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**different
drums
one
beat?**

economic and social goals in
education and training

edited by

**Fran Ferrier &
Damon Anderson**

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and Damon Anderson



Monash University-ACER
Centre for the Economics of
Education and Training



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Introduction

The relationship between the economic and social goals of education and training is fraught with a tension that arises primarily from changing demands and conflicting views about the roles and functions of education and educational institutions. What purposes and whose interests should they serve? Which are most important? How, and to what extent, should these purposes and interests be accommodated?

Within debates on these questions, two predominant perspectives can be discerned. One argues that the primary role of education should be to contribute to the achievement of national economic success by developing the human capital required by industries and enterprises. The other considers that the main goal should be to assist individuals to realise their full potential, thereby also contributing to social and cultural development. Conflict between these two perspectives is evident, for instance, in contemporary debates about whether education should be concerned with *lifelong learning* or *recurrent training*; and *general* or *vocational* education. But there are also many historical antecedents, such as nineteenth century contests between *utilitarianism* and *liberal education*.

Between these opposing poles is a host of intermediate positions which involve varying degrees of compromise between social and economic goals. Though the definitions of, and distinctions between, social and economic goals are often taken for granted, in reality they are rarely clear. Not only is there often considerable overlap between the ends they strive to achieve, but they can also be seen as complementary and mutually generative.

In Australia, as elsewhere, the balance between different goals has fluctuated in response to changes in social and economic circumstances, the policy priorities of governments and community concerns and expectations. At different times some goals have been emphasised at the expense of others. In the present era, debate about the roles and purposes of education has largely focused on post-secondary education and training which have been increasingly perceived by governments as crucial elements in determining the productivity and competitiveness required for economic success in a global economy. This view, which has much in common with the first of the two perspectives outlined above, has been particularly prominent since the late 1980s when it was influential in the formulation of the 1988 White Paper on higher education and the national training reform agenda.

Though the importance of social goals continues to be affirmed, there is considerable evidence to suggest that they have lost ground to economic goals in recent years. As a stronger emphasis has been given to the labour market outcomes of education and training - and to the development of the skills required by industry - broader non-economic goals have become less important to governments, and even to some educational institutions.

In this context, the Monash University-ACER Centre for the Economics of Education and Training (CEET) and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd. (NCVER) jointly sponsored a conference in 1997 which aimed to explore the changing relationship between the social and economic goals of education and training. The conference brought together academics, researchers, policy makers, practitioners and many others from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds. Among those who contributed papers were economists of education, educational sociologists, historians and political economists.

It has not been possible to include all of the conference papers in this volume. Those that are included have been edited, amended and/or updated and all make a valuable contribution towards an improved understanding of policy goals in education and training. The majority of papers focus on the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector which includes Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions and non-TAFE providers in industry and enterprises, in addition to VET programs offered by senior secondary schools, and adult and community education (ACE) providers. It is in this sector that the tension between social and economic goals is now most apparent given that it stands at the direct interface between education and the labour market, and is the site of many diverse combinations of work and study.

Keynote speakers set the theme for participants. Russell Rumberger, from the University of California at Santa Barbara, brought a cross-national perspective in his discussion of the changing goals of education in the United States of America (USA). Martha Kinsman, from the Canberra Institute of Technology, asked 'whose goals are they anyway?'. And Kim Bannikoff, from the Australian National Training Authority, posed the question 'how do we get social goals back on the agenda?'. These themes were explored and elaborated from a variety of different perspectives by other speakers.

The book opens with a series of papers that address cross-national and cross-sectoral issues. The paper by Rumberger compares the Australian experience with that of the USA. He notes that education and training are seen as the key for nations to compete effectively in the expanding global economy. But one of the social goals of most countries is to address, through a variety of public and private programs, the inequities in opportunities that exist among different social groups. Rumberger reports that economic goals for education and training have dominated policy discourse and initiatives in the USA for more than a decade. As a result, the commitment to social goals appears to be waning as the country moves towards a more conservative policy agenda. There are great differences in the opportunities and outcomes from education and training for different populations. Racial and ethnic minorities, predominantly Black and Hispanic, have very different opportunities and outcomes from education and training from the majority European White population.

Gerald Burke documents major reforms in the funding and organisation of education and training in Australia over the last decade and provides an overview of the outcomes. He elucidates the context of an economy increasingly exposed to international pressures at a time when the policy for economic reform favours smaller government and the wider establishment of competitive markets. Burke notes that an ongoing pressure for change in Australia arises from sectoral differences in arrangements for funding and control.

Broad cross-sectoral issues are also addressed by Simon Marginson and Chris Selby Smith in papers which focus on research and its relationship to policy. Marginson examines research on higher education and VET to cast light on the inter-relationship between the two sectors. He notes how VET and higher education research are both shaped by the requirements of government policy, and by separate histories of staff development and pedagogical practice. Noting that the degree of research overlap between the two sectors is relatively low, he proposes a strengthening of the intersectoral relationship and offers some

suggestions about how this might be achieved. Selby Smith considers several different perspectives on the nature and strength of the influence of VET research on policy and practice. He stresses the importance of developing webs of linkages connecting researchers and decision makers because, as research shows, the latter group is often unaware of research studies with potential policy relevance.

Research on various groups of students and how they view and participate in education and training is presented in several contributions. Damon Anderson's paper highlights the extent to which the formation of the current VET policy agenda has been dominated by industry and business, thereby contributing to an imbalance between social and economic goals. On the basis of research into student views and concerns about VET reform, a range of policy strategies are identified for addressing their needs and priorities which involve promoting access, participation and equity in VET. He concludes that if the current imbalance between the economic and social goals of VET is to be redressed, there is a need to recognise and include students as legitimate stakeholders in policy formation processes.

Peter Dwyer and Johanna Wyn argue that the traditional linear model of pathways characterising the relationship between education and work is no longer appropriate and should be discarded as a basis for policy development in education. Their research has identified a diversity of pathways comprising complex mixes of study, work and family commitments that are pursued by young people in preparing for adult life.

Jerry Schwab discusses the views and pathways pursued by Indigenous people, noting particularly the significant tensions government goals for education, which he argues are substantially economic, and the essentially social and educational goals of the Indigenous people. He highlights and explores a series of important questions arising from these tensions: To what degree do the assumptions inherent in government education policies and programs conflict with the social and cultural experiences of Indigenous people? How do new educational 'efficiencies' affect the particular needs and interests of Indigenous communities? Do existing educational and training structures and approaches fit the varying needs of Indigenous people? How do government notions of improved educational outcomes match the sorts of outcomes Indigenous people want?

Barry Golding and Veronica Volkoff underscore the complexity of motives driving student participation in VET. Behind each individual's decision to participate is a mix of factors - not all related to employment or other economic outcomes. In highlighting the degree to which membership of equity target groups overlaps, the research they report also challenges policy approaches based on single target group identification and indicates the need for broader more holistic strategies to promote social goals.

Mark Werner reports on the findings of research into 'reverse transfer' between universities and TAFE institutes. He argues that the acquisition of vocationally relevant qualifications through TAFE has become a 'practical necessity' for many university graduates in an increasingly competitive labour market. His paper sheds light on the reasons why university graduates choose TAFE courses, and on the extent to which they are satisfied with their learning experiences in TAFE. A range of policy responses are identified to assist TAFE to meet the needs of this client group more effectively.

The next series of papers present a broad range of contemporary and historical perspectives on policy reforms in the ACE and VET sectors. Kinsman argues that a re-examination of the relationship between the social and economic goals of education is particularly important in the VET sector where the inherently cultural and social purposes of learning have been virtually ignored. Her paper addresses the tensions that exist between the goals of administrative systems, institutions and individuals. She argues for the recognition of VET as a highly diverse sector encompassing individuals with widely differing purposes, goals and interests.

Gonczi argues strongly that while there is general agreement that the VET system is still in need of reform, the current direction of reform not only fail to address the real problems but may also create new and more serious problems. He believes there is insufficient understanding of the complexities of educational issues for changes to be implemented successfully. He posits a worst-case scenario in which under-trained staff or organisations unconcerned about the lifelong learning needs of trainees attempt to develop narrow skills which serve neither industry nor individuals.

Issues relating to diversity are addressed by Ian Falk who argues that major differences exist between the meaning and significance of the 'social' and 'economic' goals of education and training in urban as opposed to rural and regional Australia. In order to reveal the differences, issues relating to access, participation and the nature of learning are explored through research conducted on VET in rural and regional communities. Falk argues that the concept of 'communities of practice', linked to that of a learning society, provides a means by which to reconcile the seemingly disparate goals of VET in different contexts.

Several papers identify and explore important contextual issues shaping education and training in Australia now and in the past. The paper by Peter Rushbrook and Ross Mackinnon highlights the manner in which debates about the social and economic goals of education and training are historically situated. Their illuminating biography of Myer Kangan, Chair of the first Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education (ACOTAFE) and principal author of ACOTAFE's seminal report in 1974 on needs in TAFE, reveals how policy formation is often strongly influenced by the personal background, experiences and ideological commitments of key actors.

Dianne Holdforth raises the issue of political forces in her response to Marginson's paper on the higher education/VET nexus. Dianne indicates that the failure of TAFE to follow the Kangan model has created confusion about its roles. This has been compounded by more recent government policy changes and pressures. She supports greater intersectoral co-operation through more equal partnerships between universities and TAFE institutions.

John McIntyre highlights the divergence between policy rhetoric supporting the social goals of education and the economic realities of ACE agencies. He asserts that the potential of these agencies to play a bigger role in advancing equity in education is being frustrated by the narrow terms in which competition policy is being constructed. John argues for a recognition of disadvantage as being highly localised, differentiated and compound; and for the equity to be seen as an important outcome of education.

Kerry Ellerington takes a critical look at the Frontline Management Initiative and its impact on the roles of educators and educational institutions. She notes some risks in this approach to management training and development. Her paper echoes, and makes specific, some of the general concerns about training packages expressed by Gonczi.

Fran Ferrier draws on an evaluation of User Choice pilot projects in her discussion of the equity implications of this policy initiative. She explores the tensions between the success of this initiative in meeting the needs of the groups involved in the pilot projects and the possible broader and more long term difficulties that this initiative might produce.

Several papers explore different aspects of the role of industry and enterprises in vocational education and training. Julian Teicher draws on the findings of an evaluation of the Australian Vocational Training System (AVTS) Enterprise Stream and Small Business Stream pilot projects to explore a series of issues relevant to the continuing implementation of a demand-driven approach to skill formation through the New Apprenticeships scheme. He concludes that the pilots demonstrate that formal training can be portable, marketable and nationally recognised as well as flexible and relevant to industry needs.

Mark Wooden casts doubt on the conventional wisdom that employers know little about the roles and functions of Industry Training Advisory Boards (ITABs). He reports on research which shows that employers are generally aware of the existence of ITABs but that their perceptions of ITAB roles and responsibilities often differ from those defined by government. Despite the relatively high level of employer satisfaction with the performance of ITABs, the author suggests that government may need to review the role assigned to ITABs in the provision of policy advice.

In different ways, Ralph Catts and Jeff Malley address the question of who should pay for training. Catts presents case study research evaluating the outcomes of training for some small businesses. He finds that small enterprise owners have neither the time nor the skills needed to realise the potential benefits of training and argues that to promote a training culture and increase the likelihood of successful training, public funding is essential. He argues that it is in the public benefit for training to become an essential element of good business practice.

Malley proposes several alternative combinations of work and training, each of which have different implications for the distribution of costs between schools, TAFE, industry, employers and individuals. He suggests we need a new national agency to coordinate technical and legal aspects of employer participation in entry-level training and to develop new partnerships between schools, TAFE, industry and government.

The book concludes with two incisive commentaries. Among other things, Terri Seddon draws attention to the contradiction in attempting to upskill the national stock of human capital while simultaneously undermining the social organisation of expertise by treating knowledge and values as simple commodities that can be exchanged in the marketplace. She notes that this curious contradiction is reflected in a pre-occupation with the economic goals of education and suggests that the neglect of social goals ultimately threatens the achievement of economic goals.

In closing reflections on the conference, Russell Rumberger notes that education and training will always serve a variety of social and economic goals but that, at different points in history, some goals will be stressed more than others. He suggests that we may be in such a period now. The increased size and competitiveness of the global economy may keep economic goals at the forefront of policy initiatives in most countries for years to come. But many social goals also have important, long-term economic benefits. By documenting these social goals and highlighting them in public discussions and policy debates, he argues that it may be possible to reconcile the various social and economic goals of education and training.

The central theme of this conference was 'Different drums, one beat? Economic and social goals in education and training'. While the conference may not have fully resolved the considerable tension and occasional disharmony between these goals, we hope that this book makes a useful contribution to policy debates and to the process of reconciliation.

Fran Ferrier and Damon Anderson

The growing imbalance between the economic and social goals of education in the United States¹

Russell W. Rumberger
University of California, Santa Barbara

Education and training have always served a variety of economic and social goals in the U.S. When the public schooling system was established in the late 1700s, one purpose was to help prepare new immigrants for the responsibilities of citizenship in the new country (Cremin 1976). Another was to teach immigrants from many different countries the dominant language of English. It wasn't until the 1920s, when universal secondary education became common, that the economic goals of preparing workers became widespread. At that time, the concern was to provide vocational training for secondary students who were not qualified or suited for attending university.

Although education has served both social and economic goals throughout the country's history, in recent times economic goals have dominated discussion and policy initiatives both in the U.S. and in virtually all advanced industrial countries. In the U.S. the turning point was in 1983 when the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued its report, *A Nation at Risk*, in which it said:

Our nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged pre-eminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world... If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983, p.1).

Since that time, a variety of national and state reports on education have cited the economic imperatives for reforming education. A recent government report, *Education and the Economy*, begins with this common theme:

The productivity of the U.S. work force is a primary determinant of the standard of living of the U.S. population. Worker productivity is typically measured as output per worker or per hour worked. It is affected by many factors, including the education and skills of the work force. Education and skills are important because they expand a worker's capacity to perform tasks or to use productive technologies. In addition, better educated workers can adapt more easily to new tasks or to changes in old tasks. Education may also prepare workers to work more effectively in teams because it enhances their ability to communicate with and understand their co-workers (Decker, King Rice & Moore 1997, p.1).

President Clinton's 1997 State of the Union address, while not specifically focusing on economic goals, still adopted education as the 'number one priority for the next four years' 'because education is a critical national security issue for our future' (U.S. President 1997).

Although the economic goals of education are important, in this paper I argue that:

- economic goals of education have been translated into a narrow range of academic subjects in schools--primarily reading and mathematics--thereby ignoring other outcomes of schools that also have important economic outcomes;
- the economic goals of education have displaced other, important social goals of education related to the larger area of social welfare; and
- most education and training goals have focused on overall levels of achievement (e.g. means and percentages) and ignored important equity goals related to the distribution of achievement.

The economic goals of education

Because the U.S. educational system is not a federal system, historically there has been little attempt to develop national goals or standards for education. States have the constitutional authority to fund and govern public education and are allowed to set goals and standards for themselves. Recently though, the federal government and a number of national organizations with an interest in education have attempted to develop a consensus among various stakeholders in education about voluntary national goals and standards.

In 1989, President Bush and the nation's governors, established six voluntary national goals for education in the U.S. In 1994, the U.S. Congress passed the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* which endorsed the original six goals and added two others. Goal 3 addressed student achievement:

By the year 2000, all students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our Nation's modern economy (National Education Goals Panel 1997, p.3)

In his State of the Union address in 1997, President Clinton proposed voluntary national tests to assess reading standards in Grade 4 and mathematics achievement in Grade 8.

These national and federal efforts have generated considerable debate about the relationship between the federal and state governments in setting national goals and standards, even voluntary ones (Masset, Krista & Hope 1997). Nonetheless, the national efforts have clearly fueled considerable activity in the states regarding subject-matter standards and systems of assessment to measure them.

Although education goals and standards in the U.S. are quite broad as defined in the various reports and legislation, much of the focus to date has been on a relatively narrow range of traditional academic subjects. President Clinton focused on reading and mathematics in proposing voluntary national tests. The National Education Goals Panel, which was established by the U.S. Congress to monitor the nation's progress in meeting

the education goals, has thus far only developed baseline indicators for reading, writing, math, history, and geography even though National Goal Three includes arts, foreign languages, and government (National Education Goals Panel 1997).

The emphasis on academic coursework at the national level has prompted many states to increase the number of academic courses students need for high school graduation (U.S. Department of Education 1992). As a result, an increasing percentage of high school graduates have completed more advanced academic coursework than in the past. In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* recommended that all students seeking a high school diploma be required to enroll in the 'New Basics,' a core curriculum composed of 4 years of English and 3 years each of social studies, science, and mathematics. According to recent data, the proportion of high school graduates who completed this set of 'new basics' requirements increased from 14 per cent in 1982 to 51 per cent in 1994 (U.S. Department of Education 1997, p. 3). One consequence of this trend is that high school students are taking fewer vocational courses.

This emphasis on traditional academic achievement ignores other areas of education that many believe are important for achieving the economic goals of education. In 1991, the U.S. Department of Labor *Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills* issued a report that identified five competencies and a three-part foundation skills. It argued that all workers must possess if they are to operate successfully in the 'high performance' workplaces of the future economy that 'represent essential preparation for all students, both those going directly to work and those planning further education'. These competencies and skills are listed in Table 1.

Although current academic requirements fulfil some of the foundation skills that the Commission argued are important, they do not address other basic skills and the larger set of workplace competencies important in preparing students for work. In other words, the current policy focus on narrow academic subjects and basic skills falls far short of the more comprehensive and extensive preparation that students should be receiving in U.S. schools.

The emphasis on academic achievement and standardized tests ignores other educational outcomes that may be equally or more important for achieving economic goals. For example, labor market earnings are more strongly related to educational attainment than to test scores. Among 25-64 year-olds, the average annual earnings in 1992 of males with Bachelor's degrees from 4-year universities were 69 per cent higher than males with high school diplomas (U.S. Department of Education 1995, Indicator 10). Even among those with the same mid-level score on a national literacy exam, the earnings gap between university and high school educated workers was 50 per cent. Research studies have also found that educational attainment has a powerful effect on earnings even after controlling for test scores and other characteristics of workers (Stern, Il-Woo, Catterall & Nakata 1989). One study suggests that the higher wage premium associated with earning a high school diploma is due, in part, to lower rates of absenteeism and less propensity that are unrelated to cognitive skills (Weiss 1988).

If educational attainment and other educational outcomes are as important as academic achievement in reaching economic goals, then schools should pay attention to the aspects

of schooling that promote them. Research on school dropouts has shown, for example, that social engagement and social behavior are as important as academic achievement in getting students to finish high school (Rumberger 1995). This research suggests that schools need to pay attention to both the social and academic dimensions of schooling if they want to be successful in educating students.

Table 1: Workplace competencies and skills

COMPETENCIES—effective workers can productively use:

- **Resources**—allocating time, money materials, space, and staff;
- **Interpersonal Skills**—working on teams, teaching others, serving customers, leading, negotiating, and working well with people from culturally diverse backgrounds;
- **Information**—acquiring and evaluating data, organizing and maintaining files, interpreting and communicating, and using computers to process information;
- **Systems**—understanding social, organizational, and technological systems, monitoring and correcting performance, and designing or improving systems;
- **Technology**—selecting equipment, tools, applying technology to specific tasks, and maintaining and troubleshooting technologies.

THE FOUNDATION—competence requires:

- **Basic Skills**—reading, writing, arithmetic and mathematics, speaking, and listening;
 - **Thinking Skills**—thinking creatively, making decisions, solving problems, seeing things in the mind’s eye, knowing how to learn, and reasoning;
 - **Personal Qualities**—individual responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity.
-

Source: SCANS 1991, p. vii.

In summary, economic goals have dominated public discourse and policy initiatives in education over the last two decades in the United States. But this economic emphasis has had a narrow focus, with most attention and action concentrating on a few academic areas, thereby ignoring other aspects of schooling that may have equally important economic benefits.

The social goals of education

The recent emphasis on economic goals for education also ignores other important social goals. More than two decades ago, Levin (1972, p. 10) identified seven important consequences of inadequate education, which at that time he defined as the failure to complete high school:

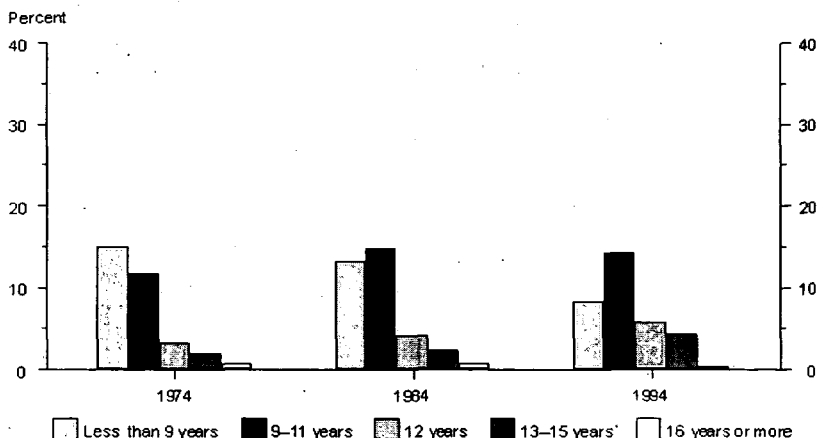
1. Forgone national income;
2. Forgone tax revenues;
3. Increased demand for social services;
4. Increased crime;
5. Reduced political participation;
6. Reduced intergenerational mobility; and
7. Poorer levels of health.

Recent data indicate that these outcomes are just as strongly related to education today as ever. In 1994, for example, high school dropouts were more than twice as likely to receive income from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) or public assistance, as high school graduates who did not go on to university (Figure 1). And between 1972 and 1994, high school dropouts or graduates who did not go on to university, and individuals with 13-15 years of schooling became more likely to receive AFDC or public assistance income.

Educational attainment is also strongly related to voting. In the 1994 congressional elections, university graduates aged 25-44 were 86 per cent more likely than high school graduates to vote, while high school dropouts of the same age were 58 per cent less likely than high school graduates to do so (Figure 2). Differences in voting behavior by educational attainment have also generally widened over time among 25-44 year-olds.

These important social goals of education have been largely absent from the public discourse and policy discussions about improving our educational system in the U.S.. Yet they are not only important to the welfare of the country, but also help to justify government support of education:

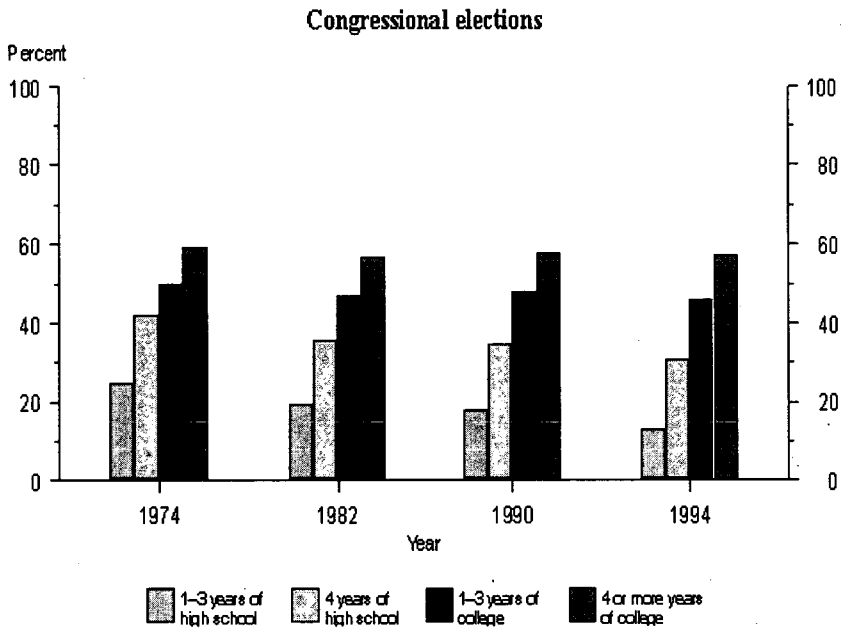
Figure 1: Persons aged 25-34, % who received income from AFDC or public assistance, by years of education completed: 1974, 1984, 1994



Source: U.S. Department of Education, 1996, Indicator 36, Chart 1.

Public investment in education has many potential benefits for the nation, including reduced reliance on welfare and public assistance programs among those who attain higher levels of education. The extent to which individuals with more education rely less on such income may be viewed, at least partly, as a return on the social cost of providing public education (U.S. Department of Education 1996, p.x).

Figure 2: Voting rates for the population aged 25-44, by type of election and educational attainment: selected years 1964-94



NOTE: Beginning in 1992, the Current Population Survey (CPS) changed the questions used to obtain the educational attainment of respondents. See the supplemental note to Indicator 25 for further discussion.

Source: U.S. Department of Education 1996, Indicator 37, Chart 1.

Equity goals of education

Explicit equity goals have largely been missing from the discourse on education as well. National Goal Three states that ‘all students will leave grades 4, 8, 12 having demonstrated competency’ in the stated subject-matter area. Similarly, in his State of the Union address President Clinton states that ‘every child should be able to read.’ Neither of these statements make any reference to eliminating long-standing disparities in achievement levels between social groups in the U.S.. The only explicit equity goal in the Goals 2000 list concerns an objective related to National Goal 2 of improving the high school graduation rate to 90 per cent: ‘The gap in high school graduation rates between American students from minority backgrounds and their non-minority counterparts will be eliminated.’

The lack of attention to equity goals is reflected in the many indicators of educational achievement and outcomes which have focussed on averages, or overall levels, rather than distributional measures or comparisons among social groups. For the most part, the annual reported progress toward meeting the National Goals is expressed as the percentage of students meeting each goal or related standard.

Although public discourse and policies have largely ignored equity issues, widespread disparities have continued to exist among social groups in both educational outcomes and factors that contribute to educational outcomes. One of the most important in the United States concerns race and ethnicity. The United States population, which is largely White, is rapidly becoming a mixture of different ethnic and racial groups.¹¹ This change is most evident in the school age population. In the first twenty years of the next century the White school-age population is projected to decrease by 10 per cent, while the Black population is projected to increase by 15 to 20 per cent and the Hispanic population is projected to increase by 50 per cent (see Table 2).

Table 2: Percentage change in the population of children aged 5–17, by race/ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity Group	Percentage change	
	1993 to 2000	2000 to 2020
White, non-Hispanic		
Aged 5–13	2.9	11.2
Aged 14–17	10.1	10.3
Black, non-Hispanic		
Aged 5–13	12.9	15.4
Aged 14–17	11.5	20.0
Hispanic		
Aged 5–13	29.8	47.0
Aged 14–17	23.6	60.6
Other		
Aged 5–13	32.5	67.2
Aged 14–17	45.1	73.3

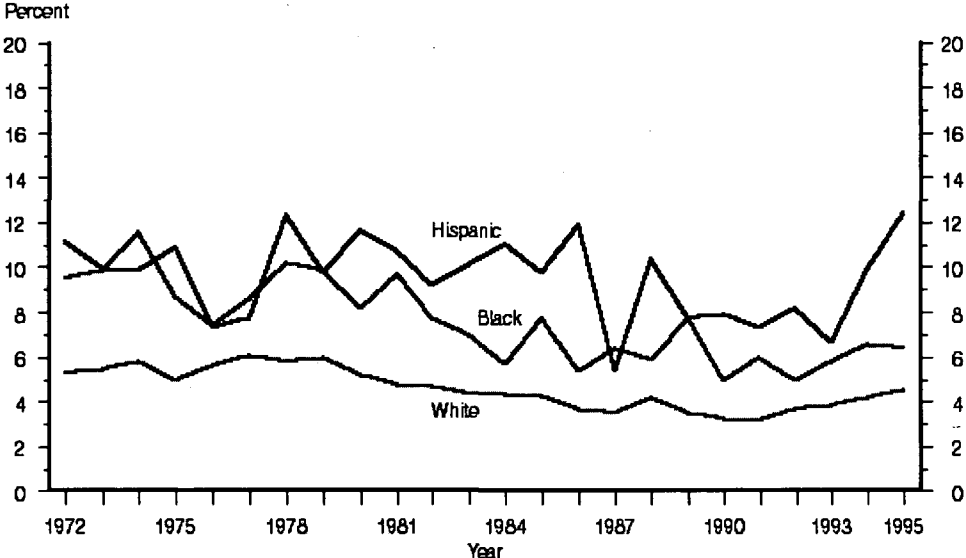
Source: Snyder & Shafer 1996, Indicator 2.

Educational achievement in the U.S. varies widely among racial and ethnic groups. Black and Hispanic students are much more likely than White students to drop out of high school (Figure 3). In 1995, for example, Black dropout rates were almost 50 per cent higher than Whites (6.4 per cent versus 4.5 per cent) and Hispanic dropout rates were almost 3 times higher than Whites (12.4 per cent versus 4.5 per cent).

University participation rates also vary widely by racial and ethnic background. For example, in 1995, 44 per cent of White high school graduates were enrolled in university compared to 35 per cent of Black high school graduates and 35 per cent of Hispanic high school graduates (Figure 4). Moreover, Black and Hispanic university students were more likely to attend 2-

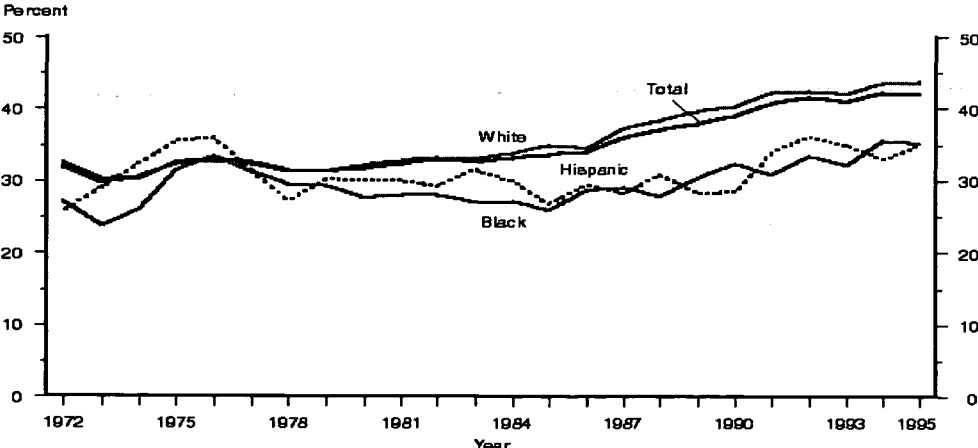
year institutions than 4-year institutions (U.S. Department of Education 1997, Supplemental Table 10-1). Combined with the higher dropout rates from high school, Blacks and Hispanics have lower educational attainment in the U.S. Among 25 to 29 year olds in 1995, 26 per cent of Whites had completed 4 years of university compared to 15.3 per cent for Blacks and 8.9 per cent for Hispanics (Snyder & Shafer 1996).

Figure 3: Percentage of students enrolled in grades 10-12 previous year who dropped out: October 1972-95



Source: U.S. Department of Education 1997, Indicator 7, Chart 1.

Figure 4: Percentage of high school graduates aged 18-24 enrolled in university, by age and race/ethnicity: October 1972-95

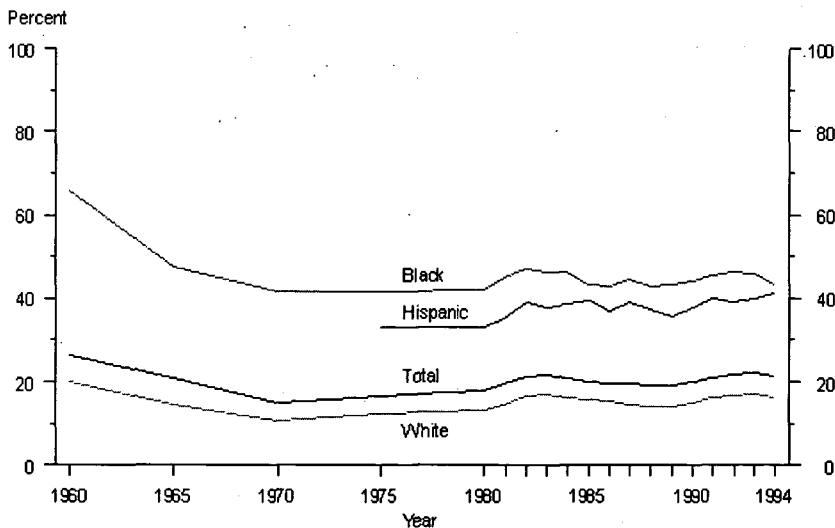


Source: U.S. Department of Education 1997, Indicator 7, Chart 1.

Minority students have low educational achievement in large part because of the characteristics of their families, schools, and communities. Both researchers and school practitioners have come to realize that the various settings or contexts in which students live—their families, schools, and communities—all shape their behaviour and influence their academic success (Jessor 1993). A recent report by the National Research Council on the problems of adolescence points out that too much emphasis has been placed on ‘high-risk’ youth, many of whom are ethnic and racial minorities, and not enough on the high-risk settings in which they live and go to school (National Research Council 1993).

With respect to family settings, there are large disparities in the family circumstances between White and minority students. For example, family poverty rates vary widely by racial and ethnic background in the U.S. Not only are overall poverty rates in the U.S. twice as high as in any other industrialized country after adjusting for the impact of taxes and governmental transfers (U.S. Department of Education 1996, Indicator 35), poverty rates for Black and Hispanic children are twice as high as poverty rates for White children (Figure 5). Parental education, which is also an important predictor of educational achievement, also varies widely among racial and ethnic groups in the U.S.. Black and Hispanic children are more likely than White children to have parents who did not graduate from high school and are less likely than white children to have parents who graduated from university. For example, in 1995, 16 per cent of Black and 27 per cent of Hispanic children aged 3–5 had parents who had not completed high school, compared to 4 per cent of their White counterparts (U.S. Department of Education 1997, Figure 3).

Figure 5: Percentage of children less than 18 years old who live in families with incomes below the poverty level: selected years 1960-94

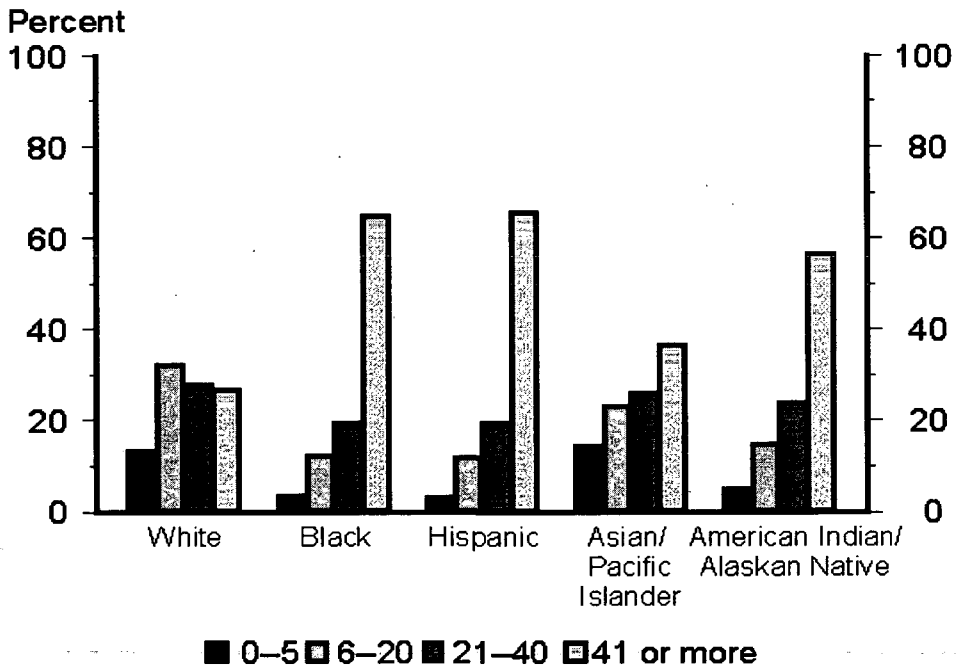


NOTE: Hispanics may be of any race. Data presented for 1980 include 1979 data for blacks and 1980 data for whites and total. Data presented for 1985 include 1987 data for blacks and 1985 data for whites and total.

Source: U.S. Department of Education 1996, Indicator 44, Chart 1.

In addition to disparities in family circumstances among racial and ethnic groups in America, there are also widespread disparities in the schools. Students are highly segregated by race and social class in the United States (Orfield, Bachmeier, James & Eitle 1997). One way to characterize this segregation is by school poverty. School poverty is frequently measured by percentage of students who receive free or reduced-price lunches under a federal government program. The government has defined 'low poverty' schools as schools in which less than 5 per cent of the students are enrolled in the school lunch program and 'high poverty' schools as schools in which more than 40 per cent of the students are enrolled in the school lunch program. In the 1993-94 school year, 27 per cent of White students were in schools with a high poverty rate compared to 65 per cent of Black and Hispanic students (Figure 6).

Figure 6: percentage distribution of students, by percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in public schools: school year 1993-94

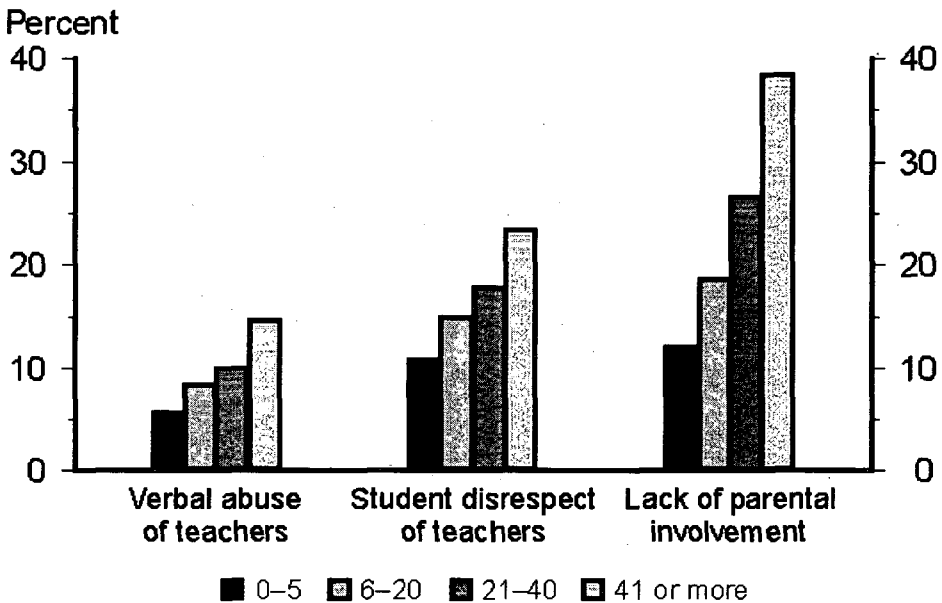


Source: U.S. Department of Education 1997, Figure 5.
 Note: Bars represent the proportion of students from each racial or ethnic group who attend schools where the percentage of students in the federal school lunch program equals 0-5; 6-20; 21-40; and 41 or more. Schools where the percentage of students in the school lunch program is 41 or more are considered 'high poverty' schools; schools where the percentage of students in the school lunch program is 5 or less are considered 'low poverty' schools.

Government data has found that the learning environments and resources differ markedly between high poverty and low poverty schools. For example, teachers in high poverty schools are more likely to report problems with verbal abuse of teachers, lack of respect for teachers, and lack of parental involvement than teachers in low poverty schools (Figure 7). Student misbehaviour, absenteeism, and teacher salaries and advanced training are also lower in high poverty schools than in low poverty school (U.S. Department of Education 1997, Figure 6, Table 56-2).

While there are already widespread disparities in family and school settings between racial and social groups in the U.S. some recent policy initiatives are likely to increase them further. For example, recent reforms of the welfare system could increase child poverty rates in the U.S. (Handler 1995). Recent federal court rulings backing off from forced integration have led to increased racial and ethnic segregation in U.S. schools (Orfield et al. 1997) while state court rulings to equalize funding of public schools as increased private support of public schools through district education foundations and school parent-teacher organizations, resulting in increased resource disparities between schools (Brunner & Sonstelie 1996).

Figure 7: Percentage of public school teachers who reported selected problems were serious, by percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch, school year 1993–94



Source: U.S. Department of Education 1997, Figure 7.

Note: Bars represent the proportion of teachers in schools where the percentage of students in the federal school lunch program equals 0-5; 6-20; 21-40; and 41 or more. Schools where the percentage of students in the school lunch program is 41 or more are considered 'high poverty' schools; schools where the percentage of students in the school lunch program is 5 or less are considered 'low poverty' schools.

Summary and conclusions

The recent focus on economic goals for education in the U.S. was brought about by the concern over foreign competition during the 1980s. That concern remains today, even though the U.S. has emerged in the 1990s as a powerful global competitor. So it appears unlikely that the economic imperative for education will subside soon. Consequently, it is doubtful that the social goals of education will become more important in the near term. Similarly, equity goals for education also appear unlikely to become elevated to a higher priority in the near future.

Recent conservative legislation and court rulings at the federal level also have tended to move the country away from equity issues. The federal government recently passed sweeping welfare reform that greatly curtails benefits to needy children and families (Goldberg 1997). Recent voter initiatives in California have abolished affirmative action programs for ethnic minorities and curtailed benefits for illegal immigrants (Tolbert & Hero 1996). And the U.S. Supreme Court has become more conservative over the last decade (Kairys 1993).

The current political climate along with demographic trends that will increase the proportion of minority students in the U.S. poses a particular educational challenge. Without suitable interventions, it is likely that disparities in educational achievement between the most successful and the least successful students could increase in the future, with dire consequences for the welfare of the country (Levin 1989).

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ⁱ The author would like to acknowledge the financial support provided by CEET during his sabbatical stay in March, 1997.

ⁱⁱ Racial and ethnic identity in the U.S. is primarily based on self-report. Respondents to various government surveys are asked to identify their racial and ethnic group. Whites and Blacks are considered racial groups, while Hispanics are considered as an ethnic group, but are also a member of the White or Black racial group. Therefore, in most government statistics, racial and ethnic groups are identified as: White, non-Hispanic; Black, non-Hispanic, and Hispanic. In this paper White and Black refer to White, non-Hispanic and Black non-Hispanic, respectively.

Education and training in Australia: Reforms and results

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Introduction

This paper documents major reforms in the funding and organisation of education and training over the last decade and provides an overview of the outcomes. The reforms to education and training were made in the context of an economy increasingly exposed to international pressures and with an agenda for economic reform that stressed smaller government and the wider establishment of competitive markets.

A major factor stimulating change in education and training was poor employment prospects for school leavers and low-skilled workers. The importance of training the existing workforce, including those at the operative level, was also recognised. The needs were emphasised by the changes occurring in the industrial and occupational structure and by competitive pressures, new technologies and changes to management, work practices and industrial relations. The majority of the Australian workforce had no post-school qualifications and little formal training in the workplace. Many had literacy skills inadequate for the new tasks and training required. Supervisors and managers were viewed as lacking the skills required for the new tasks confronting them.

There was therefore an increased need for education and training. But at the same time, economic reform required that public outlays be contained and that publicly funded activities demonstrate increased efficiency and responsiveness to client needs.

In education and training there have been steps to introduce greater competitiveness among suppliers, reforms to regulation and management and increased accountability requirements. A growing share of public funds for education and training has been made available for the private sector. In universities, where the expansion in student numbers has been greatest, students and their families have been required to bear an increasing share of the costs.

Since 1988 the organisational structure of higher education has been transformed with colleges of advanced education and universities merged into a single system. More recently the most intense pressures to adapt to the needs of the economy have been in vocational education and training. Participation of teenagers in vocational education and training (VET) had, on the data available, been low. VET courses which incorporated work-based training were largely confined to traditional male-dominated occupations where employment was diminishing. The challenge has been to extend work-based training to other areas and create combinations of on- and off-the-job and institutional training, including training in secondary schools. VET qualifications were to be based on competencies, however acquired, rather than time on course. An enhanced role for industry has been sought in determining the standards and composition of VET.

This paper reviews the changes that have been made to education and training in response to these pressures and problems. It assesses the extent to which the objectives of the reforms have been achieved. As background to the discussion, Table 1 shows the

distribution and growth of students across the major sectors. This shows little change in school enrolments in recent years but substantial growth in higher education and VET. However the changes in VET may not be as substantial as shown due to the introduction of a new data system that substantially affects comparisons over time.

Table 1. Students and clients in education and training, '000s, Australia

	School to year 10	School years 11 & 12	Higher education	VET~	Recreational etc & Personal Enrichment	'Other'*	TOTAL
% Full-time	100%	100%	59%	Approx 15%	approx 0%	Na	-
1990	2665	376	485	967	539	151	5184
1996	2772	371	634	1355	390	204	5726

Source: ABS and NCVER

Notes: * Statistics from ABS survey data; ~ VET data relate to students in streams 2100 to 4500 enrolled at any time in the year; A new system of VET data collection was introduced for 1994 with further changes in 1995 and 1996; na, not available.

A changing economy and economic policy

In the 1980s Australia's main exports of agricultural and mining products were faring relatively poorly in the changing world economy, leading to persistent balance of payments deficits and rising international debt. While growing relatively rapidly the economy had a rate of productivity increase below the OECD average (OECD 1997). The protected manufacturing sector was uncompetitive in the international economy where globalisation of production was developing with the widespread application of new information technologies. New economic policies were progressively introduced from the mid 1980s. These policies included reductions in protection, regulation of finance, industry and the labour market, and containment and reform of the public sector.

International pressures, policy changes and continuing trends including the growing participation of women, led to major changes in the composition of the Australian workforce (recent changes are discussed in more detail in Burke 1998a). Employment in manufacturing continued to decline in its share of total employment, from 24 per cent in 1970 to 17 per cent in 1985 and to 14 per cent in 1995. Community services including education, which leapt in size in the 1970s, continued to grow in the 1980s. Finance, property and business services also grew. Employment in retail and wholesale trade grew but increasingly the employment was of part-time workers. For the labour force as a whole part-time employment made up 25 per cent of total employment in 1995 compared with 18 per cent in 1985 and 11 per cent in 1970. Females filled many of the part-time jobs in service industries. Females made up 32 per cent of the labour force in 1970, 39 per cent in 1985 and 43 per cent in 1995. Over 40 per cent of females employed in 1995 worked part-time, compared with just over 10 per cent of males.

Associated with the expansion of community services, employment of groups such as teachers and nurses increased strongly until the 1990s. With the decline in manufacturing employment, the numbers of tradesmen, trades assistants and factory hands fell. There was an absolute decline in metal-related jobs and a growth in food-related jobs among the trades groups. New technology and globalisation also contributed to changes in the occupational shares within industries. Larger firms tended to increase production with relatively little

demand for labour, with most recent employment growth occurring in small business (less than 20 employees for non-manufacturing industries and less than 100 for manufacturing). In the late 1990s small business accounts for over half of the privately employed labour force, about a third of this in non-employing firms, self-employed and partnerships.

The broad impression in the 1980s and early 1990s was that unskilled work was declining and skilled and highly skilled work was increasing especially in technological areas. This was simplistic as some jobs then considered to be low-skilled were also growing fairly rapidly, for example part-time employment in personal services and in retailing (Sweet 1987). Recently Maglen and Shah (1996) analysed occupational changes using a classification developed by Robert Reich in the USA. In this analysis the group termed *symbolic analysts* are growing fastest, especially in full-time employment. Growth is also occurring among *in-person service workers*, but it is not as fast and is increasingly part-time and casual. *Routine production workers* are still the dominant group but are in relative decline, experiencing little if any growth in employment. Inequality of earnings between the three groups has increased.

Whatever the case about skills and earnings in jobs, unemployment was, and is, most concentrated among those with the lowest levels of education and training. In 1995, for example, persons with bachelor degrees aged 25-44 years had an unemployment rate of four per cent compared with 10 per cent for persons who did not complete secondary school. One per cent of those with bachelor degrees had been unemployed for 52 weeks or more, compared with four per cent of those who had left school before completing the final year. Persons with post-school qualifications, especially females, also have a higher rate of participation in the labour force than those without. Compared with the earnings of other young people, earnings of new graduates have not fallen in recent years despite the growth in numbers of new graduates. Overall there has been remarkable stability in relative earnings by qualification by age (Gregory 1995).

The increasingly competitive environment forced industry to improve quality and productivity, exerting pressure to introduce new technology and change workplace practices and management. This led to a change in range of skills and tasks required in jobs well beyond that indicated by the measured numerical changes in employment by occupation.

Educational policy response

The first responses in the 1980s to the changing economic and policy framework were mainly directed at youth unemployment and opportunities for people seen to be disadvantaged. Policy was directed firstly at increasing participation in education. The nature of education and training reform changed with the economic restructuring of the late 1980s and continues to evolve. Creating opportunities for disadvantaged young people remained important, but within an agenda that placed much greater stress on the relevance of education and training to the needs of the economy as perceived by industry.

Economic reforms led to restriction in public expenditure, and with it changes in public and private funding of education. There was concern to increase the efficiency of provision in education and training through reforms to management and institutional structures in the public sector and by increasing the exposure of public providers to competition.

Participation in schools

Near stationary at 35 per cent in the late 1970s, school retention rates began to rise in the early 1980s. The speed of increase was not seen as adequate and in the mid 1980s targets were set for retention rates eg of 65 per cent by the end of the decade. A need to reform school structures and curricula for the wider range of abilities and aptitudes among senior school students, to prepare them for destinations other than higher education, was perceived. Recommendations were made for structures that permitted a wider range of subject offerings at varying levels, including technological and vocational subjects. Statements and profiles in *eight key learning areas* were developed and have subsequently influenced State and Territory curriculum and assessment, notably in mathematics (MCEETYA 1994).

Reforms to student assistance and unemployment benefits were proposed to create incentives for school retention (*Income Support* 1984). This led to the introduction of AUSTUDY in 1987 which substantially increased the number and value of grants available to senior secondary school students, subject to family and personal means tests. These policy reforms reduced the costs to students of longer schooling. The continuing decline in full-time job opportunities for youth, the increased availability of part-time work, and the recession of the early 1990s increased the relative rewards to staying on at school. The school retention rate rose from 46 per cent in 1985 to 77 per cent by 1992, but has fallen in the recent economic recovery to 71 per cent in 1996.

Despite increasing participation, there remain a substantial number of students leaving school early: about 7 per cent of 15 year-olds are not at school and over 20 per cent of 16 year-olds. These 15 and 16 year-olds have high rates of unemployment - more than 30 per cent - and only a very small proportion of them is enrolled in TAFE. Within this group of school dropouts is an unknown number of homeless young people.

The average participation rates presented here hide many differences across type of schools and regions and among various social and ethnic groups. Second generation students of non-English speaking background fare well in the education system but recent migrants still suffer considerable disadvantage. By 1993, the retention rate of indigenous Australians had risen to 25 per cent, but this has to be compared with the average rate for Australia of more than 70 per cent. Students from low socio-economic background have lower than average rate of school retention to the final year of secondary school. Those who do stay to the end of secondary school tend to be relatively less successful in the year 12 assessment and thus have fewer post school options (MCEETYA 1996). There appears to be some - but not a large - decrease in the differences in such school outcomes in recent years.

One area of success in terms of age-participation rates has been in the education of females. By 1995 about 62 per cent of 17 year-old girls attended school compared with 55 per cent of boys. Females now have a notably higher rate of entry into higher education but a lower rate of entry into TAFE and a particularly low entry into traditional apprenticeships.

Non-government schools enrol about 30 per cent of all school students and have been increasing their share of enrolments fairly persistently for 20 years. In 1996 the apparent retention rate to year 12 in 'other' non-government schools was around 95 per cent

compared with 75 per cent for Catholic schools and 67 per cent for government schools. Because of transfers across schools the data exaggerate the differences but they do reflect socioeconomic and resourcing differences. The reasons for this and the implications are considered later in this paper.

Whether the quality of schooling has been maintained in the recent expansion is hard to assess. Assessment is a State responsibility so that national data on school achievement is mainly confined to sample surveys such as those by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). A recent review of the evidence available from national surveys and State assessments indicates, with few exceptions, stable or slightly rising levels of achievement (Steering Committee 1995). Recent international data suggest a comparatively good performance compared with most OECD countries though inferior to some Asian countries.

In summary, while quantitative evidence of learning outcomes is not abundant, there have been considerable achievements in Australian schools in recent years. There has been a large increase in participation of older teenagers up to 1992. There have been extensive revisions of the curriculum including widening provision of vocational education, discussed further below. Some of these changes appear to be in response to new management and increased competition. There has been considerable growth in participation by girls, though socio-economic disadvantage appears to remain a substantial problem.

Participation in higher education

Major reforms to higher education were introduced in 1988 and were driven by the new economic policies as well as by the continuing concern for participation. A proposed expansion was justified as necessary to increase the number of graduates closer to levels in economies such as USA and Japan. The expansion was directed to areas of particular economic need, especially in the technologies and management, in 'profiles' as agreed between institutions and the Commonwealth government.

The Commonwealth had sought over a long period to curb the burden of the higher education sector for which it assumed financial responsibility in 1974. Its base operating grant per student had declined in real terms over a long period to 1991. Universities from the late 1980s were permitted to charge tuition fees to foreign students and for various postgraduate courses. Fees paid by overseas and Australian students grew sharply from a negligible level in the mid 1980s. Overseas student tuition fees yielded over \$500 million in 1996 and Australian postgraduate student fees about \$90 million.

The Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) charge was introduced in 1989 as a source of revenue for the proposed expansion, but also justified on equity grounds. HECS was a charge on Australian students equal to about 20 per cent of the average government recurrent grant per full-time student. Payment could be made up-front, for which a discount was allowed, or deferred until the person's annual earnings reached the average in the community. No interest was charged though the debt was adjusted for inflation.

It was argued that inequality in the socioeconomic composition of the undergraduate student body had changed little since tuition fees were abolished in 1974, but since very few full-time students actually paid fees before 1974 this argument was oversimplified. Many students attended on Commonwealth or teachers' scholarships, the latter abolished in the late 1970s. The stronger case on equity grounds was that graduates in general earned more than the community at large which financed the free tuition. Since HECS required payment only when reasonable earnings were achieved, it was argued that it could tap the higher earnings of graduates without deterring students from low socioeconomic background.

By 1996 HECS was equal to 23 per cent of the Commonwealth's average operating grant to universities per full-time student. Money actually collected under HECS in up-front payments and repayment of debt amounted to about eight per cent of Commonwealth operating grants to higher education.

Actual growth in higher education enrolments and outputs has been much faster than was expected in the late 1980s. University awards totalled 78,000 in 1986 and were projected to reach 125,000 by the end of the century, but exceeded 140,000 by 1995. University student numbers, which were projected to rise from 400,000 in 1987 to 450,000 in 2001, approached 660,000 in 1997. The fastest growth has been among fee paying overseas students, in masters coursework and in higher degrees by research..

Not all students who have attained the minimum levels required for university entry have been able to obtain a place in recent years. The early 1990s saw school leavers facing increased difficulty and this led the Commonwealth to require universities to meet set targets for school leavers and undergraduates. The universities were not permitted to take Australian students as fee paying undergraduates until 1998.

Table 2 shows that there has been a growth in the participation rate of young people aged 17 to 19 from 11 per cent to 17 per cent in the last decade. However, due in part to demographic fluctuations and the shortage of places in the early 1990s, the growth in student numbers has been faster among persons in their twenties than among teenagers.

Table 2. Educational participation rates of 17-19 year-olds %

	Schools	TAFE	Higher Education	Total
1975	13	20	11	45
1985	16	24	11	50
1990	20	25	15	60
1995	24	26	17	66

Source: DEET, *Education Participation Rates, Australia*.

Note: Changes in collections affect comparability over time; numbers may not add due to rounding.

Changes in Commonwealth funding for 1997 and later years mean a reduction in government real funding per student and a substantial increase in the share of funding borne by students, either through HECS or through direct fees. HECS was increased by 35 per cent to 124 per cent in a new three-level charge related to both course tuition costs and likely future earnings. Some HECS exemption scholarships will be provided on merit to

low income students. Repayment of HECS will now be required at a much lower level of income than in the past, speeding the recovery rate and tapping income groups who might not have been required to repay their debt under existing rules. In addition universities may enrol Australian undergraduate students for full fees once they have filled their government funded HECS-related places.

The new HECS charges reduce the burden of higher education on the Commonwealth. It is argued that they distribute costs more equitably among those who benefit from higher education, though this view is not shared by all. In some courses the charges now represent over 50 per cent of government funding per student, which includes some funding for university research. The efficiency aspects of the new arrangements are not clear cut. The distribution of students across courses may change, not necessarily in line with the needs of the economy. A low cost course such as Law attracted the highest level of HECS charge of \$5500 per annum in 1997 along with a high cost course such as Medicine. Engineering and Science, which already have difficulty in attracting students, will have a HECS charge of \$4700 compared with Arts where the rate is \$3300. In addition the distribution of students across institutions will be affected by the introduction of full-fee arrangements for 'above HECS' places in 1998.

Expansion of VET

Reform of VET accelerated in the late 1980s and was outlined in a series of reports (Deveson 1990, Finn 1991, Carmichael 1992, Mayer 1992). Targets for the expansion of enrolment by young people were set in the Finn report and endorsed by Commonwealth and State Ministers. Additional funding to support these targets and other reforms was provided by the Commonwealth government each year from 1992. With the support of the States the Commonwealth established the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) which commenced work in 1993 managing the Commonwealth's growing financial contribution to VET and overseeing continuing reform.

The Finn Committee assumed in 1991 that the needs of young people and the economy would be best served by creating opportunities for nearly all young people not completing secondary school and not entering post-school courses. Its main quantitative target was for 19 year-olds: 'that by the year 2001 95 per cent should have completed Year 12 or an initial post school qualification or be participating in formally recognised education and training'.

In 1990 about 70 per cent of 19 year-olds met this set of criteria. By 1995 the figure was nearly 80 per cent (though changes in data classification affect the comparison). However, Table 2 shows that not as much growth has occurred in VET as expected. There was a slight increase in the proportion of 18 and 19 year-olds, but a decline in the number of younger students. Until 1992 this decline in the younger ages could be accounted for by rising school participation rates.

The extension of structured and recognised work-based training to a wider range of occupations was proposed in the Kirby Report (1985) and supported by the Commonwealth. This led to the introduction of traineeships, usually for one year, alongside the apprenticeship system. A target of 75,000 traineeship places was set for end of 1988.

Traineeships, in a number of forms, are now an established part of the training system. While they extended the range of occupations for work-based training and participation by young women, original targets were not met. Commencements have usually been below 20,000 per annum. They have not achieved the recognition from employers or unions given to traditional apprenticeships. Less attractive to young people because they included payment only for time on the job, they were also perceived to attract less able or committed young people and dropout rates were relatively high (Finn 1991, Sweet 1995, DEETYA 1996a). Only one year in length, they led to a lower level of qualification than apprenticeships.

As result of the Carmichael report (1992), however, some new schemes were developed. Apprenticeship and traineeships were merged into an articulated progression of awards under the Australian Vocational Training System. With additional finance under *Working Nation* (Keating 1994) and vigorous promotion, the numbers leapt in 1995-96 to 35,000.

Apprenticeships have remained attractive to young people, roughly retaining their ratio to the older teenage population set in the early 1980s (as shown in Table 3). But, they were severely affected by the recession of the early 1990s, as in the early 1980s, and have fallen again in the last two years. Arguments have been advanced that apprentice wages have been too high relative to adult wages compared to many European countries, deterring employers from hiring more apprentices. High wages may also discourage employers from funding off-the-job training for apprentices, other than for the release time at TAFE (Sweet 1995).

Table 3. Apprenticeship commencements 000s and relevant populations

	1	2	3	4	1/3	2/4
	Apprenticeship Commencements	Total Apprentices	Population aged 17	Population aged 15-19	%	%
1981	49	141	261	1297	19%	11%
1983	35	139	251	1281	14%	11%
1985	49	129	258	1305	19%	10%
1994	50	123	252	1276	20%	10%
1995**	49	123	252	1268	20%	10%
1996**	45	126	253	1279	18%	10%

Source: NCVER

Note: Commencements include recommencements; ** Break in series in 1995 due to introduction of new statistical standard.

In 1996 the Commonwealth announced a policy of Modern Australian Apprenticeships and Traineeships which is now known as New Apprenticeships. A variety of new forms of on and off-the-job training arrangements, including secondary school and work, will be encouraged. Under 'User Choice', users - especially employers - can choose a training provider, the content, timing and mode of delivery of the training. This exposes traditional providers of this training to increased competitive pressure. Trainees will be paid only for the 'productive' time on the job and not for training time. Subsidies will be continued to employers of apprentices and trainees, though at a lower rate than the peak rate of the mid 1990s. Subsidies will also be provided to ensure that trainees' pay does not fall below the level of unemployment (job search) benefits. The new arrangements make little provision for trade union involvement and will be kept separate from the industrial relations system.

These changes are designed to encourage employers to take on apprentices by reducing the costs of apprenticeship. It is expected that employers, paying lower wages, will provide more formal training to apprentices, as employers do in Germany. A concern, however, is the effect of isolating contracts of training from industrial arrangements. In the past apprenticeship appears to have been sustained in Australia and overseas mainly where there is a 'social partnership' of employers and unions.

