traineeships. Government, both at federal and State levels, should invest in a campaign to promote a positive image of

apprenticeships and traineeships. The campaign needs to address the problem of stereotyping new apprentices.

- ❖ The State government should implement the findings of the Kirby review on post-compulsory education and training in Victoria (2000), in particular, the following recommendations from the Kirby Report would assist in the creation of greater opportunities for young people to engage in new apprenticeships:
 - **Recommendation 11:** *As a first phase, between 10–15 local planning networks be supported in order to:*
 - *develop collaborative approaches towards planning and improved delivery of post compulsory education and training programs and services*
 - *investigate and trial key elements of regional co-ordination and delivery of programs*

Each planning network in the first phase should be provided with sufficient funding over a three-year period to support the collaboration and planning processes, and to enhance program and service range and quality where this is an outcome of the collaborative-planning process. (Kirby 2000, p.19)
 - **Recommendation 14:** *DEET supports/facilitates the integration and improvement of careers information and guidance services relating to education, employment and training for young people and adults.* (Kirby 2000, p.20)
 - **Recommendation 15:** *Within the local planning networks, providers of education and training should be given the opportunity to commit to a youth charter that is designed to maximise regional co-operation in the provision of information and guidance.* (Kirby 2000, p.20)

Furthermore, recommendations made by Kirby to create a Victorian Qualifications Authority (VQA) from Recommendation 29 and the Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission (VLESC) from Recommendation 29 would also assist in creating a more seamless pathway from school through to work.

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Appendix 1: Literature review

Changes in the structure of the labour market and its impact on traineeships and apprenticeships

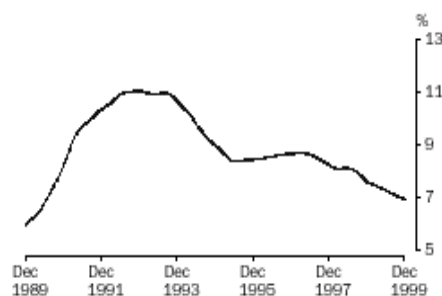
Economic context

The Australian economy has undergone a process of structural reforms as it has attempted to make itself globally competitive and less dependent on a narrow range of primary industries. Jamrozik [1998]) has summarised these changes in following manner.

... [f]rom 1965 to 1995, the structure of the labour market has changed dramatically. Industries, which until the 1960s provided the bulk of employment, such as manufacturing industries, began to reduce their labour force, either through decline in activities or through changes in the organisation of production and capital intensification. At the same time, other industries (those already existing and new ones), began to expand at a fast rate. However, because of the nature of their activities and occupational structure characterised by increasing professionalisation, these industries absorbed only a fraction of persons who had lost jobs in the declining industries...[T]he total employment over this period increased by 70.4 per cent, and the fastest growing three sectors have been finance, property and business services; public administration; and community services, which include health, education and welfare services. Employment in these three sectors increased by 221.6 per cent, a rate of increase more than three times higher than the rate of increase in total employment. (Jamrozik 1998, pp.75–76)

We will return to the issue of the transformation of the Australian labour market and its implications for vocational education and training later in this report. At this point we will focus on the level of economic growth which has occurred over the past decade. During this time the Australian economy has managed to maintain a pattern of sustained expansion for more than nine years, and according to recent Reserve Bank data, the economy is on target to continue the 1999 growth, which exceeded 4% (RBA 2000, p.1). The Australian economy was one of the least affected by the global downturn resulting from the Asian economic crisis and the subsequent predictions of a 'knock on' effect. As table 23 highlights, unemployment at the national level has been steadily declining since December 1993.

Table 23: Current unemployment rate, Australia



Source: ABS 1999, *Preliminary labour force Australia, December 1999*, Cat. No. 6202.0, AGPS, Canberra.

In a speech delivered in February 2000, G R Stevens, Assistant Governor of the Reserve Bank argued that while growth has been occurring at a macro level there are still, '... difficult problems in some regions (as indeed there are in parts of the major cities)' (RBA 2000, p.1). Despite this concession by the Reserve Bank the orthodox view is that:

... growth in the economy overall has been widely enough spread that most parts of the country have been benefiting in recent years. The benefits of growth have not been confined to Sydney, to and Melbourne, or to capital cities at the expense of regional areas. (RBA 2000, p.1)

In contrast to the views expressed by representatives of the Reserve Bank, research conducted by Hunter (1996), National Economics (1999), Maglen and Shah (1999), and Gregory (1999) points to the shift in the nature of employment growth over the past decade. According to these authors, employment growth has been uneven and to an extent narrowly focussed on particular regions within States and specific neighbourhoods within cities. One of the consequences of the unevenness of employment growth in Australia has meant that:

... [p]ersistently high youth unemployment has become one of the dominant features of the labour market over the last two decades in Australia and other OECD countries. At the same time there has been a trend away from low skilled employment in advanced economies ... As this is the main destination for those entering the labour market for the first time ... the prospects for youth are somewhat diminished. (Kelly & Lewis 1999, p.5)

The trend away from the forms of low-skill employment which had historically acted as an entry point into the labour market for young people has been assisted by a number of factors both at the macro and micro level, and under the stress of the demands of economic globalisation. Drawing on the work from the early 1990s of writers such as Reich (1992)⁷ and Castells (1993), Maglen and Shah (1999) argue that:

... in broad terms, the impact on employment in Australia of globalisation of the world economy, and of Australia's increased exposure to it, and of the attendant rapid technological change and organisational restructuring, has been more negative than positive. Over the decade to 1995/96 overall employment growth was not particularly strong, particularly on a full-time basis. There was, of course, a significant recession during this period, but taking the period as a whole, employment growth was still slow by past experience. Within this slowly growing total however, all of the stagnation and decline in employment was in the occupational categories most vulnerable to globalisation, technological change and restructuring. (Maglen & Shah 1999, p.43)

In the context of this research project the implications of this development for apprenticeships and traineeships is quite profound. The view expressed by Maglen and Shah (1999, p.43) that there is a, '... trend away from traditional core white and blue-collar occupations towards those that either require high level conceptual symbolic analytical skills, or that require very little in the way of skills and training' (Maglen & Shah 1999, p.43) has serious implications for both education and training. We will return to this point later in the literature review.

⁷ Reich in his 1992 work, *The wealth of nations*, describes the shift in the occupational structure of advanced capitalist economies towards the growth in what he calls 'symbolic analytic services':
... [I]ncluded in this category are the problem-solving, identifying, and brokering of many people who call themselves research scientists, design engineers, software engineers, civil engineers, biotechnology engineers, sound engineers, public relations executives, investment bankers, lawyers, real estate developers, and even a few creative accountants. Also included is much of the work done by management consultants, financial consultants, tax consultants, energy consultants, agricultural consultants, armaments consultants, architectural consultants, management information specialists, organisation development specialists, strategic planners, corporate headhunters, and systems analysts. Also: advertising executives and marketing strategists, art directors, architects, cinematographers, film editors, production designers, publishers, writers and editors, journalists, musicians, television and film producers, and even university professors (Reich 1992, p.177).

The consequences for apprenticeships

The report by Marshman & Associates (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49), *The employment of apprentices: The barriers*, summarises the consequences for apprenticeships of the process of industry restructuring. The authors argue that, '... [i]ndustry restructuring, increased exposure to competition, and decisions to outsource a wide range of functions have impacted on the capacity of individual firms to employ tradespeople and apprentices' (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.12). This persistent instability has undermined the role and availability of long-term contracts. Marshman & Associates argue that:

... this has introduced uncertainty about the future which makes employers reluctant to enter into the 3–5 year contract involved in the employment of apprentices. Apart from not having the capacity to carry the additional cost they do not want to have to put them off if contracts do not eventuate.
(Marshman & Associates 1996, p.12)

The authors go on to cite comments from the National Electrical Contractors' Association (Victoria) that, '... 10 years ago contract cycles and workloads were predictable (including downturns), and it was possible to be confident when employing apprentices. With restructuring and outsourcing contract cycles are much shorter and can involve 2 or 3 cycles in a year' (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.12). The unpredictable nature of contract cycles has had the effect of facilitating the '... outsourcing or transfer of the apprentice training effort, and this accounts for much of the growth of training schemes in recent years. Group Training is the only mechanism available that enables individual employers to train apprentices regardless of future workloads and contract cycles' (Marshman & Associates 1996, pp.12–13).