Another concern is whether able young people will find apprenticeships attractive at lower rates of pay. In many fields the completion of an apprenticeship appears to add little to relative earnings. Even in those fields where private rates of return are high it is not because earnings are particularly high but only because earnings foregone during training are very small (Dockery & Norris 1996). On the other hand, reforms to industrial relations may in time lead to higher relative earnings for qualified workers, increasing the returns to training. Other incentives will need close consideration. Young people who have the option of higher education will have to compare the reduced wages from apprentice training with the increased cost of HECS. Full-time TAFE courses could increase relatively in popularity.

The Commonwealth has recognised such issues and is to introduce a Youth Allowance in 1998 which will bring into line assistance to students, job search allowances and guaranteed minimum wages for trainees. This allowance replaces both unemployment benefits and AUSTUDY for persons under 20 years of age. No unemployment benefit will be available to 16 and 17 year-olds. Government benefits for unemployment for 18 to 19 year-olds will be subject to income tests. The aim is to push the young unemployed into the education and training system, and to reduce benefits to some through income tests. The educational and social benefits are disputed by several major groups.

Much of this reform concentrates on young people. However, it was argued that existing workers in all occupations also need an increased level of education and training (Dawkins 1988, Dawkins & Holding 1987). All workers need a functional level of literacy and more workers would be required to be multi-skilled, creative and adaptable - implying a need for an education that involves a convergence of the general and vocational. Learning would need to be continuous, in the workplace as well as in the education system.

In its effort to expand training in industry the Commonwealth government supported a range of measures including award restructuring and enterprise agreements within which provision for training or rewards for training can be made (Teicher & Grauzé 1996). It introduced the Training Guarantee in 1990 which required firms with a wage bill of \$200,000 or more to spend an amount rising to 1.5 per cent, of its gross wages on training. The Guarantee was suspended in 1994 and abolished in 1996. Larger firms had generally undertaken greater expenditures than required and the administration of the Guarantee was unpopular with business. It did appear to have encouraged medium-sized businesses to increase their expenditures, though this may also have been affected by the whole package of industrial reforms.

Some indication of the outcomes of these efforts is given by data from the 1989 and 1993 surveys of training undertaken by the ABS. The major aspects are summarised in Table 4. The proportion of wage and salary earners receiving on-the-job informal training rose.

There was some increase in external training but a surprising decline in in-house formal training that is as yet unexplained.

Table 4. Wage and salary earners in training, 000s, Australia 1989 and 1993

	Study or Training Courses Undertaken			On-the-job training	Some training undertaken	Total wage & salary earners	
	<i>Studied</i>	<i>In-house</i>	<i>External</i>				<i>Total</i>
1989	1124	2338	658	3205	4814	5300	6705
1993	1316	2214	836	3324	5792	6072	7079

Source: ABS 6278.0

Note: persons can undertake more than one type of study or training.

ABS data on employer expenditure on training in 1996 show a substantial fall in expenditure in small and medium sized businesses in real terms. They show an overall decline in expenditure as a percentage of gross wages and salaries from 2.9 in 1993 to 2.5 per cent in 1996 which may reflect an unwillingness by employers to commit to longer term training, given an uncertain environment and especially a workforce that is increasingly less permanently employed.

Improving the relevance of education and training

A major thrust of recent reforms has been to make education and training programs more relevant to the needs of clients - particularly to industry, but also to disadvantaged young people. In part this thrust was supported by reforms to the methods of funding (discussed in the next section) and by reforms to the curriculum, assessment and qualifications framework.

For those likely to enter the *full-time* labour force from school (still well over 50 per cent of an age cohort) two main reforms have been promoted in schools. The first was the attempt to identify and incorporate in schools what were called 'employment-related key competencies'. The second was the extension of recognised vocational education into schools.

Ensuring that young people acquired employment-related key competencies was a major recommendation of the Finn Committee (1991) and elaborated by the Mayer Committee (1992). The integration of key competencies with the separately developed statements and profiles in eight key learning areas has been piloted within the States and included information campaigns to teachers, parents and business.

Vocational education has been expanding rapidly in the final two years of secondary schooling. Many of the programs involve dual recognition for credit for both school and TAFE qualifications (Sweet 1995, MCEETYA 1996) and many involve industry placements. A stimulus to the recent expansion was the introduction under *Working Nation* (Keating 1994) of the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF) which is funded to support school-industry partnerships. Ainley and Fleming (1997) estimated that over 60 per cent of Australia's secondary schools offered programs in 1996 involving some workplace learning and that about 12 per cent of students participated in the programs. There are, in addition,

vocational programs that do not involve industry placement. New Apprenticeships will provide for the extension of school-industry arrangements to allow students to commence apprenticeships while at school, with a variety of arrangements of school and work days.

Schools have also continued with programs for the less advantaged framed largely in terms of improving their educational outcomes. The Commonwealth's National Equity Program for Schools and various complementary State activities incorporate a range of extra resources including support for English as a second language and for literacy.

In the VET sector the major reform was to base certification on industry determined competency standards, rather than on time served in education and training. A vocational competency comprises the specification of the knowledge and skill and its application within an occupation or industry to the standard of performance required in employment (National Training Board 1991). A system of state and national industry training boards was established, with employers and union membership, to advise on industry standards across occupations covered by VET sector training.

The establishment of national standards has largely been achieved. Industry competency standards define a 'product' and thus are important in the development of a training market, but there has been criticism of the effects of competency-based teaching and assessment. This centres on the application of behaviourist approaches and neglect of more holistic approaches to competencies.

There is also ongoing criticism of the operation of the framework for the recognition of training. Claimed to be excessively bureaucratic and complex it is seen as discouraging enterprises and private providers of training from participating in the system (Taylor 1996). A commitment to simplify the processes for accrediting courses and recognising providers has been made.

Industry training boards have had difficulty in carrying out some of their roles, in particular the offering of advice on the quantity of training needed for particular industries (their role is reviewed by Wooden in this book). In part this is because they represent a grouping of industries, but advise on training for occupations within a wider range of industries.

Similar reforms have not yet extended to higher education, though the Commonwealth has appointed a Committee (the West Committee) to review the financing, policy and organisation of higher education. Though competency standards have been developed for some professional groups such as nurses, in general universities have remained in control of their curricula. Various schemes of collaboration of universities and industry have been supported and universities have more actively sought industry funds for courses, consultancies and research.

Enhancing efficiency and competition

Two main approaches have been taken to increase the efficiency of the provision of education and training. One is a reform of the organisational structure and management of public education and training. The second is the increase in competitive pressures resulting

from making an increasing proportion of public funds available on a competitive basis to both public and private providers.

At a national level, separate government departments were merged to establish the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET, now DEETYA) in 1987. As mentioned ANTA was set up to coordinate national activities in VET and in particular to allocate increased Commonwealth funds to the States.

The combining of education and training with employment and the increased presence of economists in DEET compared with the former Department of Education has increased the attention given to economic analysis in policy development. A related matter has been the tendency to appoint industrial leaders rather than educators to head major committees of review in recent years.

The National Commission of Audit (1996) saw some inefficiencies arising due to overlapping roles of the Commonwealth and the States in schools and VET. It recommended that the States assume full responsibility for schools and the Commonwealth take full responsibility for VET along with higher education. Commonwealth grants to the States would be adjusted appropriately. These recommendations have not been acted on. In VET the operation of the ANTA agreement has been reviewed and reforms introduced to reduce the degree of bureaucratic complexity in its regulatory role in VET and to increase the input of business into its operations.

For schools and VET, as well as higher education as discussed earlier, there has been a move to increase the specification of outcomes, set out in profile agreements, and devolution of the methods by which the outcomes are reached. Profile agreements include the broad distribution of activities, quality assurance requirements and equity objectives. In universities, financial incentives were also provided to speed up the adoption of quality assurance procedures. Performance indicators are being developed in higher education and VET as a means of monitoring provider performance.

In higher education, public funding is provided by the Commonwealth and the universities operate as autonomous institutions in raising private revenue, in allocating their expenditures and in making contracts in Australia and internationally.

The TAFE institutes, *in some States*, have been given similar autonomy as the role of the State authority has changed to one of allocating funds to providers, rather than managing the TAFE sector. At school level there is also a movement to greater autonomy in management of government schools, again with variation across States. Across the sectors labour market reforms have led to the development of enterprise agreements and some individual contracts, though most employees still work mainly under award conditions. There has been a trend to casual employment (Burke 1998a).

Since the mid 1980s, TAFE institutes have competed with private providers, through a system of tenders, for the provision of training under Commonwealth labour market programs. TAFE institutes have also been encouraged to undertake fee-for-service activities. A more recent development has been the active promotion by ANTA of the concept of a *training market*. In its national strategy, ANTA (1994, 1996) urged the

development of a market for training as a prime means of increasing the responsiveness of VET providers to the needs of industry. It required State authorities to increase the proportion of Commonwealth funds allocated by open tender. Following a review of training reforms (Allen Consulting 1994) ANTA funded pilot projects for 'user choice' in training. This will be the basis of the provision of training under New Apprenticeships from the beginning of 1998. (The concept of the training market and the growing literature on it are reviewed by Anderson 1996, 1997).

Unlike VET, universities have not been required to tender for operating grants, though the idea has been floated (NBEET 1992). However they have engaged in strong competition among themselves for full-fee overseas students and postgraduate students. The research performance of each university affects the level of research funding it receives in Commonwealth operating grants. Academics also compete for a variety of research grants. Nevertheless, the need for increased contestability for research funds is argued by the Productivity Commission (1996).

In primary and secondary schooling the pressure for government schools to respond to parents' needs is affected by the existence of a large and growing non-government school sector. The non-government share of students has grown from about 21 per cent in 1977 to 29 per cent in 1995 with growth concentrated in 'other' non-government schools. Because tuition fees are charged, disadvantaged groups are unrepresented in non-government schools. The continuing trend to non-government schools means that the government sector will enrol an even higher proportion of disadvantaged groups than in the past. A concentration of students from low socio-economic backgrounds is likely to diminish the prospects for learning in a school. A further cause for concern is the loss of support for the government sector from the better educated and higher income sectors of the community.

Cuts in funding by the Commonwealth and States has meant, on average, a reduced public expenditure per student in education and training. Whether the outputs of education and training have been maintained or increased because of new forms of management or competition is not easy to document. Many indicators of performance are at a fairly aggregated level and changes might be due to external factors. For instance, the level of unemployment may have more effect on school retention than changes in schooling.

In VET, the data base for Australia as a whole is still inadequate for performance indicators to be considered reliable (Taylor 1996). A benchmarking exercise shows apparent sizeable differences in course costs and in measures of outputs, but these indicators need confirmation in more reliable data (ANTA 1997).

Given the lack of evidence, various beliefs can be held as to the extent to which reforms have stimulated a competitive and efficient provision of education and training. In view of the reforms to management, the strong moves towards competitiveness in VET and to a lesser extent in higher education, and the strength of non-government schools, it is surprising that the National Commission of Audit (1996) concludes that 'the providers of education, in various organisational guises appear to have gathered influence at the expense of the consumers - students, parents and industry'. In his review of the ANTA agreement Taylor (1996) also finds the progress in market reform disappointing but sounds a warning that competition is a mechanism for achieving efficiency and quality and not an end in itself.

An efficient public sector in VET needs to be preserved for a range of reasons including its capacity to serve disadvantaged groups and to sustain training over the business cycle.

Education, training and earnings

How well do the very substantial changes in education and training meet the changing needs of the labour force and of industry? The recent growth in educational output has been occurring at a time of higher productivity growth rates in Australia. However it is impossible to isolate the effects of education and training from the whole range of changes in Australian workplaces in recent years.

A range of data could be considered, including destinations of new graduates and employer and graduate satisfaction studies. The main data sets available relate to higher education. Time series data are not available for VET. National survey data on labour force participation and unemployment and skill shortages are also relevant, but the level of aggregation is usually too high to draw conclusions about particular courses of study.

Earnings associated with various qualifications can provide useful evidence, on the assumption that a worker's earnings are strongly related to his/her contribution to production. In Australia, however, the importance of centralised wage-fixing procedures and the high proportion of university graduates traditionally employed in the public sector means that the relationship of earnings to productivity has been weak. In addition few data are available for the 1990s on qualification and earnings.

It is clear that the distribution of earnings has been widening in Australia over a considerable period (EPAC 1996). These changes are not closely related to changes in the educational levels of the labour force. Gregory (1995) considered the distribution of full-year full-time earnings by qualification level from 1968-69 to 1989-90. He found that the trends were not clear but that earnings of degree holders tended to fall relative to those who left school at 17 years of age up to 1985-86, and to increase marginally in the later years. For less well-educated workers the opposite trend occurred - a slight relative increase to the mid 1980s but decline since then. Gregory noted that there is nothing in the data to signal increased rewards to education, in contrast to the United States where there have been large falls in the earnings of the less well-educated labour force.

Gregory (1993, 1995) also analysed changes in the distribution of full-time jobs by earnings from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s. When jobs are grouped by earnings in 1983, only in the top third had the employment to population ratio been maintained. Considering jobs by income level and ignoring the occupational classification, it is jobs yielding both high and low pay that have relatively expanded, whereas the middle paying jobs have declined.

Karmel (1995) analysed employment change by skill deciles, as measured by qualification levels. He found the fastest growth in the top deciles and average growth in the middle deciles. This finding appears in conflict with the Gregory's 'disappearing middle' thesis. The possible reconciliation of these competing findings may lie in the changes in the distribution of earnings *within* occupations - and that the earnings of poorly educated

persons were falling within occupations. As yet data are not available to deal with these competing analyses.

Several studies have used data on earnings by qualification level to estimate the private rate of return (eg. Maglen 1995). For persons with degrees these show a similar trend to earnings differentials as considered by Gregory (1995); in general a downward trend with some rates slightly up in the late 1980s. Maglen estimated private rates for persons with degrees, with adjustments for the likelihood of unemployment and assumptions about full-time study, length of course and method of payment of HECS. University graduates had private rates of return of about 13 per cent in the late 1980s. While lower than for earlier periods these are still quite attractive rates.

Estimates for other levels of qualifications have been made more rarely. Some recent estimates for apprenticeships for trade occupations have been made by Dockery and Norris (1996), based on the ABS 1991 Census. They show that for males in some apprenticeships, including vehicle mechanics and hairdressers, estimated lifetime earnings streams are lower than for unqualified persons, and estimates of rates of return could not be made. Three trades were considered for females and only for cooks were earnings higher than for unqualified persons. For some apprenticeships a very high rate of return for males was found eg 86 per cent for electrical mechanics. But this was due not to a high level of lifetime earnings but to very low earnings foregone during training. The rewards can be very sensitive to changes in earnings foregone, for example to changes in the earnings of apprentices during training such as proposed under New Apprenticeships.

The data available on earnings by qualification are rather dated. For example the number of undergraduate awards by universities has grown by 40 per cent from 1990 to 1994 and the effects on the labour force and earnings are yet to be fully seen. Employment rates of new graduates have risen in recent years (see GCCA 1996) but some graduates may be obtaining jobs, as suggested by Gregory's work, at the expense of lesser qualified and unqualified workers, rather than filling jobs appropriate to their training.

As well as being dated, the main data sets are concerned mainly with formal qualifications and are most useful in relation to degrees where the classification has not changed much over time. Some limited data are available on training in the workplace and its relation to earnings. Chapman and Tan (1992) found in analysing longitudinal data that formal training increased wages and had a larger effect in firms experiencing technological change as proxied by growth in multi-factor productivity. Such data are however only a broad guide to what sorts of training are most beneficial.

Government funding

Commonwealth and State governments are the major source of funding for education and training and their own institutions are the major providers. Governments also undertake regulation and supervision. The justification for government activity stems from:

- the externalities provided by education and training including their contribution to a pool of skilled labour, common values and to citizenship;
- concern for equity and justice; and
- other forms of market failure, eg. the effects of the business cycle on training.

Table 5 shows government and private outlays on education in nominal terms and as a percentage of GDP. It indicates that government education outlays as a share of GDP are about five per cent of GDP (compared with six per cent in the late 1970s). Changes in the expenditures as a percentage of GDP are due to changes in the resources devoted to education, the relative changes in prices of those resources, and changes in the GDP.

Table 5 Government and private outlays on education, \$billion, Australia

	1989-90	1995-96
Private Expenditure	4.3	6.5
Net private expenditure not financed by government	1.9	2.9
Government Final Expenditure	13.3	17.7
Government outlays	17.2	23.8
Total government and private outlays	19.1	26.7
Government outlay as % of GDP	4.7%	4.9%
Net private as % GDP	0.5%	0.6%
Total outlays as % of GDP	5.2%	5.5%

Source: ABS 5510.0

Australia is near the bottom of the list of OECD countries in the level of its general government expenditures as a percentage of GDP (OECD 1996, 1997). The main reason is that nearly all welfare expenditures in Australia are targeted on lower income groups, thus containing that area of outlay. Australia's total outlays on *education* as a percentage of GDP also appear to be at the lower end for OECD countries. Australia's private outlays are smaller than those of USA and Japan but larger than in most OECD countries for which data are provided.

Table 5 shows that private sector outlays have increased much faster than government outlays in recent years but private outlays *not* financed by government still made up only a little over 10 per cent of total outlays in 1994-95. Fees paid by foreign students and by students under HECS represent the major new private outlays. Table 5 includes most of the expenditures on formal education and related student assistance. It does not include training provided by industry. Most of this is privately financed and is comparable in scale to public funding of vocational education and training. Nor does Table 5 include government support for labour market programs and for subsidies to employers for entry level training.

In government institutions there has been concern to control expenditures. At school level this has involved benchmarking exercises on expenditures. A similar exercise is in process for VET (ANTA 1997). It is expected that such exercises will extend to the analysis of course costs associated with different forms of delivery including the extended use of new communications technology.

In schools and VET there is also the option of private provision where the resource levels can be determined by the student and family. However, the large majority of non-government schools are in the Catholic sector for which government grants provide the bulk of the funds, and there is very little choice of resource levels.

In public universities, as discussed earlier, part of the costs was shifted to the student, through HECS, full-cost fees for overseas students, some postgraduate students and from 1998 for a limited number of undergraduate students. HECS changes for 1997 will increase the charges to well over 60 per cent for Law courses, at least 50 per cent for Business courses and approaching 30 per cent of the cost for Medicine (Burke 1998). The low cost choice in tertiary education in Australia will be in TAFE institutes, where fees remain low and HECS has not been introduced. Public funding has not been made available to private universities which provide for only a tiny fraction of total enrolments.

Public provision has meant that there are relatively small differences in resource levels per student across government schools and TAFE institutes within States. There are also very small differences among States in school expenditures, though apparently somewhat larger for TAFE. The provision of higher education funding by the Commonwealth means similar funding for institutions with similar course mix across the nation. This equality in funding levels is in marked contrast with the experience across and within States in the USA.

Specific government funds are provided for a wide range of equity programs, though the vast bulk of government funds is to support tuition on a per capita basis. The HECS scheme does provide that repayment will not be required while incomes remain low, though the threshold for repayment from 1997 was reduced to about 70 per cent of average earnings. Some HECS scholarships on a means-tested basis are provided. Low-income students in TAFE are exempted from the relatively small fees that are charged. The main form of financial assistance to students is provided subject to a test on parents and students means and is thus available to less than half of full-time students aged 16 and over. The scheme will be rolled into a Youth Allowance scheme in 1998 along with other allowances for youth including the unemployment benefit or job search allowance.

There has been a trend to private funding which is likely to continue. The achievement of public funding in fairly equal provision is notable. The extent to which greater private contribution should be sought is difficult to resolve. The data on the size of private benefits are not very precise and rather dated, and there is very little data on the external benefits of education.

There are a number of anomalies in funding. HECS is not charged in VET, partly it seems because of the complexity of VET and partly because VET has often catered for lower socio-economic background students. But some courses in VET may later be used for credit for university courses. Funds are restricted to public institutions in higher education but increasingly made available to the private sector in VET and schools.

Conclusion

The last ten years have seen a remarkable increase in participation in postcompulsory schooling and in higher education. The proportion of an age cohort completing secondary schooling and entering higher education has doubled since the early 1980s. The increase in senior secondary education saw more of all socio-economic groups attending.

Expansion of numbers in VET has not been as marked but in some ways the transformation of this sector is the greatest. The nature of the sector has changed with the greater recognition of training in industry and the move to integrate it into the VET sector. The change in name of the sector from TAFE - the public providers - to VET in which TAFE institutes are but one form of provider is indicative of a major change in functioning that is well under way. An increasing proportion of the public funds in VET are subject to competitive tendering forcing the TAFE institutes to compete with private providers, including business enterprises and secondary schools. The introduction of 'user choice' in 1998 will put further competitive pressures on the system.

By permitting a wider variety of arrangements, including traineeships linked to casual and part-time work, New Apprenticeships may increase the numbers of young people in work-based VET. They could also replace training programs provided to the unemployed under labour market programs, many of which have been abolished or have incurred a funding cut of about 50 per cent. Labour market programs did not usually result in a recognised level of training, though they may have led to entry to it. As unemployment remains high this is an important area for close consideration.

Under New Apprenticeships employers will be required to pay apprentices only for the days on-the-job, and not for time spent in off-the-job training. The effects of the various incentives on both employers and would-be apprentices need to be monitored.

Industry and unions have had an enhanced role in advisory bodies and in the development of competency standards in VET in the last few years. The frustration of businesses, both large and small, with the mystery and complexity of recognition of training procedures may have shaded the extent to which the VET sector has responded to their needs. The role of employers is to be increased in revisions to the structure. The role of bureaucracy in regulating the system is to be further reduced. The need to maintain an input from employees and to enhance that of students into advisory arrangements should be recognised. The strength of the German dual system may derive in part from the social partnership and the social obligation of employers to take on apprentices.

Government schools have been subject to competition from non-government schools. Non-government schools on average receive over half their funds from governments, in some respects like a voucher system but with the value of the voucher varying with the school's resource level. Competitive pressures will increase with the abolition of a policy that provided government funds to new non-government school only if they met certain size and other requirements. At the same time, in some States, government schools are being granted greater autonomy to manage their internal operations, which may enable them to compete more effectively. The rapidity with which VET courses are being introduced into senior secondary schools indicates a fairly quick response to community needs.

The down side is that it is the higher socio-economic groups who can afford the fees of non-government schools. A remarkable achievement of government schools has been the fairly equal staffing and other resources provided across all schools in each State system. This equality is slightly diminished by the increase in local revenues and minor charges in government schools, with success in fund raising related to the incomes of parents.

Universities have been subject to a different set of changes. Since the late 1980s they have competed with each other in recruiting full-fee paying overseas students. In 1997 these students made up about 10 per cent of the student body. Public higher education has become a major export industry.

Much of the massive expansion of Australian student numbers in universities since the late 1980s has been funded from HECS. HECS was remarkable in that it made it possible to reintroduce fees without deterring low income or disadvantaged groups. However, the large increase and changes in HECS from 1997 may deter some groups, especially adults.

It is important to note that even in the United States where only half the cost of tertiary education is funded by government, low or zero fee options exist in the public sector and high fees are a feature of the elite private universities. The effects of the HECS and other fee changes should be closely monitored for their effects on different groups and on the distribution of enrolments by fields of study.

The effect of allowing Australian undergraduate students to pay full-cost fees to enter courses where they have failed to win a HECS-related place has the benefit of permitting investment where rationing previously prevented it. Against this, it will only be those who have access to quite large funds who will enter the courses. This policy will not increase equality of access.

Another recent change foreshadowed for higher education is a reduction in the funds provided by the Commonwealth, with the advice that undergraduate places should be protected but that coursework postgraduate programs should be provided for full-fees. One effect could be a reduced number of persons from medium paid occupations, such as nursing and teaching, undertaking graduate work.

Public university funds are so far not available to private universities, of which only two exist. The private universities will find their competitive position improved by any increase in the charges in public universities. There have been proposals for vouchers to be given to students to take to the institution of their choice, but these have not been taken up by the Commonwealth. An ongoing pressure for change in Australian education arises from the differences in arrangements for funding and control in the sectors. Maintaining simple arrangements and monitoring effort is no easy matter when both Commonwealth and State governments share funding, as with schools and VET.

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Research on higher and vocational education: Different drums, different beats, not within earshot of each other

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Introduction

This paper looks at inter-sectoral *relationships* - in this case, the relationship between vocational education and training (VET), especially Technical and Further Education (TAFE), and higher education in Australia. This discussion will focus mostly on research on the two fields, which in the right settings might be able to bring the sectors closer together.

Prerequisites for better VET-higher education relations

In the last decade much work has been done in the policy arena to improve relations between the post-school sectors. This work has focused mostly on formal frameworks. At the same time, there has been increasing student movement across the sectors. Barry Golding's research shows us the scale of that movement, which far exceeds what most people expected. Nevertheless, relations between TAFE and universities as institutions remain attenuated. Most people working in the two sectors are ignorant of - and often sceptical and/or hostile about - the other sector. There is far to go.

The argument for improving relations between, even loosely integrating, VET and higher education is strong on grounds of productivity and efficiency in education, the need to lift national economic performance, equity and accessibility of structures and opportunities, and choice. Better relations can only be opposed for reasons of status (which is a strong driver but one that cannot be justified in the light of day) or the fear of losing autonomy and control over one's work (which might be more understandable). I suggest that there are four pre-requisites for a fundamentally closer and better relationship between the post-school sectors in Australia:

- improved *formal articulation arrangements*, based on the delineation of the difference between the sectors through qualification frameworks, portability of credit, cross-course recognition, etc. (Progress has been made, but further movement might require change in the other areas).
- closer alignment of *cost structures*, so that educational quality, credentials, and administrative units become more readily comparable and inter-changeable, and hence more flexible and relate-able. (At present cost structures are a fair distance apart, but universities spend less on undergraduate education than per capita figures might suggest. There might also be change in the area of costs in future).
- the deconstruction of the inherited *culture of segmentation* between the sectors. Segmentation is deep-seated, protected by longstanding power balances and relationships. Genuine cross-sectoral institutions are few: I know of four, and in at least two of these the status barriers are still strong. The Monash/Casey combined

courses are an excellent initiative from the point of view of students, and probably employers and the public interest, but so far they have few imitators in higher education - though every institution wants to be into other current developments, such as research and international marketing. Note that to fragment the culture of segmentation, is often necessary to blur the distinction between the sectors, in contrast to the logic of formal articulation which requires that the sectors be more clearly demarcated.

- the development of a *field of knowledge* that genuinely crosses both VET and higher education. Knowledge systems, the product of research and publication combined with government and policy, are powerful in setting agendas, providing a common language and shaping our sense of the possible. Research alone does not do this. Research in combination with government and/or public debate, and also management, can be important - and sometimes, in the longer run, very influential. Now at present, the knowledge system linked to VET, and the knowledge system linked to universities, are almost completely separate. The two worlds scarcely even acknowledge each other. Policy crosses the sectoral boundaries, but except for a small number of cross-sectoral projects funded recently by the Commonwealth, research and publications do not cross those boundaries. I will now look at this problem more closely.

Research on VET compared to research on higher education

Neither research on VET nor research on higher education are large fields. Research on school-based education draws much more in total funding. Both VET research and higher education research are shaped by the requirements of government and policy, and by the separate histories of staff development and pedagogical practice in the respective fields. VET research is more directly shaped by the immediate requirements and the imaginative horizons of government and market. The culture of autonomous research is stronger in higher education, which is an asset. This should not be exaggerated; there is not much support in either Canberra or most vice-chancellors' offices for institutional or systemic self-criticism, for curiosity-driven research independent of funding agency.

We can examine the degree of research overlap between the sectors - or lack of overlap - in three ways. First, research organisation. Second, the pattern of research grants. Third, journal publication.

In terms of *research organisation*, there is practically no overlap between sectors. Education faculties ought to provide systematic support for both kinds of research, but few do. Most researchers in teacher education are still determined to confine themselves to schools, and neglect VET, adult and industry education, and higher education. In higher education there is one centre in Australia, namely the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE) at the University of Melbourne, a small group at the University of New England, another small group at the University of Wollongong with expertise in research policy, and scattered individuals at the University of Queensland, Queensland University of Technology, Murdoch University and elsewhere. In VET, there are research centres at Monash University in conjunction with the Australian Council for Educational Research, the University of Technology Sydney, Griffith University, and the National Centre for

Vocational Education Research in Adelaide outside the universities, plus scattered individuals. There are also people such as Belinda Probert at RMIT University, Meredith Baker at the University of Melbourne, and Judith Sloan and Mark Wooden at Flinders University whose research is workplace and labour market oriented, and who often cross into the VET research territory, although they appear less often in higher education research.

It is noticeable that the higher education research groups do not work on VET-related projects, and the VET research groups do not work on higher education-related projects, and there have been few explicitly cross-sectoral projects. There are few exceptions to these generalisations. The CSHE has a history of VET-related work, but there have been only a handful of projects over the last decade, and the centre has never presented itself as a VET research centre. The CSHE has no direct relationship with the VET department at Melbourne, which has links with the Monash University-ACER Centre for the Economics of Education and Training (CEET).

Table 1: Vocational education and higher education journals: Degree of overlap

Journal	issues	articles	POS	SROS
The Vocational Aspects of Education (UK)	Vol 46-47(8)	43	9	2
Australian and NZ Journal of Vocational Education Research	Vol 3-4:(4)	25	2	0
Studies in Higher Education (UK)	Vol 19-20 (6)	47	4	0
Higher Education (Europe)	Vol 29-30 (8)	48	2	0
Journal of Higher Education (USA)	Vol 66-67 (8)	50	1	0
Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management	Vol 17-18(4)	22	2	2
Higher Education Research and Development	Vol 14-15 (4)	35	0	3

POS: publishable in a journal of the other sector

SROS: strong relevance to the other sector

Most of the overlap occurs in articles on theory, articles on teaching and learning couched in general terms, articles on nursing and teaching in the UK journal *The Vocational Aspects of Education*, discussions of vocational education in higher education, an article on inter-sectoral student movement, and an article on research into vocational education.

In relation to the pattern of *research projects*, I do not have summative data for a comparison between the two fields. However, I have looked at the contents of *journals*. There are more higher education than VET-related journals, but VET publication is growing. I examined two VET journals, one Australian, one UK; and five higher education journals, two Australian, one UK, one European and one American. These are all leading journals, either in the Australian or the international context. The full contents for 1995 and 1996 were included in the survey, apart from book reviews.

Table 2: Vocational education and higher education journals: Content breakdown

Journal	teach, learn, test %	policy, system, finance %	local manag. tasks %	specific fields %	Other [see below] %
The Vocational Aspect of Education (UK)	12	28	5	19	37
Australian and NZ Journal of Vocational Education Research	44	24	4	0	28
Studies in Higher Education (UK)	53	17	0	6	23
Higher Education (Europe)	21	33	19	4	23
Journal of Higher Education (USA)	22	4	16	0	58
Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management	0	41	32	5	23
Higher Education Research and Development	40	9	6	14	31

Contents of 'other':

The Vocational Aspect of Education: theory 12 per cent, education 11 per cent, industry 7 per cent, students 7 per cent.

ANZ Journal of Vocational Education Research: theory 12 per cent, education & industry 12 per cent.

Studies in Higher Education: research 6 per cent, academic profession 6 per cent.

Higher Education: no other areas exceed 5 per cent.

Journal of Higher Education: gender 16 per cent, students 14 per cent, research 6 per cent, minorities 6 per cent.

Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management: gender 9 per cent, international education 9 per cent.

Higher Education R&D: international 11 per cent, academic profession 11 per cent, students 9 per cent.

There were few articles in one VET journal that would not have been publishable in the other, and the same was true of the higher education journals (leaving aside relative standard, where the international journals were stronger), except one published no articles on teaching and learning. However, the overlap *across the sectors* was negligible. There was virtually no interest in the other sector. There were seven articles out of 270 which had strong content about the other sector, and only one on cross-sectoral issues. Only 20 articles were written in such a manner that could have been published in the other sector, mostly articles on theory or staff development or student learning that were couched in general terms.

Yet many of the broad topics were common to the journals of both sectors: teaching and learning questions, policy problems, financing, management, education-industry links, technologies, gender and so on. The research wisdom of each sector excluded the other - because of the language that was used, the examples that were cited, and sometimes the values that were expressed. What we have here are two almost completely separated discourses, running blinkered, though running on parallel tracks.

The separation between VET and higher education at the level of research and knowledge is more profound than the separation in policy, and the separation in institutional structure. This suggests that if the two fields of knowledge could be brought closer

together, and a large common field of research and knowledge production could be developed between them, this could help transform the relationship between the sectors.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me suggest a few ideas for developing a closer research cooperation between research on higher education, and research on VET.

- A common research conference, perhaps annually.
- More funded projects in such areas as inter-sectoral student movement; cross-sectoral institutions; comparisons of courses, students, staff, the work of staff, gender, the labour market outcomes of graduates, management and the effects of technological change in the two sectors.
- A combined *Journal of Vocational and Higher Education*, or *Higher and Vocational Education* (or *Tertiary Education!*).
- A combined **research centre**. This would be the most useful initiative as it would provide favourable conditions for the other initiatives as well.

The impact of VET research on policy, practice and performance

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Introduction

During 1996, the Australian National Training Authority Research Advisory Council (ANTARAC) advertised a research project on the impact of vocational education and training (VET) research on policy, practice and performance. The Monash University-ACER Centre for the Economics of Education and Training (CEET) together with the Research Centre in Vocational Education and Training at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) submitted a bid with myself as Chief Investigator and Professor Rod McDonald and Geof Hawke from UTS. The project began at the end of October last year and was completed by the beginning of November 1997.

ANTARAC specified that the research project should review the evidence for, and where possible evaluate the extent of influence of, research in vocational education and training. The Council indicated that it was particularly interested in the impact of research in three areas: policy and planning; practice and performance; and community relations. Our project brief suggested that while each of these three matters would be addressed, particular attention would be paid to the first two areas with lesser emphasis on the third.

In our submission to ANTARAC we argued that it is apparent from studies of the use and impact of research within education and in other areas that the relationship between research and its outcomes is almost always complex and not readily discerned. Our further work on the project has strongly supported this initial view. The concept of *impact* needs to be understood as operating well beyond direct influence from a specific research study on a particular decision or action. In general, we are more confident of being able to demonstrate impact through tracing the role that various research-derived ideas, skills or notions have played in shaping outcomes in the three defined areas than of being able to demonstrate the impact of specific individual research projects on particular decisions or actions.

In this paper, section one outlines the five main components of the project. The second part is concerned with the scope of the project and some relevant definitions. Section three outlines the broad approach and section four considers the symposium which was held in February this year. The final section presents four concluding comments.ⁱ

Five elements

In undertaking the research project we are concentrating on five main areas. First, there are reviews of relevant literatures. It is apparent that there is no single approach to the issue of the impact of research, either generally or specifically in VET. I have commented previously on certain relevant aspects (Selby Smith 1996); while certain matters are discussed further below, in Section 3 (eg. the definitions of *research* or *impact*) and in Section 4 (eg. the settings within which the factors which can operate as barriers to, or promote, the use of research outputs in public sector decision making).

Secondly, a symposium was held to identify key issues and provide a focus for the formulation of the research questions. The symposium drew on a range of different perspectives and approaches to the research question including: different academic disciplines; different points on the continuum linking pure research with applied research; and consideration of impact from the perspective of both particular research studies and particular decisions or actions. Discussion focused on: further aspects of the relevant literatures to be included; appropriate research questions and hypotheses to be pursued in the subsequent consultations and surveys; and possible case studies which would be appropriate for further investigation of the approaches which had been identified. The papers provide a fuller coverage of the relevant literatures and a more complete enumeration of the relevant issues than would be possible for an individual researcher. (More detailed discussion of the symposium is contained in relevant section below.)

Thirdly, quantitative studies are being undertaken to seek information about the scope and nature of the impact of VET research. These quantitative studies supplement the qualitative approaches and provide valuable information and perspectives for the overall project. A questionnaire and coding scheme have been developed to establish the kinds of research in VET issues which have been undertaken over the last decade, the areas in which they have occurred and the major findings. This is primarily being achieved by coding and analysing information reported in a number of data bases. We are seeking to identify the perceived impact, gaps and weaknesses in current research as identified by policy makers and practitioners. It is intended to achieve this primarily through a comprehensive national mail survey, supplemented by telephone interviews where required (during which it is proposed to elicit further information on the role of research in determining particular decisions or outcomes of significance to vocational education and training).

Fourthly, we are undertaking some case studies to illustrate, in their real world context, major aspects of the study emerging from the literature reviews, consultations with stakeholders and surveys. The case study component will provide a richness that cannot be obtained from quantitative responses alone. Wherever possible existing case studies are being used for the purposes of this project, rather than new case studies, but a few additional studies will be undertaken. At this stage some case studies have been identified for inclusion, while discussions about others are still in progress.

From a methodological perspective we would have preferred to conduct the research sequentially, with the literature reviews and symposium discussion informing the quantitative inquiries and both affecting the specific cases chosen for detailed study. However, within the twelve month timeframe allotted we concluded that it was important to commence case studies earlier in the overall project, if possible. Nevertheless, we recognise that in the light of the results from the quantitative material and other insights developed by the research team during the project, a need might emerge for further case studies.

Finally, the project brief asked that the study cover overseas and Australian research. While our literature reviews and broad approaches include overseas material, our quantitative material and our consultations, given the limited time and resources available for the study, focus on the situation in Australia. However, we will prepare a paper setting out our developing findings based on the literature reviews, the symposium, the quantitative

surveys, the consultations with key stakeholders and at least some of the case study material. We will circulate this paper to informed overseas experts with an interest and expertise in the subject matter. We will seek the written comments of these experts on both our emerging conclusions and on the reasons for any differences from the situation in their own regions. Their comments will inform our final report and, if they agree, will be summarised in the report.

Both CEET and UTS believe that dissemination of the results from the research project is important. Thus a variety of dissemination activities are planned throughout the different stages of the project.

Scope and definitions

Definitions

Research: The definition proposed is the OECD (Frascati Manual) definition for research and development (R&D) used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as the basis for the Australian Standard Research Classification (ABS 1993), according to which R&D comprises 'creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this knowledge to devise new applications'. The ABS notes that R&D is 'characterised by originality. It has investigation as a primary objective ... R&D ends when work is no longer primarily investigative' (ABS 1993, p.3).

The ABS recognises that there may be difficulties in separating the boundaries of R&D from the subsequent implementation phase. Listed among the 'obscure boundaries' having relevance to this particular project are: general purpose or routine data collection; and policy-related studies.ⁱⁱ The ABS advise that 'collecting data in support of R&D work is included in R&D'. Data collection of a 'general nature', to record phenomena of a 'general public or government interest' is excluded. Notwithstanding this advice, we consider there is value in listing such data collections for the benefit of researchers and other users. We intend to include them in the inventory of VET research which will result from the project.

In relation to policy-related studies, the ABS concedes that to determine the boundaries is 'complex' and that 'rigour' is required. The ABS advises that 'studies to determine the effects of a specific national policy to a particular economic or social condition or social group have elements of R&D. Routine management studies or efficiency studies are excluded' (ABS 1993, p.4). Again, notwithstanding this advice, our view is that the ANTARAC brief would favour the inclusion of routine management studies and efficiency studies, particularly in relation to 'practice and performance'. In fact, the principle of inclusion will characterise our approach to 'research' in the project generally.

Defining research by reference to its essential attributes: The ABS definition is useful for defining the boundaries between what does and what does not constitute research for the purposes of an inventory. However, in a previous study which sought to establish the role of research in public policy decision making (C. Selby Smith et al. 1992a), we found that the ABS definition needed to be teased out to identify those essential attributes of research

that are the inputs into decision making. Research can also be defined by reference to these attributes.

A common starting point in the literature has been to view research as providing **information**. 'Information is a key input into the making of policy and social science (research) has become a major supplier of information' (Weiss 1980). More particularly, research has been seen to provide new and better information. Another critical attribute of research relates to what might broadly be defined as **research skills and attitudes**. Here the contribution of research is not so much a particular set of findings but an approach, a way of doing things or of assessing alternative sources of information. Thirdly, the research system provides **appropriately educated people**. As former Federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training, said: 'Australia's educational institutions make perhaps their most important contribution to our research effort through the provision of skilled personnel' (Dawkins 1989). In terms of this project, research is defined in terms of its attributes, in particular: information; research skills and attitudes; and appropriately educated people.

Research and the publication of research results: The ABS definition of research characterises R&D as 'creative **work** (our emphasis) undertaken ... to increase the stock of knowledge'. In the course of the study referred to above, it was found that there was misunderstanding here; in particular, a widespread tendency to limit research to publications. We argued that reporting and accessibility of research is to be distinguished from the research itself. It is considered that this distinction should be maintained for this project, including for assembling the data base of VET research. Thus primacy is placed on research studies. A related point is that our attention is given to the performers of research rather than to funders.

The scope of the areas of decision making and action

Policy and planning

Policy involves decisions to determine the broad parameters of a given functional area of government. Generally, policy decisions reflect the elected government's priorities and broad political considerations have a particular influence at this level. Policy decisions are about establishing the overall legislative and organisational framework in a given functional area (in this case, vocational education and training), determining the major programs and the level of resources available to support the functional area.

Planning decisions are directed towards determining the major program elements and the allocation of resources among these elements, within the overall legislative, organisational and budgetary framework which reflects policy. Planning decisions focus on establishing the parameters (including financial and human resources) and organisational structures to support the implementation of major programs having regard to effectiveness and efficiency criteria but also, often, political considerations.

The locus of policy and planning decisions primarily is at the level of national and state and territory governments, within ministerial offices and departments and agencies.

However it may also be at the level of individual providers, particularly where systems are more devolved or the degree of devolution is changing.

Practice and performance

Decision making and actions relating to practice and performance are concerned primarily with the delivery of services at the local level: the provision of vocational education and training by individual providers to trainees and industry. When policy and planning is made operational it contributes to practice and performance. Decisions and actions to achieve the most effective and efficient use of resources, once policy has been adopted, program elements have been determined and resources have been allocated, constitute practice and performance. The loci of these decisions are at the individual provider level and in operational areas of departments and agencies (the more so, the more centralised the system).

Community relations

Decision making and actions relating to policy and planning, and practice and performance generally are focused at different levels within the VET system. In contrast, community relations are concerned with the interactions between the wider economic, political and societal systems and VET. These interactions will be multi-faceted. Relations may occur at all levels – national, state and territory, regional, local and between individuals. They may be conducted through formally constituted channels or informally; and may be structured or *ad hoc*.

Impact of research

The terms of reference for this project focus on the *impact* of research in VET. What constitutes *impact* or use of research? The concept of *impact* of research on decision making and action has a number of aspects. In relation to the impact or 'use' of research findings, Weiss (1980) has commented that 'some limit the definition of use to the adoption of the explicit recommendations of a single study. At the other extreme, some people discuss their use of research in terms of sensitivity to [social science] perspectives'. In a more recent article, Weiss (1986) concludes that it often takes time and patience and multiple messages conveyed through multiple channels before social science has an impact. In fact, the impact of research can be indirect as well as direct, minor individually but major in combination, additive as well as separate. Indirect and additive effects could amount eventually to a very significant impact, even though it could not be identified with any one study.

A distinction can also be drawn between the use of research in making specific decisions and a potentially more general influence – 'ideas in good currency'. The argument here is that impact of research findings, if impact implies leading to concrete identifiable action, is too restrictive. This is for two main reasons. First, it is too simplistic in its view of decision making and of the role research may play in it. Secondly, interest could centre on decisions **not** to act, as well as on decisions to act. To resolve **not** to act is as legitimate an outcome of decision-making processes as to resolve to act.

Also, the *impact* of research outputs in decision making includes the individuals who participate in the process. It involves their education and training, their research skills and attitudes. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, just as the input of research-based information into the decision-making process is only one of a number of information sources, so too do decision makers draw upon their experience, judgment and other personal attributes, as well as on their education and training, and their research skills and attitudes, in making decisions.

Vocational education and training

There is no common or agreed definition of ‘vocational education and training’ and the boundaries between the VET sector and other education and training sectors are blurred. We have adopted the use of the term as commonly used and understood which is: vocational education, for the purpose of this project, is defined as all formal post-school education which prepares students for (or further develops their skills in) a specific vocation or for work generally, up to and including the level of paraprofessional occupations.ⁱⁱⁱ ‘Training’ has been taken to include both on-the-job and off-the-job training to a similar level.^{iv}

Scope of project

Boundaries of VET research

As the project is concerned with the impact of research in VET, research studies which focus specifically on VET and aspects of it are clearly within its scope. There are also studies which focus on issues which relate primarily to other sectors but where links or applications to VET are also established. The impacts of these studies are included. However, there are some wider studies whose findings could have implications for VET but which do not draw out these implications. Studies in these categories generally are **not** included.

Geographical coverage of research

In terms of coverage, it is proposed that the project include: work carried out in Australia on Australian VET issues; work carried out in Australia on wider or theoretical issues where links are drawn with VET; and work on VET originating overseas which includes Australian coverage or is directly relevant. Given the purposes of the consultancy, no significance is attached to the particular state or territory where the research was performed. However, we do take account of the particular organisation in which the research was performed.

Research time frame

The time frame in which studies will be considered eligible for inclusion in an inventory is necessarily arbitrary, at least in reference to its commencement. We propose that the starting date be 1987. There have been significant changes in vocational education and training since the late 1980s (collectively known as the training reform agenda) when the ACTU/Trade Development Council report *Australia Reconstructed* (1987) was published.

However, it may be that earlier studies will be relevant when considering particular decisions or actions in VET and whether previous research studies influenced them.

Disciplinary approaches

The literature indicates a variety of approaches to the analysis of *impact* of research. To the extent that researchers adopt an approach based on a particular academic discipline it can influence the problems identified as important, the key questions posed and the techniques adopted to investigate them. These differences in approach are recognised as relevant to the study.

Research and decision making and action perspectives

The relationships between decision making and action on the one hand and research on the other, can be considered from two broad perspectives: from the perspective of research or from the perspective of decision making. Our earlier study indicated that the research perspective can narrow the focus of the investigator so that the impact of research is overstated (the 'key hole' problem). Such studies tend to focus on the research process and the outcomes and underestimate the complexity of the decision-making process (particularly in government).

The same study concluded that, from the perspectives of decision making and action, research is only one source of information and that information from all sources is only one of a number of possible inputs into decision-making processes. Adoption of this perspective is not intended to imply any denigration of other important functions of research or that research should be subservient to decision making or action. Research has important objectives other than serving policy, especially if the latter is conceived as narrowly instrumental and short-term. On occasion researchers can best contribute to the development of future policy by presenting challenging and varied points of view.

Generally, the perspective of decision making and action is the primary focus in this project, including in the quantitative studies. However, the project design allows for the other perspective to be advanced, where relevant.

The broad approach

The review of relevant literatures suggested some possible relationships between research and its use in the public policy process. They are not hypotheses in the scientific sense; considerably more specificity would be required if they were to be phrased in a form suitable for testing. Four areas of explanation were suggested. First, the purpose for which research is intended affects the relationship between research and use in decision making. Secondly, the form, extent and strength of the linkages between political, bureaucratic and research settings affect the relationship between research and its use in decision making. Thirdly, different organisational behaviours, including the psychology of organisations and their political behaviour, favour different types of information (and the weight placed on information in reaching decisions) and influence the relationships between research and its use in decision making. Fourthly, use in decision making is not necessarily dependent on the technical quality of the research study.

These explanations accord with our view that the reasons for, and the barriers against, research findings being used in decision making have their loci in each of three broad areas: within research settings; within the decision-making process itself; and within the web of linkages that bring research and decision making together. These reasons include:

- the different cultures in which researchers work; the perceived authority or credibility of researchers; and the timeliness of findings;
- the nature of the public policy process; the values of key individuals and organisations; defensive mechanisms which can emerge in bureaucratic and political settings; and suspicions – perhaps well founded – of hidden agendas; and
- the networks which promote effective and continuing interaction between decision makers and researchers; the interactive relationships and discontinuities which can develop between political decision makers, bureaucrats and researchers; and the degree to which the conceptually separate elements prove not to be entirely distinct in practice.^v

Clearly there are many potential obstacles, both practical and more fundamental, that can act to prevent the optimum use of research studies in the public policy process. Information from research is only one source of information and information is only one input into the public policy process. Research skills and attitudes can also be important. However, any simple view that a particular research study results (or does not result) in a particular decision, action or use is manifestly inadequate. Furthermore, research is not solely for the purpose of immediate public policy. Finally, it appears that knowledge embodied in people can be a particularly effective form of linkage, particularly as the public policy process is a continuing one with many participants. However, such linkages require continuing nurture.

Specific case studies, while broadly confirming the relationships that have been presented, also raise additional aspects (Selby Smith et al. 1992b, vol. 2, ch.4, pp.26-97) including:

- the complexity of situations arising in the real world, and the longer term build-up of relevant factors, the need to consider dynamic (what movie is this snapshot from?), as well as static aspects, the blurring of many of the simpler theoretical boundaries and the difficulty in operationalising the definitions adopted (e.g. research; public policy as processes as well as decisions; possible differences between use and influence of research);
- the importance of sponsors or ‘champions’, whether in initiating the research, undertaking it or making effective use of the research results. If the minister changes, the government is defeated or a key participant dies, there can be important effects on the relationship between research and use;
- the suggestion that ‘the ethos of the times’ affects both the type and content of research, and also which types of research have an audience and whether they are used. In theory, a period of growth and professional development, such as the 1970’s, may tend to produce research with a different emphasis from that produced, say, in the 1980’s or 1990’s, where the emphasis is on efficiency and managerial technique. Linked with this can be changes in accepted methodology. Some studies, for example, might bring a feminist analysis to bear, whereas other studies are more traditional in their approach;

- the widespread view that research in Australia is more likely to be acted upon if the group which is the subject of the research identifies with the composition of the committee or group undertaking the research. This is particularly important if the group in question has a strong political voice. Success may be measured by inaction as well as by positive outcomes;
- the recognition that the decision-making process involves much more than research, more even than information to which research can contribute. Decision-making processes are complex, can involve many interests and actors, may only involve changes over a considerable period. Contending forces, including the force of ideas and critical opinion, on a continuing basis, are as much concerned with power and wealth as with truth (and often more so), and may not be fully rational from the viewpoint of any single participating group or individual;
- an elaboration of the first possible explanation identified above, which stresses that there may be a difference between research in which changed purposes are in mind, and research which is concerned with techniques and implementation where purposes are taken as given. Perhaps the latter sort of research is more likely to be commissioned by those at the 'business end' of the industry? In addition, perhaps this perspective can differ between research settings, as well as between research areas and over time. For example, research in government agencies – less so perhaps in ministerial committees or task forces – may give greater weight to the refinement of techniques (given purposes) whereas research in tertiary educational institutions, especially perhaps research unfunded by external grants, may be more concerned to question purposes;
- there is an important question about congruency between research results and decision makers' values and beliefs. It is not always easy to distinguish between the acceptance which policy makers accord to the research results and the acceptance accorded to the researcher; and
- the potential for the research process itself to be a linkage. Links with potential audiences during the course of the research can assist in establishing an audience in an environment of decision making and action where there is little time to read and evaluate journal articles and reports.

In the earlier Australian study it was suggested that, although the policy process will often be influenced by a number of factors and unique measures of use or influence may be difficult to define, several specific factors appeared to affect the use of research (or its neglect):

- *The quality of the study*: Appeared to be usually only a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for action. Good methods alone appeared not to be very convincing to the opponents of recommendations, although good methods can be important in defending research studies from attack by those who oppose their conclusions.
- *Timeliness*: It is often argued that if research is to be used it needs to be timely. Certainly there are key stages where important decisions have to be, or can be, made and when research results are more likely to be used. However, timeliness can also relate to the broader economic and political environment within which research studies are undertaken and results presented (e.g. stage of the electoral cycle). It is clearly wrong to view the results of research studies, and their implementation, as quite independent of the decision making context prevailing at the time they become available.

- *Decision maker involvement in the research:* Independent researchers may minimise the potential for bias in study methods, but it is more likely that research results will be ignored in the decision making process. This could be because the decision makers are unaware of the studies concerned – and our results showed that this can easily occur – or because the research does not address the relevant issues as defined by the decision makers. It might be argued that involvement of the decision makers, perhaps by commissioning, providing a grant (or staff) for it or being involved through an advisory committee mechanism, may result in a greater likelihood of use (e.g. through addressing more relevant questions or making it harder for the decision makers to distance themselves from the conclusions). However, decision maker involvement is no guarantee that the study will be used, and in extreme cases their involvement may result in less satisfactory research studies (eg. seeking to change the task midway through the study).
- *Dissemination:* For research studies to be useful they need to be focused on matters of interest in the policy process and for the results to be widely known. Earlier studies have found that attention to this matter was patchy at best, although ANTARAC always took a strong stand in relation to it. For example, some completed studies are not available publicly, and many prove hard to find. For researchers in tertiary education institutions publication in learned journals (often with limited circulation) may be a major aim, while other potential dissemination activities (such as interviews with the media or seminars for key decision makers) are often given lower priority than commencement of the next study. On the other hand, concerns have been raised that certain sponsors might seek to suppress particular research results (Hillman et al. 1991). It is important that committees of enquiry and similar bodies pay careful attention to implementation and lay the groundwork for it if subsequent policy impact is to be maximised.
- *Availability of policy instruments:* In order for research studies to have an impact, decision makers need to have the appropriate mechanisms to make changes or implement suggestions resulting from research. In general, it is likely to be helpful if the researchers consider how the results of their studies might be used. However, there may be cases where key variables underlying research results are difficult to alter eg. socio-economic factors, gender or race.
- *Conflicts and incentives:* There are many actors in the VET system and they often have different objectives. As the number of groups or organisations involved with a research study grows, compromises may tend to increase, implementation may become more difficult and any concentrated focus on key problems and solutions can be less likely (any credit is also likely to be more dispersed). In cases where there is commonality of interest, research results supportive of those interests are likely to have an impact. In other cases, perhaps more frequent, where interests are not coincident, researchers who wish their results to have an impact need to bear in mind the perspective of key stakeholders and their relative power – decision makers certainly will. It is suggested that, in these circumstances, it is likely to be helpful if the research results identify the costs and benefits according to the key perspectives and that attention is given to the structure of incentives facing the key stakeholders. If a ‘win-win’ situation can be devised then what is beneficial from a societal perspective will also be in the interest of each major group or stakeholder.

Symposium

A two-day symposium was held to consider the links between research and policy, planning and performance in VET. Attention was given to each of the areas identified by ANTARAC (ie. policy and planning; practice and performance; and community relations). A range of relevant speakers presented a wide variety of stimulating viewpoints. The perspectives of the users of research were explored, as were the perspectives of research and researchers. A range of additional literature relevant to the research project was identified and a number of possible case studies were raised. Many of the speakers had a range of relevant perspectives (ie. as users as well as researchers or decision makers at state/territory and national levels as well as at the level of individual VET providers). They were encouraged to present these different perspectives and experiences about the relationships between research and policy, practice or performance in VET.

The first two sessions of the symposium were devoted to a consideration of the relationships as seen from the viewpoint of the users of research, initially at state/territory and national levels and then at the level of individual providers. The first session focused on policy and planning. Wider aspects of governmental decision making and action were noted, at state and national levels, including DEETYA and the central agencies.

In the second session concerned with the perspectives of research, users' attention was focused on the level of VET providers, both public and private. The discussion tended to be about the contribution of research to improved practice and performance. However, attention was drawn to the fact that policy and planning occurs at the individual provider level as well as at state or national levels.

The second half of the symposium's first day was devoted to considering the relationships between research and policy, practice and performance in VET from the perspective of research and researchers. It was clear that while some research is intended to influence policy, practice or performance directly, this is not the sole purpose of research. Some variables which research shows are important, such as location, gender or age, are little open to policy manipulation.

The final session of the first day was devoted to considering the relationships between research and practice from the viewpoint of other sources of research. Research can take place in a wide range of settings, and the variety of these settings has expanded over recent years (eg. the increasing role of private consultants in VET research). The research setting can have a significant influence on the relationships between research and its impact on policy, practice or performance. It was clear that some consultancy reports are very influential, others less so.

There were three sessions on the second day of the symposium. Community relations was the focus of the first session. This proved to be a most interesting session in which employer, union and local government perspectives were presented; and attention was paid to aspects of research, including research skills and attitudes and their links to changes in policy, practice or performance.

The penultimate session considered research, decision making and action in other functional areas of government. Russell Rumberger from the University of California at Santa Barbara, found many similarities with the experience in the United States, but also noted some differences (such as the growing importance of advocacy groups with a specific orientation, who seek to use research to advance their particular objectives; the important role for intermediaries in disseminating research; and the importance of evaluation, monitoring and action research, which had not figured prominently in the discussions at the symposium). He suggested that we often need local specific knowledge, while at the other extreme cross-national comparisons can be valuable (e.g. the US is tending to move VET out of schools, while in Australia serious consideration is being given to increasing VET in schools).

A wide range of additional matters were raised including the important differences between the traditions and practices in the various Australian states (and not just in VET); the wide range of matters relevant to the research project which could arise under 'community relations'; the increasingly important (but not very transparent) role of ministers' offices; and the role in publicising research and facilitating its use (and occasionally misuse) which can be played by the media.

Concluding comments

The availability and dissemination of research studies is important, if they are to be used for policy and planning, for changing practice and performance or for influencing community relations. Earlier research has shown that many studies which might have been useful to, even used by, decision makers were not known to them (and hence not used). There is also the wider question of who should market research, and to whom. Researchers themselves may not consider this to be their function; they may not be resourced to undertake it; and they may not be particularly good at it. Committees of inquiry, working groups or task forces which build into their activities, even into their recommendations, consideration of what should be done, by whom and when, could be said to have attended, in a way, to this need for marketing. Earlier studies have shown quite clearly that this was not always done.

Secondly, the relationships between decision making and action on the one hand and research on the other, can be considered from two broad perspectives: from the perspective of research or from the perspective of decision making. The research perspective can narrow the focus of the investigator so that the impact of research is overstated (the 'key hole' problem); such studies tend to focus on the research process and the research outcomes and to underestimate the complexity of the decision-making process. Generally, the perspective of decision making and action is the primary focus in this project, including in our quantitative studies. Of course, adoption of this perspective is not intended to imply any denigration of the other important functions of research or that research should be subservient to decision making or action.

Thirdly, there is an issue as to whether to consider research in a prospective or retrospective manner. In approaching the problem from the former perspective we might ask about the extent to which, and the channels by which, particular research studies or combinations of research projects have led to changes in decision making or action.

However, if we approached the problem on an *ex post* basis we might ask whether particular decisions or actions were influenced by research done earlier and if so, how, to what extent and in what circumstances. There are indications in the literature that the latter perspective may suggest a greater role for research than the former in terms of its influence on decision making and action.

Finally, we stress the importance of the networks or web of linkages which connect researchers and decision makers. Our review of the literature confirms the initial impression that the institutional arrangements, resourcing levels and incentives that transmit research outputs to decision makers and the needs of decision makers to researchers (ie. the web of linkages) are far from adequate. The linkages can occur through both formal and informal channels. They can be in a written form, but embodiment in people appears to be a particularly effective form of linkage between research and decision making. At its best the people-level relationship is ongoing and interactive, a dynamic rather than a static web of linkages. One reason why effective linkages can be difficult to develop is because of the differing time-scales of research and decision making. To the extent that key staff in the public sector decision-making system (and related advisory structures) can foresee future needs where research may be able to contribute and are prepared to commission or otherwise initiate appropriate research in time for its results to be available when required they have a valuable role to play. Mutual trust and interaction are desirable, and an investment portfolio-type approach is likely to be required, since the future can only be foreseen very inadequately. Furthermore, there can be difficulties in creating and maintaining effective networks, or webs of linkages, to the extent that there are differences in the values and cultures of the settings in which researchers and decision makers operate. Our view is that the notion of unidirectional influence, rather than mutually supportive interaction on an ongoing basis, serves the best interests of neither the research nor the decision-making communities.

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- i The research project is currently in progress; and if interested persons have particular suggestions to make about the project please feel free to contact Rod McDonald or Geof Hawke at the Research Centre for Vocational Education and Training at the University of Technology, Sydney or myself at the Monash University-ACER Centre.
- ii Policy-related studies are defined in the Frascati Manual to include "analysis and assessment of existing programs, continued analysis and monitoring of external phenomena (e.g. defence and security analysis), legislative inquiry concerned with general government departmental policy or operations" (ABS 1993, p.4).
- iii This definition includes literacy and basic education programs, as they also prepare students for work generally.
- iv This definition is consistent with that used in McDonald et al. (1993).
- v For further discussion of these matters see C Selby Smith (1997).

Successful reform: Reframing the VET policy agendaⁱ

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Introduction

The balance struck between social and economic goals in public policy on vocational education and training (VET) is shaped in large part by contestation over the purposes of VET and the ends which it should serve. Such contests are fought out between groups with diverse values and competing interests in securing particular outcomes from VET. The extent to which certain interests prevail over others has a direct impact on the manner in which VET policies are framed with respect to social and economic goals, and on how symbolic and material resources are subsequently allocated for policy implementation (eg. Taylor et al. 1997).

In social democratic nations such as Australia, it is typically assumed that groups of people who are affected by policy decisions have a legitimate interest in shaping the outcomes, and are therefore entitled to participate in the decision-making process. As Stevenson has noted, 'those who could be viewed as having a legitimate interest in post-compulsory education and training, in its various forms, would include at least the learners themselves, their potential employers in commerce and industry, teachers, the members of society in which the learners live and the wider community ... Yet there are ... difficulties in reconciling the influences that such parties should be able to exert in educational projects.' (1994, p.104)

As Offe (1985) argues, competing interests tend to be reconciled through temporary 'settlements' forged by the state as a framework within which to manage social conflict and make strategic policy selections to address identified 'problems'. Seddon defines a settlement as 'a truce or compromise which establishes a framework for policy and practice' (1989, p.18). The current reform agenda for VET can be viewed as one such settlement in which the competing interests of capital and labour have been temporarily reconciled (Taylor & Henry 1994). However as prior research suggests (eg. Powles & Anderson 1996), the settlement reached between capital and labour in relation to VET has resulted in a significant imbalance between social and economic goals, with the scales tipped towards the latter.

A central contention of this paper is that the current imbalance in the VET reform agenda is a consequence of a policy process which has unduly privileged certain voices over others. Those voices which have exercised a dominant influence over the reform process belong to groups who have a vested interest in ensuring that VET policy serves primarily economic ends. Conversely the groups which have been marginalised in the policy formation process are those who tend to be more concerned about the social outcomes of VET. The aim of this paper is to examine the findings of a research project on the policy perceptions and preferences of a significant group of stakeholders whose legitimate interests in VET reform have been largely overlooked, namely students. The paper concludes by arguing that if a balance is to be restored between social and economic goals within the context of the reform agenda for VET, it will be necessary to take account of the views and concerns of all legitimate stakeholders.

Privileged voices

In 1994, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) commissioned the Allen Consulting Group (ACG) to review the implementation of the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA). The major aims of the review were to identify problems with, and barriers to, reform and to recommend steps for improving the implementation of the NTRA. In order to fulfil these objectives, ANTA requested the consultants to address the question: 'What are the public and stakeholder perceptions of the elements and scope of the agenda for reform and what elements are perceived as working?' (ACG 1994, p.xi).

In its final report, entitled *Successful Reform*, ACG stated that business and industry had developed little sense of 'ownership' of the NTRA, largely because there had been a perceived failure to respond adequately to their needs and priorities:

The lack of strong commitment to the reforms by business ... is a key concern. At the core of this concern is ... the key problem: that the reforms to date have lacked any strong focus on the demand side - that is, on what is actually needed to deliver to Australian enterprises ... the skills they need in order to compete in the new more open market environment. The reforms cannot succeed unless business values them, engages with them and leads them (Preface).

In ACG's view, this highlighted the need to refocus the VET reforms on the 'competitive needs of enterprises' so as to '*raise the productive performance of Australian enterprises through their effect on skills and skill formation*' (p.13). It justified this intensified emphasis on economic goals by arguing that because 'the outcome individuals seek through training is an employment outcome ... the training that is most responsive to the needs of enterprises ... is the training that will best meet equity objectives' (p.13). In order to achieve this outcome, it argued the need for a more competitive training market 'centred on *direct* client relationships between training providers on the one hand and enterprises and individuals on the other' (p.51)

In the course of conducting the review, ACG undertook extensive consultations with 'individuals and organisations, in every State and Territory' (Preface). In total, ACG consulted with around 220 interested parties including: 7 national government bodies; 18 State departments and authorities; 7 TAFE institutes; 14 private providers; 74 private and public enterprises; 64 industry associations; 8 unions; 18 Industry Advisory Training Boards; and 10 'experts and other interested parties'. On the basis of these consultations it concluded that there is '*widespread support for the need for reform, for the basic goals of reforms, and for some of the key elements ... There is a general belief that training reform is important for Australia, and must be made successful*' (Preface, emphases added).

On closer examination, the latter claims must be called into question. While there may have been 'widespread support' for the basic goals of the NTRA among the groups consulted, there is no acknowledgment of the restricted nature of the consultation process itself. Not only were no women's or community groups consulted, but students and their representative bodies were

entirely overlooked. Why ACG chose not to consult with students is puzzling for three reasons. First, as Stevenson (1994) suggests, students have a legitimate interest in VET and should therefore have been included among the stakeholder groups consulted for the review. Secondly, 'individuals' (namely students) were identified as one of the 'key clients' in the VET sector to whom ACG argued providers should become more responsive. Thirdly, ACG reported that one of the 'perceived *weaknesses*' in the reform process was the 'lack of participation of women and disadvantaged groups in setting the National Training Reform Agenda' (p.29). In effect, by excluding students (including women and disadvantaged groups) from its consultation process, ACG thereby perpetuated one of the basic flaws in the NTRA.

Such notable omissions are by no means unique to the ACG review. During the entire course of the NTRA for which over 1,200 government consultations conducted, students have been consulted on only one occasion. In 1990, the Deveson Review received a written submission from the Victorian TAFE Students' and Apprentices' Network (VTSAN) with whom it subsequently conducted a face-to-face consultation. Apart from this one exception, no concerted effort has been made to consult with students either directly via consultative fora, or indirectly through representative student organisations. Needless to say, none of the review committees included any student representatives among their membership. In effect, no official account has been taken of the views and concerns of students about either the effectiveness of, or future priorities and directions for, the NTRA.

Student voices: Researching and consulting

Against this background, the former Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training funded a proposal by VTSAN in 1995/96 under the Strategic Initiatives in Training Program to raise the profile of students in the NTRA. The project comprised an integrated mix of research and development activities. In brief, the research component of the project aimed to: investigate student perceptions of VET reform; identify barriers to, and best practice in, VET reform; and develop strategies to improve the NTRA from a student perspective.

The project was conceived, designed, organised, and conducted by TAFE students under VTSAN management. Two consultants were contracted to prepare the final report (Anderson & Hoare 1996). Although national in scope, the study focused primarily on the Victorian State Training System as the principal site for field research and consultations due to logistical and financial constraints. The lack of established student organisations and networks in the non-TAFE sector also confined the scope of consultations to students attending TAFE institutes.

A range of research and consultation strategies were employed. First, the study analysed recent policy developments, student demographic data and relevant research literature. Secondly, a variety of mechanisms were used for data collection including a survey of TAFE student organisations in Victoria, face-to-face consultations with small groups of TAFE students, and a statewide conference involving a wide cross-section of TAFE students and staff responsible for the provision of student services.

After a brief discussion of definitional issues and the conceptual approach developed for the study, some of the key research findings, their policy implications and resulting recommendations are outlined.

Towards a conceptual framework

Early in the research and consultation process, it became apparent that the major issues of concern for students related to participation, access and equity. For instance, the key areas of concern identified at the statewide conference and through subsequent consultations included: fees and charges; participation in provider and system governance; course content and delivery; Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL); gender-related barriers to participation; apprentice/trainee rights; provision of support services; and financial support. The clear message conveyed through the consultations was that a large gulf existed between the priorities and concerns reflected in the official reform agenda and those of TAFE students. The predominant view among the students was that in spite of the NTRA, both the system as a whole and providers in particular remained largely disinterested in, and unresponsive to, the needs and priorities of students, especially women and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In many instances, students were either unaware of key training reforms or felt that they had had little, if any, impact on the quality and effectiveness of their learning experiences.

For students, the key measure of successful reform in VET is not whether the competitive performance of private enterprises has been enhanced through better access to skilled labour. Rather it was whether or not VET had become more open, accessible and attuned to the diverse needs, backgrounds, and aspirations of students. The acquisition of vocationally-oriented skills and qualifications was among the primary aims of the students consulted, but it was by no means of exclusive or overriding importance. Students' motives for enrolling in TAFE were typically more diverse and their expectations much wider than just gaining job-related skills. Moreover, many students expressed concern about what they perceived to be various forms of discrimination and inequity to which female students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds were subjected in the VET sector. On the basis of these findings, the research was broadly structured around the notions of participation, access and equity.

The task of examining issues concerning participation, access and equity in the VET sector from a student perspective is complex and problematic for several reasons. First, not only are the notions of participation, access and equity inter-related, but they are also open to multiple and competing interpretations. Often however the meanings of these terms are taken for granted. Powles argues that 'the concepts of "access" and "equity" which often nowadays have little more depth of meaning than catchwords, need some sustained debate' (1991, p.61). The VTSAN study attempted to contribute to this debate by examining how notions of access and equity, together with their implications for students, have changed within the context of shifting policy frames in VET over the past two decades. This aspect of the study will be discussed shortly.

'Participation' was also defined broadly to refer to more than simply 'being enrolled' in educational programs. Drawing on a report by the Victorian Ministerial Working Party on

Student Participation (MWSPSP 1987), the definition used in the VTSAN study includes the notion of student participation in TAFE programs *and* in decision-making structures and processes. The latter dimension of participation includes involvement in curriculum and governance decisions that occur in the classroom/workshop, at the provider level (eg. institute council, student representative organisations and other fora), and at the state and national levels. Participation can occur either *directly* by involving individual students or their elected representatives in decision-making processes (eg. student union elections, institute councils, policy review committees), or *indirectly* via consultation processes. Such a definition concurred with the perspective adopted by students themselves.

Secondly, it was necessary to pose the question of 'participation, access and equity for whom?' Throughout the consultations, students gave consistent emphasis to the need to identify and remove barriers to participation for all people, particularly women and other under-represented and disadvantaged groups. However, one of the perennial problems in the debate concerning participation, access and equity in TAFE has been the difficulty of determining precisely what proportion of students falls into the categories of 'under-represented' and 'disadvantaged'. The official practice of classifying students into separate equity 'target groups' conveys the impression that students from disadvantaged backgrounds constitute an assortment of numerically insignificant minority groups on the periphery of the 'mainstream'. As a result, the issues of access, participation and equity tend to be marginalised and relegated to a second or lower order of priority in policy and planning processes.

Such images of, and assumptions about, the demographic profile of the TAFE student population were found to be inaccurate and misleading. In an analysis of the national TAFE student data for 1994, it was found that people from disadvantaged and under-represented groups (including women) comprise around 76 per cent of the total TAFE student population.ⁱⁱ This figure did not take account of the many students who belonged to under-represented groups in TAFE for whom statistics were not collected at the time (eg. people with disabilities, long term unemployed, sole supporting parents, people of low socio-economic status, people without adequate social, literacy and numeracy skills, and people living in institutional settings such as prisons). Notwithstanding the frequent overlap between such groups, it became clear that VET policies on access and equity are directly relevant to a significant *majority* of TAFE students. And contrary to conventional assumptions, belonging to an 'under-represented' and/or 'disadvantaged' student group in TAFE constitutes the *norm*, at least in numerical terms. Consequently, access and equity must be viewed as *mainstream* policy issues in VET.

Thirdly, the task of defining the student perspective in TAFE is problematic. Due to the diverse nature of the TAFE student population, there is clearly no single 'student perspective' (Anderson 1995). When addressing needs relating to participation, access and equity in TAFE, account must be taken of the multi-faceted composition of the TAFE student population in terms of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, geographic location, and a range of other variables. In view of the difficulties involved in constructing a representative sample, coupled with time and resource constraints, the study did not set out to compile a definitive 'student perspective' on the NTRA. Instead, it attempted to reveal some general patterns and trends in

student perceptions and experiences of VET reform and shed light on the major issues and concerns identified by participants in the study.

Participation, access and equity: Social and market perspectives

A twofold conceptual framework was developed for the study based on an analysis of past and present formulations of participation, access and equity in VET policy. The first dimension draws on the original notion of *social* participation, access and equity in TAFE, as articulated by the Kangan Report (1974). Kangan argued that TAFE should contribute to the development of a learning society by providing unrestricted access to recurrent education for all adults. As 'universal access is a matter of equity' (1974, p.131), Kangan highlighted the need to remove barriers to participation by women and disadvantaged groups.

In Kangan's view, participation in TAFE should include involvement not only in educational programs but also in decision making. Besides preparing students for active citizenship, Kangan considered that student participation in decision making would increase the responsiveness of TAFE to community needs, and enhance the effectiveness of decision making in TAFE. According to Kangan, the development of a 'vigorous and well-balanced' TAFE system in Australia would be achieved 'only through an active and effective student body' (1974, p.xxxii). As TAFE caters for a predominantly 'adult student clientele', attention was drawn to the need to examine 'ways and means of facilitating student representation on local councils' (1974, p.56).

From Kangan's perspective, participation in learning and decision making are inter-related processes and integral to the total framework of social access, participation and equity in TAFE. As TAFE students are not only learners but also adult members of civil society, Kangan argued that 'account must be taken of total needs which include those of being a citizen at work, at home and in the community at large' (1974, p.xxxii). Realisation of social goals in TAFE therefore necessitates the removal of barriers that prevent students as citizen-learners from gaining access to and participating actively, effectively and equitably in both educational programs and decision-making processes. Although the Kangan vision of TAFE predates the NTRA, it nevertheless remains influential in TAFE (Kearns & Hall 1994).

The second dimension of the conceptual frame for the study relates to the notion of *market* participation, access and equity in VET which has emerged in the context of the current policy emphasis on the development of an open training market. In this framework, students are defined as 'clients' or 'consumers' of VET products and services for which they are increasingly expected to pay. Market advocates claim that by empowering clients to exercise greater choice in training decisions, providers will be forced by commercial necessity to become more efficient and responsive to client needs. In a market-based system, it is held that consumers can (theoretically) exercise their market powers of 'voice' and 'exit' which respectively enable them to express their dissatisfaction with the products and services provided, and to withdraw their custom (and re-direct it elsewhere) if their preferences go unheeded (Hirschman 1970).

Implicit in the new policy framework is an assumption that all consumers have equal access to, and can participate effectively in, the training market. Insofar as market prices are concerned, 'there is equity between customers in the sense of treating all persons alike' (Deveson 1990, p.9). Deveson conceded that conflicts may arise between efficiency and equity but argued that targeted subsidies could be used to promote equitable access. Advocates also assume that markets are blind or impartial to social difference. In their view, the discipline of the market induces greater provider responsiveness to client needs regardless of gender, race and social background. In other words, current policy settings assume that market mechanisms are generally more efficient and equitable than traditional planning or non-market models of VET provision.

The twin notions of *students-as-citizens* and *students-as-consumers* provided the conceptual framework within which student perceptions of the NTRA were analysed in the context of the VTSAN study. Some of the main research findings, their policy implications and resulting recommendations will now be examined from the perspectives of social and market access, participation and equity.

Social access, participation and equity

The study found that, in spite of successive policy and program initiatives designed to increase participation and improve access and equity in TAFE over the past decade or so, many people continue to face significant barriers to gaining recognised vocational qualifications. Analysis of participation and access trends in TAFE in recent years shows that women and other disadvantaged groups remain numerically under-represented, particularly in the vocational streams 2100-4500 (Powles & Anderson 1996). Students who participated in the statewide conference and consultations confirmed that access to TAFE was hindered by a wide range of longstanding barriers including gender discrimination, cultural and linguistic differences, and socio-economic and educational disadvantage.

Traditional barriers of access have been accentuated and compounded by a series of relatively new factors arising from recent reforms in VET. In brief, consultations for the study revealed that new barriers had been created by, among other things:

- the proliferation and escalation of fees and charges which, combined with a lack of adequate financial support (eg. subsidies, loans), disadvantages those in financial need;
- competency-based training which, due to its emphasis on skills valued in the (segregated) workplace, tends to exclude women and disadvantaged groups from equitable participation in learning processes;
- flexible delivery and self-paced learning which tend to favour educationally advantaged students;
- the increasing emphasis on work-based learning which ignores the needs of the unemployed and reduces access to support services for disadvantaged learners in the workplace;

- reductions in the range, level and quality of student services in TAFE which deprive disadvantaged students of access to essential educational and social support; and
- linguistic and financial barriers associated with RPL which discriminate against particular groups such as students from non-English speaking backgrounds, students with low literacy levels and the unemployed.

Paradoxically many recent VET reforms, including those which were designed in part to improve access and equity, were seen by students to have erected new obstacles to participation by women and disadvantaged groups.

In order to identify strategies for improving access and equity, an examination was undertaken of the effectiveness of relevant government policy and program initiatives over the past decade or so. Due to the availability of program evaluation data, the analysis was limited to three major strategies: the TAFE Participation and Equity Program (PEP), the National Plan of Action for Women in TAFE (NPAWT) and the Negotiated Targets Strategy (NTS) in Victoria. TAFE PEP combined special access and bridging courses for disadvantaged students with initiatives to remove structural, curricular and attitudinal barriers to mainstream TAFE. NPAWT combined national participation targets for state training authorities with complementary action by related training agencies (eg. Industry Training Advisory Boards) and various supporting research and development initiatives. NTS utilised a performance management model which linked provider planning and resource allocation to negotiated participation targets for numerically under-represented groups. Each of these initiatives therefore reflected a different approach to the problem and their implementation highlighted various factors that facilitated and impeded change in the VET system.

A meta-evaluation was undertaken of the findings of government reports on the outcomes from each of these initiatives.ⁱⁱⁱ On the basis of these results, the VTSAN study recommended the development of a National Access and Equity in VET Strategy (NAEVETS) comprising the most effective elements of the each initiative. Accordingly, it proposed that the NAEVETS should be developed in consultation with key stakeholders in all states and territories including peak VET provider, community, student, teacher and industry groups. The principal aim of the NAEVETS would be to increase the access and completion rates of all identified target groups over a five year period to a level reflecting their proportional representation in the wider community. To achieve this goal, it recommended that the NAEVETS should comprise the following three components: *negotiated targets* to promote equitable access to and outcomes from mainstream accredited VET provision; *a range of access programs and support services* to address the special needs of women and other under-represented and disadvantaged groups; and *a program of whole curricular reform* to identify and remove barriers to equitable access and outcomes in mainstream accredited vocational courses.

The NAEVETS proposal was accompanied by a range of supporting recommendations with the aim of promoting effective policy and program implementation. Among other things, it was recommended that the NAEVETS should ensure that: targets for each of the three

components are negotiated with state and territory training systems and incorporated into ANTA/state planning profiles and industry training plans; resources are allocated annually against each of the three components; and performance is measured against achievement of annual targets for increased access and outcomes. It was also recommended that all recipients of public training resources should be required to implement the NAEVETS as a condition of funding, with their performance monitored accordingly. Other recommendations were that the NAEVETS should be: supported by a range of national research and development projects (eg. demographic data collection and analysis, employer/industry collaboration, marketing, curriculum and staff development); endorsed by Commonwealth, State and Territory ministers prior to implementation; and monitored and evaluated at a national level.

Student participation in decision making

Since the Kangan Report (1974), several government policies and reports have emphasised the importance of promoting and supporting the participation of students in decision-making structures and processes. As a consequence, the rationale for student participation in decision making in TAFE has been argued from a variety of perspectives: youth policy and development; workplace reform and new technology; industrial democracy and employee participation; and educational development (MWSP 1987). More recently, the Finn Review (1991) and Mayer Report (1992) highlighted the need for curriculum to promote the development of decision-making and related skills as key competencies in VET. Based on a distillation of prior reports, the purposes, principles and benefits of student participation in decision making are summarised in Table 1.

The study found that policies and practices for promoting student participation in decision making were generally under-developed and poorly implemented in the Victorian TAFE system. Although significant pockets of active student involvement in institute activities were identified, students generally felt that they not been acknowledged as legitimate stakeholders in curriculum decisions and provider governance. This situation was viewed as fundamentally anomalous by the students consulted, many of whom indicated that they had enrolled in TAFE with the expectation of being treated as mature adults. As the study found, over 90 per cent of TAFE students in 1994 were aged 18 years or over (NCVER 1995). Yet the evidence suggests that, in TAFE, they have been denied the political, social and civil rights and obligations that they exercise as adult citizens in the wider community.

The survey of Victorian TAFE student organisations found that student participation in key decision-making processes, including representation on institute councils, remained extremely limited. Among the major barriers to participation in decision making identified in the study were: a lack of continuity in the student population (eg. part-time attendance, short courses); timetabling constraints and conflicting priorities (eg. work, family); geographical/transport, financial and language barriers; inadequate support structures (eg. professional development, personnel, resources, facilities); and a lack of recognition/credit/accreditation for participation in formal decision-making processes.

Table 1: Rationale for student participation in VET decision making

Purposes

The purposes of student participation in VET decision making are to:

- facilitate the development of autonomous, adaptable and cooperative learners, workers and citizens; and
- promote a democratic, productive and equitable TAFE system, workplace and society.

Principles

Student participation in VET decision making is based on the principles that:

- those most affected by decisions have a right to participate equitably in making them; and
- decisions will be more effective if those directly affected participate in making them.

Benefits

Students/apprentices will:

- develop skills and competencies to participate in democratic and cooperative decision making in TAFE, the workplace and the wider community; and
- develop a sense of confidence, self-esteem and shared responsibility for the decisions which affect their learning and work lives.

VET providers will:

- develop policies, programs and services which are more relevant and responsive to the needs of their students/clients and the wider community.

Industry/enterprises will:

- gain access to more flexible, adaptable and autonomous individuals capable of participating actively in workplace reform and technological change.

Society will:

- become more democratic, cooperative and capable of enlightened self-management.

Source: Anderson & Hoare (1996) *Participation in VET: Breaking Down the Barriers*, DEET, unpublished

One of the few areas of improvement in recent years was found to be that of student involvement in student affairs. As a result of state government initiatives such as the Ministerial Working Party on Student Participation in Victoria (MWSP 1987) and the establishment of VTSAN in 1987, there had been a significant increase in the number of student organisations on Victorian TAFE campuses. At the time of the study, student organisations existed in twenty-four (24) of the twenty-seven (27) TAFE institutes in Victoria. VTSAN was found to have been active in supporting the establishment and maintenance of student campus organisations and in representing student interests at a state level. VTSAN had also assisted in the development of another statewide TAFE student network, the Queensland TAFE Students' and Apprentices' Network. The research revealed widespread student support for the various roles performed by VTSAN and campus organisations, particularly protecting the rights and representing the interests of TAFE students and apprentices to government, industry and providers. in addition to providing a range of other student services (eg.

information, advice and welfare services, policy research and advocacy, newspapers, diaries, orientation and social activities).

In several instances, TAFE institute management and teaching staff were reported to have encouraged and supported local student initiatives. In as many instances however, it was found that student organisations had been actively opposed and undermined by provider management who reportedly viewed them either as a threat or an undesirable presence on campus. The imposition of budget cuts and the introduction of state government legislation in 1992 to promote 'voluntary student unionism' were identified as major obstacles to developing new representative campus organisations and maintaining existing ones in Victoria.

At a national level, the absence of student input to the formation of the VET reform agenda was identified as a major problem. The source of the problem was traced back to the general paucity of mechanisms for promoting and supporting student participation at all levels of decision making in the VET sector:

There is enormous variation between departments, colleges and states in the level of support for student participation in decision making processes. The development of student representation on all of these levels has therefore been inconsistent, and is absent at the state level in most cases. The cumulative effect of this inconsistency is that the co-ordination of, and provision for, student input into the national training reform agenda has not been achieved, and is unlikely to be achieved until support is provided at all levels. (Anderson & Hoare 1996, p.119)

Strategies to promote the participation of TAFE students in curriculum decisions were found to be even more limited than those relating to governance. Few examples of a participatory approach to curriculum planning, development and evaluation were identified other than the inclusion of student representatives on some local course advisory committees and the occasional industry training consortium (eg. the Victorian Social and Community Services Consortium). Moreover, the introduction of competency-based training (CBT) was found to have increased the control of industry/enterprises over curriculum content and assessment at the perceived expense of students and apprentices/trainees. As the final report commented:

The curriculum planning and development process in TAFE has always been and is increasingly inaccessible to the large bulk of TAFE students. The reform agenda of developing an industry-driven training system has propagated a curriculum development process in mainstream TAFE which fails to recognise any role for student input to educational objectives and learning processes. (Anderson & Hoare 1996, p.102)

A large number of students expressed strong support for strategies to increase their input to curriculum and related aspects of the learning process, particularly via student-teacher negotiation. The study concluded that a review of CBT curriculum development, course delivery, assessment and accreditation processes is required to increase opportunities for student participation in all phases of curriculum decision making.

Exemplars of best practice identified in the report were the Student-Staff Consultative Committees (SSCCs) at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. Established several years ago, the SSCCs provide a forum in which students and teachers meet to jointly plan and evaluate course provision at a Departmental level. According to student informants, the SSCCs were generally considered to have made a valuable contribution to improvements in the delivery of TAFE programs and services. The SSCCs were therefore highlighted in the final report as an effective working model of student/staff collaboration which could be widely emulated throughout the VET sector.

In view of the above research findings, the VTSAN study recommended that a national policy framework for promoting student participation in VET decision making should be developed in consultation with key stakeholders in all states and territories including peak VET provider, community, student, teacher and industry groups. Based on the proposed rationale for student participation in decision making in VET (see Table 1), the report recommended that the national VET policy framework should include: principles to guide the participation of students in decision making in VET; strategies to promote student participation in decisions relating to curriculum and governance at all levels in the VET sector; strategies to promote equitable participation in decision making; mechanisms to support effective participation in decision making; arrangements for accrediting decision-making skills as key/generic competencies; and models of best practice for student participation in educational decision making in VET. In addition, it was recommended that all recipients of public training resources should be required to implement the national policy framework as a condition of funding and their performance should be monitored accordingly.

Market access, participation and equity

The second set of research findings and policy implications relate to the notion of market access, participation and equity and, within that framework, to the role of students-as-consumers. The research found that the superimposition of a market framework on VET had created tensions between the traditional notion of social access and the new notion of market access. These tensions were found to have generated new cultural and attitudinal barriers to student participation in decision making, as reflected in the following remark by a participant in the study:

The main barrier is the perception by management of the value of students. We need institute management to realise the positive energy the students have to contribute. Until we can make management understand they are there to provide a service and not a product there will always be a barrier. (cited in Anderson & Hoare 1996, p.109)

In other words, a strong feeling existed among students that they are now perceived and treated as passive consumers of VET products rather than as active participants in the production of knowledge, skills and organisational culture. A consistent message emerging from the consultations was that students would prefer to see themselves (and provider management and staff) as part of an educational community rather than a commercial market.

The research and consultations found that fees and charges are the major barrier to equitable access and participation in the training market, particularly tuition fees, materials fees and compulsory non-academic fees. From a student perspective, the main problems with fees and charges in TAFE are that payment is required up-front, and that the level of fees and charges is excessive in some instances. Other identified problems include the range and variability of fees among institutes, hidden fees and the lack of accountability for fee disbursement by provider management. Students consulted during the project invariably felt that fee-charging contravenes TAFE's responsibility to provide access to students from all backgrounds, regardless of their capacity to pay.

Since their introduction in the late 1980s, fees and charges have proliferated and increased steadily with adverse consequences for market access and equity (Powles & Anderson 1996). As indicated in the final report, the reported failure by the state training authority and TAFE institutes in Victoria to establish adequate fee concessions and exemption policies, in conjunction with emergency loan schemes for needy students, has exacerbated the barriers created by up-front fee payment. As previously indicated, fees and charges associated with RPL were also found to have raised new barriers to market access for various disadvantaged client groups, particularly migrant women workers and the long-term unemployed. After fees and charges, a lack of sufficient information, and poor language and literacy skills were identified as barriers to equitable participation in the training market.

The study found that in spite of the rhetorical emphasis on 'client focus' and 'user choice' in recent reforms, the rights of TAFE students as consumers are yet to be clearly identified and actively promoted. The majority of student informants lacked a clear understanding of their rights and obligations as consumers. Most students were unaware of the existence of formal complaints mechanisms and grievance procedures at the provider level. Some reported that no such mechanisms existed. Although several students expressed dissatisfaction with aspects of their experience in TAFE, such as the accuracy and quality of course information and the accessibility of teaching staff and facilities, few knew how (or felt confident enough) to lodge a formal complaint. Some students cited fear of retribution as a reason for not pursuing their grievances through official channels. Several identified their local student organisations as the sole source of information about their rights, and the only body likely to take action on their behalf.

In summary, the study found that students are generally unaware of their rights and obligations as consumers, and generally unable to exercise their powers of 'voice' and 'exit' in an effective manner. Accordingly the VTSAN report argued that it is incumbent on VET authorities at all levels to ensure that students have access to information concerning their rights and responsibilities as consumers. Moreover it argued that if access to, and participation in, the training market is to be equitable for all consumers (particularly those with limited financial resources, poor English language skills or low literacy levels) then policies on fees and charges and information relating to VET programs and services (and about consumer rights and responsibilities) must take account of these factors.

In his address to the statewide VTSA conference, the Victorian Minister for Tertiary Education and Training acknowledged the important role performed by TAFE student associations as advocates for students as consumers:

Having said that TAFE institutes must respond to the needs of their customers, I should say that I also believe student associations have an important role in clearly communicating those needs. Institutes use many techniques to monitor the delivery of services to students including quality surveys and benchmarking techniques. Student associations have a role to play too in providing a focus for feedback which leads to quality improvement in an institution (cited in Anderson & Hoare 1996, pp.108-9).

The study argued that student organisations are well-placed to perform this function and, if properly resourced, could provide a cost-effective means of ensuring that all students are fully aware of, and able to exercise, their rights and responsibilities as consumers. Further, it recommended that such rights and responsibilities should be codified in a publicly accessible and widely disseminated charter, and that publicly funded providers should abide by a mandatory code of practice. Both the charter and code should be supported by the establishment of independent complaints mechanisms and grievance procedures. The study also referred to a national Education and Student Services Standing Committee report on student services and amenities in TAFE which proposed a set of principles as a basis for developing a charter and code of practice (Anderson 1995b). It was suggested that such initiatives would assist students to participate more effectively as informed consumers in the training market.

Conclusion

To date the VET reform agenda has been virtually dominated by economic interests largely because industry and enterprises have been privileged over other groups in processes of policy review and consultation. Although defined in policy statements as one of the two key client groups in VET, students have been effectively denied a voice in the reform process. A major aim of the project on which this paper is based was to enable students to express their views and concerns about national VET reform. This research revealed that a substantial gulf exists between national priorities for VET reform and the expressed needs and interests of students. Unlike industry and enterprises whose principal interests lie in gaining access to skilled workers to increase economic productivity and competitiveness, students are more concerned about promoting the social goals of access, participation and equity. The research findings suggest therefore that the imbalance between social and economic goals in the VET reform agenda is in part due to a failure to include students in the agenda-setting process.

The VTSA research also suggests that the imbalance between social and economic goals has in various ways worked against the interests of the vast majority of VET students, namely women and disadvantaged groups. Not only do traditional barriers to social access, participation and equity persist, but market reforms have also erected new barriers and exacerbated social and economic disadvantage. Moreover, contrary to the policy rhetoric about

'client focus' and 'user choice', market access remains restricted for the financially disadvantaged and students feel unable to exercise their rights as consumers.

As outlined in this paper, the VTSAN study identified several ways to reframe the VET reform agenda so that the needs and interests of students could be addressed more effectively. Above all, it suggested that students should be given the opportunity to become active participants in policy decisions which affect their education. For such a strategy to be effective, students and their representative bodies must be encouraged and supported to participate as equal partners in decision making at all levels of the VET sector.

Ultimately if VET reform is to be successful, it will be necessary to restore a genuine balance between social and economic goals. This can only occur if equitable access to policy decisions is granted to all legitimate stakeholders, including students, and account is taken of their diverse needs and competing interests.

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ⁱ This paper is based largely on research undertaken for a project funded by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) under the Strategic Initiatives in Training Program 1995/96. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of DEET.

ⁱⁱ *Selected Vocational Education and Training Statistics 1994* (NCVER 1995) enables aggregation of student enrolment data for four groups traditionally regarded as under-represented and/or disadvantaged in TAFE. Women in vocational courses (streams 2100-4500) accounted for 500,850 student enrolments. Male students who were enrolled in vocational courses (streams 2100-4500) and who belonged to 'disadvantaged' categories (namely, people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) descent, people living in rural/remote locations, and people who speak a language other than English at home) accounted for 359,787 enrolments. In total, women and men from three key disadvantaged groups accounted for 860,637 students, or 76 per cent of all enrolments in TAFE vocational courses in 1994. Even accounting for some probable overlap between the categories of people of ATSI descent and people living in rural/remote locations, well over two in every three students enrolled in TAFE vocational courses in 1994 belonged to groups which were, and continue to be, under-represented and/or disadvantaged. This suggests that English-speaking males enrolled in vocational courses, the group traditionally assumed to form the 'mainstream' of the TAFE student population, accounted for less than 268,053 enrolments or 24 per cent of the total TAFE student population in 1994.

ⁱⁱⁱ The government evaluation reports analysed for each of the access and equity initiatives were as follows. For PEP: Standish, R 1986, *Review of the TAFE PEP Program*, Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, Canberra; for NPAWT: South Australian Department of TAFE 1994, *Women and vocational education. An evaluation of the National Plan of Action for Women in TAFE*, ANTA, Brisbane; and for NTS: Anderson, D and Luxton, M 1991, *1990 Negotiated Targets Policy Program. Performance Report*, Social Justice Policy Branch, Office of the State Training Board, Victoria; and Lundberg, D and Cleary, M 1995, *Organising a fair go. Fair participation in vocational education and training and the Victorian Negotiated Targets Strategy*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Beyond the linear models: Pathways and outcomes of 1991 Victorian exit students

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In 1996 we conducted an ANTA-funded major research study of Vocational Education and Training (VET) participants in Victoria. The project was entitled *Participant Pathways and Outcomes in Vocational Education and Training: 1992-1995*.¹ As the title suggests, the project was designed within the framework of the conventional linear model of 'youth transitions' which assumed a sequential process constituted by school at one end, and work at the other as the major 'outcome', with some form of post-compulsory education and training as the intervening 'pathway'. The data uncovered in the project call into question that linear model, and for this reason we want in this paper to re-examine some of the evidence and explore its significance.

The paper therefore has two aspects. Firstly, it articulates a theoretical concern about the need for new typologies of youth transitions, and illustrates this with reference to research findings on the 1995-6 pathways and outcomes of two thousand young Victorians who left school in 1991. Secondly, the findings are used to propose a typology of 'life-patterns' more compatible with the experience of the post-1970 generation than the conventional linear models.

New pathways

Much of the literature on the transitions of young people into adulthood makes an assumption about a linear progression defined in terms of two major end-points or life contexts: the world of school and the world of work. With the increasing emphasis placed since the mid 1980s on the importance of post-compulsory education, the concept of transition has now incorporated post-secondary education as an intermediate step between school and work. However, this too tends to be defined in sequential terms. There are major shortcomings to this presumption in favour of linearity (Wyn & White 1997).

First, it becomes increasingly difficult to allow in the linear models for the complicated mixes of study and work and family life that are now part of the youth agenda. The dominance of the school and work end-points and the sequential path between them in the established literature, including in policy documents, tends to reduce the significance of the complexity and interplay of factors. Increasingly for young people, becoming adult is a negotiated reality and transitions after high school do not form a predetermined and predictable sequence from one discrete type of reality to another. This raises doubts about the applicability of a sequential model in which work begins when study is over, or in which the educational 'mainstream' is discussed with little attention being paid to the fact that even full-time university students now see themselves as part of the workforce and negotiate their study commitments with that in mind. The post-1970 generation are negotiating an adult reality for themselves utilising study and work as constitutive elements.

Secondly, for the post-1970 generation of young people the youth labour market has been in crisis; young women have experienced new definitions of womanhood and new choices regarding marriage and child-rearing; and the generation as a whole has undertaken years of post-compulsory study which have postponed the 'post-study' end-point usually associated with the linear model.

Research findings

In 1991, in what was called the SCOPE Project, the Youth Assistance Survey of the Victorian State Government collected data regarding Victorian students intending to leave school in the following year. Included in the data was information about intentions of students for employment, training or further education. A follow-up survey, The Next Move Resurvey Project, was sent to these young people twelve months later, with a questionnaire asking if they were working, looking for work or studying. In 1995, the Youth Research Centre successfully cross-linked to the original 1991 SCOPE set of 29,155 a total of 10,985 'Next Move' completed 1992 returns. Subsequently, the Youth Research Centre has re-surveyed these 10,985 and built up further data on 4,081 of them.

The sample

In 1996, a selected sample of 81 was interviewed and 1,908 participated in a large survey questionnaire. The questionnaire sample included a representative range of school and ethnic backgrounds, both urban and rural, and a variety of parental educational attainment. Five per cent of the sample had left school prior to Year 12, while 60 per cent had attended government schools. Ninety per cent were Australian-born, but a significant proportion had parents from other countries. Only 67 per cent of male parents and 65 per cent of female parents were born in Australia, with about 20 per cent of each coming from Europe and a further 6 per cent from Asia. Most of the parents had not themselves participated in much post-compulsory education and training of a formal kind. For the male parents, 19 per cent had university degrees, 15 per cent had trade qualifications, but 44 per cent had not even completed Year 12. Most (54 per cent) of the female parents did not have Year 12, while 13 per cent had university degrees. The main features are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents' details

	Per cent
From Government Schools	60
Female	65
Australian-born	88
A-Born Female Parents	65
Male Parents with less than Yr 12	44
From Metropolitan areas	63
TAFE/VET post-secondary study	45
Completed studies	60

Evidence of linearity

Eighty-one per cent of the sample indicated that they believed in a 'strong' or 'very strong' link between further study and better jobs, and 72 per cent considered that this was

definitely true in their own case. At a more detailed level, the participants were asked what type of employment they would like to have in the future, but also what they would 'realistically expect' to do. Not only did the majority (66 per cent) indicate that they have ambitions for a professional/managerial career, but, as Table 2 indicates, almost all asserted that they also 'realistically expect' to achieve this goal (61 per cent).

Table 2: Future employment

	Would like (%)	Expected (%)
Professional/management	66	61
Farmer	1	1
Small business	7	5
Home Duties	1	1
Clerical/Office worker	4	9
Sales	2	3
Tradesperson	3	4
Factory worker or labourer	0	1
Other	16	15

These high aspirations were confirmed in other questions about their likes and dislikes concerning future employment. The picture of adult life they project is one of full-time secure employment in a two-income family (Table 3).

Table 3: Job features (% Response)

	Highly approve	Approve
The job is a secure one	61	34
The job is full-time	55	29
Had a partner with full-time job	39	43
Work while children still at school	16	49

On the negative side, the majority indicated degrees of unhappiness if they could find only casual work, were dependent on welfare, were limited to 'home duties' or had a non-working partner (Table 4).

Table 4: Job features (% Response)

	Unhappy	Very unhappy
Had casual or irregular work	46	21
Dependent on welfare	19	74
No work outside home duties	28	53
Couldn't get a full-time job	31	59
Had a non-working partner	32	19

However, they did not expect this to happen. In response to a question about what they thought their situation in five years time was likely to be, the majority rejected the possibility that they might be unemployed (86 per cent), dependent on welfare (90 per cent), only in casual or irregular work (67 per cent) or consigned to home duties (84 per cent), as reflected in Table 5.

Table 5: In 5 years time (% Response)

	Less likely	Unlikely
Unemployed	25	61
Dependent on welfare	17	73
In casual or irregular work	36	31
No work outside home duties	21	63

Evidence of complexity

The data above have been extracted as evidence for a linear model of youth transitions and pathways. Overall, the picture that emerges from this selected evidence is one of high-achieving qualified young adults who fully expect to enter into full-time professional employment with little risk of irregular or intermittent work, and in a living partnership with a similarly secure professional. There is, however, other evidence in the research findings that tells a different story.

Firstly in response to a question about 'the characteristics that make up an adult life', items related to personal autonomy were given greatest weight. It could be argued that even an insistence on getting a 'secure job' was part of this broader consideration, particularly when we note that its counterpart - academic/training qualifications - was not rated as highly as the linear models might suggest. Table 6 gives the ranking for items considered very important.

Table 6: Characteristics of adult life

Characteristic	Rating as very important (%)
Financial independence	77
Making own choices/decisions	70
Emotional maturity	68
A secure job	65
Taking responsibility for things	61
Getting on well with people	60
Sticking to one's principles	47
Owning one's own home	42
Voting rights	40
Moving out from the family home	39
Academic/training qualifications	32
Living with a partner	28
Having authority over others	5

Secondly, in describing their current situation and the varying weight they gave to study and work commitments, complexity rather than linearity seemed to dominate. This was true for respondents from both city and rural areas, and the majority of both had combined work and study most or all of the time since leaving high school. Table 7 gives the relevant responses.

Table 7: Respondents combining work and study

Combinations	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Continually	31	32
Mostly	22	22
Sometimes	27	26
Rarely	11	9
Never	9	10

The survey also asked the respondents whether they had any difficulties with combining work and study. The range of responses is given in Table 8.

Table 8: Difficulties with work/study combinations

Difficulties	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Work tends to take priority	26	21
Need to work, but would prefer full-time study	17	19
Prefer to do both	25	29
Need both, but difficult to combine	25	25
Like both, but trouble finding job	8	8
Would prefer work without study	18	18
Would prefer study without work	25	31

Note: Percentages exceed 100% due to multiple responses

The responses in the two preceding tables illustrate the complexities that are now part of the lives of students from both rural and urban backgrounds. The combinations of work and study and the varying attitudes towards those combinations indicate the degree of overlap between the two worlds of school and work, the different meanings the combinations assume in the minds of different students and the various ways in which the combinations are negotiated and balanced. It is significant that most of the respondents take some kind of combination for granted, and that even in terms of preferences 'work without study' or 'study without work' are only favoured by a small proportion.

Patterns - not pathways

In an attempt to give greater weight to this process of negotiation of a life-path, we have turned away from the linear model of transition and have made use of a new typology derived from the different patterns that have emerged in the responses of the participants. The typology (VOCAM) is presented in Chart 1.

Chart 1: Typology of youth pathways

V ocational Focus	they focus on gaining qualifications to enable a career choice to be made
(O) ccupational Focus	they give priority to work, with other life-choices subordinate to that
(C) ontextual Focus	they emphasise the 'life' context chosen (family, community, lifestyle)
(A) ltered Patterns	they reconsider their original route and change to another destination
(M) ixed Patterns	they place equal value or emphasis on a <i>range</i> of activities or goals

If the linear models of the conventional literature and the policy documents represented the mainstream, we would expect the majority of the respondents to be included under either

the Vocational or the Occupational Focus. Our analysis of the survey evidence does not support this, and in terms of the defining characteristics of each of the elements in the typology, the following distribution of respondents into the various categories emerged (Table 9).

Table 9: Total Typology Respondents

	Persons	Per cent
(V)ocational Focus	519	27
(O)ccupational Focus	254	13
(C)ontextual Focus	191	10
(A)ltered Patterns	135	7
(M)ixed Patterns	809	43
<i>Total</i>	1,908	100

The patterns revealed in the study have important policy and research implications. Although all young people were engaging in post-secondary education and training with the broad goal of achieving educational credentials, their understandings of what this meant to their lives were varied, reflected in complex patterns rather than 'pathways'. As we can see from Table 9, which presents the comparative size of the various category sub-groupings of the 'patterns' typology, in fact a *minority* of young people (40%) could be said to have experienced a linear progression through post-compulsory education, with a strong vocational or occupational focus. By contrast, the patterns of the majority of young people in the study could not be characterised as linear or as a single focus. Their own perspectives on their experiences provide an insight into the way in which these young people are negotiating and constructing the central elements of their lives and identity.

The strong emphasis that young people through the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s placed on establishing a livelihood through employment has been reflected in a policy preoccupation with a linear and sequential transition process. There is evidence to suggest that this process was never the reality for a large proportion of young people (Wyn & White 1997). In the 1990s however, it is less and less appropriate to base education and youth policy on a model of a linear and sequential model of youth.

It is relatively common for research to create an impression of linear progression; of phases, stages or transitions, through the aggregation of the patterns of many young people. The review and overview of national data bases on gender equity by Yates and Leder (1996) indicate that this view persists. Yates and Leder argue that the outcomes of education for young men and women, presented in highly aggregated data sets, can only be understood in very broad terms which assume linearity and unidimensionality and mask diversity and complexity. It is, however, important to give visibility to the complexities that are present in the lives of young people, and to explore complexity and diversity as well as the common patterns of the majority.

The question which we are interested in, as with all the young people in our study, is how do they establish a livelihood? The answer lies in the 'stories' they tell about their lives. Stories, or narratives, through which people establish and maintain meaning in their lives are not just fictional or ephemeral. They are only sustained through experience, through significant others and through circumstances. Such narratives offer the researcher a

glimpse into the way in which individual lives meet with social structures, institutions and social forces. At a theoretical level, narratives provide a reference point for understanding the relationship between agency and structure. At a practical level, they offer a means of understanding the complex mixes of work, study, relationships, and other dimensions of life that characterise youth in the 1990s.

Table 7 illustrates one of the key aspects of complexity that is now almost taken for granted by young people: mixing education and employment. The patterns of response are remarkably similar for each group, a majority of whom had combined work and study since leaving school. Being able to combine work and study is a little acknowledged characteristic of the experience of becoming adult, yet it is now part of the lives of a majority of young people. However, as Table 8 reveals, young people take some kind of combination of work and study for granted. About 50 per cent either need or actually prefer the combination, with 8 per cent who would 'like to do both' but have trouble finding a job. Yet, young people differ in the extent to which this reality is accommodated. There are different ways of combining work and study, and, importantly, different meanings of the combinations which are negotiated and balanced.

Agency and expectations

What is important here at a policy level is an understanding of youth as a process, rather than a stage of development. Young people are agentic, that is they construct their own lives within social, political and economic contexts that both limit and offer opportunities. Rather than moving through and beyond particular territory, young people may be seen as 'weaving' interconnections around their lives; ones that they will strengthen or abandon over time, with cross-overs and strands that they may return to, and connections that some may emphasise more than others. We would describe this process as the construction of *patterns*, as opposed to the use of the popular but deceptive metaphor of following of pathways (Wyn & White 1997).

An important dimension of the 'pathways' metaphor was the implication that youth was an identifiable stage, before reaching 'adulthood'. The 'patterns' metaphor challenges this notion, characterising youth and adulthood as much less distinguishable from each other. Rather than youth being seen as a threshold into adulthood, 'patterns' offer a perspective in which adulthood might be measured by the density of interconnections, achieved by different people at different rates and in varying ways.

Given the heavy emphasis in policy and research studies, on linear pathways, it is not surprising that some of our evidence reveals linear expectations on the part of the respondents. Overall, the young people shared a remarkably positive view about what they expect their lives to be like in five years time. They have high aspirations, expecting to enter into full-time professional employment with little risk of irregular or intermittent work and in a living partnership with a similarly secure professional. Table 2 illustrates that a majority (61 per cent) not only aspire to, but expect to become professionals, or managers. However, our evidence suggests that it would be wrong to interpret this vision as confirmation that these young people held a linear view of their lives, in which 'getting a job' dominates their approach. What it does suggest is that their own sense of agency carries a degree of personal investment that looks forward to - even insists on - positive

outcomes. Their expectations may appear to be over-optimistic, and the 86 per cent rejection of the possibility of unemployment and the 90 per cent rejection of the likelihood of being dependent on welfare may appear unrealistic, but what is clear is that their chances of establishing a livelihood in the terms they value will depend on the extent to which they can work with the complexity they currently face. Agency implies that they will construct positive links and experiences where, on the face of it, none may be apparent. In other words, where structured pathways do not exist, or are rapidly being eroded, individual agency is increasingly important in establishing patterns for themselves which give positive meaning to their lives.

This construction of a future reality is evident in our project interviews with the young people concerning their experiences in VET (see Dwyer et al. 1997, ch. 3). For a proportion of the young people in our study, the experience of VET offered a space in which they could bring into focus the hazy ideas they had about their lives. This finding was stronger with respect to the young men than the young women. While some young men entered VET with very specific ideas about what job they intended to have at the other end, many used VET to test their strengths and to find a niche. However, even though a high proportion of the young women in VET took up their studies with a focus on where they wanted to go, their approach to this differed from their male counterparts.

Young women tended to have an approach which allowed a wider range of issues to have a place in their lives. For example, they tended to focus on what kind of job they wanted while at the same time having a readiness to accept changes of direction. They were able to define what might be seen as 'diversions' in positive terms, in relation to their ultimate goals. For example, one young woman noted that her aim was to become teacher:

I was quite happy to do things in my own time - I was willing to do things related to teaching if I couldn't teach.

Another noted that:

I'm working now in a doctor's surgery, but I'm still looking over my shoulder.

There is a strong sense of agency here, of maintaining a vision of their future, using the present to build a base for that future and being ready to take up opportunities that might occur. However, despite the maintenance of their sense of purpose and single-mindedness about the outcomes they aim for, the *process* is not a straightforward linear one. A key element in the positive attitudes reflected in their own narrative, is that changes of initial direction, setbacks and 'u' turns are constructed as part of a complex process which will nonetheless lead towards their goal.

While VET offered the young men the chance to clarify their goals, one trend was to remain relatively fixed within one course. From their perspective, remaining 'fixed' on one option was also a way of surviving. Rather than negotiate the complexities that they all faced, this group of young men saw the ability to remain steadfast in the face of competing options as a strength, as the following quotes reveal:

At the start I didn't know what I wanted to do - pretty much got into a course and stuck with it. You take what you get and try and stay with it.

You've got to stay with what you're doing - you have to keep on with what you've got.

We emphasise that the interview sample is not large enough to prove that gender itself plays a major role in attitudes and life decisions, and there is a large crossover between males' and females' responses. There is evidence that a majority of young women who go through VET look at their studies in terms of *where they want to go*, and a proportion of the young men look at VET or tertiary study as a means of *helping them find their way*. However, what is important for this discussion is that their responses provide a means of understanding the very different approaches that young people take. The examples provided above suggest that it is more likely that young people will be able to exert some form of personal agency if they have developed a narrative or 'script' which provides them with a basis for interpreting events and making decisions. Young people who do not have this basis are more likely to cling to the false promise of the linear model and to be much more reliant on external events or institutional requirements to shape their pathways.

To return to the typology of youth patterns presented in Chart 1, we can see that there are a number of patterns that reflect the ways in which young people respond to their complex circumstances. As the typology has been constructed on the basis of how young people themselves perceive their progress, the patterns and foci are indicators of different narratives. They provide a way of understanding how young people make their way through this part of their lives. What is not clear is how 'successful' the different orientations are. For example, the young people who are characterised within vocational and occupational foci groups may well be rewarded in time for their persistence. However, the conditions of life that characterise the post-1970 generation make it more likely that achieving satisfaction and happiness and reaching the goal of having a sense of personal autonomy are facilitated by an ability to work with complexity and diversity, to see it as part of a broader personal picture of life experiences that can be woven into a pattern of supports for the establishment of a livelihood.

The limitations of individual agency

Our study of young people's complex pathways through VET has challenged the conventional wisdom of post-compulsory education and training as a linear process. The experiences and perspectives of the young people in this study reveal a range of responses to the changed reality of work and education/training of the 1990s. The patterns and foci revealed in their stories are evidence of complex responses to complex circumstances. Our research provides a view of young people who are active in the construction of their futures, rather than simply victims of circumstance.

However, this evidence should not be taken to underestimate the seriousness of the circumstances faced by the post-1970 generation. The crumbling of 'bridges' between childhood and adulthood, as described by Land (1996) in referring to the situation of young people in the UK, remains an issue. In both the UK and in Australia, there has been a withdrawal of support provided to young people and their families during the time that

young people are making the transitions to adulthood, and an increase in the costs associated with education and training borne by students or their families. The privatisation of education, and of other areas of life, such as health care, create a situation where individual resourcefulness and resilience are assets. As Yeatman (1996) suggests, the negotiation of individual contracts in the workplace has the potential to reward individuals who already have access to power and to increase the disadvantage of others. In the workplace and in other spheres, individuals who gain success frequently do so at the expense of others who are not as fortunate.

Hence, while an important factor in understanding the experiences of young people in education and training in the present context is individual agency, it should not be assumed that this limited form of agency is an unqualified positive outcome. More needs to be known about the factors that influence young people in the 'mixed pattern' group to operate their lives in terms of multiple goals, and how the young people who have a 'contextual focus' see themselves in relation to others.

An effect of the linear model of pathways through education, training and into employment is an emphasis on individual progress. At an abstract level, the gaining of credentials is seen as the road to secure, satisfying employment, even though the reality is that only a minority at best will find this outcome. As a majority of the young people in this study demonstrate, this model offers the false promise that simply by going through the process of gaining credentials each individual will attain their goal. The unrealistic expectations of the majority of the young people in this study (61 per cent) who *expect* to become professionals can be explained by the pervasiveness of the linear 'pathways' concept of transition. This deception remains a feature, even though the reality of their lives already contradicts the concept. Hence, although a considerable proportion of these young people show resourcefulness and a capacity to be flexible in the face of unexpected structural and social 'blocks', their insights are mostly confined to their own personal experience. It is unlikely that these young people are oblivious of the way in which others are constructing the patterns of their lives. We suggest that they are operating within a broader discourse of individualism, from which it is unlikely that commonalities in experience will be regarded as part of their own stories.

Yet their individual stories fall short of offering a fuller understanding of the context of their lives. To move beyond the rather simplistic notion of individual success young people need to link their own 'stories' with those of others. This does not mean that the 61 per cent of young people who expect to become professionals should lower their sights. Rather, the agency they have already demonstrated in negotiating their particular education and training process would be enhanced if they were aware of the real outcomes for all young people, and could predict the necessity of taking alternative options, while keeping the contextual focus which has sustained them through their educational experiences.

More importantly, young people have a right to be as well informed as possible about the way in which different groups of young people, not just individuals, are affected by structural and economic change and by policy developments. As the young people in our study show, they have initiative, are positive about the future and capable of making difficult decisions about complex personal and social issues. Yet they are making their decisions on the basis of inadequate information.

At a practical level, it is more urgent than ever that young people in both secondary and tertiary education are provided with information and advice that reflects the realities of life for the post-1970 generation, so that those from rural areas, young women, young men from working class communities and other groups can link their stories with those of others in their generation as an integral part of the process of negotiating the patterns that will be the basis of their future lives.

Policy and research implications

The disjuncture between the individual aspirations of young people and the ways in which they are actively negotiating the structural constraints confronting them reflects a similar disjuncture at a policy and research level. Although the patterns of life for the post-1970 generation are more complex and less predictable than those of preceding generations, policy and research agendas continue to assume a straightforward linear sequence of transition that perpetuates a false picture and expectation of predictable outcomes. This was expressed in the *Working Nation* white paper which asserted that

Ideally, the teenage years should be a period in which to invest in education and training. This will not only help young people to *enter* the workforce but will also pay off *later in life* by providing a solid basis for more secure employment and further training (Commonwealth of Australia 1994, p. 90, italics added).

This type of policy ideal is out of touch with the ways in which they now choose or are forced to live their lives. Policy and research agendas need to move beyond this sequential separation of the two worlds of education and work and develop frameworks which acknowledge that the post-1970 generation has a foot in both worlds. While the agendas need to pay much closer attention to the combinations and overlaps of work and study (as well as other life commitments), they also need to be much more explicit about the uncertainties of predictable or 'one-to-one' outcomes between prior qualifications and available careers (Dwyer 1997).

Furthermore, this type of policy is misleading. It relies on the notion that the labour market will reward individuals who 'invest' in their own education. The reality is that economic restructuring and labour market reforms have rendered a remarkably unresponsive labour market for young people. It is one which remains highly segmented by gender and which has entrenched divisions between 'career' jobs and jobs which are basically dead-end. Individual young people need much more systematic knowledge about the realities of the labour markets they are aiming for, through opportunities to reflect on their experiences of work and to analyse the broader picture.

Research agendas need to shake off the linear model, documenting and analysing the patterns that different groups of young people construct during these years. Research needs to provide insights into the 'broad picture' of patterns across large populations, as well as providing an understanding of the ways in which groups of young people and individuals see their positions and the ways in which they construct meaning and purpose out of the rather fragmented, chaotic and at times pointless arrangements that currently characterise post-compulsory education and training.

Above all, both research and policy need to be shaped in consultation with young people themselves so that policy guidelines can be developed which have experiential credibility and which help to make productive arrangements.

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Dollars and sense: economic and social tensions in Indigenous education

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Introduction¹

Among the diverse range of critical issues in contemporary Indigenous affairs, education remains prominent. Over the course of two decades, a long chain of reviews have been undertaken and countless reports written dealing directly (Aboriginal Consultative Group 1975, Hughes 1988, Commonwealth of Australia 1995) or indirectly (Miller 1985, Commonwealth of Australia 1991, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission 1994) with Indigenous education. Throughout this period and in each review, report or policy recommendation, Indigenous access, participation and equity have remained primary themes; Indigenous people chaired and played key roles in the various committees that addressed these issues (Schwab 1995). These themes are particularly significant in that they reflect not only government concerns but also, and perhaps more importantly, the interests and demands of Indigenous people themselves.

These interests and demands are underpinned by broad recognition among Indigenous people of significant tensions between the nature and definition of government goals of education which, as will be argued below, are substantially economic, and the essentially social educational goals of Indigenous people. A series of important questions arise from these tensions: To what degree do the assumptions inherent in government education policies and programs conflict with the social and cultural experiences of Indigenous people? How do new educational 'efficiencies' affect the particular needs and interests of Indigenous communities? Do existing educational and training structures and approaches fit the varying needs of Indigenous people? How do government notions of improved educational outcomes match the sorts of outcomes Indigenous people want?

This paper is intended to be an exploration of some of these issues as they relate to post-compulsory education. It begins with a depiction of findings from the first the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSIS) in 1994 pertaining to levels of qualification, desires for further education, and preferred institutions for education and training. The paper then turns to an analysis of the economic and social tensions in education that have resulted from increasing economic rationalism in education, and explores three prominent economically-based education goals: the development of human capital, increased educational efficiencies and better outcomes. The conflict between these and a range of Indigenous cultural assumptions and practices are then examined. The paper closes with a discussion of the policy challenges inherent in attempting to find a balance between government economic imperatives and culturally-based Indigenous educational goals.

NATSIS and post-compulsory education

The NATSIS was a unique exercise undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The survey was conducted in response to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal

Deaths in Custody and attempted to provide a range of statistics related to the social, demographic, health and economic status of Indigenous Australians. Unlike the census, which attempts to collect information from every Australian on a particular date, the NATSIS was a sample survey in which over 15,700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were interviewed. This survey resulted in new insights into a range of issues not covered in the census, including additional and specific details pertaining to Indigenous education and training.

Post-school qualifications

The NATSIS provides a glimpse of the levels of qualification of Indigenous Australians who might participate in post-compulsory education and training (Table 1). Among persons aged 15 and over, 83.1 per cent lack post-school qualifications, a figure that aligns with other findings showing apparent retention rates of about 75 per cent for year 12 Indigenous students in 1994 (ABS 1994, p.60). Slightly more males (18.1 per cent) than females (15.6 per cent) have post-school qualifications. The proportion of people with such qualifications appears to decrease with distance from capital cities. For example, in capital cities, close to a quarter (23.6 per cent) of the Indigenous population aged 15 or over who have left school hold a post-school qualification; the proportion in other urban areas is 17.3 per cent while only slightly more than one in ten (10.4 per cent) Indigenous people in rural locations hold post-school qualifications.

Table 1: Indigenous persons aged 15 Years and over who have left school: by sex, part-of-state, and labour force status Australia, 1994

	With post-school qualifications	Without post-school qualifications	Total	Total
	Per cent	Per cent	Per cent	'000s
Males	18.1	81.9	100	85.2
Females	15.6	84.4	100	86.3
Persons	16.9	83.1	100	171.5
Capital city	23.6	76.4	100	47.0
Other urban	17.3	82.7	100	71.2
Rural	10.4	89.6	100	53.4
Labour Force Status				
Employed Non-CDEP	31.6	68.4	100	47.3
Employed CDEP	9.8	90.2	100	16.7
Unemployed	15.2	84.4	100	39.3
Not in labour force	9.3	90.7	100	65

Source: ABS (1995) adapted from Table 32.

Examination of post-school qualifications according to labour force status is interesting. Among those Indigenous persons classed as unemployed, 84.4 per cent have no qualifications, while over nine out of ten (90.7 per cent) of those classed as not in the labour force hold no qualifications. The NATSIS data show two types of employment: mainstream employment and employment related to participation in the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme.

The CDEP scheme is a program of grants administered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission that enables Indigenous community organisations to pay wages to Indigenous members of these communities in return for work on community managed projects or activities. The scheme is often referred to as a work-for-the-dole program since the grants are calibrated to the rough equivalent of combined individual unemployment benefits and are paid in lieu of those benefits. The CDEP scheme was initially available only to rural and remote Indigenous communities where other employment opportunities were non-existent. Since 1987, however, the CDEP scheme has been extended to urban areas as well.² The NATSIS findings show that individuals with post-school qualifications are over three times as likely to be employed in mainstream programs than individuals without such qualifications. Those without qualifications who are employed are most likely to be employed in CDEP programs.

Interest in further study or training

NATSIS provides some useful insights into the educational aspirations of Indigenous people (Table 2). Among those persons aged 15 years and over who have left school, nearly half (45.7 per cent) express a desire to undertake further study or training; among these individuals there is little difference between the interest levels of males and females.

Table 2: Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over who have left school: interest in further study or training, Australia, 1994

	Wants to do further study or training	Does not want to do further study or training	Total*	Total**
	%	%†	%	('000)
Males	44.8	55.1	99.9	85.2
Females	46.6	53.1	99.7	86.3
Persons	45.7	54.1	99.8	171.5
<i>Part-of-State</i>				
Capital city	56.4	43.6	100.0	47.0
Other urban	47.2	52.7	99.9	71.2
Rural	34.3	65.4	99.7	53.4

Source: ABS (1995) adapted from Table 33.

Notes: 1 Does not include not stated; 2 includes not stated.