The uncertain nature of the restructured Australian economy and the emphasis on competition within a global economy has had a number of consequences for domestic firms, one of which has been described as:

... the propensity of medium and larger firms to only train for known and predictable requirements and to rely on labour hire companies to meet seasonal and unexpected surges in demand.
(Marshman & Associates 1996, p.13)

Related work by Marshman (Marshman & Associates, 1998) for the Engineering Skills Training Board of Victoria reinforces the bleak picture painted in the 1996 report. Marshman argues that when examining the manufacturing and engineering-related trades in Victoria it is apparent that there has been a measurable reduction in apprenticeship commencements (Marshman & Associates 1998, p.4). Marshman goes on to state that:

Apprenticeships are still universally regarded as the launching pad for a career in manufacturing, and employers believe that they provide the best grounding for the development of advanced skills. The apprenticeship system for the manufacturing industry in Victoria is on the brink of a crisis which if allowed to continue will lead to: major skill shortages; calls for increased immigration; loss of competitiveness; a collapse of the training infrastructure; and ultimately compromise the ability to make things.

Research completed by Schofield (1999) for the Queensland Department of Education Training and Industrial Relations has reached a similar conclusion on the effectiveness and quality of Queensland traineeships. According to Schofield:

... For many thousands of trainees and their employers, traineeships are a positive experience, delivering on their promise of enhanced skills and improved employment prospects. Many professional and ethical providers are delivering quality training and issuing nationally recognised

qualifications in accordance with the agreed rules of the National Training Framework. These outcomes are particularly impressive because they have been achieved in spite of the system rather than because of it. Notwithstanding some strengths and some quality characteristics, the investigation has concluded that, on the whole, Queensland's traineeship system is only partly effective, is not fit for its purpose, is inefficient and its accountability framework is not as strong as it needs to be. In short, it cannot reasonably be described as a quality system. (Schofield 1999, p.ii)

This decline in relative quality of the training system in Queensland might be in part due to the rapid uptake in apprenticeships following the commencement of the Commonwealth Government sponsored New Apprenticeship scheme.⁸

The findings of a report, *The impact of the growth of labour hire companies on the apprenticeship system* by KPMG Management Consulting (1998, p.50) also paint a negative picture of the state of the apprenticeship system.

According to the KPMG report, the decline in the labour market for traditional trades has had a detrimental effect on the number of apprenticeships available and points to a number of wider phenomena. These include:

- ❖ *declining numbers of skilled tradespersons as a proportion of the labour force (also affecting the capacity for firms to provide appropriate supervision arrangements for apprentices)*
- ❖ *outsourcing of many functions previously undertaken by skilled tradespeople*
- ❖ *changing mix of skills in the workforce, including upskilling of production workers*
- ❖ *apparent decline in the number of suitable recruits presenting for apprenticeships*
- ❖ *corporatisation, privatisation and downsizing of the public sector which has traditionally been a significant employer of apprentices* (KPMG Management Consulting 1998, p.50)

The trends identified by KPMG will be examined in a later phase of this study when employers and industry bodies are interviewed in an effort to reveal factors which might inhibit the growth of traineeships and apprenticeships.

Locational issues

At this point it is necessary to briefly canvass the significance of locational issues for apprenticeships and traineeships. A number of authors have pointed to the relationship between geographic location and educational attainment, income levels, employment and unemployment. The work of Gregory and Hunter (1995), and Hunter (1996) on the growth of 'economic ghettos' is important in this regard. This is due to long-term and inter-generational poverty and unemployment in Australia and is an important starting point. According to Hunter (1996):

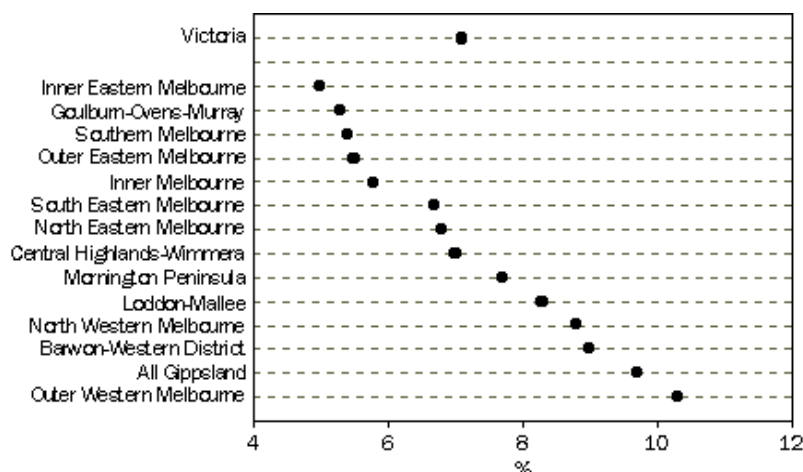
... Spatial inequality of income and employment is increasing in Australian cities. Gregory and Hunter (1995) demonstrate this with Census data between 1976 and 1991. Raskall (1995), using income tax data, shows that similar changes are evident. (Hunter 1996, p.3)

By any measure, the western region of Melbourne is one of those sectors of the Australian nation which has not fared well in the recovery of the 1990s. Table 24 highlights the unevenness of the recovery in Victoria. In August 1999, the regions inside the Melbourne major statistical region with the highest unemployment rates (original series) were Outer

⁸ A recent update on the condition of apprenticeships and traineeships in Queensland by Smith (2000) points to a rise in the number of apprenticeship and traineeships commencements in that State.

Western Melbourne⁹ (10.3%) and North Western Melbourne (8.8%). The regions outside the Melbourne major statistical region with the highest unemployment rates were All Gippsland (9.7%) and Barwon–Western District (9.0%). The lowest unemployment rate recorded in any region in August 1999 was 5.0% in Inner Eastern Melbourne (ABS 1999).

Table 24: Unemployment rates: original series, labour force regions, Victoria, August 1999



Source: ABS 1999, *Labour force, Victoria, August 1999*, Cat. No. 6202.0, AGPS, Canberra.

A report by National Economics utilises the following terms to analyse and describe this trend. The authors of the report argue that the West of Melbourne can be described as a 'production zone'. Production zones include heavy industrial cities and manufacturing regions. The National Economics report describes production zones (or regions) in the following terms:

... production regions developed around a manufacturing base. These regions are characterised by a large manufacturing sector, an industrial workforce, many people from non-English speaking backgrounds, a low skills base and high rates of unemployment. The industrial workforce is ageing and there are relatively few opportunities for young people. Long term structural crisis has resulted in social stress and demoralisation, particularly for young people and redundant workers.

(National Economics 1999, p.8)

The authors of the report go on to explain that the characteristics of the production zone have far-reaching consequences for its inhabitants and their employment prospects. They argue that the nature of production zones outlined above impacts on the potential for these areas to regenerate or participate in the overall climate of economic recovery. Recent work for NCVER by Dumbrell, Finnegan and de Montfort (2001) tends to support the argument put forward by Gregory and Hunter (1995) Hunter (1996) Kelly and Lewis (1999) that there is a correlation between geographic location and the following factors:

- ❖ availability of employment opportunities
- ❖ low income levels
- ❖ and low educational outcomes

⁹ ABS classifies Outer Western Melbourne statistical region as including Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton, Moonee Valley and Wyndham.

Gender issues

The gender imbalance in the breakdown of the numbers of young people engaged in either apprenticeships or traineeships is a significant factor. In August 1999, 72.1% of the total number of people in training were males, while the remainder 15.97% were female (NCVER 1999b). This pattern of unequal participation has been a significant feature of apprenticeships and traineeships for some time.

The research team has attempted to take account of gender difference by including six single sex focus groups in our student data set. We have not specifically focussed on gender issues, or class, or ethnicity, even though we are aware of the pivotal part they can play in many social and economic processes. Those issues warrant a study of their own.

We have focussed on identifying blockages to increased participation for all students and how increased participation can be achieved across the board. It is our view that many of the comments made in the main body of the report concerning school culture and increased support mechanisms for students apply equally to all students regardless of race, gender or socio-economic status.

Young people and the labour market

The labour market for young people in Australia has, over the past twenty years, undergone a significant restructuring. For example, the number of full-time positions has diminished to be replaced by growth in part-time and casual work (Wooden 1998). During the 1970s:

... most young people would have entered the work force on a full-time basis directly from school, often without completing secondary school and without any other intervening work experience. In effect, young people made a decision between education and work. Today the transition to full-time working is much more gradual and drawn out. Most young people will not find full-time employment until they are well into their 20s, will have a post-school qualification, and will have been exposed to the work force through part-time employment while studying.