Differences emerge, however, when the responses of individuals are examined according to location. Interest in further study or training declines with distance from a capital city. Over half (56.4 per cent) of the Indigenous people in capital cities indicated their desire for further study or training, while less than half (47.2 per cent) of the people in other urban areas expressed this same interest. Indigenous people in rural areas were even less interested with about two-thirds (65.4 per cent) indicating they have no desire for further studies or training. The low level of interest in rural areas probably relates directly to the relatively low levels of educational experience in these areas and the limited range of educational services.

Currently studying for qualification

Table 3 displays the distribution of post-compulsory students among various educational providers. Among those individuals aged 15 years and older who are currently studying for a qualification, most (39.9 per cent) are attending universities. Almost as many (36.0 per cent) are studying for a qualification at a TAFE institution. The remaining respondents (19.1 per cent) are studying through some other institution or mechanism. Looking at the distribution of these students according to sex reveals some clear differences: males are more likely to be enrolled in TAFE programs and women far more likely to be enrolled in university.³ Where 29.9 per cent of males are enrolled in university study and 39.0 per cent in TAFE study, nearly half (48.2 per cent) of all females currently studying for a qualification are doing so in universities and only a third (33.4 per cent) are enrolled in TAFE. The other category in this table presumably includes individuals studying in other types of adult education programs. These programs appear slightly more popular with male students (22.7 per cent) than with females (15.9 per cent).

The patterns of participation are strikingly different when enrolment by part-of-State is considered. While over twice as many students in capital cities attend universities (55.5 per cent) as TAFE institutions (24.0 per cent), the reverse is true in other urban areas where only 23.9 per cent of students studying for qualifications attend universities while 48.5 per cent attend TAFEs. In other urban areas, 23.5 per cent of students are enrolled in other institutions.⁴ Roughly equal proportions of rural students attend universities (36.0 per cent) and TAFEs (37.4 per cent). The high margin of error around the reported rural other institutions makes the figure difficult to interpret, but this option is more popular among other urban students (23.5 per cent) than among capital city students (14.1 per cent).

Table 3: Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over who have left school and are currently studying for a qualification: type of institution attending by sex and part-of-state, Australia, 1994

	University Per cent	TAFE Per cent	Other Per cent	Not stated Per cent	Total Per cent	Total ('000)
Males	29.9	39	22.7	*8.5	100	4.7
Females	48.2	33.4	15.9	*2.4	100	5.3
Persons	39.9	36	19.1	5.3	100	10
Part-of-State						
Capital city	55.5	24	14.1	*6.4	100	4.3
Other urban	23.9	48.5	23.5	*4.1	100	3.9
Rural	36.0	37.4	*21.3	**5.2	100	1.8

Source: ABS (1995) adapted from Table 34.

* relative standard of error is greater than 25 %; **relative standard of error is greater than 50 %.

Participation in training courses

Table 4 portrays Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over who have left school and who attended training courses in the last 12 months. As defined in the NATSIS, training courses are those that aim to develop skills or assist in learning about a subject; they do not lead to an educational qualification. The data include responses from individuals who

attended a wide range of different courses; individuals who attended half-day courses are included along with individuals who attended courses over many weeks. Most immediately striking in these data is the prominence of the category 'other' in the provision of such courses. Nearly half (46.1 per cent) of all people sampled indicated they had undertaken training courses outside the mainstream public education institutions of universities and TAFEs. While some proportion of these are likely to be adult education providers, some are likely to be independent Indigenous education providers; still others are probably employer-provided training programs for employees. As Daly (1996, p.99) points out in a closer examination of these patterns, 57.6 per cent of males and 45.3 per cent of females attending training were employed, either in CDEP or non-CDEP jobs.

Table 4: Indigenous persons aged 15 years and over who have left school and who attended a training course in the last 12 months: provider of course by sex and part-of-state, Australia, 1994

	University	TAFE	Other	Total	Total 1 ('000)
Males	10.9	36.1	53.0	100	11.6
Females	23.1	39.2	37.8	100	9.5
Persons	16.4	37.5	46.1	100	21.1
Part-of-State					
Capital city	22.8	27.0	50.1	100	7.5
Other urban	10.8	47.0	42.2	100	9.0
Rural	16.9	35.9	47.2	100	4.6

Source: ABS (1995) 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey, unit record file.

1 Excludes the not stated category.

Slightly more males than females reported attending training courses. This is a reversal of the pattern found among individuals studying for qualifications. In addition, it appears that while a higher proportion of males (53.0 per cent) undertake training through programs offered by employers or other non-public institutions, a greater proportions of females (37.5 per cent) appear to have relied on TAFE for training programs. Not surprisingly, universities provided relatively less training for Indigenous people.

The distribution of training by the variable part-of-State is more difficult to interpret. The high proportion of study through other providers across all regions seems to reflect the impact of employer-provided training; the proportion is probably highest in capital cities because employment opportunities for Indigenous people are greater there. Similarly, the proportion is probably high in rural areas because of CDEP scheme employment; employment levels are lower in other urban regions and so Indigenous people may be undertaking training through the most accessible provider, the local TAFE. Universities provided 22.8 per cent of capital city training opportunities, a pattern which may be explained by the location of the majority of such institutions in these places. These courses probably comprise university bridging, preparatory and other non-credit courses (Schwab 1996).

Even this cursory glance at the NATSIS data reveals some important features of the Indigenous population relevant to the provision of post-compulsory education. A large majority lack post-school qualifications of any sort, but those who hold qualifications are more likely to be employed. Nearly half of the Indigenous population who have left school

express a desire for further study. Among those who are currently studying for a qualification, most are enrolled in universities, but only slightly fewer are enrolled in TAFEs; about half as many study in some other form of institution as study in universities. When training rather than study for qualification is considered, it is striking that the majority of individuals who have participated in some form of training course not leading to a qualification did so at an institution other than a university or TAFE. In light of these patterns, it is worth considering how well Indigenous interests and needs are being served by the mainstream post-compulsory system and to what degree trends and political pressures in educational provision will address or conflict with those interests and needs.

The changed face of Australian education

Observers of the Australian education scene have recognised for some time important shifts in government perceptions of the nature of education. Marginson (1993, p.56) describes the appearance of economic rationalism in the educational arena in the context of a drift from democratic political goals to market economic goals in education. He suggests that education policy issues in Australia are no longer a mix of social, cultural and economic issues, but rather they are perceived by government as primarily economic policy issues.

The economic goals of education in Australia conflict with many contemporary social goals, but nowhere is that conflict more obvious than in the arena of Indigenous education. This section of the paper explores three prominent and interlaced government economic goals related to public education and examines tensions between these and a range of Indigenous cultural assumptions and practices.

Development of human capital

Human capital theory underpins current education policy in Australia (Chapman & Pope 1992, Marginson 1993). The notion of investment in human capital suffuses Australian education and training at every level. It is evident, for example, in the push for primary school literacy testing (to ensure a skilled workforce), in the conflict over national competency standards in TAFE programs (to identify measurable, transferable worker skills), and in the promotion of partnerships between universities and industry (to make research more practical). At every level, the educational system is being held more and more accountable for the nation's educational investments and the dividends of those investments are being assessed. Education is being promoted as integral to the nation's future economic health, but this assumption is deeply problematic where Indigenous Australians are concerned.

One of the assumptions of human capital theory is that individuals make rational decisions in order to maximise their private rates of return. Not only do governments invest, but individuals invest and, presumably, both benefit. The problem is that many Indigenous Australians employ a cost-benefit analysis for education that is quite different from that of other Australians.⁵ There are significant social costs to educational investment for Indigenous people that influence their decisions to participate. Some of these costs result from social disadvantage, others are derived from cultural differences. For example, many if not most Indigenous people have lacked the opportunity for post-compulsory education

until relatively recently and it is still common for individuals to be the first generation to undertake such study in their communities. As the first to venture into self-motivated study at the post-compulsory level, they sometimes contend with high levels of suspicion from within their own families and communities where, in the experience of many Indigenous people, education is a tool of oppression.

In addition, Indigenous family expectations and individual responsibilities may not allow the time necessary for study; the relatively larger family units create additional demands that often distract individuals from study. Something as simple and unremarkable as a desk to write at and a place to safely store books may be impossible for some Indigenous students. Yet the option of leaving home to study in another location may be almost impossible as a result of social demands. Those who undertake study must contend with the common expectation on the part of their families and community that their education will be put to use in the home community. Many of these individuals suddenly face a range of new responsibilities and are often called upon to assist people back home and to sit on various committees. The time demands for an educated Indigenous person increase exponentially to the point that the demands are often so onerous the students withdraw from study.⁶ In this sense, participation in post-compulsory education brings with it a range of significant cultural costs and expectations, and Indigenous students (and potential students) must weigh up those costs against the various benefits in determining whether or not to continue, or to enrol in the first place. This is a particularly difficult problem for the students who must travel great distances or relocate in order to undertake study.

Increased educational efficiencies

One of the most powerful trends in economic rationalism is the drive for increased efficiency. In education, this often translates into increased class sizes, extended use of facilities, reduction in duplication of courses, standardisation of curricula, and a range of other actions to maximise the value of educational investment. While it is sometimes difficult to separate the political from the economic there is clearly a ground-swell of intolerance for waste in the educational system. One of the crucial problems is that waste can be defined very differently by different groups and cutting costs to reduce waste may in fact result in decreasing choices, options and opportunities, particularly for those on the social periphery.

There is reason for concern about the implications of this movement, for the attempts to make education more efficient challenge many of the educational desires of Indigenous people. For years, Indigenous people have sought educational services and approaches that may appear inefficient. For example, Indigenous people have called for revised curricula with mandatory inclusion of Aboriginal studies, increases in the number of Indigenous teachers and classroom aides, support for special enclave programs, separate facilities within mainstream institutions and in some cases wholly autonomous institutions, including a national Indigenous university. The recent Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Commonwealth of Australia 1995) and the subsequent National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 1996) recommended implementation of initiatives in each of these areas, yet none of these can be accomplished without long-term commitments of additional resources, a major constraint

in the current economic environment. In addition, there is a strong push by many prominent Indigenous educators and administrators for increased community control of education. All of these are features of the educational terrain Indigenous people say they need if they are to succeed in education. Yet, the initiatives expressed in these recommendations involve decentralisation, customisation and diversity in service; all will push costs up. Consequently, the implementation of such initiatives, while conceived of as essential by many Indigenous people, is highly problematic in the current economic context.

Enhanced educational outcomes

Efficiencies in education are aimed at specific outcomes such as higher literacy and numeracy levels, increased participation and completion rates, and better employment figures. According to the tenets of human capital theory, enhanced outcomes in these areas should translate into a healthier and more productive economic system, and it is certainly clear that the present government wants to see education paying off in terms of employment, economic growth and national prosperity. Yet, not everyone is convinced that a healthier and more productive economy should be the goal of education. This is particularly evident where Indigenous perspectives on educational outcomes are considered.

Many Indigenous people see education in very different terms from other Australians. Participation in TAFE provides a useful example. According to data collected by the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs as part of the National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, TAFE appears to be the preferred avenue for Indigenous post-compulsory education. Indigenous enrolments in TAFE exceeded 28,000 students in 1993. This number represents an increase from 24,000 in 1992 and 18,350 in 1991. In comparison to other Australians, Indigenous people choose this educational avenue far more frequently; their rate of participation in TAFE is nearly twice that of others (Commonwealth of Australia 1995, p.73).

According to the report, about 40 per cent of Indigenous students are enrolled in basic education or preparatory (bridging) courses in an attempt to catch-up on missed educational opportunities. While some of the students who succeed in such courses certainly continue and undertake additional study, there is not yet adequate information available to monitor progress on the national level. Another 17 per cent are enrolled in business, administration and economics, and 10.5 per cent in the arts, humanities and social sciences; only about 13 per cent of Indigenous students are enrolled in trade or higher level courses (Commonwealth of Australia 1995, pp.74-5). These patterns are mirrored in higher education where research reveals that Indigenous students are markedly over-represented at the lowest end of the course continuum in non-credit courses and under-represented at the upper levels (Schwab 1996). The findings suggest that the nature of Indigenous participation in post-compulsory education results in different patterns of outcomes than experienced by non-Indigenous students. Specifically, most Indigenous people are still catching up and employment as a result of this training may not be a priority. The NATSIS findings show that only 24.6 per cent of Indigenous people who attended a training course did so to get a job. In contrast, more (30.7 per cent) attended such courses for personal development; another 7.5 per cent attended as a hobby.

Indigenous participation in post-compulsory education is growing but the outcomes (in terms of employment) are disappointing. While there is evidence that no other factor influences employment chances as much as education (ABS and the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (ABS/CAEPR) 1996), Indigenous employment levels still lag far behind other Australians. In addition, high proportions of Indigenous students in all sectors undertake study of value to their people, study that does not necessarily guarantee long-term employment or serve identified economic needs. This was evident in research conducted to document five successful Indigenous adult education programs that focused on literacy and numeracy. Perceptions of program value and success uniformly emphasised not outcomes in terms of jobs, but the social benefits of an Indigenous-focused approach. Indigenous involvement, group learning, flexibility, Indigenous staff, appropriate environment and venues, and a local focus on Aboriginal studies were among the key factors of success identified by Indigenous participants (New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group 1994). While student satisfaction is certainly an important outcome, it is not one that necessarily leads to a competitive workforce.

Balancing dollars and sense

Economic rationalism pervades the human capital model of the 1990s, and calls for greater efficiency and enhanced outcomes in education are common in the newspapers, over the airwaves and in the State and Federal Parliaments. It is most likely only a matter of time before 'special' education and training programs for Indigenous Australians are subject to vigorous challenge and critique.

In the context of the new political economy of education, the advantages of diversity are likely to be down-played and uniformity promoted in the name of fiscal responsibility, fairness and equity. Yet the push for efficiency and enhanced outcomes will inevitably hobble the slow progress of many Indigenous people if that push is accompanied by a dismantling of special programs. Such dismantling would ignore the fact that Indigenous Australians are different from other Australians, that their history is unique and their experience of discrimination and lack of access to educational and employment opportunities have locked many into poverty. Clearly, Indigenous Australians are different and they make educational decisions that are underpinned by historical, social and cultural difference. To deny this is to ignore an opportunity for positive change.

A recent study of factors affecting the success of Indigenous university students (Bourke, Burden & Moore 1996) has confirmed that many Indigenous students succeed as a result of strong support services and with the benefit of positive and helpful staff. Over half the students who dropped out of the university did so because they felt unwelcome, while others identified a lack of relevance in the courses and inadequate career counselling. This research aligns with other research to indicate that mainstream education and training structures still do not serve the needs of the majority of Indigenous students.

Policy makers need to focus on ensuring choice for Indigenous people in the various sectors of post-compulsory education. Options need to be provided that span a range of educational approaches. Entry into the mainstream is important to some Indigenous students, but insufficient numbers succeed there. More important is the need to protect

what has proven to work - Indigenous support units within institutions, enclave programs, Indigenous staff, and the like - and to support calls by Indigenous people for community control of some post-compulsory education programs. Independent community-controlled Indigenous adult education institutions such as Tranby in Sydney, Tauondi in Adelaide and the Institute for Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs have been tremendously successful in drawing Indigenous adults into education and training. These community-controlled institutions attract many students who would not initially enrol in mainstream TAFE or university courses, though some do in fact eventually attain the confidence to move on to mainstream institutions. While the outcomes from these programs may not always align with visions of a limited range of uniform, mainstream programs, and while those outcomes may not translate directly or immediately into employment, they serve a vital need in the Indigenous communities in which they are found. Such institutions are currently receiving transitional funding and their enrolments would generate lower levels of funding if the standard formula was applied. In addition, they will be funded at the 1996 level of funding for the next three years, effectively reducing funding over that period.

Independent institutions are critically important in that they make cultural sense to a large number of Indigenous people: they are Indigenous institutions, controlled by Indigenous people, with an Indigenous community focus and an Indigenous approach to teaching and learning. In expanding the range of people who enrol to study, independent community-controlled institutions also play a vital role in achieving one of the principle goals of education: participation. Participation in education promotes a sense of the social value of and appreciation among Indigenous people for learning. Participation also inherently promotes a culture of learning in the wider Indigenous community. That culture of learning is carried home by adult learners and can directly affect the educational success of children in that it validates and endorses learning and literacy and illustrates the vitality and value of education for Indigenous people. These are profoundly important dividends from the investment of educational dollars.

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² The CDEP scheme has been the subject of a great deal of research and discussion. Samples of some of the more prominent overviews and specific policy analyses include: Sanders (1988, 1993), Altman & Daly (1992), Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu (1993), Verrucci (1995) and Altman & Hunter (1996). Case studies of successful CDEP programs appear in Smith (1994, 1995, 1996).

³ The relatively higher proportion of Indigenous female students in universities is borne out in data collected by individual universities. An analysis of these and other patterns for Indigenous students is contained in Schwab (1996).

⁴ The category other urban includes all centres with populations of 1,000 or more, excluding capital cities.

⁵ Similarly, post-compulsory education is more readily available for non-Indigenous Australians. Indigenous Australians are still far less urban than other Australians. According to the most recent census data (1991), while 64.4 per cent of non-Indigenous Australians resided in major urban areas, only 27.6 per cent of Indigenous people did so. In comparison, 32.8 per cent of Indigenous people lived in rural areas while only 14.5 per cent of non-Indigenous people did so (Taylor 1993). Decisions about whether or not to pursue post-compulsory study are severely constrained by locational considerations such as proximity to services, a problem faced by far fewer of the largely urban non-Indigenous students.

⁶ This issue was explored in reference to higher education in Schwab (1996).

Participation in VET in Australia: Different drives, same needs?¹

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Introduction

This paper reports on a current research project that is part of a strategy by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) to develop access and equity strategies which address uneven patterns of access, participation and outcomes from vocational education and training (VET) for some client groups. The research is examining seven identified target groups. It seeks firstly to ask why? That is, why do clients in each group come to VET, and with what anticipated outcomes? Secondly, it asks who? That is, in what ways does participation for a targeted group differ from overall VET participation and also from that of other targeted groups? Thirdly, the research addresses the question where? That is, are provider location and type implicated in the observed unevenness of access, participation and outcomes for each group? This leads to subsidiary questions of whether different groups choose different VET sub-sectors for different reasons, and whether they achieve different outcomes. Finally, the research asks VET for what? That is, in what senses is VET used as a vehicle for change by each group? For example, is it primarily to assist the transition from unemployment to a job; from one career to another; from one course to another; from school to the first job?

The research goes some way towards identifying barriers to access and participation in VET and particularly, to indicate possible disparities by VET provider type. Selection of a VET sample that is wider than Technical and Further Education (TAFE) is deliberate, for TAFE makes up only approximately half of the total training market (Anderson 1996b).

Methodology

The research relies primarily on self-reported participant experiences (elicited through focus group ~~interview~~ and questionnaire). It is longitudinal (1996-97) and involves clients in:

- a wide range of VET providers: TAFE, Adult and Community Education (ACE), industry-based, commercial, community and corrections education and training providers);
- four Australian states (Victoria, Northern Territory, Tasmania and Queensland);
- six regions (Melbourne, Geelong, Alice Springs, Burnie, Toowoomba and Cairns);
- seven target groups (women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons, long-term unemployed, persons from non-English speaking backgrounds, persons with a disability [sensory, physical, intellectual, psychiatric], rural and isolated persons, persons enrolled for the improvement of literacy, numeracy and social skills [of which corrections education comprises a sub-group]); and control groups.

The paper is exploratory in that it is based on preliminary analysis of 1996 data only; 328 questionnaire returns from 22 providers; and 360 persons interviewed in 55 focus groups in 33 providers.

The project provides a very recent, in-depth snapshot of what it is that motivated people to undertake VET in 1996, and of their initial experiences. It identifies a range of outcomes anticipated by clients, as well as particular needs among individuals in the targeted groups. Its main contribution to the consideration of economic and social goals in education is that it highlights some of the barriers to access and participation actually experienced by individuals by provider type, target group and location. It also reveals the high levels of intersecting membership of individuals in the target groups.

Why? Different drives, same outcomes?

The research shows that participants undertake VET for many reasons including some unrelated to a narrowly construed view of the purposes of industrial training, skilling or direct labour market outcomes. As Anderson (1996b, p.67) anticipated, there is a wide range of non-economic factors associated with common social goals which lead to participation in VET. Many are difficult and facile to characterise in purely economic terms.

What do the clients say?

We have identified a broad range of reasons, presented here in eight categories, for client participation in VET across target groups and provider contexts. The outcomes categories are parallel, but not identical, to those used in the ABS (1995) graduate outcomes survey. These excerpts have been selected from focus group interviews to illustrate the range of reasons reported.

i. to get a job

A forty-year old long-term unemployed man is encouraged and funded by his CES case manager to attend literacy classes offered by an ACE provider. Though his main goal is to gain employment, the potential benefits of his participation extend to his family and the community:

I want to find a job and I want to know how to read so I can help them (my kids). Since coming here, I've been able to read books to my kids for the first time and I'm forty years old. It hurts when you go into a place and want a job and they ask you to write, and if you can't, they just say 'thanks a lot'. You can go for thirty or forty jobs and as soon as they know you can't read or write they don't want to know you. I feel very angry then and feel like blowing them away or shooting myself. I hope to have a full-time job, earning an honest dollar, supporting my kids.

A thirty-seven year old woman from a non-English speaking background, with an offshore degree and experience in agricultural engineering, lives in an isolated mining town. Unemployed, with children, she enrolls in a TAFE accounting fundamentals course. What drives her to continue, she says, is 'Ambition. I would really like to finish this course and get a job'.

A forty-seven year old Aboriginal man for whom English is a second language, long-term unemployed and living in a rural area enrolls in a TAFE Certificate in Vocational Access. He left school in 1961 when 'just spelling and count up to a hundred was all you needed'. Since then, he has had no formal training of any kind but has worked on cattle stations, labouring around town and for the railways:

When I came to apply for a job, they ask you to fill in a form and I couldn't do it. When they asked me what grade I finished in school, I couldn't tell them. When I first started here, I thought, what the hell am I doing here, I'm so old, but I saw some old guys and an old grandmother here ... For the first two weeks was a bit scary ... it was important to have an Aboriginal teacher and if she wasn't there, I might have stopped coming. She understood and she encouraged me to keep coming and doing it ... might do another course ... might even go back to work. I been here three years to get a certificate and when I got it I felt proud. I just want to be able to go there and fill out my application on a piece of paper and apply for that job and if anyone asks me to be able to tell them.

All three want to get a job, but are starting from very different points and are likely to achieve very different outcomes. To compare only vocational intentions and outcomes in each case would capture only part of the benefits of VET.

ii. to gain necessary or extra skills for their present job

A nineteen year old woman completing a retail traineeship with an industry based provider reports she is motivated in her study by:

Knowing I have a responsibility - work. Point of sale keeps me going. The fact that I'm in a job and training for the job, means I have a responsibility to keep going.

A forty-five year old woman working as a receptionist for a training provider commenced a TAFE Workplace Trainer, Category 2 course for both the skills and the qualification:

It will help me with my work here and help me to get into training. I want to have a diversity of skills. I want the piece of paper.

A forty-one year old woman who operates her own small business, enrolls in a TAFE Certificate in Information Technology. She closes her business one afternoon a week in order to attend classes. She reports:

I imagine that work wise I will be doing the same thing - but I hope not to have to pay my accountant as much money in the future.

All three are motivated by self-perceived needs for extra skills in their present jobs. Their outcomes, measured in labour market terms, are unlikely to alter.

iii. to get a better job, promotion or higher pay

A fifty-three year old factory worker from a non-English speaking background spends twenty-six years with an employer with no formal off-the-job training. Workplace reforms prompt both training needs and workplace-based training opportunities. He participates to:

... learn a bit about all the changes and improve my knowledge a bit. If I finish schooling, then maybe I'll get more experience to give me access to more machinery or areas. But his motivation is not looking for another job in another area, but just more money. When I get a higher level (of skill), get higher level pay.

iv. to move into a new career

A thirty-three year old man employed as a scenic pilot enrolled in a TAFE Certificate in Information Technology. His initial entry to the course was because 'a friend told me about it. I was at a loose end and my friend dragged me in'. Though he has worked in many other fields:

I now hope to get into computer programming some time later on, part time ... as a back up, especially if something happens in aviation or I get sick and can't fly ... as a form of insurance.

A thirty-nine year old woman from a non-English speaking background living in an isolated rural area decides:

... to go back to school. In 1994 I did a receptionists course, then a software applications course, then an office skills course and now I'm studying for an Associate Diploma in Business (Accounting) by flexible delivery from (an interstate) TAFE.

She uses the local TAFE computing facilities to access the flexible courseware but with some difficulty:

I have three kids and I'm in a rush to pick them up. I do a twelve hour shift (as an industry receptionist), day shift or night shift. I have to fit in my schedule.

These examples illustrate that moves through VET to new careers are not always upwards or even sideways. Course options are constrained by current jobs, local opportunities and perceptions of the future labour market.

v. to get into another course of study

For a thirty-six year old single mother, long-term unemployed and living in a rural area after years of endless, meaningless jobs, the primary goal of participation in an adult tertiary preparation course is to gain entry to a TAFE nursing course. While getting into another course of study is a primary aim, also important for her, are:

... becoming someone in my life, giving back to society and modelling for my kids. In the back of my mind I want to know that I did achieve something in my life, that I was a nurse, not just a mum, a wife. I'm also trying to enforce values in my children to get their education now rather than having to do it as I am having to.

vi. because of an external requirement

For some, participation in VET is a condition for continuing to receive unemployment benefits. For example, a long-term unemployed, twenty-five year old male is participating in a Jobskills program in an isolated area distant from his rural home and family. The program requires him to live away from home each week, Monday to Friday:

The case manager rang and said 'If you don't do the course, you will get taken off the dole for twelve weeks'. So I'm here through no choice. And it's not really a course, just scab labour for the environment and land management department. There's no training associated with it. At the start we were told we'd do a fortnight's training, but when we got there all we did was have to try on boots, overalls, thermals, gloves for sizes.

For a twenty-one year old man in a corrections centre, participation in non-accredited training means a reduction in allowance to be balanced against working towards improved conditions:

I heard you got to do them courses to bring your points down to get a lower classification. The only reason you do the courses is to get the points down. You can be a full-time uni student and get an allowance but will get \$18-19 per week, a lot less than if you work in the trade areas.

vii. to enhance family or social caring skills

Some VET clients seek skills in order to ensure the next generation are not as disadvantaged vocationally by low literacy levels. A thirty-three year old mother enrolled in a TAFE literacy course explains:

I have three little kids, 15, 8 and 6, and they need me to read and write to be able to help them with their homework.

A woodworker in his late forties living in a remote area enrolls in a TAFE Certificate in Information Technology course. It is delivered in an upstairs room in the local hall by an

itinerant teacher from the regional TAFE who brings with him a boot load of lap top computers:

I want to learn this to keep up with the kids. I'm in front so far. My twelve year old wanted to do this course, but he's too young. It's a four year course so an extra night a week would be handy. If I was doing it full time, I could do it in under twelve months.

viii. to enhance personal/living skills

What is striking in the current study is the number of persons who access VET in order to acquire skills relevant outside of a tightly defined vocational setting. A forty-three year old rural, unemployed woman with no previous course completion or full-time work history enrolls in a Skillshare Introduction to Computers course. For her, it is the:

... first time I seriously considered doing anything with computers. They are a mystery, interesting. I want to know how it works, want to further my general personal skills. I have in mind that it's good to be flexible and versatile. I favour the more artistic pursuits but I felt I was narrowing the field for myself just doing that. I intend to study various different courses ... computer graphics, link the art with the computer art. I will have a sense of achievement, follow through with something, getting the cobwebs out of the brain. Getting multi-skilled and flexible and being able to cope with what comes up for you.

An unemployed, rural woman in her late fifties enrolls in a TAFE automotive mechanics course. She seeks two, clear, non-vocational skills outcomes:

I'm separated and have a car, so came to college .. for the social environment as well as the skills I've targeted as a need.

Unable to afford a new car or to pay for the maintenance of her old one, she needs the specific skills to maintain it herself. She reports being a 'bit apprehensive because (they're) all boys, sixteen and seventeen year olds in the class, but now they come to get my help with spray painting'.

A thirty-eight year old man with an intellectual disability is enrolled in a Certificate in Work Education course, encouraged by the CES 'to improve my work skills'. However, his motivation for continuing to participate is somewhat different to that intended by the CES. It 'keeps you out of mischief, (you) see your friends. It stops the boredom. I don't want to stay at home looking at four walls or just looking at the traffic. Keeps you off the street'.

For some individuals the prime motivation is the love of learning and the positive feelings associated with acquiring knowledge or a skill. This, and the related goal of raising self esteem, was often quoted as a primary motivating factor by individuals enrolled in courses for improvement of literacy and numeracy skills. The examples below illustrate that even this goal is multi-faceted and complex for a range of VET client groups.

When asked 'what keeps you going?', a thirty-one year old coastal fisherman enrolled in a TAFE literacy/numeracy class replied:

Knowledge - seeking knowledge ... I'd like to get my literacy up and would like to get more computer skills and now that they've put the net up, I get really jealous because I want to surf on that ... I'd like to be able to get a piece of paper and put it up to people and not be ignored!

A fifty-five year old, sole male parent of two young children has a chronic pain disability incurred in an offshore oil industry accident. He enrolls in a Diploma in Arts program at his local TAFE. Juggling child care and battling to reduce his dependence on debilitating, pain killing drugs, he continues with the course because:

... it's proving to yourself that you are capable. It increases your self worth. You've gone out and done something and know you've achieved something and handled it.

A twenty-three year old woman paying \$150 per week for a course delivered by a commercial provider reports:

I never completed something before and I want to have something to say - yes, I've succeeded.

In summary, while many of the reasons offered by individuals can easily be classified as vocational in the conventional sense, others which initially appear to be non-vocational, may lead in the longer term to vocationally related outcomes.

Who? One target, multiple membership?

There is considerable overlap between membership of several of the target groups. In the current research, 293 persons were interviewed as members of the seven different equity target groups and 67 persons as members of a control group. Those interviewed were often identified in the process as members of other intersecting groups. What is apparent is the high level of overlapping membership of individuals within the targeted groups, as well as the strong nexus between unemployment and overlapping membership. One third (119) of these 360 persons interviewed belonged to four or more of the target groups, 88 per cent of whom were effectively long-term unemployed prior to their course. Varying patterns of access, participation and outcomes are more likely to be related to the degree of overlap of group membership than membership of any one group.

This important finding has the potential to lead analyses away from what McCann (1995, p.46) calls racist, patronising or assimilationist deficiency models such as those that exist within discussions of the problem of Aboriginal education. Similar deficiency discourses exist in relation to persons from non-English speaking backgrounds as well as for other target groups. The research suggests it is more likely that unemployment and perhaps socio-economic status

(NBEET 1996, p.63), compounded in some cases by one or more of Aboriginality, NESB status, disability or rurality will lie closer to the heart of the outcome dilemma in VET, however it is measured. Nevertheless, until firm evidence is available on the nature of this intersection, there will still be a need for strategies which address the particular needs of single targeted groups.

What do the clients say?

The case studies selected below would conventionally be characterised as members of a single group on the basis of one criterion (eg. non-English speaking, female). They have been chosen to illustrate the high levels of group intersection among those interviewed as members of a single target group. A fifteen year old Aboriginal youth who left school at thirteen has been unemployed for two years in a rural area. He returns to study as part of a LEAP labour market program. He says he is motivated to stay with the program because:

I was bored and slack but wish I had finished at least to year 10 - for a better future. You stick with it (the course) because you know what it's like to be bored and slack, don't want to just stay home, so keep going. Friends encourage you and say 'good on you!'

A forty-one year old Aboriginal woman, long-term unemployed and living in a rural area enrolls in an Introduction to the Certificate of Workplace Education course at the local TAFE college. She says:

I went to high school until year eight and got kicked out in first term of year eight after a fight. They gave me the flick. I was in a home and the missionaries wouldn't let me go back.

After years of unemployment, parenthood and mostly unfinished short courses, she:

... found out about this course through the CES. I chose the course myself to save going in and out to the CES and putting my form in. The course has been good. Doing this one to get off the streets and get out of the pubs. Have fun with the girls, have friends here. It's even better than sitting on the street, better sitting in front of the modules ... first time I've ever done it and I'm proud of my work ... see if I can get into an art course. I had to change for my boys. The older one is now a teenager.

A thirty-nine year old woman from a non-English speaking background, unemployed and living in a rural area, enrolls in an English Migrant Program - Certificate in Spoken and Written English, community access program. She is prompted by an advertisement on television which invites 'if you have difficulties reading and writing, ring this number'. In the rural community in which she lives, public transport is very limited and she doesn't drive, so getting to class is very difficult. Her first language is written in a different script from English so she also has trouble coming to grips with writing. Within this regional community, racism

is also rife and she feels ostracised rather than supported by her neighbour. Her goal is 'to finish the English course and get a job, any job!'

It is clear from these examples that while membership of one group can present particular difficulties to access, participation and outcomes, intersecting membership of more than one group can pose a particularly debilitating, cumulative disadvantage. It is not always possible in such cases to assume that any one group-related factor imposes the most important barrier, or to identify the most important compounding factor/s not associated with group membership.

Where? Several VETs, different clients?

VET has more than one complexion, and the barriers to access, participation and outcomes differ accordingly. However, there has been a tendency to lump different types of VET providers into one category - the VET market. It is clear from our research that different providers make up a segmented, quasi-market catering to very different target groups. Access to these different providers is affected particularly by the ability to pay varying fees and by the levels of subsidy available (eg. Austudy, employer support, labour market program).

The patterns of participation of clients across VET providers contradict views that an industry-driven VET system will provide choice for a diverse pool of clients; and that competition will lead to better service and outcomes at lower prices. These views are based on the assumption that all clients have an equal propensity to pay for their education and training, and that equity will be accommodated by the increased diversity at a provider and client level.

Our research indicates that VET choices are limited for many participants. For instance, those in corrections education are subject to the diverse vagaries of the State in which they are incarcerated. Those who are unemployed or with limited finance tend to be limited to labour market programs or the lower cost ACE sector. In contrast, those with money have a choice of both program and provider.

VET after what? Changing circumstances, new learning?

Consistent with findings of Golding, Bluer and Keating (1996), there is evidence in the research of considerable, prior, post-secondary experience of VET participants. Of the 57 per cent of questionnaire respondents who had attempted or completed at least one other post-school program:

- 38 per cent had some prior TAFE experience;
- 9 per cent had some previous university experience;
- 7 per cent had prior experience in a community or government training provider;
- 7 per cent had prior experience in a private training provider;
- 4 per cent had previously participated in industry-based training;
- 3 per cent had prior experience in an ACE provider; and
- 2 per cent had experience in a corrections education provider.

Because of the incidence of multiple prior experience these individual percentages are not additive. The extent of prior post-school experience is demonstrated by the fact that:

- prior post-school backgrounds of VET participants were more common than no prior backgrounds; and
- half (51 per cent) of those with prior VET or university experience were commencing at least their third post-school program.

The research also reveals considerable separation of formal qualifications from current occupation. This finding is consistent with the recent findings of Bodi and Maggs (1996, p.38) in relation to labour market separation. We also confirm a phenomenon of training market separation parallel to labour market separation. That is, for those with prior post-secondary study experience, current and prior fields of study are often far from parallel. The data from the Bodi and Maggs (1996, p 39) study in relation to those employed are consistent with the data from the current research, in that they:

... suggest that labelling skill movement and development from the outside can be misleading. What may appear at a superficial level to be wastage of a skill related to the formal qualification may actually be perceived by the individual as positive skill mobility.

This is particularly true if that outside observer (mistakenly) makes the first assumption that all VET is initial and vocationally motivated.

It is also important to observe that this recurrent learning does not occur on a level playing field. Persons for whom prior and current work and study fields all match, while in a minority, are considerably advantaged. Grubb (1996, p.53) identified a similar phenomenon in vocational programs in the US. Those already working, and particularly those males whose field of study matched their work, were in a better position to access and achieve vocational outcomes measured in economic terms.

There is evidence from our research that it has been particularly hard, in the 1990s in particular, for many persons displaced from work to re-enter the work force. We confirm evidence not only of significant mobility between enterprises and industries as observed in the Bodi and Maggs (1996) study, but also of an ambiguous transition between initial training and work. This transition is characterised by periods of non-participation in the labour force, further VET, unemployment, part-time work and under-employment. The difficulties are not unique to VET or to Australia, and in many ways resemble similar ambiguous transitions experienced by university arts graduates in the UK (Eggins 1992). What is common is the difficulty in finding suitable full-time work.

These difficulties are particularly explicable on an individual, micro level rather than on the basis of group membership. Extrapolating the specific findings of Bodi and Maggs (1996) outside of the industry and enterprise levels, there is evidence of increasing uncertainty in

vocational, social, cultural and geographic terms since the height of the recession around 1991, reflected in participation in VET.

What do the clients say?

The following comments illustrate some of the broad range of changes (vocational, labour market, personal) which have affected VET participants. The factors underpinning these changes have been similarly broad, many of them beyond the direct control of the individuals concerned. After many years of employment, a fifty-three year old foundry worker in a regional centre is made redundant. Unemployed and eligible for labour market programs, he begins what becomes a repeating cycle of eight courses including vegetable picking, machinist, nursery hand, aged care nurse, personal development, literacy, numeracy and, most recently, work preparation. He reports that following each course completion, he has been directed by his case manager to undertake another course, but:

... you train and then there's not a job there, so you do another one. Does get a bit boring after a while.

When asked what he hopes to be doing in twelve months time he responds:

Not a clue. All I know is that I'll be a bit older and greyer.

twenty year old woman studying at a commercial provider reports that she:

... left school and did a Certificate in Visual Art and Design, then a Certificate in Food and Beverage and am now doing a Travel and Tourism course. I wanted to get training in a whole lot of different fields. I got accepted into uni but thought it was too rugged. Wanted to do art, but not many jobs, so then I tried to do the others. Now I want to join the navy. I just decided in the last month.

fifty-two year old man from a non-English speaking background, completes an adult literacy course following the loss of his job. It is followed by various computer courses and a TAFE business accounting course. When interviewed, he is studying Tourism in a TAFE prompted by a course promotion which advertised successful outcomes. His aim is 'to obtain the qualification; to get a job'.

Synthesis: Is the market working?

The research reported in this paper debunks two myths: that TAFE and non-TAFE VET are accessed in the same ways; and that VET is purely vocational from a client perspective. Our interviews with students reinforce the positive social role that VET plays, by identifying a rich tapestry of reasons why clients access VET. They show a significant proportion of clients participating for reasons connected with a broader more integrated education than the very specific, directly work and industry-related training often assumed.

While our paper is not intended as a critique of competition in VET, our findings indicate that it is unlikely that competition will improve access, participation and outcomes for current target groups, or will solve all of the problems seen to be present in TAFE. They also provide evidence in support of Schofield's (1996) contention that there are a number of intended and unintended consequences of competition for social policy, some of which are already evident.

The diversity of VET providers in Australia offers different levels of service for quite different groups at different costs. Not all providers will survive the current re-organisation, and some groups are likely to remain, or become more, disadvantaged. A pure market, were it to exist, would not present a level playing field to individuals in the groups under study, and in a civilised society, nor should it. As Martin Luther King says, (quoted in Puplick 1996, p.10): 'If you start treating equally people who have been treated unequally, you capture them forever in their inequality'. If society is to recognise the inability of some Australians to equitably access, pay for, or achieve vocational outcomes there will be a need for specific social justice principles and programs consequential to and complementary with the efficiency objective of the National Competition Policy (Johnston 1995, p.12) as well as complementary to the expressed needs of its very diverse clients.

On the basis of our research we conclude that it is not possible to assume that what happens in TAFE also happens in the wider VET system. While some user groups are in a position to make market choices, many others have no real choices, particularly because of their inability to pay. Those in the most disadvantaged groups have the fewest choices. As importantly, clients with the most complex, multiple backgrounds and who appear most disadvantaged in terms of access have least choice of provider. When providers which attract the least funding or resources are accessed by these client groups it is not surprising that high levels of access are associated with poor vocational outcomes.

Our findings reflect views expressed by Fooks, et al. (1996) who argue that restructuring of VET into an employer-driven competitive market has been used as a facade, more as a public display of action than a real strategy for reform, and as part of the fiction that competition policies are the answer to all the real and imagined ills of TAFE. Fooks, et al. (1996) also observe that the Kangan Report (1974) maintained that TAFE was more than just training: it was vocational education with a training component; it was part of the continuum of education provision with parity of esteem with other sectors of education. They note that ideologues determined to put the entire VET system under the control of industry have a vested interest in conveying the impression that VET is not education, only training. VET providers, like universities, offer a continuum of programs on and off-site in a range of delivery modes. They offer a continuum from very job-specific training to vocationally oriented education and attract a diverse range of clients for a wide variety of reasons.

Our findings also echo the view of the ACG (1994, pp.5-8) that VET has a positive social role in promoting shared values, social cohesion and the cultural and knowledge base for democratic citizenship and equal opportunity through access to education. Our findings correspond with the ACG (1994) conclusion that equity of access of disadvantaged groups is an important social objective in VET but they suggest that we are already faced with the tiered

and segmented VET predicted by Barnett (1993), in which public provision is oriented to the needs of groups disadvantaged by the open training market and private provision is targeting the non-disadvantaged consumer. The situation on the ground at client level is best summarised by Hall's (1996) observation that governments have all of the proper rhetoric but, in the case of some of the disadvantaged groups, far too little is being done.

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TAFE: A practical necessity for university graduates

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Introduction

'Do a TAFE course! Why on Earth would you want to do that?' Such expressions of disbelief are not commonly experienced by new school leavers when they reveal their plans to undertake a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) course. Conversely, university students who decide to enrol in a TAFE course after attaining a bachelor degree or higher qualification frequently encounter such reactions. However, current trends in articulation between the vocational education and training (VET) and higher education sectors suggest that the tide of opinion may turn. In future, university graduates who enrol in TAFE are more likely to be asked 'What course are you planning to do?'

Most research on articulation between the VET and higher education sectors has been concerned with the VET to higher education pathway. Until recently, little attention was paid to so called 'reverse' articulation from higher education to VET. Even less research has been conducted on the reasons why university graduates elect to transfer to VET. Of particular interest are the reasons why some with a *complete* higher education qualification choose to subsequently enrol in a VET course.

Further, considering the not insignificant numbers moving from the higher education to the VET sector, a number of issues arise including the appropriateness of teaching styles and curriculum design in the VET sector. Should these be found to be inappropriate, then policy initiatives may be required in VET to better cater to the needs of the higher education background cohort.

In order to gain a better understanding of these issues, the South Australian Department for Employment, Training and Further Education (SA DETAFE) commissioned a project to investigate the extent to which higher education graduates participate in South Australian TAFE courses, the reasons why they choose to do so, and how appropriate they find their TAFE courses to be. The appropriateness of teaching styles and curriculum design to higher education graduates' needs were also investigated and possible policy responses to the research findings suggested. This paper outlines the findings of earlier indicative research and presents the main findings of the project conducted for SA DETAFE.

Previous research on the articulation of higher education graduates to TAFE

Recognition of articulation from higher education to TAFE

Despite a good deal of research prior to the early 1990s investigating student transfer between TAFE and higher education in Australia, all such research was concerned with movement from TAFE to higher education. However, at least as early as 1991, the occurrence of transfer from the university to the non-university education sector (roughly equivalent to TAFE) was internationally recognised. In a report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), it was stated that many countries including the United States have observed an 'increase in so-called

'reverse transfer', namely a growing number of university students and graduates, mainly from academic disciplines, and seeking a double qualification, who apply for professionally-oriented courses offered by the NUS (non-university system)' (1991, p.76).

In Australia, Golding and Eedle (1993) and Golding (1993) were the first to formally recognise inter-sectoral articulation from higher education to the VET sector. The lack of earlier in-depth research on reverse articulation was mainly due to the unavailability of data identifying students in TAFE from a higher education background. For example, in seeking the previous university enrolment data of TAFE students, the National TAFE Chief Executives Committee (NTCC 1995, p.15) made the observation that:

Much of this data proved difficult to extract largely because TAFE systems have been previously unaware of, or underestimated the extent of, university to TAFE articulation. If the information was not captured at enrolment it proved extremely difficult to capture at a later date.

Magnitude of reverse articulation

A commonly held assumption is that articulation which occurs between TAFE and universities is predominantly 'upward', that is from TAFE to university. However, indications are that reverse articulation is more prevalent. Golding (1995a) found that 7,232 or 5 per cent of the 150,698 university undergraduate course commencers in 1993 had TAFE backgrounds. Other data revealed that at least 12,814 or 18 per cent of the 72,275 TAFE commencers at TAFE associate diploma, advanced certificate or certificate level in Victoria in 1993 had a university or College of Advanced Education background:

There is very active traffic in both directions between TAFE and higher education, with more movement from higher education to TAFE than the other way round. More than *half* of the students moving in each direction have previously enrolled in *more than one* tertiary course (Golding et al. 1995, p.7).

The NTCC found that approximately 7 per cent or 54,891 TAFE students/enrolments in 1992 and 75,635 TAFE students/enrolments in 1993 had a university background prior to commencing TAFE (1995). Here, 'university background' included all students who had either completed or attempted university study.

General background data on reverse articulation

There are three main sources of previously published data on reverse articulation in Australia, namely studies by the NTCC, Golding, and Millican. The NTCC study (1995) provides general national and State/Territory statistics on TAFE students with a university background. Golding's work (Golding & Eedle 1993; Golding 1994, 1995a, 1995c) deals primarily with intersectoral articulation between higher education institutions and TAFE in Victoria, and includes analysis of data obtained via questionnaire surveys. Similarly, Millican (1995) uses data on university to TAFE articulation in Queensland obtained via a questionnaire survey.

The following general background data are drawn primarily from the NTCC study and are supplemented, where indicated, by data from the Golding and Millican studies. On the whole for Australia, TAFE students with a university background were more likely to have a *complete* rather than *incomplete* university background. Comparison of relevant data by State and Territory reveals that TAFE students in South Australia are far more likely to have a complete university background and much less likely to have an incomplete university background than their counterparts in other States and Territories. This may in part be explained by the poorer employment prospects for university graduates in South Australia compared with other States and Territories for which data were available.

Around one third of TAFE students with a university background were in the 20 to 29 years of age cohort and another third belonged to the 30 to 39 years of age cohort both for South Australia and Australia as a whole. Thus, around two thirds of South Australian TAFE students with university backgrounds were aged between 20 and 40 years.

As was the case for Australia as a whole, South Australian TAFE students with a university background were most likely to have enrolled in a stream 3100 initial vocational course with around a quarter doing so (compared with 17 to 21 per cent for Australia). Stream 3221 courses (courses which grant partial exemption to other skills courses) were the next most popular choice in South Australia with 16 per cent and 20 per cent enrolling in these courses in 1992 and 1993 respectively.

'Business, Administration, Economics' was the most popular field of study accounting for around one third of all course enrolments by Australian TAFE students with a university background. 'Engineering, Surveying' was the second most popular field of study with around 13 per cent of enrolments. These findings of the NTCC (1995) are consistent with those of Golding (1994), Golding et al. (1995) and Millican (1995). The NTCC (1995) found that approximately one third of all TAFE students with a completed university background commenced in TAFE within two years of graduating from university. Another third did not commence a TAFE course until ten or more years after university graduation.

Reasons for reverse articulation

As stated already, little research has been conducted on the reasons why those with a higher education background enrol in a VET course. The majority of work in this area has been conducted by Golding in his studies of higher education to TAFE transfer in Victoria. Further data is also available from Millican's Queensland study of university to TAFE articulation in which 568 survey responses from a sample of 2,001 TAFE students with a university background were analysed.

Overall, Golding's study (1995b) found that university graduates new to TAFE were most likely to have enrolled in a TAFE course for the following reasons:

- studying to gain vocationally specific training (86 per cent);
- retraining to avoid unemployment (38 per cent);
- studying to get a better or higher level job (45 per cent); and
- studying at TAFE as a requirement of their job or employer (16 per cent).

Similarly, Millican (1995) found that 60 per cent of Queensland TAFE enrollees with a university background had enrolled in TAFE primarily to gain employment-related skills. The next most common reasons were: 'refreshing/updating knowledge and skills' (33 per cent); 'personal interest/development' (31 per cent); and 'flexibility of attendance' (28 per cent).

In a later study of movement between higher education and TAFE in Victoria based on 281 survey returns, Golding et al. explored the vocational motivations of students and found that:

Whereas the students entering higher education were on the whole more interested in the qualification than the skills, those entering TAFE from higher education were clearly more interested in gaining new skills than in gaining a qualification *per se*. This reflects both the reality that higher education qualifications are more prestigious overall, and the fact that the older group moving from higher education to TAFE is using education differently (1995, p.11).

With respect to age, Millican found that the acquisition of employment-related skills was a greater influence among younger university graduates enrolling in TAFE.

Golding (1995b) found that 55 per cent of those who transferred from university to TAFE disagreed with the statement that 'my 1994 field of study is similar to my previous studies', compared with only 25 per cent of respondents who transferred from TAFE to university. Just under two thirds of university to TAFE transferees (62 per cent) reported that they had chosen to do further study in order to change career direction.

In investigating the opportunistic nature of transfer, Golding found that 'almost all (97 per cent) of those transferring from university to TAFE started their university course without intending to come to TAFE' (1995c, p.8). This suggested to Golding that transfer from university to TAFE was motivated by circumstance, indicative of inappropriate initial tertiary choices, or due to changed vocational circumstances.

As might be expected, Golding (1995c) found that university graduates unable to obtain employment, particularly those from a general degree background such as arts, science, education and business, were the most likely to continue studying. As Golding suggests, in a labour market with an oversupply of graduates and a shortage of particular vocational skills:

... so-called 'reverse' transfer would perhaps be more vocationally useful than 'upward' transfer. The alternative of further postgraduate study for university graduates without a job is also perhaps less attractive and more expensive than an initial vocational credential in TAFE. For many students the content of the course and the outcomes are more important than the 'levels' (1995a, p.41).

Further evidence of labour market influences on decisions by university graduates to enrol in TAFE is that 'in 1991 at the height of the recession the proportion of university graduates in the cohort articulating to TAFE in Victoria virtually doubled in one year, and has progressively declined in the two years since' (Golding 1995a, p.43).

Such findings are supported on an international scale by the OECD study which it concluded that:

Overall, the country studies reflect a favourable situation in terms of the employment of NUS (non-university system) graduates. There seems to be general agreement that, in times of job market problems, those with degrees or other qualifications from tertiary institutions outside the university sector often find it easier to get employed than those who graduate from universities (1991, p.60).

It should be borne in mind, however, that this situation varies to a large extent when specific subject areas are investigated, and also has to be qualified with respect to labour market entry levels and salary differentials.

Millican suggests that the reason why university students might concurrently enrol in a TAFE course, or enrol immediately after completing their university studies, is that they are 'using TAFE to improve their employment profile or readiness by addressing perceived shortcomings in their university course, or may perceive that their university study is not immediately transferable to employment' (1995, p.11). In relation to those students who had enrolled in TAFE at least five years after being enrolled in university studies, Millican suggests that this may have been a reflection of 'the highly volatile nature of the job market in recent years, with long-standing employment prospects disappearing, and displaced persons (or those who believe they soon may be) seeking rapid re-training [sic] for new employment-related skills' (Millican 1995, p.11).

Other factors related to higher education graduates in TAFE

In a study of Victorian TAFE commencers with a university background, Golding found that:

By far the most unattractive aspect of transition to TAFE was the less prestigious nature of the TAFE qualification. Other negatives included the poorer quality of campus life generally and/or campus facilities, lack of challenge and repetition of content previously studied. Reported attractions, in order of priority, included a 'more practical course', 'smaller classes with more personal interaction' and the lower cost of study (1995c, p.7).

With many higher level TAFE courses in Victoria comprising up to 20 per cent of students with a university background, Golding (1995c) identified implications not only for teaching in TAFE but also for teacher training and professional development. The main problems reported by TAFE students with a university background included repetition, lack of a challenge, as well as difficulties associated with belonging to mixed ability group classes comprising few other mature age students. In view of the size and different needs of the university background cohort in TAFE, it has been proposed that 'TAFE systems consider customising curriculum frameworks to meet the VET needs of students with university backgrounds' (NTCC 1995, Recommendation 4, p.52).

1996 survey of higher education graduates in SA TAFE

The survey

Postal contact details of all South Australian (SA) TAFE students in 1995 who indicated on enrolment that they had previously completed a diploma or higher qualification were obtained via SA DETAFE's central database. Survey instruments were then developed and piloted before conducting the census of 3,731 higher education graduates in TAFE courses.

Questionnaires sought general information on the respondent's highest qualification and employment status at enrolment in 1995 TAFE studies, along with a range of information with respect to the respondent's TAFE studies including: reasons for undertaking TAFE studies; similarity of the TAFE field of study to the field of study in their highest qualification; and appropriateness of teaching style and curriculum design in TAFE to the respondent's needs.

A raw response rate of 32.6 per cent was achieved. Using an estimate of incorrect addresses as the proportion of all returns that were marked 'return to sender,' and the proportion of ineligible respondents as an estimate of the proportion of surveys despatched to ineligible persons, the adjusted 'real' response rate was calculated as 41.4 per cent.

Profile of respondents

Female respondents comprised 61 per cent and males comprised 39 per cent of the sample. The mean, median and mode age of the sample was 39 years. The wide spread of ages suggests that many higher education graduates view TAFE as providing learning opportunities over the length of their working lifetime.

The mean of elapsed years between completing the highest education qualification and undertaking TAFE studies was 11 years, while the mode and median were 1 and 10 years respectively. Most of the higher education graduate cohort have not travelled continuously along the school-higher education-TAFE pathway, having interrupted their studies for a number of years. This suggests that TAFE is generally not seen by higher education graduates just as a 'top-up' to a recently completed university qualification.

Four fifths of the sample held a degree or higher qualification while the other fifth held an undergraduate diploma. A post-graduate bachelor degree, masters degree or doctorate, was the highest qualification for 12 per cent of the sample.

Just over half of all respondents (52 per cent) were in full-time employment and over one quarter (26 per cent) were in part-time employment at the time of enrolling in their 1995 TAFE studies. Twelve per cent were unemployed and 10 per cent were not in the labour force. Seventy per cent of males were in full-time employment compared to only 40 per cent of females. A high percentage of females (37 per cent) were in part-time employment compared to only 9 per cent of males. Twelve per cent of females were not in the labour force, twice that for males. Unemployment rates for the female and male samples were 13 per cent and 16 per cent respectively.

Overall, 45 per cent of enrolments were in non-award courses, this category accounting for the greatest percentage of enrolments. The next three largest categories in descending order were certificates, associate diplomas, and advanced certificates at 26 per cent, 10 per cent and 6 per cent respectively. A greater percentage of female enrolments (30 per cent) were in certificate courses compared to only 19 per cent of male enrolments. On the other hand, 51 per cent of male enrolments were in non-award courses compared to only 41 per cent of female enrolments. Respondents in full-time or part-time employment were more likely to be enrolled in non-award courses (55 per cent and 39 per cent respectively) than those who were unemployed or not in the labour force (30 per cent and 25 per cent respectively).

Over one third of enrolments (34 per cent) were in stream 3100 (initial vocational courses) while most of the remainder were divided among streams 3221 (courses which grant partial exemption to other skills courses), 3222 (complete other skills courses), and 3500 (para-professional/higher technician) which accounted for 15 per cent, 15 per cent and 13 per cent respectively.

The most popular field of study was 'TAFE Multi-Field Education' with 34 per cent of enrolments, followed by 'Business, Administration, Economics' and 'Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences' with 26 per cent and 11 per cent of enrolments respectively. Gender differences were found in a number of fields of study: 'Engineering, Surveying' with 15 per cent of male enrolments but only 1 per cent of female enrolments; 'Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences' with 14 per cent of female enrolments but only 6 per cent of male enrolments; and 'Health, Community Services' with 8 per cent of female enrolments but only 4 per cent of male enrolments (see Table 1).

Table 1: Respondents by Field of Study by Sex

	Field of study	Female		Male		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Land and marine resources, animal husbandry	51	6.7	29	5.9	80	6.4
2	Architecture, building	19	2.5	24	4.9	43	3.5
3	Arts, humanities and social sciences	106	14.0	27	5.5	133	10.7
4	Business, administration, economics	213	28.2	110	22.4	323	25.9
5	Education	14	1.9	5	1.0	19	1.5
6	Engineering, surveying	9	1.2	71	14.5	80	6.4
7	Health, community services	58	7.7	17	3.5	75	6.0
8	Law, legal studies	7	0.9	2	0.4	9	0.7
9	Science	2	0.3	4	0.8	6	0.5
10	Veterinary science, animal care	1	0.1	0	0.0	1	0.1
11	Services, hospitality, transportation	39	5.2	19	3.9	58	4.7
12	TAFE multi-field education	237	31.3	182	37.1	419	33.6
Total		756	100.0	490	100.0	1 246	100.0

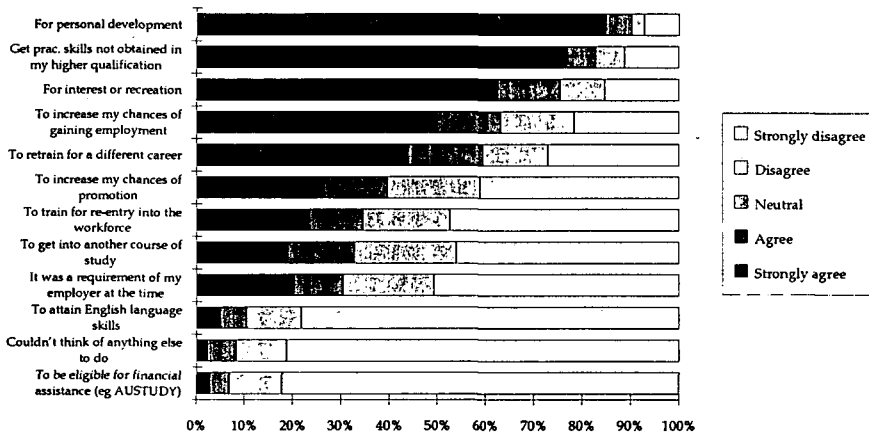
Over half of all respondents indicated that there was no similarity at all between the fields of study in which they were enrolled in TAFE and higher education. A further 24 per cent

of respondents indicated that the fields of study were of little similarity. Just under one fifth (19 per cent) of all respondents considered the fields of study to be similar or very similar. In general, male respondents were more likely than their female counterparts to have enrolled in a similar field of study in TAFE.

Reasons for undertaking TAFE studies

Respondents were asked to indicate their reasons for undertaking TAFE studies. As reflected in Figure 1, the most likely reason for higher education graduates to undertake TAFE studies was ‘for personal development’, followed closely by ‘to gain practical skills not obtained in my higher qualification’, and ‘for interest or recreation’. Half the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the proposition that they had enrolled in TAFE to increase their chances of gaining employment, while 44 per cent of respondents nominated the reason ‘to retrain for a different career’.

Figure 1: Reasons for undertaking TAFE studies: Percentage of respondents for each option, 1995



The granting of credit in TAFE courses for prior studies undertaken was found to be an important factor for only a small minority of respondents.

Analysis of reasons by other factors

Female respondents were significantly more likely than males to have enrolled in TAFE ‘for interest or recreation’, even when the cohort is restricted to those in the labour force. Being in or out of the labour force does not therefore appear to explain the difference between the sexes. Females were also significantly more likely to have enrolled in TAFE ‘to retrain for a different career’. Male respondents were more likely to have enrolled in TAFE because ‘it was a requirement of my employer at the time’.

In general, no strong correlation or differences were found between the age of respondents and reasons for undertaking TAFE studies.

No significant differences were found between labour force status categories with respect to the two most frequent reasons for enrolling in TAFE - ie. 'for personal development' and 'to gain practical skills not obtained in my higher qualification'. Respondents in part-time employment and those not in the labour force were both significantly more likely to have enrolled in TAFE 'for interest or recreation' than were those in full-time employment or the unemployed.

Unemployed respondents were more likely to have enrolled in TAFE 'to attain English language skills' than were those in full and part-time employment. This finding may reflect a higher unemployment rate among graduates from non-English speaking backgrounds. Such findings indicate that, despite holding a higher education qualification, a number of university graduates feel the need to improve their English language skills presumably to make themselves more competitive in the labour market.

Respondents who undertook TAFE studies two or less years after completing their highest qualification were significantly more likely than other respondents to have done so for the following reasons: 'to increase my chances of gaining employment'; 'it was a requirement of my employer at the time'; and 'to increase my chances of promotion in current employment'. This may have been due in part to the fact that a greater proportion of respondents who undertook TAFE studies three or more years after graduating from university were not in the labour force. In general, the findings of the research suggest that recent higher education graduates are more likely to undertake TAFE studies for employment reasons.

Appropriateness of TAFE courses

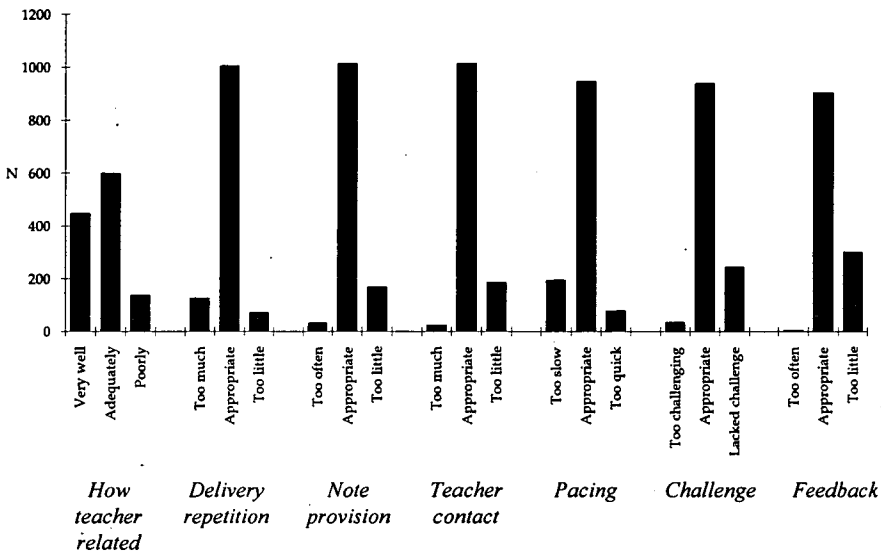
The vast majority of respondents (88 per cent) indicated that their TAFE studies were 'very appropriate' or 'appropriate' with respect to their reasons for enrolling in TAFE. Eleven per cent considered the appropriateness of their TAFE studies to be 'borderline' while only 1 per cent considered their TAFE studies to be 'inappropriate' or 'very inappropriate'. No significant differences in appropriateness of TAFE studies were found in relation to sex or between enrollees undertaking TAFE studies for vocational reasons and those for non-vocational reasons only.

Appropriateness of TAFE teaching style

As shown in Figure 2, over a third of respondents (38 per cent) indicated that TAFE teachers or lecturers related very well to higher education graduates, while 50 per cent indicated that they related adequately. Only 12 per cent thought that TAFE teachers related poorly to higher education graduates. No significant differences in the rating of how teachers related to higher education graduates were found in relation to age or sex. Some respondents suggested that there is a need to improve the teaching skills of TAFE lecturers.

For 83 per cent of respondents, the repetition of delivery was considered appropriate, while 6 per cent thought it too little and 11 per cent too much. The vast majority (83 per cent) considered the provision of printed materials such as lecture notes to be appropriate, while 3 per cent thought provision took place too often and 14 per cent too infrequently.

Figure 2: Respondents: Appropriateness of various aspects of teaching style



The pacing of the course was considered to be appropriate by 78 per cent of respondents, while 16 per cent thought it was too slow. Only 6 per cent indicated that it was paced too fast. Although some mentioned that the course was paced slower than what would have been ideal for themselves, they still thought it to be appropriate in the sense that the majority of the class required the extra time to develop the required skills. Although the majority of respondents saw the pacing of courses as being generally appropriate, many expressed a preference for more flexibility and self-pacing of courses.

For most respondents (83 per cent), the amount of contact with TAFE teachers or lecturers was considered appropriate, while 2 per cent thought there was too much contact and 15 per cent too little contact. One quarter of respondents considered the amount of feedback on progress to be inadequate.

Just over three quarters of respondents (77 per cent) indicated that the challenge offered by the course was adequate. Only 3 per cent thought the course was too challenging, while 20 per cent thought it lacked challenge. Given that most respondents were enrolled in a TAFE field of study that differed from their highest qualification, the research suggests that confronting new and unfamiliar material was a sufficient challenge in itself.

Appropriateness of TAFE course design

Just over three quarters of respondents (77 per cent) thought the length of modules or courses to be appropriate, while 14 per cent thought them to be too short and 9 per cent too long. A number of respondents commented favourably on the appropriateness to their needs of the shorter courses or modules offered by TAFE compared to longer higher education courses.

For 83 per cent of respondents, the balance of theory and practical was considered to be appropriate. Twelve per cent of respondents considered there to be too much theory in their TAFE course or module, whereas only 5 per cent thought there was too much practical. These findings, together with a number of comments from respondents, emphasise that higher education graduates primarily seek practical skills from TAFE studies and generally do not wish to undertake more theoretical learning of the kind so dominant in their prior higher education studies. A number of respondents also commented favourably on the close links that TAFE courses have to the 'real world'.

Three quarters of respondents indicated that the availability of options or choice of subjects/modules was appropriate, while a quarter thought that there were too few. On balance, higher education graduates considered that subject and module choice in TAFE was inadequate.

Many respondents were critical of non-graded competency-based assessment (ie. pass or fail) saying that they disliked this form of assessment and found it to be inappropriate. A graded assessment system was much preferred for two reasons. It provides an incentive to study and work harder in order to achieve a good result (rather than merely passing), and employers consider a graded assessment to be more informative than a mere pass/fail result.

Respondent age and appropriateness of TAFE courses

The following survey results suggest that the needs of younger and older higher education graduates differ with respect to TAFE teaching styles and course design:

- respondents who found the pacing of courses to be too slow were significantly younger than those who found the pacing to be appropriate or too quick;
- respondents who thought the amount of teacher contact was insufficient were significantly older than those who considered teacher contact to be excessive;
- respondents who considered there to be too much repetition of delivery were significantly younger than those who considered it be appropriate or too little;
- respondents who found that the course lacked challenge were significantly younger than respondents who rated the degree of challenge as appropriate or too great; and
- respondents who found the length of modules to be too short were significantly older than those who found the modules to be appropriate or too long.

Adequacy of support services and facilities in TAFE

Forty per cent of respondents felt that the availability of course equipment such as computers was better at TAFE than at the higher education institution from which they gained their highest qualification. Only 15 per cent thought it was worse at TAFE. The availability of course equipment was thought to be similar by 45 per cent of respondents.

Conversely, respondents' perceptions of library services and facilities in TAFE were less positive. Only 15 per cent thought that TAFE library facilities were better than those at their previous higher education institution, while 45 per cent and 40 per cent considered them to be similar or worse respectively. Only 17 per cent of respondents considered

TAFE library services to be better than those at their previous higher education institution, while 57 per cent and 26 per cent thought them to be similar or worse respectively. On the whole therefore, respondents saw TAFE as offering a higher standard of equipment availability but a lower standard of library services and facilities compared with higher education institutions.

Some respondents commented that out-of-hours access to TAFE facilities and services could be improved particularly for students with employment or family commitments. Others suggested that TAFE should use more up-to-date equipment and software to ensure that courses are relevant to the current needs of employers and the community. Respondents were especially critical of TAFE administrative procedures indicating that improvements are required in the processing of student enrolments and assessments. Several considered the processes associated with the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to be excessively bureaucratic.

Possible policy responses

The generally high level of satisfaction with most aspects of TAFE among higher education graduates suggests that no urgent policy responses are required to cater for the needs of this cohort. However, should TAFE wish to attract more clients from the higher education graduate market, the survey highlights a number of key areas in which policy action may be required. Areas of dissatisfaction identified by higher education graduates and possible policy responses are summarised in Table 2.

Teaching styles

The introduction of more self-paced courses would help to overcome the frustration of those who found their TAFE courses to be paced too slowly. Other improvements sought by respondents include increased contact with, and access to, TAFE teachers outside formal lecture times, and more feedback on progress. This suggests the need for a staff structure in TAFE which is less reliant on casual teachers.

The lack of challenge experienced by some higher education graduates in TAFE could be addressed by streaming or introducing more individualised learning approaches linked to ability levels within classes. Greater attention should also be given to ensuring that TAFE teachers are equipped with adequate skills and qualifications to cater for adult learners and mixed ability groups.

Course design

As the results of the survey clearly indicate, higher education graduates primarily undertake TAFE courses to gain practical skills. Although the majority of higher education graduates were satisfied with the balance between theory and practice in TAFE courses, over one in ten thought there was too much theory. To continue to cater to the higher education cohort then, the practical and 'real world' emphasis of TAFE courses should be increased. Current assessment practices should also be re-assessed in the light of respondents' criticisms of competency-based assessment and their stated preference for graded assessment.

Table 2: Summary of areas of dissatisfaction and possible policy responses

Area of dissatisfaction	Possible responses
• courses paced too slowly	• expand the range of self paced courses
• courses lacked a challenge	• have advanced activities available for 'brighter' students • stream courses
• lack of access to lecturers outside lecture times	• establish a lecturing staff structure based more at TAFE institutes • schedule times for students to access lecturers outside formal lecture times
• lecturers lacked adequate teaching skills	• require lecturers to have undergone appropriate teacher training • assess potential lecturers teaching abilities prior to taking classes
• adult learners treated the same way as less mature school leavers	• make lecturers aware that mature learners may be taking their course
• courses too theoretical	• maintain or increase the practical and 'real world' nature of TAFE courses
• competency-based assessment	• explore the possibility of providing graded assessment
• out of date equipment	• ensure course equipment is up to date
• too limited access to TAFE services and facilities	• make TAFE facilities and services available during out-of-course hours
• inefficient administrative services	• explore ways of making administrative services more streamlined and efficient
• RPL processes too bureaucratic	• explore ways of making RPL processes more streamlined and efficient

Services and facilities

The significance attached by higher education graduates to a strong practical focus and 'real world' relevance in TAFE courses suggests that efforts should be made to ensure that students have access to up-to-date equipment and software. Greater flexibility of access to facilities and equipment in TAFE is also required for students with family or work commitments. Administrative services in TAFE, particularly those relating to RPL, need to become more efficient and streamlined if higher education graduates are to take full advantage of the services offered by TAFE.

Future research possibilities

One area in which there were marked differences of opinion was the appropriateness of TAFE teaching style according to age. The opinions of younger and older respondents differed significantly about the appropriateness of course pacing, amount of teacher contact, repetition of delivery, challenge of the course, and the length of modules offered. Given these differences, research should be conducted on TAFE's role in the provision of

VET for the adult or mature age market and how effectively it is catering to the needs of different age groups. In addition, the research on which this paper is based could be replicated in all other States and Territories to determine the national level of higher education graduates undertaking TAFE course and the reasons why they do so.

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Users, goals and User Choice in vocational education and training

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Introduction

A re-examination of the relationship between the social and economic goals of education is particularly important for the vocational education and training (VET) sector, where the official discourse has taken an almost purely rationalist view of education and the inherently cultural and social purposes of learning have been virtually ignored.

I am not sure however that a juxtaposition of the social and economic goals of education is the most useful approach to such a re-assessment. More evident, it seems to me, are the tensions that exist between the goals of administrative systems, those of institutions and those of individual users.

For this reason I would like to address a somewhat different set of guiding questions:

- Whose goals are they - are they representative of all, or only some, of the interests/stakeholders in the sector?
- Are they coherent - that is, when the policy elements are put together, do they make sense? This applies not only to stated goals, but to the structures and arrangements which are put in place to implement these goals and which, in this process, often re-interpret the original intent and/or bring about unintended consequences.
- Are current administrative arrangements the most efficacious for achieving sectoral goals?

VET sector goals

The Australian VET sector differs from other sectors of education in that it was established by administrative fiat at the beginning of this decade through an amalgamation of the peak bodies for Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and the regulatory agencies responsible for managing apprentices and traineeships (and, in some cases, labour market programs).

The overriding purpose of VET has been agreed by the relevant Ministerial Council:

Australia's vocational education and training system aims to:

- provide an educated, skilled and flexible workforce to enable Australian industry to be competitive in domestic and international markets; and
- improve the knowledge, skills and quality of life for Australians, having regard to the particular needs of disadvantaged groups.

This will be fulfilled in cooperation with other education sectors, industry and those seeking vocational education and training. (ANTA 1995)

The establishment of the Australia National Training Authority (ANTA) was a landmark in the development of nationally co-ordinated and funded education and training. It has also

provided the source of a single authorised and largely uncontested version of sectoral goals and directions. These have remained substantially the same since ANTA's inception and can be summarised as:

- a national training system;
- a client focus;
- the development of a training market;
- lifelong learning; and
- equity and participation for individuals. (ANTA 1994)

It is worth making one or two observations about these goals. First, they are process goals. They do not include measurable or other explicit outcome targets related to the skill formation which is the central purpose of VET.¹ There is nothing inherently inferior about such process goals but by nature they lend themselves to a variety of interpretations and are susceptible to assuming particular meanings depending on the relative emphasis given to them by the more powerful players in the sector.

Second, while potentially these sectoral goals may be appropriate and applicable to all VET stakeholders, the emphasis and meaning given to some, and the relative neglect of others, has in practice favoured some stakeholders to the detriment of others. More specifically, three of these goals have received a demonstrably greater share of attention and resources. They are:

- the development of a national system;
- the fostering of an (industry-led) client focus; and
- the development of a training market.

It is worth briefly exploring the way in which specific interests and meanings have been attributed to goals originally intended for more universal application.

A national system

The administrative origins of VET have led to a preoccupation with the creation of a single national 'system' with all the implications this carries of coherent and interlinked component parts, where uniformity of purpose is axiomatic. This in turn has given primacy to those administrative interests concerned with maintaining homogeneity and regimentation. One manifestation of this is the application of a single set of rules for funding, accreditation and quality assurance. This involves the standardisation of the content and outcome of 'nationally recognised' courses and qualifications and, in the interests of a 'level playing field', the application of the same set of quality assurance rules to all providers be they small enterprises undertaking in-house training or very large public providers enrolling tens of thousands of students.

Similarly, states and territories each develop an annual training profile which is 'a single and comprehensive plan for the provision and support of vocational education for the year ahead' (ANTA 1996). In these plans governments co-ordinate the balance of provision down to the last *hour* of a student's contact with a teacher. In a federal democratic state, it

is difficult to imagine a more central and managerialist - or 'manpower planning' - approach to education and training.

Client focus

The legitimacy of the VET annual profiles is based on their claimed responsiveness to clients. However these profiles seem to give almost exclusive weight to the interests of organised industry particularly as represented by the Industry Training Advisory Boards (ITABs) which are largely funded through ANTA. The extent of this influence is manifest in the solely industry based membership composition of the powerful ANTA Board and has been acknowledged by a prominent officer of ANTA:

The industry led nature of the training reform process ... has shifted the control of training outcomes away from training providers and educationalists into the hands of the key industrial parties. (Carnegie 1996, p 246)

These interests control both the content of VET - through the setting of competency standards and as the principal source of client advice, the level and quantum of training for specific occupations and the overall balance and mix of training.

Development of a training market

It is something of a paradox that the same centralist administrative and industry interests have also been tireless advocates of a 'training market'. ANTA has never defined the 'training market' but 'industry' is taken *a priori* to be synonymous with the 'demand' side of the market equation. Providers are the supply side. In an ideal training market the Government ceases to be a purchaser and becomes merely a 'funder' with funding following the 'users' choice of a provider.

In this approach 'what' and 'how much' training remains centrally planned while the 'who provides' question is open to the market. ANTA's work on developing a training market has thus become increasingly preoccupied with increasing the quantum of funded providers, in order to strengthen the power of industry demand relative to supply.

This particular version of a training market is being actively implemented for regulated entry level training under the banner of 'User Choice'. Employers and apprentices will be locked into national training packages in terms of the *content* of their training but will be able to choose how this training is provided - both in terms of which provider they use and also mix of formal and on-the-job training. The process for exercising this choice and information on the availability of providers will be brokered by government sponsored 'intermediaries' (usually ITABs or group training companies).

Currently many concerns are being raised about how User Choice will work. There are practical questions - if funding follows registration, what of the time lags required for planning and equipping the delivery of technical education? There are questions of relative power - are youth wage earners really in a position to exercise a free and effective choice if their views differ from those of their employer? There are serious conceptual difficulties - how can a *market* work if, (as is permitted and does occur in this system), the 'user' or

purchaser, also decides to become the provider? And there are questions about cost effectiveness - as with so many VET sector reforms, User Choice raises the spectre of additional administrative layers and costs for possibly little demonstrated value added.

Notwithstanding these concerns I think there is some chance that User Choice may in fact work for regulated entry level training. My reason for saying this is because, as is the case in other investment markets, 'training market' transactions between providers and purchasers - or 'users' are *derived* from the interests of each in higher order markets - in this case, their interests in the relevant labour market.

Thus User Choice for regulated entry level training may work because there is an underlying *labour* market rationale - a coincidence of interests on the part of the two key labour market players (apprentice and employer). The training decision is an outcome of an *already completed labour market transaction* and the training undertaken is seen to be part of an already established employment contract.

Of much greater concern is ANTA's intention that its conceptualisation of a training market be applied throughout VET even where no such co-incidence of labour market interests can be demonstrated or discerned.

The training market is intended to bring about responsiveness diversity, quality and efficiency in training. These are the desired goals for the whole of the vocational education and training system, leading to the conclusion that the training market encompasses all of vocational education and training. (ANTA 1996, p.3)

Notwithstanding the remarkable leap from logic evident in this statement, I do not think the broader application of training market principles should be rejected out of hand. Rather I would like to explore the potential relevance of market concepts as a means of recognising and responding to the needs of the very large number of individuals who are not sponsored by their employers and who bear a considerable portion of the cost of their own training.

Individuals in the training market

Consideration of individuals in the training market will require extensive reconceptualisation of VET training markets, starting with an understanding of the purposes which drive demand for training by individuals. First, it needs to be emphasised that individual voluntary and non-sponsored participation in training by individuals represents by far the *major* activity of formal VET institutions. (The apprentices and trainees for whom User Choice has been crafted constitute somewhat less than 15 per cent of a total enrolment of approximately one million) (ACVETS 1996, 33ff). Only recently has this majority of individual clients received any considered attention (eg. Barker 1996) and both the general characteristics and key segmentation parameters need further refinement. Nevertheless it is possible to tentatively identify some important characteristics:

- The majority attend in their own time, pay their own often substantial fees and are not actively sponsored by employers;

- Full time participation by school leavers is one of the fastest growing segments where there is also a marked preference for paraprofessional qualifications;
- Another large proportion of largely part-time participants are seeking a change of employment through their training, ie their training is at best only indirectly related to current employment;
- A third major segment can be identified as second chance participants seeking to upgrade basic learning and work skills; and
- A fourth segment are seeking a second or subsequent qualification or skill set - these are usually previous TAFE graduates but also increasingly university graduates.

The majority of these people appear to have a broadly vocational or 'economic' purpose for their participation in VET. Superficially, this would appear to support the ANTA axiom that there is a natural co-incident of interest in training between individuals and industry - that since individuals want jobs and industry want skills the training needs of individuals will be automatically addressed and met in an industry-driven system. However it is only in the broadest sense that the end purpose of these individuals can be described as identical with industry. As Ryan notes, it requires a major leap of faith to infer that the broad 'quality of life' goals of such a large and diverse clientele are best represented exclusively by the more singular interests of organised industry bodies (Ryan 1996, p.46).

Any application of market concepts to individual users will require a less simplistic and more rigorous approach - one which is capable of recognising the distinctive behaviour of individuals as key demand drivers and which identifies and develops appropriate mechanisms for the efficient distribution of skill formation resources to respond to the different market segments. In particular, we need to re-define the 'end user' of an individual's training not as 'industry' but as the individual's own enhanced functioning in a higher order labour market.

There is ample conceptual analysis and empirical evidence to show that individuals and enterprises differ in their approach to investment in training (eg. DEET 1988). An especially important distinction between the training demanded by individuals and that of industry is that training decisions of individuals are directed to achieving flexibility and advancement across occupations and over a relatively long period of time. Particularly since the restructuring of labour markets in the last two decades, the more futures orientation of individuals means that most do not think only in terms of training for their first or next job, they look for a mix of skills which will enhance mobility, and a variety of options.ⁱⁱ Unlike apprentices therefore, demand by non-sponsored individuals is a demand derived from *anticipated* rather than completed labour market transactions.

By contrast employers tend to be concerned with their immediate needs. They seek to invest principally in enterprise-specific skills and to minimise both immediate and consequential increases in labour costs arising from a higher level of skill mix, while union interests are primarily related to coverage and conditions of existing occupations.

Decisions by individuals about participation in training thus have a different rationale from those made by enterprises. But there is no reason to think that individual decisions are any more or less rational or informed than the planning advice obtained from industry or the actual skill investment decisions of employers. They are both based on expectations about

the worth or 'net benefit' of different skill mixes and qualifications in anticipated and future labour market transactions.

In short, demand for training by individuals and employers reflects the two different sides of the supply/demand tension we would expect to find in a well-functioning *labour* market. Thus if we are to apply the concept of a training market to individual users of VET it needs to be explicitly recognised that their intentions and requirements may overlap but are not - and indeed, in market analysis terms, *cannot* be - synonymous with those of the organised industry interests which to date have dominated VET policy.

The role of government in individual training markets .

As another group of equally legitimate investors in training, albeit with divergent interests, there is a clear *prima facie* case for individual users to access and determine the direction of government funding for education and training and for this funding to follow rather than pre-empt these decisions. This is not merely a question of fairness to those who already bear a large part of the costs of their own training. In a market economy it can be a significant influence on the effective operation of future labour markets.ⁱⁱⁱ How then should governments act to empower individuals in the training market?

The current view is that where employers and industry intermediaries cannot undertake the purchasing function, the government will act as purchaser either through competitive tendering and/or through more comprehensive purchase agreements with public providers. The content of these agreements - what and how much is purchased - will continue to be based on advice brokered by subsidised industry advisory bodies rather than involve any attempt to reflect the decisions of individual users. These brokerage mechanisms cannot represent the aggregation of individual preferences and it is extremely doubtful that the consequent 'purchase agreements', and the central plans on which they are based are a relevant or practical means of enhancing effective individual choice.

Industry bodies such as ITABs and group training companies will represent individual interests only to the extent that they are compatible with those of current industry priorities. And, with the possible exception of a few student associations in a few TAFE Institutes, comparable bodies which give primacy to individual interests do not exist.

Further, there seems little point in increasing the number of providers if choice of content and outcomes remains so very limited. There is evidence to suggest that it is the latter which is of more central concern to individuals (Sweet 1994). It would appear that if governments are to enhance the training market for individuals there should be less emphasis on an ever greater multiplicity of providers and more attention paid to reducing the rigid administrative rules and boundaries, together with deliberate action to increase the capacity of providers to differentiate their training products and services, in order to meet the specific needs and expectations of their individual customers.

Entitlements

It may be that there is a simple and more cost-effective alternative to all the rules and layers of officialdom. It has been argued by a number of writers that individual demand for

training can be effectively expressed through direct purchasing using an entitlement system such as scholarships without any overly intrusive intervention by government as a purchaser (Sweet 1994, Karmel 1997). To some extent this is supported by experience in Australia's international student market which is becoming increasingly price and quality sensitive.

It is understandable that administrative systems such as ANTA are nervous about an entitlement system since it would relegate government to the role of funder rather than purchaser. ANTA's arguments against an entitlements system and for government remaining as a purchaser are surprisingly weak and based on anticipated rather than actual evidence of market failure.^{iv}

There are however some more serious problems with a pure entitlement system which do suggest that there will remain a role for government over and above the disinterested funding of individual choice. These include:

- *Funding cannot follow consumer choice in time.* The lead-time in planning and equipping technical education and the out-year funding implications - (sometimes as much as eight years for a part-time cohort) - requires some certainty for providers and an education and training system which can place individuals quickly. Thus Fooks et al. (1996) recommend a five-year block grant arrangement for which providers are broadly accountable in terms of the number of enrolling students. Sweet (1994) recommends that this accountability also include provision of a specified range of customer services such as employment placement or credit transfer as well as course places and qualifications.
- *Scholarships/vouchers will be easier to implement for the merit-based and the full-time market segments.* However part-time and 'second chance' clients may well be significantly disadvantaged unless funding for these segments is quarantined and guaranteed.
- *Individual providers do not have the power to challenge and override the institutional barriers* which limit their flexibility and thus reduce individual choice of programs and products. Government action is required to minimise mandatory and overlapping external accreditation requirements, reduce owner-imposed regulations and reporting requirements and perhaps most importantly, to become more pro-active in removing vertical and horizontal institutional boundaries such as exist between qualifications offered by TAFE and universities.

Conclusion

My argument in this paper has not been intended to deny the crucial importance of industry interests as one of the principal drivers of demand for VET. Rather, it is an argument for the recognition of VET as a highly diverse sector encompassing individual users with widely differing purposes, goals and interests.

Currently the national system of vocational education and training does not adequately recognise or respond to the legitimate demands of these individual users. In particular, the

system entrenches its links with current occupational structures and interests at the expense of the more futures orientation which is increasingly evident as a primary motivator of individual investment and participation in training. And far from being a response to evident market failure, current administrative rules and arrangements are themselves a major constraint on the efficacy of market processes where individuals are the key drivers of demand.

This marginalisation of the individual as a key 'player' in the training market is expensive for both the individual and the community. Both the empowerment of individuals and the viability of future labour markets requires extensive deregulation of training arrangements and, in particular, the introduction of a funding system more conducive to institutional autonomy and more responsive to patterns of individual choice.

There is an increasingly urgent need for a re-examination of these issues in VET. The key question is whether it is possible to develop a more flexible and less intrusive set of arrangements which recognise the diversity of purposes and interests of individuals and enterprises rather than remaining preoccupied with administrative boundaries and outdated preconceptions.

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ⁱ The Finn targets, which originally provided a more measurable basis for at least some key reforms and expansion in the VET sector and for examining the relationship between it and other sectors, have been paid scant attention in recent years.

ⁱⁱ It appears that their perhaps instinctive but nevertheless acute awareness of changing workforce structures is causing new entrants to the training market to perceive that they will be best served by pursuing qualifications at least at the paraprofessional/supervisory level if they are to minimise their chances of boring, semi-skilled as well as uncertain employment.

ⁱⁱⁱ Individuals will tend to choose training in that skill mix which, on present evidence, offers the highest relative/net reward, thus increasing future supply to relatively high-cost occupations, limiting inflationary 'wage push' pressures and facilitating 'normal' market adjustment processes in these occupational markets.

^{iv} These include:

- *'Government must ensure 'priorities' are met and resources allocated to best effect'*: But so far administrative arrangement have limited, rather than enhanced, the ability of providers to respond to the priorities of individual clients.
- *'Information may be limited thus constraining the ability of consumers to make informed choices'*: This may frequently be true but justifies a government-funded information service which informs rather than a comprehensive purchasing role.
- *'Consumers will be advantaged by a multiplicity of providers'*: Subsidies to different providers do not require a purchasing function, only guidelines for funding eligibility.
- *'an entitlement system would require Government to assess what it is prepared to pay for'*: True, as is the case for professional qualifications delivered by universities, and as has been done much more laboriously for apprenticeship training. This is an observation, not an argument (ANTA 1996, pp.14-15).

The potential destruction of the vocational education and training system

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Introduction

At one level everyone involved with vocational education and training (VET) policy would agree about its goals. We all want a VET system which provides the skills needed to make our nation economically competitive but which, at the same time, provides opportunities for the aspirations of the full range of the population for a satisfying career. This would include those seeking entry level training, continuing development and the disadvantaged.

Unfortunately once we start to go beyond this very general description of the goals, disagreements begin to appear. For instance:

- What are the skills needed in the economy? Who should decide what these are? How specific to particular industries/enterprises should the skills be? How much, if at all, should VET provide for the general education needs of students?
- What should be the role of government in VET policy - formulation and implementation, or only the former? Which institutions should deliver the skills? What sort of quality assurance/evaluation mechanisms are appropriate?
- Who should pay for the development of the skills?
- How important is the call for a national system of VET? How might such a system provide for local needs?

Of course these (and many others) are not new questions. What is new is the circumstance in which these questions are being asked, in particular the uncertainty, complexity and the intense anxiety of the social and economic world in which we live.

While there are a large number of people in various roles and at many levels involved in the development and implementation of education policy, most are influenced by the dominant ideas of the day. In the last decade in Australia and elsewhere, these have been largely economic, as Pusey (1991), Marginson (1993), Harris et al. (1995) and many others have pointed out. In their recent book, Harris et al. (1995, p.11) suggest that 'economic factors are increasingly becoming the rationale for education policy decisions and the means of measuring their success'. Yet as Walker (1993) has argued, it is not just the economic significance of education which has been the driving force of education policy, but a more general cultural anxiety which has focused on the education system as both the cause of, and the possible solution to, the national uncertainty. This anxiety has undoubtedly been fuelled by the popularity of post modernism in intellectual discourses. As a result of the combination of these factors governments have become much more *directly* involved in educational decision making than in the past. In addition to their traditional role of providing general directions for educational curriculum, they have recently sought to influence the actual *content* of the curriculum and the way in which it is assessed.

While it is true that the nexus between education policy and the economy is being more openly expressed in many countries than at any time in the last 50 years, the link itself is not new. Successive governments in most developed countries since World War Two have largely justified the enormous expansion of educational provision and spending on the basis of economic returns for the individual and society as a whole. This justification became known, in the 1960s, as human capital theory. As the critics of this approach to education have long argued (eg. Blaug 1972) there is little evidence to support a causal link between the provision of education on a macro level and economic growth and productivity. However in the three decades after 1945, economic growth was enough to ensure that a detailed examination of the rationale for education spending was not undertaken. The relative cultural stability of this period also helps to explain the lack of concern to examine the funding and directions of the education system.

In Australia, there was far more confidence in the direction the country was taking and in the nature of its cultural identity in the two decades after the war than over recent decades. In retrospect, it is easy to characterise this confidence as complacency and to discern the beginnings of cultural anxiety as the Protestant-Anglo-Saxon hegemony came under pressure and the structural weaknesses of the economy were exposed. This uncertainty has certainly intensified during the globalisation of the 1980s and 1990s and is the root of much of the education policy of the last decade. It is certainly at the heart of the currently perceived need to develop skills formation policies and to enlist the education system at all levels in this aim. But it also helps explain the desire of a variety of groups to influence and even determine the content of education provision.

This desire to influence the content of curricula is the core of the differences between traditional human capital theory and the new skills formation theories currently championed by the OECD and adopted by most developed countries. While traditional theory argued the need to build education systems and improve educational attainment in a macro sense, without much consideration for the *content* of education, the new skills formation policies have concentrated on the balance between the various sectors and on the content of education within them. There have been increasing calls by industry leaders, governments and unionists for education that is 'relevant' to industry 'needs' and that meets the requirements of 'consumers' of education rather than 'suppliers' (see for example ACG (1994), the Higher Education Council's paper on educational quality and the Finn report into post-compulsory education and training). While these calls for educational 'relevance' are not new, the determination of groups outside the education profession to intervene and play a substantial role in influencing the content of curriculum has been a recent development in Australia.

Competency-based education provides a framework which facilitates direct intervention in the content of education by those anxious about the directions of society. Clearly it was (and is) the expectation of some of the proponents of a competency approach that defining the tasks that need to be performed in industry and their assessment (and sometimes also the 'key' competencies needed for effective working life) would lead to an education system that was relevant to the needs of industry. I have tried to point out in various publications how foolish, simplistic and destructive such a reductionist and behaviourist approach is, but apparently with no effect. I will return to this point later.

In the past, VET policy was of little interest to governments. It remained largely in the hands of bureaucrats in state government departments and the TAFE teachers who implemented it. There was little industry involvement in VET and there were very few private providers. While industry trained some of the staff it needed (or insisted that they be imported via immigration policy) there was virtually no structured training of the kind that fits within a VET policy framework encompassing systematic thinking about desirable goals and activities.

In recent years VET has become the subject of policy in a way that was not evident in the past, with the exception of a brief flowering of interest in the mid 1970s. The problems of the economy identified during the last decade have been the main cause of this interest. This has led to the development of national VET perspectives, a greater number of participants in the policy process and an increasing recognition that there is need for reform of VET. Increasingly problematic, however, are questions about who the participants in this policy process should be, and what weight should be given to the views of interested parties in the reform process.

The main point I want to make in this paper is that while most of us would agree that the VET system is still in need of reform, even after a decade of changes, it is likely that the directions these reforms are currently taking will make the situation much worse. This is not an academic paper as much as a call to all interested in VET to look at what is happening and to start to do something about it.

In a paper delivered at the last ANTA Research Advisory Council (ANTARAC) conference (Gonczi 1996), I raised a number of issues about the thinking behind the Modern Apprenticeship and Traineeship Scheme (MAATS). I argued that much of this thinking was flawed, being ideological, excessively simplistic or based on unexamined or demonstrably false assumptions. I would like to summarise these issues here before I go on to suggest that the points I made specifically about MAATS apply *a fortiori* to the most recent series of proposed VET reforms encompassed within the 'National Training Framework'.

The most substantial policy changes are firstly, the decision taken in late 1996 to abolish the need for vocational education/training curriculum and secondly, the decision to base the awarding of qualifications on assessment against standards. The aim of this strategy seems to be to destroy the TAFE system, or at the very least, to reduce its significance in the VET sector of the education system. In addition there is, I believe, a desire to destroy the apprenticeship system and replace it with a traineeship system.

Ideology

The ideological framework within which MAATS was developed could best be described as the 'new contractualism' (Boston 1995). This consists of a number of ideas/theories: rational choice theory: agency theory and a growing loss of confidence in political processes. Rational choice theory is a belief that all individuals are dominated by self interest. In the public sector, it is argued, this results in the desire to maximise efficiency irrespective of the impact on the public. The theory argues that there should be a separation of the policy and delivery arms of government and, or at least, a plurality of providers of

services so that public services are open to competition. Agency theory argues that social and political life should be seen as a series of contracts in which two parties enter into an exchange relationship. Growing loss of confidence in political processes and by extension in public administration has been recently pointed out by the OECD (1996).

When combined with the new managerialism which dominates public sector thinking, the implications for education of these theories are substantial. There is a certain logic in separating the creators of education policy from those who provide it, in sanctioning a range of educational providers, and, in an extreme application of the theory, of contracting out or privatising all the delivery of education.

Simplistic thinking

Earlier I referred to this as the uncritical acceptance of the OECD approach to education. This approach suggests that in the knowledge-based economies, economic competitiveness depends on the skills and knowledge of its people. Therefore there is a need to train more people to a higher level than before. This view is hard to contradict unless one questions whether Australia is really a so-called 'knowledge-based economy'. In fact there are many industries and firms which are not at the cutting edge. To design a system without taking this into account would thus be highly dangerous.

Questionable assumptions

The most problematic issues however are the series of assumptions about the lack of training opportunities for young people. The decline in apprenticeship, the thing that has ostensibly driven the most recent reform in VET, has been assumed to be caused by the concern among employers about the excessive regulation of the system and the expenses associated with payments to apprentices. This is undoubtedly a major issue but it is not the only one and is not insuperable.

The Australian Recognition Framework

In my ANTARAC paper (Gonczi 1996), I argued that there were real problems to be overcome: lack of training opportunities; a TAFE system less responsive to industry than was desirable; and a lack of commitment/involvement by industry. However, the combination of questionable assumptions, free-market ideologies and a lack of rigorous examination of the nature of industry today (the fact that most of it is not leading edge and not likely to be) means that the suggested solutions run the serious risk of making the situation worse.

Since I wrote that paper there have been a number of developments, including:

- The exclusion of curriculum as a necessary part of the delivery of training (substituting training packages consisting of endorsed standards, assessment guidelines, qualification title and level, and some possible learning strategies). The responsibility for developing these strategies has been given to industry training bodies.
- A quality assurance system which depends on provider registration rather than accreditation of courses.

- The formation of the National Framework Training Committee and its dominance by industry membership.
- Assessment and reporting to be related directly to competency standards.
- Greater commitment to workplace training (as opposed to institutional delivery).

All of this is now known as the Australian Recognition Framework - the main aim of which seems to be to change the process of gaining qualifications from the undertaking of a course of study to the assessment of individuals against competency standards.

Clearly this combination of reforms seeks to achieve a system of training which: includes a plurality of providers; is responsive to local conditions; ensures that TAFE awards are based on industry standards; and leads to greater and more consistent recognition of skills achieved. At a higher level of generalisation, these reforms seek to ensure an industry-led system and a system which produces more training places.

Will this raft of initiatives succeed? I want to raise five issues:

- The question of who should 'lead' the system;
- The quality of the new system;
- The continuing failure of apprenticeship;
- The failure to conceptualise and consider the need for full time institutional places; and
- Articulation of VET with higher education.

Leadership of the system

All the statements issued by the Federal Government and ANTA over recent years have stressed the need to ensure that industry 'leads' the VET system. What exactly does this mean? It is hard to argue against the proposition that in order for industry needs to be met, industry should have a major say in deciding the content of a VET course. However, determining what is meant by this phrase is quite difficult. As many have argued, there will be very different opinions held by different enterprises within an industry. In addition, even if we assume that industry is able to agree on its needs, it does not follow that industry alone should determine what courses are offered, the content of these courses and the way in which they are offered. In effect this is what is happening through the training packages.

The cornerstone of the training packages is competency and the subsequent assessment of the explicit outcomes contained in the competency standards. Since the quality of the standards themselves are extremely variable, this is highly problematic. Many of the industry training bodies are well aware of the complexities of determining standards and of designing suitable assessment strategies. But on the basis of the standards developed, it is apparent that some are not. Many industry standards are still excessively reductionist and because their designers often have no theory enabling them to understand the holistic nature of competent performance, ignore the relationship between various parts of the standards. This is to say nothing about the ability of industry to assess the constructs implicit in the standards. Even amongst assessment experts there are as yet no criteria available to judge the validity of performance assessments. It is an utter travesty to suggest that industry trainers who have undertaken a short course in assessment would be able to assess competence validly.

Many groups contribute to the funding of VET (though the principles that should determine the respective shares are quite unclear). All should share in determining its directions and modes of operating. Why should we accept that an 'industry-led' system means a system where the voice of industry is the only one heard? There is a plausible argument to be put for the rights of students (and their parents), especially those who would not want to be confined (in the worst-case scenario) to the learning of specific skills in an old fashioned workplace under the control of untrained and unthinking personnel. Why should *they* not lead the system or at the very least have a say in the nature of the courses and where and how they are offered? What of the community that funds the system? It includes many people who should have a place in determining the nature of the system - including those in TAFE and universities who have a wider perspective of the VET system.

Assuring the quality of the system

How quality can be assured in a responsive and diverse VET system is a major issue. In the past, curriculum was developed through a process which consisted of internal institutional approval with external verification. The quality of this process has been recognised worldwide. In addition to an intellectually coherent curriculum and a valid and reliable assessment system, it ensured that the financial and human resources were available to carry the curriculum through. This meant trained staff with a qualification and experience in the discipline in which the curriculum was designed and an appropriate management system.

This time-honoured method for assuring quality, in effect for assuring the intellectual integrity of the training, has now been abandoned. It was always going to be difficult to maintain in a deregulated, industry-dominated system. However to suggest that there is now no need to have any curriculum development, and to allow any person or organisation with three or four days of training to take the industry competency standards and assess a person against them (the minimum compulsory in the training packages) is not merely intellectually bankrupt but has the potential to destroy the VET system completely.

The work that has gone into the building of the reputation of VET, of offering it as an alternative to university, of attempting to show that it has much in common with the general education system, will be destroyed by these developments. Universities will not accept the qualifications awarded by such a system and it is not likely that the general population will either. The supreme irony is that the only vocational education and training which will have a guarantee of educational quality will be that delivered in schools, since they will maintain their quality assurance processes.

Failure of the apprenticeship system

Attempts by governments and ANTA to introduce training for a wider range of occupations than at present are to be applauded. However the reforms will do nothing to arrest the decline of the apprenticeship system. Since apprenticeship is still the sole means of formal training in Australia for many of the key skilled occupations in a number of industries this is a serious matter. In fact as Fooks has argued (1997), it is likely to

exacerbate the problems of apprenticeship. This is so because the one-year MAATS traineeships, welcome in themselves, are likely to produce a reduction in industry commitment to longer training courses.

Reasons for the decline in apprenticeship have not been addressed. Central to the decline is the unwillingness of employers to take on apprentices, despite the reduction of regulation. (De-regulation has been posited by ANTA as a key reform, likely to encourage the opening up of places). Clearly the decline is associated with the difficulty of taking on apprentices for four years at relatively high rates of pay, though there is some evidence from the work undertaken by Barclay Mowlem in building Liverpool Hospital that wages are less important than the time taken to get apprentices to a minimum level of competence. There are other issues also that help to explain the decline, such as the increase of places in universities.

If university places were reduced, as is likely, it is possible that the decline in apprenticeships would be arrested. In addition, if the experience at Barclay Mowlem was able to be generalised, a combination of off and on-the-job training at the beginning of an apprenticeship (run by TAFE but on site and customised for the specific firm) might solve the problem. This example of partnership is, as I argued in the ANTARAC paper, much more likely to succeed than reforms designed to create a competitive training market.

The net effect of abandoning the apprenticeship system, which is what MAATS seems to be suggesting we should do, will be to substantially reduce the overall commitment of industry to training.

Role of pre-employment courses in VET

The VET reform process has so far ignored the place in the system of full-time or part-time students who are not currently employed. This oversight seems to be a result of the dominance of industry and the elevation of workplace training to a position as the *sine qua non* of vocational education and training. If the training packages operate as suggested, then there will seemingly be no place for such pre-vocational training. Workplace training will be compulsory and assessment will be against competency standards. Does this mean that full time pre-vocational courses, that could not ensure these things, will not be offered? If so, what will happen to those people who cannot get a job, or who want to change jobs?

Given that industry training bodies have been given the responsibility of developing the training packages, it is possible that TAFE institutions and other private trainers will have to wait around for the packages to be developed. To date the performance of the ITABs has been patchy at best. Why should we believe this will change? There is the prospect of training bottlenecks.

Articulation of VET with higher education

One of the most welcome education advances in recent years has been the acceptance by some universities of VET qualifications for advanced standing in university degrees. This has enabled a large number of VET graduates to improve their qualifications and reach their career potential. In a system where there is no curriculum, this articulation will be in

danger. It would be ironic if one of the major outcomes of the reforms was the erosion of this successful achievement built up slowly over the last decade.

Conclusion

I believe there is a real danger that the current reforms could destroy the VET system. A worst-case scenario would see under-trained staff of organisations unconcerned about the lifelong learning needs of trainees attempting to develop in them narrow skills which will serve neither the industry nor the individual. In order to satisfy the requirements of the training packages, the only repository of a trained and intellectually credible workforce in VET, the TAFE system, will be forced to break up coherent curriculum into a series of tasks/skills with no cohesion or intellectual credibility. Pre-vocational courses will wither away and TAFE will be reduced to a rump.

Apprenticeship will disappear and be replaced by watered-down unplanned 'courses' delivered on the job through a one-year traineeship. Firms will further reduce their financial commitment to training. The leadership of the system will be in the hands of ITABs - organisations which are not always capable of providing the intellectual leadership that the system needs. There will be huge quality variations across the country. Turning back the reforms of the last decade, universities will not accept VET qualifications. The boundaries between the education and training sectors will be re-drawn.

All these things will not necessarily happen, but are far more likely to occur now than they were before the current policies of ANTA were developed. I have said before that there are many things in the reforms that have enormous potential, particularly the emphasis being given to workplace learning and to the involvement of enterprises in VET. What makes the current situation particularly troubling for me however, is the fact there is not sufficient understanding in the sector of the complexities of educational issues in order for changes to be implemented successfully. These complexities include: the nature of competency; the link between practice and understanding; the importance and limits of workplace learning; the nature of valid and reliable performance assessment; the relationships between the key competencies and technical skills; and the place of lifelong learning. Even in the TAFE sector this understanding is limited. All the evidence suggests that in enterprises and in the ITABs it is even more so.

I may be accused of being alarmist but these are deeply worrying times, when to assume the worst is the sensible thing to do.

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You can take the \$ out of the \$ocial, but it doesn't make much 'cents': The learning 'community' as the means of reconciliation

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Introduction: What's to reconcile?

The conference theme, *Different drums, one beat? Economic and social goals in education and training*, presupposes that there are two sides to the question of goals in education and training, those of the *economic* and the *social*. In this paper, I attempt to identify the key issues that separate the social from the economic and, in these times of 'fuzzy boundaries', I examine a case which seems to point to a means of reconciliation: the idea of a learning society brought about by communities of learners. By 'community', I mean any group of people in geographic or electronic communication. I tend to use the term in the sense of 'communities of practice' (Gee 1997). In reflecting on the learning community as a means of reconciliation, I focus particularly on the problems of regional and rural Australia.

There are six key issues in our Vocational Education and Training (VET) system which help to define the difference between the economic and the social:

- What is VET?;
- Access and participation in VET: Pathways to what? Whose pathways?;
- Meanings of formal, nonformal and informal learning and education;
- The problem of 'transfer' of learning;
- Modes of learning and 'flexible delivery'; and
- Learning, change and values, and *whose* values if 'user pays'?

Issue 1: What is VET?

The example of the 'rural/urban divide' will be used to illustrate this point. Notions of 'rural' and 'urban' conjure up differing images of 'work' which reflect the binary nature of the terms. 'Rural' is commonly (though mistakenly) used as a synonym for agriculture or farming, with rustic, relaxed and pastoral backdrops. 'Urban' carries images of bustling people frequenting industrial landscapes and working in big factories or tall buildings.

Under the immigrant landed gentry who presided over the country's ride 'on the sheep's back', jobs and property were inherited and owned by the 'worker'. Consequently, notions of apprenticeship and training were quite foreign in the farming and agriculture sector. Conversely, the industrial revolution, automation, factories, unionism and occupational awards, organisational development, human resource management theory and practices, and a host of other concept systems originated from the idea of densely populated and tightly structured workplaces. Ownership was associated with the management not the worker. Apprenticeships belonged to the industrial landscape, not the rural one.

Our present understanding of the boundaries of the VET agenda are reinforced by Australia's use of 'declared vocations' (eg. DIRVET 1996, p.9) which were once based on a classed (the working class cf. the landed gentry), gendered (workmen, traditional male trades such as metals and building) and White Australia. Government expenditure on apprenticeship and traineeship training depend on which vocations or trades are 'recognised' from time to time. Given this tradition, it is hardly surprising that VET is associated with urban areas.

Issue 2: Access and participation in VET: Pathways to what? Whose pathways?

There is a problem of terminology and meaning here. Different systems and different people tend to refer to different ideas, and there is no single, convincing answer to be found in the literature. The term 'access' appears to have been supplanted or supplemented by the notion of 'pathways' of learning. 'Pathways' implies a linear access from 'low' levels of learning to more advanced ones, a problematic idea for adults and one which is beginning to be informed by recent research (eg. Golding 1996).

Perhaps an interim solution to the confusion is a model in which the term 'pathways' is used in reference to actual sequences of courses. The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) provides an example of a framework for locating courses in a format which allows people to move through it acquiring different qualifications in a timespan determined by themselves. However, a pathway might include non-accredited courses as well. In such a pathway of courses, a person may indeed 'learn' in a straight line. They may progress in a regular fashion from easiest to most difficult. In this sense of a pathway, the VET system does need to provide opportunities for people to progressively acquire incremental aspects of knowledge, values and skills.

At the same time, to avoid confusion with 'courses pathway' terminology, it is worth considering a cessation of use of the term 'learning pathways'. In addition to the confusion created, it also implies that a person learns on one particular track or line, and that other learning, which might occur at any time and be incidental and informal or nonformally acquired, somehow does not count. For example, consider the case of valuable learning from a nonformal evening class on numeracy skills. One participant is a small business operator who also watches an Open Learning program on the ABC on managing a small business, even though she is not formally enrolled. Through active but informal learning, this small business operator connects information from one source with the other which enables her to: first, hire a part-time trainee as an accounts clerk; and secondly, enrol in a TAFE Associate Diploma in Management gaining Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) status as a direct result of the numeracy class linked with information gained from the Open Learning program.

In this case, there is a clear notion of a *courses* pathway, but the progress of the *learning* which can be seen to contribute to the student's progress through the courses is less direct. Such an example also allows consideration of discussions to follow in Issue 3 concerning 'learning' and 'education'.

Given that a proportion of those undertaking training will be placed in employment, and that this employment will 'stick' - ie. become long term - what are the consequences for those who can't be placed in employment or who continue to cycle through short-term work interspersed with periods of unemployment? The system needs to provide for the majority but the bigger question is 'which majority'? People living in rural areas account for around 30% of the national population; women represent over half; and ethnic groups, disadvantaged youth, people with disabilities and the long-term unemployed/unemployable represent other significant proportions. The resulting 'majority', a composite of 'special groups', is hardly likely to be what Prime Minister Howard refers to as 'Mainstream Australia'.

Which brings me to the next question: Whose pathways are these, and whose ends do they serve? The Nation's? Industry's? The learner's?

Issue 3: Meanings of formal, nonformal and informal learning and education

Even the rhetoric of Dawkins' 'Clever Country' (1988) assumes a need to learn across all sectors of society. The frequency and multiplicity of uses of the word 'learning' that have arisen during this 'clevering' of Australia have been remarkable: Terms such as 'lifelong learning', 'continuous learning', 'action learning', 'informal learning', 'on-the-job learning', 'self-paced learning', 'learning in teams', 'heuristic learning', 'learning organisations', 'modes of learning' and 'flexible learning' are all part of our language now. However, there is a similarly prolific use of the word 'education' and there is considerable slippage between the two terms 'learning' and 'education'. Confusion arises when notions such as informal, nonformal and formal 'learning' and 'education' are used interchangeably.

The fallacy with all the definitions is that they state or imply that for any degree of formality of educational context, the *learning* which occurs somehow follows suit. For example in nonformal education, the 'learning situation' has certain features. Or is it that the institution which 'legitimises' the education has certain features, legitimised by 'government' and/or law? In formal education, the learning is carried out in a set of more formal circumstances. There is still a gliding or slippage between the two terms 'education' and 'learning'. However, none of the definitions make this clear.

Education or learning?

One means of clarification is to separate notions of education and learning in the literature, our thinking and policy. There is a justifiable rationale for a separation of *contexts* in which education occurs, while learning appropriate for different people and different purposes can be seen to occur in all these settings. What follows is an attempt to integrate and summarise the common aspects of the definitions, and to propose a clarification of the term 'education' when it is used to refer to various degrees of 'formality'.

There are characteristics of sites for education which allow them to be classified as more or less 'formal'. It seems that these characteristics include: the extent to which the learning of knowledge, skills, and values/attitudes is deliberate and systematic; the degree to which the

space, time and material formats are, on the one hand, explicit, defined, and structured or, on the other hand, incidental and culturally relevant; the social and legal status of the institution 'providing' or 'legitimising' the learning situation; the credentials acquired and required; and the qualifications for teacher and learner.

These characteristics will vary according to the *purpose* of the education in that setting. Yet none of the definitions talk about educational purposes, only of surface features. In addition there is a forced and contradictory aspect to defining 'education' in these terms when viewed against the data where farmers are engaged in so-called 'informal education'. Where is the cut-off point in application of the word 'education' in the 'over-the-fence' discussions between farmer and neighbour? Or at field days which combine social interaction with 'information dissemination' by suppliers and government extension officers? These folk would not refer to themselves as engaging in 'education' and yet learning is occurring, so why try to squeeze this activity into a definition?

It seems useful, then, to retain the term 'education' if its use is restricted to 'formal' and 'nonformal' sites of practice, where it is possible to talk about the deliberateness, the physical resourcing differences, qualifications and certification, and the legitimisation aspects for different purposes at different times. This enables us to make sense of the present government's scenario of conscripting and corporatising Australia's nonformal system of education for more formal and economically advantageous purposes. In this example, we see a valuing of the nonformal system because: it provides a cost-effective supplement to standard vocational provision; it is cheaper per student contact hour than the formal VET system; and it can be sold as obviously and specifically applicable to employers. The definition lacks usefulness and becomes artificial in discussions of 'informal education' where none of these variables is any more relevant than the other.

Regarding the term 'learning', it is all too easy to resolve the confusion by posing three 'forms' of learning (as opposed to education) - formal, nonformal and informal - and arguing that a learner may be engaged in one or all of these in a given learning situation. In research on orientation/training days for farmers on quality assurance, Falk and Kilpatrick (1997) observed that formal presentations were likely to be interspersed with small group discussions and a liberal amount of talk over the scones and cream at morning tea time. In these situations, a variety of aspects of learning were found to occur in the one learning situation or context.

How can any of these aspects of learning be classified as formal, nonformal or informal? The answer is that they can't, as they are all part of the process which occurs in that learning *context* or site of practice. We can say that the educational setting is more or less formal according to the characteristics summarised above, but how can we discriminate between formal, nonformal and informal in any particular learning situation? Why would we want to label them as such?

It *would* make sense to describe some aspects of the learning as 'incidental', accidental, unintended, random or spontaneous. But it is argued that these words have been used in place of an understanding of the learning process as integrating and involving all practices which

contribute to an outcome which is valued as 'learning' by a group of people. Learning incorporates all possible ways of achieving membership of this community or culture of practice (Billett 1993, Gee 1997, Lave & Wenger 1991). It may involve listening to a single speaker-as-teacher, reading, writing and talking with people in small groups, engaging in apparently idle conversation over sandwiches, perhaps taking notes and writing. It is in these learning contexts that language is used to jointly construct the participant as acquiring the valued knowledge, and where the participant as a result moves closer to acquiring the previously unfamiliar language and concepts encountered there (Falk 1997). The learning process involved in achieving these new knowledges and values are integrated into talk and actions. They are simply not separable or able to be labelled as formal, informal or nonformal.

Issue 4: The problem of 'transfer' of learning

The underlying point made above is that a group of activities will only be recognised as 'learning' if it is valued (in part Stevenson's 1996 notion of 'legitimate learning'). And it is only ever valued because it does someone some good. By inference therefore, it will disenfranchise those who do not hold those values. Learning can be recognised retrospectively when reflecting on past activities which were not valued at the time they occurred (Harrison 1997). This process has been formalised through RPL procedures. Yet there has so far been insufficient attention paid to precisely *what it is* that is being recognised and the effect of the precise circumstances under which it was acquired. If we put even some of the research together on the lack of transferability of so-called 'prior learning' to new and different scenarios (eg. Falk 1995a, Lawson 1991, Mikulecky 1981, Mikulecky & Ehlinger 1986, Perkins & Saloman 1994, Resnick & Collins 1994, Schmidt & Young 1987, Stevenson 1996), it might well ring more alarm bells for policy moves under the New Apprenticeship System (NAS) to make increased use of RPL mechanisms.

More troublesome is the translation of a system of assessment and RPL, designed and trialed in highly structured large industry settings, to regional and rural contexts. Here I have in mind the problem identified in Falk and Kilpatrick who found that 'values were at the core of resistance to change' (1997, p.iv). No increase in the availability of courses or convenience of delivery mode overcomes this single biggest barrier to farmers participating in VET. The values maintained in the more formal vocational education presented by the quality assurance programs were seen to be even more 'remote' by the learners (Falk & Kilpatrick 1997). Another factor working against the applicability of RPL for much of rural Australia is that the contexts of learning acquisition may be even more remote from the context in which the RPL assessor judges the skills to be now applicable.

The RPL issue in regional and rural Australia stems from the lack of a traditional 'vocational' formal pathway (eg. apprenticeship, traineeship) and the huge amount of experiential learning which has occurred in rural Australian workplaces. It is an issue. for example, for an experienced farmer who needs to undertake the management components of an agricultural certificate or diploma but does not need to do the practical components, and so wants RPL. This issue applies to forestry workers, machinery contractors, and stock and station agents, as

well as to farmers. This may render the RPL process even less valid (at least less useful and therefore less used) and certainly more difficult to implement than in urban settings.

This analysis highlights another set of questions relating to the current NAS initiatives. The questions relate to assessment in all its shapes and forms, and to the relationship between the transferability issue, assessment and reporting. The questions are these: Who is the assessment for? Who pays? Who gets the benefits? And when the assessment is completed and it comes to reporting the results: Who are the reports for? Who pays for them? Who will they benefit?

Issue 5: Modes Of learning and 'flexible delivery'

The issue concerning modes of delivery and flexible delivery is encapsulated by the question of access to technology. Essentially, there are two groups of questions, variously informed by research, regarding learning that are relevant. One concerns the need for *any* form of education and training for regional Australia which suffers from the tyranny of distance and a lack of facilities and resources that population centres often provide. Herein lie the justifications for various forms of distance education whether it is mediated purely by printed materials, as in the traditional forms of study by correspondence, or electronically by fax, phone, CD ROM, audio and video tape, Internet, or some combination of these.

The other group of questions concerns the *effectiveness* of such non-personal mediated forms of learning on which there is fairly conclusive research (eg. Falk & Kilpatrick 1997; Kilpatrick 1996; Australian National Training Authority 1996). On the issue of how farmers learn effectively, Falk and Kilpatrick (1997, p.iv) conclude that: 'For effective learning, delivery modes need to recognise and incorporate farmers' preferred ways of learning, and as well address the major problem of learning for values-change. In addition, on the basis of existing research, the report finds that farmers learn most effectively when they are able to interact with others farmers and with 'experts', and respond best to education and training which is directly relevant to their own businesses. Like other small business managers, farmers prefer informal and nonformal education and training to formal education (Kilpatrick 1996, Schofield 1996). In terms of implication for modes of delivery, Kilpatrick (in press) identifies the following characteristics for training programs to promote effective learning and participation:

- interactive training with opportunities for interacting with peers and 'experts';
- relevant topics applicable to the target group's situation;
- credible facilitators/instructors and materials;
- groups of people who regard each other as similar, or homophilious;
- reduction or removal of barriers such as child care and transport;
- sessions times and venues to suit the target group's work and personal lives;
- short sessions;
- value for money;
- programs that can be taken in manageable chunks; and
- marketing through associations, community groups and organisations.

As well as these characteristics, Kilpatrick (in press) identifies three other relevant factors. First, there is no one best way of delivering education and training for rural Australia. A variety of delivery methods and training programs should be available to meet the needs of different individuals and groups. Secondly, the fostering of interaction between participants and with 'expert' facilitators should be an integral part of program design and delivery. Thirdly, high quality flexible delivery materials should be developed for delivery in any rural location where there is a demand, and a national register of these training course materials and their providers should be established.

Schofield (1996) recommends that increased use be made of electronic communication for learning in rural and remote communities. Consideration of existing research, together with the findings of this study, suggests that further research is needed to determine the extent to which electronic interaction can replace face-to-face interaction in facilitating effective learning. A Queensland study, *Best practice principles for effective delivery of VET in remote areas* (ANTA 1996), recommends six principles which, in summary, relate to: staff characteristics for remote delivery; face-to-face provision; strong community support; community ownership; realistic expectations; and cultural and environmental impact on timing and planning. A high degree of convergence therefore exists between the aforementioned research across all items.

To resolve the question of resourcing for remote areas, along with the problem of accessing the required technology, it seems important to operate a flexible delivery system for rural and remote areas. The degree and nature of the flexibility will depend on: locally available resources; the capacity of participants to meet (and through which medium); the length of sessions; available technology; the backgrounds and prior knowledge/values/skills of the participants; the desired process; availability of facilitation; and the purpose/s of the learning. A model which encapsulates these criteria when planning, developing, delivering or evaluating some configuration of flexible learning is provided in the accompanying figure.

Issue 6: Learning, change and values, and whose values if users pay?

Western countries have all responded to the emerging features of contemporary social conditions, variously referred to as the information or technological revolution and the 'digital renaissance' (Spender 1997, p.4), by recognising the need for institutional change. Industry is restructuring, as are trade unions and their awards. Accepted social meanings of words such as 'family', 'gender' and 'employment' are also undergoing change. The causes of these changes have been discussed for at least two decades, but they seem to crystallise around six trends identified by Field (1995) paraphrased here as:

- *Environmental turbulence*: The speed of change plus amount of information produces a pressure to learn more, and more quickly;
- *Knowledge as a primary source*: The decline of the manufacturing sector and growth of service and information industries means organisations will depend more on the capacity to extend knowledge and apply it effectively;

- *Multi-dimensional change*: Integrated change across all sections of an organisation (eg. employee relations, work organisation, skills, technology and information management) produces a need to know more across boundaries of specialities;
- *More permeable, fuzzy boundaries*: A breakdown of barriers between 'inside' and 'outside' the organisation, formation of strategic alliances, visits across sites for benchmarking etc., flattening of layers of internal management, and facilitation of collaboration and sharing via computer and other networks, all of which produce a huge knowledge flow and necessity to learn;
- *Reduced time frames*: The pressure of reduced time frames results in a need to absorb new concepts and values, and to integrate new software and hardware; and
- *Internationalisation*: Instant global communication and trade in a deregulated environment means a magnified urgency for a flexibly trained workforce in responsive organisations.