(Wooden 1998, p.8)

According to Wooden (1998) this trend can be seen in the labour force statistics which indicate that, 'the minimum age at which more than 50 per cent of young people are in full-time employment and not in full-time education has risen from 18 years in 1981 to 22 years today' (Wooden 1998, p.8)

Even the reliance on casual and part-time work has become problematic for this segment of the labour force. The work done by Wooden (1998) indicates that as 'teenagers' mature into 'young adults', the level of part-time work as a percentage of total employment declines from 62.3% to 24%. In the case of casual employment, the level as a percentage of total employment declines from 62.4% to 28.4% (Wooden 1998, p.4).

It is not possible within the constraints of this report to offer a new critique of the work on youth labour markets completed by authors such as Jamrozik (1998), Wooden (1998), Lewis and Mclean (1998), Lewis and Mclean (1999), Kelly and Lewis (1999), VandenHeuval and Wooden (1999). Instead it is sufficient for us to acknowledge the complexity of the youth labour market and to focus on the specific characteristics of the youth labour market in the western region of Melbourne.

The decline in employment opportunities for young people has led to increased pressure on schools through high retention rates to provide a curriculum which meets the needs of a

cohort of students who might otherwise have left school early to take up work. As Wooden points out: '... education and work are no longer alternatives, but complement each other as young people make the necessary adjustments in the preparation for a future in the work force' (Wooden 1998, p.8). The preparation for work that Wooden (1998) talks about, while still a factor in the west of Melbourne should be placed within the context of the realities of education, unemployment and work in the western suburbs of Melbourne.

A recent study by Dumbrell, Finnegan and de Montfort (2001) for NCVER has provided some startling evidence on the relationship between geographic location and employment opportunities. According to Dumbrell and his colleagues: '... [f]or males in Western Melbourne unemployment rates averaged over 17% over 1998/99. Melbourne, like Sydney, reflects a pattern of uneven employment distribution, with almost 55% of its total employment located in the three inner regions of Inner Melbourne, Inner Eastern Melbourne and Southern Melbourne. By contrast these regions account for just 36% of the 15–24 population' (Dumbrell, Finnegan & de Montfort 2001, p.16). They go on to argue that:

... young people in outlying regions, both to the west and the south-east, have fewer local employment opportunities and higher unemployment rates. The Outer Western Melbourne Region appears to be the only labour market region in any Australian metropolitan area where the local 15–24 population actually exceeds the total number of local jobs.

(Dumbrell, Finnegan & de Montfort 2001, p.16)

Dumbrell and colleagues support this assertion in table 25 which contains data which suggest that the ratio of 15–24-year-olds to jobs is 1:0.3. The same data source illustrates the reality that there are only 26 000 total jobs in the region which compares with 222 753 in the Inner East and 428 793 in Inner Melbourne (Dumbrell, Finnegan & de Montfort 2001, p.51).¹⁰

Table 25: Labour market regions, metropolitan area, Melbourne

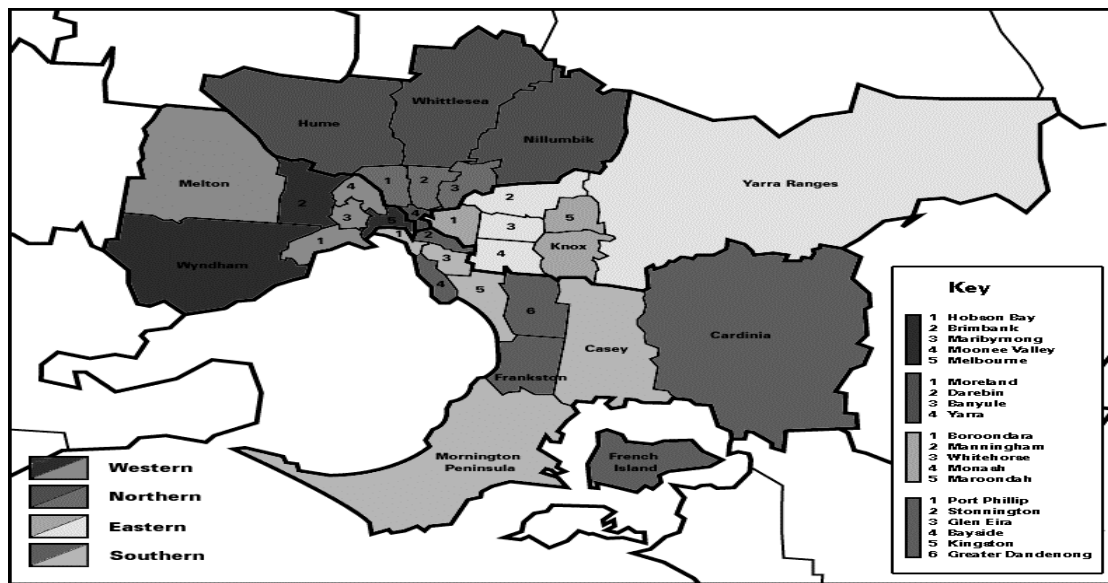
Region	Population aged 15–24 (May 1999)	Total jobs in area	Ratio 15–24 population: jobs	Unemployed 15–24 (Yr av. 1998–99)	15–24 unemployed rate (May 1999)
Outer West	83 900	26 327	1:0.3	8 950	14.0%
North West	38 300	94 238	1:2.5	3 700	13.2%
Inner Melbourne	46 500	428 793	1:9.2	2 825	9.6%
North East	57 300	122 167	1:2.1	6 300	12.8%
Inner East	88 300	222 753	1:2.5	5 950	10.6%
South Melbourne	44 900	148 280	1:3.3	4 200	14.1%
Outer East	51 500	119 726	1:2.3	5 600	13.7%
South East	56 900	106 040	1:1.9	5 125	13.8%
Mornington Peninsula	27 400	56 057	1:2.0	3 350	18.9%

Source: Dumbrell, Finnegan and de Montfort (2001)

¹⁰ It is important to note that, of the percentage of unemployed 15–24-year-olds cited in the table for the Outer West, 14% is lower than the figures for either South Melbourne 14.1% or the Mornington Peninsula 18.9%. It should also be noted that what Dumbrell, Finnegan and de Montfort (2001) are illustrating is that the underlying ratio of young people to the number of jobs is worse for the Outer West of Melbourne than for either other parts of the metropolitan region (even though they are also appalling) or elsewhere in the nation. Both the Outer West and Southern Melbourne are areas in need of special consideration by the Commonwealth and State authorities.

Figure 5 illustrates the geographical location of the western region of Melbourne and the local government areas under examination in this report. ABS data indicate that the western region of Melbourne has a higher proportion of young people aged between 5 and 17 years (13.98%) than does the overall Melbourne statistical division (12.93%) (Outer Urban Research Centre 1999). The large number of young people who reside in the region coupled with entrenched high levels of unemployment means that education and training is perhaps one of the few mechanisms by which they can break the cycle of disadvantage.

Figure 5: Department of Education Melbourne metropolitan regions



Source: Outer Urban Research Centre 1999

Post-compulsory education and training in the western region of Melbourne

The available data for the period from 1986 to 1996 indicate that while some forms of education in the western region notably, '... bachelor's degrees, postgraduate diploma, and higher degrees almost doubled. Skilled vocational qualifications dipped, while those with basic vocational qualifications effectively halved' (Outer Urban Research Centre 1999).

Table 26 illustrates the emerging trend in the decline in the number of people holding skilled vocational (a decline of 2.08%) and basic vocational qualifications (a decline of 3.48%) within the region. During the same period the number of people with bachelor degrees increased by 2.4% (Outer Urban Research Centre 1999). The improvement in the number of people holding bachelor degrees and the decline in the number of people holding various forms of vocational qualifications are perhaps manifestations of the changes in the structure of the Australian economy and the labour market reported earlier in this review. In particular, growth in employment has occurred at either end of skill spectrum; low-skilled process-oriented jobs at one end, and high-skilled symbolic analytical jobs at the other (Maglen & Shah 1999).