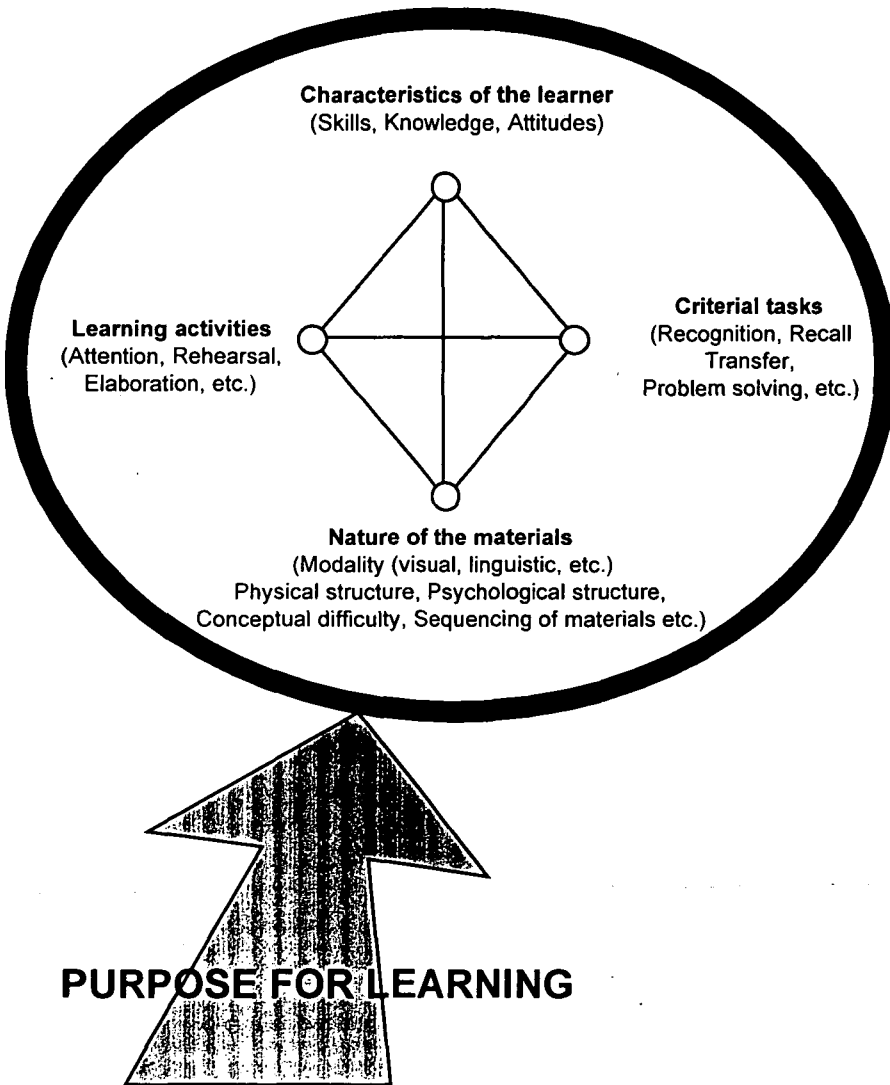
Although these trends relate to the organisational and management sector, they are broadly applicable to other sectors. With respect to the last trend, for instance, 'organisations' in the context of regional Australia could refer to bodies responsible for coordinating rural effort such as product bodies (*Meat and Livestock Corporation*), rural industry training organisations, rural suppliers (*Elders, Dalgety*), and professional and lobby groups (*National Farmers Federation*). There are four recurring themes in these points: communication; a focus on knowledge; a need to adjust to incorporate new values; and flexible assemblies of skills required in the workforce. These themes suggest a view of the kind of learning characterised here as being 'instant' and 'constant', and of a fundamentally different nature to the kinds of more measured and protracted learning processes with which we may be more familiar.

Falk and Kilpatrick show how sections of the rural industry respond differentially to the necessity for change, and that at the core of change is the need for learning:

The project identifies a number of barriers to farmers accessing imperative changes in their industry ... and indicates that these barriers should be surmounted. To a large extent, they can be overcome through implementing the proposed recommendations ... which all relate to quality in learning, in the interests of regional Australia achieving the hallmarks of a learning society (1997, p.ii).

In other research (Cole & Engestrom 1993, Engestrom 1995, Falk 1997), learning is shown to be a collaborative endeavour. The learners, teacher and texts (used in a broad sense, eg. Kress 1993) interact to produce and reproduce the changes in social practices which are accepted as 'what-counts-as-learning'. The reproduction of social practices as learning outcomes ('what-counts-as-learning') are shown by Falk (1997) to make sense by drawing on socio-historical discourses demonstrable at a broad social level and connected to specific instances of group conversational interactions. 'What-counts-as-learning' is shown to be co-constructed knowledge-values. It is also recognised that what-counts-as-learning will vary from time to time and place to place depending on the particular society's construction of the meaning of learning. A view of collaborative, co-constructed meaning (shared 'knowledge-value') through showing how learning occurs should be consistent with the above conditions.

Figure 1: A framework for considering the factors involved in flexible learning.



The bases for this framework originated with the work of Jenkins as adapted by Bransford (1979). It was further adapted by Falk (1995a, 1995b).

Given the above, and building on the assumption that values education is at the core of any education, it is desirable to reflect on the consequences of the so-called 'user pays' principle in our VET system. It can best be expressed by the conundrum: *If the user pays, whose values are they paying for? Is this made explicit? Why? Why not?* So what is the user paying for under such a system? Is it possible they will be paying for someone else's profitability? Perhaps the question should be: Who *should* pay?

Conclusion: The uniting conception of learning communities and communities of learners

People involved in the development of the policy and practice of urban and regional sustainability, and those engaged in community development, share strong underlying needs. These needs include: accepting and implementing change; accepting diverse values and views; learning to work together; developing alternative means of reaching goals, and needs relating to leadership and team work. There are symbolic terms which signify the struggle various individuals and groups are engaged in to fulfil these needs. Commonly used terms in the field of urban and regional sustainability include: 'development'; 'empowerment'; 'critical thinking'; 'social construction'; 'building a sense of identity'; 'achievement and assessment of objectives'; 'learning tool'; and 'learning to make decisions'. The Community Development Society in the United States of America uses language such as 'capacity building', 'empowerment' (again), 'self-help' and 'local control' (Hustedde 1997). Fundamental to all these notions is a capacity to *learn*. In some cases, learning is a direct synonym for the other terms. Yet learning in its own right seems to have received little attention as a strategic process for implementing sustainability for regions and communities.

David Korten, a business consultant, states that the 'global economy' for which we are training everyone 'preys on local economies with impunity' (1996, p.5). We have a choice, he says, of allowing 'a global economic system that is now functioning on auto-pilot beyond conscious human control to consume and destroy the ecosystem and our social fabric in its insatiable quest for money' (Korten 1996, p.5). Rifkin calls for a shift to rebuilding local communities. He claims we need a new focus which will help to counter 'the destabilising effects ... of new technologies and management practices (which) are displacing workers, creating a reserve army of contingent labourers, widening the gap between the haves and the have-nots, and creating new and dangerous levels of stress' (Rifkin 1995, p.198).

The idea of a 'community' can be used in order to expand the basis for using learning principles and practice to bring about change for sustainability in urban renewal and regional areas. Moreover, it is suggested that indicators of community well-being, including possible components of what it might mean to create a 'learning community', should be used as a possible alternative, or supplement, to community indicators of well-being such as 'unemployment' (Falk 1997).

Unemployment levels are often used by communities as indicators of community well-being (eg. Simmonds 1997, p.16). Unemployment affects a community in more ways than one, including its youth who often have to move to larger centres in order to improve their chances

of gaining employment. When changes to the agricultural sector and related 'bad times' are combined with the contemporary moves to resource rationalisation, evidenced in regional centres by the closure of services such as banking, medical and government offices, it is becoming increasingly difficult for rural communities to sustain a positive outlook amid such poor economic times. For communities in regional Australia ranging from unsustainable or marginally sustainable to sustainable, economic indicators such as poor 'employment self-image' of the community can create further damage by acting as the only reference point for being a successful community.

By contrast, so-called 'good' communities are reported to exhibit certain characteristics. Take, for example, the regional daily newspaper of Tasmania's northern region reports on the township of Deloraine which won the '1996 Australian Community of the Year'. Various words were used to describe Deloraine ranging from 'pride' (Editor 1997, p.8) to those of Voss (1997): 'spirit'; 'teamwork'; 'working together'; 'friendly'; 'support for each other'; 'everybody pulls together'; 'co-operation between everyone'; 'all walks of life working together'; 'people band together ... on a project'; 'grassroots community action'; and that 'what has been our strength is we've brought different lifestyles, different ideas and different views together and moulded them into this community outlook' (p.7). The achievement is even more noteworthy when set against the original impetus for repairing the community divisions of a decade or more ago caused by the 'greenies' versus the conservative residents or '... the good, honest old timers' as Voss (1997, p.7) quotes one resident.

More detailed research into indicators of community well-being is currently in progress. For example, the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia, University of Tasmania, is conducting a number of concurrent studies. But from a naive outsider's perspective, it can be said that the Deloraine community has certainly been engaged in constant 'learning'. It has learned that there are benefits in working together for common purposes, and it has certainly demonstrated that it has learned to achieve certain shared values. It has found that learning processes must cut across and merge previously separated groups and sectors. Equally obviously and naively, the various factions and groups whose values originally did not coincide have presumably both maintained their individual (or separate group) values, and learned some new values about the benefits of sharing goals while retaining a value for diversity.

In any conceptualisation of learning and training therefore, it seems that we disregard the four spheres of social activity at our peril. These four spheres of activity relate to: individual; organisation; community; and society. And learning must somehow account for all four spheres. However, since we (think we) know that learning is first about values, how do we reconcile these *four* potential value sets when we prepare for *one* training course?

Finally, the present VET system is one which has taken the emphasis off inputs (eg., reduced curriculum accreditation or registration, abolition of the ASF) and accentuated the outputs (assessment of outcomes, competencies). It is difficult to see how such a system converges with the necessity to work, change and learn across sectors, and across boundaries. I am advocating a learning society as being integral for any response to present and future needs in

VET, and certainly as the only means we have of reconciling the differences between the economic and social to the greater good. Yet learning itself is being relegated to the status of being 'only' an input. The nature of 'work' itself, as well as the way it gets done, is and will change. The point is that we must pay attention to these inputs if we are to achieve the characteristics of a learning society. It will be counter-productive and far more costly in economic and social terms to de-emphasise learning as an input.

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Technocrat or visionary? Reflections on the Kangan legacy

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Introduction

In an August 1974 edition of the *Associate News*, the newspaper of the Technical Teachers' Association of Victoria (TTAV), a sceptical editor titled the transcript of a recent speech by the chair of the Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education (ACOTAFE): 'Myer Kangan - Prophet, Saviour or Impostor in the field of technical education?' Kangan, a long-serving Department of Labour and National Service (DLNS) bureaucrat with a background in industrial training, had given his name to ACOTAFE's seminal report *TAFE in Australia: report on needs in Technical and Further Education* tabled in Canberra several months before (Kangan 1974). That he was unknown to the corralled ranks of educational practitioners who had lobbied so hard for a federal inquiry into technical education accounted for the headline, and a range of other less than subtle comments about his appropriateness for the role.

With the hindsight of more than two decades, however, Australian Technical and Further Education (TAFE) teachers and educators generally acknowledge the contribution Kangan made in giving the sector an identity, a philosophy, increased status, and much-needed funding. And the TAFE sector itself, though mauled by economic rationalism and a shift to meeting the needs of industry before those of individuals, remains an identifiable child of the report.

But in all that has been written and debated about the report over those years, little light has been shed on how the Kangan Report itself was constructed. Some key questions are suggested. What circumstances led to the request for a report on technical and further education? Who was Myer Kangan and why was he appointed? And, how was the report shaped, and by whom? Answers to these questions, though not entirely conclusive, add to the understanding of one of the nation's most significant educational interventions.

Why the Kangan Report?

An enduring myth of the Kangan legacy is that the report was a simple outcome of the Whitlam Labor government's social democratic agenda which emphasised equal opportunity, social justice and the right to satisfying work. The reality, however, was more complex and less than romantic. Forgotten in recent years was Labor's commitment to the colder realities of 'manpower planning': by the early 1970s, at a time of emerging economic crisis, capital and the division of labour demanded, but had not received, specific and pre-defined numbers of skilled and semi-skilled workers for placement in industry and commerce. Public and private sector initiatives over the previous decade, including overseas missions, migration programs and government-industry initiatives, demonstrated a need for real change to industrial practices. However, Australia's centralised arbitration system, though successfully brokering industrial peace, ensured also the maintenance of that time-honoured but ultimately conservative dance between employers and organised labour to regulate, pay and lead, but rarely transform. One tool for change, not immediately

obvious to the government at the time, was the development of a national system of technical and further education (Rushbrook 1995, pp.242-259).

Another Kangan myth is that the report was commissioned solely after intense teacher union lobbying and Minister for Education Kim Beazley's 1972 consequent discovery that the needs of over 400,000 post-compulsory students were not being met by either the universities or colleges of advanced education (Beazley 1980). Though certainly factors, these reasons alone are not sufficient explanation.

As with most matters related to education, fuller explanations of policy initiatives are usually found in other arenas, mostly political and economic. Labor's inertia may have been due to a belief that the sliding economy and skill shortages were short-term cyclical phenomena not demanding quick educational transformation, or that other strategies such as an open-university (subsequently abandoned) would meet the 'lost' students' needs. Another explanation suggests that the Victorian branch of the party was opposed to state-based technical education systems being colonised by the federal government. More generally, the sector's lack of influential sponsors and lobbyists, in spite of teacher union efforts, may also have contributed to inaction (Ford 1983).

An influential but forgotten player in the commissioning of the Kangan Report was Clyde Cameron, former Australian Workers Union official and Whitlam's Minister for Labour. It was Cameron, as much as Beazley, who persuaded Cabinet to establish an inquiry. And it was Cameron who suggested the appointment of Kangan as chair. Significantly, Cameron regarded technical education and manpower policies as 'complementary matters', with technical education as 'indispensable to the full development of the latter', though each, according to him, should be kept separate. It was this last suggestion that was enacted as Cameron established his own *Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Training* (the Cochrane Report) during the period of the Kangan inquiry. An underestimated partner to Kangan, the Cochrane Report stated that 'in the process of overcoming labour imbalances the potential of labour market training as an instrument of social policy has not been fully appreciated' (Fooks 1994, p.11). Another two decades were to follow before an attempt was made to reconcile Cochrane's labour market instrumentalism with Kangan's emphasis on 'the educational and social purpose of technical and further education' (in Batrouney 1984, p.169). Kangan freely admitted the dilemma: 'The problem of reconciling personal and public advantage is complex and not easily resolved. Its final solution will not be found in this report' (Kangan 1974, p.9).

Who was Myer Kangan?

Kangan remains an elusive personality. Though the bones of his biography are known, little has been revealed about his demeanour and role in shaping the report's outcomes. Kangan was born in Brisbane on 12 July 1917, the eldest of five children. Contrary to the comments of his critics, his first occupation was as a primary teacher in outback Queensland between 1934 and 1940. Declared unfit for military service, he was denied an armed-forces role during the Second World War but worked on war-related matters after joining the DLNS in 1943. Of interest to him and the nation was the problem of increasing war-time productivity with limited resources. In a move that shaped the remainder of his life, he began to research connections between industrial welfare and productivity, drawing

heavily on vogueish industrial management approaches offered by theorists such as Frederick Taylor and Elton Mayo. His research and practical experience led to a specialised career in personnel practice: in 1958 he wrote the first Australian book on personnel management and for many years edited the DLNS's journal *Personnel Practice Bulletin*. His administrative prowess saw him rise to high office and from 1962 to 1971 he was First Assistant Secretary of the DLNS and from 1972 its Deputy Secretary; on occasion he served as acting permanent head. For a long time he saw his destiny as departmental head (Goozee 1994, pp.1-5).

Kangan's emphasis on the human condition and its potential for enrichment or diminution through education, life and work was influenced strongly by his biography. Though apocryphal stories abound about him, two verified accounts reveal a little of his complexity. From his parents he learned of the vicious European pogroms involving many family members who were left helpless and stateless. Remembering this he felt a strong connection between individual ability and the obligation of using one's capacities for community service. He maintained an interest in associations for the welfare of the Jewish community until his death in 1991. He also had considerable empathy for people with disabilities, a view reflected in the report. He attributed this to an incident during his time as a teacher when at one stage he taught his sister. He knew that she was bright, but was concerned that she was not performing well at school - something was amiss. It eventuated that she was short-sighted, and, sitting at the back of the room, could not see the board. Kangan learned a great lesson from the experience: disabilities could be overcome and education could provide access and new beginnings (Mackinnon 1996, p.10).

Yet to meet him was often a difficult and harrowing experience. Though much respected as an efficient administrator he was universally feared for his sharp tongue and ruthless logic. In less formal environs, however, he could equally display great compassion, humour and empathy. He was short in stature, slightly built, rather florid in the face, had piercing eyes that saw all, and was balding and grey. He mostly wore light grey suits and possessed a loud and rasping voice. He was never keen to have his photo taken and throughout his life remained intensely private (Mackinnon 1996, p.8).

So, why then was a fifty-seven year-old labour market bureaucrat with few educational connections appointed to chair an important report into the condition of the nation's technical and further education sector? From Cameron's point of view, Kangan was eminently qualified. He was widely experienced in the machinations of the national and international labour market bureaucracies and possessed a reputation for achieving results. Not strictly an educationalist, he was nevertheless aware of the connections between vocational education and training, productivity and worker welfare.

To an extent, Kangan was regarded as 'Cameron's man' in the inquiry. Though rumoured to be an appointment of expedience to make way for a more politically favoured departmental head (Cameron 1990, p.237), he nevertheless relished the chance to head the ACOTAFE team. For Beazley, a politician who put ideas before pragmatism, Kangan was likewise considered intellectually appropriate. And with the appointment of part-time ACOTAFE members with technical education and industry backgrounds he was assured of a balance of viewpoints. With the inquiry in place from 26 April 1973, its members were virtually left to their own devices until they reported to parliament on 5 April 1974

(Kangan 1974). Neither Cameron nor Beazley anticipated the profound personal influence Kangan was to exercise over the direction the report took.

Writing the Report

As testament to Kangan's quixotic nature, recorded accounts of his role in assembling the report vary, often to the point of contradiction. One committee member, for example, noted seeing him shift from a 'hardline manpower expert' to someone who endorsed a 'concept of TAFE with a wider social and educational role' (Batrouney 1985, pp.169-170), while another saw from the beginning his talents as 'a leader with vision'. Other accounts recorded his lack of 'guile' or 'stealth' in running the inquiry (Fleming 1994, p.10), yet it was noted elsewhere that it was not beyond him to leave sticky issues to the end of the long ACOTAFE meetings where they were likely to be more quickly resolved. The range of these and other more dissonant views are most likely explained by the part-time nature of membership of the committeeⁱⁱ, where access to the private Kangan was difficult, and the added insights of those who worked closely with him within the inquiry's small secretariat (Mackinnon 1996).

In spite of differences in reading Kangan's approach, all who worked with him agreed about his influence over the inquiry's outcomes. It was Kangan who often worked twenty-hour days and laboriously wrote in longhand the first draft of the report (it was later refined by the inquiry's executive officer and a committee-member, and proof-read and corrected further by the remaining committee membership). It was Kangan who toured the country as leader of his team and asked the difficult questions; for example, immediately after arriving at one technical school, he cut the small-talk and asked the shell-shocked principal the difference between education and training! It was Kangan who insisted that committee members read UNESCO's 1972 Faure Report, *Learning to Be*, a key publication introducing the notion of recurrent education and lifelong learning. It was Kangan who steered the inquiry to come up with an agreeable pronunciation of the word 'TAFE'; such was his concern for the acronym that he specially flew an officer from Melbourne to the report's Canberra printer to ensure that 'TAFE' appeared on the front cover. It was Kangan who kept the inquiry distanced from political meddling, on one occasion noting wryly: 'Oh, I suppose I better go and see the Minister. I haven't seen him for a while' (Mackinnon 1996, p.12). And it was Kangan's commitment to the inquiry which produced a decline in his health, forcing him to take early retirement and bury any hopes that remained of heading his beloved department (Rushbrook 1995, ch.6).

Conclusion

So, prophet, saviour or impostor? Though obviously intended as hyperbole rather than careful analysis, the *Associate News* headline nevertheless captured the unease that educators felt about Kangan's appointment. Kangan's professional and bureaucratic distance from education and his often abrasive approach only exacerbated this anxiety. A prophet? Maybe, but perhaps in ways he didn't intend. For example, his foresight in introducing the concepts of recurrent education and lifelong learning strongly reflects 1990s' approaches to adult and workplace vocational education. Though an idea captured in post-Kangan years by the community education sector, it should be remembered that Kangan's particular application of recurrent education and lifelong learning was drawn

from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) which saw them as part of a strategy for closely connecting educational and economic systems in a way that contributed to a more efficient and productive capitalism (Duke 1976, p.453). In this sense, then, recurrent education and lifelong learning were trojan horses, serving the interests of self-selected, self-directed, non-credentialled adult learning yet containing within them possibilities for the other-directed and formal outcomes-based vocational training technologies we are so familiar with today. It is this turn that Kangan feared: that the needs of industry would take priority over the vocational and educational needs of individuals. Perhaps this was the price of his failure to reconcile personal and public advantage in vocational education provision.

Saviour? Definitely. His steering of (and sometimes by) an expert committee drawn from vocational education, industry and organised labour defined sharply the poor condition of technical and further education provision and brought its findings to national attention. Once on the Cabinet table, the TAFE option won over other vocational education and training possibilities (for example, increased funding for private enterprise training). Though not receiving the funds promised because of a declining economy, TAFE sympathisers were nevertheless soon able to witness great Taj Mahals rising on the sites of decrepit technical schools. Under Kangan and later but consequent reports and commissions, the TAFE sector became a reality (Rushbrook 1995).

Impostor? No. Kangan may have been an outsider to technical and further education but he brought with him from his labour market training background a profound understanding of the connection between learning, work and the human condition. Though judged too hastily a technocrat by those who did not know him, a closer reading of the private Kangan reveals qualities which predisposed him to the inquiry's wider vocational goals. To be bold, it could even be claimed that Kangan's personal emphasis on broad-based vocational education, access and lifelong learning (he was insistent, for example, on TAFE colleges establishing or re-building their libraries and locked funds in for this purpose) in fact *created* the agenda which marks the report as the final chapter in the 1960s and early 1970s educational reform movement. It is unfortunate that much of what today is offered in Kangan's name neglects this contribution.

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ⁱⁱ Membership of the Kangan Committee: Myer Kangan (Chair), George Brown (past chair of the Victorian Railways Commission), Cliff Dolan (General Secretary of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia; Senior Vice-President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions), Peter Fleming (Director of Staff Development, Public Service Board, South Australia), Neil Gow (Chair and Managing Director, R. M. Gow and Co. Ltd; immediate past-President of the Chamber of Manufactures, Queensland), Kathleen Holmes (Unilever Pty Ltd; Federal Secretary of the Institute of Personnel Management, Australia), Walter House (Director of Technical Education, Tasmania), Hugh King (Director, New South Wales Department of Technical Education), William Paterson (Director of Technical Education, Western Australia), George Lees (President of the Technical Teachers' Association of Victoria; Vice-President of the Technical Teachers' Association of Australia; Executive member of the Australian Teachers' Federation), Edwin Richardson (Assistant Professor of Education, Macquarie University).

VET and higher education relations: A response to Marginson

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Introduction

Simon Marginson's paper, 'Research on higher and vocational education: Different drums, different beats, not within earshot of each other' (this volume), depicts the 1990s with remarkable clarity and amplifies a number of political anomalies facing higher education and vocational education and training (VET) in the contemporary period. The themes emanating from the paper emphasise the dilemmas faced by all educational sectors in their quest for some sensible and coherent framework for integration, articulation and cooperation.

Convergence or political deception?

In 1936, Frank Sublet forecast two possible paths for the development of technical education. He first saw technical education organised on a highly specialised basis, its only role being to fulfil the needs of industry. Sublet (1936) saw this as most undesirable:

Admittedly citizens of the future will require specialised technical training but it is to be hoped that this will always be something that is merely supplementary to their general education, and that it will never occupy the position of primary importance in the educational organisation of any land.

Sublet's preferred course saw technical education fulfilling its potential to act as an agent of liberation.

Like Frank Sublet, Myer Kangan attempted to outline the basic concepts of a vision for technical education that would recognise and address the importance of the cultural backgrounds and personal aspirations of individuals through progressive education that was complementary to the needs of industry (Kangan 1974). Kangan provided an opportunity not only to realise Sublet's vision but also to provide a way forward for technical education that would secure it a legitimate future role. But the future Sublet envisaged was won and lost in 1974.

Through no fault of its own, the Kangan reform served to confuse the technical and further education (TAFE) agenda rather than clarify it. Duke (1976) suggested that 'dynamic conservatism' allowed TAFE to, on the one hand, accept and embrace Kangan's recommendations but, on the other, permit only token changes to be implemented to its charter. Kangan, along with others, was fully aware of the social, psychological and systemic barriers within TAFE which prohibited change, but could do little more than observe as it moved away from the integrated charter that he had clearly articulated.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the political and bureaucratic misunderstandings of the Kangan reforms became more apparent. As early as 1981, the Victorian Department of

Technical and Further Education sought clarification, without success, on the role and function of TAFE in the wake of the implementation of the Kangan reforms. An analysis of documents failed to provide a clear insight into current policies for TAFE in Victoria (Education Department 1981). In the same year Kangan addressed a national conference of TAFE Principals in Melbourne. He stated quietly and disappointedly that 'TAFE's inability to adapt to my philosophy is too silly for me to have to correct' (Kangan 1981).

And the beat goes on ...

When it comes to technical education, history repeats itself with an unfortunate degree of monotony. The argument for a national training system is, of course, far from new: debates on this issue date back to the early 1930s. In the past, the concept has been rigorously rejected by federal coalition governments which held the view that technical education should remain under the jurisdiction of State and Territory governments. In the contemporary period, one thus has to question the political will, sincerity and tenacity of the federal government in its support for a national training system.

The development of a view of training, based on agreed national standards, became part of the 1980s' agenda with disturbing ease. The trade union movement endorsed the concept of skills formation and expressed the need for greater accountability, and a rethink of the apprenticeship system. Some TAFE systems considered this national focus as a loss, reducing what little latitude they had to attempt a progressive educational role. Concentration on the formation of a national system, however, may have served only to camouflage a broader agenda, the politicisation of TAFE, the deskilling of the labour force through competency-based training (CBT) and CBT's final consequence - work intensification.

Articulation or segmentation

The debates of the 1980s heralded the beginning of a period of instability which will last well into the next century. Ambiguity in the roles of Australia's educational sectors is opening the door for a resurrection of a two-tiered higher education system. In his retiring address as Chairman of the Victorian Chapter of the Australian College of Education, Dr W R Lang recalled how, in Manchester, England, technical colleges such as the Owen's College, the Manchester Technical College and the Royal Technical College successfully acquired university status and shed their vocational diploma work and part-time courses:

If the golden words 'university', 'degree', 'academic' should take charge and the college of advanced education should forget its vocational heritage ... will someone else, some new bodies arise to take up those very vocationally valuable courses, shed for reasons of pseudo-respectability? (Lang 1973).

Blurred educational boundaries result, in part, from the Government's inability to govern with clear determination and an inability to foster an environment of conciliatory debates across, and between, sectors. More clearly differentiated boundaries may eventuate, boundaries which actually separate TAFE, VET and higher education.

Already the 1990s have seen the emergence and growing stability of two disparate and non-competitive sectors - TAFE and VET, understood here as comprising non-TAFE providers of vocational programs. In the absence of clear government direction, TAFE institutions once again are being forced to redefine their own commission. (An analysis post-1988 of enrolment patterns in TAFE, against those of private providers and VET in schools, is worth an investigation). Marginson notes that TAFE and universities are ignorant of, and often sceptical and/or hostile about, each other. What he omits to add is that TAFE and parts of the broader VET sector are equally sceptical and hostile towards each other.

The early 1990s saw a rush by universities to enter the VET arena. While this paper is not the place to discuss nor debate motives, universities need to re-examine the responsibilities this intervention represents. It is an unfortunate reality that, in their quest for research brevity and novel solutions, duly rewarded by Commonwealth dollars, some university researchers have shown little interest in TAFE establishments, overlooking the diversity and historical contexts which characterise the culture and inhibit change.

Universities are historically positioned to help facilitate what will be a challenging decade of transition for TAFE nationally. To achieve articulation, sectoral cooperation and joint research endeavours, a number of critical issues need to be addressed, not the least being the scepticism to which Marginson refers. Marginson also comments on the conservatism within our educational systems:

It is noticeable that the higher education research groups do not work on VET-related projects, and the VET research groups do not work on higher education-related projects, and there have been few explicitly cross-sectoral projects. This clearly needs to change.

In working together, care needs to be taken so that research effort does not replicate or validate the errors of the 1980s and early 1990s which heralded much discussion, debate and supposed sectoral reconciliation but which, in fact, provided little convergence or guidance to TAFE organisations. Despite the political resilience of TAFE, if the next decade fails to return revenue to governments for efficiency gains then TAFE systems, and the government-subsidised VET sector, may not survive. It is important that researchers consider investigative relevance more than they have in the past.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Marginson recommends 'improved formal articulation arrangements, closer alignment of cost structures, the deconstruction of the inherited culture of segmentation between the sectors and the development of a field of knowledge that crosses both VET and higher education'. These will not be achieved unless higher education institutions recognise that the journey, the paradigm, the agenda, the pedagogy, the priorities and the research methodologies for TAFE research, must be allowed to surface from within TAFE. Very few researchers and academics have had any direct experience of TAFE. The impetus to change this situation must come from within TAFE.

if this does not occur, the 1990s will prove to be simply another wasted opportunity in the history of technical and further education in Australia.

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Policy symbolism and economic realities: ACE, equity and the market

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Adult and Community Education (ACE) providers often depict themselves as moving to the beat of different drum compared with the big bands of vocational education and training (VET). On the margins, ACE sounds its sweeter harmonies of local responsiveness, flexibility, concern for disadvantage and commitment to lifelong learning.

ACE is marginal in various ways: marginal to policy, marginal in resources allocated, and marginal in being run by a largely volunteer and female workforce. It is apparently marginal in public policy terms, since a recent analysis of education policy in Australia mentions it not once (Marginson 1993). Yet ACE appears to have some symbolic value for governments who desire a more market-driven system of VET. The sector can be held up as an example of the kind of client-focused delivery which the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) desires in a more open and competitive VET system.

The 'ACE sector' is a policy construct which can be made to represent significant symbolic values in policy struggles around the de-regulation of vocational education and training. ACE national policy (eg. MCEETYA 1997) speaks perhaps less to sectoral interests than to the bigger issues around lifelong learning in post-compulsory education generally. Two Senate reports in five years (SSCEET 1992, SCEET 1997) have done much to give ACE this symbolic value. Thus Federal Labor, now out of office, has time to repent its 'persistent neglect' of ACE as it seeks to re-orient educational policy to lifelong learning (Baldwin 1997).

In this paper, I highlight the divergence between policy rhetoric and the economic realities of community adult education agencies. In practical terms, I argue that this gap needs to be closed by a greater recognition of community providers within a more open and competitive system of vocational education and training. Current thinking on the development of a 'competitive training market' is failing to imagine a future in which community providers might play a bigger role, and in particular, a role in social justice. Their potential role is being frustrated by the narrow terms in which VET competition policy is being constructed (eg. ANTA 1996) as well as differences in the attitudes and funding policies of state training authorities to ACE.

I argue that ACE can play a larger part in achieving equity in a market-driven VET system. However, to conceive of a public policy framework where this is possible requires a better understanding of equity in the context of competition policy than has been so far been advanced. It also requires a better understanding of the economic realities of ACE as a largely 'user-pays' system. In exploring this view, I will refer to recent research conducted for the NSW Board of ACE on the economics of ACE (McIntyre et al. 1997).

My subtext is a conviction that a more open and competitive allocation of public funds would allow a larger role for ACE organisations in VET. If a more competitive system makes the achievement of equity objectives more problematic, then given the widespread

belief that ACE is an avenue of 'second-chance education' (SSCEET 1992), the potential role of community-based providers in equity needs to be considered.

Policy symbolism and the ACE sector

Within the symbolism of national VET policy, ACE seems to represent alternative policy positions in a number of areas. This is underlined by the provocative recommendations of the recent report of a second Senate Committee on ACE, *Beyond Cinderella* (SCEET 1997) and its challenges to the current boundaries of vocational education and training.

Several key discourses can be found in ACE policy which bring it into major policy struggles around the 'reform' of vocational education and training. There is the ubiquitous discourse of lifelong learning. The ACE sector has been able to represent itself as embodying principles of lifelong learning in national policy (eg. MCEETYA 1997, SCEET 1997) and hence become more 'mainstream' and relevant by mobilising support for this concept in forums beyond the community sector.

A second is the discourse of the economic necessity of education and training markets associated with economic rationalism (Marginson 1993). In adult education, the reality of 'the market' arrived some time ago. General adult education as provided through community agencies is largely resourced through 'user-pays' with little other funding support except in Victoria. Community providers think in marketing terms of their educational provision as few other agencies do.

There are some aspects of this 'marketisation' of adult education that are worth noting. Governments imposed user-pays adult education as a deliberate policy in order to limit demands on the ballooning education budgets of the 1980s. It is little appreciated how the state has acted upon the 'ACE sector' to encourage a specific education market based on self-managing community organisations. This marketisation occurred in the wake of the expansion of community agencies which extended the demands made on government for community services. In short, 'user-pays' adult education was about encouraging local 'markets' for adult education services and limiting state expenditures. Thus marketisation went hand in hand with the communalisation of adult education (McIntyre 1995, 1997).

A third discourse evident in ACE policy is one of equity as second chance education for disadvantaged groups. The first Senate Report, *Come in Cinderella* (SSCEET 1992), claimed an access and equity role as one of the major achievements of ACE. It is remarkable how the equity vocabularies of the 'Kangan philosophy' of TAFE were taken up in ACE just as they were being taken out of TAFE by training reform. The new policy symbolism of the 'emerging ACE sector' and its significance for disadvantaged groups obscured questions about the effects of economic realities of user-pays and resource-starvation on access and equity.

Since then, the equity discourse of second chance education has become an important way of linking ACE into policy struggles around the de-regulation of public vocational education. Thus, the corporatisation and marketisation of public vocational education and training is seen as threatening TAFE's ability to deliver equity outcomes. Equity is a 'casualty' of competition policy, a market failure (ANTA 1996). Hence, other providers might help to deliver on equity policy. The Employment and Skills Formation Council was one of the bodies that followed the Senate report and picked up the theme of the value of ACE as a 'second chance' provider within a diversifying system (ESFC 1992).

The symbolism of responsive, community-based providers concerned with access and equity and calling upon a powerful discourse of communitarianism, has helped to fill the vacuum created by the abandonment of the 'community access' ideal of TAFE in the post-Kangan 1980s (McIntyre 1995).

Economic realities: User-pays and equity in ACE

The emerging research evidence suggests a different picture of ACE's achievements in the equity domain, and the second Senate Inquiry into ACE has been more sanguine about the realities of ACE as 'second chance' education (SCEET 1997). *Beyond Cinderella* mounts a blistering attack on the narrow vocationalism of ANTA and its failure to promote a national system of lifelong learning. By reasserting ACE as lifelong learning, the report repositions the sector within a global rationale for post-compulsory education and training and exposes the boundaries of adult and vocational education as arbitrary and destructive of the ideal of a learning society (SCEET 1997). Other reviews of ACE's role in VET (eg. Schofield 1996a) suggest that its role in meeting the needs of disadvantaged participants is highly dependent on public funding and quite limited by the effects of ACE's user-pays base.

The research evidence is against the view that ACE, at least general adult education, is performing an important equity role. Participants in general adult education courses are relatively advantaged in terms of their employment and qualifications (see McIntyre et al. 1995; ACFE 1995; McIntyre & Crombie 1996), though it is true that some ACE organisations are dedicated than others to achieving equity outcomes (Kimberley & McIntyre 1997).

Consequently, some state adult education authorities have shifted the policy focus to widening participation of 'non-traditional' participants and urged providers to target the lack of participation by disadvantaged individuals and groups. The theme of 'widening participation' is not a peculiarly Australian emphasis, but also currently a major concern of government abroad, especially in the UK (eg. Uden 1996).

The question is how far these participation patterns are the result of the marketisation of adult education. We have some evidence of the effects on ACE organisations and the participant profiles of user-pays funding regimes in recent research for the NSW Board (McIntyre et al. 1997). *The Economics of ACE* examined the finances of recognised NSW ACE providers in relation to funding issues, the costs of delivery and the effects on equity in participation. This research developed an ecological analysis which sees participation patterns as the result of an interplay of funding regimes, provider cultures and strategies, the demands of ACE clienteles and the character of the 'community' being served. This led to an analysis of the first AVETMISS data collected from ACE to map the catchments of providers and link participation rates for postcodes to socio-economic indicators such as income, occupation and education.

The research concludes that existing funding regimes, together with a 'user-pays' system over the last decade, have probably discouraged participation by people in disadvantaged postcode areas. One explanation for differences in postcode participation rates seems to hold for urban areas and another for rural and remote areas. To survive financially, ACE providers in urban areas target relatively advantaged clienteles who have a given capacity to pay for the kinds of courses they want at a given level of fees and who are concentrated in particular localities. In the absence of funding regimes which require equity outputs,

participation tends to narrow to clienteles advantaged in terms of qualifications, employment and income living in more affluent areas. Thus a combination of two factors, household income and population density, could account for most variation in participation in ACE in Sydney postcodes. In rural areas, the availability of government funding supporting providers in itself is a major factor explaining participation. Without significant subsidies there would be no provision, given rural population and income levels.

It is hardly surprising that the provision of adult education on a user-pays basis is highly susceptible to variations in the capacity of residents in particular localities to demand and purchase courses. But the consequences are significant for the development of ACE organisations and what they actually provide, since the ethos and delivery of courses will tend to reflect the needs and cultures of advantaged clienteles rather than the special needs of different equity groups, or the particular needs in particular localities.

This limits the extent to which providers target individuals in need as opposed to maximising fee-paying students. Few localities have the required levels of affluence to support any program targeting 'equity groups' from surpluses generated from fees, and providers are highly unlikely to do so unless this is rewarded by the funding regime, which it is not. (The indicator of affluence employed in the study was the proportion of households having a 1991 household income over \$50,000).

The consequence is that ACE providers choose to 'compete' in different ways in this deregulated and 'communalised' provision of adult education (McIntyre 1997). More affluent providers can compete in the general adult education and business services markets of the inner city. Providers in less affluent areas (and particularly those in poorer and less populous localities) have fewer options in developing their financial base. Hence, the failure of cost-recovery has driven some ACE organisations into submission-based and targeted State or Commonwealth programs which reach groups who do not usually participate in ACE. Because this funding is equity targeted, the effect in policy terms is that the Commonwealth programs has been underwriting equity in NSW if not other in States and Territories where ACE is user-pays.

The effects of this political economy of provision can be seen in the diverse income and activity profiles of ACE organisations in NSW. While some larger inner urban organisations generate most of their revenues from course fees, providers in poorer areas have gone in search of alternative funding, while small rural centres are effectively subsidised to deliver programs to remote communities. Those providers forced to seek alternative funding have diversified into labour market programs, literacy provision and employment services. With the change in government and reduction of some of these programs, and the privatisation of the CES, it is not surprising that some of these organisations have moved strategically to develop employment services linked to their adult education and training provision.

The reality is that ACE has an equity role mainly as a result of the diversification away from its general adult education base. The outstanding recent feature of this diversification - but only where state training authorities have recognised ACE as VET providers - is a growing provision of accredited VET courses (see Schofield 1996a). This diversification has thus been driven largely by the lack of resources, but it has had the positive outcome of differentiating the programs available and expanding the range of clients served. In many places, ACE is filling gaps left by the retreat of TAFE from short course activity, precisely the outcome desired by the restructuring of TAFE in the mid-eighties.

What then is the potential role for ACE given these effects of the user-pays funding regime? What is needed for ACE to have a bigger impact on equity? Clearly, the capacity of ACE organisations to achieve equity outcomes is highly dependent on appropriate funding regimes, which are a function of the structures of ACE provision across the States and Territories. A funding regime must target those who do not otherwise participate and encourage the development of appropriate services for them.

Other research shows that, by and large, this kind of targeted funding regime is as yet poorly developed in ACE. For example, it is doubtful that the rhetoric about 'pathways' from ACE to VET for disadvantaged women, a goal of the national women's VET strategy, is matched in practice. As a generalisation, only in those States where there are strong networks of independent ACE providers, together with targeted funding, is this bridging likely to occur (McIntyre & Kimberley 1997).

In the Victorian ACE sector, for example, there is an orientation to this bridging role among its many small providers who tend to be funded by a mixture of provider grants, user-pays and submission-based community services funding. Fierce competition for VET funding among public and community providers is further complicating the economics of this provision. In such a competitive system, what might be the role of community providers, and how might they fare in this competition?

It has been argued by Schofield (1996a) in her review of the contribution of ACE to national VET system that ACE has numerous competitive advantages. It is responsive to demand in local and regional labour markets and does so in localities serviced by neither public nor private providers. It contributes to community development and is able to integrate with other agencies and identify and meet the demand for relevant VET. It usually has a learner-centred culture able to address the specific needs of particular 'equity groups'.

However, as the foregoing discussion has demonstrated, the capacity of ACE to meet the needs of disadvantaged learners is dependent on public funding precisely because ACE is a user-pays system within an increasingly de-regulated 'training market'. Equity in ACE provision is limited by the constraints of cost-recovery and competition for adult learners with a capacity to pay.

Hence, how the 'rules of competition' make available public funds is crucial to ACE's ability to participate in a more competitive environment. The question is whether the rules of competition will be written to allow ACE organisations which have developed competitive advantages in meeting equity needs at a local level to compete. In most States, at present, they are not.

Barriers in policy to ACE's equity role

There are other policy barriers to ACE taking a greater equity role. Current ANTA thinking (eg. ANTA 1996) places a number of obstacles in the way of a larger equity role for community providers. These include inadequate policy understandings of equity and competition which make it difficult to envisage how equity outcomes can be an integral part of an open and competitive system, let alone give community providers a part to play.

Schofield (1996b) makes a crucial point about equity and the market in a recent paper. She argues that advocates of social justice weaken their position by opposing the marketisation

of TAFE, rather than conceptualising how equity might be achieved within a more competitive VET system. Schofield suggests that it is time to question the way social justice objectives are opposed to objectives such as efficiency which might be achieved through greater competitiveness. Social justice principles need to be embedded in national frameworks for a competitive VET system and not be an after-thought.

One question is how equity might be understood as a kind of demand. How can equity be a positive outcome of a more demand-driven system, which it is the business of providers to target and deliver and which can (in the current lingo) be 'purchased by government'? Equity as an objective of competition would acknowledge the possibility that some providers are better placed to deliver equity outcomes than others, will seek to develop their competitive advantages in doing this, and so on.

However, there are general problems with the construction of 'equity' in national policy which make it difficult to develop this argument further. For example, the following generalisations seem to hold:

- Equity is understood in tokenistic terms, not as highly differentiated and compounded. VET policy in various places speaks of the 'representation' of 'target equity groups' and denies the compound nature of disadvantage experienced by individuals (see Golding and Volkoff 1997).
- Disadvantage is not understood as localised and unequally distributed over localities and regions, nor is it understood in terms of variations in local and regional labour markets. Yet labour markets are a key element in thinking about how 'efficiently' as well as how 'equitably' VET meets demands for skills.
- Because disadvantage is compound, localised and unequally distributed, the burden of achieving 'equity outcomes' is not evenly shared across VET systems or across institutes or networks of provision, and providers are not necessarily resourced to achieve such outcomes (Butler & Lawrence 1996).

There are several consequences of these examples of inadequate understandings of equity. There is a failure to acknowledge the role of locally responsive provision in favour of vague notions of demand from a singular 'industry client'. Hence, competition policy continues to write out community-based agencies, indeed to write out the whole dimension of regional diversity in need and demand for VET.

The policy failure in understanding equity is compounded by a failure to recognise the nature of education and training markets. For example, current thinking:

- speaks of a monolithic 'training market' when in reality markets are differentiated or segmented, including those of adult education.
- alludes to a singular industry 'client' when there are many clienteles with different needs and demand for VET which interact with providers in a complex way. ANTA's own commissioned research shows that demand for VET is mainly differentiated by enterprise size and type of industry (Hayton et al. 1996).
- fails to understand demand as differentiated in local and regional labour markets which interact with variable supply of VET, with little understanding of an 'ecology of provision' of the kind outlined in the discussion of ACE.

- ignores key differences between urban and regional Australia in the nature of training markets, and the recommendations of policy for decades on the necessity of cross-sectoral collaboration in rural provision (eg. NBEET 1991).

Because the training market is understood in such terms, it is virtually impossible for current policy to project how equity outcomes might be achieved in a de-regulated system. The failure to see equity as something localised and differentiated is paralleled by the failure to recognise the local and regional nature of education and training markets (or labour markets for that matter). The effect is to make it difficult to imagine how community providers might play a role in a relatively open system responding in a complex way to its markets. Nevertheless, there is an argument that ACE organisations are well-placed to take such a larger role, given appropriate conditions.

Conclusion.

This paper has developed the view that the policy symbolism associated with adult community education is obscuring the economic realities of the sector and hindering a realistic understanding of what it might achieve within a diverse and market-driven VET system. It has highlighted some of the difficulties to be overcome if ACE is to play a larger role in equity within a competitive system. These include the significant limitations which user-pays places on community providers and their priorities and educational culture, and the significant difficulties for ACE in the way VET policy currently understands equity and the market. The 'rules of competition' are being written in a way that limits the potential of ACE to contribute.

The paper, in taking an ACE perspective, has argued that current ANTA policy fails to appreciate the local or regional dimension to equity and the market. This can be corrected in a number of ways, for example by: widening its concept of the 'intermediaries' who may identify and meet demand for VET to include community organisations; understanding demand for VET in terms of local and regional labour markets which both mediate the demands of industry for skills and influence social and personal needs of individuals; understanding disadvantage as highly localised, differentiated, and compound; and recognising that equity is a kind of outcome that can be competitively provided for. Finally, equity should not be inevitably constructed as a casualty of competition policy, or as the sole province of public providers and their 'community service obligations'.

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The Frontline Management Initiativeⁱ

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Introduction

David Karpin's 1995 report, *Enterprising Nation*, is one of a number over recent years which have argued for an effective response to the new challenges of the domestic and global business environment. Commissioned in mid 1992 by the former Minister for Employment, Education and Training, the Hon. Kim Beazley MP, the report is the work of an industry task force. The task force included experts in management, engineering, economics and education, drawn from major corporations, small business, higher education and the human resource, consulting and advisory sectors. They were to advise on measures to strengthen management development and business leadership within Australian enterprises. They were asked to identify effective management practices in a range of areas, to raise awareness of the need for improved leadership and management skills and to foster enterprise commitment to management development.

The task force comprised sub-committees with specific areas of responsibility and was underpinned by 27 research projects which extended from analysis of management skills needed for international operations to the challenges of management in the twenty-first century. The Frontline Management Initiative is a direct response to one of the major findings of the task force: that increasing globalisation, widespread technological innovation and pressure on business to customise products and services have created an international business environment that requires managers to have skills and characteristics radically different from those of only a decade ago. In a change from the autocrat of the past, today's manager must be a communicator, but tomorrow's manager should be a leader or 'enabler'.

If we accept the results of the research that led Karpin to his assessment, then these skills obviously need to be developed; yet Karpin found that Australian enterprises, educational institutions and other training providers are lagging behind in the preparation of managers to meet the new needs. He also found that overseas enterprises are quickly leaving Australia behind in the march to the new century. If we also accept in the economically rationalist climate of the nineties that 'good managers are the key to a more competitive economy and higher performing enterprises', as Karpin did, then it follows that governments will be keen to embrace initiatives such as the FMI that are designed to redress existing weaknesses in Australian management education, training and development, and 'pave the way for improved national prosperity in the future' (Karpin 1995, p11).

In May 1996, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) Ministerial Council agreed to a series of major reforms to expand employment and career opportunities and to create a highly capable and flexible national skills pool. With the broad support of industry, ANTA has risen to the Karpin challenge by initiating the Frontline Management Development Strategy. This Strategy is aimed at supporting enterprises to raise their performance by developing the competency of their frontline managers. It enables

competency to be developed and assessed in the workplace and empowers enterprises to make their own decisions about ways to improve frontline management competence. While it is not the purpose of this paper to attempt to justify the contentious issue of competency based training, it is important to acknowledge that the trend has been accepted by successive governments and by major players in industry and so is the way at least of the foreseeable future.

What do these developments mean for those who provide education and training for Australian managers? This paper will briefly describe the implementation of the FMI through the development of the Frontline Management Development Kit. This kit puts the task of upskilling Australia's managers firmly in the hands of the enterprise, taking it out of the control of educational institutions. There will also be an attempt to look at some of the ramifications of the introduction of this and similar training packages, considering especially Karpin's recommendation that the Frontline Management Development Strategy be 'driven' by industry and enterprises.

The FMI training package

The concept of training packages as a means of allowing greater flexibility in options and choice at the enterprise level within a national framework was developed in a draft policy paper prepared by ANTA in 1996. As a training package the FMI is in the forefront of the implementation of this policy and is being trialed in five enterprises across the nation. Like all such packages, it comprises the following endorsed components: national competency standards; national assessment guidelines; and national qualifications.

The FMI presents state recognition authorities with a challenge (that most have not yet met) in that rather than being based on a conventional curriculum, it has an assessment framework leading to the awarding of three qualifications at AQF Levels Three, Four and Five. Under the Australian Recognition Framework, training packages like this will become the norm rather than the exception and it is expected that a growing number of such packages will soon be available on a national register for application across Australia.

This approach marks a significant departure from the kind of conventional approaches to management training and development that we have been accustomed to in Australia and its with the idea that such training be enterprise rather than institution driven. The FMI explicitly avoids the process of converting standards to a curriculum and developing a course in line with this curriculum. In doing so it has the potential to create problems for a narrowly focused training provider who might see no way to deliver a 'qualification' other than by presenting a student with a prescribed course in a conventional classroom setting.

The approach might also be problematic for a provider used to being the sole arbiter on deciding whether or not course requirements have been met for the granting of an accredited award. It identifies competency gaps and allows for the negotiation of strategies, often work-based, to overcome them. Though a data base of suitable courses will be provided as an option for students, this information will simply be supplied as a resource. The student may decide instead to use project work or to develop a mentor within the workplace in order to bridge the identified competency gap.

The Frontline Management Development Kit

The Kit has been developed by ANTA as a package to inform enterprise decisions on the development of their frontline managers. The expectation is that using the Kit an enterprise will be able to improve its productivity, create high performance, and link the development of its frontline managers to its strategies, vision and development plan. In short, it will be able to upskill its frontline managers in the workplace so that they are ready to take on the business world, locally and internationally, and meet the challenges of the twenty first century. To quote directly from the Kit:

The key to improving the performance and productivity of an enterprise is to have highly competent frontline managers. Therefore the competence of managers has to be of direct relevance to the enterprise's business goals. Frontline management development can be used to increase the performance of frontline managers. This development should be part of a strategy linked to business goals.

By linking frontline management development with business goals, your enterprise will become a better performer and more competitive enterprise. In addition, integrating Frontline Management Competencies with business goals provides the enterprise with important information to assist with:

- planning training and development;
- assessing and recognising current competencies;
- planning for career development;
- identifying competencies which are transferable to other occupations or functions;
- performance appraisal (ANTA 1996c, p.4).

The Kit includes the Frontline Management Competencies and advice and guidelines on assessment and learning strategies. It explains to industry players the intricacies of the training reform agenda and offers a step by step guide to coordinators of and participants in the training and development process. It also includes implementation support material and development options directories. The promise of this particular training package is that it offers much more to employers than the generic management course of yesteryear.

Implementation of the FMI follows a four step process: gaining the commitment of enterprises to the notion of frontline management development; identifying the participants for development; conducting an initial assessment; and preparing individual development plans. Is this process likely to be accepted as a better option for enterprises than advertising for an enterprising, talented, innovative, yet inexperienced, young MBA full of theory and bright ideas? Is it preferable also to sending a promising employee off to do a management course which will take years of time and not inconsiderable expense for a possibly nebulous outcome?

What will it mean for the frontline manager? This is most probably a person who left school at age 15 or more, who has gained a vocational qualification and become technically proficient in their chosen field before being elevated to a managerial position, but who has little or no management training. The FMI offers her or him an opportunity to gain a national management qualification which is portable across Australia and all he or she

has to do is demonstrate workplace performance. It recognises the competencies this person has developed through experience within the workplace and can provide formal recognition of them. No more irrelevant night school classes learning how to, for example, 'manage information' when the job has required them to do that for years. And, any gaps in management skills which are identified can be learned on the job with the employer agreeing to provide the opportunity for such learning where necessary and in the most appropriate way. The benefits to both employer and employee are not difficult to seeⁱⁱ.

The ramifications

What are the ramifications of this 'paradigm shift' (Varpins 1996, p.3) for the way management training is delivered and organised in Australia? Perhaps of most relevance to educators is that the role of the trainer as 'expert' is significantly changed. From being the font of all knowledge, the training provider must learn to consult with enterprises to assist them to arrive at a management training program which specifically meets their needs. This may include customising the generic standards, providing advice or assessment services or perhaps upskilling other employees from the enterprise so that they can competently carry out the required assessment. However, one could ask how many providers are ready to provide this service to industry? And how many are even beginning to think about gearing up for the change? Unless training providers are willing to adopt the training package approach, either they will miss out on management training in the future or the initiative will have trouble succeeding.

The competency approach to the training of frontline managers requires a high level of commitment. Though it promises flexibility and individualisation, it is perhaps a more complex approach than just sending an employee off to do a traditional course. This begs the question, however. The traditional approach to management training has been available for many years but Karpin reports that more than 80 per cent of current Australian managers have no formal management training, let alone a management qualification. With the increase in 'User Choice' it will perhaps be the participants who will seek out the FMI option from those training providers who are able to embrace the new role and give them the assistance they need.

Of the training providers who are ready, how have they prepared their staff to meet client expectations? To register as a provider of the FMI, the training provider must have assessors who will need to be not only competent workplace assessors, with all that implies, but will also themselves be able to meet the FMI generic competency standards. How many current trainers are workplace assessors let alone also have management competencies which can be demonstrated in their own workplace? Recognition authorities also require that FMI training providers meet the following criteria:

- provision of consultancy services to candidates;
- ability to customise competency standards while maintaining validity;
- ability to undertake workplace assessment;
- to facilitate learning by flexible methods;
- to facilitate individual learning plans;
- to facilitate practical/fieldwork experience;
- to map/link learning activities to the competency standard; and
- to validate the benefits of learning to the organisation and/or the individual.

There are obvious risks in this approach to management training and development especially in ensuring that the credibility and integrity of the FMI are maintained. As Varpin so rightly acknowledges, the 'main strategy for risk minimisation is professional development for the practitioner' (Varpins 1996, p.10).

This paper has attempted to outline the radical change which the implementation of competency based training in general and the FMI in particular will bring to the education industry. If training providers do not embrace this change it has often been said that change will be very slow, will go nowhere, or the status quo will continue. I would argue that the development of the FMI Kit, its eager embrace by large enterprises and the determination of the policy makers to remove training from us, the educators, and place it squarely in the hands of industry, will not allow this to happen.

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ⁱ Though the opinions expressed are solely the author's, this paper was prepared with the close cooperation of Barton Institute of TAFE and the Australian Competency Research Centre; in particular, Colin Griss, Megan Lilly, Lisa Frank and Sarah Newton.

ⁱⁱ The recent experience of Barton Institute of TAFE provides anecdotal evidence that large enterprises *are* interested as demonstrated by the number which were eager to be part of the pilot group. And the same anecdotal evidence indicates that frontline managers are more than keen to gain a qualification for their workplace practices.

The good, the bad and the unknown: Equity and User Choice in VET

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Introduction

During 1996, Australian state, territory and federal government ministers responsible for Vocational Education and Training (VET) adopted a policy initiative referred to as User Choice. This paper outlines the context in which this initiative arose, its meaning and aims, and draws on the findings of an evaluation of the projects that piloted the User Choice concept to examine its implications for the achievement of equity in VET.

Three questions are addressed. Within the context of User Choice did students get something different? Did they get something better? What are the likely implications for equity if User Choice is implemented more widely throughout the VET system?

Equity and VET reform

Both economic and social concerns have been used to justify the reform of the VET system over the past decade. Economic justifications derive from a view that the nation will improve its economic performance and international competitiveness by developing a diverse and dynamic national skill pool. Within this framework individuals are regarded as an economic resource and there is concern that many Australian (have) potential skills and abilities that are not being utilised. Social justifications centre on the capacity of education and training to change people's life chances, enabling them to develop to their full potential and to have security and satisfaction in work and in life (ANTA 1996).

In spite of the stated commitment to both economic and social goals, the evidence suggests that in practice social goals such as equity have generally taken second place. Some reforms, such as Recognition of Prior Learning, have failed to live up to their potential to increase equity (eg. Ferrier 1995, Butler 1997). More significantly though, where changes have been criticised as likely to cause greater, rather than less, inequity, critics have had little success in forcing substantial change or delaying implementation.

User Choice: Background and pilot projects

Among the many factors that spurred reform of the VET system was a view that too many education and training decisions were made at the point of supply, rather than demand. Reformers sought a way to turn this around - giving 'users' or 'clients' of the VET system more influence over who would provide the education and training, what would be provided, and how.

Recent reform effort has concentrated on achieving a 'training market', that is a framework in which providers' of VET compete for students, and for public and private funding. This

reflects a view that greater competition will increase efficiency - optimising quality and value for money, and will encourage providers to be more responsive to the needs of students and employers - re-defined as their 'clients' or 'users' (see, for instance, ACG 1994, Anderson 1996, 1997).

Within the framework of the 'training market', a major report commissioned from the Allen Consulting Group (ACG 1994) by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) suggested that responsiveness could be further improved by implementing a User Buys approach. Like a voucher scheme, this would give public funding directly to 'users' or 'clients', enhancing their capacity to make choices. The ACG argued that this would strengthen the demand side influence by injecting more market signals into mainstream arrangements. It would also increase responsiveness as the needs of users were more clearly articulated.

ANTA subsequently developed a modified approach that it referred to as User Choice. The difference between User Buys and User Choice is the treatment of public funding. While User Choice gives users the same capacity to make choices as User Buys, it does not give them direct control of public funds. These would remain with the public authority until the user indicated the direction of choice, when they would flow directly to the selected provider. ANTA's view was that it was not necessary to give funds to the user for the choice to be exercised and in any case, this might involve employers in unnecessary contractual and audit requirements.

In order to test the User Choice concept and indicate how it might work in practice, ANTA provided funding to the state and territory training authorities for a set of pilot projects. These pilots were to be concentrated on apprenticeship and traineeship arrangements (contracts of training) as they were primarily 'directed to decisions made by firms and their employees' and to 'enhancing client focussed arrangements between providers, employers and employees/students'. ANTA indicated that the pilots would be characterised by an 'increase in the ownership of the training program by the firm and workers and (would) allow for negotiation at a local level of delivery arrangements and greater customisation of training'. (ANTA 1994).ⁱⁱ

The pilots were to include firms of varying sizes, including small businesses, and group training companies. They were also to be established in a range of fields of study and industry areas. ANTA was particularly concerned that they cover the full range of providers, and areas where competition in the training market was 'thickest', such as hospitality, business and computing studies (ANTA 1994). Equity considerations were acknowledged in that ANTA also indicated it was important to 'test the impact' of User Choice on the 'broadest range of clients possible'. Thus some pilots could involve clients not engaged in contracts of training such as rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that did not have access to such contracts (ANTA 1994).

The criteria to be applied in selecting suitable projects included that clients were to have relevant information on which to base choices; they should be given a choice of provider; and

clients, or their broker, would be able to negotiate and customise the training. The level of funding for each project would be based on standard unit costs determined by the relevant state or territory training authority (ANTA 1995). Fifty projects were subsequently funded around the country. Forty involved students in contracts of training. The remaining ten were designated 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) initiatives' and involved Indigenous students, most of whom were not in paid employment.

From the outset, ANTA appointed consultants to evaluate the projects and provide advice on the wider implementation of User Choice. Some state and territory training authorities also appointed consultants to evaluate User Choice projects within their jurisdiction - particularly some additional projects which they funded separately.

Structure of the evaluation

The evaluation of the pilot projects took place over a twelve month period from April 1996-1997. The evaluation team engaged by ANTAⁱⁱⁱ undertook the task in two stages. Stage one, consisting of a telephone survey of participating employers and consultations on the ATSI initiatives, concentrated on aspects of the initiation of the pilot projects. An additional activity comprised consultations on key policy issues in the implementation of User Choice, which entailed discussions with many groups and individuals including state and territory training authorities, employer organisations, industry training boards, and VET providers.

Stage two, undertaken some months later, consisted of a further survey and case studies of selected projects. Its objective was to improve the level of understanding of the operation of User Choice at the project level, indicating what might happen in VET if User Choice were introduced more generally. Ten case studies were undertaken - three of ATSI initiatives and seven of the larger group of projects.

The evaluation produced several different reports and papers. In addition to separate reports to ANTA by the consultants on stage one (Selby Smith et al. 1996a), and on stage two (Selby Smith et al. 1997), a paper by the author (Ferrier 1998) focuses on the implications of User Choice for lifelong learning.

Reflecting the different types of projects and participants, there were some differences in the approaches taken to the ATSI initiatives and the other projects. In particular much more of the survey work was done through consultations, rather than by telephone, and some issues of less relevance (such as those based on employer-employee relationships) were not discussed. Some elements were expanded to determine the involvement of the communities in creating the pilot projects and to explore the ways in which training had been customised to take account of the social, cultural and educational characteristics of the communities and students.

While the ten ATSI initiatives were the most obvious demonstration of ANTA's desire to acknowledge the importance of equity issues in User Choice, several other projects also involved students from recognised equity target groups. One concerned only students with disabilities; many involved students with limited literacy and numeracy skills, from rural or

remote locations, or from non-English speaking backgrounds. Much of the following discussion arises from the evaluation of the ATSI initiatives. Other equity issues will be dealt with in the section on Key Policy Issues.

ATSI initiative projects: Objectives, origins and structure

In the first stage of the evaluation, only one of the ATSI initiatives contacted^{iv} had reached the stage where training was being delivered. Thus consultations focused on the collection of background information about the objectives, origins, structure, content and mode of delivery of the training programs.