The low numbers of people holding basic vocational qualifications could be viewed as being an under-utilised pathway into an apprenticeship or traineeship. The factors contributing to young people's hesitancy to engage in basic vocational training as opposed to tertiary education will be examined in more detail in the discussion and analysis of the focus groups. The data referred to earlier for the western suburbs tend to support the view that the reason

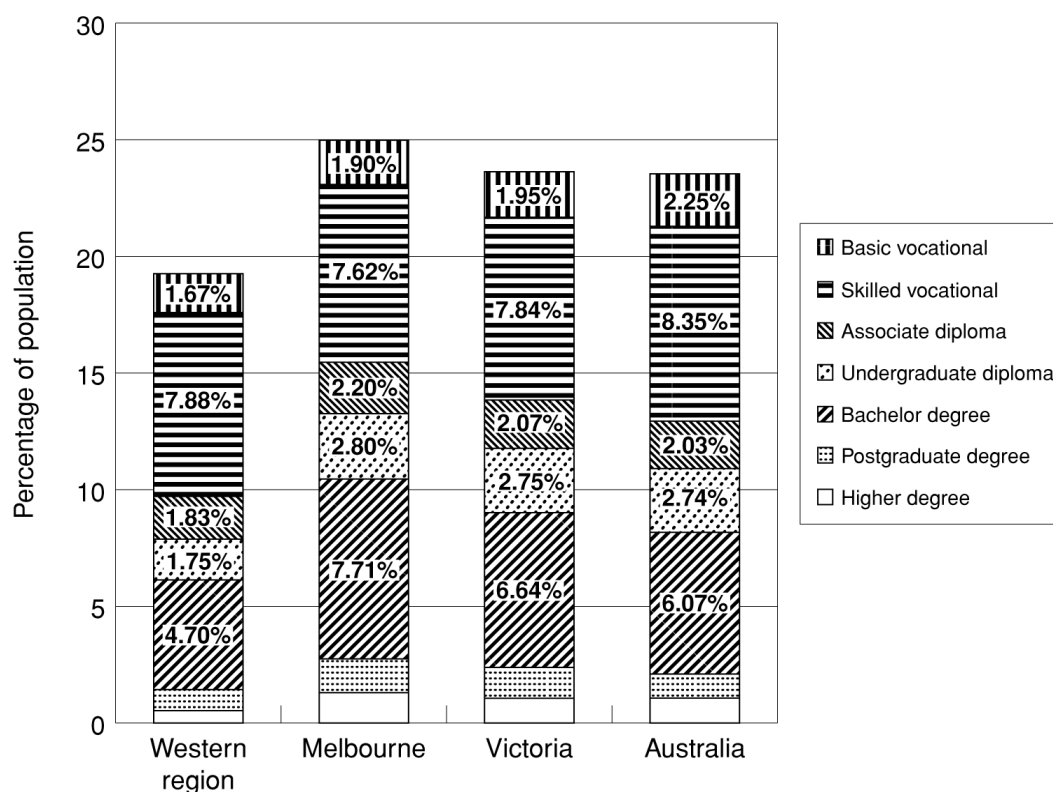
why employers are unwilling to take on young people into apprenticeships and traineeships is because they are able to draw on a pool of unemployed/underemployed older tradespeople who they can call on through labour-hire companies. Research by KPMG on the growth in the use of labour-hire companies points to the negative impact this trend is having on long-term skill formation. The data collected by the Outer Urban Research Centre (1999) supports the view that, while increases in tertiary level participation rates for young people in the west are a positive, they in no way compensate for the decline in the process of skill formation.

Table 26: Western region qualifications 1986–96

	1986	1991	1996	Change 1986–96
	%	%	%	%
Bachelor degree	2.30	3.97	4.70	2.40
Basic vocational qualification	5.14	2.57	1.67	-3.48
Higher degree	0.22	0.43	0.53	0.30
Postgraduate diploma	0.41	0.78	0.90	0.49
Skilled vocational qualification	9.96	10.24	7.88	-2.08
Associate diploma		0.98	1.83	0.86
Undergraduate diploma		2.44	1.75	-0.69
Inadequately described	4.56	0.69	0.46	-4.10
Not stated	10.78	11.42	8.43	-2.34
Total¹¹	18.04	21.40	19.26	1.22

Source: Outer Urban Research Centre 1999

Figure 6: Levels of qualification 1996



Source: Outer Urban Research Centre 1999

¹¹ Excludes the 'Inadequately described' and 'Not stated' categories.

Apparent retention rates

Table 27 contains data on the apparent retention rates for government schools for most of the 1990s. On examining the data it appears that while retention rates have declined from their peak in the mid-1990s of 87.6 to 79.2 in 1997, the western metropolitan region has performed better than the rate for the northern region (3.4%) and the rate for all government schools (2.9%). The difference between the western metropolitan region and all other Melbourne metropolitan regions is 2.2%. The fact that retention rates for senior secondary school students in the west of Melbourne have not only grown but have also been sustained is quite a significant development. When the increase in levels of people holding tertiary qualifications is also taken into account, it is argued that we are seeing a shift in the aspirations of a significant portion of the young people in the west away from vocationally oriented pathways towards the tertiary route. The growth in high-skill, high-pay jobs associated with symbolic analysis might be regarded as a far more lucrative post-school destination than an apprenticeship. The qualitative segment of our project will present an opportunity to test what can only be a crude hypothesis at this stage.

Table 27: Apparent retention rates for government schools by region July 1991–97 (%)

Region	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Western metro	76.7	82.6	87.1	87.6	82.0	79.5	79.2
Northern metro	76.4	87.6	86.7	82.7	79.1	76.5	75.8
All metropolitan regions	79.5	88.9	91.2	87.4	82.7	81.7	81.4
All gov't schools	75.5	84.6	85.9	81.3	77.3	76.7	76.3
Difference between Western metro and all metro regions	2.8	6.3	4.1	-0.2	0.7	2.2	2.2

Source: Outer Urban Research Centre 1999

Vocational education and training: Background

Vocational education and training has been a significant feature of Australian life since the late nineteenth century. Educational establishments such as working men's colleges, mechanics institutes and the various schools of mines helped to build the skill levels of Australia's labour force. One of the most significant characteristics of these early institutions was their focus on the preparation of young men for employment in a narrow and often highly technical set of industries. This pattern remained dominant until well into the twentieth century when the realities of social and economic change forced all forms of institutions, both educational, and non-educational to engage in a process of restructuring.

Traineeships and apprenticeships

Apprenticeships have been utilised as a mechanism for preparing young people to enter a wide range of trades, such as carpentry, cabinet-making, plumbing, vehicle maintenance and various engineering occupations for decades (Ray 2001, p.36). The recent history of this job pathway has been subject to a process of almost continuous upheaval and change. This pattern of change had its roots in the industry restructuring promoted by the Hawke–Keating Governments over the period 1983–96, in particular, through its accord with the trade union movement and the tripartite agreement between the then Federal Labor Government, the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Business Council of Australia and its constituents (Keating 1998).

From the mid-to-late 1980s many reports and inquiries on various aspects of industry and employment, sponsored by government and industry, indicated the need for change and improvement in VET in Australia. The reports included:

- ❖ the Kirby Report (1985) on labour market programs
- ❖ the ACTU/Trade Development Commission report, *Australia reconstructed*
- ❖ the Deveson Report, *Training costs of award restructuring* (1990)

One response of the then government was the creation of a training levy modelled on the French *taxe d'emploi*. The Australian levy was applied to firms with more than twenty employees if they did not devote a minimum amount of their budget to training (Keating 1998).

In 1992, the Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training (MOVEET) established a set of six national goals for the expansion of VET. These six MOVEET goals became the basis for what is now known as the National Training Reform Agenda.

Jack Keating (1998) describes these goals in the following manner. The Ministers would endeavour to bring about:

- ❖ the establishment of a more open training market with public (TAFE) and private (non-TAFE) providers of training
- ❖ the implementation of competency-based training across the full range of industry areas (an unofficial target of 90 per cent of industries was established)
- ❖ the establishment of a national system of accreditation of training courses and recognition of training qualifications and partial qualifications
- ❖ the reform of entry-level training (apprenticeships and traineeships)
- ❖ the expansion of VET in Australia
- ❖ improvements in access and equity in training

In order to implement the new training agenda and to include the State governments with whom constitutional responsibility for education resides, a new institution was created. By 1992 these changes resulted in the establishment of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA). The core task of ANTA was the co-ordination and overall responsibility for the promulgation of VET policy in Australia. ANTA would be given the support of the various State and Territory governments in return for extra funds from the Commonwealth. Despite the injection of extra funds, the State and Territories provide the bulk of funding for VET and as a consequence, they maintain control of the sector. Along with the creation of ANTA, a representative body called the Ministerial Council (MINCO) was established to provide input into Commonwealth decision-making and to ensure the continued national and State commitment to the national training system through ANTA.

According to Keating (1998) most significant features of the national vocational education and training system are the creation of:

- ❖ the national training authority (ANTA), and a ministerial council (MINCO)
- ❖ national industry competency standards and a national qualifications framework, built into national training packages
- ❖ a nationally consistent approach towards the registration of training organisations
- ❖ the mutual recognition of training qualifications and registered training organisations across States and Territories
- ❖ a national approach towards entry-level training
- ❖ a commitment towards an open training market and to the principle of user choice in training programs

- ❖ a set of principles for VET in Australia, including access and equity

Despite the reforms of the early 1990s, the then existing pattern of vocational training had a number of drawbacks, for example, it was limited to 'declared vocations' locking out the new 'sunrise' industries such as information technology and the service sector in general. It also incorporated the outmoded concept of 'indenture' and lacked the flexibility to accommodate part-time training. In 1996 the newly elected coalition government announced a significant reform to the system of preparing apprentices, through a program called the Modern Apprenticeship and Traineeship System. The Minister for Vocational Education and Training the Honourable Dr David Kemp at the time outlined the goals of the new program in the following terms:

- ❖ *there must be clear pathways for young people from school in productive work*
- ❖ *a national framework needs to ensure that skills are portable and that firms can train their staff without being hindered by state and territory borders*
- ❖ *training arrangements should be essentially matters for agreement between employers and employees at the enterprise level*
- ❖ *there must be a fair system to recognise the short-term costs to employers and trainees of undertaking training as well as the longer-term benefits; and*
- ❖ *there must be local responses to local needs.* (Kemp 1996a, p.4)

In another public statement, Dr Kemp outlined his government's views on why the apprenticeship system was in need of 'modernisation'. According to the Minister:

... [t]he major reforms being introduced through the Modern Australian Apprenticeship and Traineeship System will make a difference to our young people. Our intention is to rebuild the pathway from school to work, and give students hope, opportunity, and real assistance to enter the labour force. Secondly, the Modern Australian Apprenticeship and Traineeship System is part of our strategy to place Australian enterprises in a situation where they can compete in a rapidly changing global economy. Nobody would argue that rapid change is not occurring in the global economy. This is being accelerated year by year through the introduction of new technologies, especially in information and communications. (Kemp 1996b, p.2)

Critics of the reform have argued that the reform of the apprenticeship system should be considered in the context of the coalition government's roll-back of the previous Keating Labor Government's labour market programs flowing from the *Working nation* (1994) initiatives. Whatever the case, the new Modern Australian Apprenticeship and Traineeship proposal was a significant intervention into the area of vocational education and training.

Following Minister Kemp's announcement in May 1996, a meeting of the ANTA Ministerial Council in May 1996 formally agreed on a set of principles which would provide the foundations for the process of reforming the system of apprenticeship and traineeships. The principles agreed to at the Ministerial Council are as follows:

- ❖ *an industry led system*
- ❖ *streamlined regulation*
- ❖ *expanded training opportunities*
- ❖ *regional and community involvement*
- ❖ *a national Training Framework*
- ❖ *access and equity* (ANTA 1998, p.1)

The ANTA Ministerial Council established a reference group made up of industry representatives which subsequently produced 23 specific suggestions based on the principles

referred to above. Late in 1996 this council sanctioned the proposals of the reference group and then requested that it be given advice on how to implement the proposals.

(ANTA 1998, p.2)

By May 1997 ANTA had developed a strategy and a set of proposals on how to implement the new initiative within the context of a 'broad policy framework' (ANTA 1998, p.2). The ANTA proposals incorporated:

- ❖ *a regulatory framework for New Apprenticeships*
- ❖ *User Choice (on which New South Wales subsequently reserved its position)*
- ❖ *the National Training Framework, including Training Packages and the Australian Recognition Framework*
- ❖ *group training*
- ❖ *New Apprenticeships in Schools*
- ❖ *resourcing*

(ANTA 1998, p.2)

In August 1997 the program was publicly launched as the 'new apprenticeship' scheme. They key features of new apprenticeships include:

- ❖ New apprenticeships are now available in areas not previously associated with this mode of training, such as media, entertainment, information technology, and hospitality.
- ❖ Apprentices and employers sign a registered training agreement, validated by the state/training authority.
- ❖ Employers now have greater input into the content, delivery and location of delivery of the training.
- ❖ Students are now able to undertake an apprenticeship while still at school and are then eligible to receive a nationally recognised qualification.
- ❖ Employers have been encouraged to participate in the program through a number of incentives.
- ❖ The establishment of GTCs has enabled employers to share an apprentice or trainee with other firms.
- ❖ Existing employees can apply to be a trainee or apprentice.

The introduction of the new apprenticeship system has been accompanied by a renewed commitment to vocational education by schools through structured work placements. In Victoria, VET-in-Schools is now a viable option within the VCE (South East Development 1999). VET-in-Schools enables classroom learning to be supported by work experience in the workplace. A crucial component of this program is the structured work placement, which is significantly different from traditional work experience.

The major features of a structured work placement include the following:

- ❖ *it is structured. Students will have specific task to undertake in order to demonstrate or reinforce competence in a variety of designated skills*
- ❖ *an appropriate Workplace Supervisor/Trainer must be assigned to teach or reinforce the designated skills*
- ❖ *a logbook is used to record the student's achievement of competence in each skill*
- ❖ *the work placement forms a part of the student's formal studies and is recognised nationally*

(South East Development 1999)

The combination of new apprenticeships and structured workplace learning in the upper secondary years of schooling now offers a significant range of entry points either directly or indirectly into the workplace for young Australians. The success or failure of these schemes is

dependent on a range of structural and attitudinal factors. In particular, the views of employers and students towards both modes of training are an important focus of research and debate.

Employer views on apprenticeships

There is a growing body of literature which focusses on the level of employer satisfaction with the training and apprenticeship system auspiced by agencies at the State and Commonwealth levels. In particular, recent work completed by NCVER for ANTA (NCVER 1999a) is beginning to build an informative collection of data on the area. While this work is still in its early days, a number of key trends in employer attitudes are starting to emerge.¹²

According to NCVER:

- ❖ 83% of employers state that they are satisfied with the vocational education and training system
- ❖ 74% of employers strongly agreed or agreed that training pays for itself through increased worker productivity
- ❖ 69% of employers strongly agreed or agreed that the VET system is providing graduates with skills appropriate to employers' needs
- ❖ 80% of employers stated that they had provided time off for their employees to attend some form of training in the previous 12 months. (NCVER 1999a, p.4)

The report *Benchmarking employer satisfaction with training for apprentices and trainees* (Morgan 1998), prepared by Roy Morgan Research sought to find answers to the following questions:

- ❖ How satisfied are employers with the quality, relevance and availability of apprenticeships and trainee training in Victoria overall, in particular institutes, and in particular trade/industry areas?
- ❖ What aspects of training are more important to employers, and how well do institutes and the system satisfy these?
- ❖ What information do employers use to choose providers for entry-level training?
- ❖ What information do employers need to effectively choose a provider, and is it available?

The results of the qualitative component of this study point to the complex, 'interrelationships between experiences, expectations and the specific circumstances of different employers' (Morgan 1998, p.111). According to the Morgan report, most employers in Victoria are broadly satisfied with the service they receive from TAFE in the preparation of trainees and apprentices (Morgan 1998, p.ii). Employers reported that they consider off-the-job training important in the process of upskilling trainees and apprentices.

While these data provide a snapshot of employer perspectives on the general question of satisfaction with the VET system, the question of how to increase participation rates is not addressed.

Employer-identified barriers to the expansion of new apprenticeships

The work cited earlier in this review by Marshman and Associates (1996) is a valuable source of data on the factors which inhibit the expansion of apprenticeships and traineeships. The report is the result of 70 consultations held over a two-week period with both large and small

¹² In a recent NCVER publication the following qualification is made: 'Data on employer overall satisfaction with VET are available for only two surveys but show a slight increase in the number of employers who reported being satisfied with VET' (NCVER 1999a, p.2).

employers. Note, however, that it was confined to the manufacturing sector and traditional trades, industry associations, group training companies and the then Commonwealth Employment Service (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49).

The authors of this report came to the following conclusions:

... apprenticeship numbers in traditional areas do not appear to be declining because of inadequacies in the national training system. Reforms such as modularisation, national standards, competency-based approach, a competitive training market, user choice and the increasing flexibility of the public provider, TAFE, have widespread support.

(Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49)

The problem with apprenticeships lies with:

... the vocational preparation of young people, the changing demographics and skills of the applicant pool, the image and status of trades as a worthwhile career, the extent of Government incentives for the employment of apprentices, and the impact of economic and industry restructuring and competitiveness on the capacity of employers to enter into 3–5 year commitments.

(Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49)

According to the authors of this report:

... [t]he solution to the current problems will not be found in further reforms to the training system although it is important that the current direction be continued. They will be found in an understanding, on an industry by industry basis, of the conditions on which employers make decisions to employ apprentices and the policies and programs that are needed to support that employment. These conditions have changed, and the changes are likely to remain.

(Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49)

The authors found that, in their discussions with employers and other groups, the following issues were raised:

- ❖ the quality and quantity of young people seeking apprenticeships (the applicant pool)
- ❖ the image and status of the trades
- ❖ the impact of restructuring and outsourcing, and changes in contractual cycles
- ❖ the growth of group training
- ❖ the role of government
- ❖ costs and wages—a two-edged sword

(Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49)

The applicant pool was criticised in terms of the:

... widely held view that despite improvements in secondary school retention rates there has been a major drop in the quality, and in the case of the engineering and electrical trades the interest and number of young people seeking apprenticeships. There is still a healthy demand for apprenticeships in the building and construction industry which appears to be associated with a desire to work outside, and to be free of the disciplines and confines of factory work.

(Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49)

Employers also stated that the ‘image and status’ of trades was problematic. According to the authors of the report, ‘there was a general consensus that the image and status of the traditional trades are at an all time low ebb’ (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49). Common views of traditional trades include:

- ❖ Vocational education and training is a second option for students, it ‘takes a back seat’ in the school system.

- ❖ There is a low regard for manufacturing with a commonly held view that it has no future (despite skill shortages).
- ❖ Job losses and redundancies associated with industry restructuring have left large numbers of middle-aged tradespeople unemployed, or forced to move to improve employment prospects.
- ❖ There is a view that trade skills are no longer a 'ticket for life'.
- ❖ Other vocations which require less study and effort and have as much security and higher pay are more attractive. (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49)

Another inhibiting factor identified by Marshman and Associates is the impact of industry restructuring and the prevalence of short contract cycles. A flow-on of the instability associated with this restructuring has been the outsourcing of training and the narrowing of training goals to meet short-term needs.¹³ A flow-on effect of this uncertainty has been the growth of group training companies.

Marshman and Associates argue that GTCs have acted to fill the gap created by the reticence of some firms to enter into the long-term commitment associated with the apprenticeship system. The authors of the report point out that:

Group Training Schemes were established in the early 1980s to enable apprentices to be employed centrally and rotated among small employers to provide a diversity of on-the-job training experiences. They were at the margin of the apprentice market. They have now graduated to become major players in that market. (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49)

The number of apprentices employed nationally by group training companies was 6.8% in 1991; by 1995 they employed 12.2% (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49). Particular industries such as building have benefitted most from the growth of GTCs. The rise of sub-contracting, the primary mode of employment within the industry, has led to the transfer of training to GTCs. Marshman goes on to argue that:

The major reason for this growth appears to be the fact that Group Training is the only mechanism that takes account of the unpredictability of contract cycles associated with competition and outsourcing, and provides continuity of employment for the apprentice.

(Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49)

Employers interviewed by Marshman and Associates argued that there was a general lack of support from government and that many of the policies promoted at the time were counter-productive and were sending 'the wrong signals' (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49). These signals were:

- ❖ a failure to support manufacturing industry generally through research and development and promotion
- ❖ a failure to promote apprenticeships generally. There was widespread comment about the lack of material available, and the suggestion that group training companies are the only bodies effectively promoting apprenticeships
- ❖ the reduction in the incentives for employers to employ apprentices announced in the 1996 Federal Budget
- ❖ the outsourcing or abandonment of training effort and infrastructure associated with corporatisation and privatisation
- ❖ a perceived downgrading of the State government consultancy/inspectoral role in Victoria

¹³ These factors were discussed in some detail above.

- ❖ the fact that State government instrumentalities in Victoria were not allowed to employ apprentices, other than through group training companies
(Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49)

Many, if not all of these criticisms could still be levelled at both State governments and the Federal government.

The final criticism voiced by the employers interviewed by Marshman and Associates relates to the cost associated with employing an apprentice. Some employers (especially those in the building trade) argued that it was cheaper to employ a sub-contractor (often fully qualified) than a final-year apprentice. Employers also expressed the view that off-the-job training should occur during an apprentice's own time (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49). In contrast to this view, other employers stated that wages for first-year apprentices were too low and unattractive compared to other employment opportunities (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49).

Another document which examines the factors inhibiting the success of traineeships and apprenticeships is a report prepared by the Western Australian Government entitled, *New apprenticeships: Making it work* (Western Australian Department of Training 1998). This report contains the results of a series of focus groups, and face-to-face interviews with over 500 employers and apprentices. Some of the key findings from this report are:

- ❖ Factors that motivate employers to take apprentices and trainees are a mix of 'altruistic' and 'business' motives. However, 'maintaining skills in the industry' is by far the most important motivation for all employers.
- ❖ In general, employers of apprentices are more motivated by the 'altruistic' motives, whereas employers of trainees are more motivated by the 'business motives'.
- ❖ Employers cite economic concerns and concerns over the quality of apprentices/trainees as issues that would prevent them from taking on more apprentices/trainees in the future rather than concerns about the training system.
(Western Australian Department of Training 1998, p.47)

An earlier study by Dockery et al. (1997) points to another factor which might be inhibiting the full potential of the new apprenticeship scheme—the cost associated with taking on an apprentice. According to Dockery et al. (1997):

... on average, firms were found to incur a net cost of around \$22 000 over the standard four year apprenticeship, comprised of a cost of nearly \$13 000 in the first year of the apprenticeship, declining to a small benefit in the fourth year.
(Dockery et al. 1997, p.ii)

If the calculations arrived at by Dockery et al. in their 1997 study and the ongoing work of the Curtin University Centre for Labour Market Research for NCVET are accurate, then employers are incurring a significant cost in engaging in the preparation of apprentices. The impact of cost in the decision to take on an apprentice by a firm whether small or large is yet to be fully analysed (Dockery et al. 1997) and raises a number of questions. The research team will attempt to gather some material of its own on the relationship between the cost of engaging an apprentice and the extent to which this factor impacts on an employer's decision to participate in the training process.

The literature highlighted above points to a number of the barriers to increasing opportunities for apprenticeships. The present research project will attempt to test some of the conclusions of the reports cited and to add new insights to the debate. To conclude it is important to restate some of the key findings from the literature.

This review has been an attempt to identify a number of the possible factors which undermine the availability and sustainability of the new apprenticeship scheme. A useful way of pulling together some of the themes identified thus far in the project is to utilise the concept that supply and demand factors contribute to the problem.

Supply factors

One of the significant supply factors raised in the literature on apprenticeships and traineeships has been the image and status of trades held by the general community (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49). Traditional trades are seen to be unattractive to young people and to lack the kind of status that other jobs might have. Another factor impacting on the success of training programs has been the negative perceptions about the applicant pool held by employers (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49). In some industry sectors employers felt that the quality of young people entering the trades has declined, as has interest in technical subjects such as engineering and the electrical trades (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49). Another supply-side factor is the prevalence amongst young people of the view that VET-in-Schools is a last option if other more attractive pathways are blocked. This could be partially due to the perception that manufacturing does not have a future, despite publicity about growing skill shortages. Job losses associated with the restructuring of various industry sectors have created large pools of unemployed middle-aged tradespeople and thus in the general community trade skills are no longer seen as a 'ticket for life' (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49).

Demand factors

The demand factors identified in the literature included the unevenness of the current economic recovery and the uncertainty about long-term economic prospects. Changes in the labour market as a result of the increased use of labour-hire firms have also contributed to the decline in demand for apprentices and trainees. Firms have transferred their traditional training functions to GTCs which can act as the central training site for specific industries and thus are better able to work within the constraints of the variability of the economic cycle (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49; Western Australian Department of Training 1998, p.47).

Other demand factors inhibiting the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships identified in the literature relate to the impact of government policy, costs and wages levels. Government policy shifts and reforms were also highlighted in the literature as having an impact on the demand for apprenticeships and traineeships. In particular, the decline in the level of government support for research and development, the growth of outsourcing and privatisation and the subsequent decline in the training levels and infrastructure, and the reduction in government subsidies (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49). Another theme canvassed in the literature relates to the perceived high cost associated with the training of apprentices and trainees (Marshman & Associates 1996, p.49; Dockery et al. 1997, p.61).

Appendix 2: Methodology

Introduction

In this section the methods used in order to answer the research questions proposed by the research team are outlined. This research project will employ a variety of methods to facilitate the triangulation of the responses to the research questions listed above. This strategy will facilitate the production of a research report and will draw on both qualitative and quantitative research methodology. In this project we will utilise the following methods:

- ❖ **Literature review:** the research team will examine a wide range of published sources in order to inform our analysis of the data and refine the research questions. The research team will review ABS data, industry training plans, web sites and relevant Australian and international research literature. This will include a review and analysis of existing research on youth employment, youth education and training options and work integrated learning by researchers such as Ball and Robinson, Teese, Wooden, and research reports commissioned by ANTA and NCVER.
- ❖ **The focus group technique:** this will form the first part of the research triangulation. The research team will select students from schools located within three local government areas (LGAs), representing small, medium, and large take-up of apprenticeships by young people. Young people will be engaged in a focus group initially in early February and then again in June 2000. The size of the focus groups will be between 8 and 10 students per school. Two schools per municipality will be selected, one government and one non-government. In each school the careers teacher will be asked to assist the research team in the selection of students who meet the following criteria:

Year 10 students: one group of males and one group of females. We are interested in testing their understanding of VET and the nature of the labour market in the western region of Melbourne early in the academic year before they have been asked to select VCE subjects.