Objectives

All projects had clearly stated objectives of two kinds: general and specific. General objectives were common to several projects and were overwhelmingly concerned with providing skills for employment and/or to improve community self-sufficiency. Specific objectives were different for each project and for different communities even within the same project and were related to the characteristics of individual communities. They were highly localised and usually reflected the geographical location of the community and the traditional skills of its members. Both kinds of objectives were consistently presented as the product of negotiation and consultation between the community and the training organisation and/or broker.

Origins

All but one of the projects were new programs of training that did not exist prior to the User Choice pilot project. However, in five cases, training had previously been provided for the community by the same training organisation. In one case, the training organisation had been recommended and introduced to the community by a respected and trusted intermediary.

The existence of established relationships between the communities and particular training organisations or brokers seemed to play an important role in providing a base on which the pilot projects were built. Many of those consulted stressed the importance of this relationship and the length of time taken to establish it. Without this effort, the User Choice project would not have been successful.

Discussions about the sources of the ideas for the training programs yielded some ambiguous results. In five cases, it appeared initially that the training program had been created by a training organisation or broker in response to a need perceived by the community. However, further probing suggested that training organisations or brokers had played an important role in helping to identify, or clarify, the training need. In the other two cases it was not clear whether the need had been perceived by the community or suggested to it by an external agent.

In most cases, training organisations or brokers appeared to have been the driving force behind the establishment of the pilot project, rather than the community. This reflected the way in which information was distributed about the availability of project funding - ie. to training

organisations, not communities. A common pattern emerged: a training organisation or broker received information about the pilot projects; this organisation or broker then contacted a community with which it had a relationship; and together they negotiated a possible program and funding submission. Only two cases were different. In the first, an urban group had initiated contact with a training organisation which they had not used before, however a training broker played an important role in bringing the two parties together. In the second case, the training organisation sought User Choice project funding in order to extend the student contact hours in a training program that already existed and for which there was a high level of demand that could not be met within the existing funding.

Development

Discussion of the development of the projects centred on the question of the extent of involvement by the communities in the shaping of the training program. In all of the projects there was evidence of community involvement, though it varied in extent. In most cases, the training organisation or broker had identified key people and negotiated the program with them, but in one case a committee comprising representatives of the community and the training organisation had been established.

Negotiations had dealt with questions such as: what should the objectives of the program be? How and what should be included in the training? Where, when and in what form should the training be delivered? How should students be assessed (and should they be assessed)? And what pathways should be provided into other courses? These negotiations led to significant levels of customisation in all cases.

In many cases, comments were made that development of the training program would be an ongoing process, even while the training was being delivered. If some things did not work well, they would be changed or dropped - or new elements might be added. Among training organisations and communities, there was a shared view that the project provided a means to try something new or different, and to see how it worked.

The importance of choice

The training organisations, brokers and communities all supported the importance of choice, particularly when interpreted as customisation. From the point of view of the training organisation it was important to give the communities 'what they want' because if not, they would reject the training - 'they won't come'. From the community point of view, the User Choice approach 'allows more diversity', is good because 'the customer is always right' and the training can be 'Koori-ised'.

Customisation

Customisation included the content of the program, its mode and place of delivery, and the way in which students would be assessed. Most of the programs had been put together by selecting modules from different programs and adapting course materials to make them more

relevant and appropriate to the students. Much of the training was to be delivered within the communities and would take workshop form. The mixed age and skill range of the students had been considered. Training organisations also acknowledged the importance of involving the community elders in delivering the training so that younger members of the community might be encouraged to participate.

Although training organisations appeared on the whole willing to adapt training programs to suit, some expressed concern about constraints that limited their ability to customise. Two constraints in particular were mentioned: competency standards and set contact hours for some modules. Competency standards did not take into account the students' very mixed levels of skills at the beginning of the course - and the consequent range of outcomes. Set contact hours were problematic for two reasons. In some cases training organisations thought the designated number of hours insufficient, given the low skill levels of the students and the need for them to achieve particular standards. Funding for additional hours could not be obtained. In other cases, the number of hours was regarded as excessive as the students' ability to attend was restricted by other commitments.

In one or two cases, the training organisations attempted to include in the program certain elements they thought important, but which the community resisted, or regarded as less critical. There were also indications of some misunderstandings over customisation. In one case, a community representative spoke glowingly about an anticipated element of the customised training program, but its existence was denied by the training organisation. As the training had not been delivered this was not yet a problem but had the potential to become so.

Some concern was expressed that too much customisation might be disadvantageous to the students. Training programs should be 'mainstream' and should 'have somewhere to go', ie. they should be recognised and provide entry into other courses. In particular, concern was expressed that where certificates were designated (Koori) they were often regarded as second class and of little value in the labour market because the skill levels achieved were perceived as being too low.

Choice of training organisation

It was not clear from the consultations whether choice, when interpreted as choice of training organisation, was as important as customisation. The way in which the pilot projects were developed, with many training organisations acting as a driving force, meant that choice of training organisation was not a strong element. In addition, it appeared that the existence of established relationships between communities and training organisations was an important factor in determining who would provide the training.

Advantages and problems

The consultations confirmed widespread awareness and acceptance of the importance of choice to ATSI communities, particularly the customisation of training to take account of special needs, learning styles and different life experiences. The communities had been

involved in the development of the training program in all cases, and in some cases would also be involved in its delivery. All the training programs had been customised - mainly in content, and in mode and place of delivery. In many cases allowances had been made for the varied ages and skill levels of the students and the structure of the communities with particular attention being paid to the role of community elders.

Most of the projects were based on relationships that already existed between some communities and training organisations/brokers. Most of the relationships had been developed over a considerable period of time, and as one training organisation commented, 'had been carefully nurtured'. In only three cases was choice of training organisation apparent, and in each of these cases the choices were assisted by a training broker who also had an established relationship with the community or group.

There was evidence that much customised training for ATSI communities was already being developed or planned, or had been implemented, by training organisations or brokers in consultation with the communities, prior to the pilot project. Given this, it was apparent that a main function served by the User Choice project was to boost existing effort by providing an additional source of funding - and one that was more flexible.

ATSI initiatives in operation at the project level

When the ATSI initiatives were revisited in the second stage of the evaluation, the main aim was to gather further information about the ways in which User Choice had operated at the project level. Most of the projects were continuing, or had been completed, with only minor, if any, problems, and with some successful outcomes. One project experienced more serious difficulties due to unforeseen staffing problems within the training organisation. Funding had been inadequate to provide the support needed to retain the students when these problems occurred. However, the organisation remained determined and optimistic that the training program would be completed successfully. Two others had not gone ahead as planned, due to practical difficulties.

Support for the User Choice concept

Support for the User Choice idea among the Aboriginal communities who participated in the projects remained overwhelming. The concept had been empowering. It had enabled them to articulate what sort of training they wanted more confidently and had raised their expectations that the training program would be customised accordingly. It was commented that User Choice broke down the notion of education as a 'great big thing on a hill', and:

User Choice is what any area of education and training should look at. It builds up hopes and confidence - being part of the program.

User Choice was also welcomed by most of the participating training organisations. It had contributed to the development of their understanding of their students. The result was the development of programs that better retained the interest and support of the students. It had

sponsored the development of closer relationships with students, providing more opportunities to explain what was, and was not, possible, and why. It had also provided opportunities to demonstrate a willingness and capacity to recognise and respond to special circumstances, within the limits of funding constraints and other requirements, such as competency standards.

Benefits to students

The recognition that student needs are important and that their views are of value, was an important factor in inspiring confidence in the students:

Students feel important. It sets up a challenge for them ... putting something into their mind ... they become more confident and demanding.

Participation in training customised to suit their circumstances enhanced the capacity of the students to benefit from it. Through the development of new skills and the improvement of their existing skills, students gained more confidence in their abilities and a heightened sense of self-esteem.

(The students) have not been in this sort of a program (before) ... it has expanded their wings.

In one case, an indication of the development of their self-confidence was the way in which students became able to articulate concerns about some aspects of the training and negotiate changes during the course of the program.

The VET system has traditionally catered for students who have a range of learning problems and difficulties, or gaps in their education and training, that may be due to a variety of causes including educational disadvantage. The User Choice pilot projects provided additional 'second chance' opportunities, and through customisation took such special circumstances into consideration in formulating and delivering the programs. Several projects included participants with low level literacy and numeracy skills. Most of these students had limited educational experiences and had previously experienced difficulty in gaining access to appropriate training. Some projects involved participants who had little other chance to participate in training due to the lack of opportunities in rural or remote areas, or in particular industries.

Benefits to staff of training organisations

Some the staff of the training organisations involved in the projects benefited professionally and personally from their participation. Depending on the nature of the particular project, this varied in scope and degree. Some staff commented on the degree of enjoyment and fulfilment they experienced in negotiating with participants to customise training programs. In some cases, this enthusiasm led them to develop and support activities that were beyond the boundaries of the project. Some commented on how much they had learned about the needs of Indigenous students. They had also been able to further their skills in designing and delivering

appropriate training. For the staff of an organisation with little previous experience of dealing with an ATSI community this was an important outcome of the pilot project.

Funding flexibility

A common complaint expressed by those involved with the ATSI initiatives was that the funding categories and criteria under most national training schemes did not reflect the needs of many Indigenous students. For instance, funding could not be obtained for the basic training programs sought by the students because these programs did not satisfy required competency standards, were too short/long, did not articulate into other recognised programs, or did not provide a certificate. In addition, much of the paperwork required information about the participants that was impossible to obtain.

In contrast, their comments indicated that the process of applying for and obtaining User Choice funding had been a welcome change. Though there were still some problems - particularly in relation to competency standards - they experienced a greater openness to diverse needs and much less bureaucracy. The degree of time and effort required in preparing applications for funding had been considerably less than usual, and there had been more opportunities to be innovative and creative in designing training programs.

Constraints on flexibility

The precise nature and degree of customisation sought and provided varied from project to project but there were some commonalities. In all of the projects it was apparent that customisation of a training program to produce culturally relevant and appropriate training is very important to, and increases the effectiveness of learning by, Indigenous students. Above all, it was important that 'the course (be) framed around Aboriginal people'. However, in most cases, there was some aspect of customisation that had been desired but could not be achieved. Often these aspects were minor and detracted only slightly from the overall success of the project. In some cases though, they were more significant, and had had a more substantial impact.

In one case, a gap between what the training organisation provided, and what the community sought, occurred because of the necessity of meeting industry standards:

(The training organisation) is no different to any other mainstream organisation that has to meet industry standards.

This was one of several factors that brought the training program to a temporary halt when most of the students discontinued. Required for certification, these requirements covered aspects of the content of the program, and imposed minimum participation standards. But they were at odds with the lack of interest that students displayed in gaining a certificate, and with their desire to complete only those modules in which they had a particular interest or through which they would learn particular skills. Few students were concerned with gaining the skills

necessary for employment in industry. Rather, they hoped to use the skills in community-based projects.

As the pilot projects continued, it became clearer that the funding provided was inadequate to meet all of the customisation expectations. In one case, funding proved insufficient to support the full customisation of course materials sought. In another case, lack of resources meant that the forms of support essential to encourage and maintain student participation could not be provided. This contributed to a lower than anticipated initial enrolment, and disappointing levels of student retention. A further common disappointment was that though the communities had articulated a wish that the training incorporate an Indigenous perspective delivered by an Indigenous person, this had rarely been achieved.

These experiences point to some drawbacks in the way User Choice had been framed and applied. In particular, the need to meet industry standards even where students did not intend to, or were unlikely to have opportunities, to work in industry reinforced the dominance of the industry voice in the VET system, and of employment/work-related objectives of VET over other objectives. It indicated that the choices of some users, in this case ATSI communities, would be restricted to a narrow industry-defined framework.

Concern about the future

There was a great deal of support among both the training organisations and the communities for the individual projects to continue with new sources of funding after the User Choice pilot project was completed. However, based on past experience, there was a great deal of concern that new funding would not be secured - even where the projects could show evidence of success. To some extent, this uncertainty about the future cast a cloud over the present.

Equity policy issues

Two main equity issues were canvassed in the consultations on the key policy issues in the implementation of User Choice: the recognition of the diverse training needs of students and their accommodation within the User Choice approach; and the ways in which User Choice might contribute to the improvement of equity, while also meeting economic goals. The positive aspects of the evaluations of the pilot projects contrasted with some of the more reserved attitudes expressed in the consultations.

In many of the consultations a major concern was expressed about the strong industry focus of User Choice and the potential for this to marginalise equity to the detriment of students. It was acknowledged that meeting the skill needs of industry is an important objective of the VET system but asserted that the system also meets a range of other important training needs all of which are important in different ways. Recognition of these broader needs entails acknowledgment that users are not only enterprises and employers, but individuals and communities with diverse needs and characteristics.

It was agreed that User Choice had a potential to improve equity - if it was handled carefully and appropriately. Through its encouragement of greater flexibility and responsiveness by training organisations, it was seen as having the potential to offer a way for the diverse needs of students to be addressed. Discussions revealed many examples of failures of the existing system to accommodate such needs: health workers in remote communities forced to travel long distances for training, leaving the community without medical support; spouses of tradespeople acting as (often unpaid) office managers/book-keepers in need of training to run the business but unable to leave the office to attend class; some students with special needs forced to travel further for training than their peers without special needs - and at their own expense. In cases such as these, User Choice was seen as offering hope of a better deal.

Acknowledgment of the potential of User Choice to improve equity led to the question of *how* this potential might be harnessed. Moreover, not just how it might be done, but how it could be done in a way that ensured equity was recognised as central to the implementation of User Choice. This raised a number of complex issues.

Commitment to equity

First, uneasiness was often expressed about the enhanced power the User Choice approach might give to employers, employer organisations, and private training organisations. This uneasiness had a number of dimensions, but, in relation to equity, centred on the perception of a lack of commitment by these groups to objectives other than those concerned with profit and efficiency. A common view was that in a User Choice system focussing on enterprise and employer needs, employers and private training organisations would ignore equity concerns so that students already advantaged by virtue of being in employment would be further advantaged. It was argued that private training organisations would be interested in offering training only in the cheapest and most profitable areas, and would not be interested where equity requirements entailed additional costs. Similarly, it was argued that for reasons of presumed efficiency and ease, employers would continue with discriminatory recruitment and training practices that advantaged some groups at the expense of others.

The fear was voiced that in a system of this type it would be left to the TAFE colleges to 'pick up the pieces' - to provide for the needs of the disadvantaged; to offer training with objectives other than employment; and to offer more expensive options that took equity concerns into consideration. Some considered that this would strengthen and improve the TAFE system; others believed it would lower the status of TAFE, cause funding problems, and create ghettos of disadvantage.

These strong and widely held views were counterbalanced by discussions with employers and employer groups, during which many raised the topic of equity and expressed concern and support for its incorporation within a User Choice system. Keen to see more responsiveness to their own needs, they also showed an awareness of other needs in the VET system. Examples of good practice by employers in respect of equity provided a welcome contrast to views about the prevalence of poor practice, and discussions about some existing training programs

revealed a willingness by some private training organisations to meet special needs, such as those of remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The need for balance

A number of different perspectives were presented on the need to achieve a balance in a User Choice scheme between the needs of employers and other users. Often this issue was raised in connection with portability of skills and qualifications. A common concern was the lack of recognition that the needs of students and employers might not always be identical. In particular, a view was put that some employers have very narrow training needs and that addressing these needs only will not necessarily be in the best interests of the students, who may later wish to change employment.

There was also seen to be a need for balance in ensuring that the diversity of needs of students in any training program is recognised - and that over-emphasis is not given to particular elements in a way that advantages some students and disadvantages others. Even within the same training program, students are likely to have a range of motivations and be seeking a variety of outcomes.

Balance was seen as important also in supporting diversity within the VET system. States and territory training authorities revealed that while they all have a similar broad range of equity concerns, in each case the balance between these problems is different, depending on local geographic, demographic and cultural features. In the Northern Territory, for instance, providing appropriate training for Indigenous communities is a high priority. This contrasts with some southern states where more emphasis is placed on addressing the needs of students from non-English speaking backgrounds, of women in non-traditional areas, of students with disabilities, or of students from lower socio-economic groups. Each state or territory also had in place a range of equity measures that reflected their particular priorities. Some of these initiatives incorporated partial or full User Choice elements. This ability of the states and territories to respond to local equity needs and circumstances in an appropriate manner based on local knowledge was presented as a strength of the existing arrangements that should be built upon as User Choice was extended.

Consolidating existing equity initiatives

The consultations highlighted the view that the overall effectiveness of strategies for improving equity in VET depends on consolidation; that initiatives such as User Choice should recognise and take account of measures that already exist, so that successes can be built on and the expertise that has been developed can be tapped and extended.

Some suggested that the approach to equity in VET had so far been too fragmented, with an over-emphasis on short-term funding and quick results rather than long-term change. Successful measures, were forced to cease when short-term special funding ran out and no further funding was available. With revision of ANTA's equity strategy, it was hoped that some differences in approach might eventuate.

General issues

Several other more general issues were raised with particular relevance to equity. The first concerned the allocation of public funding. It was strongly felt by some representatives of state and territory training authorities that public training funds should not be used to advantage further those already advantaged, but for the benefit of all members of the community. Moreover, some felt that the distribution of funding in a way that fails to accommodate the training needs of students outside the advantaged group represents a waste of a potentially very large skill pool, and is an inefficient use of public resources as well as an inequitable practice.

The second concerned the costing of training - and the inclusion within the calculation of unit costs of equity measures. In general, it was agreed that unit costs would be increased by the inclusion of equity measures. Nevertheless, there was support for the incorporation of some measures for reasons including that: unless this occurred equity would be marginalised; this would give formal recognition to the existence of community objectives for the system; and it would lead to more effective training. In particular, a strong case was made for the provision within unit costs of training in language, literacy and numeracy skills. It was argued that the majority of students in the VET system had relatively low levels of these skills and that without them could not fully benefit from training - or participate fully in the life of the community. Support was also expressed for the inclusion of more general student support services, such as counselling and career advice, effective in assisting students to complete courses, and for the provision of information to students about the choices available to them in a User Choice system.

Finally, many were concerned that User Choice can work effectively only where the users have adequate and appropriate information on which to base the choices they make. People gather information in many different ways, depending on where they live, their educational background, their first language, their computer proficiency, their use of media (newspapers, TV, radio), their personal networks and friendships. This makes the task of reaching potential users a complex one, requiring an understanding of the diverse ways in which information is collected, and a multi-faceted response. Many students from equity target groups are information-poor. They may have limited access to sources such as libraries; they may lack the self-confidence to approach providers and the skills to use information banks; they may not have the English language skills necessary to process the information they receive. All of these factors work against their successful participation in a User Choice scheme.

The need to provide information in appropriate forms and settings for these students of much concern. It was noted though, that some initiatives had already been taken in this regard and some expertise had been developed that could be drawn on. In particular, it was argued that personal help and support, through a field officer, for instance, was vital for many students - and that implementation of schemes providing such support had been successful in encouraging students from equity target groups to enter, and continue with, training.

Concluding observations

User Choice was warmly welcomed by those involved in the pilot projects known as ATSI initiatives, and produced some benefits for both students and training providers. More specifically, User Choice facilitated negotiations which increased the training providers' understanding of the needs of students, and customisation which led to more appropriate training. Though it may have been possible to achieve similar results in other ways (eg through other types of programs involving negotiation and customisation), the empowerment that students felt as users (the customer is always right) to articulate their needs in a scheme designated as User Choice, added an extra element contributing to the success of the projects. Overall, the students did appear to get something different and something better.

Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that the capacity of User Choice to improve equity in VET more generally is open to question. While there are several factors contributing to this doubt, it is most strongly attributable to the emphasis that User Choice gives to the concerns of enterprises and employers. This emphasis was apparent initially in the allocation of funding for the User Choice pilots primarily to projects involving contracts of training - even though only one in ten VET students enrolled in vocational programs are indentured apprentices and trainees (Anderson 1997).

The report which proposed the original User Buys concept (ACG 1994) justified the prioritisation of the needs of enterprises on the grounds that the needs of individuals and enterprises are converging (ACG 1994). More recently ANTA (1996) has argued that because enterprises are the end users of skills acquired through training, compete nationally and internationally, and create jobs for individuals, VET providers should respond directly to their needs rather than those of individual students. However, as Anderson (1997) indicates, student participation in VET courses is motivated by a variety of reasons not all related to employment outcomes. Convergence is thus very limited. An emphasis on the needs of employers and enterprises will not necessarily produce equal benefits for students.

Further doubt about the ability of User Choice to contribute to improved equity in VET reflects widespread scepticism about the commitment to equity of private training organisations. Thus far, only public providers have demonstrated a consistent commitment to equity and willingness to bear the additional costs associated with equity measures. If these providers lose business to private providers as a result of User Choice arrangements, their financial viability may be threatened. Who will look after equity if they cannot?

The prospects for equity in the context of User Choice are thus both good and bad. But because the pilot projects were limited in number and scope, much remains unclear. The application of User Choice to all new apprenticeship and traineeship arrangements from 1998 will allow a much more detailed investigation of its implications for equity in VET.

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ⁱ VET providers are now referred to as 'Registered Training Organisations'. They include Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges or institutes, adult and community education organisations and private training organisations.

ⁱⁱ ANTA indicated that 'customisation' meant the capacity to vary curriculum within the accredited framework to meet the particular needs of different students and could include variation of content, within allowable limits, and use of learning resources or modes of delivery to suit local enterprise requirements (ANTA 1994).

ⁱⁱⁱ The consultant organisation was Joy Selby Smith Pty Ltd. The evaluation team consisted of Joy Selby Smith, Chris Selby Smith and the author. I am grateful to Joy and Chris for allowing me to draw on the evaluation material for this paper. However, the views I express are my own.

^{iv} Contact was made with eight, and information was obtained about seven, of the ATSI initiatives in this first stage.

^v Case studies were conducted of four 'ATSI initiative' projects and consultations gathered information about a further four projects.

The Australian Vocational Training System pilots: Implications for demand-driven approaches to skill formation

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Introduction

In the late 1980s a series of government reports and policy documents highlighted the need to raise the skill level of the workforce in order to increase Australia's international competitiveness and reduce unemployment; see, for example, *Skills for Australia* (Dawkins & Holding 1987), Australian Science and Technology Council (1987) and Kravac & Stretton (1988). Particular emphasis was placed on the need for the private sector to increase its investment in skills. In order to redress this problem, the federal Labor government developed a series of major policy initiatives known as the Training Reform Agenda. These initiatives included the establishment of a National Training Board, agreement between State and Federal Ministers on a National Framework for the Recognition of Training (NFROT), development of the Australian Standards Framework (ASF), implementation of a competency-based approach to training and the establishment of a new entry-level training system, the Australian Vocational Training System (AVTS).

The concept of the AVTS was first articulated in a report by the Employment and Skills Formation Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (1992). This report, better known as the Carmichael Report, highlighted the need for training to be responsive to industry and enterprise needs. Further, it argued that in order to be successful a national training system must be driven by industry needs and have the support of the industrial parties, governments and vocational education and training (VET) providers (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1995). This view shaped the implementation of the AVTS and is a continuing feature of the training policy adopted by the Coalition Government elected in early 1996.

Implementation of the AVTS proceeded through a piloting process. The first phase of the evaluation, conducted in 1995, investigated the general level of acceptance the AVTS approach had received from the various stakeholders and highlighted a range of implementation problems faced by the pilots (DEET 1995). Building on this base, the second phase of the evaluation, of pilots funded under the Enterprise and Small Business streams, investigated the 'general perceptions of the major stakeholders regarding the successes and barriers to participation in the streams'. Issues investigated included perceived barriers to entry, difficulties in introducing on-the-job training, industrial relations problems, reluctance on the part of many employers to take the initiative in 'driving' the system, difficulties experienced by some employers in coming to grips with the concept of work-based assessment and the implementation of the equity objectives of the system (Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs 1996).

This chapter draws upon the findings of two reports (Teicher and Grauze, 1996; 1997) produced for DEETYA as part of its evaluation of the AVTS Enterprise Stream and Small Business Stream. These reports explore a series of issues important to the continuing implementation of a demand-driven approach to skill formation through the New

Apprenticeships scheme. This research was undertaken by the National Key Centre in Industrial Relations and the Monash University-ACER Centre for the Economics of Education and Training during 1996.

The AVTS Small Business and Enterprise streams

The two AVTS streams, Enterprise and Small Business, were designed to serve distinct purposes. Owing to a general perception among enterprises that much TAFE-provided vocational training lacked relevance to their operations, many organisations wanted their internal training to receive formal recognition. In part, this also reflected the unwillingness of some large enterprises to embrace the concept of national competencies. Responding to a proposal from the Business Council of Australia (BCA), DEETYA developed an AVTS stream which allowed such enterprises to develop their own internal training programs, standards and qualifications and have them formally recognised and accredited (DEETYA 1996).

Participants in the Enterprise Stream were given a relatively free rein in designing course content and delivery methodology, but AVTS training was primarily directed to new entrants. The Government envisaged that courses would be developed to encompass a range of occupational streams, skill levels and qualifications, with the end result being a framework for an enterprise-specific career path. Some restrictions were imposed on participating companies; in particular, training was required to be competency-based and to include modules, such as communications, which addressed the seven key competencies previously identified by the Mayer Committee (1992).

As with the Enterprise Stream, the Small Business Stream aimed to address perceived deficiencies in the relevance of TAFE training. In all other respects the rationale for the Small Business Stream was distinct. It was based on a recognition that in some areas of the economy where small businesses were prevalent, formalised training was restricted or unavailable. (For example, in dry cleaning there was only one course, provided by an institute of Technical and Further Education [TAFE] located in the inner suburbs of Melbourne, covering the whole of Victoria and Tasmania.) Without a widely-available and recognised qualification to rely on, employers were unable to gauge the skills and knowledge of prospective employees. In some areas traditional apprenticeships were the only way to provide entry-level employees with a comprehensive training. This was not always a viable option, especially as there was a widespread perception that the apprenticeship system was unresponsive to the needs of employers. The Small Business Stream was established to improve access to accredited training for small business employees and develop forms of training more relevant to the needs of their employers (DEETYA 1996).

Methodology

Evaluation of the AVTS pilots proceeded in three stages. In the first two stages, consultations were undertaken with a variety of stakeholders with either direct involvement in, or knowledge relevant to, the pilots. A series of nineteen preliminary consultations (12 in the Enterprise Stream and 7 in Small Business) with stakeholders were undertaken. The second stage consisted of twenty in-depth consultations with stakeholders (7 Enterprise, 11

Small Business and 2 relating to both streams). Stakeholders consulted included individual companies, employer associations and unions, state training authorities, industry training advisory boards (ITABs), group training companies and Institutes of TAFE. Thirdly, a series of case studies from both streams (5 in the Enterprise Stream and 2 in Small Business) were conducted primarily to obtain qualitative information from organisations directly involved in piloting the AVTS streams and gain in-depth information on the evaluation issues. In investigating the Small Business Stream, we were hampered by the fact that only seven pilots had been funded and implemented since the inception of the AVTS. This shortcoming was offset by conducting consultations among organisations running training programs in other streams, but which had significant small business participation.

Stakeholders and commitment to training

One of the major aims of the AVTS streams was to provide training which was more relevant to business needs than existing training. Organisations involved in the Small Business Stream pilots tended to consult widely and include many stakeholders in developing pilots. Stakeholders also were involved through steering committees which clarified and addressed promotion, recruitment, selection, placement and monitoring arrangements. Overall, this approach appeared to generate a high level of commitment to the pilots, though it created coordination problems and increased the time involved in decision making.

Companies involved in the Enterprise Stream were less willing to consult with other potential stakeholders. DEETYA guidelines required only that they obtain support from the 'enterprise parties' and the Stream was promoted on the basis that companies would not be subject to outside 'interference' in the development and implementation of enterprise-specific competencies. Companies were generally wary of consulting with relevant ITABs, as their membership often included potential competitors.

Workplace-based training

Perhaps the most significant impact of the AVTS pilots was the introduction of structured training where none previously existed. This was more often the case in the Small Business Stream pilots, as larger enterprises typically had established entry-level training programs. In small business, random and *ad hoc* training activity previously undertaken in isolation was replaced by structured, recognised and industry-specific training options. (Some examples of this were floristry, retail pharmacies and food manufacturing). Two important factors in gaining small business acceptance of formal training were employers' retention of control over the selection of employees and scheduling of training; and provision by the TAFE institutes of a structure to guide the delivery of on-the-job training.

Some pilots were established in areas where training was available through TAFE or other sources, but often lacked relevance. Typically it was conducted off-the-job in a classroom or semi-practical situation by trainers with varying levels of current knowledge and experience of the workplace and industry. AVTS pilots attempted to address these deficiencies by focusing on the situation of the enterprise or the industry. In the Small Business Stream, for example, a South East Asian restaurant industry pilot was developed

because the industry employer association recognised the need for a comprehensive training program. Traditional methods of recruitment and on-the-job training were failing to satisfy the demand for suitably trained chefs and existing TAFE trade courses were not sufficiently specialised.

Another problem identified by employers was the generic nature of training offered by TAFE and other training providers. Many participants, especially in the Enterprise Stream, felt that training was of limited value unless it focused on the operations of the particular employer. The AVTS attempted to address this concern by ensuring that the majority of training was provided on-the-job or at least in the workplace. In both streams training delivery was more focused on work tasks, applying theoretical frameworks in practical situations.

Flexibility

A significant aim of the AVTS was to establish training programs that would be flexible to the needs of employers. This issue was investigated in the consultations and case studies and it was found that overwhelmingly participants in both streams viewed the flexible nature of training as an important influence on their willingness to continue participating in the AVTS and was a distinctive advantage of this form of training.

In practice, flexibility had several dimensions. Where an industry exhibits cyclical or seasonal patterns, as in agriculture and hospitality, it allowed training to be tailored so that trainees would be available to work when most required. Conversely, training could be intensified in slack periods, such as particular seasons in agriculture or early in the week in the case of restaurants. These arrangements enabled employers to utilise their productive capacity fully. This type of flexibility was evident in the Small Business Stream pilots.

Secondly, flexibility allowed changes in the rate at which individuals could progress through the coursework components of a program. Training modules were assessed in a variety of ways including work requirements, demonstrable competencies and oral or written tests. In the case of the communications module of a smallgoods pilot, trainees were required to satisfy a series of work requirements, but these could be undertaken in the order and at a pace chosen by the trainee. In some cases, such as an engineering industry pilot covering ASF levels 1-4, flexible delivery resulted in trainees finishing courses up to twelve months earlier than the allocated time frame. This enabled them to progress to higher wages in line with their qualifications, while employers benefited as trainees became more productive sooner and by a reduction in the net costs of employing trainees. This flexibility sometimes met with resistance from unions, as in the case of the engineering industry pilot where the union argued that completions should be determined by reference to time served.

In small business pilots a third dimension of flexibility was apparent. In an automotive industry pilot, trainees in small garages could work on only a limited range of vehicles and were unable to gain experience in using specialised components like on-board computer systems. This situation was common to many small businesses because of their specialisation in particular areas of an industry and limited range of functions. To overcome these limitations, multiple trainee placements were introduced which allowed

trainees to be placed temporarily with other organisations that could provide broader on-the-job experience and training. Many employers initially were unresponsive to this innovation, but increasing acceptance followed the realisation that multiple placements produce employees with a wider range of skills.

The notion of multiple placement traineeships extends further than trainees being 'loaned out' to other employers. For example, two group training companies in the construction industry established AVTS pilots which employed trainees, oversaw off-the-job training and hired out trainees to various employers for blocks of on-the-job experience and training. This provided small business with the skills of apprentices as required and reduced the costs associated with employing them, including the time to complete the associated paper work.

A final element of flexibility associated with the small business pilots was the requirement that courses include training relevant to related industries. DEETYA required that each pilot include some subjects focussing on the communication and personal development skills that would be transferable between workplaces and industries. This would provide trainees with an avenue to broader career paths. In the smallgoods industry pilot, an element of portability was provided by an optional module leading to the award of a license to operate fork lift trucks.

Training and assessment

In the Small Business Stream the role of the employer in the training process changed substantially. Before the AVTS, training typically was conducted informally on-the-job and trainees learned only those skills required to complete specific tasks or functions. Employers had little difficulty in fulfilling the role of on-the-job trainer, as the skills and knowledge they imparted were those used on a daily basis. Under the AVTS, on-the-job training was formalised and became the responsibility of a supervisor who was either the employer or a fellow-employee. Difficulties were experienced where formalised training structures were unusual in the industry.

While the role of training provider was readily accepted by employers, many found it difficult to assess trainee competence. The role of assessor was unfamiliar to many employers, especially those with little experience of formalised training structures such as apprenticeships. These difficulties were overcome by increasing contact between coordinators, training providers and employers with a view to developing assessment skills. Their new role also prompted some supervisors to undertake training. In a rural industry pilot, employers were trained in training and assessment skills before the pilot was implemented, while some supervisors in the South East Asian restaurant pilot undertook English language training to improve their teaching and assessing skills.

Training culture

As with other elements of the Training Reform Agenda, such as the Training Guarantee (see Teicher 1995), there was an expectation that the AVTS would contribute to the development and extension of a training culture. In the Enterprise Stream pilots, participants felt that this had occurred only to a limited extent. While participating

organisations usually had well-established and extensive training programs, in some cases the AVTS pilot led to the extension of competency-based training across the entire workplace or the adoption of a more formalised approach to recording and evaluating training. Unless the enterprise was an industry leader and there was no existing industry training, pilots were unlikely to stimulate increased training expenditures in the rest of the industry.

The impact of the pilots in creating a training culture was more apparent in the Small Business Stream. In some industries, particularly where there was no previous structured training, the pilots were 'an enormous catalyst' for industry training. Provisions were inserted into awards for recognition of prior learning (RPL) of existing workers and firms were encouraged to identify further training opportunities and articulation pathways for employees.

The changing role of TAFE

In some pilots, participation in the Enterprise Stream was a response to the past failure of TAFE to provide anything other than a standardised industry training product. This perception changed markedly. The majority of the participants in both the Enterprise and Small Business Stream pilots commented that TAFE had become more responsive to the needs of industry and enterprises.

In most cases TAFE was perceived as having adopted a very flexible approach to training delivery. Employer preferences for on-the-job training were usually met and scheduling arrangements generally reflected employers' needs. TAFE designed work-based solutions for situations where employer size and operational requirements precluded coordination of on- and off-the-job training. TAFE was often instrumental in designing lesson plans, assessment modes, curriculum and learning materials, as well as providing expertise in these areas. Co-operative arrangements between TAFE and industry were particularly effective in cases where supportive TAFE personnel acted as consultants to the pilot or were located at company premises. However, some TAFE personnel were resistant to the workplace-based character of AVTS training.

Because of the willingness of most of the TAFE institutes to be flexible in delivery methods and times, both groups of pilots were able to conduct much of the training at ASF levels 1-3, on-the-job and on-site. The distinction between the two modes of training, on- and off-the-job, has blurred as the quality and structure of on-the-job training has improved. As employers adopt a greater role in the provision of entry-level training, the role of TAFE appears to be shifting toward the provision of more specialised and higher level (ASF levels 4-6) programs.

Industrial relations issues

In the literature on the Training Reform Agenda there is considerable emphasis on the nature and extent of industrial relations problems; see for example the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (1991) and DEET (1995). Interestingly, this group of issues did not arise exclusively from unions, but also from employees and employers.

Industrial relations problems were a feature of many of the pilots examined, though in most cases the impact was minimal. Small business pilots were more likely to be affected by industrial relations problems than those in the Enterprise Stream. Problems or issues arose from four separate areas: demarcation; introduction of a training wage; introduction of competencies; and employee involvement in training.

Three small business pilots encountered demarcation problems. Unions raised the issue in two cases that attempted to combine training from a number of traditional trade areas into a single building-skills vocation. In the third case the union opposed building industry trainees receiving training in electrical competencies. To avoid such demarcation disputes, specific elements of the training were deferred until the issues could be resolved satisfactorily. Demarcation was also an issue in the health sector and resulted in a dispute notification to the Industrial Relations Commission.

The second major industrial relations issue in the small business pilots involved trainee wage payments. Typically, this issue arose when businesses were uninformed or unsure of the appropriate wage rates and conditions of employment. The training wage issue also led to problems in trade-based pilots where awards provided wage rates rigidly geared to the year-level of the apprenticeship. Some unions opposed adjustments to award structures that would underpin competency-based progression. A related problem was union opposition to trainees being signed-off early as having completed all the requirements of the traineeship.

A further issue arose in an Industry Training Council (ITC) pilot that established competency-based training for an existing apprenticeship. The unions involved opposed the proposed competencies on the grounds that the framework did not comply with the industry award structure and would lead to trainee wage problems. In order to resolve the situation, the ITC asked the unions to offer a more suitable competency framework. As this was not provided, the ITC proceeded with the training program.

The final industrial relations issue concerned the level of employee involvement in, and acceptance of, AVTS training. AVTS pilots proceeded only in those cases where good industrial relations existed at the workplace. Thus though a peak employer association indicated that industrial relations problems were a major difficulty in the Enterprise Stream, only one pilot and one case study referred to these problems. In the pilot, problems arose from the introduction of enterprise competency standards and the inability of existing employees to access the training. Management attributed these problems to the 'rigidity of the existing workforce', many of whom had been employed by the company for up to two decades and were from predominantly non-English speaking backgrounds. This view was indirectly supported by a peak union body which indicated that tensions were common when new training systems were introduced into workplaces. These problems were likely to be most acute where existing workers were classified as unskilled or semi-skilled and were unsure of their future position and how RPL would change their relative position in the workplace. In some cases, opposition arose from the exclusion of existing employees from the AVTS training program.

Administrative issues and the future of demand-driven training

Funding

Although many of the pilots expected to continue offering AVTS training, a large proportion indicated this was dependent on the availability of continued government funding. In the Enterprise Stream, the receipt of funding was perceived as a 'vote of confidence' in the company's capacity to provide effective training and enabled training managers to raise the profile of training in the organisation. Having obtained external funding, training managers were often able to leverage additional funds from senior management.

Predictably, small business pilots were even more reliant on government funding than the Enterprise Stream. With the costs of curriculum development, training materials and course fees substantially covered by AVTS funding, employers were required to meet the costs of trainees' wages. Interviews with pilot coordinators indicated that future participation of small business was contingent on the availability of wage subsidies received for hiring trainees from among the long-term unemployed through labour market programs such as JobStart. Additional problems for small business were the costs of maintaining records and supervisory costs associated with on-the-job training. Under the AVTS, the former were minimised because ITCs and other pilot coordinators tended to take responsibility for record-keeping and other administrative requirements, while the latter were borne directly by employers. Despite employers' satisfaction with the AVTS, they appeared unwilling to bear the course fees charged by TAFE or other providers.

Administrative requirements

Administrative requirements posed a problem in both streams, though the better-resourced Enterprise Stream companies seemed more able to address these problems. Some engaged consultants to act as project managers, completing the reporting requirements and negotiating with the relevant state and federal authorities. Nevertheless, there were complaints of excessive and unnecessarily complex paperwork and the lack of any clear mapping of the processes, or explanation of the rationale, associated with national recognition. Many companies relied on DEETYA officers and National Training Board (now Standards and Curriculum Council) staff to traverse the approval processes at state and federal levels.

In the Small Business Stream, pilot coordinators reported that administrative requirements acted as a barrier to participation. Consequently, group training companies and Industry Training Advisory Boards (ITABs) promoted their willingness to undertake all employer paperwork and other administration involved in the pilots.

The industry and employer organisations consulted also complained about the level of reporting and documentation required from employers and pilot coordinators.

Equity objectives

All pilots were required to establish goals for the inclusion of disadvantaged groups. For most pilots these goals were readily achieved, however, this conclusion should be treated cautiously, particularly in the Small Business Stream where target-setting was tempered by judgements of what was 'realistic'. For example, the interview notes of one pilot record that the process of setting targets was 'hard' but their achievement was 'not a significant problem'. Target achievement was maximised when the access and equity groups were defined consistently with the demographics of the relevant industry or enterprise workforce, or defined broadly in terms like 'disadvantaged'. In one hospitality pilot, for instance, women were classified as a disadvantaged group.

Problems with equity goals were most pronounced in the case of workers with disabilities. Employers in a range of industries emphasised the obstacles to employing workers with physical disabilities. Recognising the difficulty of securing small business involvement in training initiatives, coordinators of the Small Business Stream pilots were reluctant to impinge too far on employer recruitment practices. Some employers and pilot coordinators lacked awareness of the range of gradations of disability and the availability of additional subsidies for hiring some categories of disadvantaged workers.

Ongoing support

In order for Small Business Stream AVTS or other VET programs to be successful in the long term, there is a need to develop a formal support structure to assist coordinators in dealing with problems encountered in establishing and running particular traineeships. It was also apparent that pastoral care is needed in programs which involve large numbers of trainees and employers as course coordinators do not have the time necessary to ensure that employers' requirements from the training are met.

The future of demand-driven skill formation

When our evaluation of the AVTS Small Business and Enterprise Stream pilots was undertaken in 1996, the federal government was reforming or replacing most of the labour market programs established by its predecessor, including the AVTS. Nonetheless, it is clear that the approach which underpinned the AVTS remains in place and the lessons of that experience warrant close study in developing and implementing successor programs such as New Apprenticeships.

The Enterprise Stream pilots represented an opportunity for large companies to design and develop their own training and experiment with new and more flexible forms of training. Many of the companies were satisfied with the programs because they were specifically designed for their particular needs and addressed an identified skills shortage. Some enterprises saw the AVTS pilots and the introduction of competency-based training as an opportunity to change the workforce culture, improve the company's competitive advantage and avoid demarcation problems that existed between trade-qualified areas within the organisation. For small business the most significant impact of the AVTS pilots was the introduction of structured training where none previously existed. In these cases,

random *ad hoc* training activity was replaced by structured, recognised and industry-specific training options.

The AVTS pilots provided a demonstration of the positive aspects of a demand-driven approach to training. They proved that formal training can be flexible and relevant to industry needs, as well as portable, marketable and nationally recognised. Participants responded positively to: the production-driven, work-based nature of the training; limiting of the loss of productive capacity; and the creation of a context for skill development. There was a general perception that costs were lower because organisations gained access to a higher level of skills sooner than under a traditional training regime. In some companies, the pilots provided recognition of the skills and competencies of the existing workforce and in turn created a powerful incentive for employees to pursue further skills development. While traineeships provided a point of entry to an industry and opportunity to develop a career path in that industry, the mandatory inclusion of generic competencies could be expected to enhance trainees' employment prospects outside the particular industry.

Small businesses responded positively to: the financial incentives; the emphasis on training in the workplace; and sensitive scheduling of off-the-job training to account for business needs and cycles. The assistance provided by ITABs and Group Training Companies in the co-ordination, administration and project management areas was critical to the success of the pilots and the ongoing commitment of small business.

In both streams, the most significant difficulties were experienced where employers were inexperienced with assessment, monitoring and evaluation of trainee progress. Administrative requirements proved burdensome for many small businesses. Group Training Companies and ITABs alleviated these requirements by bearing the brunt of the administrative tasks. While industrial relations issues impeded some pilots, it must be recognised that these problems may emanate from employers and employees as well as unions.

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Employer Perceptions of ITABS: Survey Evidence

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Introduction

Industry training advisory bodies, or ITABs, are autonomous industry bodies which are recognised by governments as the major source of advice from industry on training matters. Typically, they are incorporated bodies employing their own staff, with membership representing employers and employees within a specific industry or related group of industries. Currently there are eighteen ITABs at the national level, and over 130 State-based bodies, and together they are claimed to have coverage of around 90 per cent of the Australian workforce (ANTA 1996, p. 9).

While the functions of ITABs have been described as highly diverse (see the ANTA/VEETAC Working Party on the National ITAB Network 1993), their major functions can be summarised as falling into four categories (see Collins 1995, p. 24). These are:

- analysing and responding to the changing training requirements of industry;
- provision of advice to Government about industry training requirements and concerns;
- providing a unified single industry voice on training issues; and
- promoting training reform and the benefits it brings to industry.

ITABs thus have a potentially important role to play in ensuring that the vocational education and training (VET) system delivers outcomes which are congruent with the demands and needs of industry. However, despite the relatively long history of ITABs, lack of responsiveness of the VET system to industry needs and a lack of industry involvement in training reform remains a common complaint among employers and employer groups (Allen Consulting Group 1994, Mead 1995, Moran 1994, Sweet 1993).

It is often claimed that at least part of the explanation for this lack of responsiveness on the part of the VET system lies with the ineffectiveness of ITABs (see Sweet 1993, p. 21). In particular, it has been claimed that most ITABs have insufficient direct contact with employers, and as a result are unlikely to be in a good position to adequately fulfil their objectives. Further, it has been claimed (eg. see Kemp 1996) that there is a widespread perception that ITABs were created to serve the needs of government rather than industry. There is, however, very little objective evidence to either support or refute such claims. The aim of the study reported on here is to help fill this gap. In particular, this paper reports the results from a survey seeking information from employers about their knowledge of the roles and functions of ITABs within their industry sector, and perceptions about the performance of those ITABs. Reference will also be made to complementary data collected from the chief executive officers (CEOs) of a matching sample of ITABs.

The emphasis in this research is on perceptions of State-based ITABs rather than national ITABs. The rationale for this focus is simply that employers are much more likely to have come into contact with the relevant State-based body than the national body; a view which received unanimous confirmation from the sample of ITAB chief executive officers.

Survey method and response

The main vehicle used for this study was a questionnaire-based survey administered by telephone in October 1996. In line with the practice adopted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in its 1994 survey of training practices (see ABS 1994), the unit of analysis for this survey was individual employers within a particular State or Territory. The person within the organisation whom the survey was aimed at was the person with most responsibility for decision-making concerning employee training. In the case of small firms, this was typically the company manager, whereas in large organisations it was usually a senior manager from a division specialising in human resources and/or training.

Resource constraints limited the size of the sample. As a result, attention was restricted to five randomly chosen industry sectors - electrical and electronic equipment manufacture and service, finance and business services, furniture and furnishings manufacture, hospitality and tourism, and retail and wholesale trade - and to specific States and Territories (four for each industry group). In summary, selection was constrained to locations as follows:

Table 1: Industry and geographical locations

Industry sector	States and territories
Electrical and electronics	New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria, Western Australia
Finance and business	Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania
Furniture and furnishings	Victoria, Tasmania, Western Australia, South Australia
Hospitality and tourism	New South Wales, Queensland, Northern Territory, Tasmania
Retail and wholesale trade	New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, ACT

Because of the strong likelihood of very small firms having very little involvement in, interest in, or need for, employee training (see Baker & Wooden 1996), the scope of the survey was also restricted to organisations with at least five employees.

The population frame from which the sample was chosen was the *Yellow Pages* telephone directories available on the World Wide Web. Key-words pertaining to the five industry sectors were first used to establish suitable *Yellow Pages* business classifications to search for business entries. In the larger States, selections were drawn from specific sub-regions (but always including the capital city) rather than from the entire State.

The desired number of completed interviews was 300, which was to comprise 60 firms in each industry sector and, in turn, these industry sub-samples were to comprise 15 firms from each of the four States or Territories. Furthermore, these sub-samples were further stratified by size. The survey resulted in a total of 293 completed interviews which was achieved from a total of 1222 selections. When calculated as a proportion of actual contacts made, the response rate was 55 per cent, which compares quite favourably with other employer-based surveys. Moreover the refusal rate, at 29 per cent, was quite low. The

survey results were complemented by interviews conducted with the CEOs of the corresponding ITABs in each State/Territory and industry.

Employer awareness of ITABS

Given that an important function of ITABs is to provide advice on industry training needs and priorities, it follows that ITABs must consult with industry. Responses from ITAB CEOs, however, indicated quite clearly that ITABs typically have only a limited amount of direct contact with individual employers. Instead, ITABs tend to work through representative structures, especially their own Board members as well as industry/employer associations. Indeed, Board membership is often dominated by representatives from employer associations. Direct contact with employers tends to be restricted to isolated instances where an ITAB receives a request for assistance with a specific problem, or to a select group of employers with an interest in training (usually the larger firms within the industry).

As a result, most ITABs considered that awareness among employers about ITAB activities was unlikely to be high. Only four of the 20 respondents from state ITABs indicated that there was even a moderate degree of awareness about the ITAB among employers. Views on whether this represents a problem for ITABs were more mixed, but it is concluded that on balance, most ITABs do not believe that diverting resources to self-promotion would be a sensible use of those resources, especially given the limited amount of funding received. Indeed, resource constraints were mentioned by 80 per cent of the state ITAB CEOs as being a significant obstacle to the ITAB achieving its objectives. In contrast, just 20 per cent of employers suggested that lack of direct contact with employers was a major problem.

In assessing the extent to which lack of direct contact with employers was a problem, it seemed appropriate to first confirm whether in fact employers are unaware of the activities of ITABs. This was a major objective of the employer survey. More specifically, respondents were asked to indicate whether they were aware of an advisory body within their State (or Territory) created to service the training needs of the industry, and whether they could name this body. The name(s) of the relevant ITAB(s) was then read out and respondents asked to confirm whether they had heard of it. Further, respondents who indicated that they were aware of the presence of an ITAB, were asked whether they had any knowledge about the ITAB's functions and objectives. A summary of these responses cross-classified by industry sector is provided in Table 2.

These results suggest, at least at first glance, that awareness among employers of the presence of ITABs is probably larger than widely assumed. Just over half of all respondents (53.6per cent) indicated that they were aware that an advisory body existed within their State (or Territory) which had been created to service their training needs. Of course, such responses may be based on only a vague level of awareness or, alternatively, may be the result of employers confusing another organisation with the relevant ITAB. Only 27 per cent of respondents, for example, were actually able to name the advisory body, and only a little over half of these respondents named the relevant ITAB as being that body. Thus, in total, just 14 per cent of respondents indicated that they were both aware of the presence of the ITAB and able to correctly name that body.

Table 2: Employer awareness of ITABs by industry (per cent)

	<i>Electrical etc</i>	<i>Finance/ business</i>	<i>Furniture etc</i>	<i>Hospitality/ tourism</i>	<i>Wh. & ret. trade</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
Aware of ITAB:						
and knew its name:						
and got it right	5.0	1.7	19.0	36.2	8.6	14.0
but got it wrong	10.0	10.2	15.5	13.8	17.2	13.3
but did not know its name	21.7	23.7	34.5	22.4	29.3	26.3
Unaware of any training advisory body	63.3	64.4	31.0	27.6	44.8	46.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Recognised name of Relevant ITAB	16.7	10.2	55.2	77.6	29.3	37.5
Have knowledge of function & objectives of ITAB	8.3	3.4	27.6	58.6	20.7	23.5

Nevertheless, it may still be inappropriate to assume that just because a specific manager within an organisation is unable to name the ITAB, a reasonably high degree of awareness does not exist. Perhaps more reasonable indicators are provided by the final two rows in Table 2, which report: (i) the proportion of managers who responded affirmatively when asked whether they had heard of the ITAB when it was named; and (ii) the proportion of managers who indicated that they had knowledge of what the functions and objectives of ITABs were. Thirty-seven per cent of respondents indicated that they recognised the name, while 23 per cent indicated that they believed they knew what the functions and objectives of the ITAB were.

Table 2 also reveals that the awareness of ITABs varies markedly across industry sectors. Awareness and recognition is extremely high in hospitality and tourism. In this sector, 36 per cent of respondents were able to correctly name the ITAB without prompting, while almost 78 per cent indicated that they recognised the ITAB name. Awareness and recognition is also relatively high in the furniture and furnishings sector with around 55 per cent indicating that they recognised the name of the relevant ITAB. This may seem surprising given that the merging of the former furniture and furnishings ITABs with ITABs from other sectors (mainly textile, clothing and footwear) to form new ITABs operating under the industry label 'light manufacturing' could have been expected to weaken industry identification with the ITAB. However, given the recency of the mergers and consequent name changes, respondents were asked whether they recognised the ITAB under either its current name or its former name. Almost half of those respondents from the furniture and furnishings industry who indicated that they recognised the ITAB, only did so after the former name (which invariably included a reference to the furniture and furnishings industry) was read out.

At the other end of the spectrum, industry awareness and recognition of ITABs is very low in both the electrical and electronics sector and the finance and business sector. Within the former, only five per cent of respondents were able to correctly name the relevant ITAB

and only 17 per cent recognised its name. Not surprisingly, the proportion that indicated that they knew anything about what ITABs do was also very low - just eight per cent. In finance and business services the level of awareness is even lower, with the comparable figures being just two, ten and three per cent. The low level of awareness in finance and business services is not surprising and undoubtedly reflects the fact that the ITAB presence in this industry sector is relatively new.

As expected, employer awareness of ITABs varies not only with industry sector but with firm size. Figures reported in Table 3 show that recognition of, and awareness about, ITABs and the functions they perform is highest among larger employers. For example, just under 30 per cent of respondents from small firms (less than 20 employees) indicated that they recognised the name of the relevant ITAB compared with almost 48 per cent of firms with 50 employees or more. Nevertheless, while statistically significant, the difference is possibly not as great as might have been expected.

Table 3: Employer awareness of ITABs by firm size (per cent)

	<i>No. of employees:</i>		
	<i><20</i>	<i>20-49</i>	<i>50+</i>
Aware of ITAB:			
and knew its name:			
and got it right	4.2	12.7	22.7
but got it wrong	16.8	10.1	12.6
but did not know its name	23.2	34.2	23.5
Unaware of any training advisory body	55.8	43.0	41.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Recognised name of relevant ITAB	29.5	31.6	47.9
Have knowledge of functions & objectives of ITAB	12.6	22.8	32.8

Firm size and industry, however, may not be the only variables with which employer awareness of ITABs correlates. Other variables which might be expected to have an influence, and on which data were available, include: the need for training advice; the extent of training; age of firm; and respondent attitudes towards coordinated industry-wide approaches to training. In order to disentangle the relative importance of these different influences, binary logit models of employer awareness of ITABs were estimated using three different dependent variables.

The results confirm that there are significant inter-industry differences, with the size of the coefficients indicating that, other things held constant, employer awareness and recognition of ITABs is greatest in hospitality and tourism, followed by furniture and furnishings, and then wholesale and retail trade. The level of awareness among employers within the electrical/electronics sector, however, was found not to be significantly greater than in finance and business services. The results also confirm that size differences exist, though the relationship is not linear. Awareness is very low among employers with fewer than 20 employees, but among larger employers awareness does not continue to rise with size. Indeed, awareness of ITABs would appear to be greatest among firms with between 50 and 99 employees. Very differently, and in contrast to expectations, age effects were found to

be largely non-existent, with newer firms not being any more or less likely to report knowledge of ITABs. On the other hand, the perceived need for training advice was, as expected, strongly associated with a much greater recognition and knowledge of ITABs. Finally, those respondents who described national training initiatives as being helpful, were much more likely to be aware of ITABs.

ITAB functions and objectives

The survey instrument also asked respondents to indicate what they believed were the main functions undertaken by the relevant State-based ITAB. This question, however, was only posed to those respondents who indicated that they had any knowledge of the functions and objectives of the ITAB. This group is relatively small (just 24 per cent of the total sample) and hence we are constrained in the amount of detail that can be reported. A summary of results with firms classified into two broad size groups is provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Main functions of ITABs by firm size (per cent of firms with knowledge of ITAB functions)

	<i>Firm size (employees):</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>Prob. of zero diff.</i>
	<i><50</i>	<i>50+</i>		
Advising employers of available training options	100.0	73.0	85.1	0.002
Working with training providers to improve training courses	100.0	73.0	84.6	0.003
Providing training	55.2	38.9	46.2	ns
Advising government	92.9	91.4	92.1	ns
Accrediting courses and providers	89.3	77.8	82.8	ns
Marketing government training initiatives	65.4	63.6	64.4	ns
Assisting firms to identify training needs	71.4	51.4	60.3	ns
Selling training resources and materials	60.7	47.2	53.1	ns
Promoting industry training	96.6	86.1	90.8	ns

Note: ns, not significant

The figures suggest that a broad degree of consensus exists among respondents, with the large majority of firms of the view that the main functions of ITABs were: advising government on training needs (92 per cent); promoting industry training (91 per cent); advising employers of available training options (85 per cent); working with training providers to improve training courses (85 per cent); accrediting training courses and/or providers (83 per cent); marketing government training initiatives (64 per cent); and assisting firms to identify training needs (60 per cent). Differences across the two size categories were generally not pronounced, though it is true that small firms were much more likely to see both provision of advice with respect to available training options and working with training providers as part of the ITAB function (in fact, *all* respondents from organisations with fewer than 50 employees were of this view).

There are, however, good reasons to be concerned about the extent to which these responses reflect actual practice. Most obviously, 46 per cent of respondents were of the view that ITABs actually provide training when in fact this is manifestly untrue for nearly all ITABs. Perceptions may not accord with reality for a number of reasons. It may simply reflect a lack of direct involvement with the ITAB, even though the firm may be aware of

the presence of the ITAB. Alternatively, some firms may confuse ITABs with other bodies with training responsibilities. This seems very likely, for example, in the retail trade sector where the industry skills centres had previously been operated by the ITABs.

Finally, all respondents who recognised the name of the relevant ITAB in their industry were asked what they felt *should* be the three most important functions of ITABs. A breakdown of responses is provided in Table 5. This table reveals that the majority of employers believe the main function of ITABs should be to provide advice to industry. Almost 60 per cent of respondents to this question listed training advice to industry as one of the three most important functions that an ITAB should perform. In contrast, just 25 per cent nominated provision of advice to governments.

Table 5: Employer perceptions of most important ITAB functions (per cent of firms which recognised relevant ITAB)

Functions	Per cent
Provision of training advice to industry	59.5
General advice about training matters	47.6
Advice on available training options	14.3
Advice about firm training arrangements	6.0
To improve training arrangements (e.g., by working with training providers)	36.9
Provision of advice to governments	25.0
Training delivery	19.0
Involvement in accreditation and recognition processes	15.5
Provision of training resources and facilities	10.7
Promotion of training to industry	7.1
Assistance with trainees and apprentices	7.1
Monitoring industry training standards	7.1
Determining industry training needs	6.0
Coordinating an industry-wide approach to training	4.8
Other	13.1

Note: the percentages are calculated after excluding 26 cases (or 23.6 per cent of the valid sample) who failed to provide an adequate response to this question.

Comparison with qualitative data collected from the CEOs of the ITABs corresponding to the employer sample suggests a clear tension between employers and ITAB management. While there appears to be no dispute about the primary role of the ITAB as a source of training advice, there is a clear difference in expectations concerning the direction in which that advice should flow. Industry expects the advice to flow down to employers, whereas ITAB management is much more likely to regard the upward flow of information to government as more important.

The other often-mentioned function was assistance in bringing about improved training arrangements, usually through working with training providers to make courses more relevant to industry needs. Almost 37 per cent of respondents were classified as responding in this way. Again, responses from ITAB management suggest that this objective is, while not unimportant, subsidiary to other functions such as promotion of industry training, involvement in accreditation and recognition processes and, of course, provision of advice to government. Employers, on the other hand, would appear not to share these sentiments.

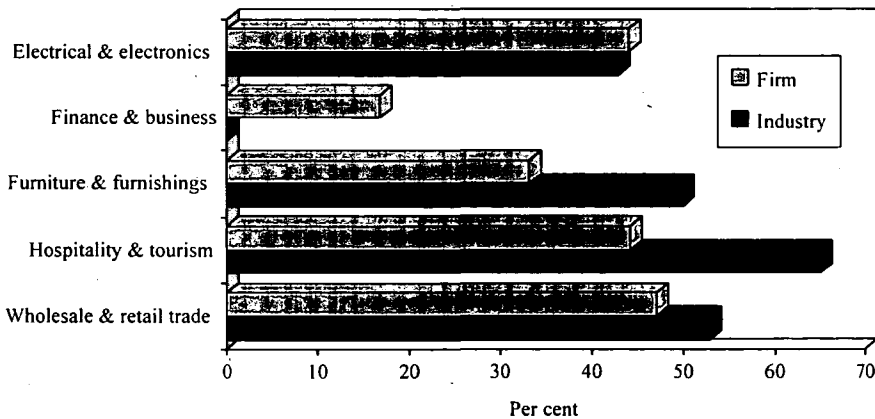
It is also again worth noting that almost one in five respondents mentioned training delivery as a function that they felt ITABs should be involved in, even though this has been explicitly ruled out in all funding agreements between governments and ITABs.

Satisfaction with, and benefits of, ITABs

Finally, we turn to evidence on employer perceptions of ITAB performance. On balance, the survey results suggest a reasonably high level of satisfaction with ITAB performance. For instance, most employers (77 per cent) who claimed to have some knowledge of what functions ITABs perform were of the view that their ITAB was doing what they believed it should be doing. Further, when respondents were asked about their perception of the value of the ITAB to their industry (asked of all respondents who were aware of the presence of the relevant ITAB), only a small proportion (8 per cent) indicated that the ITAB had had a negative impact. Most claimed the ITAB had either been good for the industry (55 per cent) or had been neither good nor bad (37 per cent). On the other hand, the proportion responding that their own organisation had directly benefited from an ITAB presence was lower - 40 per cent of all firms which recognised the name of the relevant ITAB.

As shown in Figure 1, the proportion reporting that ITABs had been beneficial varied across industry groups. In particular, very few respondents from the finance and business services sector indicated that ITABs had been good for either their industry (none in fact) or their own organisation (17 per cent). Nevertheless, the small sample sizes involved does mean that the differences across industry groups are not statistically significant.