Year 12 VCE students: academic stream. In each school one group of students who has chosen purely academic subjects will be identified and interviewed. In each school a group comprising equal numbers (if possible) of students enrolled in VET subjects with a work placement and students enrolled in VET subjects without a work placement will be identified and interviewed.¹⁴

- ❖ **Questionnaire:** once the general research questions listed above are refined, the research team will develop a survey instrument. The research team will then select a stratified sample comprising key stakeholders—including employers, employer associations, industry associations, and industry training boards. A pilot survey will be trialled with a small sample of the larger selection. Once the research team is satisfied with the structure and effectiveness of the survey instrument, it will be administered to the larger sample. The questionnaire will form the second part of the research triangulation.
- ❖ **Interviews:** the research team will conduct a small number of one-on-one interviews with a selection of representative key stakeholders, including employers, students, employer associations, industry associations, ITBs. The interviews conducted by the research team will provide the basis for a series of in-depth analysis of specific issues and the development of a set of case studies. The interviews will form the final part of the research project and validate the survey outcomes.

¹⁴ See Appendix C for Focus group questions.

- ❖ **Reporting:** a number of interim reports will be prepared for distribution to NCVER (they are detailed in the phases of the project listed below). The final outcomes of the study will be reported to the immediate stakeholders and the VET system generally.

This research approach will provide the study with both quantitative and qualitative data as well as a means of building on and validating existing and new research outcomes.

Research themes

The research themes under investigation involve:

- ❖ an examination and analysis of changes in the labour market and their relationship to changing patterns of participation in apprenticeships and traineeships in Melbourne's west
- ❖ an examination of employer and student perceptions and attitudes towards the apprenticeship and traineeship system in Melbourne's west
- ❖ an examination of the role of apprenticeships and traineeships in key industry sectors in Melbourne's west
- ❖ an examination of the effectiveness of on-the-job learning as it applies to apprenticeships and traineeships with the study seeking to identify the factors which inhibit growth in apprenticeship and traineeship numbers in Melbourne's west and to identify strategies to overcome these factors

Research questions

The following research questions will target employers, apprentices, trainees and school students in Melbourne's west to assist in determining research outcomes:

- ❖ What labour market changes have occurred in Melbourne's west in the past three years?
- ❖ What is the relationship between labour market change and the patterns of participation in apprenticeships and traineeships?
- ❖ What are the perceptions and attitudes of employers to apprenticeships and traineeships?
- ❖ How appropriate are apprenticeships and traineeships as a method of skilling the workforce in key industry sectors?
- ❖ What are the perceptions and attitudes of students to apprenticeships and traineeships?

Methodology

Research methods and sample

Questionnaire

Population A: a random sample of employers within the western suburbs of Melbourne who are members of the Western Region Economic Development Organisation (WREDO). Total population for the purposes of our research are 2500 employers. WREDO is the peak business and local government forum in the western suburbs of Melbourne. The sample size will be 400 thus giving us a confidence interval of +/- 3% with 95% confidence. The employer sample will comprise individual employers, employer associations, industry associations and industry training boards. The survey instrument will be administered via a combination of direct mail and telephone. We will send out an initial fax asking for the respondent to agree to participate in the survey. If the response rate is low we will make telephone contact with the respondents in order to conduct the survey by telephone. WREDO has a near 100%

response rate to its mail/fax back contacts with employers. An initial pilot survey will be conducted to test the questionnaire.

In selecting our sample we will draw respondents from the WREDO database. Reference will also be made to the WREDO publication, *Western & North Western Melbourne regional profile*. Industries which draw less than 5% of their workforce from the western region will be excluded.

Groupings:

- ❖ Manufacturing
- ❖ Construction
- ❖ Wholesale
- ❖ Retail
- ❖ Transport and storage
- ❖ Property and business services
- ❖ Education
- ❖ Health and community services

Focus groups

Population B: students who are enrolled in a VCE VET-in-Schools program. For the purpose of this project we will focus on a sample of students drawn from schools within the following municipalities: Melton, Moonee Valley and Hobsons Bay. After examining data collected by WREDO in 1998 it was clear that the three local government areas listed above illustrate inconsistent levels of take-up of apprenticeships and traineeships within the western region of Melbourne. In 1998 the three LGAs we have selected had the following numbers of apprenticeships: Melton (259), Moonee Valley (1122) and Hobsons Bay (2219).¹⁵

Interviews

A representative sample of key stakeholders drawn from Population A (between 5–10%), including employers, employer associations, industry associations and industry training boards will be selected to participate in a series of individual interviews. The research team will select the respondents on the basis of:

- ❖ levels of employment in specific industries
- ❖ numbers of apprentices engaged
- ❖ leaders of key employer groups and ITBs

Triangulation

Broadly speaking, triangulation is a concept drawn from the study of experimental methods and describes the use of more than one method to investigate a phenomenon. Triangulation is useful as a means of guarding against any inherent problems concerning validity. By comparing the results of data acquired using a variety of methods we are able to overcome the problem associated with the validity of each individual method.

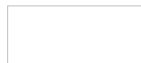
¹⁵ Details on the composition of the focus groups can be found above.

Appendix 3:

Employer survey sample

Employer Questionnaire - Increasing Opportunities for Apprenticeships and Traineeships in Melbourne's Western Region

The following questionnaire is conducted on behalf of Victoria University (VU), Western Melbourne Region Economic Development Organisation (WREDO), Workplace Learning Melbourne West (WLMW) and Jobs Plus New Apprenticeship Centre (NAC) to gather information about employer perceptions on apprenticeships and traineeships. The questionnaire is part of a research project investigating the factors that inhibit the take up of apprenticeships and traineeships in the western region, and to develop strategies to address these barriers.



The questionnaire will take approximately 15 minutes to complete and **ALL** information collected will be **CONFIDENTIAL**.

If you have any questions or problems, please contact Tess Demediuk, the Project Manager on ph (03) 9284 8309 or email tess.demediuk@vu.edu.au

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Please return this questionnaire in the enclosed Reply Paid envelope by **12 May 2000** or fax back to **9284 8345**.

Section A: Employer Profile

1) Please tick the industry category that best describes your business.

- | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|--------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Wholesale/Retail | <input type="checkbox"/> | Manufacturing | <input type="checkbox"/> | Transport/Storage | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Building/Construction | <input type="checkbox"/> | Community Services | <input type="checkbox"/> | Finance, Property & Business Services | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Information Technology (IT) | <input type="checkbox"/> | | | Recreation, Personal & Other Services (Including | |
| Hospitality, Tourism) | <input type="checkbox"/> | | | | |
| Other | <input type="checkbox"/> (please specify) | | | | |

2) What form of ownership is your business?

- | | | | | | |
|---------------------|---|-------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Sole Proprietorship | <input type="checkbox"/> | Partnership | <input type="checkbox"/> | Private Company | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Public Company | <input type="checkbox"/> | Government Funded | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
| Other | <input type="checkbox"/> (please specify) | | | | |

3) How many years has your business been operating?

- | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| Less than 2 years | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2-5 years | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6-10 years | <input type="checkbox"/> | 11-20 years | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 21-50 years | <input type="checkbox"/> | 51+ years | <input type="checkbox"/> | | | | |

4) How many people does your business employ?

Actual Number No. of Males No. of Females

5) How many people are employed in the following employment categories?

Full Time Part Time Casual Contractors

6) What is the postcode of your business' location in the western region?