Figure 1: Percentage of firms responding that ITAB had been beneficial for their firm or industry, by industry



Further inferences about the value of ITABs can be drawn from responses on the specific benefits that ITABs are believed to have conferred on individual organisations. As documented in Table 6, just over 45 per cent of the relevant respondents (that is, those that believe ITABs have benefited their organisation) pointed to improved training outcomes resulting from, for example, the introduction of traineeships, improved courses, provision

of new courses, access to national standards and improved accreditation processes. A further 37 per cent pointed to improved training information and advice. Other less frequently mentioned benefits include greater awareness about training, a stronger industry voice on training matters, and improved coordination of industry approaches to training and the training reform agenda.

Table 6: Employer perceptions of types of benefits conferred on firm by ITAB (per cent of firms which believe they have benefited from ITABs)

Benefits	Per cent
Improved training outcomes	45.6
Traineeships / improved apprenticeship outcomes	14.3
Improved training courses and arrangements	11.6
Provision of specific courses / seminars	9.3
Access to national standards	9.3
Accreditation of courses and/or providers	7.0
Other	7.0
Improved information and advice	37.2
Greater industry coordination / interaction on training matters	9.3
Greater awareness about training	7.0
Enhanced industry voice	7.0
Other	9.3
Not stated	4.7

Of some interest, comparisons between these employer responses and those from ITAB management reveal a high degree of similarity, with perhaps the most notable difference being that the ITABs, as compared with employers, are much more likely to point to the benefits to industry of the information and advice they provide.

Conclusions

Despite the apparent lack of direct contact between ITABs and individual employers, the evidence from the employer survey casts doubt on the conventional wisdom, shared by most ITABs, that there is very little knowledge among employers about ITABs. Almost 40 per cent of respondents to this sample (which admittedly is small - 293 cases - and excludes all employers with fewer than five employees) recognised the name of the relevant ITAB within their State and industry group, while almost a quarter claimed to have some knowledge of the functions and objectives of ITABs. Furthermore, the rates of recognition varied markedly across industry sectors, ranging from just 10 per cent in finance and business services to almost 78 per cent in hospitality and tourism. The differences between these two sectors are almost certainly a function of the very different histories of the ITAB networks in these two industries. The ITAB network in hospitality and tourism has been relatively well established over a long period, whereas ITABs in the finance and business services sector are a recent phenomenon. Further, unlike many other sectors, the organisational structure of the ITAB network in hospitality and tourism has been relatively stable which in turn has been conducive to the nurturing of networks within the industry. These results thus suggest that greater awareness of ITABs in other industry sectors will result given both time and stability of ITAB and industry structures.

The results also suggest that most employers are not disaffected by the performance of the ITABs which cover their industry (at least at the State level), with over half (55 per cent) responding that the ITAB had been good for their industry, and 40 per cent indicating that the activities of the ITAB had directly benefited their firm. Nevertheless, evidence was uncovered which suggests that the role firms expect ITABs to play is something different from the role ITABs see themselves as having. Most obviously, while there appears to be no dispute about the primary role of ITABs as a source of training advice, there is a clear difference in expectations concerning the direction in which that advice should flow. Industry expects the advice to flow down to employers, whereas ITAB management is much more likely to regard the upward flow of information to government as more important (or at least as using up much more of their resources). There is also a clear expectation among a sizeable minority of employers that ITABs should be actively involved in training delivery, which is counter to current policy. Very differently, evidence was uncovered which suggests that what firms value most highly is not so much the information and advice that ITABs provide, but instead initiatives that lead directly to improved training outcomes. The ITABs, on the hand, are more likely to describe the information and advice role has the major benefit accruing to industry.

The findings reported in this paper have a number of potentially important policy implications. First, given the correlation between awareness and stability of ITAB structures, it follows that further restructuring of ITAB networks will only serve to undermine ITAB effectiveness. Second, the results suggest that consideration should be given to re-focusing the role of ITABs on the provision of advice to industry, rather than to government. This, however, will require governments, and particularly State governments, to reconsider the role they expect ITABs to play in policy formation, with a view to rationalising the demands placed by governments on ITABs

Finally, the usual caveat concerning the need for more research is warranted. The research findings reported in this paper come from just five industry sectors. It remains to be seen whether the conclusions would continue to hold in a larger sample of firms drawn from a wider cross-section of industries.

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Training: who pays - who benefits? The case of small retail firmsⁱ

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Introduction

The question 'who should pay for training' requires a context for any response. This particular response seeks to address the question from the perspective of continuing education and training in small business. It is based on findings from an Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) Research Advisory Council funded project which involved case studies of four small retail firms in provincial cities in South East Queensland. The smallest firm had a full-time staff of eight, two had nearly twenty staff, and the largest had forty-five. Three firms qualified as small enterprises according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics definition, while the fourth firm was a medium sized enterprise. Each firm was owner managed and had operated in their communities for many years. The majority of staff were long term employees and some had family links to the company owners. With possibly one exception, neither staff nor owners had any post school education or training qualifications. The firms faced competition from national retailers, especially through satellite shopping complexes. Three firms operated in strip retail locations, and one was based in a retail/industrial park.

Methods

The methodology used to evaluate training outcomes was derived from Kirkpatrick (1959, cited in Pine & Tingley 1993), who proposed four levels to evaluate the effects of training in terms of workplace outcomes. Level One considered the immediate measurement of participant reaction to training. Level Two identified the skills and attitudes that were learnt in the training. Level Three considered participant use of new skills and acquired knowledge, and Level Four measured the Return on Investment (ROI) obtained from the training. Other writers (Shelton & Alliger 1993, Pine & Tingley 1993) have argued that by careful identification of measurable outcomes it is possible to determine quantitatively the effect on ROI of workplace training. The approach adopted in the present study was more conservative. The critical question was whether owners of small enterprises are convinced that benefits of training can be inferred from the evidence. Therefore a sequenced analysis was developed which used the four levels of evidence proposed by Kirkpatrick to infer a causal relationship between training and changes in productivity. Once training occurred, evidence was collected about staff responses to the training (level one), the competencies achieved (level two), continued use and maintenance of the skills (level three) and business performance (level four). It is argued that only where there is evidence that each step in this link is confirmed, can a link between training and business performance be claimed.

Staff perceptions about training (level one) were collected by interview and through the use of a self-report instrument. Competencies obtained (level two) were to be obtained through a comparison of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) outcomes and post-training competency based assessment conducted by the training provider. For reasons outlined below such data were not available and qualitative evidence from interviews with staff and supervisors was substituted. Staff use of new skills (level three) was measured indirectly by

a customer survey. The Return on Investment (level four) was addressed through the collection of business statistics reported by the owner.

If the assumption is accepted that the question of who should pay depends upon who benefits, then the question can be answered by segmenting the training process into components and considering the primary beneficiary of each aspect of training. Segments include establishing a training culture, recognition of prior learning, development of staff in firm specific competencies, and accreditation for individuals against the national standard. Comment is also offered on some associated issues including formulating contracts for training, roles for managers and staff in training delivery, and the effects of employer expenditure on commitment to training.

Training Components

Establishing a training culture

Although all owners were convinced that improvements in customer service were necessary, none of the owners were willing to meet the expense of a structured training program in customer service. They had no experience of formal training and no perception that such training was 'worth' the expenditure. Although the project had not been planned to foster a training culture in each firm, there was evidence in the case studies that where a facilitator fostered awareness of the potential benefits of the then Australian Vocational Training Scheme, the owner responded in a positive manner. From this experience it was apparent that the concept of a training culture needs to be introduced to a client in a context that provides relevance for the firm. Government advice on training opportunities and funding assistance through promotional materials and information sessions is often generalised and, at least in the four cases analysed, did not appear to reflect the specific day-to-day concerns of small enterprises. Introductory material about training should reflect the immediate concerns of specific small firms. Face to face contact in individual firms is an expensive but effective means of delivering such information.

It was a recommendation of the study that small firms receive guidance from a publicly funded facilitator, in a role analogous to that played by Group Training Companies for individuals seeking to enter the labour market. Expenditure required to induct the owner of a small firm into the culture of workplace training is necessarily a public cost, simply because it is unlikely to happen unless the owner can be persuaded as to the benefits of making a commitment to structured training. In the firms studied, owner initiated direction of staff was inefficient if not counter-productive, in obtaining improved performance. Nonetheless the lack of experience among owners and staff of post-school education and training means that this approach is at best an unfamiliar option, and more likely a threat to the self esteem of both the owner and experienced staff.

Recognition of Prior Learning

The provision of RPL in a small firm is crucial to the efficient delivery of training services. In the four case studies, most staff were probably competent against the standard criteria in the draft Retail Competency Standard when training began. This was demonstrated in one case where RPL against all criteria was eventually granted for all but one member of staff.

In the other firms, staff declined to complete an RPL exercise in which they were to self report their competencies and have these reports assessed by a supervisor and by the trainer. Due to the risk of alienating staff, this approach was abandoned and training proceeded on the assumption that most staff met the competency standard, but needed refreshing and extension.

An alternative approach is for RPL to be part of the training needs analysis. The process would establish the extent to which the industry standard is achieved, the extent to which systems and practices in the firm support the achievement of competencies, and could identify additional competencies required to enhance the market niche of the firm. The process would involve a focus on the collection of information about needs, by individual and group interviews, in which the competencies of individuals might be determined as an associated outcome. In this approach, staff will have a major role in the establishment and reinforcement of new competencies and the training provider will need to create a team environment that supports enhanced performance, verifies demonstrated competencies, and provides guidance to experienced staff in internal mentoring.

This alternative approach to RPL differs considerably from that adopted in institutional settings where individuals apply for RPL. In the work setting, the responsibility rests with the trainer to initiate RPL assessment and to use this as a vehicle through which to acknowledge competence, identify firm specific needs, and build the confidence of staff in the trainer, and in the process of continued learning in the firm. The conclusion therefore is that RPL is a legitimate training cost to be met as part of the needs analysis for the firm.

In an environment where a needs analysis is required to demonstrate to the owner and staff that training can be of benefit, the cost of RPL should, at least for initial training experiences, be carried by government agencies seeking to foster workplace training. For this reason the study recommended that a Small Enterprise Training Scheme (SET) be established to allow small firms without prior experience of accredited training to gain expert advice on training needs, and to guide initial experiences of structured training. Once a training culture is established in a firm it may be reasonable to expect the firm to meet some or all of the costs of any subsequent RPL in additional areas of training need.

When RPL is initiated with staff their levels of responsibility, their range of tasks, and their skills become more clearly identified. This can result in a member of staff seeking additional support, equipment, or a pay rise. Although this involves a specific member of staff, the situation may reflect equity or efficiency considerations in the firm, as much as any personal advantage for the individual concerned. In one case a person used the RPL material as a basis for seeking to justify a pay rise, and in another to seek additional equipment. In preparing firms for the RPL process, one needs to identify that when staff participate there could be some management issues that impinge on the salary levels, or services, or support or equipment provided to staff. Management should be advised to anticipate this possibility and be prepared to interpret it in a broader context of the overall performance of the training. Changes in expectations or demands by staff could help to clarify areas of ambiguity where there has been a lack of identification of function or need.

Developing enterprise competencies

While people currently in employment may look to develop their productive capacities through training, the process is more complex than we had presumed at the start of the project. Whereas one can assume little industry knowledge with initial Vocational Education and Training and set about providing a framework of industry competency, this is not the case with continuing Vocational Education and Training. Lewis (1995) suggested that to achieve their goals 'good' firms would add extra elements, performance criteria, and units of competence to a national standard. To reconceptualise this approach, there appears to be a need for additional dimensions, not just elements, in the skills framework laid out in a National Standard. Workplaces are multi-dimensional training environments where interpersonal relations, systems and organisational structures come in to play, as well as the specific enterprise competencies that enable a market niche position to be realised.

The processes and the dynamics involved in delivering effective workplace training in these kinds of organisations are complex ones. This complexity needs to be addressed so that training providers can identify the processes involved in winning commitment, developing competency and ensuring support for newly learnt skills. Nevertheless, the potential benefits of specific enterprise training lie primarily with the firm and the direct training costs can be argued to be the responsibility of the firm.

The project team assumed that the principals of the firm would be able to manage and drive training, but one of the findings from the case studies is that in general principals of traditional small firms have neither the knowledge nor the skills necessary. If this finding applies more widely in small and medium enterprise, then the assumption that business can drive the New Apprenticeships model is flawed.

What owners and managers can do, and need to do, is to show their commitment to realising effective training outcomes. One manager asked, 'How can I show staff I'm committed to training?' The response includes participating in training and taking a leading role. The manager needs to say to the staff that this is *my* initiative, *not* the trainer's. When resistors speak the manager needs, on one hand, to allow concerns to be expressed, but then indicate why concerns should be put aside. In one case study, staff resistance was challenged by the principal who gave specific examples of why the training was necessary and why current performance levels were inadequate to ensure the firm's future survival.

The case studies established that principals lacked the knowledge of the training system needed to meet the requirements of funding bodies. All required assistance in identifying forms required, in filling them out, in sending them and in asking the questions of the training provider that would help them to complete these tasks. They were unaware of the documentation they were entitled to receive from the training provider to support the completion of the forms.

In all of the case studies we were alerted to the need for assistance to the principal when material was received from the training provider. Primarily this material comprised a bill for the training services, together with some documentation about the training. In all cases the documentation provided by the training provider was insufficient. In the case of one firm the training provider did not supply the student identification numbers. In a second

case the provider did not include the Employment Training Provider Public Liability Insurance, student enrolment names and the student identification numbers. As funding documentation requires that the principal confirm all the information prepared for the funding agent by the training provider, the open document sent to the principal for signature in this case was something like a blank cheque.

In each case the facilitator advised the principal to refuse to sign and the relevant documents were subsequently promptly received. Acting on experience with other small firms, the training provider had sought to take the responsibility for ensuring that the forms were completed, after they were signed by the firm.

The case studies demonstrate the unequal position of small firms in managing contractual matters with training providers and government agencies and provide evidence of a need for an independent facilitator to represent them in these circumstances. However, given the attitudes of small firm owners to the costs of training, it is unlikely that owners will meet the additional costs of obtaining the services of a facilitator. In small firms there is an expectation that 'it won't happen to us' when it comes to failures in training, as with other 'chance' events. The cases reported demonstrate that even when a facilitator is introduced, difficulties can arise, although it should be added that the facilitator was introduced part way through the process and instructed to observe, rather than lead the process. If further research can demonstrate that a facilitator can enhance training benefits, then the costs associated with training facilitation might be argued to be in the benefit of the firm. Given the difficult task of persuading firm owners to meet the costs of accredited training, the best that might be hoped for is that governments and firms share the costs of facilitating training. Provided facilitated training is shown to be more effective, the benefit for government will be wider acceptance of the benefits of structured training.

It is proposed therefore that a subsidy be offered for training facilitation consultancy, perhaps on a dollar for dollar basis and up to a specified proportion of the direct training costs. Provided these direct training costs are the responsibility of the firm, and provided the facilitation is provided by an agent genuinely independent of the training provider, there is a natural constraint on inflated costing for facilitation.

Accreditation

We could find neither need for nor interest in accredited training among small business owners and staff. Among the firms involved in the case study, long term survival of the business was the major concern. Interest lay only in improving performance in the firm and in the benefits this would bring. Staff benefited directly from the training by receiving bonuses and through increased job security. Owners benefited in terms of a more secure future and the potential for improved profits.

In one case study family members who were able, in the opinion of the facilitator, to demonstrate the required competencies, declined to submit log books. There was a question of 'rights' as family owners, and 'risks' associated with the possibility that staff would demonstrate additional competencies. In another firm, repeated efforts were needed to persuade staff to submit evidence of competency for assessment. Only newly appointed

staff were consistently willing to be assessed, suggesting that the role of accreditation is of primary interest to those new to the firm or industry.

Whether accreditation is necessary is open to question. For experienced staff, the need for accreditation would arise in a context where they change employment. In this case references would normally be relied upon more than 'pieces of paper'. Should they seek entry to a tertiary institute, the question that arises is what value would be placed on workplace qualifications? If governments wish to impose accreditation requirements on work place training, then this is primarily to satisfy government policy requirements. It follows that government should pay.

Associated Issues

Contracts with trainers

The question of a partnership between the trainer and the firm, and the role of the contract in that partnership, is crucial to achieving effective delivery of training with 'naïve' firms. Initially it is difficult to clearly articulate the fundamental needs of the firm. It requires a considerable degree of awareness of the interpersonal processes and of the systems that underlie these processes within the firm. This could be addressed in part by expanding the needs analysis to include office systems and communication channels. Notwithstanding that, as training constitutes a change process for the firm, it is imperative that the contract includes a capacity to respond to changes in perceived needs by the client.

If the contract includes a mechanism for negotiating changes in content, mode and timing of delivery, this could help to facilitate more responsive training. Both the firm and the provider should be able to initiate changes, and have a mechanism to ensure change. In addition, the firm needs the power to stop the training without incurring an onerous financial burden, just as the provider needs protection from whimsical changes by the firm, such as changes at short notice to dates for formal sessions.

The case studies demonstrate that the training provider felt an obligation to deliver in the terms in which the contract was originally structured but was placed in an ambiguous position where other needs emerged in the workplace. On the one hand there was an internal contract within the training organisation, which the trainer was obliged to meet and so-called 'quality' control required that training be delivered according to specifications. On the other hand personal commitment by the trainer to the client created conflict where a different type of response was required to that negotiated and included in the terms of the contract. It appears that this can best be resolved by providing flexibility for the parties to vary the terms of the contract.

There is a distinction also to be made between different sub-sections within the training organisation - between the delivery, capacity, and teaching style of the person presenting the individual sessions, and the role of the commercial manager. While the trainer has primary carriage of the delivery, the manager has to maintain the integrity of the organisation, while allowing the flexibility that the trainer needs to respond to the client as needs emerge. This impacts on the timing and quality of delivery.

Between training sessions, there needs to be discussions between mentors, participants and the provider to ensure that the training remains effective, relevant and responsive to the sometimes changing needs of the work environment during the training process. A training facilitator can play the role of negotiating the adjustments needed to ensure the relevance of training.

'Feeling the pain'

In the four case studies the costs of training were analysed to identify the source and level of expenditure. The training package provided was similar in each case, so the costs are comparable. In three firms training was completed. In one case the firm provided just twelve per cent of funds, and between forty and fifty per cent of expenditure in the other two cases. In the fourth case, the manager reported paying staff for hours spent in training but this was not independently confirmed. No government funds were expected to be provided, beyond the limited support provided by the research facilitator. The low financial commitment of firm two was primarily because in this firm the staff were not paid for the hours spent attending formal training sessions. The figures are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Expenditure on training by source of funds

Case	Training outcome	Firm input \$	Government input \$	Firms %
1	Positive	6,960	9,315	43
2	Positive Short term	876	6,943	12
3	Negative	5,500	6,075	48
4	Incomplete	Not known	850	90 plus

In promoting Client Purchase Agreements, Training Queensland staff expressed the view that the way to ensure commitment from the firm was to make the principal put up a significant amount of the cost of the training, thus encouraging ownership of the effectiveness of the outcome. In calculating this contribution, Training Queensland did not allow for the salary costs of staff. From Table 1 it is evident that staff costs make a substantial difference to the training costs for small enterprises.

In the most successful case, the owner made a significant contribution to the cost of training, although not in a form recognised by the funding agency. However in case study three, where the owner contributed an even larger proportion of the costs, the training and associated activities in the firm led to a negative outcome in terms of customer service. The owner, however, remained committed to training in his firm, but opted for non-accredited training to redress the situation. In the remaining study, the owner made a negligible contribution to the costs of training and did not actively support the maintenance of the training benefits. It is concluded from these cases that a financial contribution by the firm is a necessary but not a sufficient basis for securing owner commitment. In Cases Three and Four, where a manager or principal was not fully supportive, more funds have been expended, or are potentially at risk than in Cases One and Two, where training benefits were derived.

Summary

This paper has identified four principle cost components of accredited continuing vocational training in workplace settings. It is argued that in small enterprises, the cost of initial needs analysis should be borne by government, as the price of encouraging a training culture in small business. It is further argued that the costs of facilitating quality training delivery that is responsive to changing workplace needs should be shared on an equal basis between firms and government, and costed as a proportion of the actual costs of delivering training. Facilitation should in part be a public cost provided that further research confirms the benefits in terms of training outcomes. The value of accreditation to small firms is questioned, and therefore if it is to be mandated it should be a government cost.

The direct costs of training including wages, teaching resources, and delivery fees should be assigned to the firm since these are the activities that can bring direct benefits to the performance of the firm. Assigning these costs to the firm may encourage commitment from a manager to support training, but is no guarantee of successful outcomes. Public funds are needed to imbed a training culture and to increase the possibilities of successful training outcomes, because small enterprise owners are not equipped with the time or the skills needed to realise the potential benefits of training. As it is in the public benefit for training to become an essential element of good business practice, public monies are needed to ensure that the private funds are put to good effect.

This approach is different to that one adopted by state authorities who presume that sharing all costs will provide for quality of training. The approach advocated is one where costs are assigned for various aspects of the totality of training provision, according to whether the benefit is primarily public or private.

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ⁱ This paper reports some outcomes of a research project which was funded in part by the Commonwealth Government through the ANTA Research Advisory Council. The University of Southern Queensland and Central Queensland University have also supported the project. Those who contributed to the research project included Dr Emory McLendon, Dr Chris Forlin and Mr Kris Kossen of USQ, Ms Catherine Arden of the Stanthorpe Training Company, and Mr John James, an industry consultant.

Entry level training and New Apprenticeships: Delivery and funding options

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Introduction

In the current climate of change towards more market-sensitive training systems there are a number of emerging program delivery options for vocational education and training (VET) courses and packages. These need to be considered if public funds for training are to be used more efficiently and effectively.

Using practices drawn from a range of existing school/enterprise and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Institute partnerships, alternative models of training delivery can be identified which challenge the present administrative and resource separation of education and training agencies. These models of partnership offer guidelines for the delivery of training at a reduced unit cost, particularly for Entry Level Training (ELT). The models:

- shift the focus of full-time ELT delivery to senior secondary school;
- eliminate curriculum/training package duplication between ELT VET courses and other senior secondary school courses;
- increase use of school/TAFE Institute partnerships and structured work placement in full-time ELT courses; and
- selectively use subsidies or tax incentives to attract more employers to provide work-based training places.

These new models suggest that cost-shifting through reconfiguration of training provision may occur in two ways: from public sector to private sector and vice versa. They also suggest a redistribution of training costs within the public sector to the major delivery points of a reconstructed concept of ELT.

The options are derived from projects at local and regional levels which have been created in response to national training, education or labour market policy initiatives of the last seven years. To give them a policy context it is first necessary to consider some elements of recent training history.

Connected changes in training

Four themes of training provision and structure in Australia have a bearing on the development of alternative delivery models for ELT and New Apprenticeships:

- an ongoing national discourse on the reform of skilled training provision over at least the last twenty five years, creating a policy thread;
- a growing practice of cross-skilling/multi-skilling across traditional trade and technical occupations;
- increasing levels of skill and credentialism required in occupations once designated as semi-skilled or low-skilled; and

- the involvement of senior secondary schools in the provision of entry level skills training.

These themes suggest that the emerging alternative models of ELT delivery are based on past and present practice and are local responses to central policy initiatives rather than mere theoretical constructs. As local responses, they often lie outside the uni-dimensional and fragmented policy, program and resourcing guidelines of government agencies responsible for components of the education, training and labour market mix. The gains and efficiencies they offer in such areas as resourcing, program delivery, equity and other social and economic goals are not fully realised. The explication of these models is a positive contribution to reconceptualising a more responsive and fairer system of skills training in a period of constrained public expenditure.

The policy thread

Since at least 1974 the need for training reform and the development of opportunities for individuals have been seen as fundamental steps in the structural adjustment of the Australian economy. In 1974 The Australian Labour Market Training Report argued for the long-term restructuring of the workforce by increasing the general level of skill, using new flexible training arrangements to cover the full range of occupations (Cochrane 1974). In 1992 the entry level training taskforce echoed this argument when it stated that: '...this report is proposing a medium to long-term response to structural adjustment and concomitant training needs' (Carmichael 1992). Both reports identified key related issues such as micro-economic reform in the workplace, and the need for more flexible training arrangements than provided by the traditional apprenticeship model.

Similar concerns are apparent in the 1985 Inquiry into Labour Market Programs (Kirby 1985) which produced the Traineeship concept, and the white paper *Working Nation* (DEETYA 1994) which created NETTFORCE. More recently the 1996 Modern Australian Apprenticeship and Traineeship System (now referred to as New Apprenticeships) policy statement (Kemp 1996) of the Federal Government and the amended Workplace Relations Act (Commonwealth of Australia 1996) provide a framework for changing employment and skill training practices.

All the policy initiatives identified above share a concern about achieving flexibility and responsiveness in Australian training systems and build on the directions and openings developed by preceding policies and programs. The New Apprenticeship concept has elements in common with programs and ideas in each of the previous policy initiatives. Many aspects of *Training Agreements and Training Wages* as presented in the 1996 Workplace Relations Act are extensions of ideas that were considered during 1993 and 1994 prior to the establishment of the 1994 Youth Training Wage Agreement and were also considered by the Kirby Report of 1985.

Cross-skilling, flexible training and increasing credentialism

Traditional trade occupations have responded to technological change and work re-organisation by incorporating new skills into existing occupational and trade union structures. Very few new occupations emerged in the post World War II era which used the

apprenticeship model of entry level training. Other entry level occupations which were major employers of youth did not develop a strong contract of training approach as they were either considered to be unskilled or they maintained internal labour market training structures - an approach which avoided contracts of training, formal certification and consequent salary and job status issues.

From the 1970s two influences began to change the traditional response of occupations to skill ownership. The first was the re-organisation of work. Through pressures including technological change and the need to improve productivity, work began to be re-organised across traditionally separate occupational boundaries, resulting in an increasing range of shared skills¹.

Cross-skilling has now progressed to the point where a small but growing number of national industry associations have produced skill and qualification pathway maps which place skill modules into a variety of course or qualification types. For instance, in the metals/manufacturing industry modules are contained within either an Engineering Traineeship or an Engineering Production Certificate. Students studying for either of these qualifications have common core skills, thus allowing a high degree of transferability on-the-job.

The second and related influence was the increasing level of skill (and measures of skill attainment) required in occupations traditionally classified as low-skilled and with no qualification linkage to remuneration. Industries such as Retailing and Wholesaling, Transport and Storage, Meat and Food Processing, increasingly require credentialled skill training for what were once considered semi-skilled jobs. The adoption of the Traineeship concept by these industries indicates an expansion of elements of the apprenticeship model (structured contracts of training) into new occupational areas.

New technology industries such as Information Technology, which do not have a long history of a training culture, are also adopting the Traineeship concept as a credentialled and contract approach to entry level training provision.

School involvement in entry level training

In Australia there is a long tradition of secondary schools providing occupational skills training, including the teaching of typing, shorthand and office administration; carpentry and joinery; metal work and wool classing. Traditionally these were basic entry level skills, though some students maintained continuous learning programs from grade 7 or 8 to grades 11 or 12 and to the local 'senior tech' (i.e. TAFE College or Institute) after they left school. In addition many early school leavers undertook an apprenticeship that required them to undertake some off-the-job study components at the school they had just left. Though common in the 1950s and 1960s, this began to change in the mid 1970s with the emergence of TAFE Colleges and a more academically-oriented secondary school curriculum. By the mid 1980s, most Australian secondary school systems had discontinued or significantly reduced the applied learning curriculum and associated industry contacts.

However, since 1993 there has been a re-emergence of secondary school engagement in skills training. With funding initially from the Australian Vocational Training System

(AVTS) scheme and later from the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF), a growing number of schools have formed partnerships with other schools, enterprises, group training companies, TAFE institutes, industry skill centres, regional employment groups and other registered training providers (Ainley & Fleming 1996). Many such partnerships incorporate credentialled entry level training up to AQF level 2 or 3, and provide articulation with advanced standing into traditional trade occupations, non-traditional trade occupations and further education and training coursesⁱⁱ.

Towards a training provision framework

Since 1993 a number of pilot training programs and policy initiatives have emerged which together form a conceptual framework for New Apprenticeships. This framework uses AQF levels to create a two stage apprenticeship.

The first stage, which could be labelled Entry Level Training (up to AQF level 2) would result in the award of a Traineeship Certificate. It could be provided in a variety of ways depending on the preferences of the trainee/student and employer: a non-wage work-placement model delivered by school industry partnerships as part of a full-time school program; a wage-based traineeship full-time with an employer; or a part-time traineeship where a trainee attends school and work on a shared-time basis. The emphasis would be on industry-wide skills training (within a national competencies framework) and more general core or key competencies, providing the traditional justification for public sector resourcing. Enterprise-specific skills could be taught but would form a minority of the curriculum.

The second stage could be labelled Apprenticeship and would result in an AQF 3 or 4 qualification. It could be completed only through an indenture with an employer. This stage would allow the employer to concentrate on enterprise-specific skills or particular industry specialisations. The employer could choose to arrange an apprenticeship by either:

- entering into two sequential contracts of training with a young person (ELT Traineeship and Apprenticeship), or
- recruiting someone who has completed an ELT Certificate, or
- entering into a traditional indenture arrangement to cover both the ELT and Apprenticeship period.

Employers would also have the flexibility to determine the mix of on and off-the-job training, depending on the level of skill and technology available within the workplace, subject to their capacity to achieve specified training outcomes.

A parallel stream of institutional based training could be offered by TAFE institutes and other training organisations to deliver non-apprentice qualifications with similar skill profiles at AQF 3 or 4 levels, but without the indenture relationship. These courses might include structured work placements, but this would not confer apprenticeship status.

This division of apprentice training into two stages provides advantages to employers, state education and training authorities and young people. The main advantage to employers is the ability to choose the training arrangement that best suits the size and activity of the

enterprise. Another advantage is that in using the ELT Traineeship concept at Stage 1 the framework allows the inclusion of non-traditional apprentice occupationsⁱⁱⁱ.

An advantage of this model for state education and training authorities is that it offers the possibility of expanding the number of training places available to youth at a cost below that of maintaining ELT in TAFE institutes. The model would shift the allocation of ELT from TAFE institutes to school/industry partnerships, lowering costs by reducing curriculum duplication; and through the lower unit delivery costs for some school-based areas of learning and through increased employer provision of training. It might also have a positive impact on school completion rates and create stronger linkages between schools and job brokers.

Advantages to young people of this model would be a choice of entry points, pathways and participation levels, depending on their orientation to continued schooling, further education or labour market entry. It would also provide a credential/qualification and a decision break before they commit to a full apprenticeship.

Reconfiguring ELT

If the New Apprenticeship program becomes a two-stage program, then Stage 1 might offer an array of access or provision pathways. In order to demonstrate cost and provision advantages some of these delivery options are examined in detail.

A schematic representation of delivery options for Stage 1 is provided in Figure 1. This is based on actual examples of delivery and is not meant to identify all possible constructs for ELT provision. For illustrative purposes this schema is based upon the delivery of a 400 hour AQF level 2 course in the form of an Entry Level Traineeship. The hours can be adjusted to suit any particular Traineeship as the following case is meant to be general. The concept of Entry Level Traineeship could therefore be broadened to refer to any VET course or training package that results in an AQF level 2 outcome. A requirement that Entry Level Traineeships must also contain either structured work placements for students or recognised wage based training contracts might be sought by funding authorities concerned about linking enrolments in Stage 1 training to some notion of industry demand. This schema also assumes that through the National Training Framework and the modularisation of skill components there is a high degree of skill congruency between credentials of similar AQF standards within similar industry or occupational domains.

Model 1

A familiar option for skills training is the full-time course at a TAFE Institute. In 1995 full-time VET course attendance by young people 19 years old and under made up 5.7 per cent of VET enrolments and 17.4 per cent of course hours. The majority of these 93,757 enrolments were direct school leavers undertaking AQF level 2 or 3 certificates (Table 1).

For purposes of illustration and interpolating from NCVER data it is assumed that in 1995 approximately 45.2 million instructional hours were provided by VET providers for vocational courses undertaken on a full-time basis by direct or near-direct school leavers (Table 1). Using the ANTA estimated 1995 national average cost of a curriculum hour at

\$10.50 (ANTA 1996, page 18) these 45.2 million hours represent approximately \$474.6 million of recurrent VET expenditure. From this NCVER data a national average full-time course length of 487 hours for the 19 and under age group is derived.

Figure 1

Entry Level Training delivery models. Stage 1 New Apprenticeship.

Approximately 400 to 600 nominal student contact hours for appropriate AQF outcome.

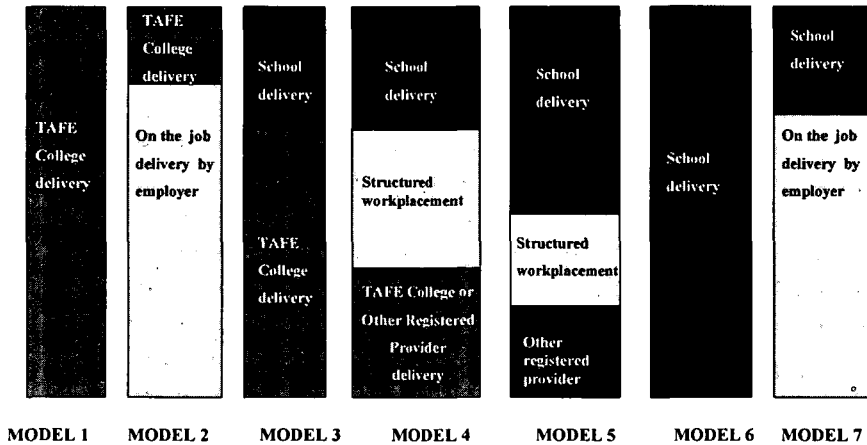


Table 1: Summary of VET course hours and enrolments by age grouping and attendance type, Australia 1995

	19 & under full time	19 & under part time	20 – 24 full time	20 – 24 part time	25 & over full time	25 & over part time	Total
Course hours'000s	45,223	42,017	24,210	35,809	30,102	81,736	259,096
Per cent of course hours	17%	16%	9%	14%	12%	32%	100%
Enrolments '000s	94	253	50	244	71	917	1,629
Per cent of enrolments	6%	16%	3%	15%	4%	56%	100%

Source: NCVER unpublished data

Note: excludes Stream 1000; Recognised Prior Learning (06) and Credit Transfer(09) broken across age groups.

Again for illustration purposes and applying these estimates at the course level, a 400-hour course delivered full-time will cost state training authorities on average \$4200 per student to deliver. By using a 400-hour course as the baseline model of comparison the estimates in the following exercise will be under-estimates of costs and savings as many AQF level 2 courses exceed 400 hours of nominal instruction time. Using these conservative estimates derived from Table 1 for illustrative purposes an estimated cost of delivering full time Entry Level courses to these 93,737 enrolments is \$393.8 million (Table 2).

Model 2

The delivery of the same skill outcomes through an on-the-job and off-the-job mode of delivery, such as a Traineeship, requires a different level of public sector funding. If, say, one third, or 133 hours, of the course is delivered off the job at a TAFE Institute then the cost for instruction is \$1400. If the employer receives a training subsidy from the Federal Government then a further \$1000 could be added to the public sector cost making a total cost of \$2400. This form of training delivery is thus \$1800 per student cheaper to the state to deliver than the same course delivered full-time at a TAFE Institute. This occurs because the employer bears a proportion of the instructional cost of program delivery.

The model could be applied to occupations and industries that have had little previous engagement with indentured training. To gain the potential public sector cost savings from the expansion of new employers and occupations into indentured training arrangements governments may initially have to invest in the development of employer-focused marketing and training programs. This would add to public sector costs of delivery but could be partly offset against any imputed savings gained by switching some of the full-time course enrolments at TAFE institutes into this form of training delivery.

Some considerations have the potential to reduce the apparent level of imputed public sector savings indicated. For instance, governments might offer an inducement to convince employers who have not previously engaged in training to participate. Another consideration is the cost of co-ordinating on and off-the-job training as the employer base grows. These would need to be investigated further to determine their impact. These type of costs could also offset imputed savings identified in models 4 and 5, described below.

Model 3

An emergent model of training delivery is a partnership arrangement between a school (or a group of schools) and a TAFE Institute to provide a VET Certificate as part of end of school certification. An example of this is the VET in Schools program in Victoria (formerly Dual Recognition). In this example, particular Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) subjects can be substituted for particular modules of a VET course. Examples are VCE English as a substitute for VET Communications, VCE Mathematics for VET industry or trade mathematics, VCE Information Technology for VET computer modules and VCE Physics for some VET modules in electronics.

Typically this works with a limited range of VET skill modules. Schools cannot provide technical modules relating to applied technology skills as used in the workplace. For these modules many schools seek a TAFE Institute partner. A public sector cost configuration of this model is represented in Table 2.

When delivering a VET Certificate in this way the proportion of the VET course that is substituted by VCE subjects is a cost already incurred by the school and therefore can be subtracted from the full cost of delivering the VET course. For illustration purposes it might be that up to one third of a VET course might be delivered through a dual recognition type process and two thirds by a TAFE Institute. This would mean that the cost of delivery for that VET Certificate would be \$2800 per student. In other words this

represents a potential \$1400 per student saving of public expenditure over the alternative of a full-time course enrolment in a TAFE Institute.

This model raises a number of issues including:

- the extent of curriculum or learning outcome duplication between senior school subjects and VET modules;
- quality differences between VET courses which are delivered entirely through an institutional framework (school /TAFE; TAFE; or school); and
- the likely impact of mixed institutional mode delivery of VET courses (i.e. school/TAFE) on secondary school retention and completion rates, and subsequent tertiary education participation rates.

The legitimacy of the learning outcomes from this type of delivery may be questioned by the absence of workplace learning. Nevertheless, the model represents a significant potential public sector saving over full-time delivery of the same course at a TAFE Institute. Another possible benefit of this delivery mode is the retention of students who might otherwise leave school early.

A challenge is to achieve an administrative and funding structure to support this type of model. Transitional funds would need to be made available to assist teachers to adjust their skills and curricula to reflect industry required competencies. Funds might also be required to train TAFE teachers and industry personnel in the delivery of industry skills within a senior school setting. These transitional costs might be offset in the medium to longer term by the savings derived from adopting this method of delivery.

Model 4

Model 4 builds upon the school/TAFE Institute partnership described in model 3 by adding a structured work placement segment. For the purposes of this particular example the structured work placement refers to the placement of a secondary school student doing a VET Certificate with an employer for 133 hours. The placement is usually non-wage-based and subject to various state and territory legislative provisions. Under ASTF guidelines it is expected that the student will receive structured skills training in the workplace as distinct from the more passive concept of work experience.

Two important features of this model are:

- it is demand related in that employers will be unlikely to make work placements available to schools and students if they do not fit in with the needs of the organisation; and
- over time participating employers will develop skills their skills in on-the-job training and assessment.

Over the period of a VET course the employer work placement could deliver, say, up to one third of the designated course hours. Thus the recurrent public sector cost of course delivery would be reduced by another third. (Although there might be some costs associated with organising and maintaining an employer base and student rotations.)

Table 2: Cost models of alternative entry level training arrangements (as illustrated in Fig.1) based on 1995 data for all full time VET course enrolments of youth 19 and under in 400 hour AQF Level 2 Courses, Australia, \$million

% of enrolment in schools or in schools and industry arrangement	Model 1	Model 3		Model 4	
	Costs to State Training Authorities to deliver course	Costs to State Training Authorities to deliver course	Savings from non duplicated teaching and curriculum	Costs to State Training Authorities to deliver course	Savings from non duplicated curriculum & structured workplace learning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full time TAFE Institute attendance mode at \$10.50 per hour • No school partnership and no structured workplace learning • Baseline for comparison 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One third of course hours by school at no additional cost • Two thirds by TAFE at average TAFE unit cost of \$10.50 per hour 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One third by school delivery • one third by industry work placement* • one third by TAFE at cost of \$10.50 per hour 	
50	Na	\$328.1	\$65.6	\$262.5	\$131.2
30	Na	\$354.4	\$39.4	\$315.0	\$78.8
25	Na	\$361.0	\$32.8	\$328.1	\$65.6
20	Na	\$367.5	\$26.3	\$341.3	\$52.5
10	Na	\$380.7	\$13.1	\$367.5	\$26.3
0 (100% in TAFE)	\$393.8	na	na	na	na

Note: na not applicable

Based on the full time enrolments in VET by persons 19 year old & under (93,757 FT).

* The modelling assumes no direct public sector cost for employer provided structured work placement. If this assumption is considered unrealistic then allocations for its provision could be made from the potential savings. If the provision for structured workplace learning is at a lower rate than the funded course hour rate then Model 4 would still deliver AQF 2 outcomes at a cheaper rate than a full time TAFE Institute course.

If this work placement is accompanied by credit transfer/dual recognition arrangements (as described above) then the public sector cost would be two thirds less than the cost of providing the same course full-time at a TAFE Institute - \$1400 per full-time student compared with \$4200. (The \$1400 cost arises from the purchase of some course hours from a TAFE Institute or other training organisation). Indicative savings for a national level take up of this model are illustrated in Table 2. A proportion of the potential saving of \$2,800 per student towards covering work placement costs could be directed towards covering work placement costs.

Other models of VET ELT delivery

Using the models above as examples it is possible to design other models of VET delivery. For example a form of New Apprenticeship may be to take Model 4 and substitute paid, contracted work for unpaid work placement. The development of these models has deliberately avoided specifying a time frame for the delivery of a course. This could be, for instance, a two-year period coinciding with year 11 and 12 studies at secondary school. Alternatively, it might include a year 13, or one year of full-time study and work at school.

Implications

By combining two features of emerging local responses to training provision a more coherent and efficient approach to New Apprentice provision might be derived. The two features identified in this paper are:

- the restructuring of apprenticeship into a two stage model where stage 1 builds on the Traineeship concept; and
- a multiple pathway approach to the provision of ELT which encourages trainees and employers to participate without detracting from traditional forms of provision.

The adoption of some of these models at a systemic level could lead to a more coherent approach to Entry Level Training. At a national level it could generate savings which could be ploughed back into education and training systems. Possible levels of savings are illustrated in Table 2. Using 1995 national VET enrolment data it can be shown that if Model 4 was adopted and applied to 20 per cent of the under-19 full-time enrolments in VET then a potential \$52.5 million annual saving could be achieved, assuming connected student flows over time. That is, if ELT were seamlessly available across the present sectors then a significant proportion of the TAFE full-time entry level training enrolments of present 15 to 19 year olds could be shifted to secondary schools engaged in partnership programs.

The imputed level of savings indicated in Table 2, and suggested by the models, have been arithmetically derived and take no account of other costs. Clearly a large-scale substitution of some of these models for full-time TAFE Institute delivery will invoke costs associated with organisation and co-ordination. At what point potential savings might be overtaken by other costs is unknown and should be subject to further investigation.

No one model is proposed as preferable. The lack of employer places for some types of VET courses in a particular region might mean that a school/TAFE Institute partnership is appropriate, while other courses are offered on a multiple partnership basis between industry, schools and a TAFE institute. It is possible that the provision of full-time ELT courses for school leavers by TAFE institutes might be reduced to a residual option available to those who did not complete VET courses at school.

Other benefits that might be gained from the proposed restructure of ELT are:

- increased participation of the 19 and under age group in ELT and school completion;
- improved access for education and training staff of state agencies and institutions to industry-based expertise and technology;
- higher levels of congruence between institutionally provided ELT, locally demanded skills and job outcomes; and
- the creation of an ongoing flow of ELT skills into the workforce to reduce the time and cost for training.

To reap these benefits the following are necessary:

- a review and rationalisation of curriculum content between VET courses and school courses;
- a significant staff development program for secondary and TAFE teachers;
- provision of funds for strategic and co-ordinated work place co-ordination; (This could be part funded from the savings achieved by reducing content duplication between school and TAFE/VET courses/packages and increasing the level of employer participation in work place learning.);
- targeted marketing and information program to explain to enterprises the range of options and benefits they have for participation in ELT; and
- a targeted incentive scheme to attract more employers into a non-wage partnership (Incentives by way of subsidies are already available to employers who engage trainees or apprentices on an indentured basis, however no incentive is available for employers who participate in non wage based work placement programs).

Conclusions

The models offer some more efficient and effective ways of providing entry level training for young people aged 15 to 19 years. The models already exist in practice, operating at the individual school and regional level. If adopted more widely then it would be possible for many more young people to access ELT within the same budget allocation. This would entail allocating a proportion of traditional TAFE/VET funds on a cross sectoral basis to schools, redefining VET to include senior school delivery of some types of VET courses, or creating a new post compulsory education and training sector.

For some states and territories a more flexible approach to senior school and TAFE institute linkages might lead to consideration of other forms of links. Many alternatives are possible. For TAFE institutes the models necessitate the adoption of a leadership role in servicing and supporting ELT without necessarily being a major provider. This would

enable them to specialise in providing advanced skills training at stage 2 of apprenticeship or beyond.

For the Federal Government the maintenance of its leadership role in setting and implementing a reform agenda might require a more strategic approach to change management. One possible option involves combining the best features of NETTFORCE and the ASTF to form a new organisation that would act as a change agent for the establishment of entry level training and as an advisory and support agency on matters of policy and pilot funding for schools, employers and employment brokers. There are a number of reasons for such an organisation including:

- A single organisation could co-ordinate approaches to employers for entry level contracted training places, non-wage structured workplace learning, work experience and work-shadowing positions. There are signs that uncoordinated competition for employer places between TAFE institutes, schools, private providers and group training companies is beginning to have a negative impact on employer participation. A combined agency could focus on overcoming this and provide advice in other key areas such as aligning state and territory policies on indemnities and insurance provisions for employers taking students into the workplace on a non-wage basis.
- There is a need to develop and implement a co-ordinated seed funding program to encourage more employers to be involved in the provision of entry level training. This could be made up of co-ordinated marketing and funded developmental programs targeted to industry, occupational and regional groups as well as state and territory governments.
- The need for an organisation to act as a focal point for the development of partnerships between schools, TAFE institutes, industry and governments. The structure of existing government agencies has led to cross-sectoral practices with regard to policy and resourcing. Consequently approaches to the engagement of employers in the education and training sectors have not been optimal.
- There is a need to build on the many instances of successful school implementation of VET courses based on the translation of work-based Traineeships into the senior school curriculum.

This paper has proposed a framework for linking apprenticeships and traineeships that recognises emerging practice and structures and which might be acceptable to industry, students and parents. To further the development of a national training system which encompasses the principles of this framework, state, territory and federal agencies will need to work together to encourage employer participation in ELT provision. They will also need to overcome existing separated education and training models that maintain curriculum and cost duplication. Given the difficulty often encountered in implementing national change programs many of the ideas in this paper might first be trailed on a pilot basis under the aegis of a reformed Australian Student Traineeship Foundation.

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ⁱ An example of the transition to multi-skilled trades is the refrigeration mechanic. The nature of the work performed by these mechanics regularly required them to work with electrical componentry and installing refrigeration equipment into electrical outlets, so that they required electrical skills. Negotiations between employers and the relevant union led to them becoming formally trained in a limited range of electrical skills and awarded a restricted B Grade licence.

ⁱⁱ Some examples of these partnerships include ALCOA at Point Henry Victoria with James Harrison Secondary College and the Gordon Institute of TAFE, Claremont College in Tasmania with Australian News Mills, Bradfield College NSW with a range of enterprises, MOSEDG acting as a broker between a range of enterprises, schools, group training companies, a TAFE Institute and a NETTFORCE Training Company.

ⁱⁱⁱ If the use of the apprenticeship label is at issue for Stage 2 then higher level AQF outcomes might be referred to as Advanced Traineeships and be accorded the same status as apprenticeship.

Different drums, different drummers: But whose beat is authorised?

A commentary

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The Monash University-ACER CEET and NCVER conference, and this book, have provided a valuable opportunity to discuss the social and economic goals of education and training. These goals were explored through the theme - 'Different drums, one beat?' A number of writers and speakers used this metaphor to draw out issues related to the goals of vocational education and training (VET). I follow their lead in this commentary, using the theme of drums and beats to raise further issues about the goals of vocational education and training.

On goals and governments

As the first keynote speaker of the conference, Kim Bannikoff provided a valuable overview of the way in which different government reports in VET have shifted the emphasis between economic and social goals. He argued that since the mid 1970s, VET has been pressed in the service of economic goals and social goals have been de-emphasised. He ended with a question, *how do you get social goals back on the policy agenda?*

Russell Rumberger tackles this question in his discussion of US education and training, stressing the need to recognise 'equity goals' alongside social and economic goals. He argues that in the US, education serves economic goals by preparing young people in ways that will enhance national economic performance. Interestingly, in the US this goal is pursued by emphasising academic performance while in Australia it involves vocationalising curricula. Education also serves a variety of social goals by enhancing young people's access to further education, their capacity to learn and by reducing the incidence of social outcomes such as criminality and teenage pregnancy. However, he argues, it is important not only to take note of individual instances of social outcomes, but also to consider the distribution of social outcomes across different social groups. He presents a variety of data indicating that some social groups experience poorer social outcomes from others. There are disparities in educational opportunities between groups and the evidence shows that these disparities are increasing with more people in certain ethnic and SES groups living below the poverty line.

Martha Kinsman slices into the theme in another way. She comments that while it is useful to re-examine social and economic goals in education and training, it is important to ask whose goals they are and how they are organised and institutionalised. Kinsman argues that the goals of VET have been established through administrative fiat. ANTA has defined the authorised version of VET. The result is a strong administrative interest in VET that emphasises: standardisation within a 'system'; the servicing of 'clients' defined, particularly, as industry; and the promotion of a 'training market' that equates industry with 'the demand side'. Yet, she argues, employer-sponsored participants in VET are only about 13 per cent of total enrolments. The real end-user of VET is not industry in its current configuration, but the future labour market. The organisation of VET on a systems model increasingly reflects the current demands of industry, whereas individuals base their

choice of training on anticipated future occupational options. The advantaging of industry in VET confirms the old stratified system of vocational and professional education because that is the way current industry is arranged. Individuals, by contrast, are less locked into to these old institutional patterns and systems. They seek flexible, future-oriented, education and training options and curriculum choices based on their assessment of future opportunities.

These three papers open up the issues of social and economic goals of vocational education and training in helpful ways. Bannikoff emphasises one drum by stressing the significant role of government in shaping the goals of VET. Governments have responsibility for certain kinds of work in national societies. This work is concerned with population management on a grand scale. It is sometimes crudely defined as policy formulation, the framing and setting of contexts for action, leaving the action itself to practitioners of various kinds. But governments differ from other agencies because of their authority. Governments that are responsible and representative are authorised within the rules of democracy to conduct their work of population management. The work of government is about power and the authorising of goals and applications.

Rumberger indicates that while there may be one drum there are many beats. Whatever the authority of government, persistent social inequalities justify a concern with distributive justice, who gets what social goods and how that distribution is socially patterned according to ethnicity, class and gender. He shows that while governments deal with policy in abstract terms, there is a need to focus on the everyday world of real people and their lives, to consider real life *bodies*, in the consideration of social and economic goals.

Kinsman suggests that there are many drums as well as many beats, but governments attend to some drums and beats more than others. She flags that in talking about social and economic goals of VET it is important not only to consider government policy and diverse social groups, but also to recognise that there are different knowledge bases that become institutionalised in VET and that government plays a role in this institutionalisation.

These three themes - government, bodies and social groups, and the institutionalisation of knowledge and voice in public affairs - tangle together in complex ways. I focus the remainder of my commentary on this tangling, mapping out a set of issues (in a very preliminary way) that will require further attention.

On drums and beats

Let's be clear about what is meant by knowledge. Knowledge encompasses a whole range of cultural resources - discursive capacities that are evident as embodied wisdom and practical skills as well as abstracted, codified knowledge. These knowledges, or discursive practices, are always value-laden and never stand alone. They are always embodied, that is, located with and within real life people. You cannot have the knowledge without the body and you cannot have the body without its knowledge. But knowledge is not specific to individuals. Rather it is socially organised. Groups have knowledge and individuals have knowledge as a consequence of their group membership.

Once it was easy to talk about the knowledge and value-bases of different social groups. Knowledge conferred authority on those who possessed it partly because it enhanced their capacity to act. Expertise was valuable in a practical sense but was also socially organised as a result of the way different groups protected their knowledge base. This institutionalisation of knowledge took familiar forms. Unions protected the knowledge of craft occupations by institutionalising the ownership of knowledge at the core of the award system. This arrangement linked knowledge, skill and pay, and provided a means of gatekeeping entry to occupations. The professions did the same, institutionalising their knowledge at the core of their training, screening, and salary systems. In political parties similar processes occurred. A party stood for particular knowledges and values. One joined the party and submitted to its discipline in return for membership and belonging.

This social organisation of knowledge and bodies provided protection both to those who embodied the knowledge and to the knowledge itself. It also ensured that expertise, exercised at an appropriate level and quality, was available for use. Knowledge, and the practical expertise it endowed, was an important basis for community organisation. Social groups existed not only because they were made up of bodies that were differently positioned in terms of ethnicity, class and gender, but also because those differently positioned bodies took up and embodied different knowledge and value bases. This social organisation of knowledge and value is the touchstone of community cultures and community organisation.

Government is important in this social organisation of community because in social affairs government authorises some groups and their knowledges more than others. For example, in Australia, unions fought for the centralised system of industrial relations but its institutionalisation at the turn of the century contributed significantly to the subsequent organisation of unions and employer organisations. The work of government in legislating for industrial arbitration served to organise union (and employer) voice by encouraging the growth of union membership and legitimating union participation in a range of industrial and governmental negotiations. Parallel processes have occurred with employers organisations. Government endorsement has also been important in relation to other communities and their cultures. Monopolies of knowledge by professional communities existed because their cultural resources were legitimated as learned knowledge codified through learned bodies which were, in turn, authorised by government. Indigenous communities and indigenous rights movements have also been recognised and legitimated as a consequence of governmental authorisation.

Now, this social organisation based on the institutionalisation of knowledges and values is unravelling. Unions and professions are attacked for being protectionist, irrespective of the practical utility of their expertise and the role of occupational groups in codifying that expertise and standards of performance. Political parties stand for anything. These changes are being fuelled, in part, because government is retracting or reworking its endorsement and authorisation of these communities. As Michael Pusey suggests, Australian governments have rejected nation-building in favour of market liberalism. Rather than endorsing and authorising traditional knowledge and value-based communities organised as unions, professions - even parties, government impresses on us the necessity of markets in which knowledge can be bought and sold as a commodity.

Knowledge-based authority relations are turned on their head in this process because knowledge is no longer valued as a community achievement but priced as a commodity that can be bought and sold. Knowledge as authority is undermined by the emphasis on commercial viability and by pressures for customer service that presume knowledge can be appropriated without gaining admittance or belonging to particular communities.

The ANTA authorised VET agenda privileges industry as the critical, authorised voice of Australian education and training. As industry is organised and endorsed, other knowledge-based communities are de-authorised and disorganised. They lose their voice in public affairs. Damon Anderson notes, for instance, that out of over 1,200 government consultations in relation to policy formulation for the national training reform agenda, TAFE students were consulted only once.

But industry has to weld many voices to achieve one voice in public affairs. The management of voice is difficult in relation to employers, as for unions. Dealing with this politics has encouraged an emphasis on enterprise voice in VET. Like industry, enterprise is a distinctive kind of community. They both entail a set of social relationships which constitute a network of roles and responsibilities. Yet enterprises are also different from industry and most other communities (eg. unions, professions, parties, indigenous groups, ethnic communities). Enterprises are organised (and organise knowledge) on the basis of the employment contract, while these latter communities develop a broadly shared and negotiated knowledge and values-base. The centrality of the employment contract in enterprises means that the community life of the enterprise is structured by a fundamental inequality of power. It is, after all, employees that get sacked, not employers.

Enterprise-knowledge and values are a composite made up of employer and employee knowledge. Business survival is a matter of common interest among employers and employees but the employment contract makes employees far more vulnerable than employers. Sharing knowledge for the good of the business makes sense when you risk economic security but sharing knowledge also breaks the old nexus between knowledge-base and (non-enterprise) community membership. The worker is encouraged to join with the enterprise, but this simultaneously undermines old community attachments.

On drums and drumming

The metaphor of drums and beats helps to draw these points together. There are certainly many drums in contemporary education and training. Each drum has a different drummer and they engage in different kinds of drumming. Some play reggae, some play rock. Others are military bands.

These patterns of drumming are not just spur of the moment choices but historically embedded in communities and their institutions, and embodied by those who belong to communities and those who enact community institutions. Drummers have little choice about what kind of drumming to do because their community membership leads them to particular styles and tastes in drumming.

These drums and drummers stand in relationships to government and the patterns of authority that are endorsed through the work of government. Those who drum reggae and

rock have less authority than military bands. Different drummers and the communities they drum for have different voice in social affairs and this voice is shaped by governmental work.

What is challenging about our moment in history is that it appears to be a time of transition. The nation-building state has changed its mind. It seeks simultaneously to upskill the national human stock and to undermine the social organisation of expertise by treating knowledge and values as simple commodities that can be exchanged in the marketplace.

The pre-occupation with the economic goals of education and training reflects this curious contradiction. It captures the contribution of education and training to human capital investment, but is blind to the social organisation of knowledge and communities which continuously construct and protect cultural resources. The contemporary neglect of social goals of education and training ultimately threatens economic goals because the drummers of old knowledge and values-based communities now confront the market. Their economic vulnerability means that irrespective of the way they have traditionally valued knowledge and styles of drumming, only that which can be sold is now valuable. The upside is that there is lots of scope for diversity. Some people will buy anything. The downside is that the tastes and preferences of the new contractualist communities authorised by government disorganise the social production and exercise of cultural resources on which economic performance rests.

Economic and social goals in education and training: Is reconciliation possible? Necessary?

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Education and training are seen as the key for all nations to compete in the expanding global economy. This conference examined the economic and social goals of education and training in Australia, with occasional reference to the situation in other countries. I was privileged to represent one of those countries—the United States—and to contrast the situation in my country with that in Australia. Many of the issues discussed at this conference have been raised in the US. I commented on a few of them in my paper. Here I will comment on a few other issues that were raised at the conference.

1. Economic themes dominate policy initiatives in education and training

The theme of the conference was the economic and social goals of education and training. As I suggested in my paper, economic goals for education and training have dominated policy discourse and initiatives in the United States for more than a decade. The same appears to be true in Australia. But other economic themes were identified at the conference. These included the notion of user choice in selecting education and training and the economic principle of competition among providers of education and training. Terri Seddon suggested that ‘economic rationalism’ underlies much of the current thinking in the provision of education and training in Australia. I would say the same thinking characterizes the thinking and policy initiatives in the US.

2. Economic goals and principles ignore the political, historical, and institutional contexts that also influence the provision of education and training.

Several of the papers at the conference identified some important contextual issues that have shaped education and training in Australia. Peter Rushbrook provided an interesting historical look at the forces that shaped the making of the Kangan report. Dianne Holdforth raised the issue of political forces in her discussion of papers by Gerald Burke and Simon Marginson on education and training in Australia. And both John McIntyre and Fran Ferrier discussed the issue of institutional contexts in their papers.

3. Research on Australian youth reveals more complicated and multifaceted goals for education and training.

Several conference participants presented research on different groups of Australian youth and how they view and participate in education and training. Barry Golding and Veronica Volkoff argued that students participate in VET for a variety of reasons even if they seek the same goals—often a better-paying, more rewarding job. Peter Dwyer and Johanna Wyn argued that the traditional linear model characterizing the relationship between

education and work is no longer appropriate. Their research has found that there are several different pathways that youth pursue in preparing for adult life, including one where some youth become highly skilled in a number of areas or remain flexible as opportunities continually change. Jerry Schwab discussed the views and pathways pursued by indigenous populations, while Ian Falk discussed differences among regions and within rural communities in the economic goals of education and training.

In the US, there are also great differences in the opportunities and outcomes from education and training for different populations. Racial and ethnic minorities, predominantly Black and Hispanic, have much different opportunities and outcomes from education and training than the majority European White population, as I illustrate in my paper. One of the social goals of most countries is to address inequities in opportunities that exist among different social groups through a variety of public and private programs. Unfortunately, the commitment to such social goals in the US appears to be waning as the country moves toward a more conservative agenda.

4. Researchers play an important role in documenting and analyzing the economic and social benefits of education and training.

Much of the research on the economic benefits of education and training has focused on labor market outcomes such as employment and earnings. These benefits are private, as they accrue to individuals. But there are a host of other benefits that accrue to the larger society. In my paper I provide a list generated by a colleague, Henry Levin, 25 years ago as part of his study before the US Congress. They include reducing public assistance, lowering crime, and improving health. These benefits are as important today as they were then. Unfortunately, much less research has been done on documenting social benefits than economic benefits because they are much harder to measure and accrue over a long period of time. Nonetheless, they are as important as ever and it remains incumbent on current scholars to acknowledge them and to continue to research them.

Finally, I would like to address the title of this commentary. Education and training will always serve a variety of social and economic goals. At different points in history, some goals will be stressed more than others. We may be in such a period now. The increased size and competitiveness of the global economy may keep the current focus on economic goals in the forefront of policy initiatives in most countries for years to come. But as I suggest above, many social goals also have important, long-term economic benefits. By documenting these social goals and keeping them in public discussions and policy debates, I believe it is possible to reconcile the various social and economic goals of education and training.