7) What is the postcode of your business' Head Office (if applicable)

Section B: Apprenticeship and Traineeship Employment

Please tick the relevant box:

8) Do you currently employ apprentices or trainees?	Yes <i>(Please go to question 9)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	No <i>(Please go to question 17)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9) How many apprentices or trainees do you employ?	Actual Number	.....
10) What regions of Melbourne do your apprentices or trainees live? <i>(Please place a number beside the appropriate regions)</i>	Melbourne - Inner	.....
	Melbourne –West	.....
	Melbourne – East	.....
	Melbourne – North	.....
	Melbourne – South	.....
	Other <i>(please specify – e.g. rural)</i>	
11) How are your apprentices or trainees employed? <i>(Tick as many boxes as appropriate)</i>	Full-time	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Part-time	<input type="checkbox"/>
	School-based New Apprenticeship	<input type="checkbox"/>
12) Would you employ an apprentice or trainee for any of the listed reasons? <i>(Tick as many boxes as appropriate)</i>	Family Member	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Son/daughter of existing employee	<input type="checkbox"/>
	A work experience person you liked	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Result of a formal recruitment process	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Result of an informal recruitment process	<input type="checkbox"/>
13) What type of training do you provide for your apprentices or trainees?	All on-the-job	<input type="checkbox"/>
	All off-the-job	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Combination of both	<input type="checkbox"/>
14) In the past five (5) years, have you increased, maintained or decreased apprenticeship or traineeship numbers?	Increased	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Maintained	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/>
15) In the next five years, will you increase, maintain or decrease your numbers of apprentices or trainees?	Increase	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Maintain	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Decrease	<input type="checkbox"/>
16) Do you offer opportunities for school students in your organisation? <i>(Tick as many boxes as appropriate)</i> <i>(Please continue to question 20)</i>	Work experience	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Structured work placement	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Part-time work	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Casual work	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you answered *No* to Question 7, please answer the following questions.

17) Would you consider employing apprentices or trainees in the future?	Yes <i>(Please continue on to question 18)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	No <i>(Please go to question 19)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18) What would be the reason for employing apprentices or trainees? <i>(Please rank in order of importance to you, e.g. 1, 2 3, etc)</i> <i>(Please go to question 20)</i>	Skill shortage in your business	.....
	Suitable person	.....
	Growth of business	.....
	Improved knowledge of apprenticeships and traineeships	.....
	Government subsidies	.....
	Other <i>(please specify)</i>	

<p>19) Why would you not employ apprentices or trainees? (Please rank in order of importance to you, e.g. 1, 2, 3 etc)</p> <p>(Please continue to question 20)</p>	Lack of information	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Too expensive	<input type="checkbox"/>
	“Red Tape”	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Lack of demand from young people	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Amount of Government subsidy	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Decline in business	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Industrial Relations	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Uncertainty in business	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Prefer skilled staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Too difficult to train an apprentice/trainee	<input type="checkbox"/>
	No training support in the workplace for apprentice/trainee	<input type="checkbox"/>
	My business is too small	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other (please specify)	
<p>20) What factors concern you with the current apprenticeship or traineeship arrangements?</p>	Standard of training for apprenticeships/traineeships	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Lack of Government support	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Level of Government subsidy	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Not familiar with apprenticeship/traineeship arrangements	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other (please specify)	
<p>21) Where do you get information about apprenticeships/traineeships?</p>	Registered Training Organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>
	TAFE	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Secondary Schools	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Industry Associations	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Industry Training Boards	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Trade journals	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Workplace Learning Clusters	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Unions	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Group Training Companies	<input type="checkbox"/>
	New Apprenticeship Centres (NACs)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Media	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Government Department	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Employment Agency	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Never received any information	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)		
<p>22) Is the information about apprentices and trainees provided to you adequate?</p>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>23) Have you heard the term ‘New Apprenticeship’?</p>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
	No	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section C: Perceptions of apprenticeships/traineeships (please circle the number corresponding to your views)

24) The concept of apprenticeships or traineeships is well understood.	Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Do not know 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
25) The information about apprenticeships and traineeships is easy to understand.	Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Do not know 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
26) Apprenticeship or traineeship incentives for business are adequate.	Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Do not know 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
27) On-the-job training is essential to apprenticeship or traineeship outcomes for achieving work related skills.	Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Do not know 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
28) Off-the-job training is essential to apprenticeship or traineeship outcomes for achieving work related skills.	Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Do not know 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
29) Secondary school students while completing Year 11 and 12 make successful part-time apprentices or trainees.	Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Do not know 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
30) Relevant work experience is a positive factor when employing new staff.	Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Do not know 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
31) Agencies and organisations promoting apprenticeships or traineeships provide adequate information to employers.	Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Do not know 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
32) Apprenticeships or traineeships are a positive means of meeting the employment needs in my business.	Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Do not know 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5
33) Apprenticeships or traineeships are a positive means of meeting the employment needs in my industry.	Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Do not know 3	Disagree 4	Strongly Disagree 5

34) If you have any further comments or issues you would like to raise, we welcome your input in the space below.

35) Would you be interested in being interviewed about this research project? Please tick the box below:

Yes No

If you are interested in being contacted about this project, please complete the following details.

Mail Telephone Email (please provide address)

Name Company Title

Company Name

Company Address

Please return this questionnaire in the enclosed Reply Paid envelope by 12 May 2000 or fax back to 9284 8345.

Appendix 4: Project reference group

The following organisations formed the Project Reference Group for the NCVET Research Project, *Increasing opportunities for apprenticeships and traineeships in Melbourne's western region*:

Western Melbourne Regional Economic Development Organisation

Jobs Plus—New Apprenticeship Centre

Workplace Learning Melbourne West

Institute for Youth Education and Community, School of Education, Victoria University

Appendix 5: School profiles

School A (Government) is a Years 7–12, coeducational college of approximately 900–1000 students situated in the Melton Shire Council region. Melton is a satellite city of 40 000 residents, 45 minutes west of Melbourne (Victoria, Australia). It is a rapidly growing outer suburb with one of the highest ratios of adolescent to adults within the State.

Students are drawn mainly from the Shire of Melton and the majority of their parents work outside the local area. School A delivers a range of VCE and VET-in-Schools subjects at Years 11 and 12.

School B (Catholic) is situated in the Hobson’s Bay area which has a number of distinctive characteristic employment patterns compared with metropolitan Melbourne, such as a higher proportion of manufacturing jobs, significantly lower proportion of community services jobs, lower proportion of finance, property and business services jobs.

School B has a single gender student population of approximately 700. The school is administered on a single campus and offers subjects from Year 7 to Year 12. VET-in-Schools programs are offered in Years 11 and 12.

School C (Catholic) is a single gender secondary school of approximately 1100 students from Year 7 through to Year 12. School C is situated in the City of Moonee Valley which is home to diverse cultures with a third of the population born outside Australia. The resident population is estimated at more than 110 000 people with 25% of jobs filled by local residents. Moonee Valley has a number of firms involved in finance, property and business services.

School C is administered as two separate campuses—Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 to 12. The school offers a VET-in-Schools program in Years 11 and 12.

School D (Government) is coeducational and situated in the City of Moonee Valley. The student population is over 1500 students from diverse cultural backgrounds. School D is administered over three campuses, two in junior secondary and the third in senior secondary education. The school delivers a range of VCE and VET-in-Schools subjects.

School E (Catholic) is a senior coeducational school with 650 students. Although situated in a neighbouring local government area, students come from feeder schools located in the local government areas targeted for this research project. School E offers a range of VET-in-Schools programs.

School F (Government) is a coeducational school with an enrolment profile of 750 students. School F is situated in the Hobson’s Bay Council area. School F offers a range of VCE and VET-in-Schools programs.

This is one in a series of publications on apprenticeships, now available in print and on the internet. Published by NCVER, these cover facts and figures on the current vital issues for Australian apprenticeships.

Available online only:

- ❖ *Apprentices' and trainees' English language and literacy skills in workplace learning and performance: Employer and employee opinion*, S O'Neill, A Gish
- ❖ *Apprenticeship in Australia: An historical snapshot*, J Ray
- ❖ *Factors affecting the provision of entry-level training by enterprises*, K Ball, B Freeland
- ❖ *Factors that contribute to retention and completion rates for apprentices and trainees*, R Harris, M Simons, K Bridge, J Bone, H Symons, B Clayton, B Pope, G Cummins, K Blom
- ❖ *Issues and directions from a review of the Australian apprenticeship and traineeship literature*, S Saunders
- ❖ *Locational issues in new apprenticeships*, T Dumbrell, W Finnegan, R de Montfort
- ❖ *On-the-job traineeships: Advantages and disadvantages for employers and trainees*, J Misko
- ❖ *Review of the Australian apprenticeship and traineeship literature: References and their key issues*, S Saunders
- ❖ *Training for the skilled trades in Australia, 1980 to 2000: Training reforms*, E Webster, M Dockery, T Bainger, R Kelly

Available in print and online:

- ❖ *Australian Apprenticeships: Facts, fiction and future*
- ❖ *Australian Apprenticeships: Research readings*
- ❖ *Australian Apprenticeships: Research at a glance*

www.ncver.edu.au/apprentices.htm

